

# Photo Identification of Common Snakes In Other Parts Of Kenya

Distributed freely by Jonathan Twining for the purpose of community education in Kenya

For other venomous and harmless snakes,  
please see our other photo ID slide set on the  
snakes of western Kenya

## **A note to trainers:**

1. Remind participants that there is a great deal of variability in color and markings within snakes of the same type
2. Also, teach these in small chunks - maybe 5 snakes at a time especially the ones most likely to be dangerous in their village

# Cobras and Mambas

## Characteristics

Large, slender tree snake

Long coffin shaped head, small eye with round pupil and yellow iris

Smooth scales

Body bright green and pale green belly

Found in coastal southeastern Kenya only



## Green Mamba

*Dendroaspis angusticeps*

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

**Dangerous with venom that affects nerves and breathing; may feel “pins and needles”, tingling, numbness, muscle contractions; a bite = medical emergency and needs respiratory support**



## Characteristics

Large body with base color being brown, olive, or gray; sometimes yellow-brown

Large head with large eyes; round pupils and orange-brown irises

Deep, dark brown bar on the underside of the neck, but this can be broken up into several dark bars with yellow scales in between

Spits large amounts of venom

## Ashe's or Brown Spitting Cobra

*Naje ashei*

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**Dangerous with venom that damages cells and tissues; a bite or venom in the eyes is a medical emergency**

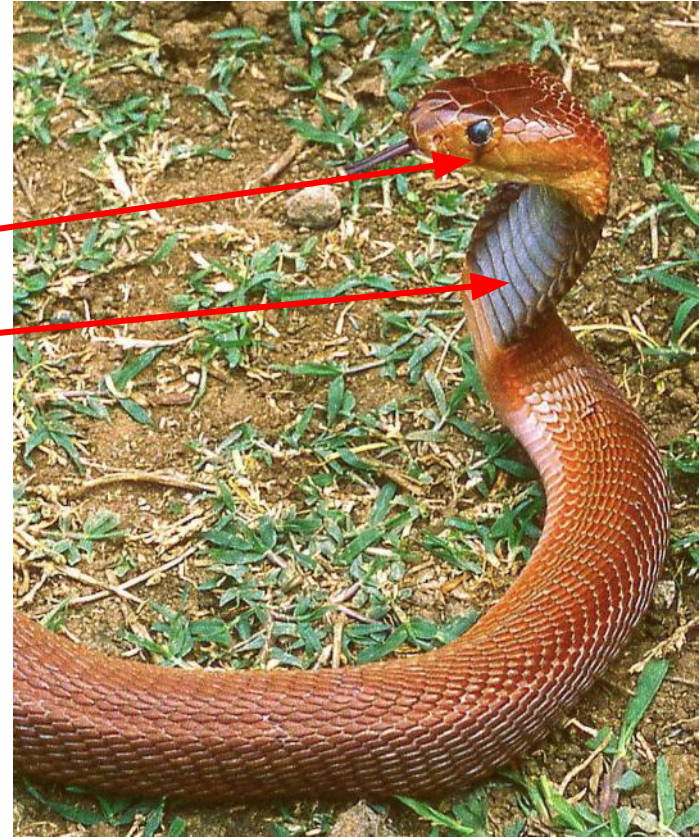
## Characteristics

Smaller body size, small head

Large eye with round pupil; black patch below the eye

Wide black throat band

Base color can be orange, red, red-brown, pink, yellow, or gray



## Red spitting cobra

*Naja pallida*

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**Dangerous with venom that damages cells and tissues; a bite or venom in the eyes is a medical emergency**

# Vipers and Adders



## Characteristics

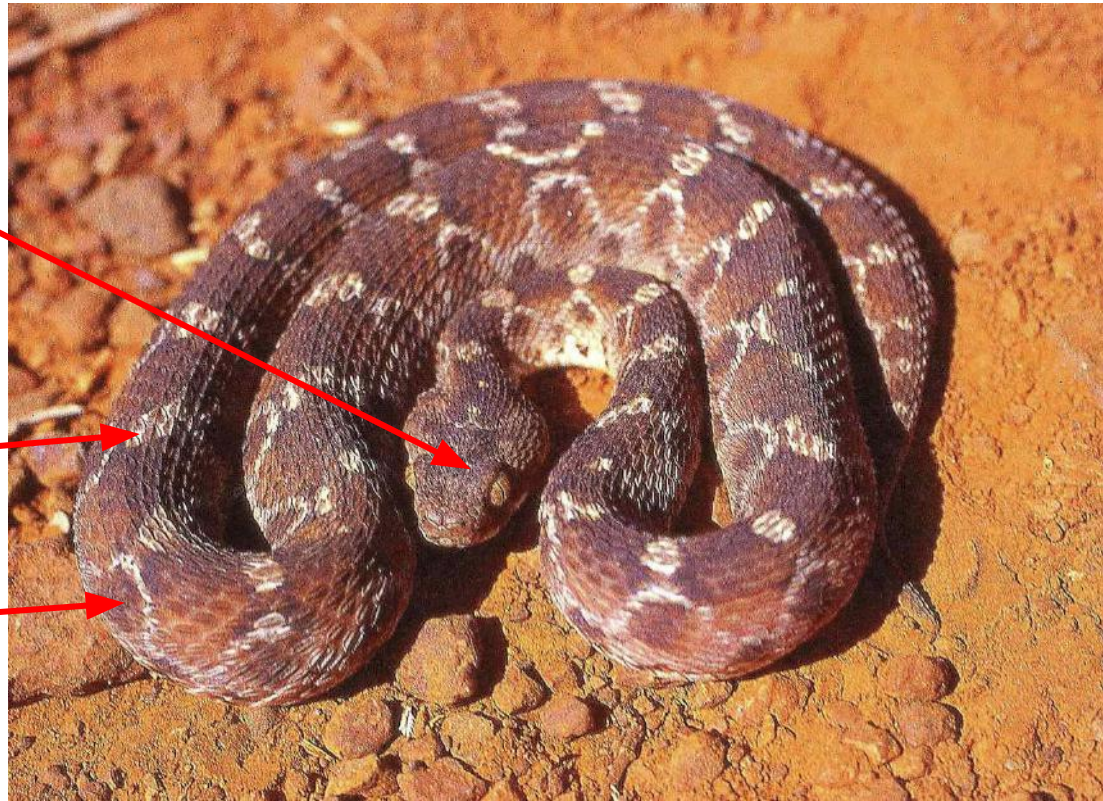
Pear shaped head covered with small scales, pale yellow irises with vertical pupils

Body color yellowish, brown, grey, or rufous

Pale oblique cross-bars with dark spaces in between

On sides, row of dark triangular or circular markings with white edging

Found in northwest and northeast Kenya



## Northeast African Carpet Viper Saw-Scaled Viper

*Echis pyramidum*

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

**Dangerous with venom that damages cells and tissues, and makes your blood flow freely; active at night; a bite is a medical emergency**

## Characteristics

Broad, flat, triangular head with small overlapping, strongly keeled scales

Small eyes, vertical pupils, iris silver with black flecks

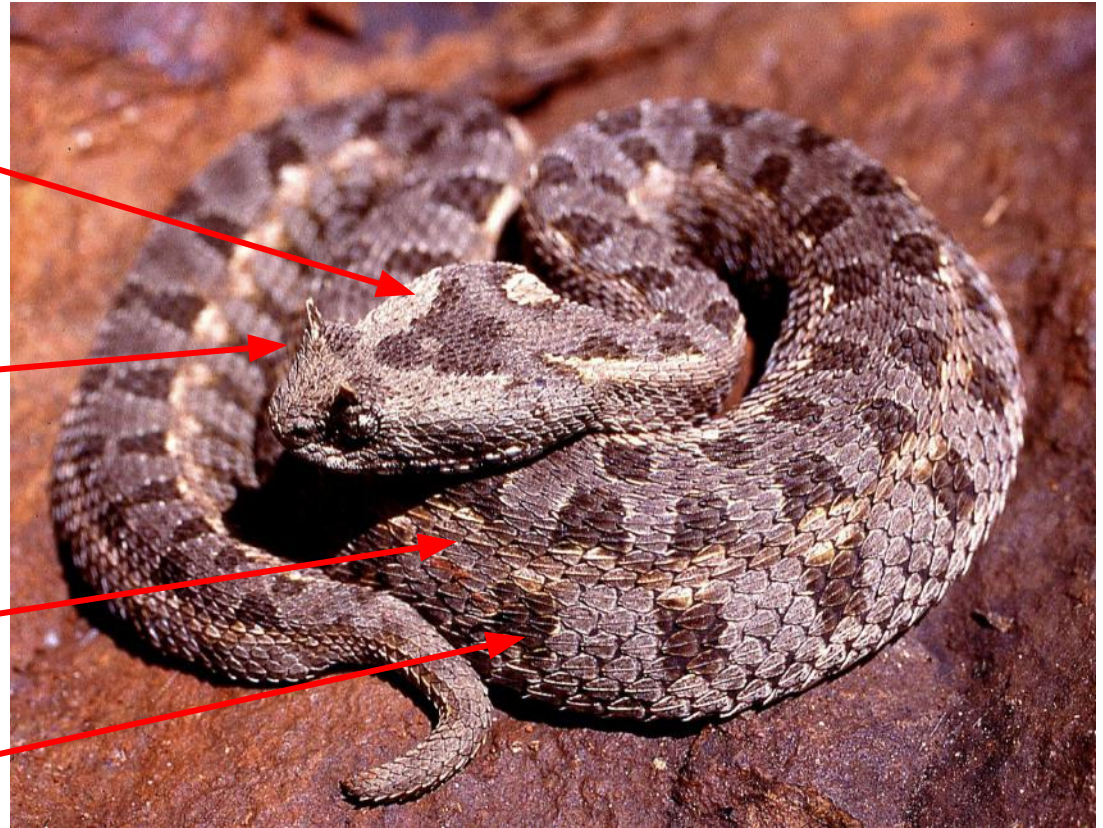
Single horns on a “raised” eyebrow

Scales heavily keeled

Body color gray

Dirty gray stripe on sides

Somewhat circular, square, or triangular markings above and below line



## Kenya Horned Viper *Bitis worthingtoni*

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

**Low risk with venom that damages cells and tissues; bites are painful and cause swelling; should be treated for symptoms at local hospital; no antivenom produced**



## Characteristics

Elongated triangular head, covered in small keeled scales

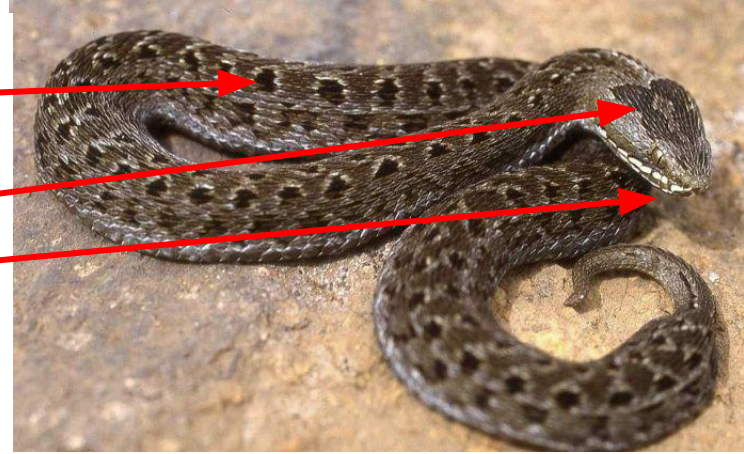
Small eyes with brown iris and vertical pupils, set forward on head; dark stripe passes through eye

Dull grey or brown body

Paired triangular, pale-edged black blotches along the back

Irregular brown arrow shape on top of head

Lips are white



## Kenya Montane Viper *Montatheris hindii*

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**Very low risk due to isolation of the species  
No antivenom available**



## Characteristics

Large, thick-bodied

Head broad, triangular and covered with small keeled scales

Small eyes, vertical pupils, set forward on head

Body green and black, each scale edged with yellow or green, making body look speckled

Yellow V shaped markings along sides on lower body

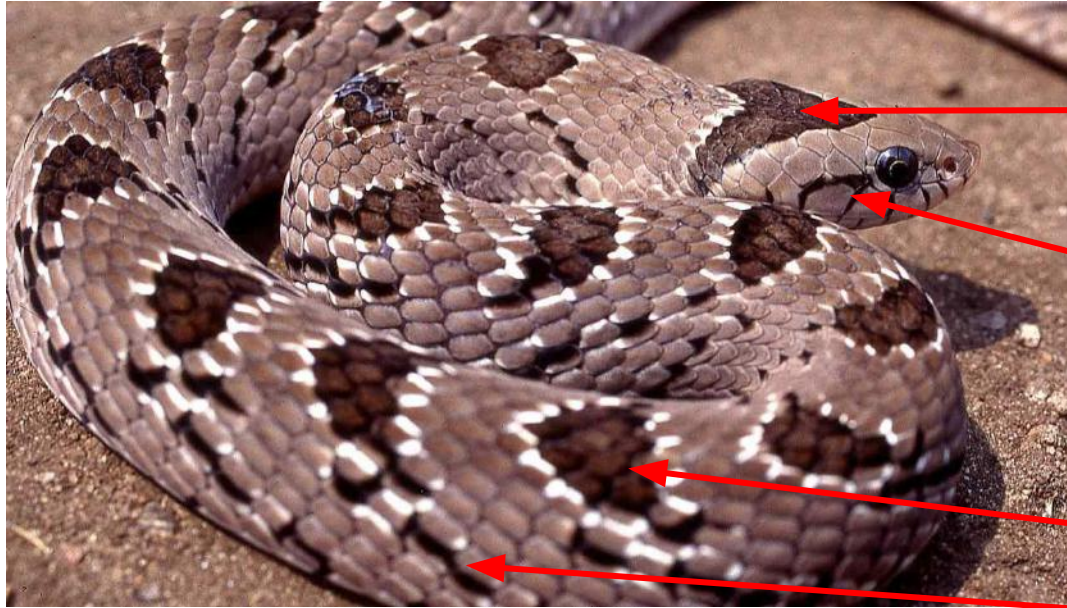
Found only in high central Kenya

## Mount Kenya Bush Viper

*Atheris desaixi*

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**Low risk due to isolation; venom that damages cells and tissues; bites are painful and cause swelling; should be treated for symptoms at nearby hospital**



## Characteristics

Body small and moderately thick, with upturned nose and V-shaped mark on head

Medium sized eye with round pupil with black mark behind the eye

Top of head covered with 9 large scales

Back is brown, pinkish brown, or gray-brown

Pale-edged diamond shaped blotches on back

Slanted black bars on sides

## Snouted Night Adder

*Causus defilippii*

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**Mildly venomous; venom that damages cells and tissues; bites are painful and cause swelling; should be treated for symptoms at nearby hospital**

# Rear-Fanged Snakes



## Identifying Characteristics

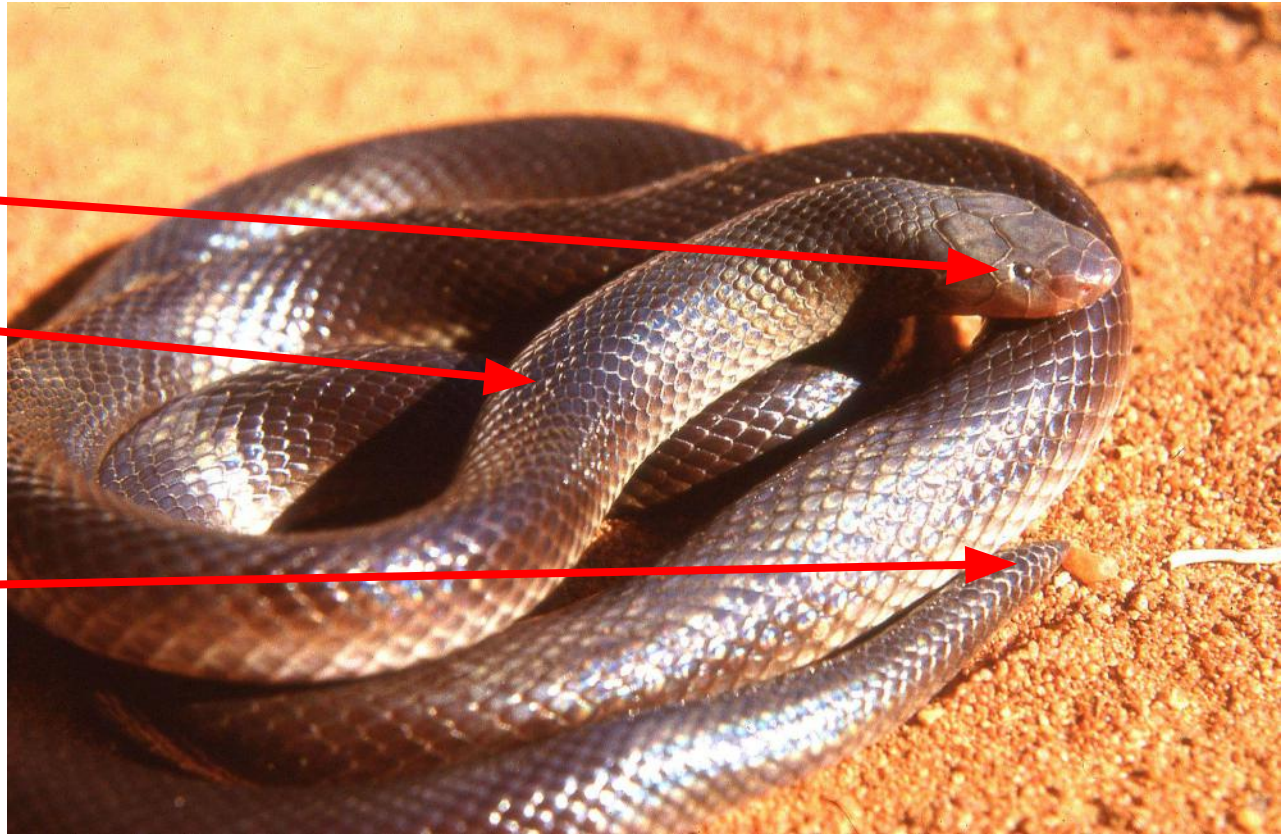
Small eyes on rounded head

Shiny skin like rainbow

Black, brown, purple-brown

Blunt cone-shaped tail

Fang can come out side of mouth



## Burrowing asp or stiletto snake

*Atractaspis bibroni*

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

## Characteristics

Thin, medium-sized tree snake

Grey, grey-brown, or whitish  
with intense dark speckling

Large eye, keyhole shaped  
pupil, yellow iris

Head long, snout pointed

Area behind eye brown  
speckled with black (brownish  
line through eye)



## Twig or Vine Snake

*Thelotornis mossambicanus*

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**Deadly venom but snake not aggressive  
and avoids people; venom can cause your  
blood to clot excessively; no antivenom but  
get treated in hospital if bitten**

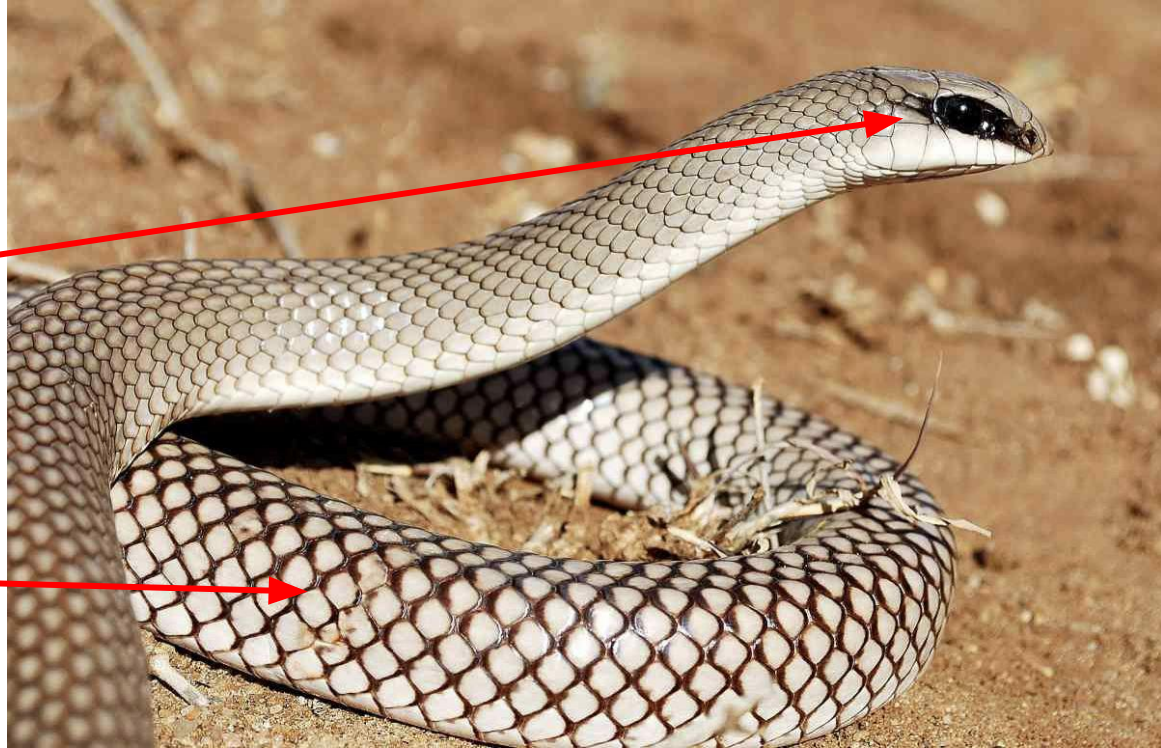


## Characteristics

Large muscular snake with short head and pointed snout

Eyes large with a broad black line through it; round pupils, iris golden or red-brown

Appears speckled when seeing it in the field; body color can be grey, pink, brown, or orange, or white; can appear to have whitish scales with black outlines



## Rufous beaked snake

*Rhamphiophis rostratus*

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**Mildly venomous - no effect on humans**

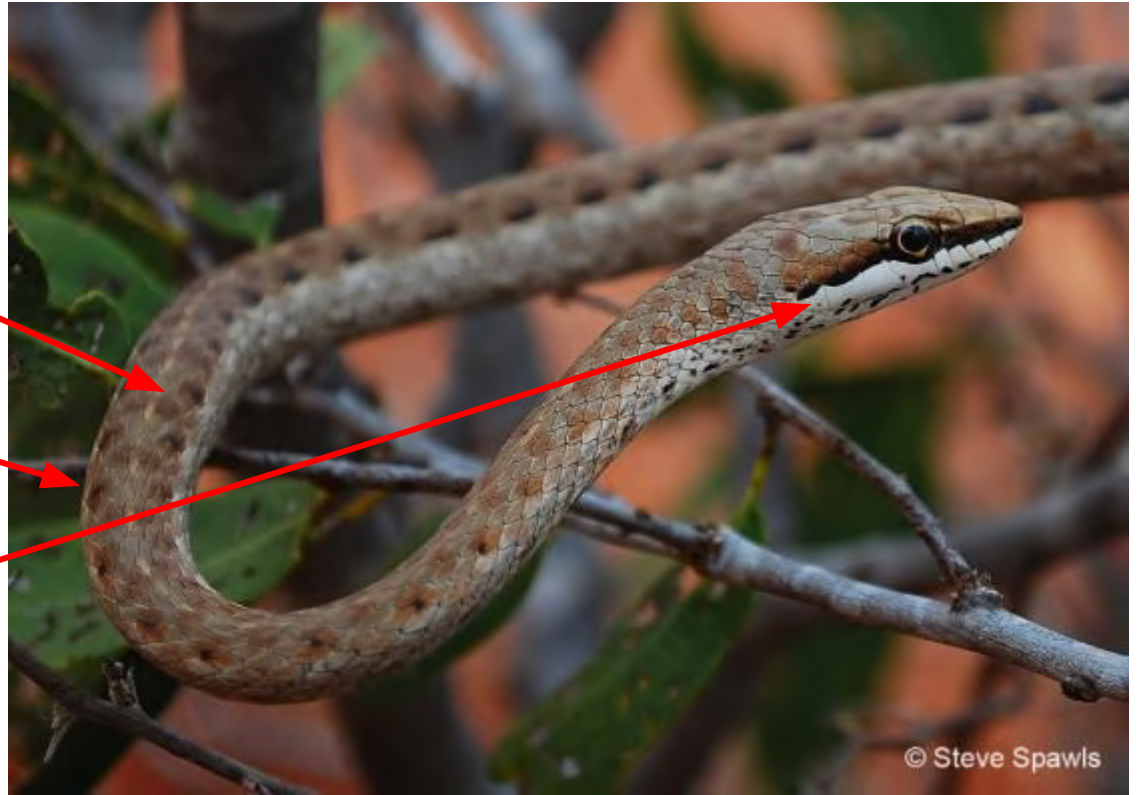
## Characteristics

Long, pointed head, large eyes, round pupils, yellow-brown iris

Thin body with olive or brown stripe down the middle

Somewhat triangular blotches on either side of stripe

Upper lips white bordered by a dark line



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## Link-marked sand snake

*Psammophis biseriatus*

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**Venom causes pain and swelling, possibly profuse bleeding - rear fanged and chews venom in when biting**

# A Few Non-Venomous Snakes From Other Parts of Kenya

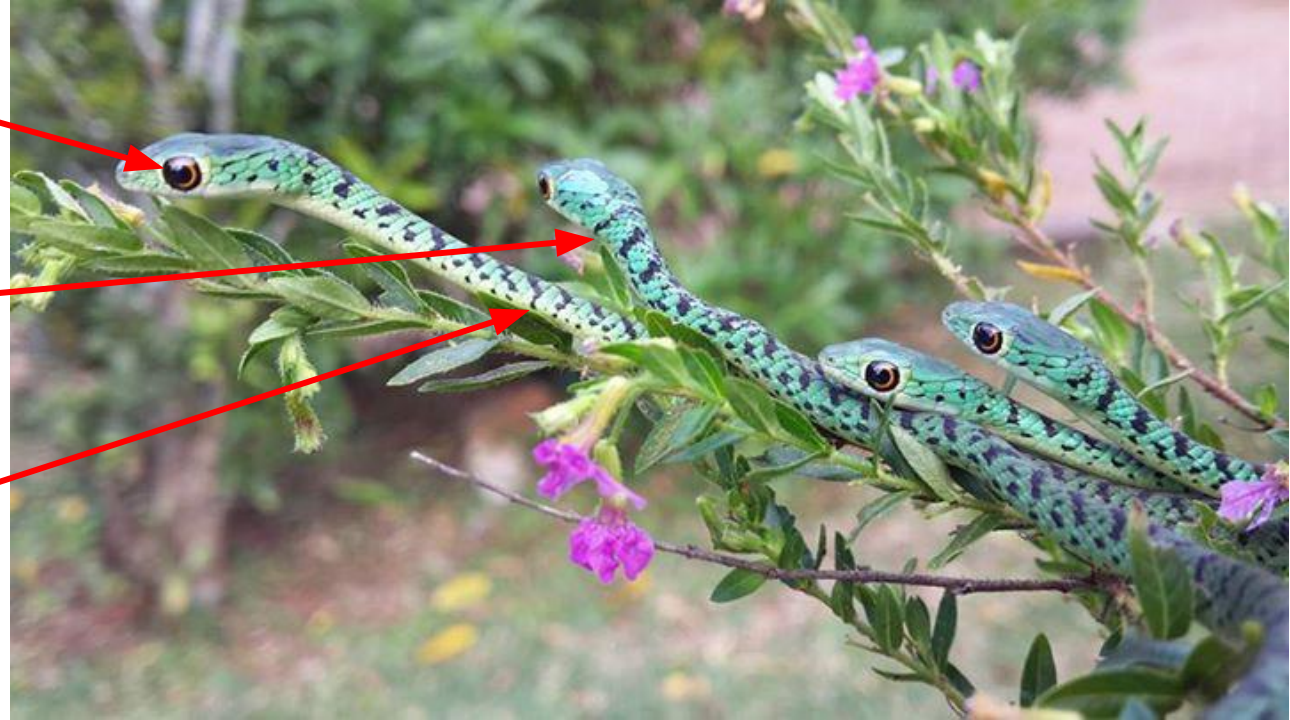
## Characteristics

Large eyes, round pupils, iris golden or orange, raised scale or “eyebrow” above eye

Body green, usually with black cross-bars

Smooth scales

Black spots along sides and sometimes on head



## Spotted Bush Snake

*Philothamnus semivariegatus*

Photo courtesy of Craig van Rensburg under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](#) license.

**Harmless**



## Characteristics

Short head, large eyes, round pupils, iris golden

Body vivid green, sometimes bright blue on lower sides

Smooth scales

Snout orange, yellow, or greenish-yellow

Lives in same areas as green mamba, so is sometimes confused with that snake



## Southeastern Green Snake

*Philothamnus hoplogaster*

Photo courtesy of Bernard Dupont, under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic](#) license.

**Harmless**



## Characteristics

Small snake <50 cm

Head flattened, eye small and dark, pupil round

Throat may be white

Juveniles with two light crossbars on neck

Smooth scales

Body gray or black

## Black Centipede Eater

*Aparallactus guentheri*

Photo courtesy of John Lyakurwa under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](#) license.

**Harmless**



## Characteristics

Head short, eye small and dark, round pupil

Body can be (1) gray, with white-edged scales; (2) plain gray or black; or (3) brown or yellow with or without black-edged scales, brown or orange head, and black neck collar.

Smooth scales



Black cross-bars and dots along the back that fade as the snake gets older

## Plumbeous Centipede Eater

### *Aparallactus lunulatus*

Photo courtesy of Ryan van Huyssteen under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International](#) license.

**Harmless**

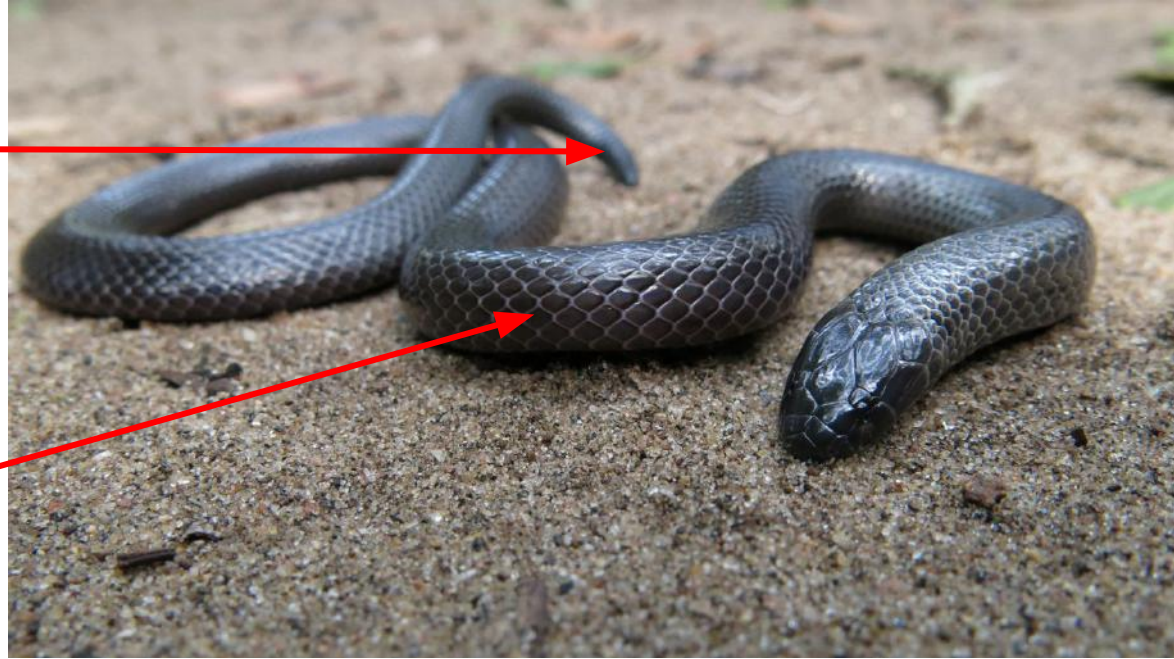
## Characteristics

Moderately thick snake with blunt tail

Short, rounded head; very small eyes; round pupil (hard to see)

Body purple-brown to pinkish-brown, sometimes blackish-brown

Smooth scales with purple shiny appearance; sometimes with a pale edge



## Common Purple-Glossed Snake

*Amblyodipsas polylepis*

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**Mildly venomous  
but harmless**



## Characteristics

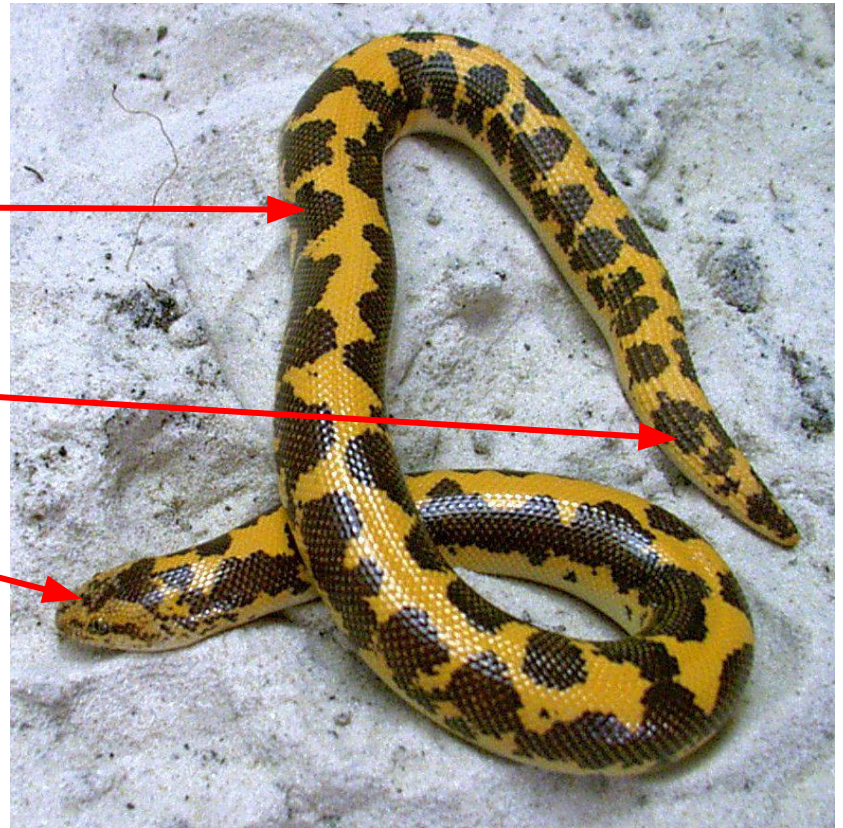
Short, thick body colored gray, yellow, or orange with brown, black, or grey blotches

Belly white, cream, or pink

Tail rounded with pointed tip

Bullet shaped head with tiny eyes - yellow iris and vertical pupil

Enlarged rostral scale at end of snout



Kenyan Sand boa

*Eryx colubrinus*

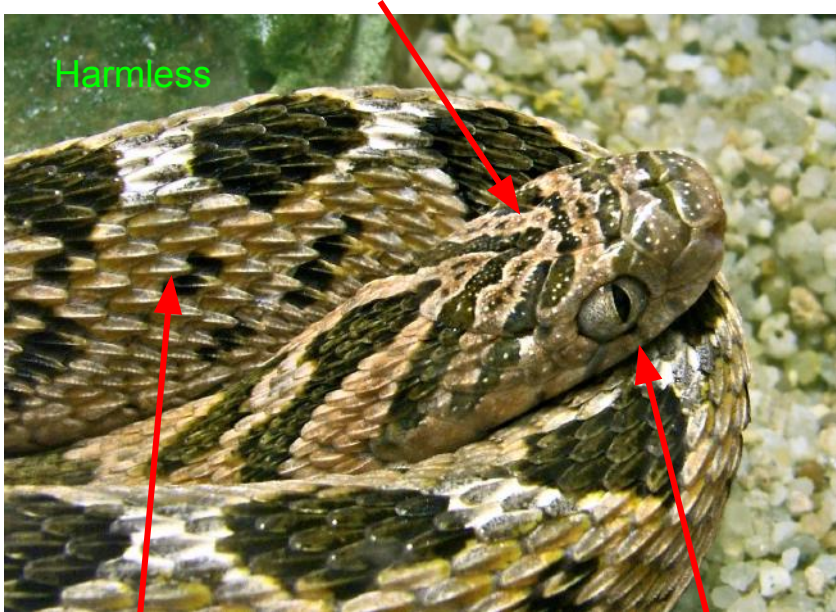
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**Harmless**

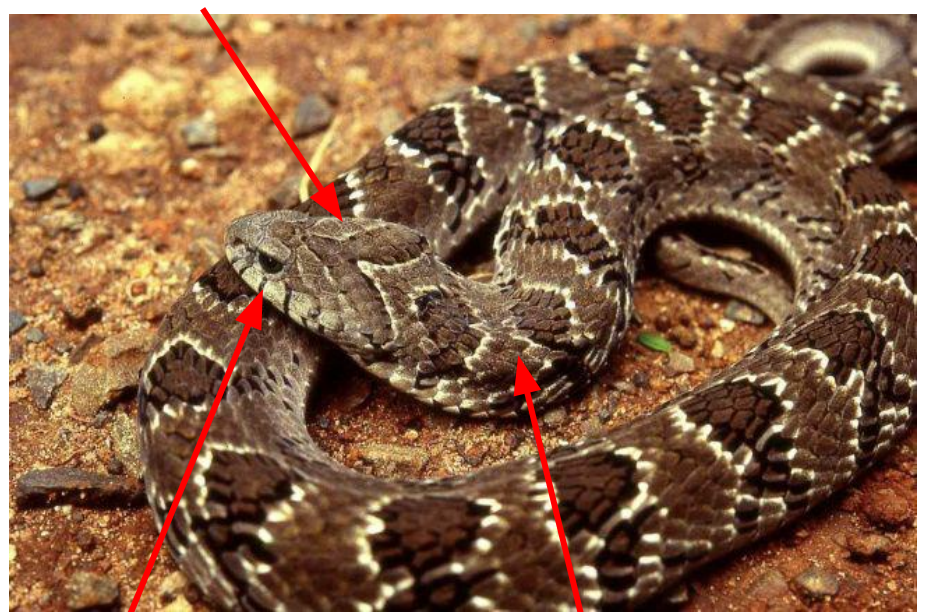
# Comparison of Some “Look Alikes”

# Rhombic Egg Eater vs Rhombic Night Adder

1-2 V-shaped Markings On Head Behind Eyes



Prominent V-shape On Head Ending Between Eyes



Strongly Keeled Scales

Vertical Pupil

Round Pupil

Weakly Keeled Scales

Common (Rhombic) Egg Eater

*Dasypeltis scabra*

Photo courtesy of Wildfeuer under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](#)

Rhombic Night Adder

*Causus rhombeatus*

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# Battersby's Green Snake vs Green Mamba



**Battersby's Green Snake**

*Philothamnus battersbyi*

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**Green Mamba**

*Dendroaspis angusticeps*


Only found in SE Kenya near coast

Note: green snakes are often confused with green mambas, even when they do not live in the same parts of Kenya

# SNAKE COMPARISONS

	<p><b>Black Mamba</b> <i>(Dendroaspis polylepis)</i></p>  <p><b>VERY DANGEROUS</b></p>	
	<p><b>Boomslang (female)</b> <i>(Dispholidus typus)</i></p>  <p><b>VERY DANGEROUS</b></p>	

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# SNAKE COMPARISONS



**Boomslang**

*(Dispholidus typus)*

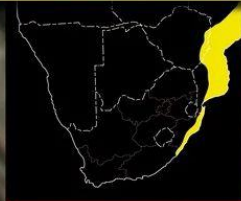


**VERY DANGEROUS**



**Green Mamba**

*(Dendroaspis angusticeps)*



**VERY DANGEROUS**



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# SNAKE COMPARISONS

	<p><b>Common Purple Glossed Snake</b> <i>(Amblyodipsas polylepis)</i></p> 	
<p><b>Mildly Venomous</b></p>		
	<p><b>Bibron's Stiletto Snake</b> <i>(Atractaspis bibronii)</i></p> 	
	<p><b>DANGEROUS</b></p>	

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# SNAKE COMPARISONS



**Common Night Adder**

*(Causus rhombeatus)*



**DANGEROUS**



**Puff Adder**

*(Bitis arietans)*



**VERY DANGEROUS**



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# SNAKE COMPARISONS



**Spotted Bush Snake**

*(Philothamnus semivariegatus)*



**HARMLESS**



**Boomslang**

*(Dispholidus typus)*



**VERY DANGEROUS**



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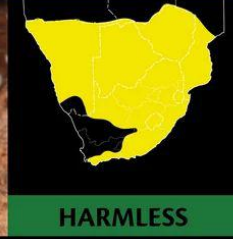


# SNAKE COMPARISONS



**Common Wolf Snake**

*(Lycophidion capense)*



**HARMLESS**



**Bibron's Stiletto Snake**

*(Atractaspis bibronii)*



**DANGEROUS**



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# Assessing What People Learned



Which one of these is a carpet viper? Why? What is the other snake?



Which one of these is a spotted bush snake? Why?



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Which of these is a red spitting cobra? How do you know? What is the other snake?



Which one is the green mamba? How do you know?



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Is this a rhombic egg eater or rhombic night adder? Why?



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Is this a rufous beaked snake or a burrowing asp? How do you know?



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Is this a link-marked sand snake or twig snake? How do you know?



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