Snakes of South Africa

South Africa is home to many wonderful snakes as well as other reptiles that cannot be found anywhere else. Learning about them and how to recognize them will help to prevent them from being killed out of ignorance and fear.

Venomous snakes

In Southern Africa, less than 10 percent of our snake species are considered dangerous to humans. Some 98 percent of snakebite victims in Southern Africa survive. However, a bite from a venomous snake should never be taken lightly and it is thus necessary to be aware of the facts regarding snakes and their venom.

Types of snake venom

**Cytotoxic venom**

This type of venom is slow-acting and attacks and destroys cells. Snakes that possess this type of venom include spitting cobras, the Rinkhals, stiletto snakes and most adder species. A cytotoxic snakebite will cause swelling and burning pain on the bitten area as well as internal bleeding.

**Neurotoxic venom**

This type of venom attacks the nervous system and is very fast-acting. Mambas, most cobras, the Rinkhals, garter snakes, sea snakes, Coral Snakes and the Shield-nose Snake have this type of venom, but the venom of the Rinkhals and spitting cobras is also cytotoxic at the same time.

**Hemotoxic venom**

This type of venom attacks the blood cells and prevents blood from clotting. Back-fanged snakes typically have this type of venom. Symptoms of a hemotoxic snakebite include headaches, bleeding from the mucous membrane, vomiting and bleeding of all the internal organs.

Types of snake venom fangs

Nonvenomous snakes don’t possess any fangs, but may have rows of very sharp teeth. They kill their prey by holding them with their teeth and constricting them. Pythons have rows of jagged teeth that can inflict serious wounds. However, egg-eaters have no teeth.

**Front hinged fangs**

Vipers and adders possess this type of fangs. These fangs are long and designed to fold into the roof of the snake’s mouth when it is closed, but can stand erect when the mouth opens. Cytotoxic snakes usually have this type of fangs.

**Fixed front fangs**

Mambas, cobras, the Rinkhals, garter snakes, harlequin snakes, Shield-nose Snakes, Coral Snakes and sea snakes have these fangs. The small fangs are situated in the front of the mouth and do not fold back when the mouth is closed.

Non-venomous snakes

Now and then people can encounter a snake in their garden or house. Some examples are detailed below.

House snakes

These are commonly found near people’s houses. They include the Brown House Snake, Aurora House Snake and Olive House Snake.

Red-lipped Snakes

These mainly eat frogs and toads. Thus, any pond in your garden that attracts frogs will also attract these snakes. Dripping faucets also attract frogs. The Rinkhals mostly eats toads.

Flowerpot Snake

This is an exotic species imported from Australia. It was accidentally introduced to South Africa and is often found in flowerpots, hence the name. It likes to live in humus-rich soils in and around cities.