



**SNAKE BITE**  
ASSIST



# SA SNAKES

*An interactive pdf guide*



# SA SNAKES IA PDF

## Contribution

## Acknowledgements



We sincerely thank the following persons and organizations for their contributions in the making of this field guide

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Harmless to humans



Mildly venomous treat with caution



Venomous medically significant



Venomous potentially deadly



# VENOM

The venom of snakes are produced in modified salivary glands and has the purpose of immobilizing prey, digestion of prey and possibly defence against predators. The venoms are a mixture of various toxins which often work synergistically and can end up being very potent because of the combinations. We broadly categorise the toxins into

**Neurotoxins** which cause flaccid paralysis and are further divided into Presynaptic, Postsynaptic and Anticholinesterase effects.

**Haemotoxins** that interfere with normal haemostasis by causing either bleeding or thrombosis.

**Cytotoxins** (also called necrotoxins) which cause direct cell deaths at the site of the bite and surrounding area.

**Myotoxins** which destroy skeletal muscles and then

**Cardiotoxins** which means it has a negative effect on the action of the heart, due to poisoning of the cardiac muscle or of its conducting system.

In South Africa we group the snakes into the first three main categories as these are usually the effects that we monitor . As already stated some snakes have combinations of these toxins but we have managed to divide them into just three for these purposes.



# CYTOTOXIC

## TISSUE AFFECTING TOXINS

Major cytotoxic snakes include –

PUFF ADDERS, GABOON ADDERS, MOZAMBIQUE SPITTING COBRA, WESTERN BARRED SPITTING COBRA (Namibia), WOOD'S BLACK SPITTING COBRA.

Spitting Cobras have a Cytotoxic and to a lesser extent Neurotoxic venom.

Rinkhals in some areas have a strong cytotoxic effect as well.

Minor cytotoxic snakes include –

Stiletto snake (also known as the burrowing asp), Horned Adder and Many-horned Adder, Night Adder and Snouted Night Adder, Desert Mountain Adder and Plain Mountain Adder.

The venom and fangs: In the adder family, venom is injected most often just under the skin into subcutaneous tissue via hollow, movable fangs located in the anterior mouth although because of the size of the fangs intramuscular or intravenous injection also occurs. The cobras do not have movable fangs and these are much shorter so most bites are subcutaneous.

Cytotoxic venom is generally composed of several digestive enzymes and spreading factors, which result in local and systemic injury. Clinically, local effects progressing from pain and edema to ecchymosis (bleeds under the skin) and bullae (watery blisters) most commonly predominate. Hematological abnormalities including benign defibrination with or without thrombocytopenia (increased bleeding and decreased clotting) may result, but severe generalized bleeding is not common.

Pain and swelling occurs almost immediately after the bite from a cytotoxic snake and gradually becomes worse, in the next few hours. (Within 4 to 6 hours it will be more pronounced) It is often described as "cold fire" Later shock develops and this may cause death.

Findings of necrosis usually are evident by 48 hours following the bite. Necrosis begins with darkening of the area around the fang punctures. Blistering may follow. Necrosis usually is confined to the skin and subcutaneous tissue, but may be quite extensive. A putrid smell is characteristic.

Acute inflammation of the eye follows venom-spitting exposure and is characterized by ocular congestion, edema of the conjunctiva and cornea, and a whitish discharge.



# NEUROTOXIC

## NERVE AFFECTING TOXINS

Major neurotoxic snakes include –

BLACK MAMBA, GREEN MAMBA, CAPE COBRA, FOREST COBRA, SNOUTED COBRA (formerly known as Egyptian Cobra), RINKHALS, SEA SNAKES.

Rinkhals have a Cytotoxic as well as a Neurotoxic venom.

Minor neurotoxic snakes include –

Coral Snakes, Shield Nose Snakes, Garter Snakes, Berg adders (generally do not cause respiratory distress).

The Elapid group: To many people, the cobras and mambas are the quintessential venomous snake. Most of these snakes elevate the head and spread the neck as a threat gesture. However, a number of other snakes, venomous and non-venomous, employ this defense as well. However when encountered, cobras and mambas usually try to escape, but occasionally defend themselves boldly and may appear aggressive.

The venom: Non spitting cobra and mamba envenomation is an extremely variable process. Most species cause profound neurological abnormalities (eg, cranial nerve dysfunction, abnormal mental status, muscle weakness, paralysis, and respiratory arrest).

Mamba bites are considered more serious than bites from other elapid species. This is due to greater volumes of injected venom and more rapid onset of neurotoxic symptoms. Mortality is also higher.

Most snakebites are inflicted on body extremities. Since these snakes usually only bite when molested, bites on the hands and feet are common. Due to their size, bites to the head and torso is not uncommon with mambas.



# HAEMOTOXIC

## BLOOD TOXINS (HAEMOTOXIC)

Major haemotoxic snakes include –BOOMSLANG, BIRD or TWIG SNAKE

### SYMPTOMS.

This type of venom is slow in comparison with the other two types mentioned. Effects can be seen after as little as 1 hour but can take a few days to manifest.

The venom causes irregularities in the victim's blood, preventing it from clotting.

A bleeding tendency occurs starting with all the mucous membranes and progress to nose bleeds, bruises, blood is found in the urine and vomiting of blood. Anaemia and shock may develop and eventually kidney failure may set in.

Slight pain and discomfort and haemorrhage at sight of bite, dizziness and headaches are known to occur. Fibrin degradation products are cleared through the kidney and secondary renal failure is a potential complication of coagulopathy.

Death usually follows after 2 to 5 days. Antivenom can be administered after a few days and still work effectively however the kidneys would have been damaged by then. In the event that the antivenom is not obtained in time, whole blood and fresh freeze-dried plasma should be administered



Aurora House Snake



Common File Snake



Brown House Snake



Common Slug Eater



Rhombic Egg Eater



Common Wolf Snake



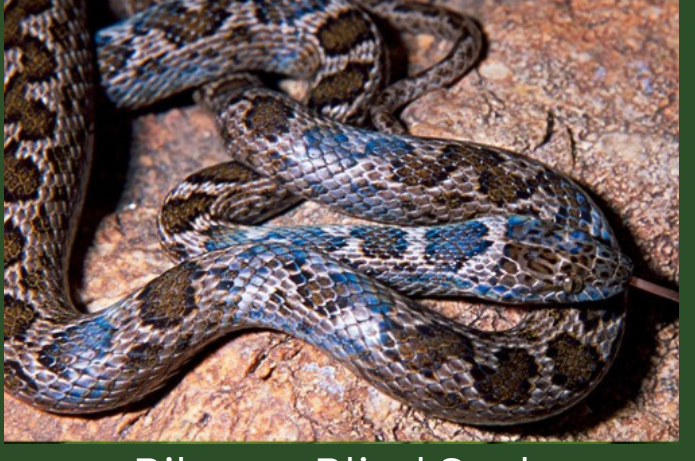
East African Egg Eater



Delalande Beaked Blind Snake



Spotted House Snake



Dusky Bellied Water Snake



Bibrons Blind Snake



Green Water Snake



Brown Water Snake



Olive House Snake





Southern African Python



Spotted Bush Snake



Sundevall Shovel Snout



Swazi Rock Snake



Two-striped Shovel Nose



Western Natal Green Snake



Bark Snake



Namib Tiger Snake



Cross Marked Sand Snake



Short Snouted Grass Snake



Stripped Skaapsteker



Purple-Glossed Snake



Red Lipped / Herald Snake



Rufous Beaked Snake



Spotted Harlequin Snake



Spotted Skaapsteker



Striped Harlequin Snake



Tiger Snake



Western Yellow-Bellied Sand Snake



Natal Black Snake



Beaked Stiletto Snake



Berg Adder



Bibrons Stiletto Snake



Cape Coral Snake



Decosters Garter Snake



Horned Adder



Many Horned Adder



Namaqua Dwarf Adder



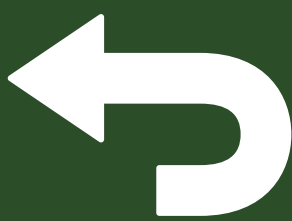
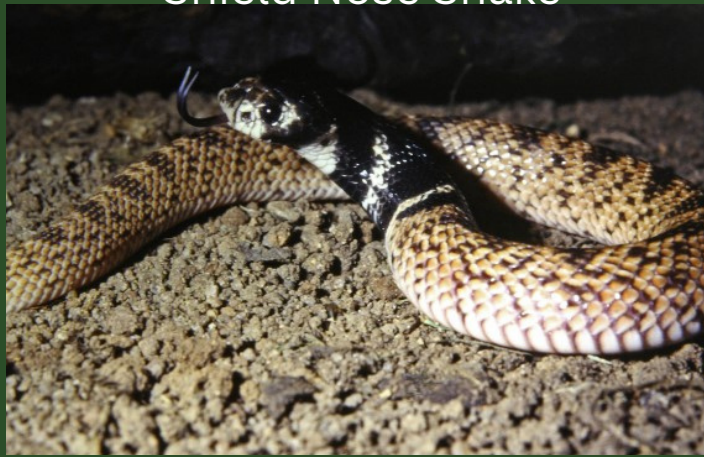
Rhombic Night Adder



Plain Mountain Adder



Shield Nose Snake



Black Mamba



Black Spitting Cobra



Boomslang



Cape Cobra



Forest Cobra



Gaboon Adder



Green Mamba



Mozambique Spitting Cobra



Puff Adder



Rinkhals



Snouted Cobra



Vine Snake




# QUICK FACTS



## AURORA HOUSE SNAKE

*lamprophis aurora*

 18cm - 90cm



**Harmless to humans**



- Colour can range from olive green to bright green and even yellow.
- The orange stripe along its spine and head is unique to this species.
- Feeds on rodents, frogs and lizards
- This harmless constrictor moves primarily at night and is very reluctant to bite.
- When disturbed this species will often hide its head under its body.



This species occurs in various habitats where they can be quite common if the area is suitable, therefore they are not considered threatened even though a lot of their natural habitat has been destroyed.

This is a shy inoffensive constrictor which hunts at night.

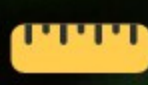


# QUICK FACTS



## BROWN HOUSE SNAKE

*Boaedon capensis*

 15cm – 1.2m



**Harmless to humans**



- Brown in colour, may be patterned in some areas with lateral lines running down its sides.
- Belly is pearly white in colour
- Has lines above its eyes that are light in colour
- Feeds on lizards, frogs and small mammals.



Occurs in various habitats across Southern Africa.

Found in abandoned burrows, under rocks or crack and crevices. Very common species and is often encountered near houses, where it hunts for mice and lizards.






# QUICK FACTS



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## RHOMBIC EGGEATER

*Dasypeltis scabra*

 21cm - 1m



**Harmless to humans**



- Light brown to grey in colour with dark rhomboid markings on its body often edged in white.
- Has multiple dark chevrons on its head (easily confused with night adder, which has only one)
- The inside of the mouth is pitch black and the teeth are not visible.
- This species will make a horseshoe shape when threatened and rub its scales together to make a hissing sound



Occur in almost all habitats across South Africa save for extreme areas such as true deserts.

This species feeds exclusively on bird eggs which it swallows whole after which it then cracks the shell in its neck drinking the contents and regurgitating the crushed shell in a neat package.

The snake can swallow eggs many times the diameter of its head.



# QUICK FACTS




SNAKE BITE  
ASSIST

## EAST AFRICAN EGG EATER

*Dasypeltis medici  
medici*

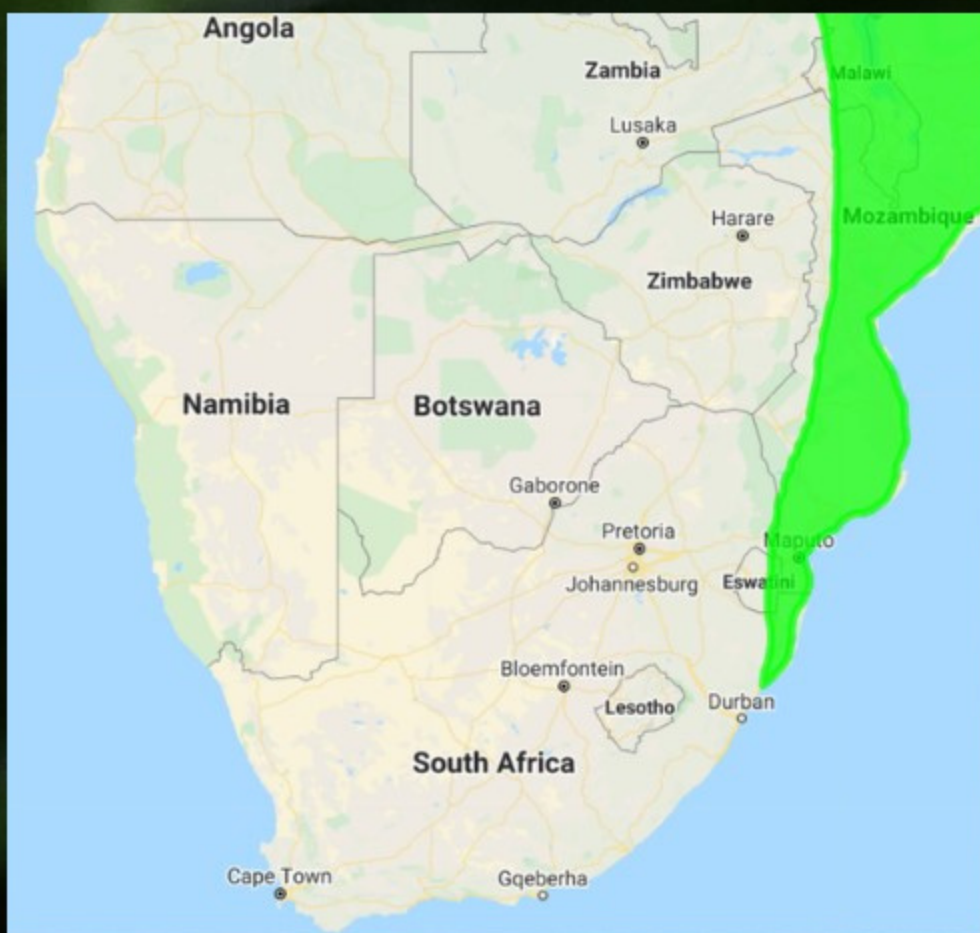


 12cm - 90cm

**Harmless to humans**



- Light brown in colour with dark brown markings on its body.
- Like the rhombic egg eater it has multiple chevron markings on its head
- Feeds on bird eggs



Occurs mostly in evergreen forests but can also be found in moist savanna found in abandoned burrows or under fallen leaves and branches.




# QUICK FACTS



## SPOTTED HOUSE SNAKE

*Lamprophis guttatus*

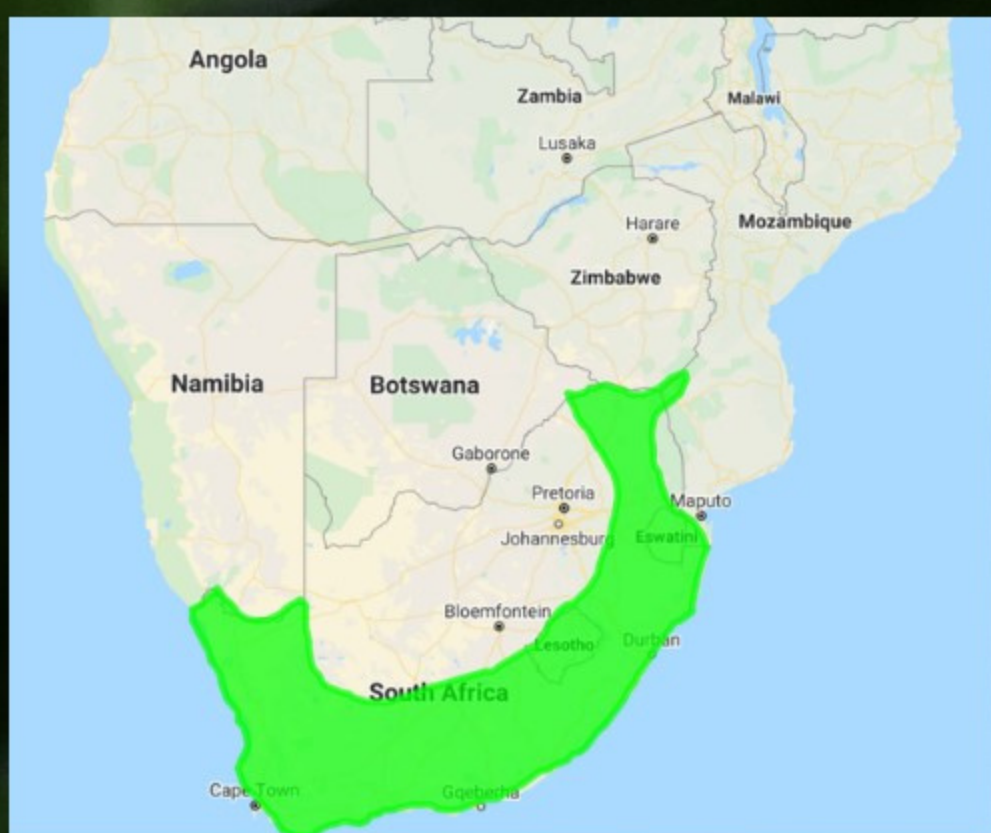


 12cm - 70cm

**Harmless to humans**



- Light brown, yellow-brown or grey in colour with dark brown or black spots down its back sometimes forming a zig-zag pattern.
- Feeds primarily on lizards and rodents that live in rock crevices



Occurs in various habitats across South Africa such as savanna and coastal forest as well as arid areas but it prefers rocky and mountainous areas.

Usually found in crack and crevices within rock faces.

Primarily a nocturnal species.




# QUICK FACTS



## BIBRONS BLIND SNAKE

*Afrotyphlops bibronii*



 11cm - 45cm

**Harmless to humans**



- Colour ranges from dark brown to earthworm pink (glossy scales).
- Head and tail cannot be distinguished from one another at a distance.
- As the name implies the eyes are reduced to small dots.
- The tail of this species ends in a sharp spike and when the snake is picked up it will often press this into the skin and is confused with a sting.
- Feeds on ants and termites



This is a burrowing species that spends most of its time beneath the soil surface frequently seen after heavy rains or when unearthed.





# QUICK FACTS



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## BROWN WATER SNAKE

*Lycodonomorphus  
rufulus*



 18cm - 90cm

**Harmless to humans**



- Colouration varies from light brown to olive green.
- The jaw is lighter in colour than the rest of its body.
- The belly is usually a salmon pink to orange colour.
- Feeds on frogs, fish and sometimes rodents.



Often occurs near rivers and streams where it uses leaves and fallen logs as shelter.

This snake is inoffensive and rarely bites.




# QUICK FACTS



## COMMON FILE SNAKE

*Limaformosa capensis*

 39cm - 1.8m



**Harmless to humans**



- Colouration varies from blackish to dark grey with a white to yellow stripe down its spine, with the belly being white to cream.
- White colouration can sometimes be seen on the skin between the scales.
- Not harmful.
- Feeds primarily on other snakes (immune to venom) but also feeds on small mammals, frogs and lizards.



Occurs primarily in savanna areas where it can often be found under fallen branches or logs.




# QUICK FACTS



## COMMON SLUG EATER

*Duberria lutrix*

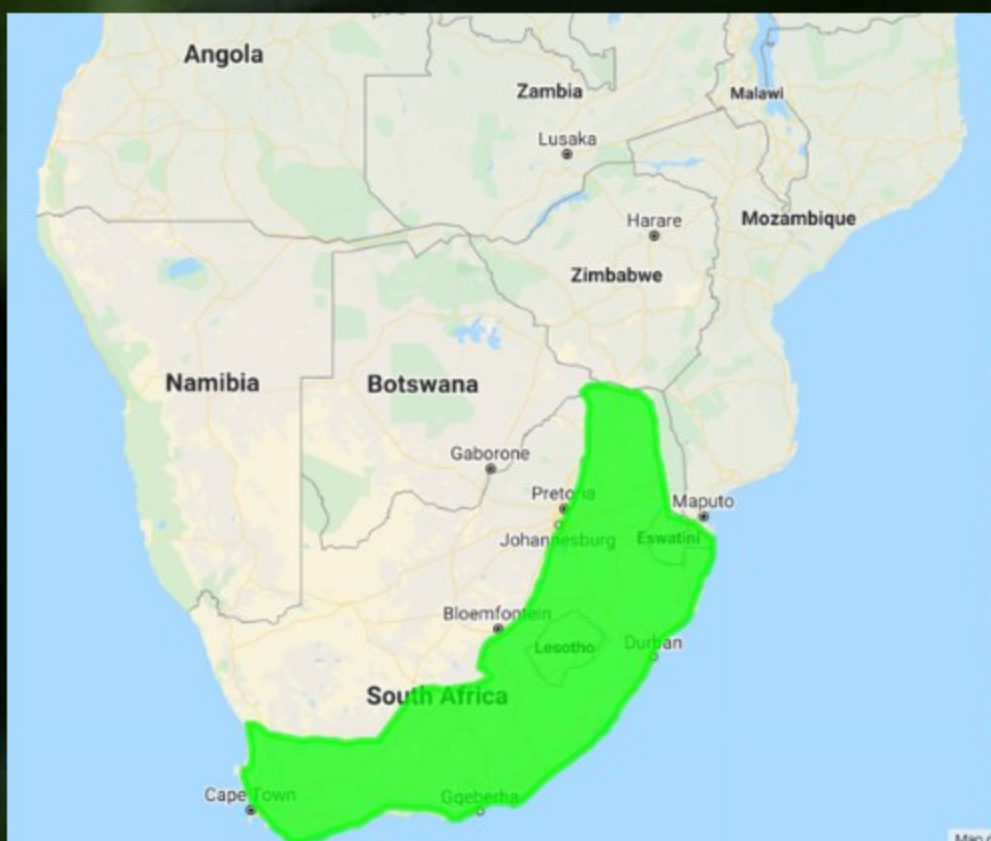


 8cm - 40cm

**Harmless to humans**



- This snake is grey in colour with a broad brown stripe down its back and a fine black stripe down the spine.
- Belly is usually a mottled creamy white colour.
- Feeds on slugs and snails
- When exposed this species can coil up into a tube shape. It can also empty its stomach contents which has a potent smell meant to deter predators.



A nocturnal snake that shelters under rocks or logs and leaves during the day until it emerges at night to hunt for food.

In some areas this snake is extremely common and can be found in high densities in gardens and areas with slugs and snails.

This snake is a livebearer and babies are very small.



# QUICK FACTS



## COMMON WOLF SNAKE

*Lycophidion capense*

 8cm - 45cm



**Harmless to humans**



- Dark-brown or black in colour
- Each scale usually has light spots on their tips giving the snake a powdered or speckled appearance.
- The belly is usually white with black mottled markings.
- Feeds on lizards



This nocturnal snake is often found under rocks or fallen branches. This snake is often confused with more dangerous snakes like Stiletto snakes.





# QUICK FACTS



## DELALANDE BEAKED BLIND SNAKE

*Rhinotyphlops lalandei*

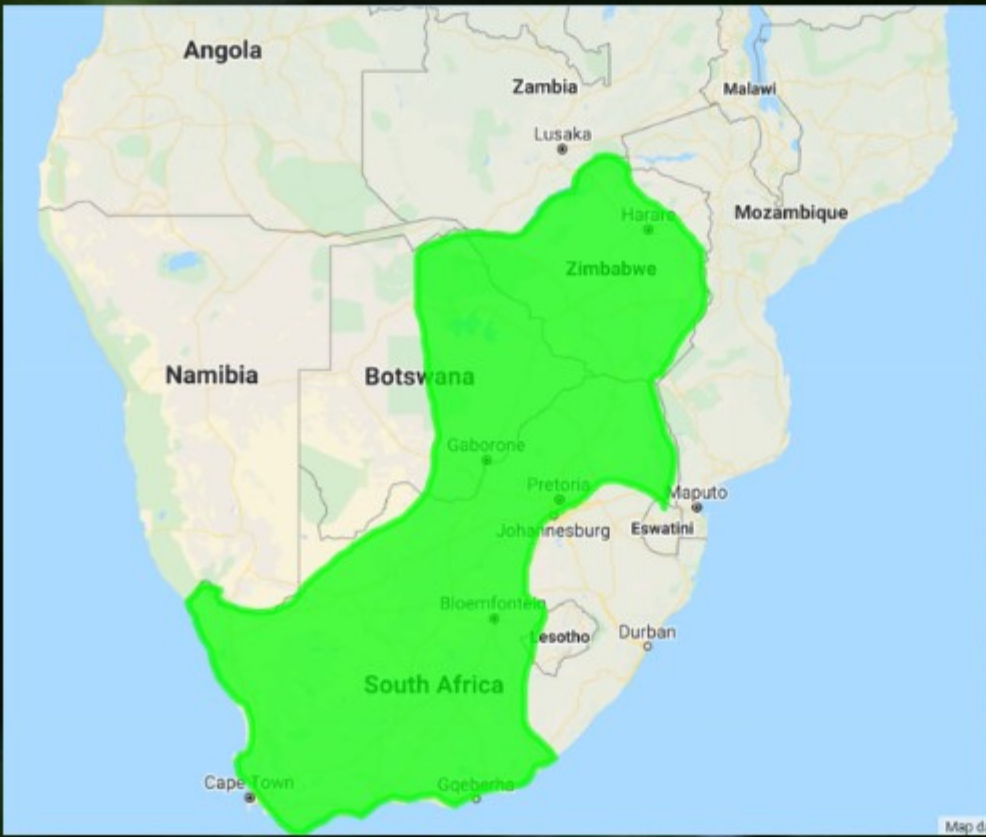


+/- 0.2m

**Harmless to humans**



- Body colour ranges from dark grey to pink
- Body has a checkered appearance
- Has tiny eyes that are barely visible and its nose area is covered by a large scale.
- This species has small belly scales unlike most other snakes.
- This species is often confused with earthworms.
- Feeds on insects like ants and their eggs.



Occurs in various habitats across South Africa.

A burrowing snake that is usually encountered after heavy rains or when accidentally excavated.



# QUICK FACTS



## DUSKY BELLIED WATER SNAKE

*Lycodonomorphus  
laevissimus*

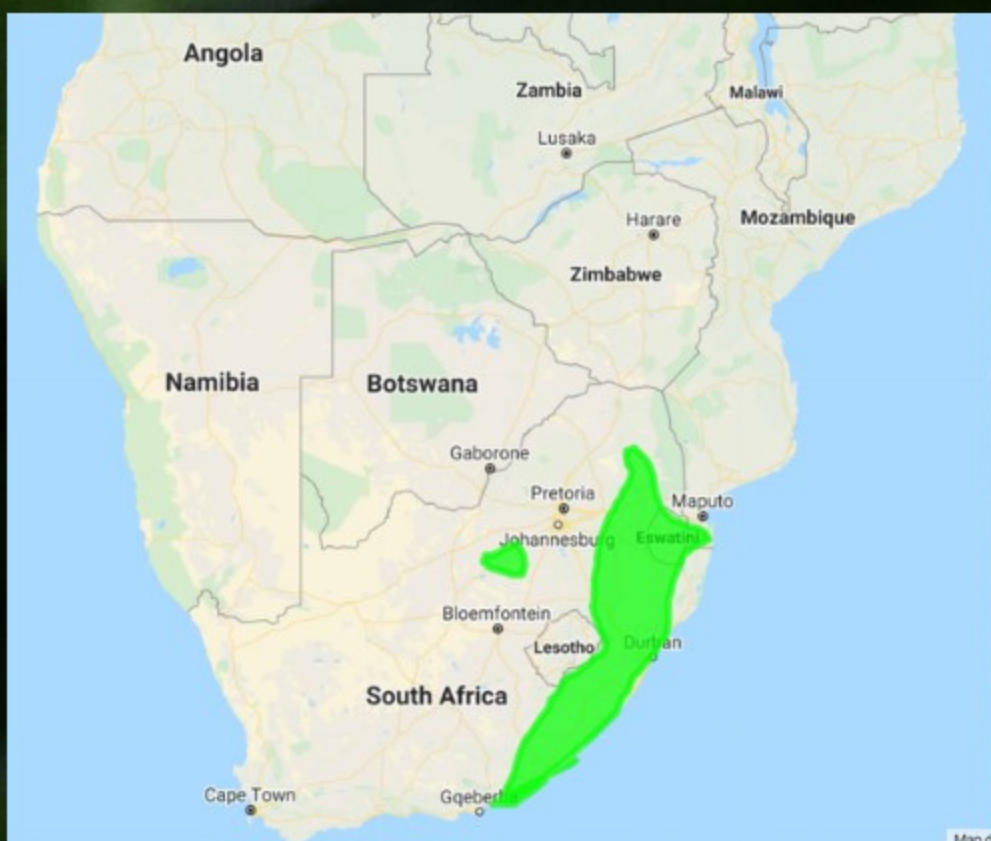


14cm - 1m

**Harmless to humans**



- Black, brown or grey in colour
- Stomach colour ranges from yellow to white with an indistinct marking down the belly
- Large eyes that are situated near the top of its head
- Feeds on fish and frogs



Occurs near rivers, dams and streams. This species however favors water masses with rocky banks. This snake is inoffensive and constricts its prey but can give off a musky odour when handled.



# QUICK FACTS



## GREEN WATER SNAKE

*Philothamnus  
hoplogaster*



12cm - 1m

**Harmless to humans**



- Bright green in colour
- The lips are white in colour
- The belly is either a creamy white or greenish yellow.
- Feeds on fish, frogs and lizards



Occurs in floodplains and wetlands or in damp areas near rivers and streams.

Can be found actively hunting for prey during the day.



# QUICK FACTS



## OLIVE SNAKE

*Lycodonomorphus  
inornatus*



22cm - 90cm

**Harmless to humans**



- Olive, brown or black in colour
- Head usually darker than the rest of body
- Lower jaw may be a pale colour
- The belly can be creamy white, green or even black.
- Feeds on lizards, rodents as well as other snakes
- Was grouped with house snakes in the past but is more closely related to the Brown water snakes.



Found in abandoned burrows, termite mounds or under rocks and branches. Is often found near permanent water and hunts at night.





# QUICK FACTS



## SOUTHERN AFRICAN PYTHON

*Python natalensis*

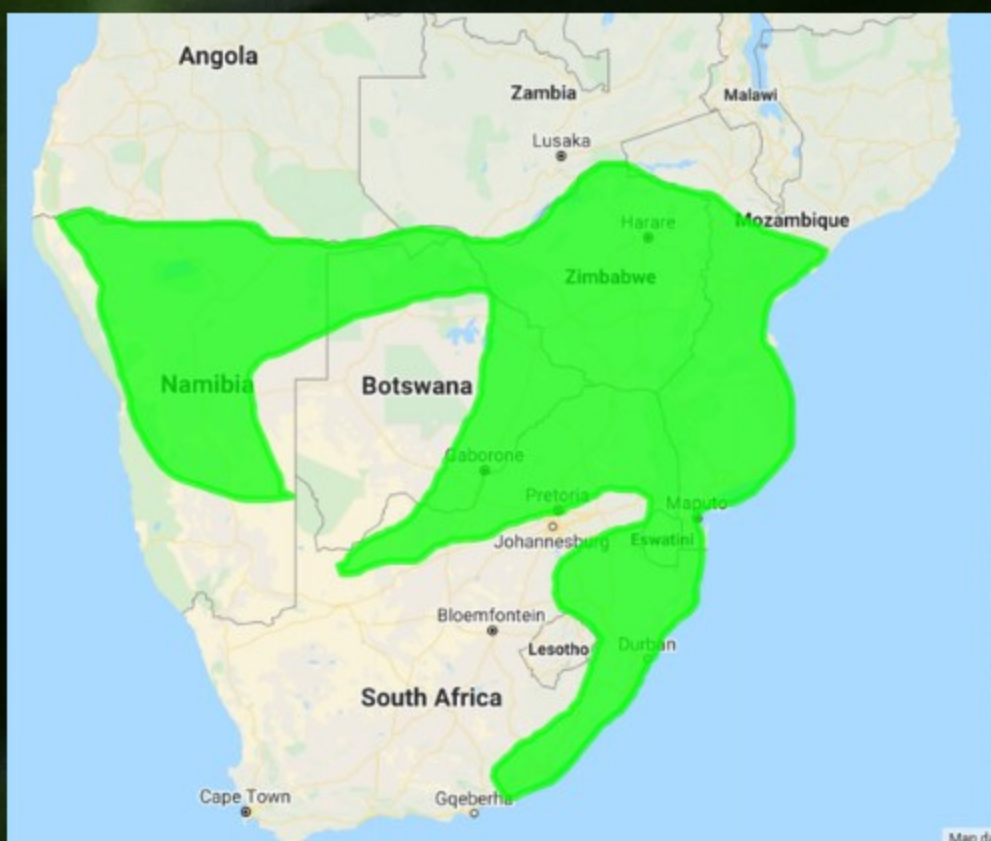
 45cm - 5.4m



**Large Specimens  
could pose a danger**



- Greenish grey background with light to dark brown patterns and a solid stripe through both eyes. Often striped on the tail.
- Not venomous but its large size makes it potentially dangerous. The size of the teeth means it can inflict deep wounds.
- Feeds on mammals, birds and occasionally reptiles.



Occurs across various habitats but prefers areas near a permanent water source.

Females can be found sheltering in abandoned burrows or termite mounds or old warthog holes where eggs are deposited and incubated.



# QUICK FACTS



## SPOTTED BUSH SNAKE

*Philothamnus  
semivariegatus*

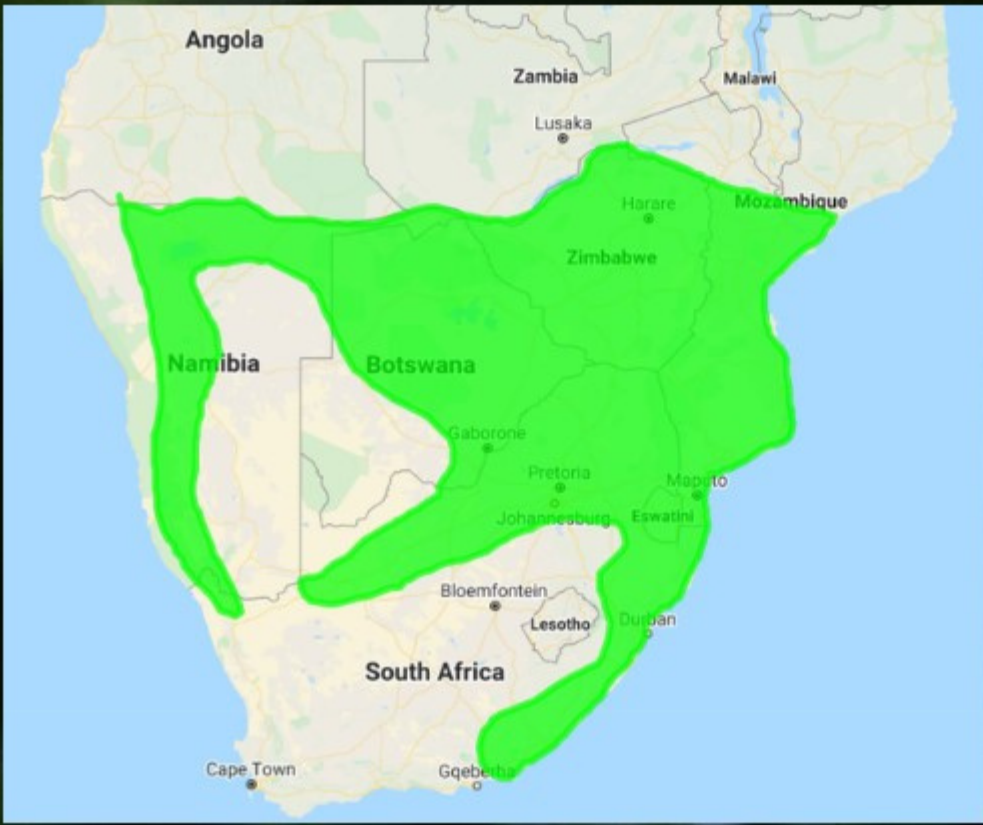


25cm - 1.1m

**Harmless to humans**



- Bright green in colour with black markings on the front half of the snake
- Stomach either white or yellow in coloration
- This species has orange eyes
- In the northern parts of its distribution the bottom part of the body is a bronze colour.
- In parts of Namibia this snake is completely brown with black spots.
- Feeds on lizards and frogs



Occurs in a wide variety of habitats but prefers areas with sufficient tree coverage or thick bush.

This is a very fast moving diurnal snake and will bite when held.



# QUICK FACTS



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## SUNDEVALL SHOVEL SNOUT

*Prosymna sundevalli*

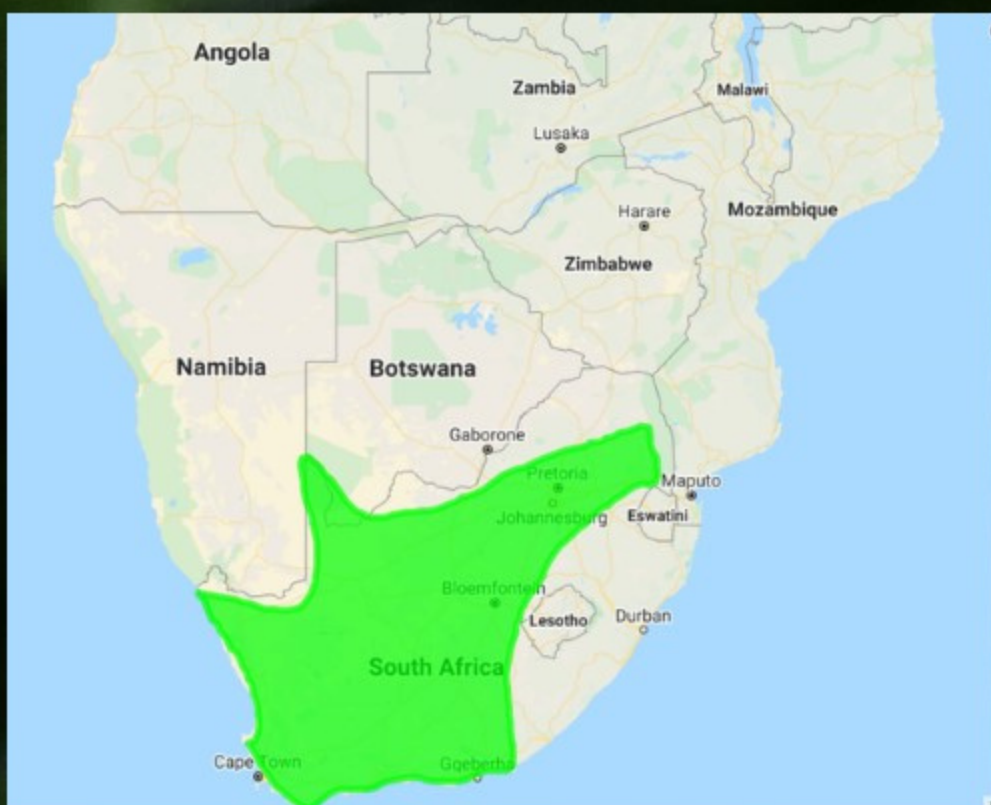


+/- 0.3m

**Harmless to humans**



- Body colour can range from dark brown to reddish brown.
- The snake is mottled with both dark and light spots.
- Stomach is usually cream white
- Head is dark brown with a lighter colouration forming a circle with a dark dot in the center of its head.
- The head is distinctly shovel shaped which is where the name comes from.
- Its mouth is too small to inflict a bite on a human.



Found in areas with loose soil which the snake burrows into.  
When disturbed the snake will coil up like a watch spring.  
This species feeds on reptile eggs, especially those of geckos.

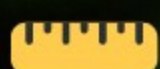


# QUICK FACTS



## SWAZI ROCK SNAKE

*Inyoka swazicus*



+/- 0.6m



**Harmless to humans**



- Dark brown to orange brown in colour
- Has a glossy appearance with orange eyes
- This snake's head is distinct from the body.
- This is a nocturnal species which hunts geckos and sleeping lizards.



Occurs in grassland and savanna, preferring rocky areas.





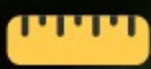
# QUICK FACTS



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## TWO-STRIPED SHOVEL NOSE

*Prosymna bivittata*



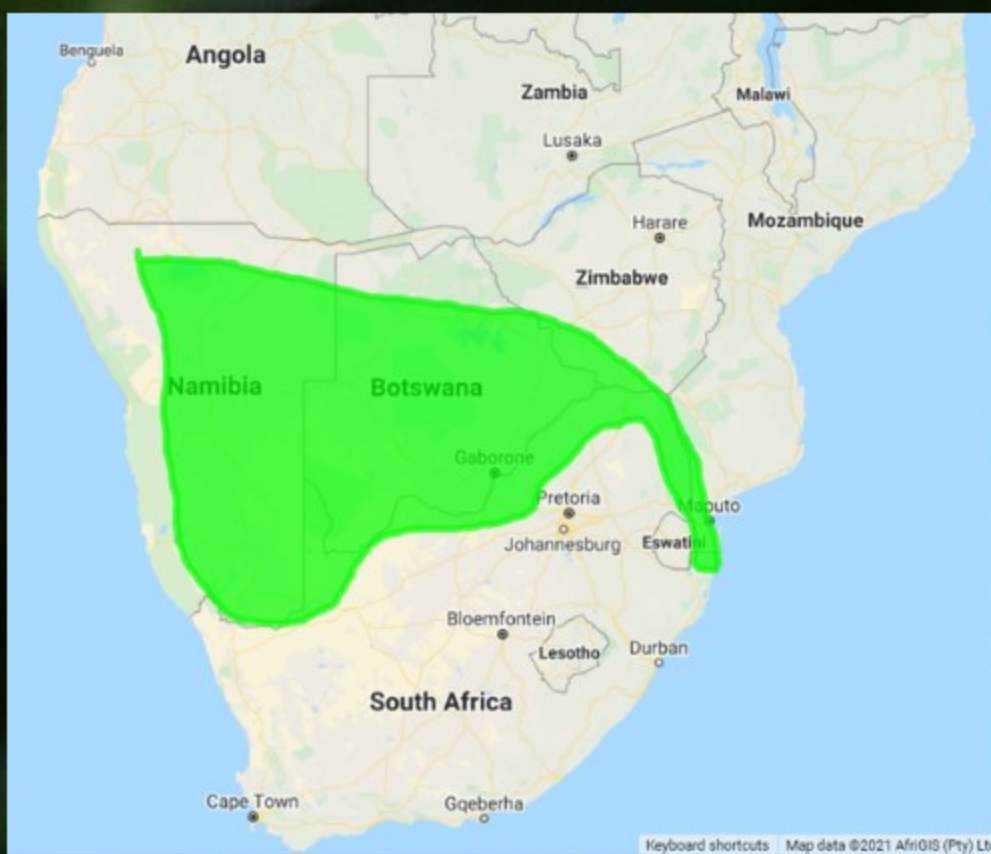
+/- 0.3m



**Harmless to humans**



- Sides of the snake are dark in colour (usually dark brown to black)
- Top of the snake is light brown to orange in colour giving it two distinct stripes
- Usually has a black dot in the middle of its shovel shaped head
- Stomach is usually cream white
- Feeds primarily on other reptiles eggs



Often found under rocks, fallen branches, abandoned burrow or termite mounds.



# QUICK FACTS



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## WESTERN NATAL GREEN SNAKE

*Philothamnus  
occidentalis*



12cm - 1m

**Harmless to humans**



- Green in colour, sometimes with a glossy blue sheen
- Some scales may have yellow or turquoise coloration
- This snake has very dark eyes.
- Belly is greenish yellow to white in colour
- Feeds on lizards and frogs



Occurs in coastal forest and prefers areas near water such as rivers or streams.

Often found in trees or tall shrubs where it shelters within crack or holes in the bark.

Diurnal hunter which can often be found in close proximity to other snakes of this species.




# QUICK FACTS



## MOPANE / EASTERN BARK SNAKE

*Hemirhagerrhis notoaenia*

 **10cm** – 42cm



**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- Grey to light brown in colour.
- Has dark patterns down its back which often take the shape of zig-zags.
- The tail of the snake ranges from orange to red in colour.
- The head of the snake has a dark marking with the neck being a light orange to almost rust - like colour.
- The venom of this snake has little effect on humans and it rarely attempts to bite.



Occurs in lowland forests and savanna.

This snake can be found within cracks and holes in trees or under bark as its name suggests.

It is perfectly camouflaged within its habitat and uses its bright coloured tail to lure prey within striking distance or simply ambushes its prey if it wanders close enough.




# QUICK FACTS



## NAMIB TIGER SNAKE

*Telescopus beetzii*

 16cm - 70cm



**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- Body is pale yellow in colour with an orange head
- Black spots on its body
- Feeds on small reptiles such as geckos and lizards
- Cytotoxic venom that has very little effect on humans



This snake is often found in crevices between rocks and under fallen logs. This snake species is nocturnal and emerges to hunt at night.

This snake can also be found crossing roads in the areas where they occur.





# QUICK FACTS



## CROSS MARKED SAND SNAKE

*Psammophis crucifer*

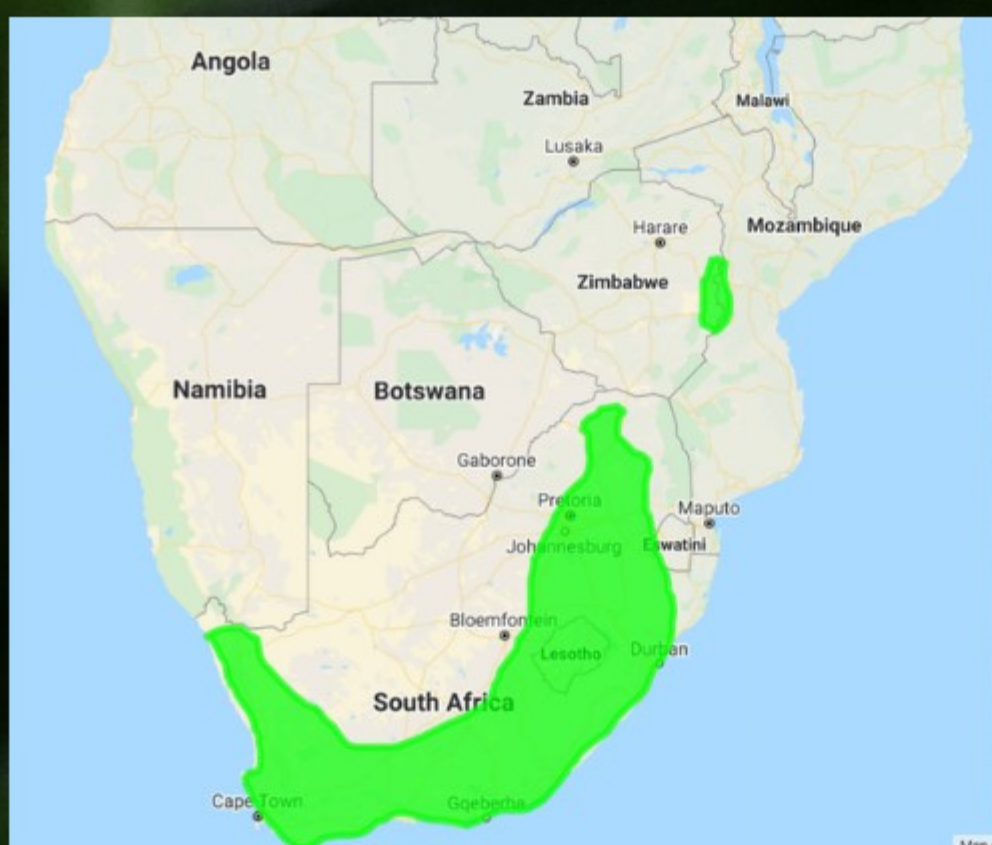


+/- 0.6m

**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- Darkly coloured on its back and sides with light colouration in-between
- Has a cross shaped mark at the back of its head
- Feeds on lizards and frogs



Occurs in a variety of habitats (fynbos, savanna, forests and grasslands) but prefers the sandy shrub covered areas within these habitats.

Often found in abandoned termite or rodent holes as well as cracks and holes in trees.



# QUICK FACTS



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## SHORT SNOUTED GRASS SNAKE

*Psammophis brevirostris*

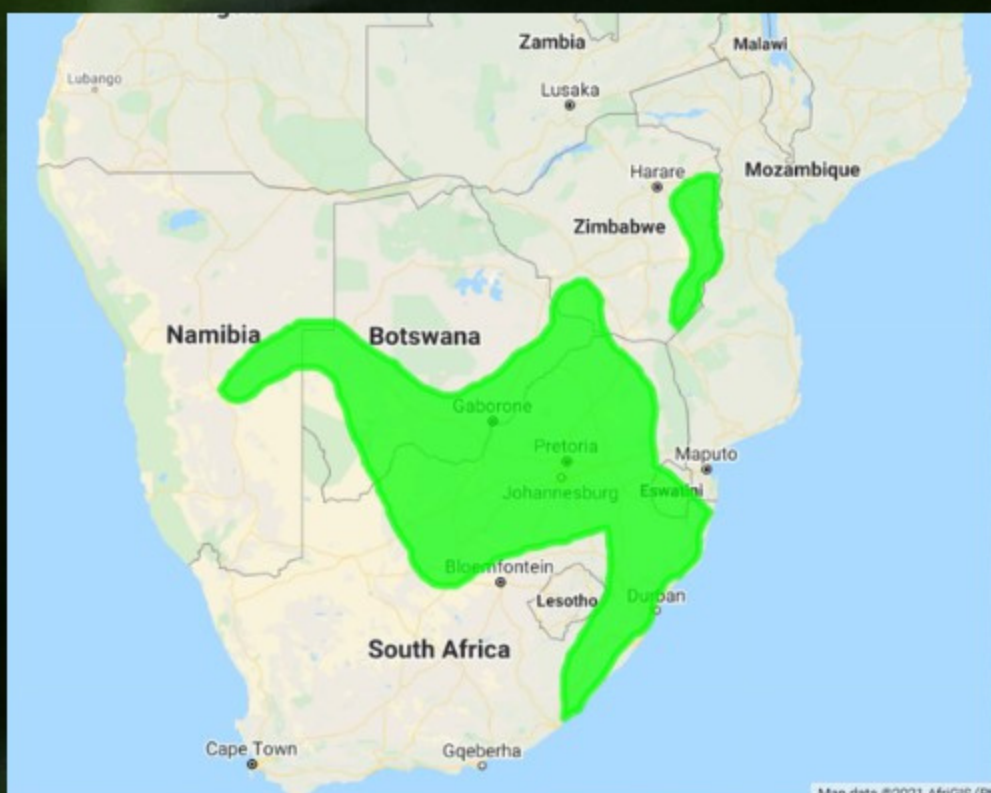


22cm - 1.1m

**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- Light brown in colour with a darker brown band along its back
- The spine has a light stitch like pattern on a darker background colour running down its entire length.
- Feeds on lizards, snakes and rodents
- This is an incredibly fast moving diurnal snake which hunts by sight.
- Bites from this species cause mild swelling but is of minor medical concern.



Occurs in savanna, grassland and coastal forest regions.

This fast moving snake will not hesitate to bite if it is handled and will even snap of the end of its tail in order to escape its aggressor.




# QUICK FACTS



## STRIPED SKAAPSTEKER

*Psammophylax  
tritaeniatus*



 10cm - 70cm

**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- The back is a cream brown with a dark stripe running along its spine.
- Sides are dark brown and the stomach cream white.
- The stripes extend onto the snakes head
- Feeds on lizards, rodents, frogs and birds.
- This fast moving snake is usually found in areas with long grass and reeds where its camouflage blends in with the background.



Occurs in savanna, grassland and wetland areas.

This is a diurnal species which actively hunts its prey.

Small prey items are immobilized and then swallowed while large prey may even be constricted.

Females will stay near the eggs and protect them from predators.




# QUICK FACTS



## PURPLE-GLOSSSED SNAKE

*Amydipsas polylepis*

 15cm – 1m



**Mildly venomous**  
**treat with caution**



- Black colour with a shiny (glossy) purple tint, very easily confused with Common wolf snakes and Stiletto snakes.
- This is a rear fanged snake that is very reluctant to bite. Not much information is available on the effects of its venom
- Feeds on other burrowing reptiles such as blind snakes and legless skinks



A burrowing snake that can be found under logs or rocks but usually only encountered after heavy rains or when accidentally dug up during building or excavating in areas.





# QUICK FACTS



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## RED LIPPED / HERALD SNAKE



*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*



8cm - 1m

**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- The colour is usually olive to brown or even grey, usually with white specks on its body.
- The top lip can be bright red, yellow or orange coloured (although this may be white in certain localities)
- The temples of this species are always characteristically dark.
- This snake will often flatten its head when threatened and pull back in an S shape, although it is not considered dangerous
- Feeds on amphibians and lizards.



Occurs in most habitats excepting the arid areas in the karoo and Northern Cape.

Found near water or in damp marsh like areas where it shelters under branches, leaves or rocks.




# QUICK FACTS



## RUFIOUS BEAKED SNAKE

*Rhamphiophis  
oxyrhynchus*

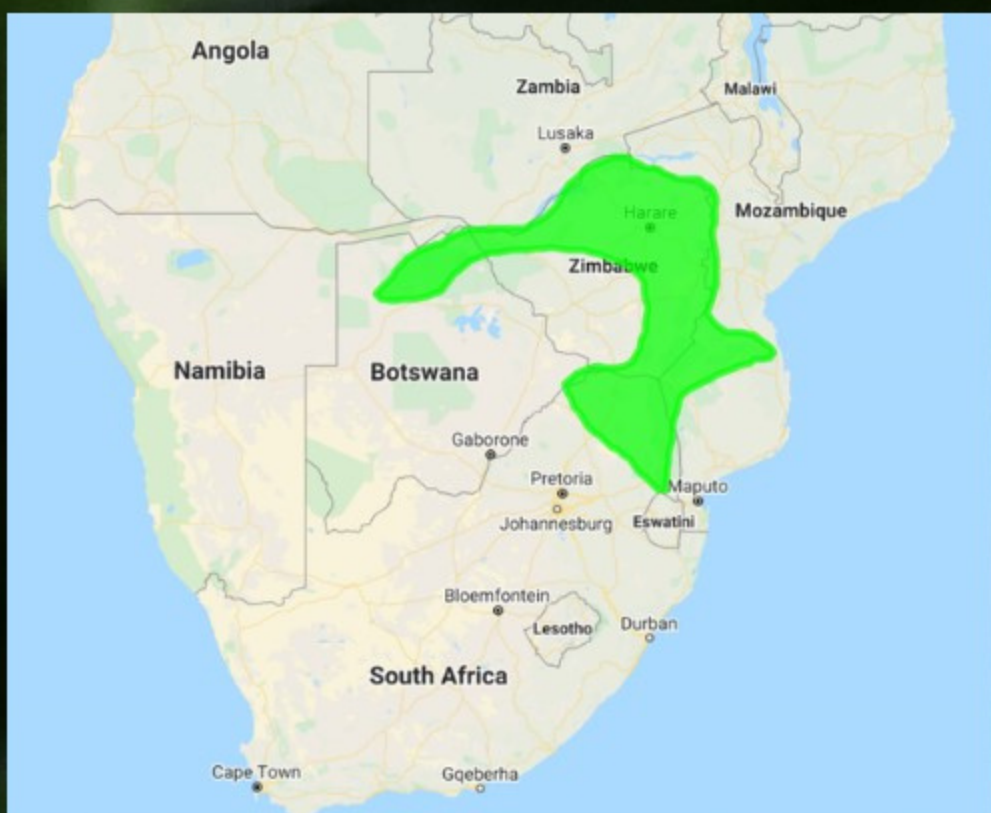


 16cm - 1.2m

**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- Yellow-brown or red-brown in colour with a net-like pattern on its body
- The dark patches over the eyes and beaked nose are distinctive of this species.
- Feeds on rodents, lizards and birds, although babies have even been found feeding on insects.
- Bites from this species are rare but are best avoided as massive swelling and bruising have been reported.



Found in bush- or thornveld areas of the northern provinces.

This fast moving diurnal species hunts by sight and is often seen with the head lifted high off the ground while searching for prey.




# QUICK FACTS



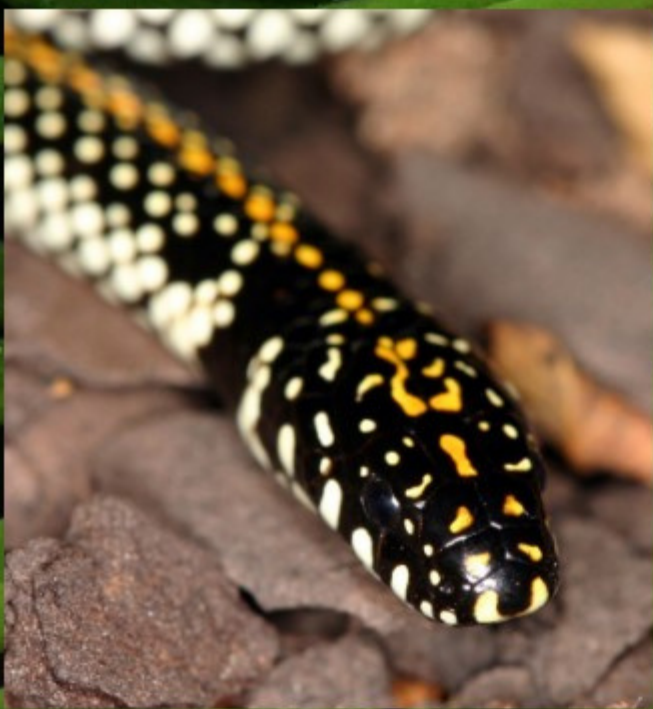
## SPOTTED HARLEQUIN SNAKE

*Homoroselaps lacteus*

 12cm - 62cm



**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- Has a bright line down length of its spine that differs from bright yellow to orange depending on locality.
- covered in black speckles or has black and yellow bands depending on locality.
- feeds on lizards, skinks and other snakes
- Cytotoxic venom.



Occurs in fynbos, moist savanna, grassland and lowland forest areas. Often found under rocks, fallen branches or crevices.



# QUICK FACTS



## SPOTTED SKAAPSTEKER

*Psammophylax  
rhombeatus*

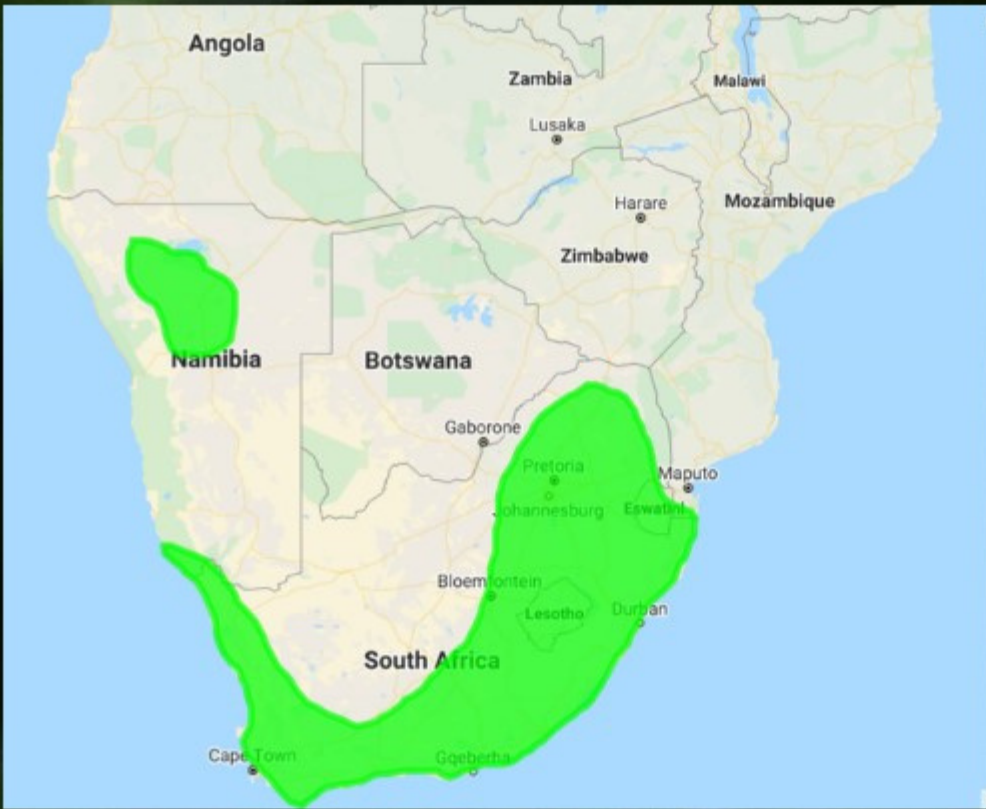


10cm – 90cm

**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- The background colour is usually grey to brown and can be either striped or spotted in appearance.
- If it is striped the spots will be fused on the sides of the neck while the spotted variant has large spots that occur along the lateral body from the neck to the tail.
- Feeds on lizards, rodents, birds and frogs.



This widespread species can be common in the correct environment. Found near bushes and abandoned burrows or termite mounds.






# QUICK FACTS



## STRIPED HARLEQUIN SNAKE

*Homoroselaps dorsalis*

 +/- 0.25m



**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- This snake has a bright yellow stripe from nose to tail down its spine.
- The sides are black and it has a cream coloured stomach.
- This snake is extremely thin and fragile looking.
- Feeds on worms and blind snakes.
- The venom of this species has not been researched and its effects are expected to not be of medical concern.



Burrows in loose soil looking for prey although it can be found in abandoned burrows or termite mounds. Very little is known about this species.



# QUICK FACTS



## EASTERN TIGER SNAKE

*Telescopus semiannulatus*



18cm - 1.1m



**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



- Orange or orangish yellow in colour with black bands across its body just like its namesake.
- Not dangerous to humans although it is considered mildly venomous.
- Feeds on a wide variety of prey such as geckos, rodents, bats and birds.



Occur in a wide variety of habitats across South Africa.

Found under fallen branches or rock crevices.

When agitated this snake will flatten its head and pull back in an S position.



# QUICK FACTS



## WESTERN YELLOW BELLIED SAND SNAKE

*Psammophis subtaeniatus*



**Mildly venomous  
treat with caution**



+/- 0.8m



- This species has stripes on its back and sides that range from black to brown in colour with light striping in between.
- The neck has a spotted appearance with its upper lip having smaller speckles that form a dotted line.
- The belly of this species has longitudinal dark stripes bordering a bright yellow underside.
- Feeds on lizards, rodents, birds and frogs.



Found in savanna grassland and bushy areas.

Like other Grass and Sand snakes this species will not hesitate to bite and may snap off the end of its tail to escape if it is caught.




# QUICK FACTS



## NATAL BLACK SNAKE

*Macrelaps  
microlepidotus*



 13cm - 1.1m

**Venomous**  
**Medically significant**



- Completely shiny black in colour including the stomach
- Has white markings between its scales
- Almost identical to purple glossed snake (only differs in subcaudal scales of which it only has a single row)
- Feeds on rodents, lizards and is even known to feed on carrion
- Venom unknown as there have been few recorded bites.(but should not be underestimated)



Occurs in coastal forest and savanna along the eastern coast of South Africa.

Found under fallen branches or leaves although it often burrows and is usually accidentally excavated.

This snake can be found crossing roads after rains.






# QUICK FACTS



## BEAKED STILETTO SNAKE



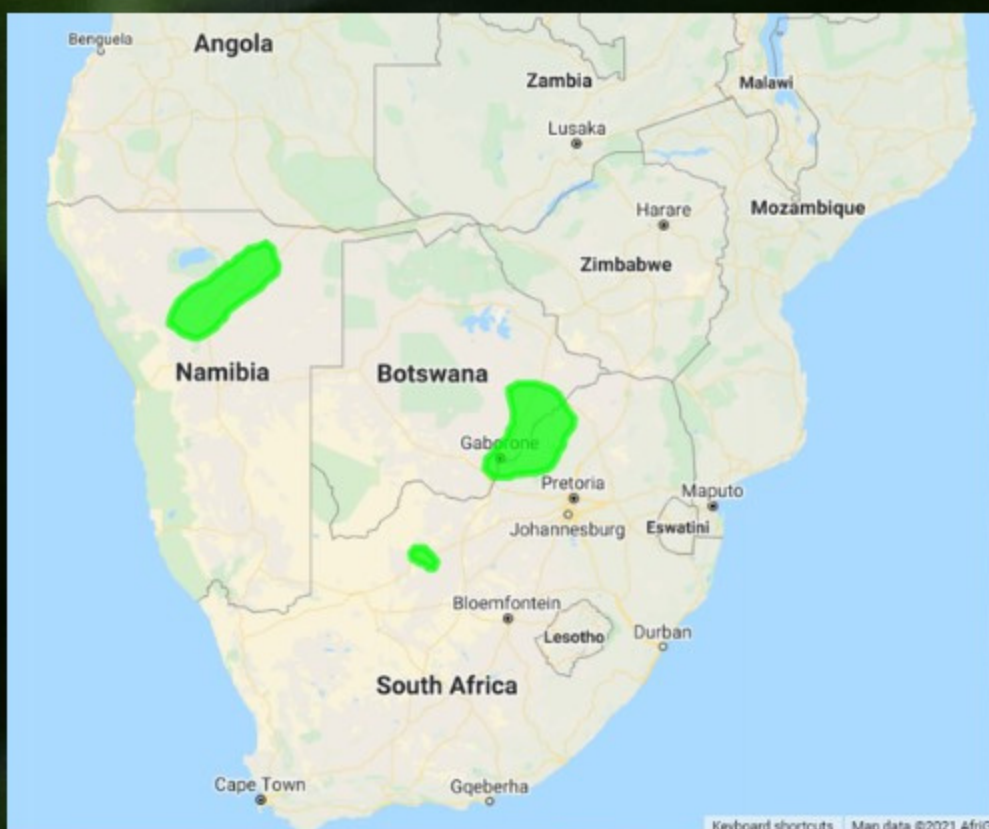
*Atractaspis duerdeni*

 11cm – 50cm

**Venomous**  
**Potentially**  
**Medically Significant**



- Black to dark purplish brown in colour
- Snout has a beaked appearance (its only difference from Bibrons Stiletto other than habitat)
- Has small beady eyes.
- Stomach is usually a cream colour.
- Has a short tail that is spiked at the tip.
- Relatively cytotoxic venom that is delivered by its side positioned fangs.



Burrowing species that is primarily found underground until forced to the surface by heavy rains or accidental excavation. Comes to the surface at night to hunt.

Feeds on small burrowing mammals and reptiles.

Do not attempt to handle this species




# QUICK FACTS



## BERG ADDER

*Bitis atropos*

 13cm - 55cm

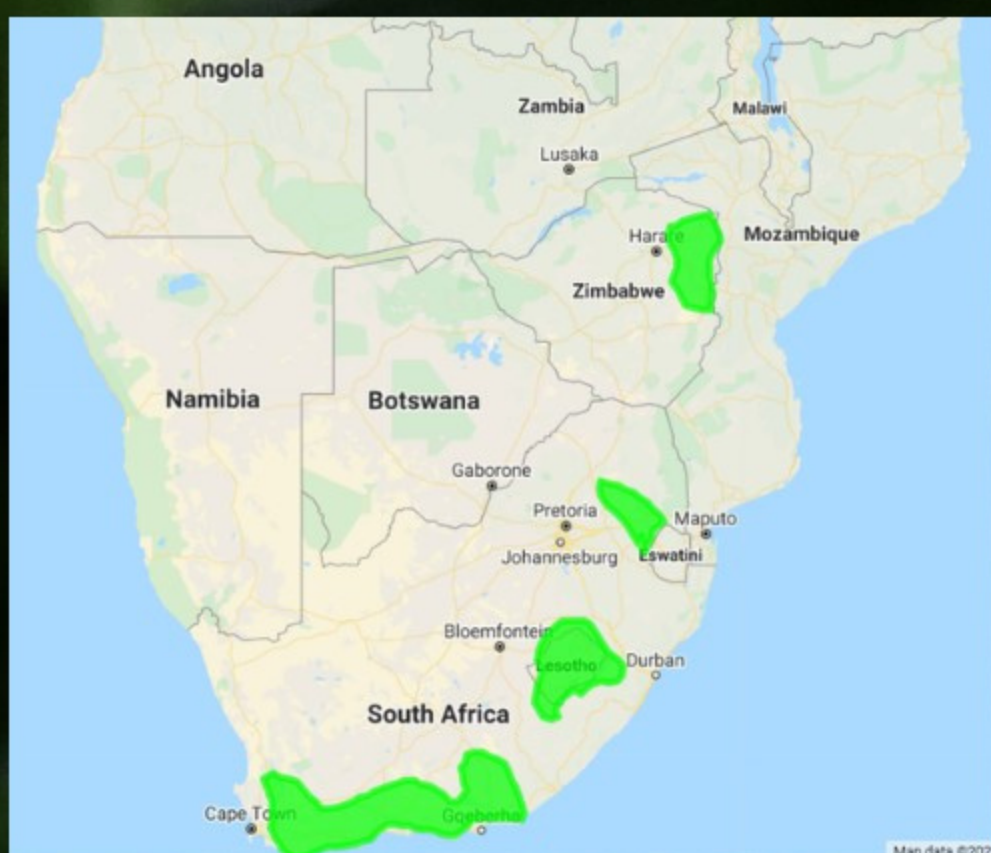


**Venomous**

**Medically significant**



- Grey, brown or red in colour
- Usually have dark markings down its spine that take the shape of butterfly wings
- Stomach usually greyish white in colour
- Feeds on small mammals, lizards and frogs. Cannibalism is not uncommon among babies.
- Cytotoxic venom which varies in potency depending on the distribution of the specific snake. Bites from this species must not be underestimated.



This snake occurs in various habitats found in mountainous regions preferring mountain slopes and hillsides but also occurs in grassland areas and under bushes on mountains.

The possibility of more than one species being identified in the future is not impossible as there is a large variation from one area to another.



# QUICK FACTS



## BIBRON'S STILETTO SNAKE



*Atractaspis bibronii*



11cm – 63cm

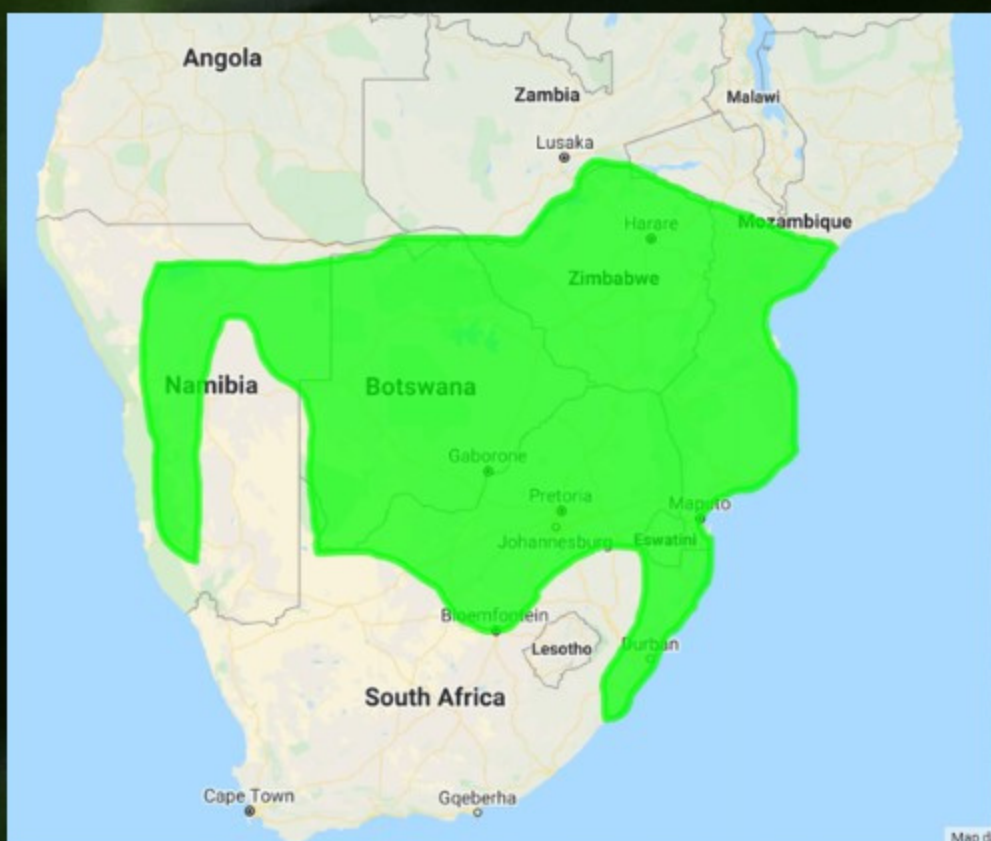
**Venomous**

**Potentially**

**Medically Significant**



- The specimen on the left is a Bibron's stiletto and right is a Beaked stiletto.
- Dark brown or black in colour.
- Snout usually lighter in colour than the rest of the body.
- Has small beady eyes.
- Stomach is usually a cream colour but is dark in some specimens.
- Has a short tail that is spiked at the end.
- Cytotoxic venom that is delivered by its side positioned fangs.



Occurs across various habitats but is absent from most areas within the Cape and its surrounding coastal areas.

Burrowing species that is primarily underground until forced to the surface by heavy rains or accidental excavation or when in search of prey. Feeds on small burrowing mammals and reptiles.

Do not attempt to handle this species. Bites cause immediate intense pain and swelling however no deaths have been recorded.

Bites commonly occur on hands and feet.




# QUICK FACTS



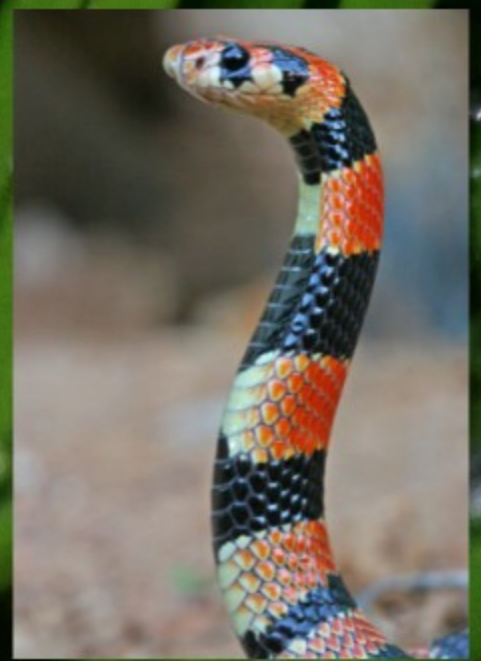
## CAPE CORAL SNAKE

*Aspidelaps lubricus*  
*lubricus*



 12cm - 73cm

**Venomous**  
**Medically significant**



- Red or orange in colour with black bands on its body
- Cream white stomach that is also banded in black.
- Black tear-shaped markings under eyes
- Feeds on lizards, small rodents and other snakes
- Neurotoxic venom



Occurs in fynbos and karoo preferring sandy or shrub areas within these regions.

Often shelters in rock crevices and abandoned holes although this species is also known to burrow if the soil is soft enough.

When agitated this snake flattens its neck but is not a true cobra.






# QUICK FACTS



## DECOSTERS GARTER SNAKE

*Elapsoidea sundevalli  
decosteri*



 13cm - 90cm

**Venomous**  
**Medically significant**



- Brown to dark brown in colour with a pale white or salmon pink stomach.
- Juveniles are dark with light banding.
- Feeds on toads, reptiles and rodents.
- Venom is poorly known but has caused symptoms such as swelling and nausea in bite victims. Bites from this species are rare.



Occurs within the coastal forest and sandveld areas in KZN.

Found near water sources where it shelters under rocks or fallen leaves and branches.




# QUICK FACTS



## HORNED ADDER

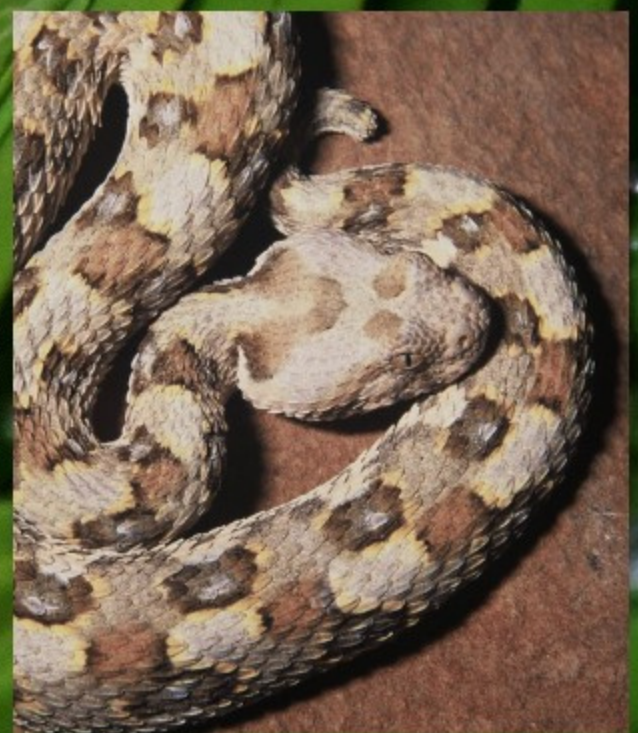
*Bitis caudalis*

 11cm - 45cm

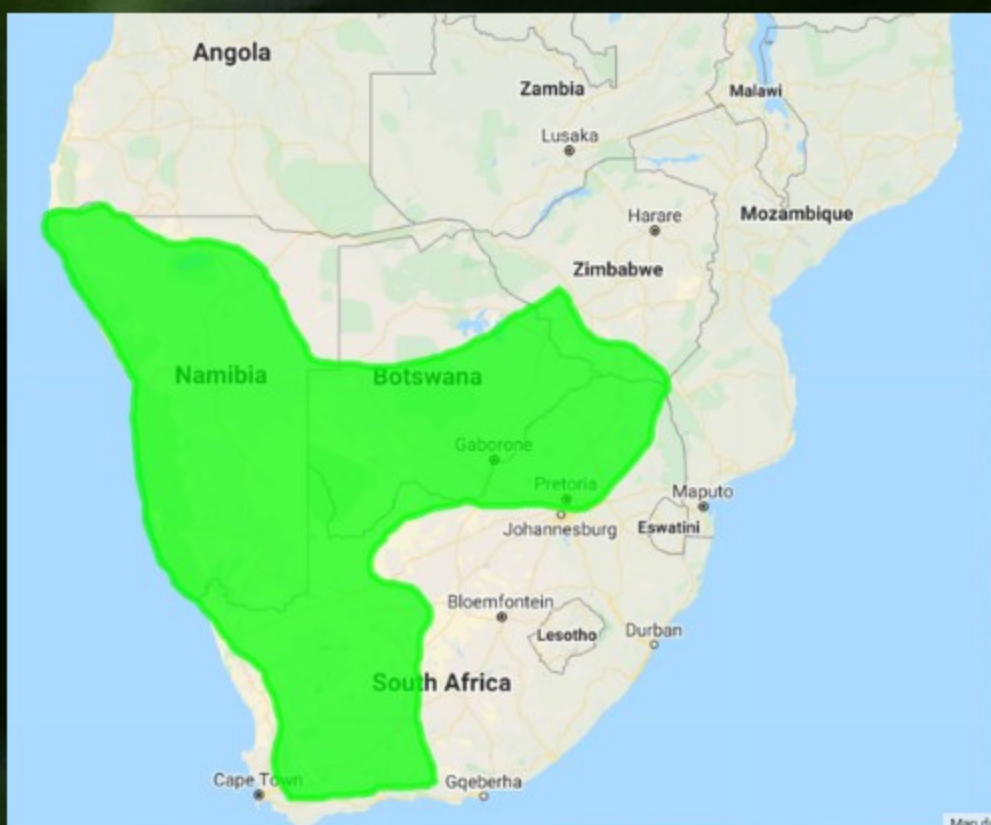


**Venomous**

**Medically significant**



- Can be grey, brown, yellowish or red in colour
- Have dark rectangular markings down the length of its body
- Has two horns, one above each eye
- Feeds on small mammals, lizards and geckos.
- Cytotoxic venom which is not lethal but causes limited necrosis around the bite site, SAVP polyvalent antivenom is not effective for this species.



Occurs in mostly arid areas throughout South Africa.

Found under rocks, in crevices or partially covered by shrub or sand depending on the locality.

This snake's markings differ from area to area and blend into the colour of the sand.




# QUICK FACTS



## MANY HORNED ADDER

*Bitis cornuta*



 10cm - 45cm

**Venomous**

**Medically significant**



- Body grey to brown in colour
- Has rectangular shapes down its body
- Many horns above each eye
- Feeds on small mammals, lizards and geckos.
- Predominantly cytotoxic venom is nonlethal, however the hemotoxic effect can be quite extensive with bruising under the skin but very little systemic bleeding.



Occurs along coastal regions on the Western side of South Africa where it can be found under rocks, in crevices or partially hidden by sand or shrubs. This small snake will rely on its camouflage to not be noticed, however it hisses loudly when disturbed.




# QUICK FACTS



## NAMAQUA DWARF ADDER

*Bitis schneideri*

 7cm - 28cm



**Venomous**  
**Medically significant**



- Grey or light-brown in colour (like sand)
- Has pale spots/mottles all over its body
- Feeds on lizards and frogs
- Mild cytotoxic venom



Occurs in coastal dunes and in areas of Namaqualand.

Found under rocks, in crevices or partially hidden by sand or shrubs.

This snake will shuffle into loose sand with just the head exposed.






# QUICK FACTS



## RHOMBIC NIGHT ADDER

*Causus rhombeatus*

 10cm - 93cm



**Venomous**  
**Medically significant**

Albino form



- Grey, brown or olive in colour with dark rhomboids on its body.
- Single V shaped marking on its head and dark markings on its eyes giving it a masked appearance
- Feeds on frogs and toads.
- Cytotoxic venom that is not deadly but can be quite serious, however it is often deadly to dogs.
- SAVP polyvalent antivenom is not effective for bites from this species.



Occurs in various habitats throughout the eastern part of South Africa. Prefers damp areas and is often found under rocks or fallen branches or leaves.

Contrary to its name it does not move around much at night and can be found hunting during the day.



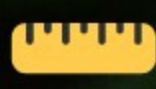
# QUICK FACTS



## PLAIN MOUNTAIN ADDER

*Bitis inornata*

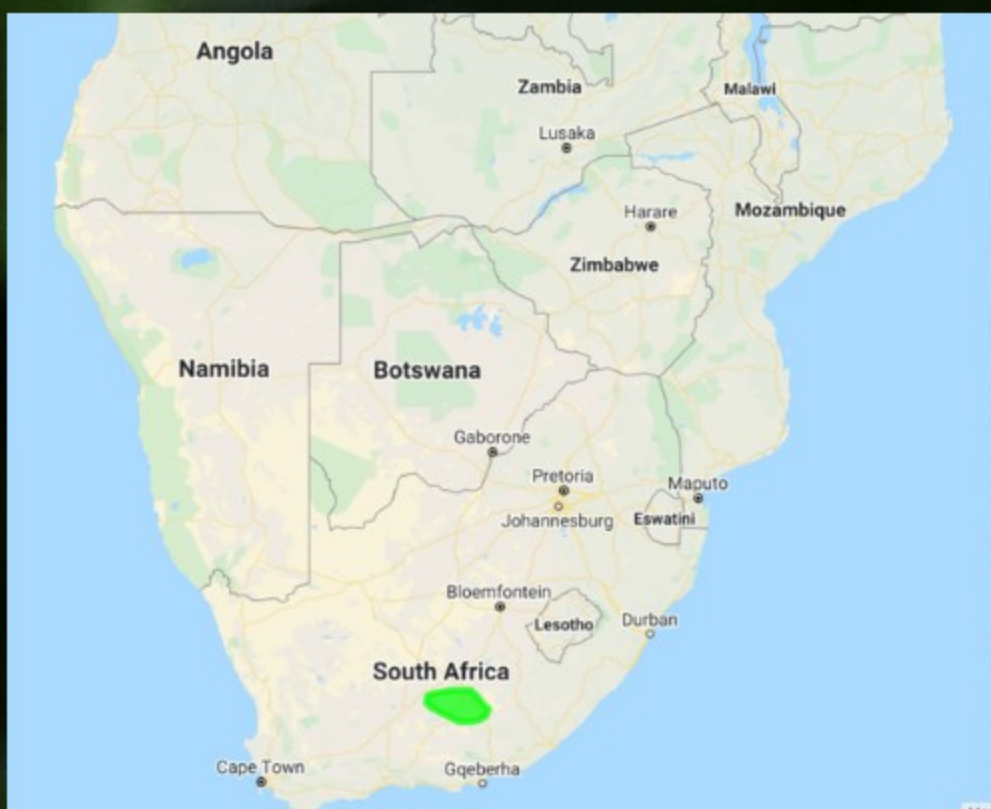


 12cm - 40cm

**Venomous**  
**Medically significant**



- Red-brown or yellow-brown in colour
- Has faint flecked markings over its body
- Stomach white in colour with dark speckles
- Feeds on small mammals and lizards.
- This snake does not have horns above its eyes.
- Mild cytotoxic venom



Occurs in the snowy mountains of the eastern cape.

Found under rocks or in crevices.

Due to its locality this snake is rarely encountered.



# QUICK FACTS



## SHIELD-NOSE SNAKE

*Aspidelaps scutatus*

 12cm - 60cm

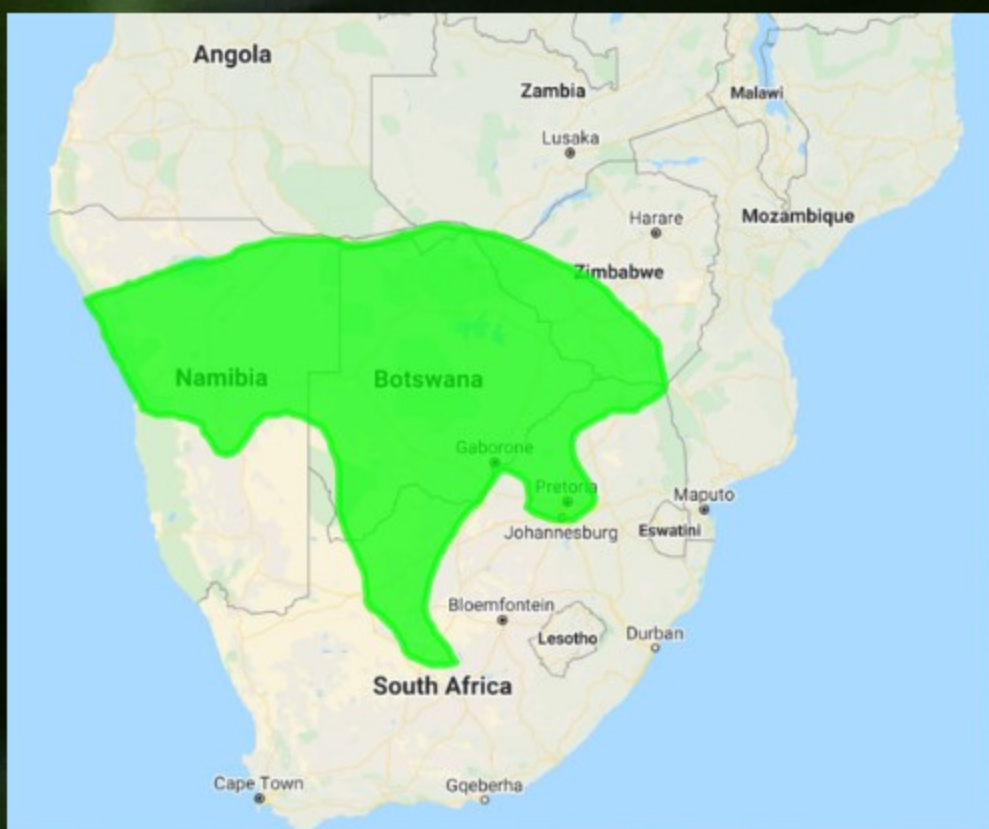


**Venomous**

**Medically significant**



- Colour varies depending on region usually orange or white with a black head and neck. This snake has a flat shield like scale on its nose.
- Mixture of cytotoxic and neurotoxic venom
- Feeds on prey such as small mammals, frogs, lizards or other snakes.



Occurs in the arid areas of central and northern Southern Africa.

Found in loose sand in which it burrows for prey or sheltering under rocks and in crevices.

When exposed this snake rears up and flattens its neck and strikes with short sharp hisses .



# QUICK FACTS




SNAKE BITE  
ASSIST



## BLACK MAMBA

*Dendroaspis polylepis*



 40cm - 4.3m

**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- Light-olive, light-grey or gunmetal-grey in colour
- Head is shaped like a coffin
- Makes a small hood when threatened
- Body may have dark bars at the tail end of the snake
- Feeds on rodents and birds
- Potent neurotoxic venom
- Any close encounter with this snake should be regarded as a possible medical emergency.



This diurnal species occurs in semi-arid as well as moist lowland forests and savanna areas. Can often be found in trees as well as rock crevices and abandoned termite mounds which this species uses as shelter.

A Black Mamba is considered potentially one of the fastest moving snakes, however it usually tries to avoid contact with humans.

This snake is probably responsible for more deaths than any other snake within Southern Africa.





# QUICK FACTS



## BLACK SPITTING COBRA

*Naja nigricincta woodi*

 25cm - 1.8m



**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- A large snake that is solid shiny black in colour
- Has a potent cytotoxic venom
- Can spit/spray venom
- Venom sprayed in the eyes should be washed out with water as soon as possible.
- Feeds on a variety of prey such as small mammals, frogs, birds, lizards and even other snakes.



Occurs in the arid areas of the Western and Northern Cape such as where it prefers to reside in dry river beds.

Found in abandoned burrows and termite mounds.

This snake is extremely shy and rarely encountered due to its nocturnal habits and the low density of people living there.

This snake is not used in the production of SAVP polyvalent antivenom and its efficacy is unknown at this stage.




# QUICK FACTS



## BOOMSLANG

*Dispholidus typus*

 20cm – 1.7m



**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- Mostly bright green colouration in males, sometimes with black between the scales although depending on region it may vary in colour ranging from black and yellow or even green and orange.
- Females of this species are mostly brown in colouration although green females are not unheard of.
- Large eyes, seem almost disproportionate to its head size.
- Feeds on small mammals, frogs, birds and lizards.
- Extremely potent haemotoxic venom.



Occurs in savanna and forest regions where as its name suggests it is found within trees and shrubs as it is mostly arboreal in nature.

This is a diurnal snake which hunts for food during the day taking shelter in holes and cracks within trees.

Boomsnang are generally inoffensive and are reluctant to bite until they are molested.

SAVP monovalent antivenom is required to neutralize the venom of the Boomsnang and can even be administered many hours or days after the bite and still be effective.



# QUICK FACTS



## CAPE COBRA

*Naja nivea*



 35cm - 1.8m

**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- This snake's colour can vary from yellow to beige or even brownish black.
- Some may appear speckled or even mottled in some cases. All babies will be yellowish with a black tipped tail.
- Feeds on small mammals, frogs, birds, lizards and other snakes
- Potent neurotoxic venom and potentially the most toxic cobra in Africa.



Occurs in various habitats such as Fynbos, Karoo as well as both the Namib and Kalahari deserts. Often shelters in rock crevices and abandoned termite or rodent holes. This cobra is very common in the areas where it is found and encounters with humans and dogs are not unusual

The venom of this snake is extremely potent and unless antivenom is administered timeously total paralysis could occur. Death will result from the lack of oxygen when breathing stops.




# QUICK FACTS



## FOREST COBRA

*Naja melanoleuca*

 25cm - 3m



**Venomous**

**Potentially deadly**



- Shiny brown or bronze that becomes dark towards the tail, tail is usually black in colour.
- Stomach cream white or yellow
- Feeds on small mammals, frogs, birds, lizards and other snakes
- Potent venom that is both neurotoxic and cytotoxic.
- Potentially the largest cobra in South Africa.



Occurs in coastal forests and moist savanna regions where it prefers areas dense with trees or thickets. Found in abandoned holes either in the ground (termite mounds or rodent holes) or trees.

This smooth scaled snake is shiny and also moves very quickly.

The hood is very narrow and snake rises higher than most other cobras. Bites from this species have caused amputation of digits.





# QUICK FACTS



## GABOON ADDER

*Bitis gabonica*



25cm - 1.8m



**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- A large snake with a stocky build.
- This snake has patterned colours to match the foliage on the forest floor and hourglass markings on its body.
- Feeds on a variety of birds and mammals.
- Potent cytotoxic and hemotoxic venom, a bite from this species must be considered a medical emergency.



Occur in coastal forests or the woodland that surrounds them where it uses its distinct colouration and markings to camouflage on the forest floor.

This snake will lie motionless and ambush its prey, it strikes with lightning speed and has the largest fangs of any snake found in this region.

This snake gives live birth and can have 60 to 80 babies from a large female.




# QUICK FACTS



## GREEN MAMBA

*Dendroaspis  
angusticeps*



 30cm - 2.2m

**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- Velvety green in colour with occasional yellow scales
- Stomach is light green
- Head is shaped like a coffin
- Feeds on birds and mammals
- Potent neurotoxic venom. Bites from this species are less common than the Black Mamba and effects are not as rapid although it must be considered serious.



Occurs in coastal areas near the ocean where it prefers areas with thick bush or tree growth.

It is seldom seen in open areas, unlike the black mamba.

The Green Mamba males combat readily during mating season and are often oblivious to people or animals around them.




# QUICK FACTS



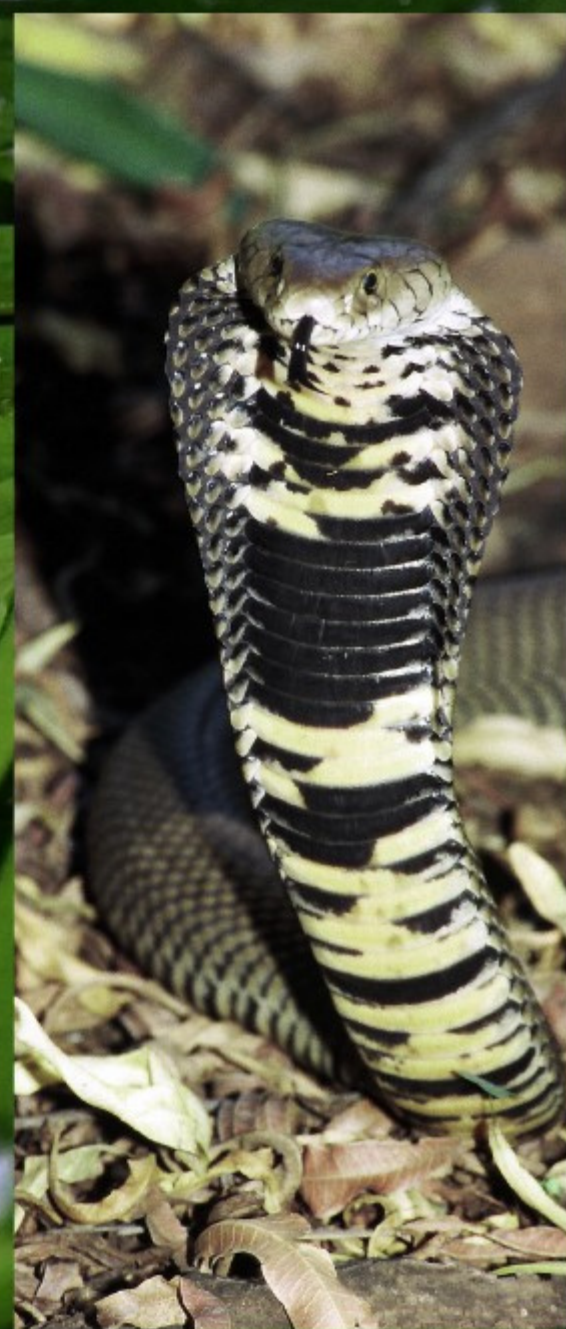
## MOZAMBIQUE SPITTING COBRA

*Naja mossambica*

 25cm - 1.5m



**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- Grey or olive-brown in colour
- Edges of scales are black
- Throat is salmon pink in colour with black bars and spots on its edges the belly is usually also salmon or yellowish but greyish bellies are not unheard of.
- Feeds on frogs, rodents and other snakes, however it will eat almost any edible item it can fit in its mouth.
- Potent cytotoxic venom
- Capable of spitting its venom with accuracy from any position



Occurs in savanna, tropical and subtropical areas.

Found near water bodies in abandoned burrows, termite mounds and cracks/holes in trees

This snake is not scared of humans and will readily enter houses and dwellings, it is not shy to bite and will even bite sleeping children.

The venom destroys tissue and even rapid administration of antivenom does not ensure that vast areas of necrosis will not result.



# QUICK FACTS



## PUFF ADDER

*Bitis arietans*



12cm - 1.22m



**Venomous**

**Potentially deadly**



- This snake has V shaped markings down the length of its body pointing towards the tail and patterned background colors to match the area it occurs in, usually light brown or yellow.
- Feeds on birds, lizards, amphibians and small mammals
- Potent cytotoxic venom and responsible for a large number of snakebites.



Occurs in most habitats and is a very common and widespread species. Found under rocks, in crevices or under branches, shrubs or leaves. Puffadders are ambush hunters and rely on camouflage to avoid detection. They can give a loud low hiss which is where the name originates. Potentially the fastest striking snake in South Africa, it possesses large hinged fangs and can envenomate deeply into the tissue. This snake is a livebearer and can give birth to up to 160 babies at a time.






# QUICK FACTS



## RINKHALS

*Hemachatus  
haemachatus*



 16cm - 1,4m

**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- Can be grey, black, dark brown or olive in colour
- Sometimes has orange or yellow bands across its body
- Throat has black bands easily seen when it hoods up
- Belly is usually either black or grey
- Feeds on frogs, toads and mammals.
- Cytotoxic venom
- Can spit its venom once it hoods and rears up



Occurs in the colder grasslands across South Africa.

Found in abandoned burrows or termite mounds.

This snake is not a true cobra and has rough (keeled) scales and also gives birth to live young.

Its venom is extremely toxic to dogs and deaths within a matter of minutes are not uncommon.

This snake plays dead when harassed hoping that the aggressor will move off.

Bites from this snake on humans generally causes mild necrosis and deaths are very rare.



# QUICK FACTS



SNAKE BITE  
ASSIST



## SNOUTED COBRA

*Naja annulifera*



25cm - 3m

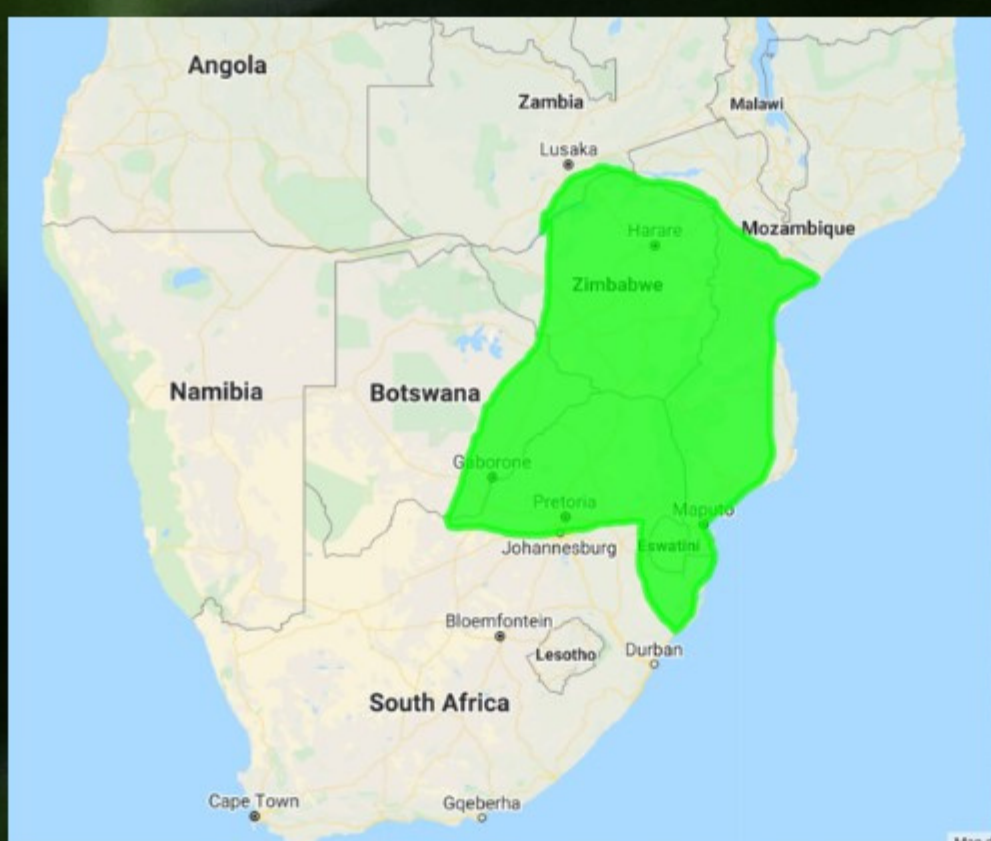


**Venomous**

**Potentially deadly**



- Yellow to light or dark brown in colour with mottling occurring on entire body.
- Sometimes it may have black bands across its body.
- Belly is usually yellow in colour with slight mottling.
- Feeds on small mammals, frogs, birds, lizards and other snakes
- Potent neurotoxic venom
- Potentially one of the largest cobras in Southern Africa.



Occurs in moist savanna within bushveld and lowveld areas. Found in termite mounds or abandoned burrows when they are not out hunting for food. Snouted cobras are commonly found near human habitation where they hunt rodents attracted by waste food. Bites from this species are often not as serious as bites from other cobras but extreme cases have required large doses of antivenom.

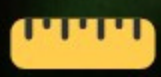


# QUICK FACTS



## VINE SNAKE

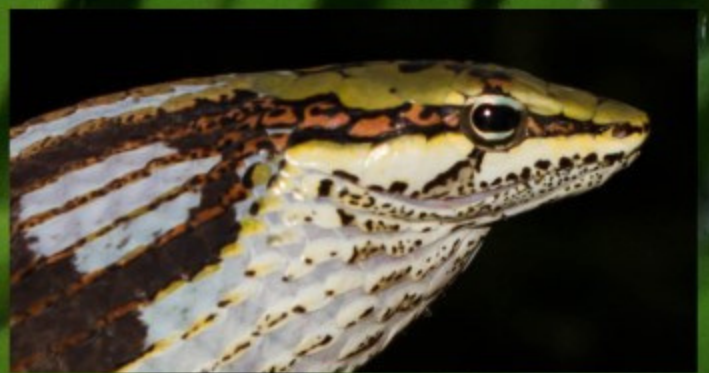
*Thelotornis capensis*



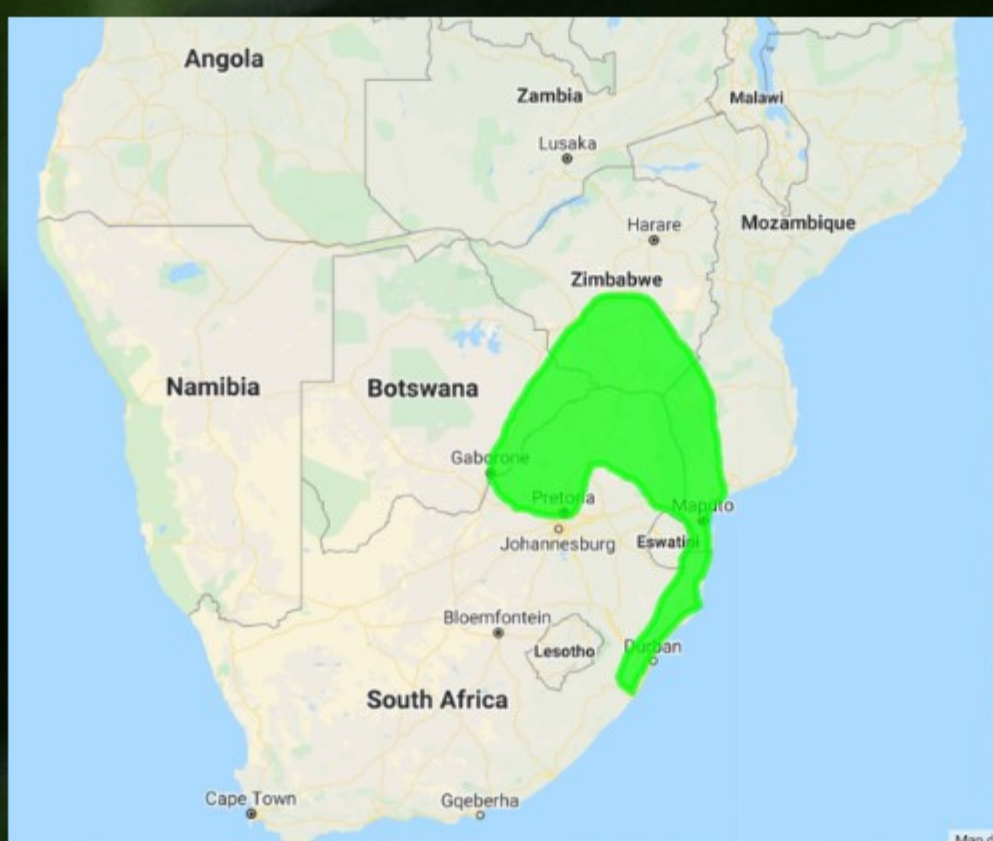
24cm - 1.3m



**Venomous**  
**Potentially deadly**



- Colouration resembles that of a twig or branch with black speckling on its neck and lower head
- Head quite distinct from body with darker colouration and bright orange or red tongue with a black tip
- Unique iris shape that resembles a keyhole
- Feeds on small birds, frogs and lizards
- Potent haemotoxic venom



Occurs in savanna and coastal forest regions where there is thick bush and heavy tree presence.

Found in trees and tall shrubs where it shelters in cracks or holes within them.

Vine snakes are reluctant to bite and will often freeze when encountered, a bite from this species however can be serious and the venom is not neutralized by the Boomslang monovalent antivenom even though the venom is similar.

Deaths from this species have not been recorded in South Africa but bites to children and the elderly could be potentially lethal.



# Disclaimer

The information contained in this publication is based on the most common snakes found in South Africa

This application is a work in progress and frequent updates will be made according to availability of information, including video and photographic data supplied by our herpetologists during field work

Although the data found here has been produced and processed from third party sources believed to be reliable, no warranty expressed or implied is made regarding accuracy, adequacy, completeness, legality, reliability or usefulness of any information.

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