



VENOMOUS



Photo Bill Branch

Stiletto Snakes

(*Atractaspis spp.*)



Average length
30-50 cm



There are around 20 species of stiletto snakes in Africa. They average around 30 cm in length but may reach 80 cm. Stiletto snakes live underground but emerge on hot summer nights, especially after rain, and may be stepped on. These snakes have large rotating fangs and cannot safely be held behind the head - they simply jerk the head and stab the handlers finger. They are mostly blackish-brown in colour with a similar-coloured belly, but some have white bellies. They are easily confused with a number of harmless dark snakes. The venom is potently cytotoxic, causing pain, swelling, blistering and necrosis. There is no antivenom for stiletto snakes and a number of fatal bites have been recorded.



Photo Steve Spawls