

SNAKES

Relevant information for residents and visitors

Several residents have experienced snakes coming into their homes or encountering them on walks, so it is important to be armed with information on how to deal with this natural phenomenon.

Gappy Smythe, a past Estate Manager of Cathkin Estates, supplied relevant data on the commonest varieties in the Valley, and what action to take.

Most importantly, it is essential to be able to identify the reptile. Gappy summarized the most commonly encountered snakes in this area, according to their degree of toxicity:

1. Non venomous

Common house or olive house snake: They are light to medium brown, with light marking on the side of the face or jaw line. Another characteristic is the bulging eyes.

Mole snake: found mostly in the garden. light to medium brown, with small eyes, a beaked head and a very thick body.

Green bush snake: Emerald to dark green with dark spots on upper half of body. large eyes with long, thin tail.

Common garden snake (slug eater): The light colour on top is divided from the darker colour below by a distinctive line. It has a light underbelly and is very laid back!

Common egg-eater: is often confused with the night adder. It is light brown with longish dark spots (not a 'V').

2. Mildly venomous

The night adder: Grey/brown in colour with darker spots but has a distinct V behind the head which is squarish. Although aggressive, they sometimes advertise their presence by making considerable noise.

Whip snakes: Usually found in grassland, they are olive to brown in colour, with a midline of darker brown to black down the back. The belly is orange to off white.

Spotted skaapsteker: is brown with two definite pale stripes down the back, and a spotted neck area.

Herald snake: Light or dark brown with a darker head and usually white flecks on the body. Its distinctive feature is the orange mouth.

3. Venomous

Puff adder: The fattest of the adders, it is large and lazy with big fangs. Yellow, brown or dark brown in colouring, it has regular, chevron-like markings on the back. Unless trodden on, it will hiss before striking.

Rinkhals: Hooded, but not a cobra. They will mostly hiss, then spit before striking. Eyes caught in the venom must be washed out with any liquid available at once. There are two main variations in the Valley:

- dark brown with sandy markings. When it rears up, it has two creamy/yellow/orange bands on the underside of the neck.
- Dark brown upper body with lighter bands, with two white bands on underside of neck, with mottled underbelly.

Berg adder: A short (max 0,5m), fat body, dark brown/grey with definite geometric pattern and a distinctly adder-like head. Beware of this little adder on hikes as it is often on rocky surfaces in the sun and strikes instinctively if threatened.

Boomslang: Although uncommon here, it has been seen in the Valley. It has varied colouring, but commonly greenish, with large eyes. This snake should not be confused with the variegated bush snakes. It is very shy and usually takes off when it is disturbed. Although back fanged it has extremely potent venom.

General pointers

- Always make a noise when out walking (especially when alone).
- Try to stay calm if confronted by a snake.
- Try to identify the snake, being cautious if you cannot.
- If you know it is non-venomous or mildly venomous, guide it gently into a plastic packet or other container, and set it free away from the house.
- If not successful at the above, you may have to kill it as a last resort by striking it on the head.
- Snakes love eating frogs, so see that your house and garage are clear of these. Lights attract insects which attract frogs which in turn attract snakes.
- If you are bitten, Rule No One is to STAY STILL and call for help (i.e. hike with a cellphone).
- If the biter is identified as venomous, get yourself off to a doctor or casualty department as soon as possible.
- Apply a pressure bandage from the bite area upwards (towards the heart) – but not for a puff adder bite.
- DON'T CUT OR SQUEEZE; DON'T USE TOURNIQUETS; DON'T APPLY SUCTION BY MOUTH – only with mechanical device, operator being careful not to become infected as well.
- Immobilise the limb in a splint or sling. Keep the limb below the level of the heart.

Remember....

Learn to identify.

Keep frogs out of houses and garages – don't leave lights on inside with doors open at night.

Only destroy the reptile if absolutely necessary.

LIST OF SNAKES KNOWN TO OCCUR IN THE CENTRAL DRAKENSBERG AREA

Snake	isiZulu	Seen on Cathkin Estates
Venomous		
Berg Adder	(SS) Qwaane	
Boomslang		
Mozambique Spitting Cobra	(Z) M'fezi	
Puff Adder	(Z) Ibululu / iHobusha	X
Rinkaals	(Z) Uphepethwane / iPhimpi	X
Sundevall's Garter Snake		
Mildly Venomous		
Black-headed Centipede Eater		
Common Purple-glossed Snake		X
Cream-spotted Mountain Snake		
Crossed Whip Snake / Cross marked Sand Snake / Montane Grass Snake	(Z) inTlangu	
Herald Snake / Red-lipped Snake		X
Many-spotted Snake / Reed Snake		
Rhombic Night Adder	(Z) Nyoka yasebusuku / inHlangwana / uMantshingelana	X
Spotted Harlequin Snake	-	
Spotted Skaapsteker / Rhombic Skaapsteker		X
Non-venomous		
Aurora House Snake		
Bibron's Blind Snake		
Brown House Snake	(Z) Umzingandlu / inKwakhwa	X
Common Brown Water-snake	(Z) iVuzamanzi elimduba	
Common Slug-eater		X
Common Wolf Snake / Cape Wolf Snake		
Dusky-bellied Water Snake	(Z) Ivuzamanzi elimnyama	
Green Water Snake	(Z) vuzamanzi eliluhlaza	
Mole snake	(Z) uBhulube	X
Olive House Snake / Black House Snake		X
Rhombic Egg-eater / Common Egg-eater		X
Southern Brown Egg-eater		
Spotted Rock Snake		
Green Bush Snake		X

Schedule Ref.: A Field Guide to the Natal Drakensberg (P Irwin, J Akhurst & D Irwin)
& A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa (J Marais)