

SNAKES AND OTHER REPTILES

In September/October every year the NATF^{Inc} Wildlife Rescue Service gets many calls about reptiles being in gardens, houses, pools, ponds etc. This is the time of the year that reptiles come out of hibernation and start getting very active to breed and feed up over summer ready for next winter. The other time they become more active around houses also occurs during March/April/May when the reptiles are looking for somewhere to hibernate.

Many get injured on our roads, especially our slow moving Long-necked Tortoises, Blue-tongued Lizards, Bearded Dragons, Pythons and many other species of snakes and lizards. They often sit on the tarred roads for extra warmth as reptiles need to be warm to catch and digest their food.

What to do if you find a snake in your house

If you do come across a snake in your house then please close all the other doors that lead into the rest of the house and if there is a gap under the door block that off too using towels jammed firmly under it blocking the whole space as snakes can slide through very small gaps. If there is a door that leads outside then leave it wide open and keep watch to see if the snake leaves. On hot days snakes will often go into houses looking for a cool place to rest during the hottest part of the day. Even though they need warmth to feed and digest food they do not actually like it too hot as they can die quite quickly if stuck in direct sun for too long. In really hot weather some prefer to move about on warm nights instead of during the day.

**If the snake does not leave then call the NATF^{Inc} Wildlife Rescue Service hotline for advice on
0418 628 483 or
0418 NATIVE**

If you have a snake in your garden – keep your dogs and children indoors and keep an eye on the snake to see if it leaves your area. Keep a safe distance away from the snake and watch where it goes.



Blue tongue Lizard – dog attack



Jacky Lizard – cat attack



Carpet Python – escaped pet



Lace Monitor-unsuitable environment

Snakes Found in the Hunter Region: Non-Venomous & Venomous

The **Diamond Python** and **Green Tree snake** are our two larger non-venomous snakes in the Hunter. If found in a tree or fence, etc. just leave it in peace if it is not in danger from dogs, cats, or people, etc. These reptiles are harmless and will assist in keeping mice and rat numbers down around your yard if they decide to hang around but most just pass through and you never see them again will probably be gone by the next day.

The **Diamond Python** has small cream diamond shape on most scales, some forming a rosette pattern along the length of the snake. If you have a python living in your roof you will never have a mouse or rat problem as these are their favourite foods.

The **Green Tree Snake** is not venomous – they can still bite though – and can range from a green colour to caramel brown with blue flecks showing between each scale. They have a bright yellow throat and belly; and are a very slender snake with a very thin tail. Tree snakes are attracted to frog ponds and cool thick vegetation that is good habitat for frogs because that is their favourite food.

The **Brown Tree Snake** is similar but has very large brown bulgy eyes and a very narrow neck and has more pattern on their body scales.

The most common poisonous snake to appear in gardens is the **Red-bellied Black Snake**. They particularly like swampy and wet areas, especially if you have a pond or a dam and frogs in the area. Many Red-Bellied Black snakes are attracted to ponds and swimming pools during hot summer months as they require water to soften their outer skin when they are ready to slough (peel or rub) it off. This is how they grow. Their outer skin actually gets too tight and they have a new skin underneath that is bigger.

The other poisonous (highly poisonous) snake that turns up is the **Brown Snake**. Even little brown snakes are very poisonous. Juvenile brown snakes 20cms and up to 40/50 cms have a black head and a black collar and usually have bands across their body as well.

Also there are various small, usually nocturnal (night active) snakes that are only mildly venomous and only cause local symptoms like a bee-sting:

Yellow-faced Whipsnake grows to about 80 to 100 cms. It is very long and thin, with a small white patch in front of and behind its eyes and it moves very quickly.

Marsh Snake 40 cms. Dark coloured with pale white stripes on upper lip and behind the eye.

Red-naped Snake 45 cms - harmless with a red patch on head.

Golden Crowned Snake 40 cms – has a gold crown pattern on its head and is a dark brown colour.



Golden Crowned Snake



Juvenile Brown Snake (Venomous)



Red Bellied Black Snake (venomous)



Green Tree Snake (non-venomous)



Diamond Python (non-venomous)

SNAKEBITES

ESPECIALLY IF IT IS A BROWN OR RED-BELLIED BLACK SNAKE.
TRY TO KEEP CALM - THE CALMER YOU ARE THE SLOWER THE VENOM TRAVELS THROUGH YOUR BODY.

If someone is with you –sit still while they get bandages to bandage around your wound and then they will ring for medical help and an ambulance.

The following is from the recommended RED CROSS AID.

SNAKE BITE.

Many snakes are quite harmless to people, those which are dangerous will usually only bite to protect themselves. Most bites occur on the ankle or lower leg, so thick socks and strong shoes should be worn when walking through long grass or scrub. Treat all snake bites as poisonous, unless expert opinion is available at the scene.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- puncture marks
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- headache
- double or blurred vision
- breathing difficulties
- drowsiness, giddiness
- pain or tightness in chest or abdomen
- respiratory weakness or arrest.

WHAT TO DO IF BITTEN BY A SNAKE:

1) Check for signs of life

- if casualty is unconscious, follow DRABCD (Danger, Response, Airway, Breathing, CPR, Defibrillation).

2) Calm casualty

- Keep the person calm and at complete rest.

3) Apply pressure immobilisation bandage

- Apply a firm, broad roller bandage (5cm – 10cm) firmly over the bite site. With a second roller bandage, commence at the extremity of the limb and apply upwards, working towards the heart, to cover as much of the limb as possible. If only one bandage is available, commence at the extremities and work upwards including the bite site in the process.
- The bandage needs to be very firm as would be used for a sprained ankle.

4) Immobilise casualty

- Apply a splint to immobilise the bitten limb.
- Check circulation in fingers or toes.
- Ensure casualty doesn't move. Once applied, the bandage and splint should be kept in place until the person reaches hospital.

5) Call 000 for an ambulance

WARNING

Do not wash venom off the skin as retained venom will assist identification of the snake and the decision about which antivenin is required.

Do not cut bitten area or try to suck venom out of the wound.

Do not use a constrictive bandage (i.e. arterial tourniquet).

Do not try and catch the

Extra handy notes:

- *Constantly observe the person; if there are no signs of life start resuscitation at once.*
- *When possible, bring medical aid to the person or transport gently and without panic to the nearest hospital.*
- *Mark on the bandage where the bite occurred so that the whole bandage does not have to be removed at hospital – they can part the bandage at the bite site. You could mark it with a texta pen or just place something in the fold of the bandage to show the position.*
- *Until antivenin is available and ready to be administered **DO NOT REMOVE the bandage.***
- *Stress again – DO NOT WRAP the bandage TOO TIGHT as the blood circulation could be cut off and when the bandage is loosened then the flow of the venom will rush too rapidly through the body. Snakes can sometimes do 'dry' bites so it may not have injected any venom, however, always assume they have*