

Snakes of the Wet Tropics

Snakes are protected by law

Snakes are shy creatures. When confronted by humans, they will usually retreat if given the opportunity to do so. As most bites occur when people try to catch and kill snakes, they should always be left well alone.

Snakes in the Wet Tropics

The Wet Tropics region is home to 43 species of snakes, representing an impressive 30% of Australia's snake fauna. These images represent a selection of the more common species, most of which have ranges extending beyond the Wet Tropics. Of the species pictured, only the northern crowned snake is unique to this region. The snakes of the region range from small, worm-like blind snakes to six metre pythons. Only a handful fall into the dangerously venomous category, but these few play an important role in balancing the natural environment, as they are significant predators of rats and mice.

Snakes in the backyard

If you live near bushland or creeks you are more likely to encounter snakes in your garden, especially if there is habitat disturbance such as burning or clearing of vegetation in the local area. To discourage snakes from taking up residence around your home remove likely hiding places such as logs, building materials, long grass, loose rocks, discarded flower pots and corrugated iron.

Snakes in the house

Snakes will sometimes enter a house in search of food and shelter - particularly during periods of extended rain. The risk of this happening can be reduced by having well-sealed doors and screens over external windows. If a snake enters your house, contact the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service for advice on its removal. Cairns (07) 4046 6600. Townsville (07) 4796 7777.

Snakes on the road

Snakes like to warm themselves on roads and are often injured by passing cars. Drive slowly so you can safely give way to them. If you find injured wildlife phone Cairns 0407 962 075. Townsville 0414 717 374.

First Aid

- In the unlikely event of a snake bite, don't cut the wound and try to suck the poison out. Don't wash the wound, as the venom may be used to identify the type of snake.
- Apply a crêpe bandage to the entire limb, at the same pressure as for a sprained ankle. Then apply a splint to the limb with a second bandage.
- This will help keep the affected limb immobile. Seek medical help.
- Do not attempt to capture or kill the snake for identification as this may lead to further bites.
- Antivenene has been developed to ensure recovery in most cases. The important action is to reassure the victim and get them to medical assistance as soon as possible.

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Snake look-alikes (harmless)

LEGLSS LIZARD - *Delma mitella*

Largest of its genus with a length to 75cm. It is closely related to geckos and occurs only in Australia and New Guinea. They have no forelimbs and only flap-like hindlimbs. A rare and poorly known species, they most likely feed on insects and lay 2 eggs per clutch. Found only at a few rainforest edge sites on the eastern side of Atherton Tableland and Paluma.



Non-venomous and Pythons

COMMON TREE SNAKE - *Dendrelaphis punctulata*

Common tree snakes are active during the day and found in a variety of habitats. They are agile climbers and come in a variety of colours. Their backs can be black, grey, green or a spectacular blue and their bellies are always paler.

Length to 2m.



KEELBACK - *Tropidonophis mairii*

Keelbacks are often seen near water and are active both day and night. At Cape Tribulation a striking yellow form can be seen. They are known to eat small cane toads.

Length to 1m.



BLIND SNAKE - *Ramphotyphlops polygrammicus*

Length to 40cm. Small and glossy, with reduced eyes capable only of detecting light and dark. Often found in termite chambers where they feed on termites and eggs, larvae and pupae. All blind snakes lay eggs, are non-venomous and incapable of biting humans. Found in rainforest from Dunk Island to Cooktown, also Cape York and Torres Strait.



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SLATEY GREY SNAKE - *Stegonotus cucullatus*

Slatey grey snakes are often found near water and are more likely to be seen at night or after rain. Their backs generally range from grey to black in colour and their belly is very striking glossy white. They are defensive by nature and caution should be taken.

Length to 1.5m.



AMETHYSTINE PYTHON - *Morelia kinghorni*

The amethystine python is Australia's largest snake. They live in rainforest and woodlands but will venture into urban areas in search of food. Colour pattern varies from almost plain tan to boldly patterned brown and yellow. They are distinguishable from Carpet Pythons by large head scales. Has a characteristic iridescent sheen. Will bite if threatened.

Length to 6m.



CARPET PYTHON - *Morelia spilota*

This boldly patterned snake is found in many habitats, including farms and urban areas. They vary in colour, although in the Wet Tropics a distinct jungle pattern occurs. Will bite if antagonised.

Length to 3m



SPOTTED PYTHON - *Antaresia maculosa*

The nocturnal species may be seen in a wide variety of habitats from wet coastal forests to cane fields. Colour uniform light brown overlaid with dark brown blotches.

Length to 1m.



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WATER PYTHON - *Liasis mackloti*

As the name suggests these pythons are often found near water. Their backs are usually uniform brown or olive with an iridescent sheen to the scales and yellow to cream bellies. May behave defensively if alarmed.

Length to 3m.



Venomous - Low danger

BROWN TREE SNAKE - *Bioga irregularis*

The most commonly sighted snake in the region, usually nocturnal and often encountered in trees. A rear-fanged, mildly venomous species. Bites from large specimens should be treated with caution. They can be defensive when alarmed.

Length to 2m.



NORTHERN CROWNED SNAKE - *Cacophis churchilli*

The only snake unique to the Wet Tropics and found in most habitats including rainforests and drier forests. The backs of the northern crowned snakes are metallic brown with a yellow band on the top of the neck. Found from Townsville to Daintree.

Length to 0.3 - 1.4m.



COLLARED WHIP SNAKE - *Demansia torquata*

All whip snakes are slender with tapering whip-like tails. The collared whip snake is found in open forests from Airlie Beach to Cooktown. They have grey to brown backs, with a much darker head. A pale 'comma' mark may be seen on each side of the eye.

Length to 0.7m.

Other whip snakes found in the region include the yellow-faced (low danger), black and Papuan (highly dangerous).



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Venomous - HIGH danger

RED-BELLIED BLACK SNAKE - *Pseudechis porphyriacus*

Red-bellied black snakes are usually found near water and are common around Kuranda and Julatten. The underside of northern forms can be white to pinkish, with dark edging to the belly scales. The distinctive red colouration is confined to the lower flanks. An antagonised red-bellied black snake will behave defensively by flattening its neck and body but will retreat if at all possible.

Length to 2m.



COASTAL TAIPAN - *Oxyuranus scutellatus*

Coastal taipans are found in a range of habitats including open forest, grasslands, grassy beach dunes, pastures and cane fields. Their backs are variable, from pale brown to black and their bellies are somewhat paler with orange spots. The head is rectangular and distinct from the neck. Given the opportunity taipans will retreat quickly, but will defend themselves if cornered.

Length to 2.6m.



EASTERN SMALL-EYED SNAKE - *Cryptophis nigrescens*

These snakes are nocturnal and are superficially similar to the red-bellied black snake. They have a black back and a pink or white belly. They can be distinguished by their very small eyes.

Length up to 1m.



NORTHERN DEATH ADDER - *Acanthophis praelongus*

These snakes favour dry forest and grassland and often lie camouflaged in leaf litter. They have unique short, stout bodies, with broad heads and a grub-like lure at the end of the tail. The lure is used to attract small mammals and reptiles.

Length to 0.4m.



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ROUGH-SCALED SNAKE - *Tropidechis carinatus*

Rough-scaled snakes are mainly found in cool, high altitude rainforests and moist open forests and pastures. They are one of the few venomous Australian snakes that regularly climb trees, are known for their defensive behaviour and are distinguishable by their banded appearance. Seen here in a defensive pose.

Length to 1 - 1.2m.

