



**SLMA**

**ANNOTATED GALLERY OF SNAKES**

Produced by the  
Expert Committee for Snakebite

Compiled by Malik Fernando  
Wijerama House  
Wijerama Mawatha  
Colombo 7  
June 2022

# AN ANNOTATED GALLERY OF SNAKES VENOMOUS and NON-VENOMOUS

This gallery of images is a section of the  
Guidelines for the Management of Snakebite in Hospitals - 2021  
produced by the SLMA Expert Committee on Snakebite

**The images in this gallery have been contributed by:**  
Ansem de Silva, Deepika Fernando, Malik Fernando, Suranjan Fernando,  
Namal Kamalgoda & Palitha Anthony (website Zero3 Images),  
S. A. M. Kularatne, Kalana Maduwage, Namal Rathnayaka

# LAND SNAKES

## Highly venomous

*Naja naja* : Cobra

*Bungarus caeruleus* : Common Krait

*Bungarus ceylonicus* : Sri Lankan Krait

*Daboia russelii* : Russell's Viper

*Hypnale hypnale* : Merrem's Hump-nosed Pit Viper

*Hypnale zara* : Lowland Hump-nosed Pit Viper

## Potentially highly venomous

*Hypnale nepa* : Sri Lankan Hump-nosed Pit Viper

*Craspedocephalus trigonocephalus*:  
Green Pit Viper

## Venomous

*Echis carinatus* : Saw-scaled Viper

*Rhabdophis ceylonensis* : Sri Lankan Keelback, Blossom Krait

## Snakes of Low medical importance (mildly venomous)

*Boiga* spp.: Cat Snakes

*Calliophis melanurus*: Sri Lanka Coral Snake

*Ahaetulla* spp.: Whip or Vine Snakes

*Chrysopelea* spp.: Ornate Flying snake; Striped Flying Snake

## Non-venomous

*Ptyas mucosa*: Rat Snake

*Python molurus*: Python

*Eryx conicus*: Rough Scaled Sand Boa

*Cercaspis*, *Dryocalamus*, *Lycodon*,

*Oligodon*: Wolf snakes, krait mimics

*Rhinophis homolepis*: Kelaart's Earth Snake (krait mimic)

Spectacled Cobra  
Indian Cobra  
*Naja naja*

Highly Venomous



Cobras, Coral snakes & Kraits  
Family Elapidae

The only snake in Sri Lanka with a hood.  
Has a spectacle mark on the back of  
the hood and two spots in front (ventral)

Common Krait  
*Bungarus caeruleus*

Highly Venomous

*Bungarus caeruleus*

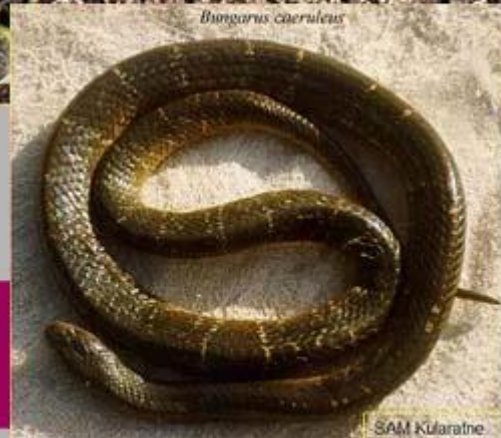
Anselm de Silva



*Bungarus caeruleus*

(C) Anselm de Silva

Cobras, Coral snakes & Kraits  
Family Elapidae



SAM Kularatne

The white,  
paired rings  
fade with  
age

Sri Lanka Krait  
*Bungarus ceylonicus*

Highly Venomous

*Bungarus ceylonicus*



(C) Anselm de Silva

A species endemic to Sri Lanka, being found only in the wet zone of the Island, in shady home gardens, plantations and rain forests. The belly is patterned with paler bands.



All kraits have enlarged, hexagonal, mid-dorsal scales (shown by the white line in the image above).

Cobras, Coral snakes & Kraits  
Family Elapidae

Russell's Viper  
*Daboia russelii*

*Daboia russelii*



(C) Ansem de Silva

Vipers and Pit Vipers  
Family Viperidae

Highly Venomous

The dark, oval-shaped patches outlined in black and white are characteristic. They can be circular.

Young pythons can be mistaken for vipers, but they have squarish markings.



Kalana Maduwage

Merrem's  
hump-nosed pit viper  
*Hypnale hypnale*

Highly Venomous



SAM Kularatne

Vipers and Pit Vipers  
Family Viperidae



*Hypnale hypnale*

Anselm de Silva



*Hypnale hypnale*

(C) Anselm de Silva



Lowland  
hump-nosed pit viper  
*Hypnale zara*



Vipers  
and Pit Vipers  
Family Viperidae

Kalama Maduwage

Highly Venomous



The pit vipers are so called because they all possess a heat sensitive loreal pit, located between the eye and the nostril, on each side of the head.

The three species of *Hypnale* look alike, with upturned snouts, differing in scale counts.

Sri Lankan hump nosed viper  
*Hypnale nepa*

Potentially  
Highly venomous

*Hypnale nepa*



Kalana Maduwage

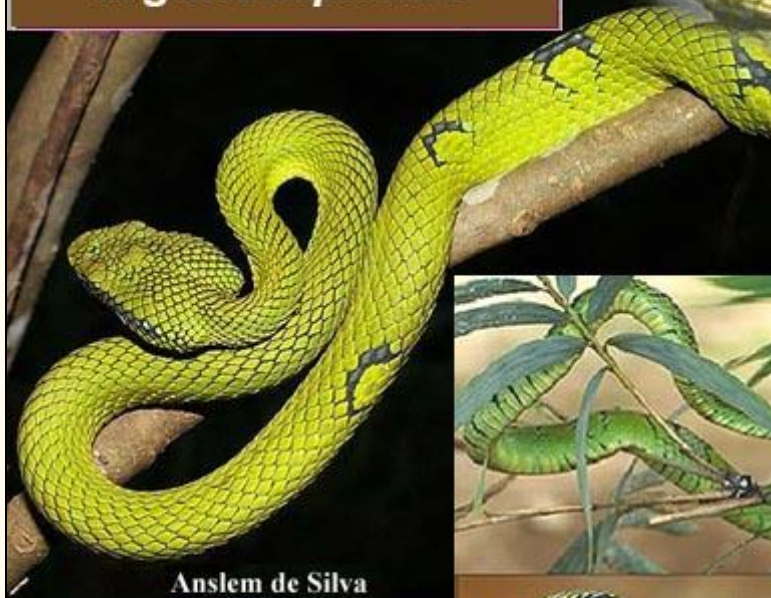
An endemic species confined to the central hills of the Island.

Eight cases of proven bites by this species causing envenoming have been reported in the medical literature, with no fatalities.

Vipers and Pit Vipers  
Family Viperidae

Green Pit Viper  
*Craspedocephalus*  
*trigonocephalus*

Potentially  
Highly venomous



The black markings on the body are variable, but the black stripe through the eye is constant.



Vipers  
and Pit Vipers  
Family Viperidae



The arrow points to the loreal pit



The head scales  
small and of the  
same size

Namal Rathnayaka



K. Maduwage

Saw Scaled Viper  
*Echis carinatus*

**Venomous**



A. de Silva



*Echis carinatus*

© D. Fernando

Vipers and Pit Vipers  
Family Viperidae



*Echis carinatus*

SAM Kularatne

*Rhabdophis ceylonensis*



Palitha Anthony

© copyright Zero3Images.

**Venomous**

Sri Lanka Keelback  
Blossom Krait

***Rhabdophis  
ceylonensis***

Previously named  
*Balanophis ceylonensis*

**Keelbacks**  
**Family Colubridae**

A lowland rainforest dweller, seldom encountered. Medical Importance category has been upgraded to VENOMOUS based on the report of envenoming of a researcher while handling a snake.



## Cat snakes Family Colubridae

Low medical importance

The gamma cat snake (raan mapila in Sinhala) is the most irritable of Sri Lanka cat snakes, attacking at the slightest movement. The head view at bottom left shows the vertical slit pupil of the eye, a characteristic of all cat snakes.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*

## Gamma Cat snake *Boiga trigonata*



Forsten's Cat snake  
(naga mapila, le mapila)

## *Boiga forsteni*

Forsten's Cat Snake is seen in five distinct colour variations. The most common form is at bottom left, the most striking, crimson hued one, called *le mapila* in Sinhala, is at right.  
- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*.

Low medical importance



*Boiga forsteni*  
Forsten's cat snake  
'mapila'

Mildly venomous.

Cat snakes  
Family Colubridae

**Slender Coral Snake**  
*Calliophis melanurus*

Low medical importance



Ansem de Silva

Lowland dry, intermediate and semi-arid zones.  
Moderately venomous, no deaths or serious  
problems reported.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*

**Coral snakes**  
**Family Elapidae**



Ansem de Silva



Underside of snake

Ansem de Silva



*Ahaetulla nasuta*



Anslem de Silva

Low medical importance

Whip or vine snakes have a fearful reputation but are only mildly venomous. Two species are found in Sri Lanka.

*Ahaetulla nasuta*



(C) Anslem de Silva

Whip or Vine snakes  
Family Colubridae

Green vine snake

***Ahaetulla nasuta***

*Ahaetulla pulverulenta*



Anslem de Silva

Low medical importance

Brown vine snake  
Hena kandaya

***Ahaetulla pulverulenta***

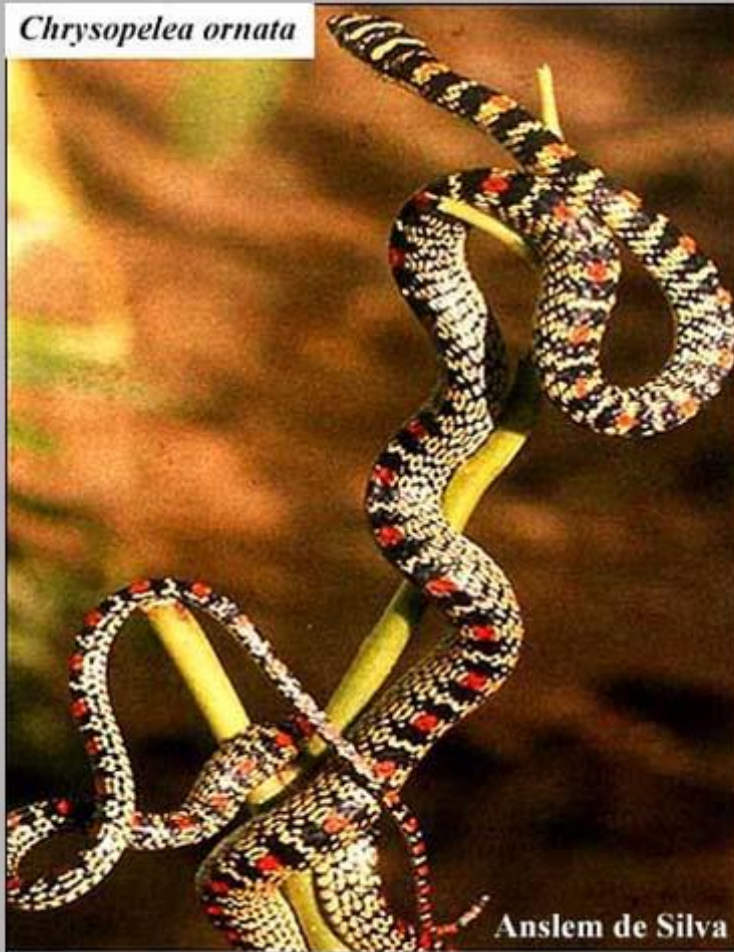
*Ahaetulla pulverulenta*



(C) Anslem de Silva

Whip or Vine snakes  
Family Colubridae

*Chrysopelea ornata*



Anslem de Silva

Low medical importance

Ornate Flying Snake  
*Chrysopelea ornata*

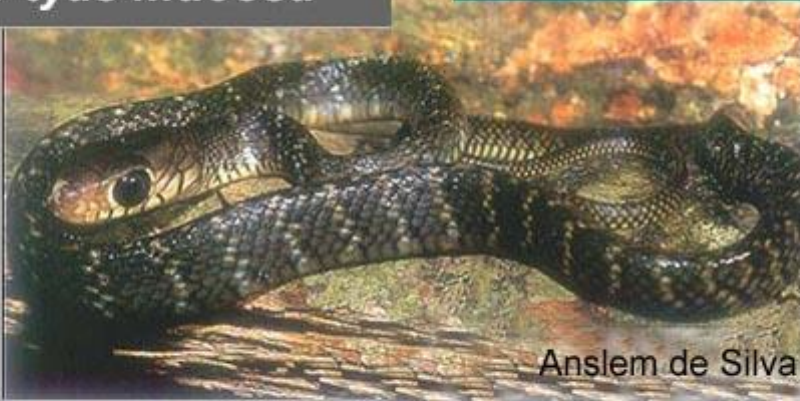
Some specimens are highly irritable and bite savagely, others are docile.

*Chrysopelea taprobanica*, the Sri Lankan Flying snake, is of similar colouration but without the red markings.

Flying snakes  
Family Colubidae

Indian Rat Snake  
*Ptyas mucosa*

Non-venomous



Anslem de Silva



Anslem de Silva

Found throughout the Island from sea level up to 2000 m. Habitat includes forests, agricultural fields scrublands, mangroves and home gardens.

Is a large, robust snake, growing up to 150 cm, with round pupils.

Distends neck and hisses like a cobra when cornered. Bites savagely, but is non-venomous.

- de Siilva & Ukuwela, 2017,  
*Reptiles of Sri Lanka.*



Anslem de Silva.

Family Colubridae

Non-venomous

Python  
*Python molurus*



*Anslem de Silva*

Python molurus



*Anslem de Silva*

Kills by asphyxiation  
by tightening coils  
around the thoracic  
region of the  
prey



*Python molurus*

*Daboia russelii*

SAM Kularatne

The python and Russell's viper are somewhat similar in colouration. They may be told apart by the shape of the markings -- oval in the viper, rectangular in the python.



Anslern de Silva

Sand Boa  
*Eryx conicus*

Inhabits coastal sand dunes of the dry and semi-arid zones of the north, north-west and north-east.

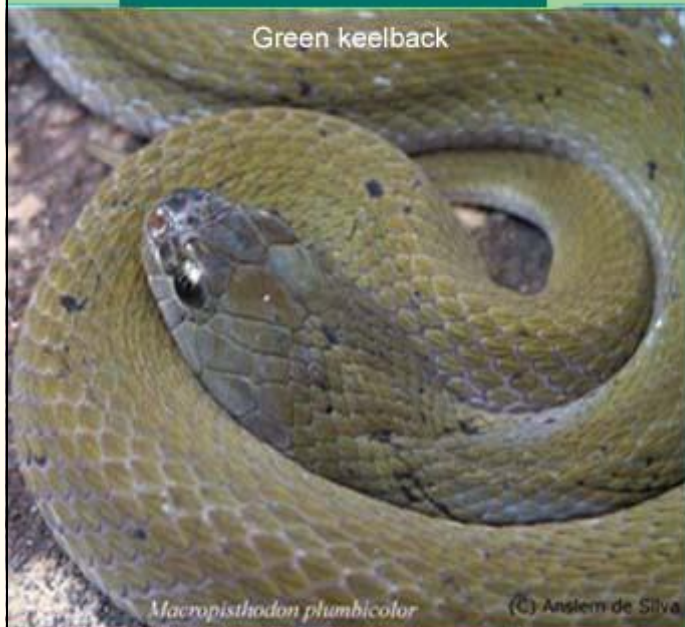
- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*

Non-venomous

Family Boidae

A short, thick snake that could be mistaken for a Russell's viper on account of the colour pattern. Non-venomous, but some may bite savagely.

## Non-venomous



### ***Macropisthodon plumbicolor***

A resting snake. The enlarged head scales contrast with the small, uniform body scales.

### ***Coelognathus helena***

(*Elephe helena*)

Trinket snake

This small, non-venomous snake is in a threat posture with inflated fore-body. The enlarged ventral scales extend the full width of the underside.





*Cercaspis carinatus*



© A. de Silva

*Cercaspis carinatus*

**Non-venomous**

Three non-venomous snakes that might be encountered in home gardens. Some species may even enter houses. Those that mimic kraits on the next page.

*Lycodon aulicus*

*Oligodon* sp.



*Lycodon aulicus*

© A. de Silva

## Non-venomous

*Dryocalamus nympha*  
Common bridal snake



*Rhinophis homolepis*  
Kelaart's earth snake



## KRAIT MIMICS

A selection of Krait mimics with various combinations of white markings on a black background. None have enlarged, hexagonal, mid-dorsal scales.

*Lycodon aulicus*  
Common wolf snake



*Boiga forsteni*  
Forsten's cat snake  
'mapla'



*Lycodon cerinatus*  
Sri Lanka Wolf snake



# AQUATIC SNAKES

## Fresh Water

*Atretium schistosum*: Olive  
Keelback

*Amphiesma stolatum*: Buff  
Striped Keelback

*Xenochrophis asperimus*:  
Checkered Keelback

*Xenochrophis piscator*:  
Checkered Keelback

## Brackish Water

*Cerberus rynchops*: Dogface  
Water Snake

*Gerarda prevostiana*: Gerard's  
Water Snake

*Acrochordus granulatus*: Little  
File Snake

## Marine

*Hydrophis platurus*: Yellow  
Bellied Sea Snake

*Hydrophis schistosa*: Beaked or  
Hook-nosed Sea Snake

*Hydrophis viperinus*: Viperine  
Sea Snake

**Olive Keelback**  
***Atridium schistosum***

**Non-venomous**



Anslem de Silva

A water snake that lives in streams, ponds, wells, and paddy fields. It is also quite at home on land. Feeds mainly on frogs and fish.

Non-venomous and inoffensive.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017,  
*Reptiles of Sri Lanka*



© A. de Silva

**Typical Snakes**  
**Family Colubridae**

**Buff Striped Keelback**  
***Amphiesma stolatum***

**Non-venomous**



A widely distributed freshwater snake that inhabits banks and bunds of ponds, streams, and other waterways. Also paddy fields and open grass tracts.

A docile, non-venomous snake that feeds mainly on frogs.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017,  
*Reptiles of Sri Lanka.*

**Typical Snakes**  
**Family Colubridae**

Checkered Keelback  
*Xenochrophis cf. piscator*

Non-venomous



Typical Snakes  
Family Colubridae

A semi-aquatic snake spending most of its life in water: in streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, paddy fields and even in domestic wells.

Non-venomous, but may bite savagely when cornered. The checkered pattern is seen in the image. - de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*.

**Non-venomous**

Sri Lanka or Boulenger's  
Keelback  
*Xenochrophis asperrimus*



**Anslem de Silva**

**Typical Snakes**  
**Family Colubridae**

An endemic aquatic snake inhabiting streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, paddy fields and even domestic wells. Non-venomous, irritable, bites without hesitation.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*.

Dogface Water Snake  
*Cerberus rynchops*

Low medical importance

A brackish water aquatic snake that lives in estuaries, lagoons, mangroves and mudflats. Hides in crab holes during the day, emerging at night to feed on fish, crabs and frogs.

Mildly venomous, rarely biting when handled.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017,  
*Reptiles of Sri Lanka*



Indo-Australian  
Mud Snakes  
Family Homalopsidae

Underside of snake





Gerard's Water Snake  
*Gerarda prevostiana*

Low medical importance

A brackish water aquatic snake that lives in mangroves, swamps and river mouths.

A mildly venomous, rare species, known from only a few specimens.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017,  
*Reptiles of Sri Lanka*



Anislem de Silva

Indo-Australian  
Mud Snakes  
Family Homalopsidae



Anislem de Silva

Little File Snake  
*Acrochordus granulatus*

Non-venomous

A brackish water aquatic snake.

Found in lagoons, estuaries, mangroves and other brackish water habitats along the coast.

Feeds mainly on bottom-dwelling fish.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017,  
*Reptiles of Sri Lanka*



Anslem de Silva

File Snakes  
*Acrochordidae*

**Yellow-belly Sea Snake**  
*Hydrophis platurus*



**Highly Venomous**

A pelagic sea snake, usually found in deep water off shore. Feeds on fish found near the surface. Aggressive and highly venomous.

Colour varies from black to brown upper, belly light brown to yellow.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*.

Ansem de Silva



**Cobras, Coral snakes,  
Kraits & Sea Snakes  
Family Elapidae**

**Beaked or Hook-nosed  
Sea Snake  
*Hydrophis schistosa***

**Highly Venomous**



(C) Ansem de Silva

**Cobras, Coral snakes,  
Kraits & Sea Snakes  
Family Elapidae**

A large, highly venomous sea snake found in the brackish waters of lagoons, estuaries and bays. Caught in fishing nets, encountered by fishermen in lagoons. Aggressive, and bites when handled.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*

**Viperine Sea Snake**  
***Hydrophis viperinus***

**Highly Venomous**

Is confined to the coasts of northern Sri Lanka, where it is found 5 - 10 km offshore.

Highly venomous, bites aggressively when caught in fishing nets.

- de Silva & Ukuwela, 2017, *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*.



Anslem de Silva



Anslem de Silva

**Cobras, Coral snakes,  
Kraits & Sea Snakes  
Family Elapidae**



Anslem de Silva

**This is not an exhaustive list of snakes found in Sri Lanka.**

One hundred and four (104) species of terrestrial and aquatic snakes are listed by Anslem de Silva and Kanishka Ukuwela in their 2017 publication *Reptiles of Sri Lanka*.

**Compiled by Malik Fernando**

January 2022

SLMA Expert Committee on Snakebite

**SLMA – Guidelines for the Management of Snakebite in Hospital - SBG2021**