

Photo Identification of Snakes from Western Kenya

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

Cobras, Mambas, and Garter Snakes

Characteristics

Long, slender, and fast moving

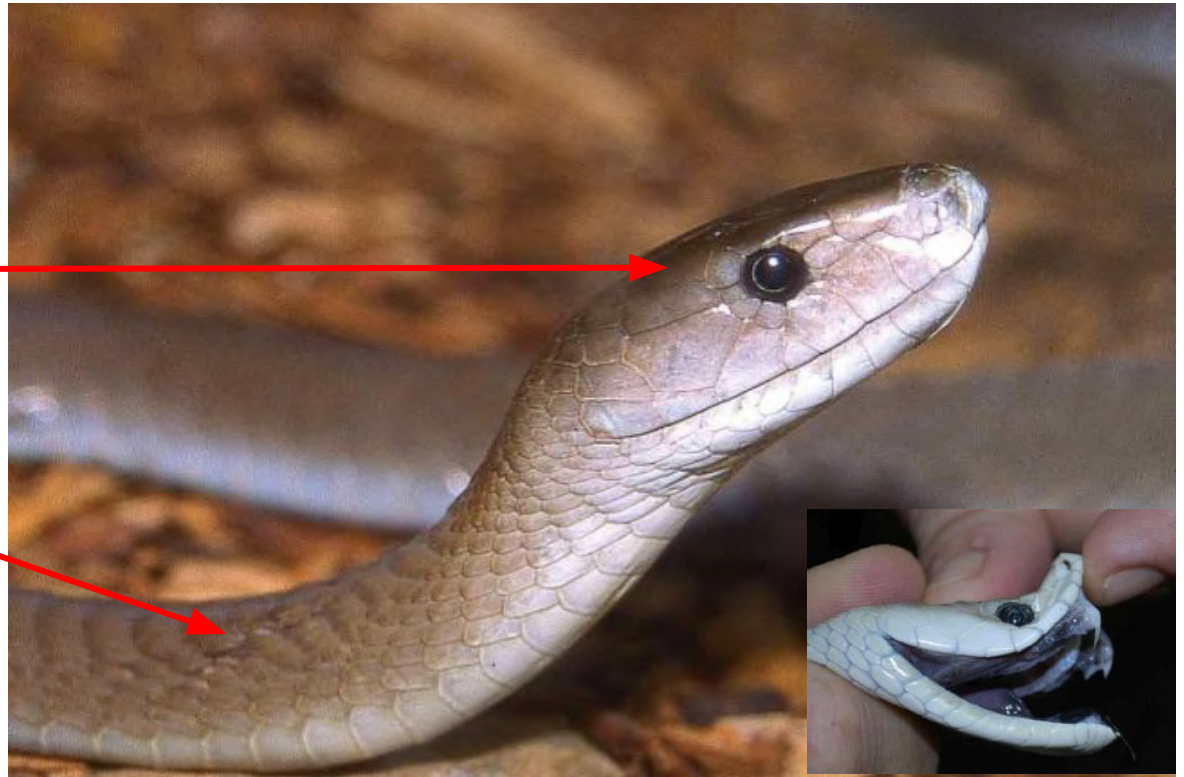
Long, narrow, head shaped like a coffin; medium sized eye with round pupils

Inside of mouth is bluish-black (see inset photo)

Olive, brown, yellow-brown, or gray in color (never black)

Smooth scales

Belly is cream, ivory, or pale green; can be speckling near tail

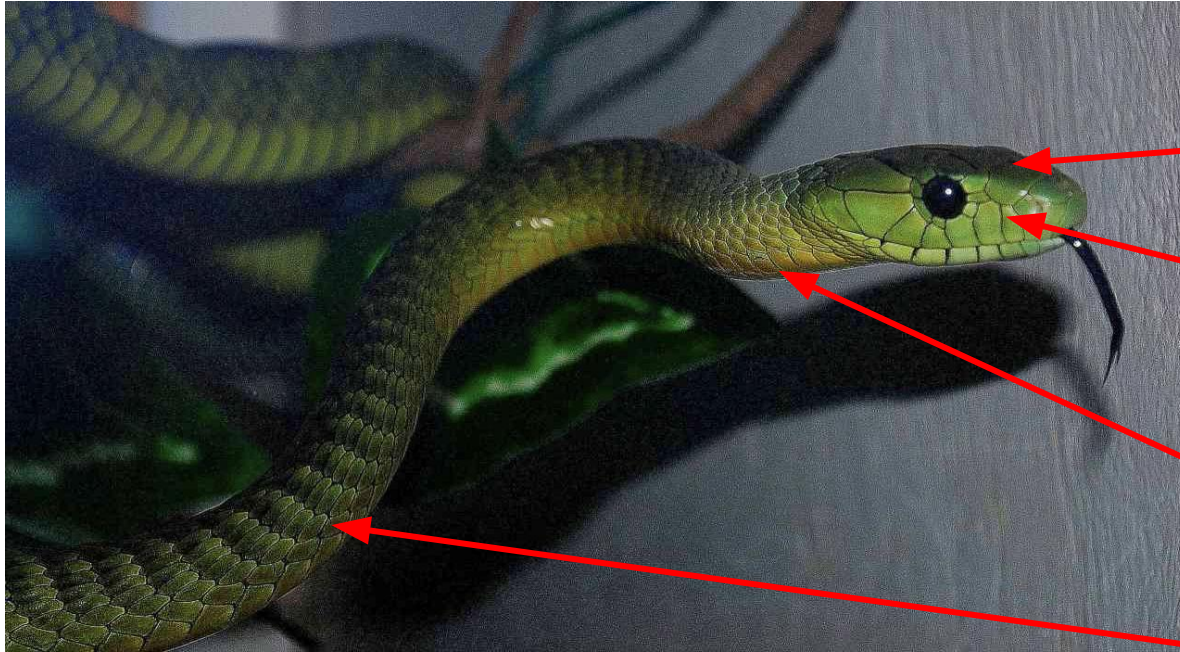


Black mamba

Dendroaspis polylepis

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

Dangerous with venom that affects nerves and breathing; a bite = medical emergency and needs respiratory support



Characteristics

Long, slender, and fast moving

Long, narrow, head shaped like a coffin

Finely black edged head scales; small eye with round pupils

In Kenya and Uganda, tail black

Yellow on neck and throat, belly pale green

Body dull green mottled with black and yellow-green; sometimes with narrow bands

Jameson's Mamba

Dendroaspis jamesoni

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

Dangerous with venom that affects nerves and breathing; a bite = medical emergency; needs respiratory support

Characteristics (from Lake Victoria basin)

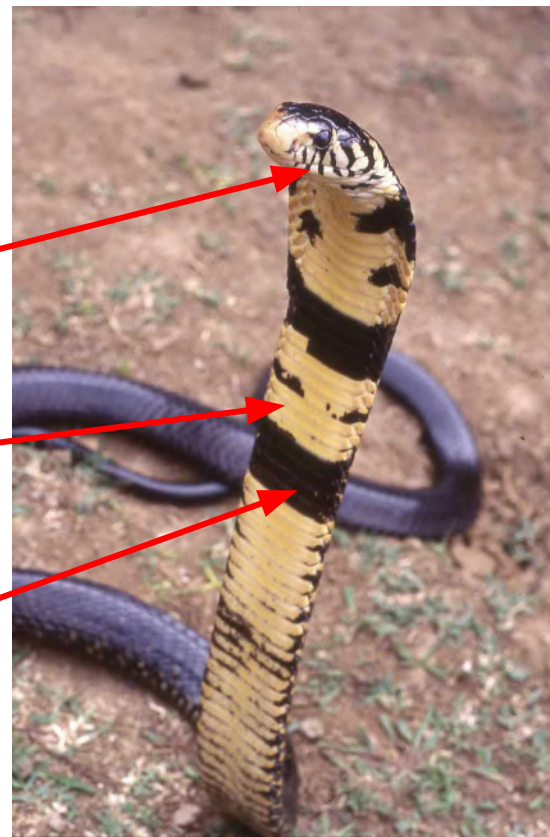
Large head, large dark eye,
round pupils

Vertical black and white bars
on the lips

Belly and throat cream, white,
or yellow

Long, thick body with smooth
scales; brown or black

Black cross-bars and blotches
on throat



Brown Forest Cobra *Naja subfulva*

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**Dangerous with venom that affects the nerves
and breathing; a bite = medical emergency;
respiratory support may be needed**

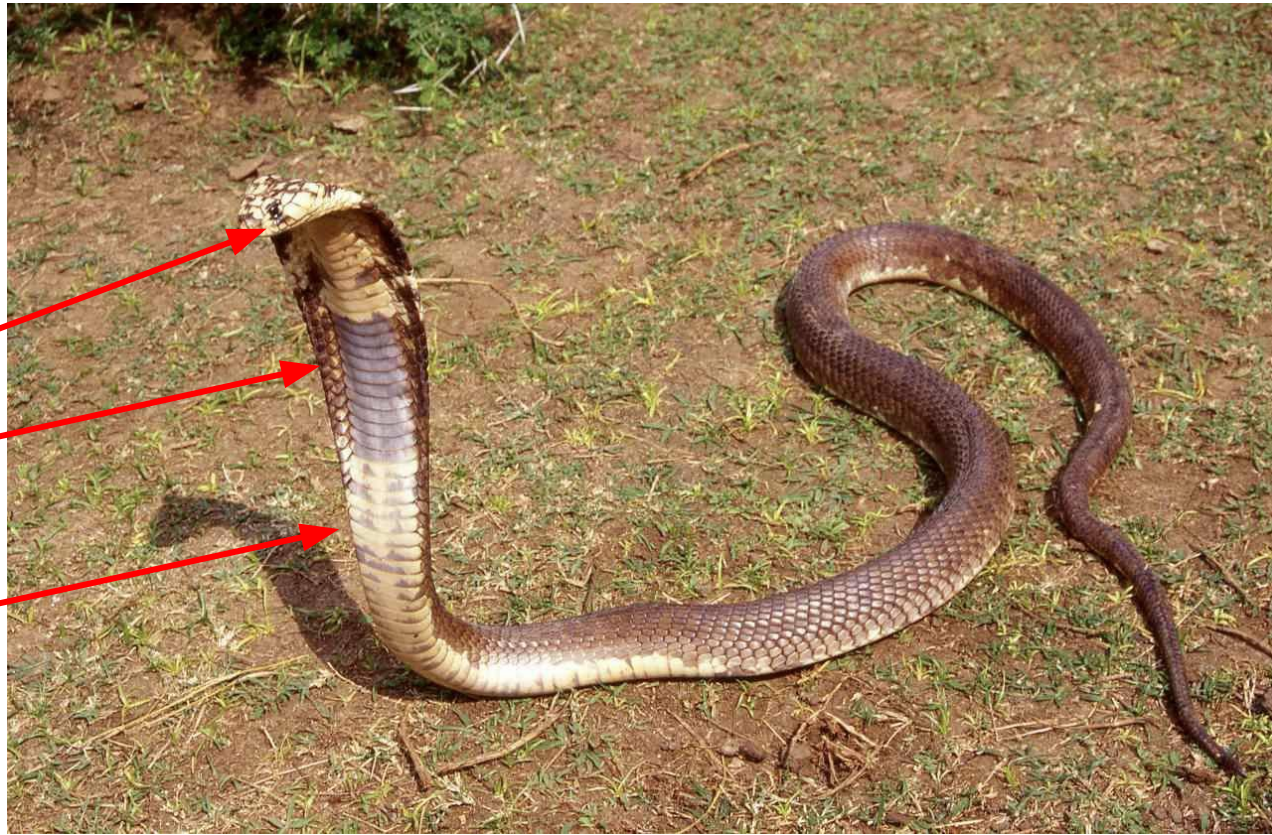
Characteristics

Long, thick body with smooth scales; brown, red-brown, grey-brown, or black

Large eyes, pupil round; dark patch under eye; lips yellow

Broad gray or brown throat bar

Irregular patches of brown or yellow on neck, back, and underside



Egyptian cobra

Naja haje

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Dangerous with venom that affects the nerves and breathing; a bite = medical emergency; respiratory support may be needed

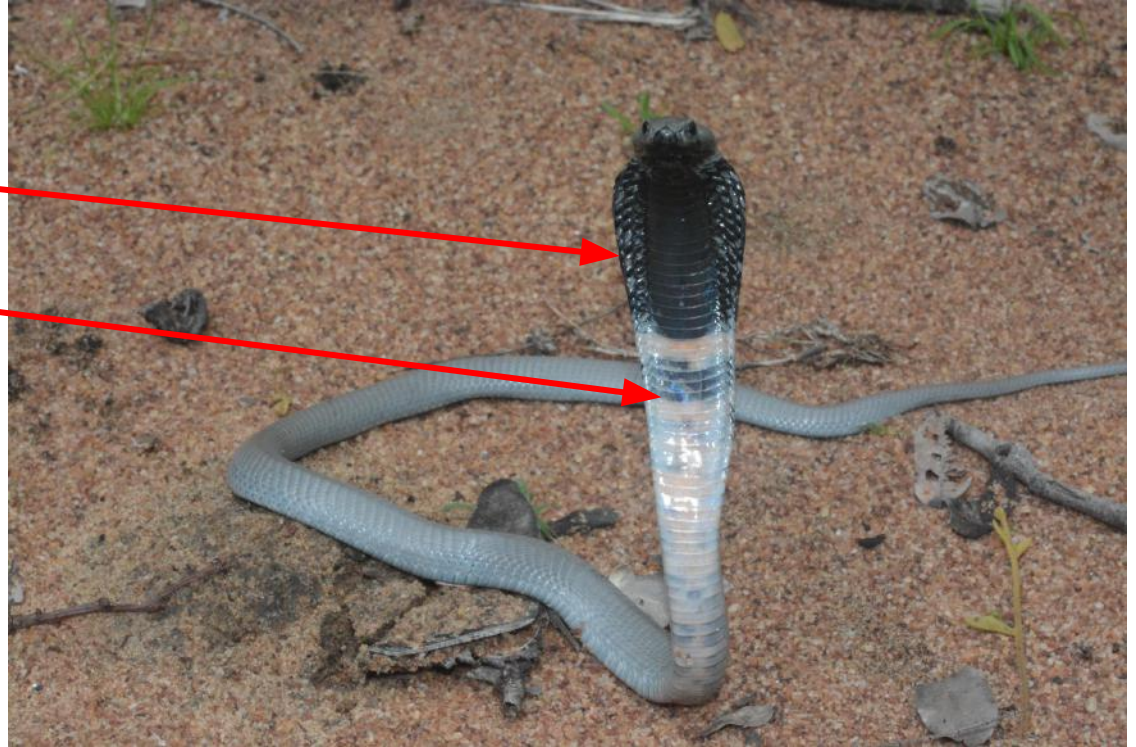
Characteristics

Broad, black head and neck

Lower throat has red/orange/pink and black bands

Body can be black, grey, or reddish-brown

Can spit venom 3 meters or more with accuracy



Black-necked spitting cobra *Naja nigricollis*

Courtesy of John Lyakurwa under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](#) license without changes.

Dangerous with venom that causes cell and tissue damage; a bite or venom in the eyes is a medical emergency

Characteristics

Huge dark eye and round pupils

Large, thin-bodied, shiny black, smooth scales

Scales on chin, throat, and side of head yellow edged with black

Belly yellow

Tail long and ends in a spike



Gold's Tree Cobra

Pseudohaje goldii

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Dangerous with venom that affects nerves and breathing; a bite = medical emergency; respiratory support may be needed

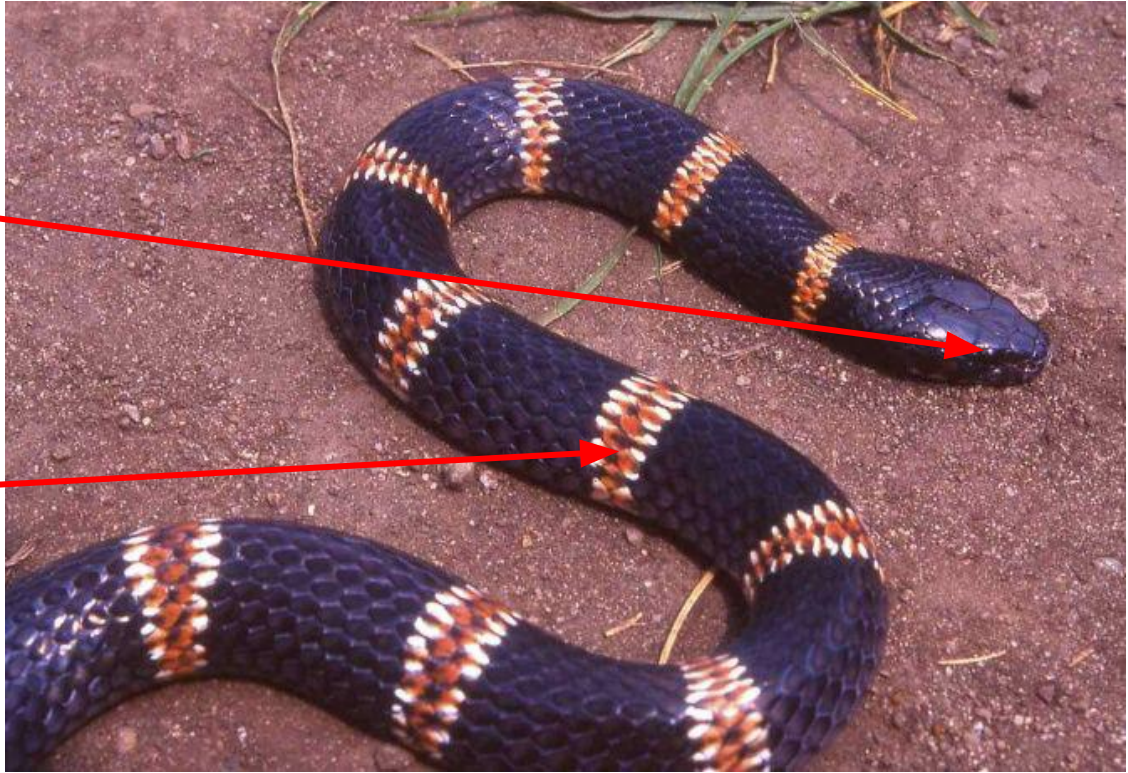
Characteristics

Short head, eyes near front of head,
with round pupils

Body gray to black

Scales smooth

Color of bands variable from pink or
red bands to white-edged black
bands or two fine white bands



East African Garter Snake

Elapsoidea loveridgei

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

Venomous but not known to be deadly to humans; intense local pain and swelling

Vipers, Bush Vipers, Night Adders

Characteristics

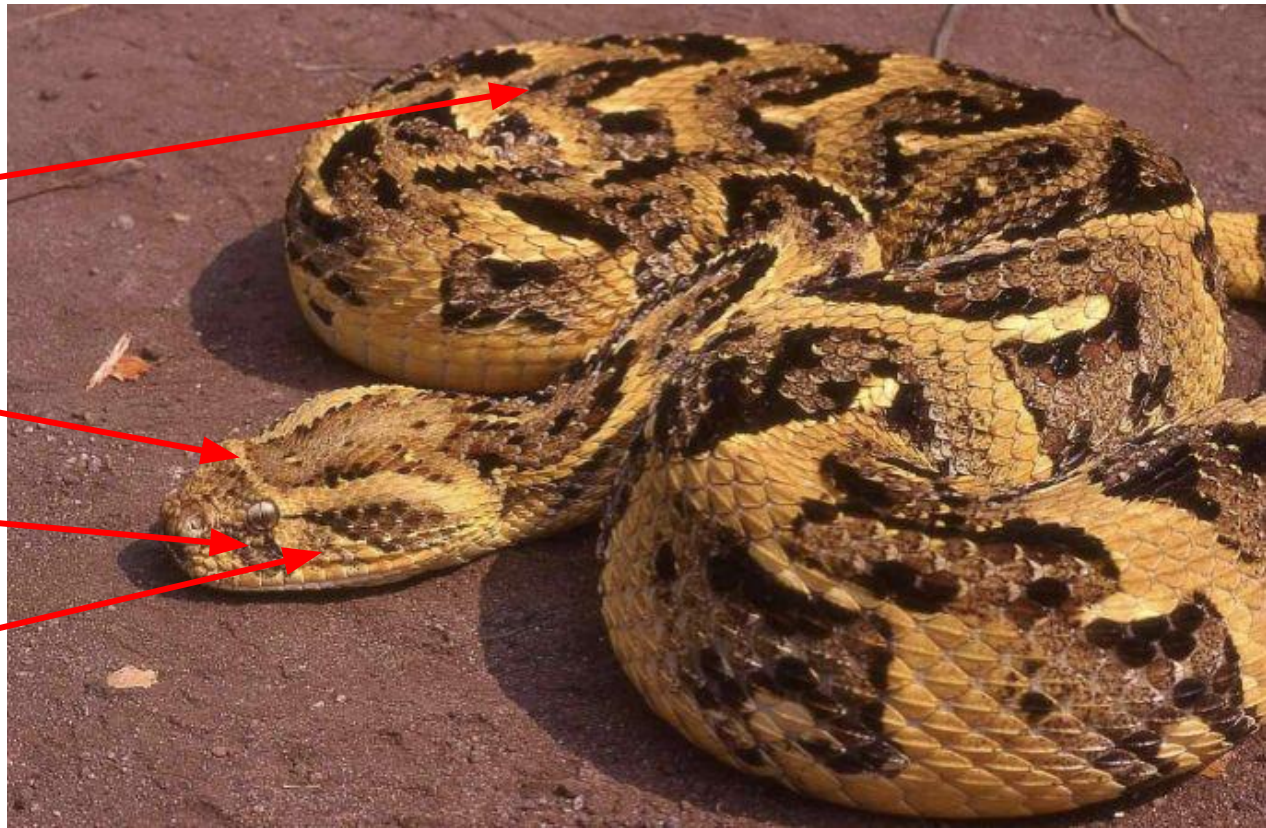
Heavy, thick body; patterns on back are V-shaped (chevrons)

Broad, flat, triangular head with pale bar between eyes

Small eyes set forward on head with vertical pupils; dark bars underneath and behind eyes

Pale bars from eye to jaw and also between the eyes

Base color brown, grey, orange, or yellow

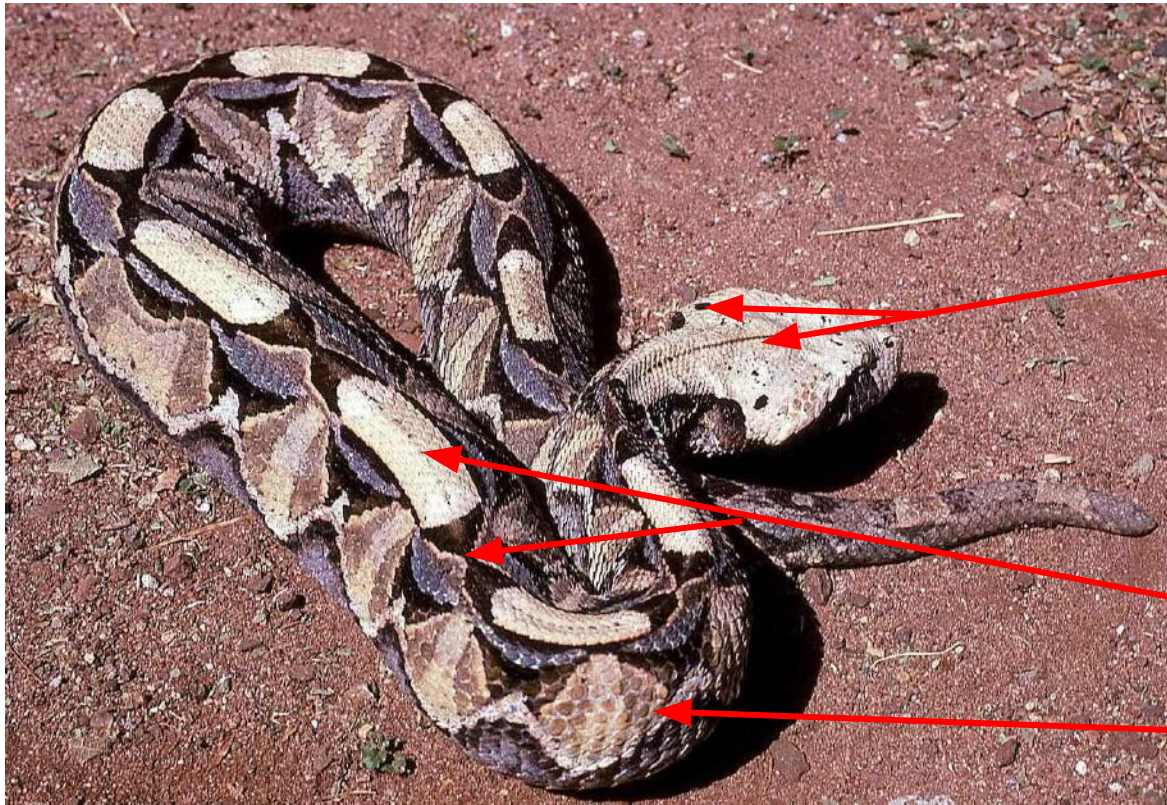


Puff adder

Bitis arietans

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Dangerous with venom that kills cells and tissues; a bite = medical emergency



Characteristics

Heavy, thick body with keeled scales

Broad, flat, triangular head, white or cream, black dots on rear of head, fine dark central line, tiny horns on end of nose

Small eye well forward on head; vertical pupils, iris yellow-white or orange

Oblong patches along spine in between dark hourglass marks

Sides with diamond pattern with light vertical central bars

Eastern Gaboon viper

Bitis gabonica

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Dangerous with venom that kills cells and tissues; a bite = medical emergency

Characteristics

Heavy, thick body with keeled scales

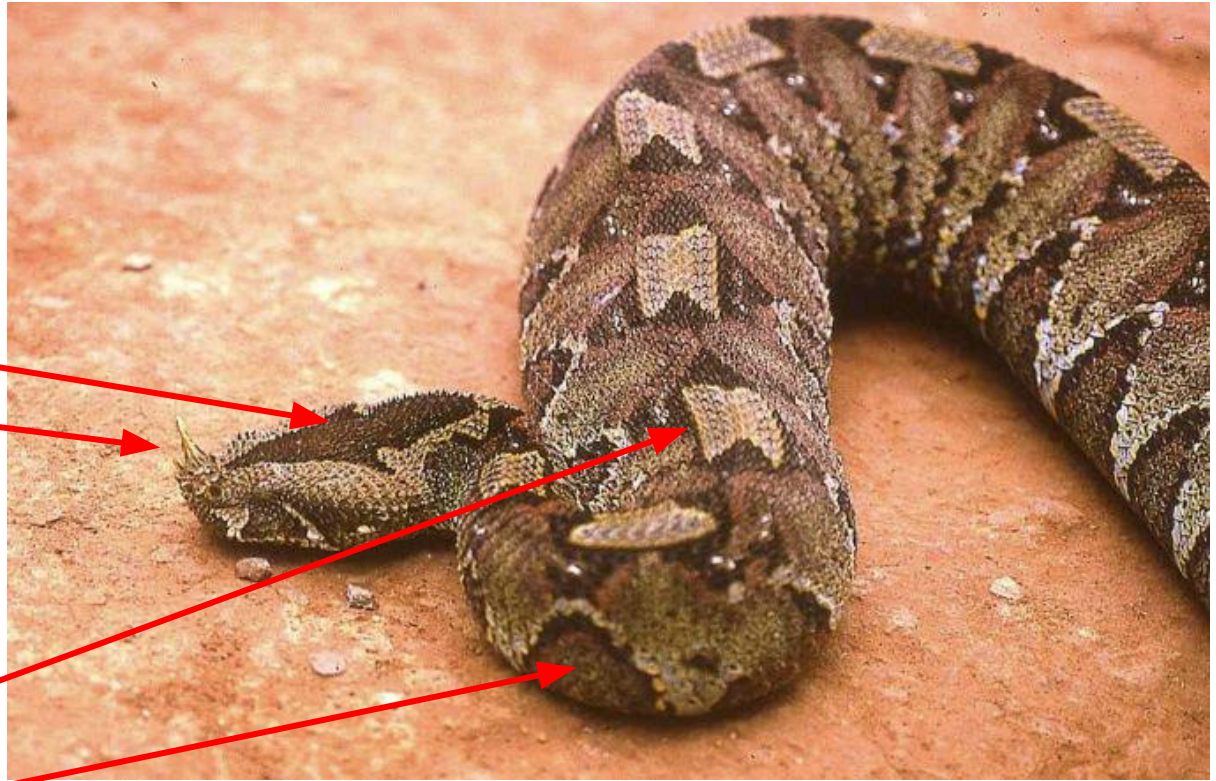
Narrow, flat, triangular head covered in strongly keeled scales; arrow mark on top

2-3 horn-like scales on end of nose

Small eye well forward on head; vertical pupils, iris green or gold with black flecks

Oblong patches along spine inside dark rhombic patches

Sides with triangular patches



Rhinoceros viper

Bitis nasicornis

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Dangerous with venom that kills cells and tissues; a bite = medical emergency

Characteristics

Body green, yellow-green, or occasionally brown

Head broad and triangular with small, strongly-keeled scales

Small eye with vertical pupil

Fine yellow cross-bars on body

Prehensile tail (tail can wrap around branch and support the weight of the hanging body)



Green or Variable Bush Viper

Atheris squamigera

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Dangerous; venom affects cells and blood, with intense pain, much swelling, and blood clots; has caused human fatalities

Characteristics

Somewhat triangular head with large eyes,

Scales heavily keeled, prickly, and shaped like leaves

Males olive green with black mark on back of neck resembling an H, V, or W or just an irregular dot; sometimes a dark line behind the eye; belly greenish

Females yellow-brown or olive-brown, similar black mark on back of neck, yellow brown belly



Vertical pupils and brown iris

Rough-Scaled Bush Viper

Atheris hispida

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Venom not studied and no bite cases reported. Venom may cause pain, swelling, and blood clots like other bush vipers

Characteristics

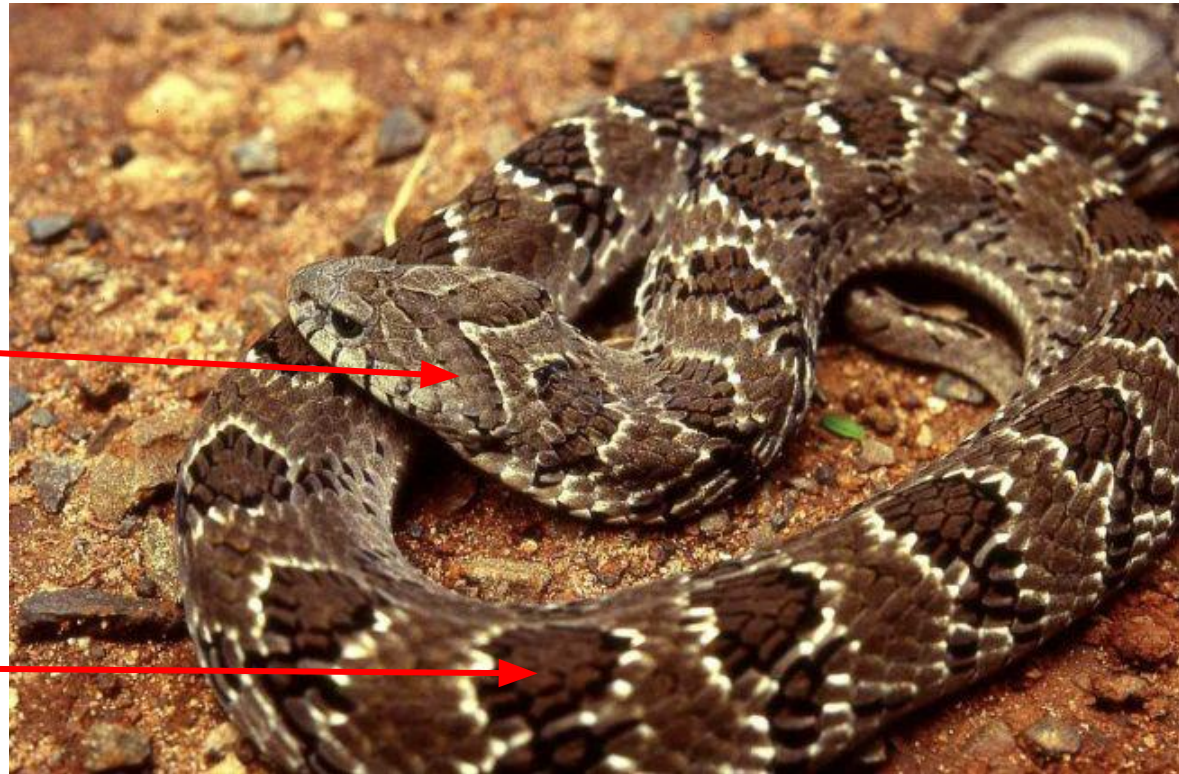
Thick bodied, short head, rounded snout, medium sized eye with round pupils

V-shaped mark on head

Scales slightly keeled

Base color brown, pink, gray-brown, or olive-green

20-30 dark, pale-edged rhombic patches along spine, dark bars on sides



Rhombic night adder

Causus rhombeatus

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Venom damages cells causing pain and swelling - could be serious for children and animals

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Characteristics

Body various shades of green to brown; velvety appearance

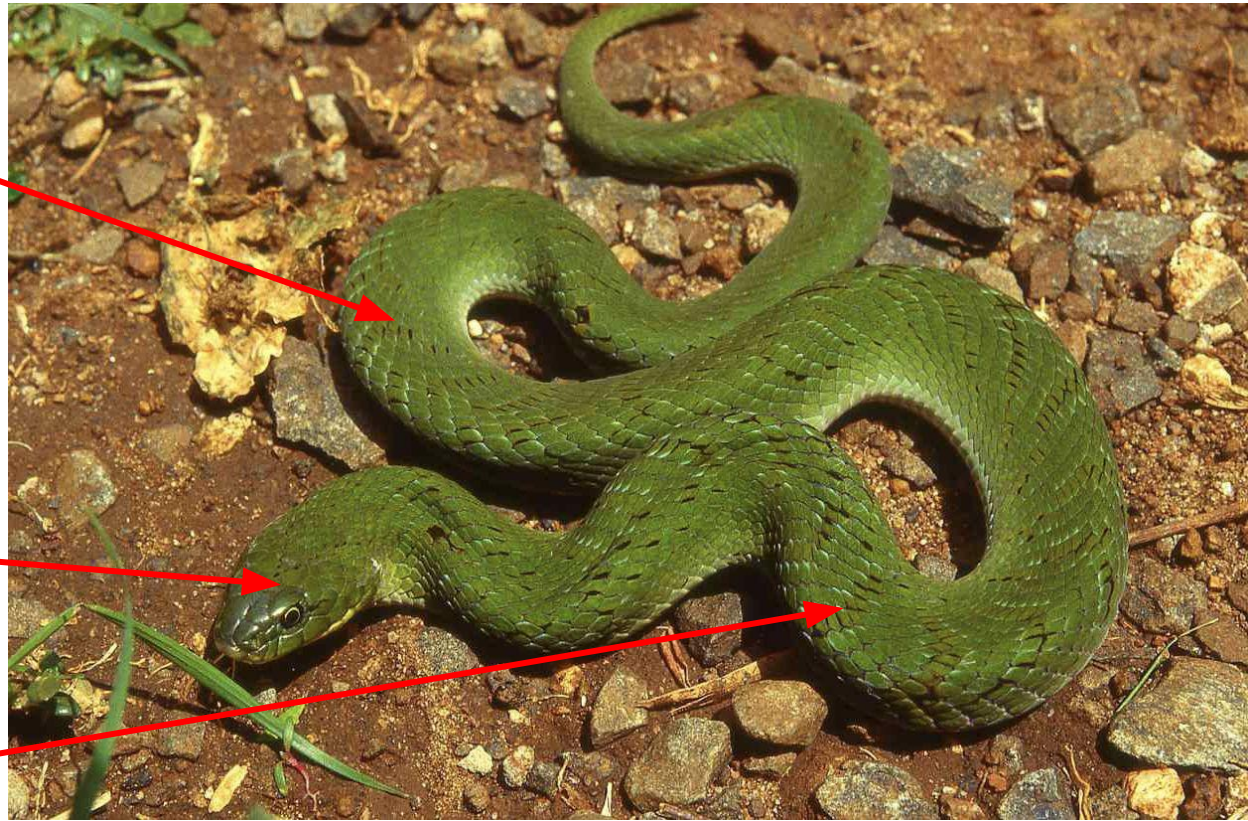
Moderately thick body, head distinct from neck

Medium sized eye with round yellow pupil

Nine large scales on head

Chin and throat yellow

Indistinct black markings (bands) on back and sides



Velvety-Green Night Adder

Causus resimus

(Photo used with permission from Stephen Spawls)

Venom unknown but probably similar to other night adders - mildly venomous with pain, swelling, fever for a few days. No antivenom available.

Characteristics

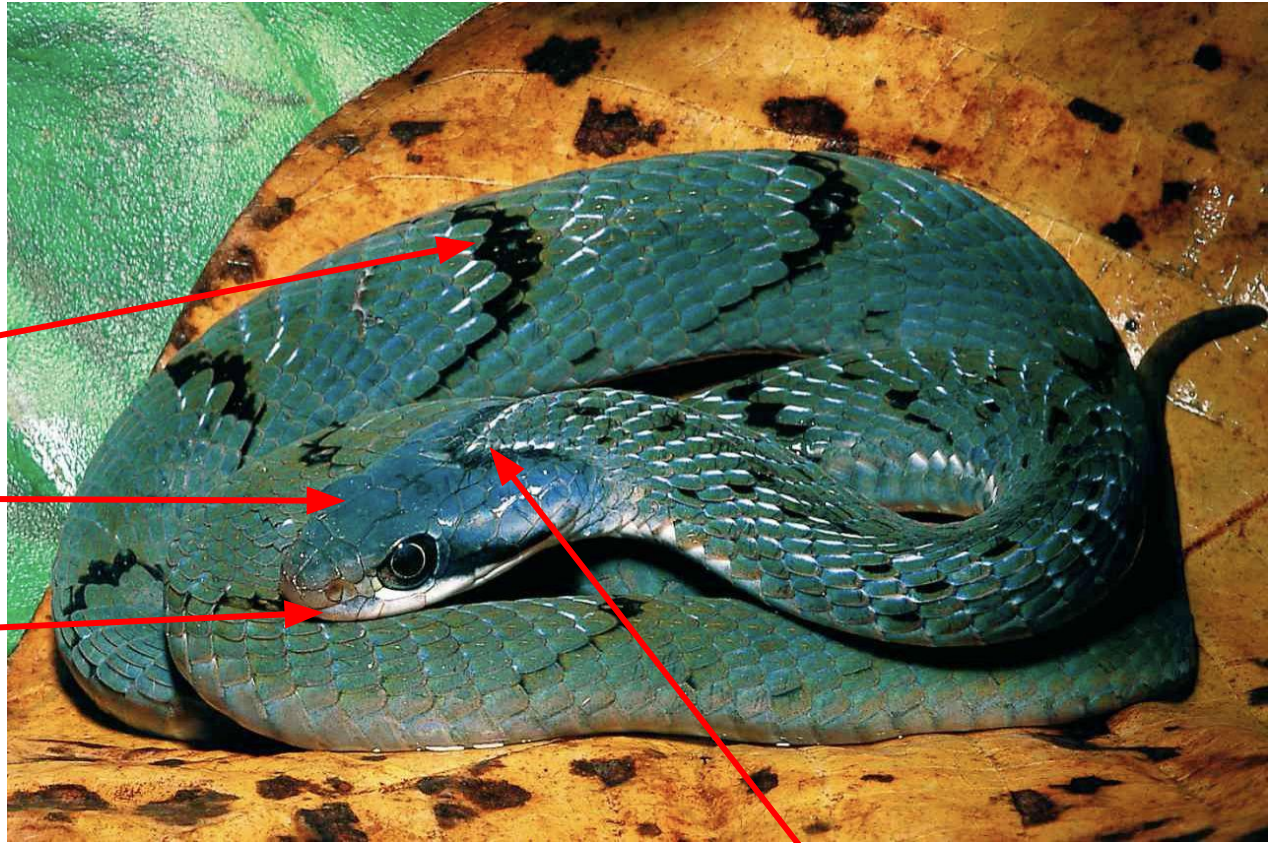
Rounded head, distinct neck,
rounded pupils

Color variable shades of green

Sometimes dark V-shaped
markings on back

Top of head has nine large
scales

Lips yellow, throat yellow or
white



White V-shape on neck

Mildly venomous with pain, swelling, fever for a few days. No antivenom necessary.

Forest night adder

Causus lichtensteinii

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Rear-Fanged Snakes

Characteristics

Body **color highly variable** -
green, gray, brown

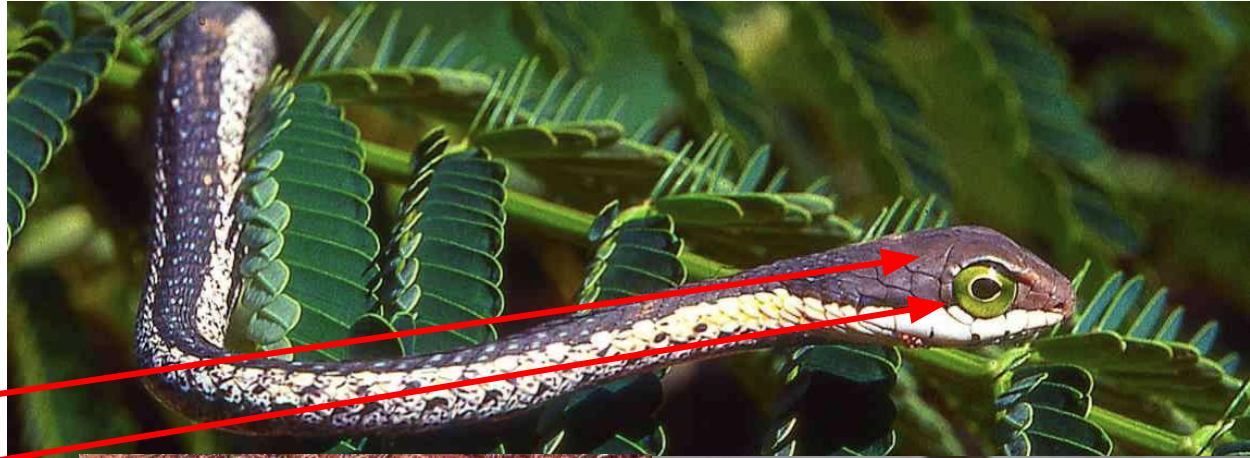
Keeled scales

Short egg-shaped head

Huge eye

Rounded pupil, iris yellow or
light green

Body flattened from side to side

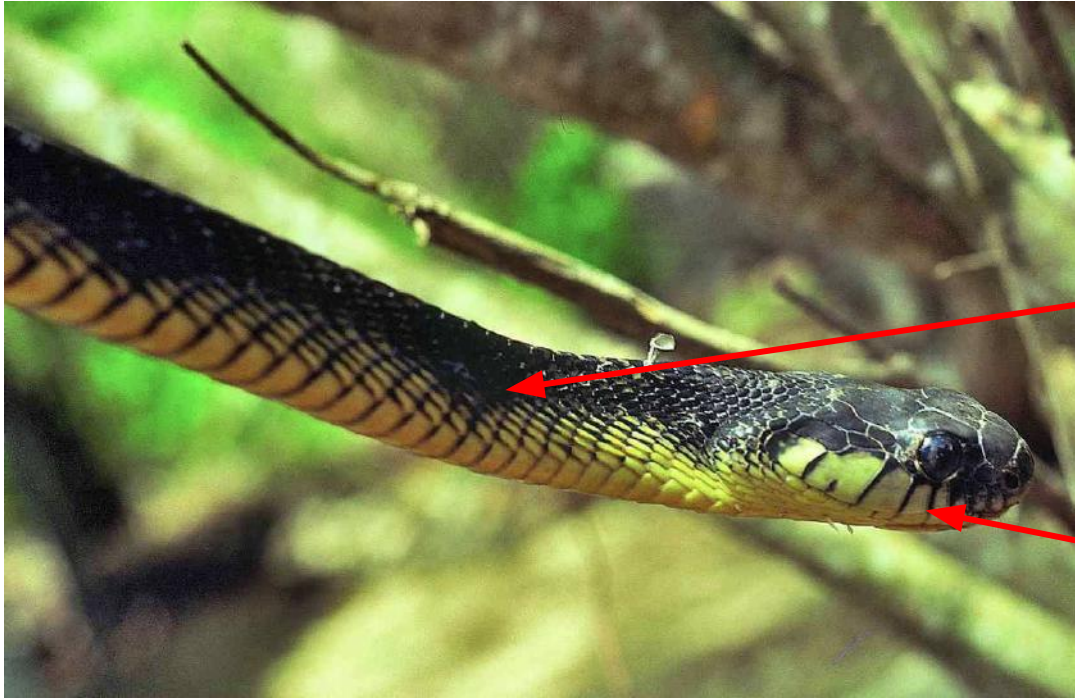


Boomslang

Dispholidus typus

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Dangerous with venom that causes blood to flow freely; may not recognize symptoms for hours; a bite = medical emergency



Characteristics of Males

Large stocky body with thin neck

Black back and yellow belly

Short, broad, flattened head;
prominent eyes with dark eyes and
vertical pupils

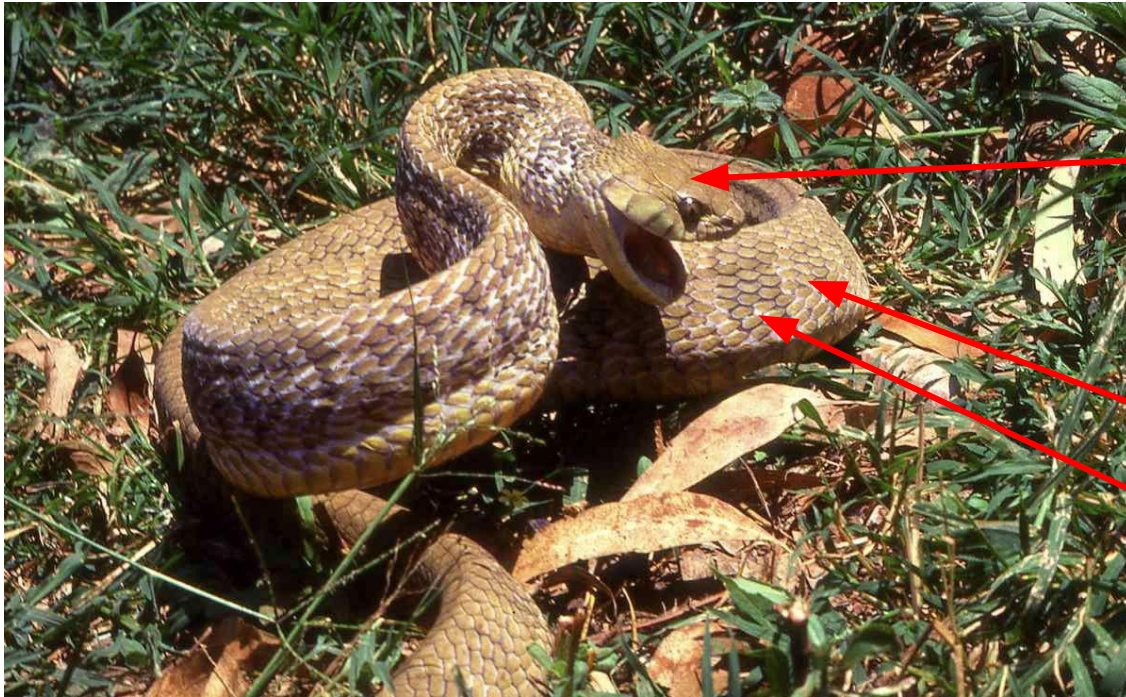
Lips yellow bordered by black

Blanding's Tree Snake (male)

Toxicodryas vexator

(Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls)

CAUTION; venom affects the nerves; causes pain, swelling, dizziness, chest and muscle pain, sensitive skin; no antivenom available so treat symptoms



Characteristics of Females

Large stocky body with thin neck

Short, broad, flattened brown head and yellow-brown lips

Prominent eyes with yellow to brown eyes and vertical pupils

Brown, gray, or yellow-brown body

Darker cross-bars or diamonds on sides

Skin blue-gray when snake inflates body

Blanding's Tree Snake (female)

Toxicodryas vexator

(Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls)

CAUTION; venom affects the nerves; causes pain, swelling, dizziness, chest and muscle pain, sensitive skin; no antivenom available so treat symptoms

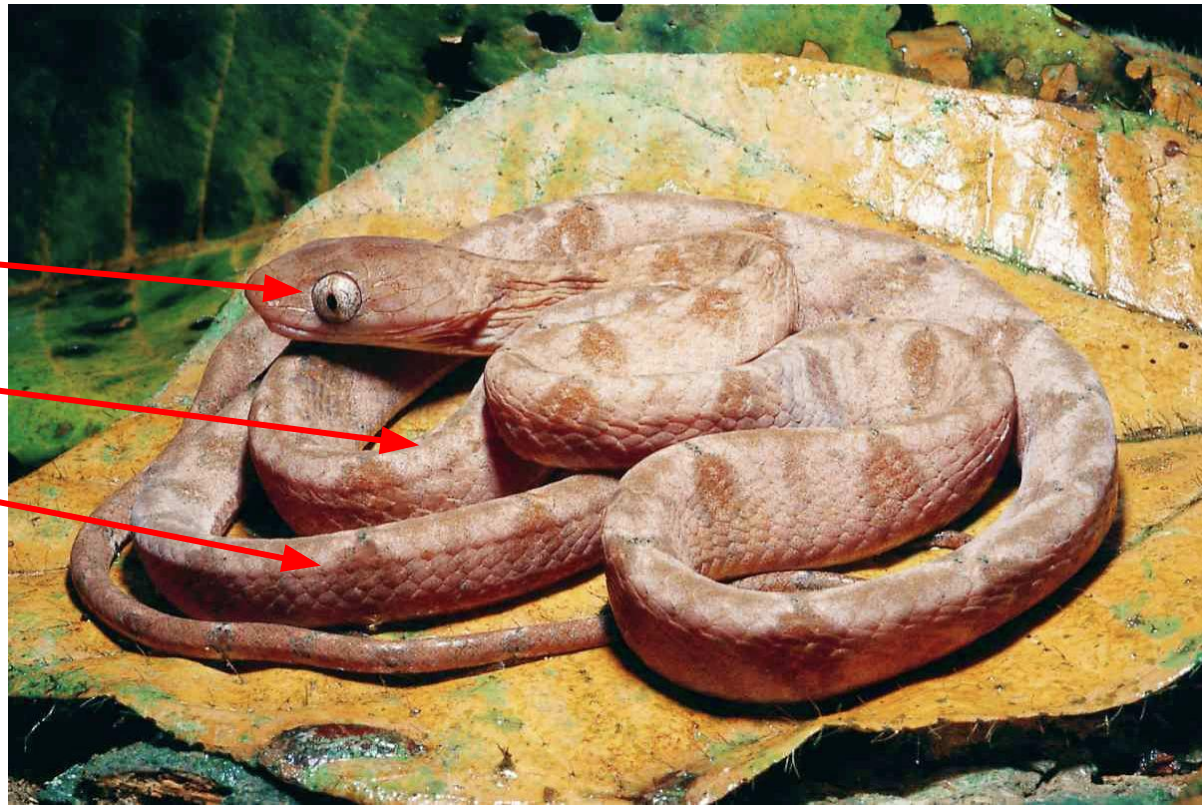
Characteristics

Large broad head, large prominent eye, vertical pupils, pink tongue with white tip

Pink or red-brown in color

Darker cross bars that alternate between narrow bars and triangular bars that enclose a pale spot

Brown or pink specks on the back



Powdered Tree Snake

Toxicodryas pulverulenta

(Photos used with permission of Stephen Spawls)

Use caution. Not likely to be a threat. Venom not studied, but related snakes do have a toxic venom.

A Few Non-Venomous or Mildly Venomous Snakes Of Western Kenya



Southern African Rock Python

Python natalensis

Photo used with permission from Stephen Spawls

Characteristics

Large, heavy bodied snake (<5 m); color a mixture of brown, tan, yellow, and gray blotches

Triangular head with vertical pupils

Arrowhead shape on top of head

Narrow dark patch behind the eye

Dangerous, but not venomous

Characteristics

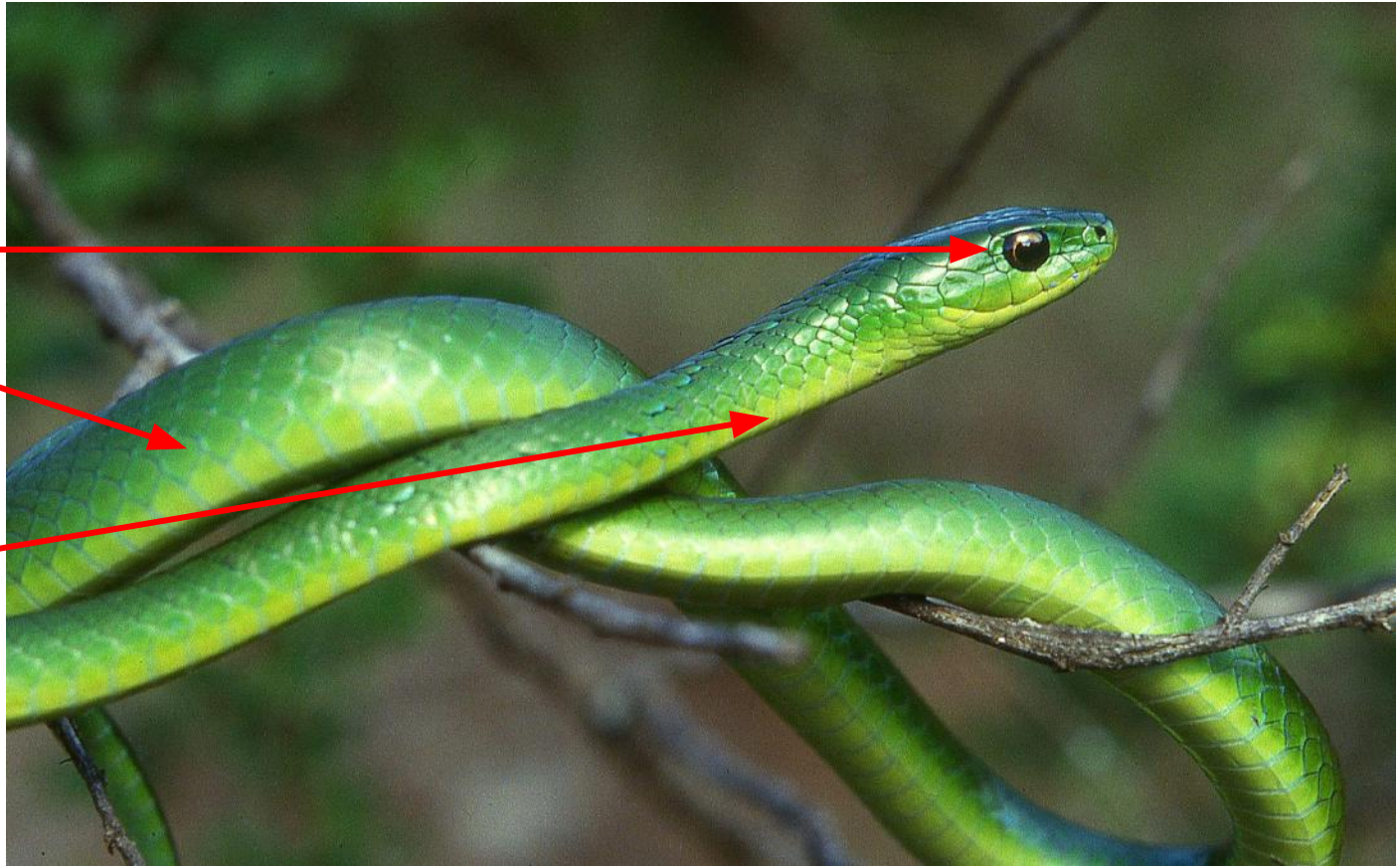
Long, thin green body

Golden brown iris with round pupil

Blue or white spot on lower edge of scales on back

Belly scales are green with white or yellow

Can be difficult to distinguish from other green snakes in field



Battersby's Green Snake

Philothamnus battersbyi

Photo used with the permission of Stephen Spawls

Harmless

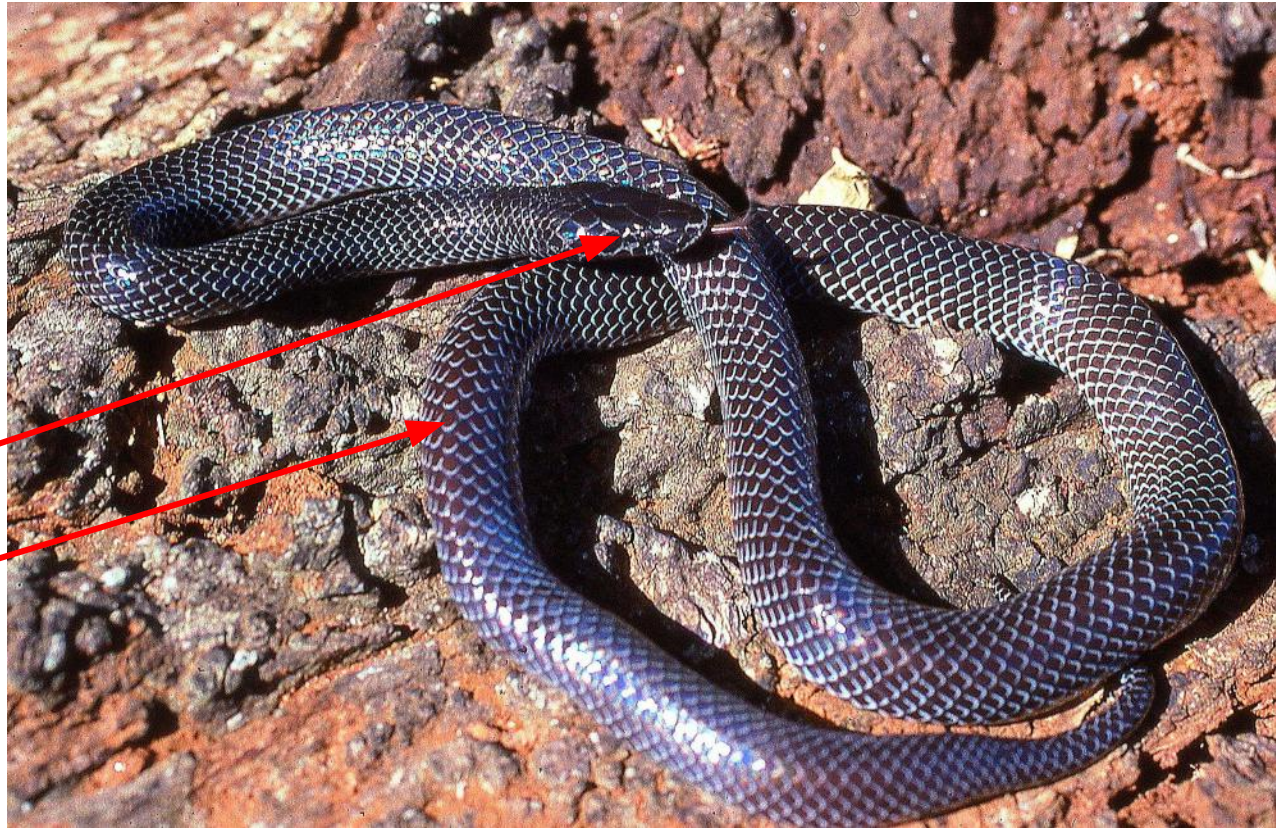
Characteristics

Body gray, brown,
purple-brown, or black

Head flattened

Eyes tiny with vertical pupils

Smooth black or brown scales
with fine white edges



Cape Wolf Snake

Lycophidion capense

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

Harmless

Characteristics

Brown or grey body

Lines of white dots (sometimes absent so uniformly dark)

Rounded snout with wide rostral shield at front of snout

Lives underground, but may come out during rainy season at night



Lineolate blind snake

Afrotyphlops lineolatus

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

Harmless



Characteristics

Slender body with long tail and smooth scales

Brown and yellow stripes

Bars on head and neck

Long head, pointed snout with three yellow stripes

Large yellow-brown eyes with round pupils

Lips light speckled with brown

Northern stripe-bellied sand snake

Psammophis sudanensis

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Harmless

Characteristics

Broad head with prominent eyes and vertical pupils

Most of body with smooth scales, but become keeled near tail

Belly scales cream or white

Head scales shiny (iridescent)

Lip usually white

Crossbars on body made up of white dots



White-lipped snake

Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia

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Rear-fanged but
harmless to
humans

Characteristics

Head similar shape to a python

Eyes medium sized, with vertical pupil and brown-yellow iris

Color variable, most often brown

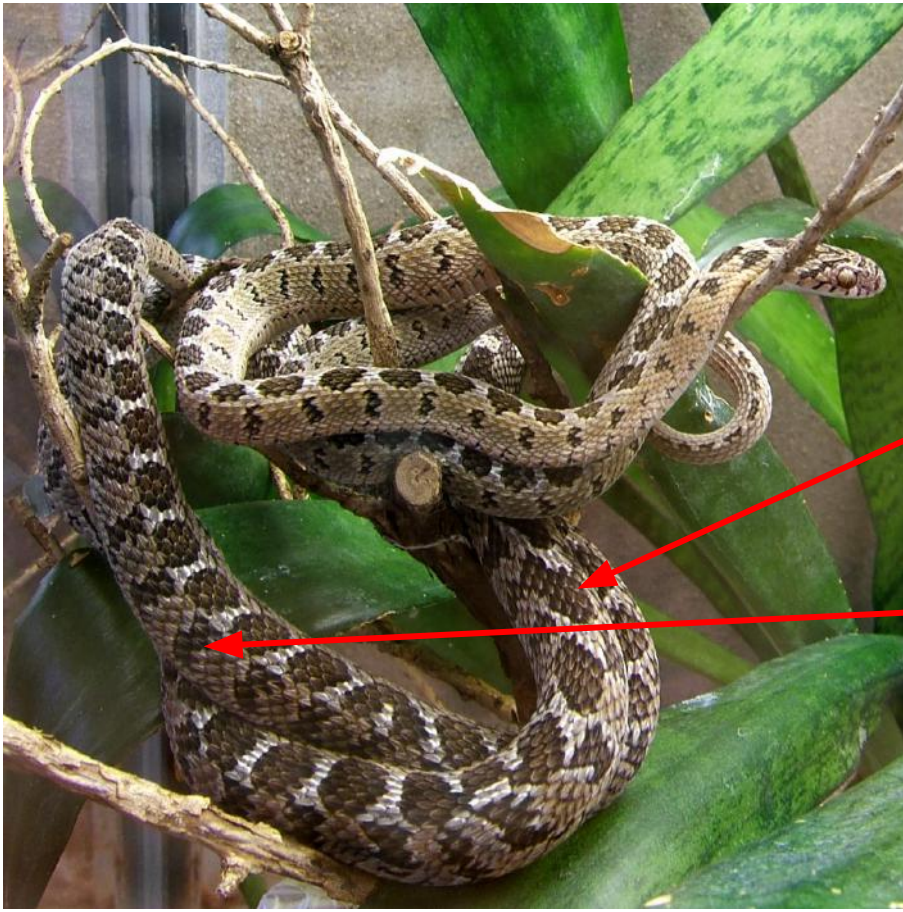
Typically a **pair of pale lines on each side of head**, one through the eye, the other through the cheek (see inset photo)



Brown house snake *Boaedon fuliginosis*

Photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls

Harmless



Characteristics

Bullet-shaped head

Small prominent eyes with vertical pupil, iris golden

Body brown, red-brown, or grey with darker oval or rhombic shapes on back

One or two V-shapes on the neck

Dark bars on the sides

Closely resembles carpet viper and rhombic night adder, which are dangerous snakes so assume this snake is dangerous unless you are very confident of its identification

Common or rhombic egg eater (*Dasypeltis scabra*)
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Harmless

Assessing What People Learned

What kind of snake is this? How do you know? What clues do you see?



Photo courtesy of Marius Burger - available in the public domain

What kind of snake is this? How do you know? What clues do you see?



Courtesy of Tim Vickers. In the public domain.

What kind of snake is this? How do you know? What clues do you see?



Courtesy of Marius Burger. In the public domain.



What kind of snake is this? What clues do you see?

What kind of snake is this? How do you know? What other harmless snake looks like this one?



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What kind of snake is this? How do you know? What clues do you have?



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What kind of snake is this? How do you know? What does this tell you about this kind of snake (highly variable in color)?



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