

# Living With Snakes – FACT SHEET -- 5



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(WILVOs) [www.wilvos.org.au](http://www.wilvos.org.au)

If you need assistance with native wildlife call our 24 hour hotline number

**5441 6200**

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## Living with Snakes



carpet snake

Photos...Graeme & Debbie Lloyd



green tree snake

The Qld sunshine coast region is home to around 20 species of snakes. They range in size from 20cm to 400cm. Colour and patterning can vary immensely, not only between different species, but also even among individual snakes of the same species. In addition, the juveniles of many species differ in colour and markings from their adult form. All of this is usually compounded by a fleeting glimpse, which makes identification extremely difficult.

Of these 20 odd species only a handful are considered dangerous to humans, and, unless you live in very bushy surroundings, you are unlikely to see most of these. Snakes are generally solitary animals although two or more may be seen associating in spring during mating activities. Individuals of a few species sometimes congregate at the same site during the colder months

Even if you live in built up suburbia there is more than likely a snake nearby. We rarely see them because most of the time they are hidden from sight, and when they aren't they are masters of camouflage. A snake's first line of defence against predators is to stay motionless, and thereby undetected. Most of the time this works. If it fails, the snake's reactions may vary widely, but there is usually a warning. (Snakes do not want to bite large animals because the resulting retaliation can be fatal to the snake). If a confrontation or potential contact with a large animal seems imminent, a snake may immediately attempt to make its presence known through sight and sound. (Humans are not the only large animals with an innate fear of snakes, and they take advantage of this fact). A sudden movement is the best way a snake can alert you of its presence. If this fails to halt the approaching threat, a hasty retreat is usually a snake's preferred "last ditch" attempt to avoid injury. However, depending on the snake's personality and temperament at the time, an attempted bite may ensue, even from a harmless species.

So, with this brief insight into snake behaviour, living with snakes becomes a safe and simple task. In a nutshell - BE AWARE. When you are outdoors, think "snake" in the same way you think "car" when you are near a road. You do not need to fear snakes any more than you fear cars. Be prepared to encounter a snake, even in suburbia. When you do, give it time and space to withdraw. If the snake is still in the motionless phase, take a couple of steps back and avert your eyes so that you can still see the snake with your peripheral vision. Once the snake feels safe it will move away.

## **Tips to avoid snakes, and what to do when you see them**

There are a few simple measures, which you can employ, to minimize the chances of snakes being on your property: -

Snakes tend to avoid open, exposed areas - keep grass mown low and do not leave anything lying on the ground which could provide shelter or cover for snakes.

Many snakes eat mice and rats - be sure no foodstuffs are available to these rodents. Possible sources of food could include uneaten pet food, birdseed from caged birds, or a compost bin not proofed against mice. Anything that attracts rodents can indirectly attract snakes.

Finally don't forget that native fauna, including all species of snake, are protected by law. Do not allow anyone to interfere with or injure snakes, it is dangerous and illegal. If you really feel threatened by a snake's presence, a relocation service is available at a small fee. Call the WILVOs to get a number of a snake catcher in your area. Although snakes probably fare better than mammals after relocation, because they can survive long periods without food, the best course of action is to leave the snake where it is. Be sure to confine your pets inside the house while a snake is on or around your property.

With these common sense guidelines snakebite should never occur at your place. Never the less if you, or someone you are with, is bitten by a snake, first aid is simple. Apply a pressure bandage (as for a sprain) immediately over the bite site and downwards away from the heart, then up the limb. The limb should be splinted (a rolled up newspaper is easy and effective) to keep the limb immobile. Ring for an ambulance and keep the patient calm and still. Do not attempt to catch or kill the snake for identification.

## **Facts, Myths and 'Old Wives' Tales**

Snakes do not find milk irresistible and will not be lured from a hiding place by a saucer of milk.

Dogs (and cats), which regularly kill snakes, are not immune to snake venom. They have just been lucky (up till now).

Browns and Blacks (or any other venomous snakes) cannot interbreed with Carpet Pythons. ALL Carpet Pythons are harmless. Those, which are particularly aggressive, have pugnacious personalities or you've just stepped on its tail.

Brown Snakes can have cream, brown, or black dorsal (back) colour.

Green Tree Snakes can have brown, green, or black dorsal colour.

Australian snakes cannot change colour like a Chameleon.

Many amateur Red bellied Black snake identifications should correctly be assigned to Small-Eyed Snakes.

The Keelback or Freshwater Snake is the only local species of snake, which is not harmed by eating Cane Toads.

Broken eggshells around the inside of your house will not keep snakes out. Ensure, windows and doors seal correctly and do not leave screen doors open.

In conclusion snakes are fascinating and unique creatures which play a vital role in ecology. Apart from the pharmacological benefits that snakes have provided for mankind, they also contribute economically by controlling rodents in suburbia and rural areas. At the very least snakes deserve our respect and a secure future on this planet.