



ASI SNAKE BOOKLET

COMMON SNAKES OF WHITE RIVER

Copyright: Johan Marais - African Snakebite Institute
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SNAKE COURSES

The ASI offers both public and corporate snake courses.

Public courses take place at various venues throughout South Africa.

The corporate training is done on-site, both in South Africa, as well as in 19 African countries.

We pride ourselves on teaching only the safest snake handling methods, to ensure the safety of both the handler and the snake.

We offer a range of different course options, including snake awareness, first aid for snakebite, venomous snake handling, venomous snake handling bootcamps, as well as advanced first aid for snakebite, advanced venomous snake handling and a reptile photography course.

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INTRODUCTION

The African Snakebite Institute is the leading training provider of Snake Awareness, First Aid for Snakebite and Venomous Snake Handling courses in Africa as well as the largest distributor of quality snake handling equipment, snake PPE and snakebite first aid kits. Our aim is to spread snake awareness as far and wide as possible, which is why we've launched our new free E-Book series.

Our CEO, Johan Marais is a well-known herpetologist with over 40 years of experience with snakes. He has worked at various reptile facilities and has collaborated on a variety of scientific studies with some of the world's leading herpetologists. He is also one of Africa's most prominent authors of snake books and has written the best-sellers *A Complete Guide to Snakes of Southern Africa*, *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* and *First Aid for Snakebite*, to mention just a few.



COMMON SNAKES OF WHITE RIVER

Mpumalanga has 69 different snake species. Of the 30 snakes that occur in White River six are highly venomous, two are venomous, two can inflict a painful bite and the rest are mildly venomous or harmless. We've listed the common species in this booklet, showing venomosity, key ID features, full distribution, and snakebite info for venomous species.

Snakebite is problematic with most bites reported from the hot, wet regions in the eastern part of the country. More than 4,000 snakebites are reported annually with over 1,000 victims being hospitalised. Of those around 60% show signs of envenomation and the remaining 40% show no symptoms – these are referred to as dry bites or may be bites from mildly venomous or harmless snakes. In a recent 5 year survey of 879 snakebite cases in Zululand, nearly 98% of victims showed typical signs of cytotoxic envenomation – largely Mozambique Spitting Cobra, Puff Adder, Common Night Adder and Stiletto Snake bites. Despite their relative frequency, if treated correctly in hospital, these bites are rarely fatal. Most bites occurred in the early evening in the warm wet summer months from November to April/May. Around 84% of the bites were inflicted well below the knee. Less than 11% of these victims received antivenom and none of the bites in this survey were fatal.

Generally speaking we have 10 – 12 fatal snakebites a year in South Africa and these are invariably caused by the Black Mamba and Cape Cobra. Both of these snakes have a potent neurotoxic venom that may quickly affect breathing.

SNAKE HANDLING EQUIPMENT

The African Snakebite Institute is the leading provider of quality snake handling equipment in Africa. View our range online [here](http://www.AFRICANSNAKEBITEINSTITUTE.com).



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COMMON SNAKES OF WHITE RIVER



There are around 30 snake species recorded for White River. The majority of these snakes are harmless or mildly venomous. This poster contains the medically important and common snakes of the area.

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Has caused human fatalities

VENOMOUS

Painful bite, but does not require antivenom

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Not thought to be harmful to humans

HARMLESS

Not dangerous to humans



Black Mamba
(*Dendroaspis polylepis*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Snouted Cobra
(*Naja annulifera*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Mozambique Spitting Cobra
(*Naja mossambica*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Boomslang
(*Dispholidus typus*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Bibron's Stiletto Snake
(*Atractaspis bibroni*)

VENOMOUS



Common Night Adder
(*Causus rhombatus*)

VENOMOUS



Puff Adder
(*Bitis orietans*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Southern Vine Snake
(*Thelotornis capensis*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Herald Snake
(*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS



Black-headed Centipede-eater
(*Aparallactes capensis*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS



Southern African Python
(*Python natalensis*)

CAN INFLICT A NASTY BITE



Spotted Bush Snake
(*Philothamnus semivariegatus*)

HARMLESS



Common Wolf Snake
(*Lycophidion capense*)

HARMLESS



Brown House Snake
(*Boaedon capensis*)

HARMLESS



Common Slug-eater
(*Duberria lutrix*)

HARMLESS



Bibron's Blind Snake
(*Afrotyphlops bibroni*)

HARMLESS

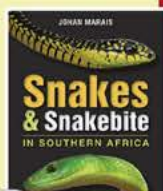
JOHAN MARAIS is the author of various books on reptiles including the best-seller *A Complete Guide to Snakes of Southern Africa*. He is a popular public speaker and CEO of the African Snakebite Institute. The **African Snakebite Institute (ASI)** offers a variety of courses including Snake Awareness, Scorpion Awareness and Venomous Snake Handling. ASI is accredited by the **International Society of Zoological Sciences (ISZS)** and Travel Doctor-approved service provider. The courses are also accredited by the **Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)**. ASI is the largest provider of quality snake handling and safety equipment in Africa.

FREE ASI SNAKES APP

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EMERGENCY PROTOCOL

IN THE EVENT OF A SNAKE BITE

- 1 Keep the victim calm, immobilized and transport the victim to the closest hospital **without delay**.
- 2 If the victim stops breathing, resort to artificial respiration or make use of a Bag Valve Mask.
- 3 Call the Poison Information Centre help-line for further advice: 0861 555 777.

DO NOT

- ... apply a tourniquet.
- ... cut and suck the wound.
- ... use ice or very hot water.
- ... give the victim alcohol.
- ... apply electric shock.
- ... inject antivenom randomly. Antivenom (if required) must be administered by a doctor in a hospital environment.

Download the high resolution poster [here](http://www.AFRICANSNAKEBITEINSTITUTE.com).

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HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Black Mamba

(Dendroaspis polylepis)

Maximum Length:
3.8 m



Other names:

Swartmamba

This is by far the largest venomous snake in Africa, with a maximum length of 3.8 m (historically specimens over 4 m were reported). Despite its reputation it is a shy, elusive snake that is quick to escape but will not hesitate to strike repeatedly if cornered. It is active during the day, often basking near a hole in an anthill or large rock crevice, into which it quickly disappears if disturbed. When threatened it will gape exposing the black inner lining of the mouth and it may form a narrow hood. The venom of this snake is potently neurotoxic and may cause difficulty with breathing within half an hour. Antivenom is effective but often required in large quantities (10 – 15 vials).



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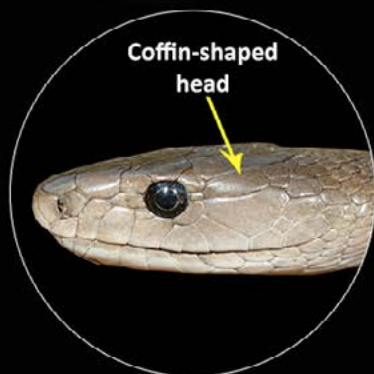
ASI EASY ID

Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 2.2 - 2.6 m. Maximum length: 4.5 m

Can be confused with: Boomslang, Olive Grass Snakes, Cobras



Coffin-shaped head

Colour varies from light olive to light grey, darkening with age to olive, greyish brown, or gunmetal grey. Sometimes has mottling

Elongated coffin-shaped head

Can lift up to a third of its body off the ground

Inside of the mouth is usually black

Forms a narrow hood when threatened

May have barring toward the tail

Light grey belly, sometimes with mottling

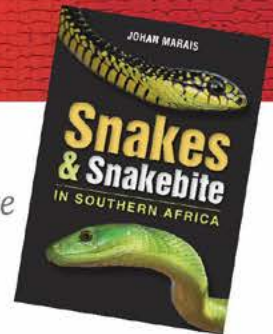
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SNAKEBITE PROFILE

BLACK MAMBA

Dendroaspis polylepis



Risk of Bites

The Black Mamba is a nervous snake and is quick to escape. If accidentally cornered in a confined space or surprised in the veld, it may strike out and bite more than once in quick succession. Contrary to popular stories, it does not chase people and bites are quite rare.



Most Bites

Most victims are bitten in the veld when they accidentally get very close to a Black Mamba basking. Or when accidentally cornering a mamba in a confined space like a pump house on a farm. Never approach a Black Mamba closely and do not try to kill or catch one.



Symptoms & Venom

A potent and fast-acting neurotoxic venom that results in pins and needles in the lips, hands and feet, as well as nausea, excessive sweating, drooping eyelids, difficulty in swallowing and eventually drowsiness and muscle pain followed by paralysis and respiratory failure. In severe cases victims become unresponsive within less than one hour.

See pages 43-45
– *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa*
(2024).



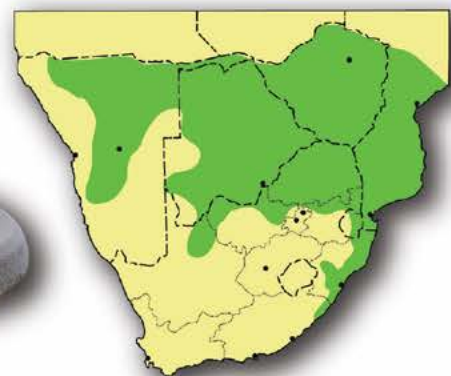
First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient, who must lie down in a rescue position. Immediately arrange transport to a hospital with emergency facilities. If far from a hospital, apply a pressure bandage (Page 19 of *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa*). Resort to artificial respiration if the victim stops breathing.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation where patients are not breathing, they are intubated and ventilated and treated with 12-15 vials of SAVP Polyvalent antivenom. Additional vials of antivenom may be required at a later stage.



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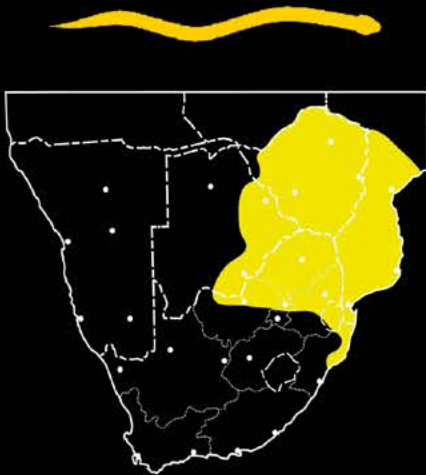


HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Snouted Cobra (*Naja annulifera*)

Maximum Length:
2.5m



Other names:

Wipneuskobra, Bosveldkapel

The Snouted Cobra is largely a moist and dry savannah inhabitant but is also found in lowveld and bushveld areas where it actively hunts its prey during the day or at night. It feeds on rodents, birds, their eggs and especially toads, but is fond of eating snakes, including the Puff Adder. It is not an aggressive snake but if cornered will stand its ground and form an impressive hood. It may exceed 2.5 m in length. It is usually different shades of brown, but some individuals have broad light brown and purplish-black bands on the back. The venom of this snake is both neurotoxic and cytotoxic and may cause some tissue damage. Polyvalent antivenom is effective, but luckily bites are rare.



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ASI EASY ID

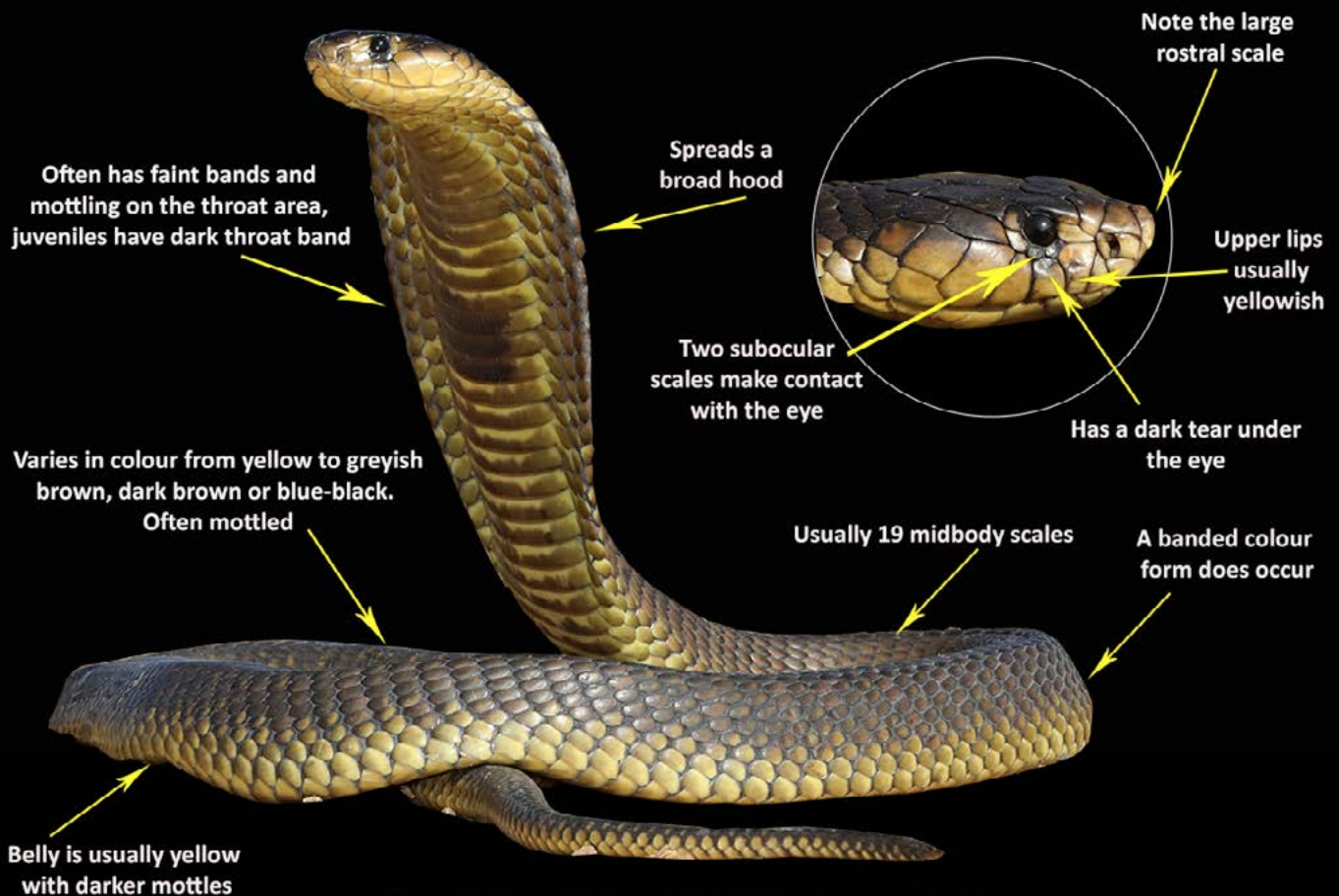
Snouted Cobra (*Naja annulifera*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Average length: 1.2 - 1.6 m. Maximum length: 2.5 m

Can be confused with: Mozambique Spitting Cobras, Cape cobras



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Snakebite Profile

Snouted Cobra

Naja annulifera



Risk of Bites

Bites from the Snouted Cobra are not common. This snake frequently visits residential gardens in search of rodents and toads. It also raids poultry runs. Dogs are at risk and often get bitten when attempting to kill the snake.



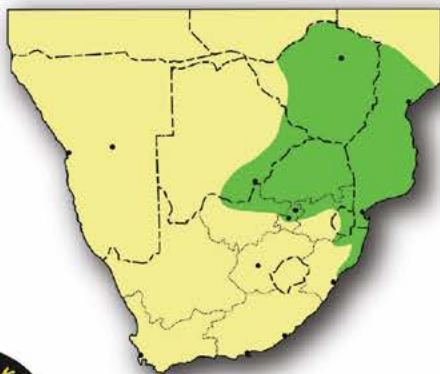
Most Bites

Bites are infrequent and usually occur when accidentally confronted or stepped on at night. Most bites are on the lower legs, or to those who try and handle the snake.



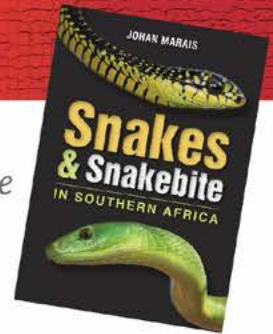
Symptoms & Venom

The venom is both neurotoxic and cytotoxic. It is one of our largest cobras reaching 2,5 m in length and can deliver a lot of venom in a single bite. Bites may result in burning pain, nausea and swelling followed by tissue damage. It can also affect breathing.



See pages 52-53

– *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* (2024).



First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient, who must lie down in a rescue position. Immediately arrange transport to a hospital with emergency facilities. If far from a hospital, apply a pressure bandage (Page 19 of *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa*). Resort to artificial respiration if the victim stops breathing.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation, especially where patients are not breathing, they should be intubated, ventilated, and treated with 12-15 vials of SAVP Polyvalent antivenom. Additional vials of antivenom may be required at a later stage.



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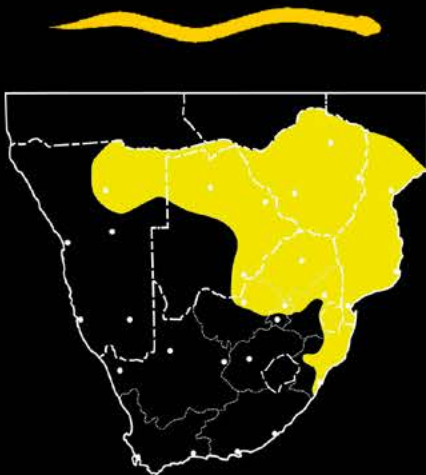


HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Mozambique Spitting Cobra (*Naja mossambica*)

Maximum Length:
1.8 m



Other names:

Mosambiekse Spoegkobra

The Mozambique Spitting Cobra occurs on the eastern side of South Africa, most of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, north-eastern Botswana, northern Namibia and further north in Africa. Its diet consists largely of frogs, small mammals, birds and snakes, including the Puff Adder. It is active on overcast days, but more active at night, often ending up in houses where people are bitten while asleep. This snake accounts for the majority of serious snakebite cases in southern Africa, but fatalities are rare. It also spits its venom and does not always spread a hood when doing so. The venom is potentially cytotoxic causing pain, swelling, blisters and in many cases severe tissue damage. Antivenom is effective if administered early and in large dosages.



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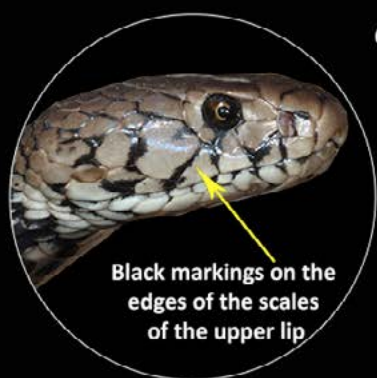
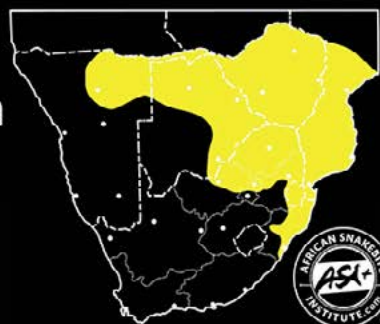
ASI EASY ID

Mozambique Spitting Cobra (*Naja mossambica*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 80 cm - 1.2 m. Maximum length: 1.83 m

Can be confused with: Rinkhals, Snouted Cobras



Black markings on the edges of the scales of the upper lip

Can spit effectively up to 3 m

Salmon coloured throat

Black bars and blotches on the throat

Spreads a hood, but can spit from any position

Slate grey to olive brown body

Belly may be off-white, to salmon in colour

Black edged scales

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SNAKEBITE PROFILE

MOZAMBIQUE SPITTING COBRA

Naja mossambica



Risk of Bites

Bites are common, as this snake is widespread throughout much of southern Africa. Along with the Puff Adder, these two snakes account for most serious snakebites in southern Africa. Dogs are at risk and often get bitten when attempting to kill the snake.



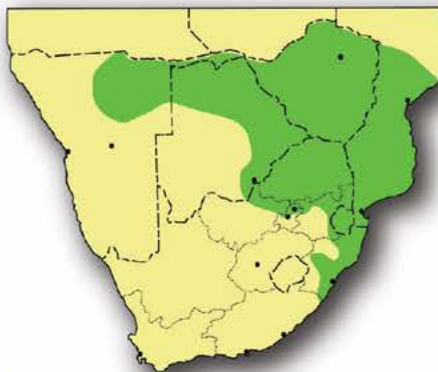
Most Bites

Most victims are bitten at night when accidentally stepping on the snake, or while in bed. The snake enters homes and may bite sleeping victims, often multiple times. Bites in bed appear to be somewhat of a feeding response with the snake smelling a mammal and biting. Should you live within the range of this snake it is advisable to ensure that exit doors seal well without gaps or to fix mosquito-proof doors to all exits. People are also encouraged to sleep under mosquito nets.



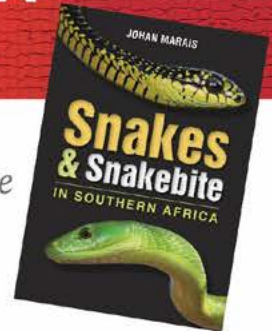
Symptoms & Venom

The venom is predominantly and potently cytotoxic. Symptoms include severe pain, progressive swelling, various lesions and, in some cases, severe tissue damage.



See pages 64-65

– *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* (2024).



First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Elevate the affected limb and remove tight clothing and jewelry. Promptly transport the victim to the nearest hospital that has emergency facilities. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages. For venom in the eyes, wash the eyes out immediately using water or any other bland liquid and get the victim to a medical doctor for further examination and treatment.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation where there are clear signs of progressive swelling, extending more than 10-15cm per hour above the bite site, doctors must treat such bites with 12 ampoules (or more) of polyvalent antivenom. It appears that SAVP polyvalent antivenom is not very effective against the venom of this snake, therefore it should be administered within an hour or two after a bite. Anti-inflammatories (NSAID's) and antibiotics are not indicated in the short term. Fasciotomies are rarely justified and should generally be avoided. In cases where patients suffer tissue damage, surgery may be required but rarely in the first few days.

Fatalities are rare.



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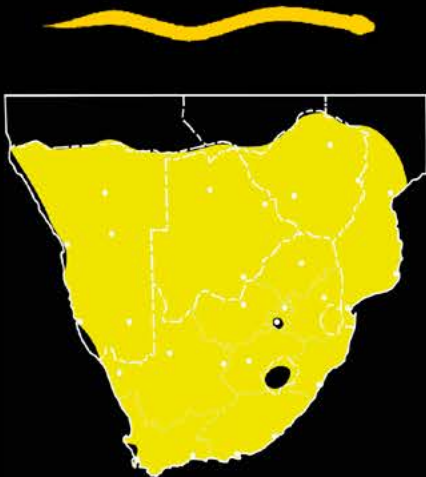
HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Puff Adder

(*Bitis arietans*)

Maximum Length:
1.4 m



Other names:

Pofadder, Imbululu

The Puff Adder is widespread over much of southern Africa and further north into Africa. It is a heavy-bodied snake that relies on its excellent camouflage and is reluctant to move. Much of its life is spent in camouflage mode and recent research has shown that when hiding, the Puff Adder will not hiss or strike when approached, as this would give away its presence. It is an ambush hunter that will coil up into a striking position and await its prey. This can last several days or even weeks. Toads are lured closer with flicking of the tongue. Puff Adder venom is potently cytotoxic, causing severe pain, swelling, blistering and in many cases severe tissue damage. Polyvalent antivenom is effective.



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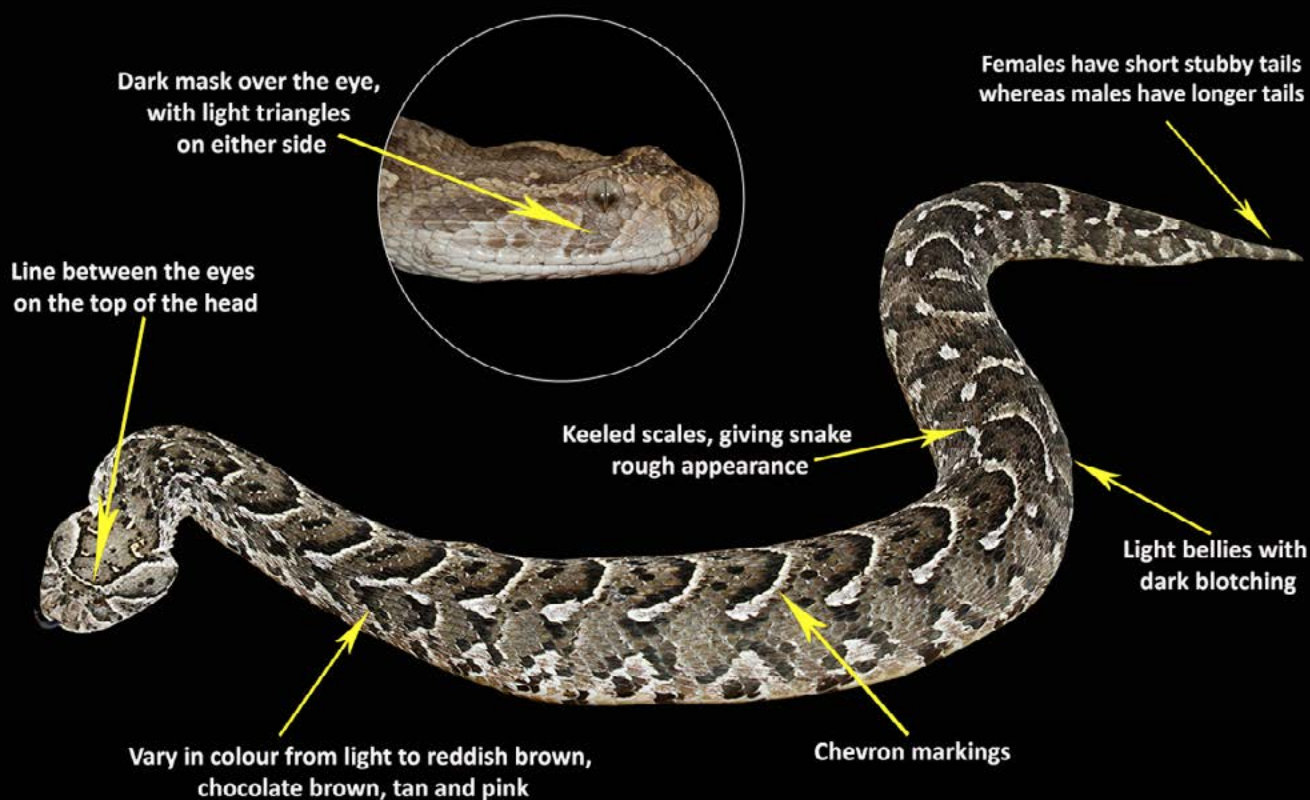
ASI EASY ID

Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 90 cm. Maximum length: 1.4 m

Often confused with: night adders and Berg Adders



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SNAKEBITE PROFILE

PUFF ADDER

Bitis arietans



Risk Of Bites

Bites are common as this snake is widespread throughout most of southern Africa. Along with the Mozambique Spitting Cobra, these two snakes account for the majority of serious snakebites in southern Africa. Dogs are at risk and often get bitten when attempting to kill the snake.



Most Bites

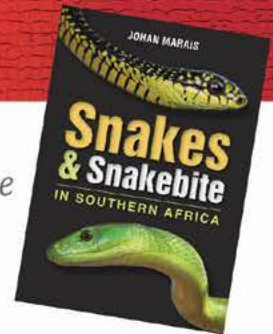
Most victims are bitten at night when accidentally stepping on the snake, but bites are also inflicted during the day when the snake is basking. Most bites are on the feet or lower legs.



Symptoms & Venom

The venom is potently cytotoxic as well as haemotoxic. Symptoms include severe pain, progressive swelling, bleeding from the fang punctures, blistering and tissue damage. The lymph nodes may also be affected. Dogs may perish after a bite from this snake, unless treated with polyvalent antivenom, if required.

See pages 26-28
– *Snakes and Snakebite
in Southern Africa*
(2024).



First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Elevate the affected limb and remove tight clothing and jewelry. Promptly transport the victim to the nearest hospital that has emergency facilities. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation where there are clear signs of progressive swelling, which extends more than 10-15cm per hour above the bite site, doctors will treat such bites with 6 ampoules (or more) of polyvalent antivenom. Anti-inflammatories (NSAID's) and antibiotics are not indicated in the short term. Fasciotomies are rarely justified and should generally be avoided. In cases where patients suffer tissue damage, surgery may be required but rarely in the first few days.

Fatalities are rare.



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HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)

Maximum Length:
2.1 m



Other names:

Boomslang

The Boomslang is largely tree-living but may descend to the ground to bask. In trees it poses no threat to humans as it is extremely reluctant to bite, and bites are rare. Juveniles are grey with a massive emerald, green eye but change to the adult colours around a length of 1 m. Most males are bright green, sometimes with black between the scales, but in the Cape Provinces they are usually black above with green, yellow or orange sides. Females are usually brown to grey in colour. Boomslang venom is haemotoxic and compromises the blood clotting mechanism, causing uncontrolled bleeding if not treated. The South African Vaccine Producers manufacture a monovalent antivenom for bites from Boomslang that is very effective.



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ASI EASY ID

Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)

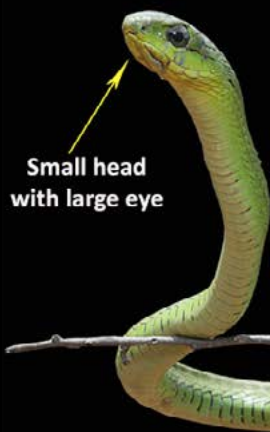
HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 1.2 m. Maximum length: 2.1 m

Often confused with: Black Mambas, Green Mambas, green snakes and sand snakes

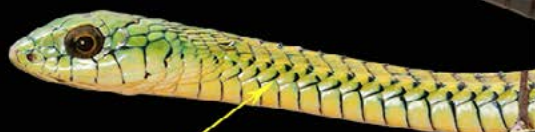
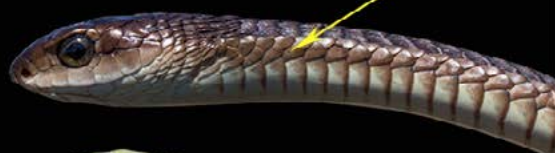


Females are normally olive grey to brown or brick red in colour



Small head with large eye

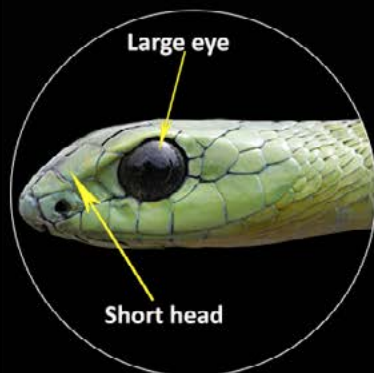
Scales are keeled giving snake a rough texture



Most males are green in colour



Males in the Cape are usually black above with yellow, green or orange sides



Large eye

Short head



Juveniles have big emerald green eyes

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Snakebite Profile

BOOMSLANG

Dispholidus typus



Risk of Bites

Bites are not common in South Africa. This snake lives in trees and shrubs and interactions with humans are infrequent. It is a placid snake that only bites when provoked or handled. If spotted, it is quick to flee higher up into trees.



Most Bites

Bites occur when a basking snake is accidentally stepped on or grabbed, or when it is handled.

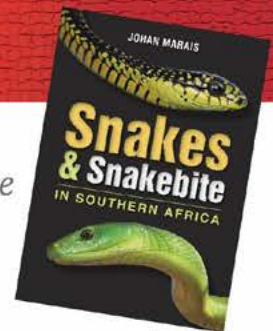


Symptoms & Venom

Drop for drop the Boomslang has the most potent venom of any snake in Africa. It is slow-acting, but potentially haemotoxic and symptoms include bleeding from the bite site, the nose, mucous membranes and internal bleeding.

See pages 79-81

– *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* (2024).



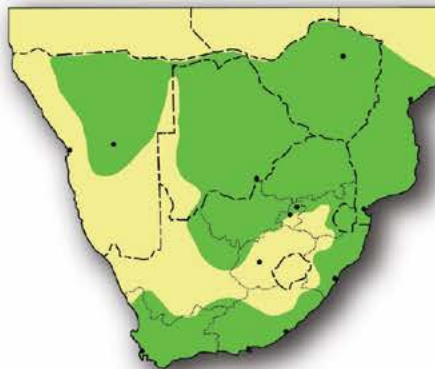
First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Elevate the affected limb. Promptly transport the victim to the nearest hospital that has emergency facilities. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation patients are treated with monovalent Boomslang antivenom. The initial dosage is two vials but, in some cases, a third vial may be required. This antivenom is produced by the South African Vaccine Producers. It is a Schedule 4 drug, therefore a script is required should one wish to purchase it. It comes in a 10 ml vial and must be refrigerated. It has a three year shelf life.



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HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Southern Vine Snake (*Thelotornis capensis*)

Maximum Length:
1.47 m



Other names:

Twig Snake; Bird Snake; Takslang; Voëlslang

This perfectly-camouflaged tree-living snake is seldom seen because of its excellent camouflage and habit of remaining very still in low shrubs, observing the ground below for passing lizards and snakes. Birds often mob this snake, and it will inflate its neck with its bright orange tongue flickering – this leads to the incorrect assumption that they lure birds with their tongue. It is extremely placid but, if provoked, will inflate its neck and strike viciously. Most bites are to snake handlers. Like the Boomslang, the venom of this snake is haemotoxic affecting the blood clotting mechanism and causing uncontrolled bleeding. There is no antivenom for the venom of this snake and although a few fatalities have been reported, none were in South Africa.



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ASI EASY ID

Southern Vine Snake (*Thelotornis c. capensis*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 1.2 m. Maximum length: 1.47 m

Often confused with: Juvenile Boomslang, Eastern Bark Snakes





Snakebite Profile

Southern Vine Snake

Thelotornis capensis



Risk Of Bites

This snake lives in trees and shrubs and interactions with humans are not common. It is a placid snake that only bites when provoked or handled. Bites are very rare in South Africa.



Most Bites

There are very few documented bites from this snake in southern Africa, except for incidents where snake keepers are bitten by captive snakes, or by other people handling this snake.

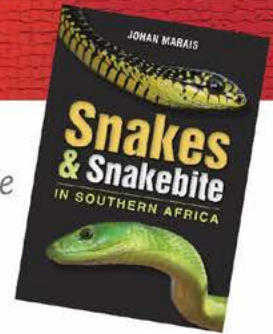


Symptoms & Venom

The venom is potently haemotoxic, like that of the Boomslang. Symptoms include bleeding from the nose, mucous membranes and bite site. This may eventually lead to internal bleeding.

See pages 82-84

– *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* (2024).



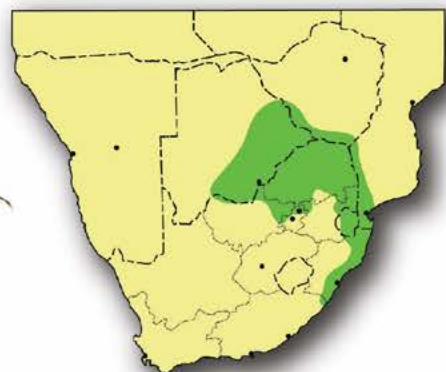
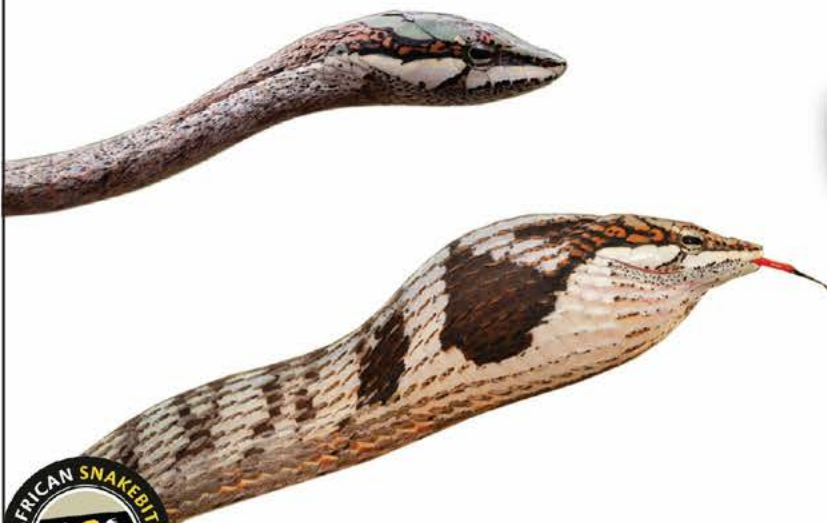
First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Elevate the affected limb. Promptly transport the victim to the nearest hospital that has emergency facilities. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages.



Medical Treatment

Polyvalent and Monovalent antivenom do not offer cross coverage for Vine Snake bites and should not be administered. Bites are treated symptomatically with blood transfers and platelets, but this may not be effective in severe bites. To date we do not have any documented fatalities in South Africa, however a few fatal bites have been recorded further north in Africa.



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VENOMOUS



Bibron's Stiletto Snake (*Atractaspis bibronii*)

**Maximum Length:
70 cm**



Other names:

**Bibron se Sypikslang; Moladder; Mole
Viper; Burrowing Asp**

After the Mozambique Spitting Cobra and Puff Adder, the Bibron's Stiletto Snake accounts for most serious snakebites in South Africa. It spends most of its life underground but often emerges on hot humid nights and may be stepped on. With large hinged fangs it cannot be handled safely and also cannot be held behind the head – it merely twists its head sideways and will get a fang to penetrate a fingertip. It is usually blackish brown in colour and is easily confused for a variety of harmless snakes. This snake averages 30 cm but can exceed 70 cm in length. Its venom is potently cytotoxic causing severe pain, swelling, blistering and necrosis. Antivenom is not available for this snake.



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ASI EASY ID

Bibron's Stiletto Snake (*Atractaspis bibronii*)

VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 98 cm

Often confused with: wolf snakes, blind snakes, purple-glossed snakes



Body is brown to blackish in colour

Short stubby tail with spike on the end

Tries to bury head in sand, forming an arch in its neck

Has single subcaudal scales

Small pig-like eyes

Belly may be white or same colour as body

Large hinged fangs

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+ SNAKEBITE PROFILE

BIBRON'S STILETTO SNAKE

Atractaspis bibronii

Risk of Bites

Bibron's Stiletto Snake is largely active at night, especially on warm summer nights after a bout of rain. It may also fall into swimming pools and may be brought indoors by cats.

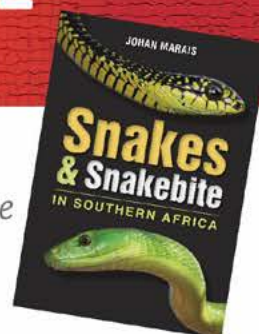
Most Bites

Most victims are bitten picking up Stiletto Snakes, mistaking them for a harmless snake. Otherwise, when stood on while walking barefoot at night.

Symptoms & Venom

The venom of this snake is potently cytotoxic, causing severe pain, local swelling, blistering, and potentially local tissue damage.

See pages 85-87
– *Snakes and Snakebite
in Southern Africa*
(2024).

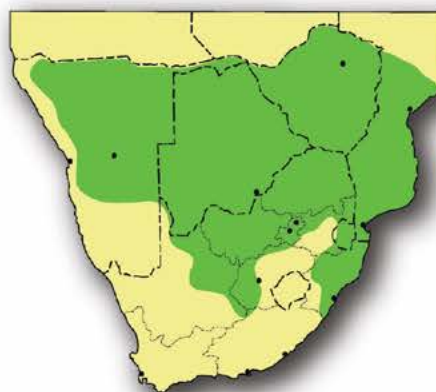


First Aid

There is virtually nothing that can be done. Elevate the affected limb and get to a hospital that has an emergency department.

Medical Treatment

As there is no antivenom for a bite from this snake, doctors need to treat for pain and rehydrate the victim. Anti-inflammatories, antibiotics and antihistamines are not effective and should not be administered. It is equally as important not to resort to any form of surgery for at least 5-7 days. Only thereafter should debridement be considered depending on the severity of the bite.



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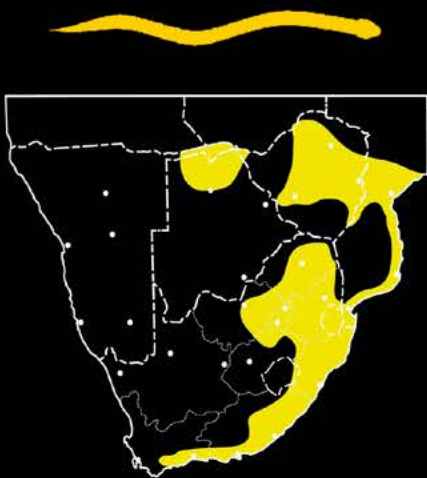


VENOMOUS



Common Night Adder (*Causus rhombeatus*)

Maximum Length:
1 m



Other names:

Rhombic Night Adder, Gewone Nagadder

Despite the common name, the Night Adder is more active during the day. It averages 30 – 60 cm in length, but can reach 1 m. It can be identified by the distinct dark V-marking on the head. It prefers damp localities and is a frog specialist. The Night Adder is generally a docile snake but will hiss aggressively and strike when provoked. It accounts for many bites, especially in KZN and the Eastern Cape. It is commonly found in suburban gardens.

Night Adder venom is cytotoxic, and most bites are not serious – causing pain and swelling. Having said that, the venom of this snake should never be underestimated, especially in children, as some victims require hospitalisation.



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ASI EASY ID

Common Night Adder (*Causus rhombeatus*)

VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 1 m

Often confused with: Rhombic Egg-eaters, Berg Adders and Puff Adders



Despite the common name, they are mainly active during the day

Rhombic markings.
Dark brown, light-edged blotches along the centre of the body and tail

Single distinct "V" marking on the head. The apex of the V ending between the eyes

Black lines on the edges of the scales of the upper lip

Often has dark mask over eye

Belly usually white to yellowish or light grey

Colour, varying shades of light grey, olive, or light to pinkish brown

Round pupil

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Snakebite Profile

COMMON NIGHT ADDER

Causus rhombeatus



Risk of Bites

Bites are quite common in coastal KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Despite the common name, this snake is active during the day and frequents moist areas at dams, rivers and streams, where it feeds largely on toads. Dogs are at risk and often get bitten when attempting to kill the snake.



Most Bites

People are bitten when accidentally stepping onto one of these snakes. Most bites are on the feet or lower legs. Some people are under the wrong impression that Night Adder venom is mild and get bitten when handling the snake.

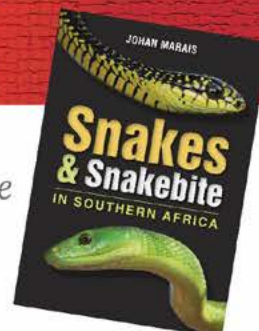


First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient, elevate the affected limb and rest it. In severe cases, especially in small children, the patient may require hospitalization for rehydration and pain.

See pages 40-41

– *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* (2024).



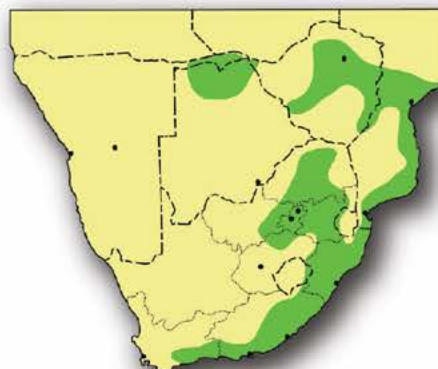
Symptoms & Venom

The venom is largely cytotoxic (cell-destroying), causing pain, local swelling, and discoloration of the bitten area within an hour or two. The lymph nodes may also be affected. Swelling and discoloration may persist for more than a week, but blistering is rare. The venom of this snake does not cause tissue damage but could be quite serious when dogs are bitten. Small dogs may perish after a bite from this snake.



Medical Treatment

There is no antivenom for this bite of a Common Night Adder. Both antibiotics and anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) are not indicated and should not be given in the first 72 hours. If well rested, patients recover fully within a week or two.



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MILDLY VENOMOUS



Black-headed Centipede-eater (*Aparallactus capensis*)

Maximum Length:
40 cm



Other names:

Swartkop Honderdpootvreter,

A small slender nocturnal snake that averages 30 cm with a maximum length of 40 cm. This common snake is usually found in deserted termite mounds or under logs and rocks as well as in leaf litter. It occurs in the eastern half of the country from the Eastern Cape northwards.

The Black-headed Centipede-eater is a specialist feeder and preys on centipedes – it will seize its prey and then chew along the body until the venom takes effect. The centipede is eaten headfirst. It has a blackish head and light brown to orange-brown body, making it easy to identify. This snake is back-fanged and mildly venomous and poses no threat to humans.



Luke Kemp



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ASI EASY ID

Black-headed Centipede-eater (*Aparallactus capensis*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 30 cm. Maximum length: 40 cm



Colour varies from
beige to red

Small slender snake

Distinct dark head
and band on neck

Often has
dark ventral
stitching

Feeds exclusively on centipedes

Belly is pearl in colour

Dark tear under
the eye

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MILDLY VENOMOUS



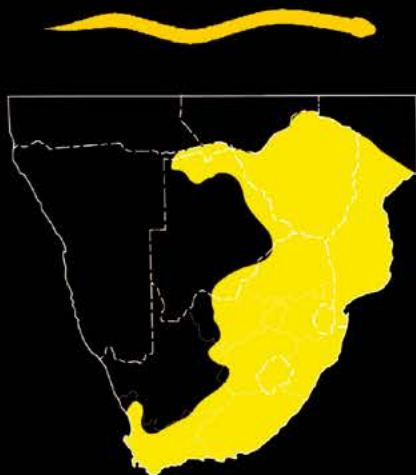
Photo Luke Kemp

Herald Snake

(*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

Maximum Length:

1 m



Other names:

Rooilipslang, Red-lipped Snake

A nocturnal snake that frequents suburban gardens, especially those with water features. It is a toad specialist and often eats toads that look far too large to swallow. The Herald Snake is usually greyish to olive-grey in colour, but some individuals are quite dark. The head is always darker than the body and there may be white speckles on the body. In parts of the range the upper lip is bright red, orange or yellowish to white. When threatened, this snake puts up quite a show, drawing the head back into a striking position with the mouth agape and the head flattened. It is mildly venomous and poses no threat to humans or domestic animals.



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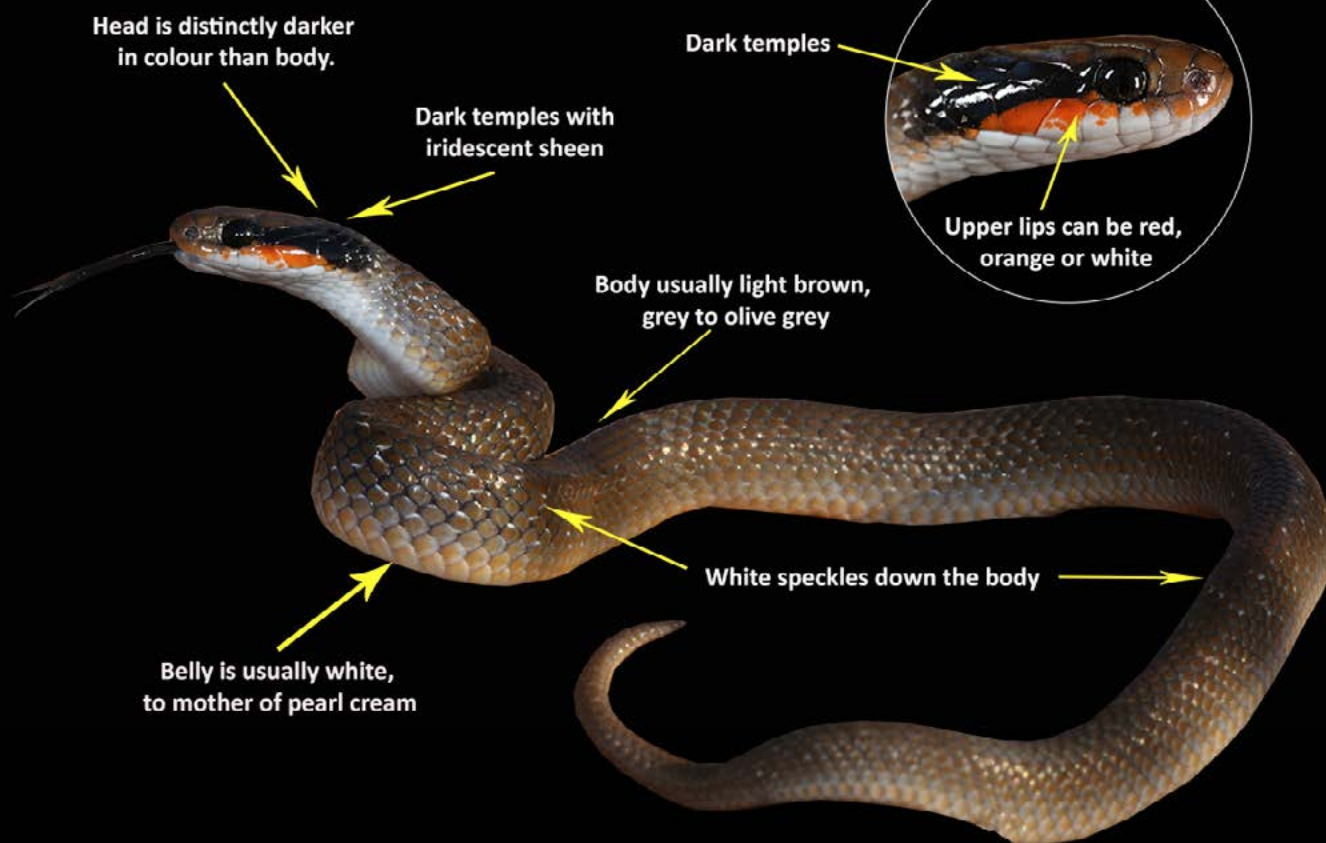
ASI EASY ID

Herald Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 82 cm

Can be confused with: juvenile mambas and cobras



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CAN INFLICT A NASTY BITE



Southern African Python (*Python natalensis*)

Maximum Length:
6 m



Other names:

Luislang, previously called a Rock Python

The Southern African Python is by far our largest snake, reaching a maximum length of around 6 m and weighing in excess of 65 kg. It feeds largely on warm-blooded prey like small antelope, monkeys, game birds and dassies, but also takes leguaans and even crocodiles. Attacks on humans are rare and fatalities virtually unheard of. This snake is largely active at night but is fond of basking during the day. It is at home in water and can remain submerged for long periods. Females produce 30 – 60 (but in exceptional cases more than 100) eggs, which are roughly the size of a tennis ball. The female remains with her eggs throughout incubation and the young measure 50 – 70 cm in length.



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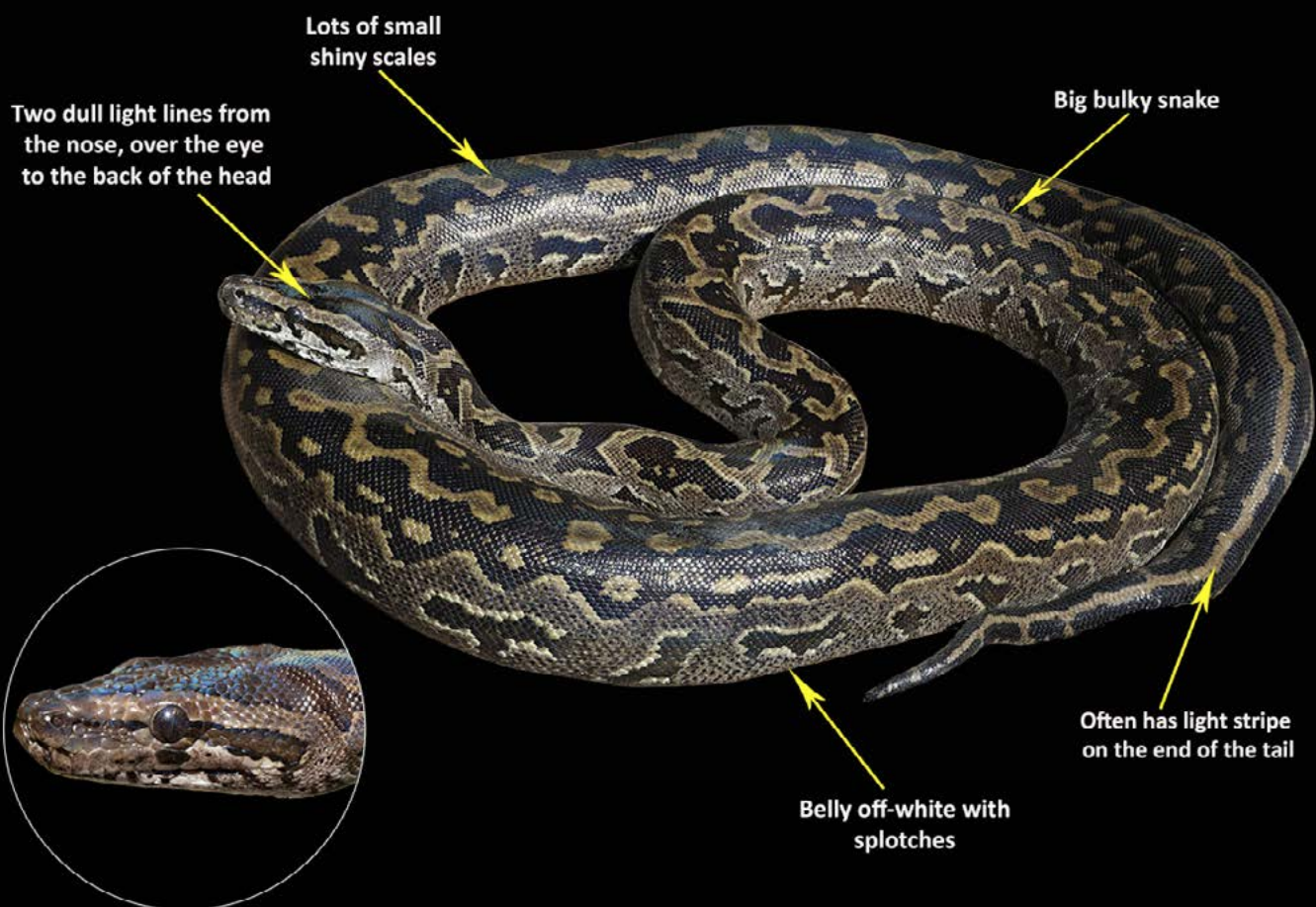
ASI EASY ID

Southern African Python (*Python natalensis*)

NON-VENOMOUS, BUT CAN INFLICT A NASTY BITE

Average length: 3 m. Maximum length: 5.5 m

Often confused with: Puff Adders



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Snakebite Profile

SOUTHERN AFRICAN PYTHON

Python natalensis



Risk of Bites

Pythons are ambush hunters and bites usually occur when walking down pathways or through thick bush, where a python is coiled up awaiting a passing prey animal.



Most Bites

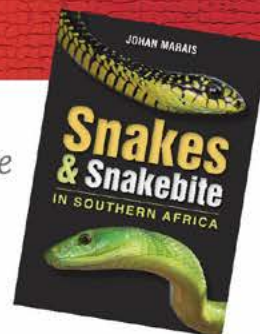
Most bites occur to the lower leg, when the snake lunges at a passerby. They are usually quick to release the bitten person, and often leave a row of small teeth punctures in the leg or calf.



Symptoms & Venom

Pythons have no venom, but have over 80 long recurved teeth, which they use to hang onto prey items. Large pythons may leave nasty wounds after a bite.

See pages 103-105
– *Snakes and Snakebite
in Southern Africa*
(2024).



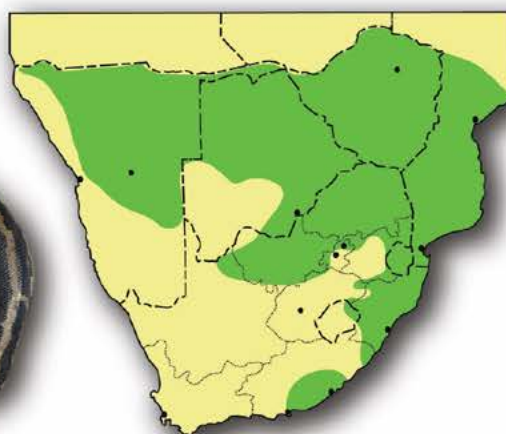
First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Bandage the bitten area to reduce blood loss and transport the victim to a hospital or doctor.



Medical Treatment

In severe bites victims may require stitches. Bites from pythons should be cleaned and disinfected and monitored for signs of infection. Doctors will also administer tetanus injection.



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HARMLESS



Brown House Snake

(*Boaedon capensis*)

Maximum Length:
1.5 m



Other names:

Bruin Huislang

The Brown House Snake, true to its name, frequents human dwellings where it feeds largely on rodents and lizards. It is completely harmless and relies on muscle power to constrict its prey. It is widespread in South Africa and very common in suburban gardens.

This snake is active at night and is relatively slow-moving. Most individuals are medium to dark brown with a mother-of-pearl belly and two light lines on either side of the head – one from the nose through the top of the eye to the back of the head and the other from the back of the eye to the angle of the jaw. The Brown House Snake comes in a variety of shades of brown, often with mottling of white along the neck.



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ASI EASY ID

Brown House Snake (*Boaedon capensis*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 55 cm. Maximum length: 1.5 m

Can be confused with: Slug-eaters



Varies in colour from light brown to reddish brown, chocolate brown, tan and pink

May have mottled markings down the neck

One light line from the nose through the top of the eye to the back of the head

Belly is generally a pearl colour

A second light line from the back of the eye to the angle of the jaw

Note the lines above and below the eye



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HARMLESS



Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*)

Maximum Length:
1.3 m



Other names:

Variegated Bush Snake; Gespikkelde Bosslang

An alert, day-active snake, that climbs well and is often found between the walls and ceilings of outbuildings, where it hunts for geckos. Sadly, this harmless snake is often mistaken for a Green Mamba or Boomslang and needlessly killed.

The body is bright green to a copper-green with distinct blackish spots on the front half of the snake, but little or no dark marks on the back half. The belly is yellowish to white and the pupil orange.

This snake has keeled belly scales which enables it to climb up the bark of a tree or even up face-brick walls. It is commonly found in suburban gardens and juveniles are often killed by domestic cats.



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ASI EASY ID

Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 70 cm. Maximum length: 1.3 m

Often confused with: Western Natal Green Snakes,
Green Mambas, Boomslang



Prominent
yellow to red iris

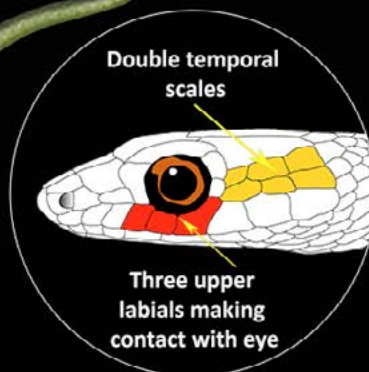
Blackish spots on the
first half of the body

Have bright metallic blue flecks

Excellent climbers, often found in trees and bushes
and in ceilings of outbuildings

In the north of their range,
they often have a
copper coloured tail

Yellowish to white belly
with keeled ventral
and subcaudal scales
for climbing



Double temporal
scales

Three upper
labials making
contact with eye



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HARMLESS



Common Wolf Snake (*Lycophidion capense*)

Maximum Length:
65 cm



Other names:

Cape Wolf Snake, Gewone Wolfslang

This common little snake averages 25-40 cm in length and is frequently found in suburban gardens. It is active at night when it hunts for lizards, especially skinks and geckos. The Common Wolf Snake is fond of damp localities where it seeks refuge under rocks, logs and in rubbish heaps. Though harmless it has long, recurved teeth in both the upper and lower jaw, hence the common name. Females produce 3-9 eggs in early summer. The Common Wolf Snake is difficult to distinguish from the venomous stiletto snake. It differs by having a long thin tail, the head is distinct from the body, and it usually has light spots on the back of each body scale.



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ASI EASY ID

Common Wolf Snake (*Lycophidion capense*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 40 cm. Maximum length: 64 cm

Often confused with: stiletto snakes



Head is distinct
from body

Photo © Luke Kemp

Flattens body
when threatened

Has light spots on the back
of each body scale

Has a long thin tail

Has long recurved teeth
in both the upper and lower jaw,
hence the common name

Belly can be white or black.
Those with white bellies usually
have dark spots on belly

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HARMLESS



Common Slug-eater (*Duberria lutrix*)

Maximum Length:
43 cm



Other names:

Gewone Slakvreter, Tabakrolletjie

A small snake that averages 30 – 35 cm. It feeds exclusively on snails and slugs and locates them by following the slime trail. The Common Slug-eater favours damp localities in the south-eastern half of southern Africa.

During the day it seeks shelter under rocks, logs and grass tufts and emerges in the evening to hunt. It is reluctant to bite and if threatened will defecate and secrete a foul-smelling substance simultaneously. It also has the peculiar habit of rolling up into a tight spiral with the head concealed, like a roll of tobacco, hence the Afrikaans name. This small slow-moving snake is not venomous and poses no threat to humans.



Luke Kemp



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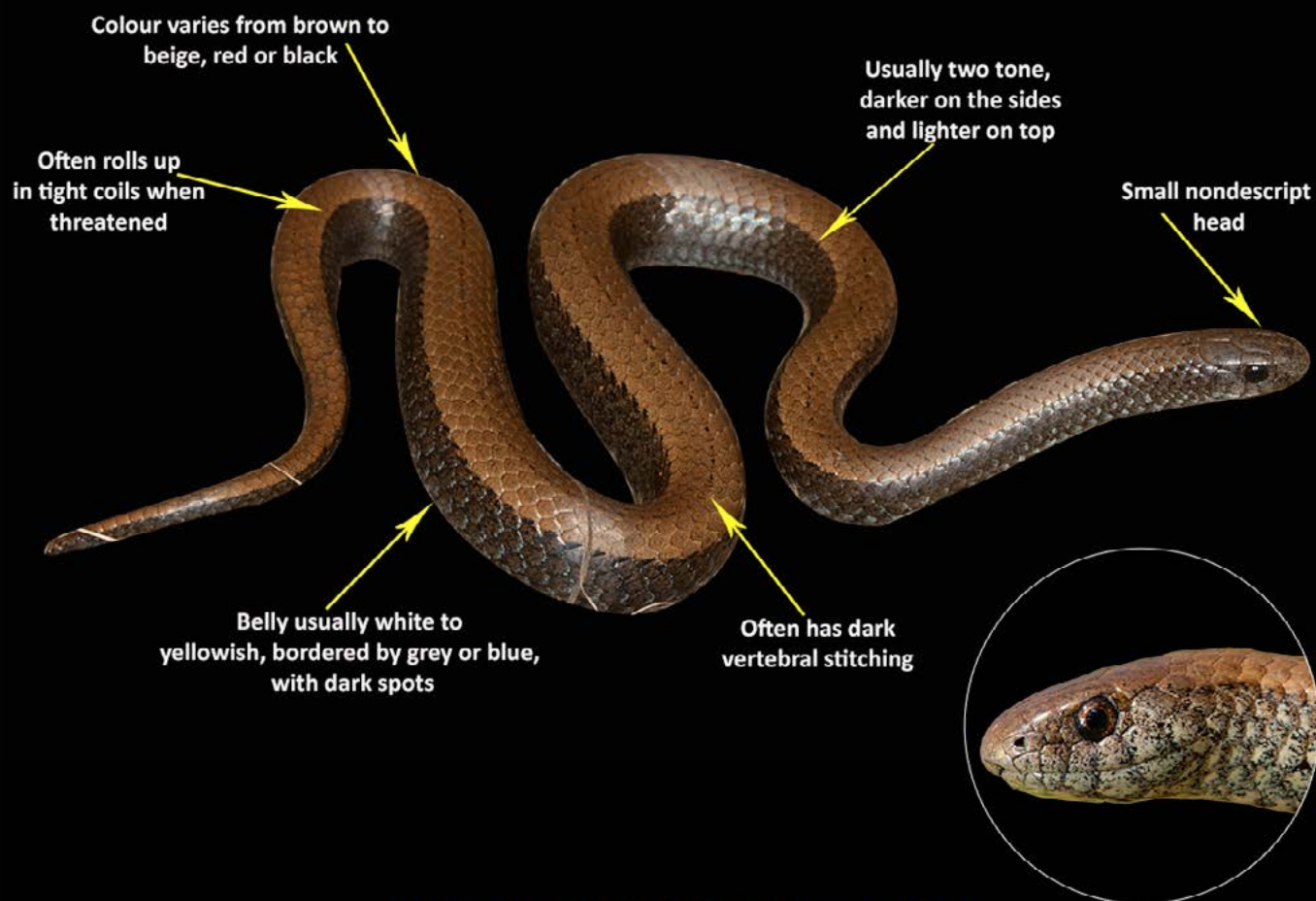
ASI EASY ID

Common Slug-eater (*Duberria lutrix*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 35 cm. Maximum length: 45 cm

Often confused with: Juvenile Cape Cobras



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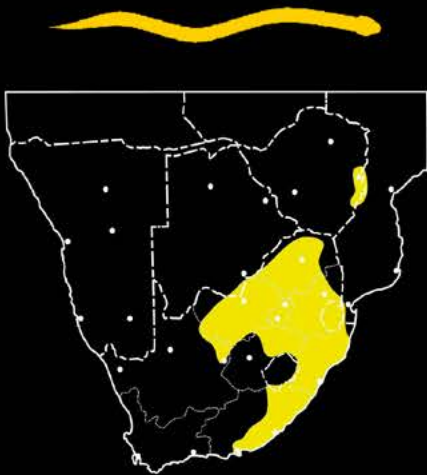
HARMLESS



Bibron's Blind Snake

(*Afrotyphlops bibronii*)

Maximum Length:
48.4 cm



Other names:

Bibron's se Blindeslang

This harmless burrowing snake spends most of its life underground where it feeds on ants, termites and their larvae. It is often flushed to the surface after heavy rains. As the common name indicates it is largely blind, with a scale over the eye – an adaptation for an underground existence. Bibron's Blind Snake averages 30 – 38 cm with a maximum length of 48.4 cm. Both ends are rounded, and one must look carefully to work out which end is the head and which is the tail. A variety of burrowing snakes, like the stiletto and harlequin snake prey on this species. This snake may be confused with Delelande's Beaked Blind Snake and the venomous stiletto snakes.



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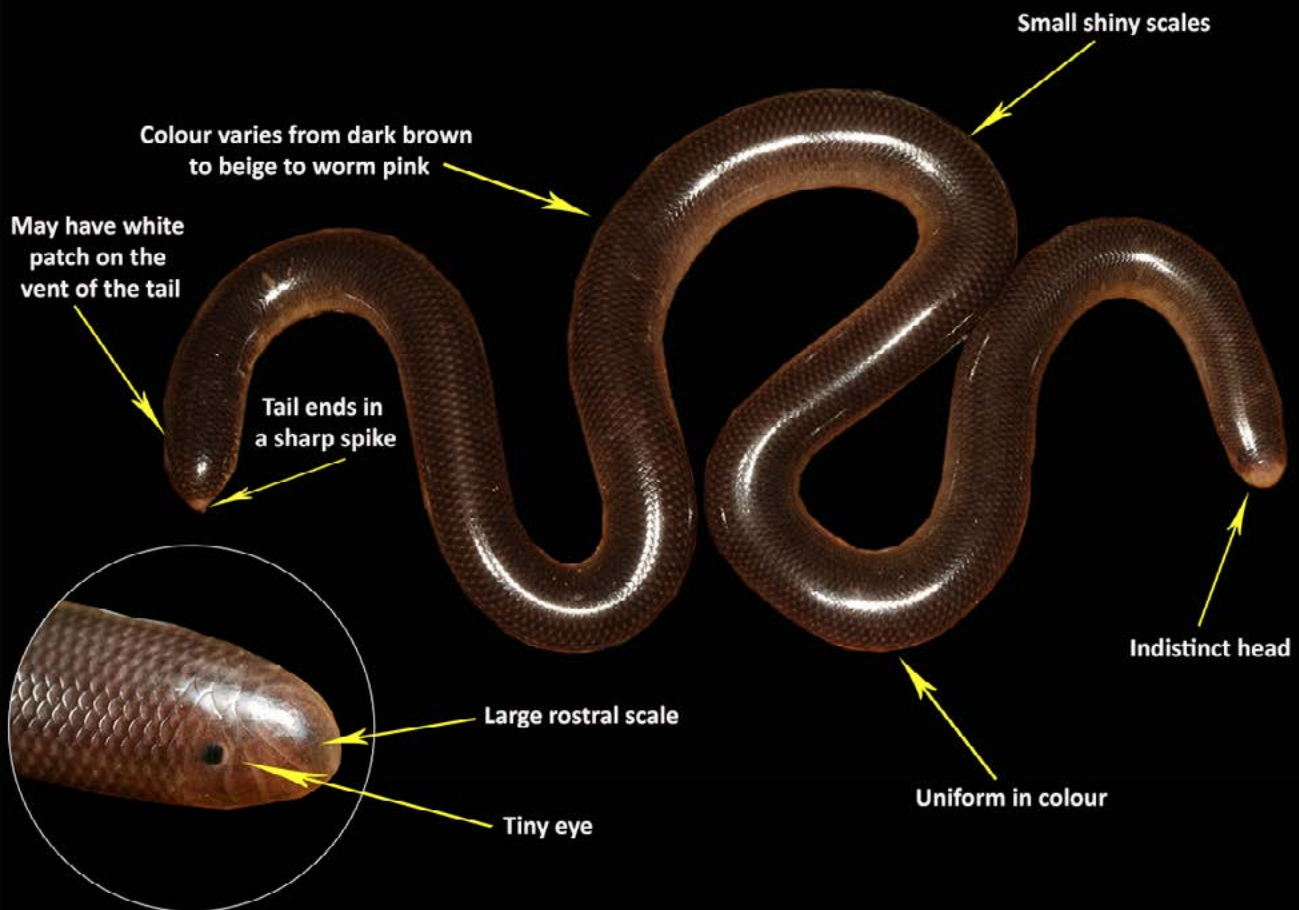
ASI EASY ID

Bibron's Blind Snake (*Afrotyphlops bibronii*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 30-40 cm. Maximum length: 48.4 cm

Often confused with: stiletto snakes and Deleclande's Beaked Blind Snakes



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FIRST AID
FOR
SNAKEBITE

Johan Marais

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FIRST AID FOR SNAKEBITE



IN THE EVENT OF A SNAKEBITE, DO...

- ✦ Do get the victim to a hospital as soon as possible and in a safe manner. This is by far the most important first aid measure. For medical advice in a snakebite emergency, call the African Snakebite Institute **+27 (0)82 494 2039**.
- ✦ Do keep the victim calm. Often easier said than done as people tend to panic in a snakebite emergency. Many snakebite victims go into shock, experience a drop in blood pressure and may even become nauseous and faint. If possible, do not allow the victim to walk, run, jump etc. Bear in mind that more than 99% of snakebite victims that are hospitalised within a few hours survive their snakebites.
- ✦ Do remove jewellery as well as tight clothing. If bitten on the hand/arm/foot/lower leg, remove rings, bangles, bracelets, watches, anklets and any other tight jewellery including tight clothing.
- ✦ Do administer artificial respiration if patient stops breathing. In serious snakebite cases involving snakes with predominantly neurotoxic venom, like the Black Mamba or Cape Cobra, the victim may soon experience difficulty with breathing, even within 20 minutes. This is a very serious medical condition and assisted breathing could be life-saving. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation may be beneficial in the short term, but the proper use of a Bag Valve Mask is far better in such an instance.

SPITTING SNAKES

- ✦ The common spitting snakes in South Africa are the Mozambique Spitting Cobra or M'Fezi and the Rinkhals. In the western parts of the country these are replaced by the Black Spitting Cobra. These snakes spray their venom up to a distance of three metres and do so in self-defence to temporarily blind their attacker so that they can make a quick escape.
- ✦ Although spitting snakes accurately aim for the eyes, the venom diffuses into a spray over a wide area and may get onto your hair, face, arms and chest. Venom in the eyes is very painful and must be flushed or diluted as quickly as possible. The production of tears starts this process, but as a first aid measure, flush the eyes with water or a weak (normal) saline solution. The idea is to flush away any excess venom. Transport the victim to a medical doctor, who will examine the eyes for corneal damage and prescribe antibiotic eye drops to prevent secondary infection. There is no reason to use diluted antivenom – it has no proven benefits and may cause an allergic reaction.
- ✦ If treated quickly, the chance of permanent damage to the eyes is extremely remote.

Snakebite Emergency Numbers

Netcare Ambulance: 082 911

ER24 Ambulance: 084 124

Provincial Ambulance: 10177/112

African Snakebite Institute: +27 (0)82 494 2039

HOSPITALS AROUND WHITE RIVER

Rob Ferreira Hospital (Nelspruit/ Mbombela)

Tel: 013 741 6100
(-25.478519, 30.969944)
Piet Reief st, Sonheuvel,
Mbombela, 1201

Nelmed Medicross(Nelspruit/ Mbombela)

Tel: 013 755 5000
(-25.476232, 30.977789)
Rothery Street, Nelspruit, 1200,
Mbombela, 1201

Mediclinic Nelspruit Hospital

Tel: 086 117 4448
(-25.493146, 30.962332)
1 Louise St, Sonheuvel,
Mbombela, 1201

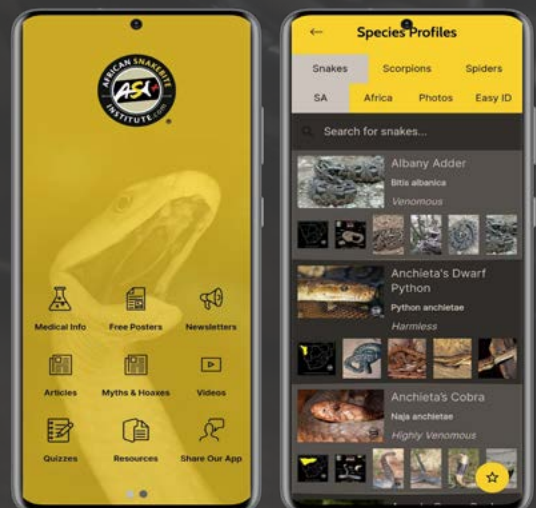
Busamed Lowveld Private Hospital

Tel: 013 752 7576
(-25.476142, 30.977368)
10 Rothery St, Sonheuvel
Central, Mbombela, 1200

Snake Removers Contacts

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The ASI team travels thousands of kilometres a month, often to remote parts of southern Africa, for both snake awareness and venomous snake handling training and for reptile surveys.

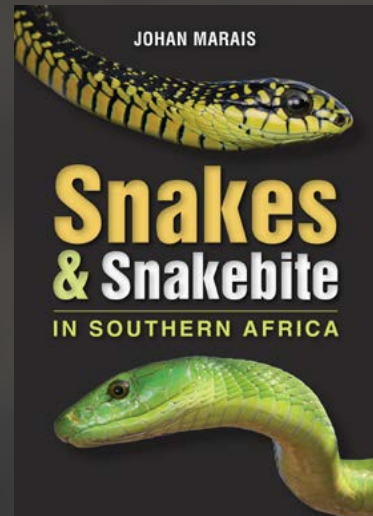
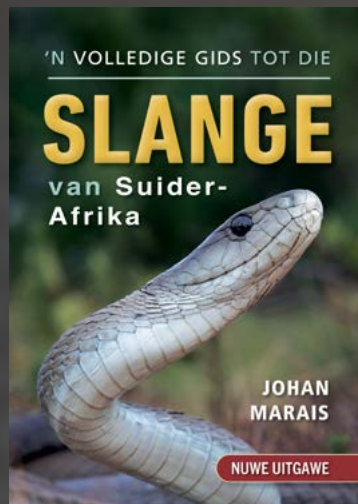
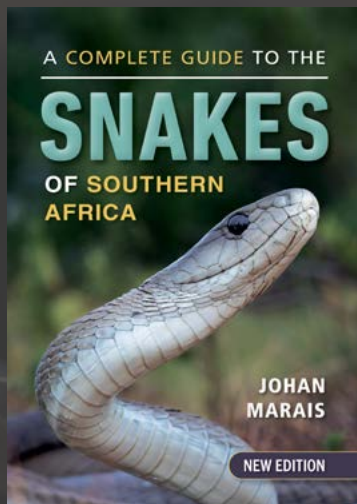
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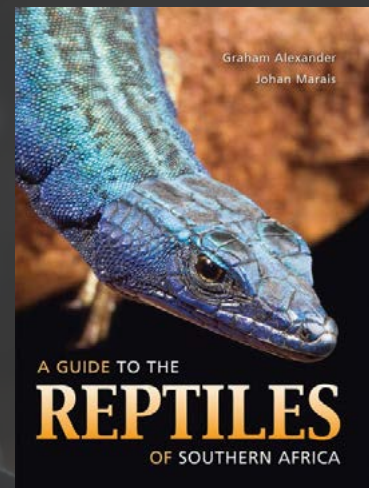
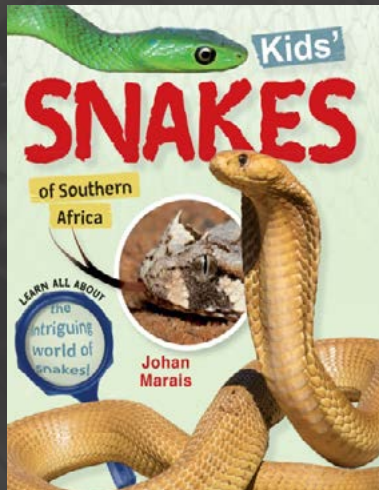
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