



What snake is that?

It is in the Spring when reptiles start to bask in the warm sun, search for food, and look for a mate to reproduce after the winter months of relative inactivity.

More activity also means more reptiles are hit by cars, brush cutters, and attacked by dogs and cats. So, reptile carers, get ready for a busy season ahead.

It is also the time the group gets calls to remove unwanted visitors from their homes or environs. Most are not so concerned about the reptiles with legs, although a full-grown Lace Monitor is quite a scary sight! But a snake in the house is something most people are uncomfortable about.

As phone volunteers and carers, we need to be able to identify the snakes we get calls about, in order to allay fears of the callers, gauge how urgent the situation is and know whether we need to call a venomous or non-venomous snake handler or carer. As citizens of the Tweed, we should know about the snakes that co-inhabit our world.

Venomous or non-venomous?

Often people only want to know if the snake in their yard poses any threat to them, their children, their dog or their guinea pig.

A sure way of knowing if the snake is venomous or not is to check the pattern of scales on its head. If it has loreal scales between the eye and nostril, it is non-venomous. Sometimes the only way to differentiate between two similar-looking snakes is to count the number of scales around the middle of their body. Keelbacks and Rough-scaled snakes are often confused, but the former has 24 scales and the latter 23.

Of course, most of us do not want to get that close to a snake to check their eyes or count their scales! Instead we need some more distant indicators of species and, therefore, of the danger posed.

Key species indicators

When you see a snake there are several key features you should look for that will help identify it. You cannot go by colour alone. An Eastern Brown snake could be anything from pale silver to almost black. And a young Brown snake often has distinct dark bands all around its body. Green tree snakes can be silver, blue or appear quite black.

• Thin or thick body

Brown snakes and Yellow-faced Whipsnakes may both be brown, but the Brown is a thick-set snake and the Whipsnake thin.

• Head distinct or indistinct from body

Carpet pythons and Brown Tree snakes have heads that are very distinct from the rest of their bodies, whereas the heads of Brown snakes and Green Tree snakes are continuations of their bodies.

• Colour of belly

If you can see it, take particular note of belly colour. Brown Tree snakes always have a salmon-coloured belly; Green Tree snakes a yellow one; Brown snakes a cream belly with pink blotches; a Small-eyed snake a pinkish-red belly, and so forth.

• Patterns on body

Does the snake have patterns on its body? These may look like tyre treads in the case of the Brown Tree snake and the Rough-scaled snake, or bands like the Tiger snake.

• On the ground or up high

As a general rule, highly venomous snakes are terrestrial, ie they do not climb. If you see a snake up in the rafters, you can be pretty sure it is not a major threat – it is most likely going to be a tree snake or a python.

• Nocturnal or diurnal

All snakes may come out and bask in the sun at various times of the day, even nocturnal ones (active at night). However, nocturnal snakes are less likely to be out for any length of time during the day. This indicator will help identify the snake where there is confusion, eg of the two dark snakes with a red belly, a Red-bellied Black snake is diurnal (active during the day) but the Small-eyed snake is nocturnal, apart, that is, from the Red-bellied being thick-set and the Small-eyed being thin and small.

A combination of these key features will usually be sufficient to accurately identify most snakes.

Less common Tweed snakes

Although the Tweed's five most common snakes are described overleaf, several other snakes might be encountered:

Rough-scaled snake – a highly venomous snake that can also climb (there always have to be exceptions to the rule!). Looks similar to a Keelback and is sometimes confused with a Brown snake.

Bandy Bandy – a small, distinctive-looking black and white banded snake that is very common but not often seen as it lives underground and is nocturnal. It is venomous but not dangerous.

Golden Crowned snake – a small, venomous snake with beautiful markings on its head and a very distinct red and black banded belly.

Marsh snake – a small, venomous snake found near creeks and swamps, with obvious streaks on the side of its head.

Small-eyed snake – a slender, small black snake with a reddish belly, often thought to be a Red-bellied Black snake because of this. Often found under logs or in sleeper walls.



Rough-scaled snake



Bandy bandy



Golden Crowned snake



Marsh snake

Tweed's top five snakes

1

Coastal Carpet Python

- The most common species in the Tweed, often found in rooves, sheds, rafters, chook houses and rabbit cages.
- Non-venomous
- Mainly nocturnal (active at night)
- Eats mammals, eg rats, mice, possums
- Arboreal (tree climber)
- Distinct blotchy pattern
- Distinct head
- Unusually maternal. Pythons lay their eggs and then wrap themselves around them, staying there until the eggs hatch. This could mean up to three months without feeding or moving.



2

Brown Tree snake

- Very common, often found in rooves.
- Venomous but not dangerous. It is rear-fanged and would need to chew you to envenomate you
- Nocturnal
- Loves eating birds!
- Arboreal
- Salmon belly
- Distinct head
- Commonly called a 'Night Tiger' because of its golden eyes and vertical pupils
- Often misidentified as a Brown snake



3

Green Tree snake

- Non-venomous
- Diurnal (active during the day)
- Loves eating frogs and skinks
- Arboreal (tree climber)
- Yellow belly
- Head indistinct from its body
- May not be green but can be silver, blue, green or almost black



4

Yellow-faced Whipsnake

- Very common snake often found in rock and sleeper walls
- Venomous but not dangerous
- Diurnal (active during the day)
- Eats skinks, frogs and reptile eggs
- Terrestrial (ground dweller)
- Head indistinct from its body
- Very shy and quick
- Distinct yellow patch around eyes



5

Eastern Brown snake

- Very common snake, attracted to rubbish piles
- Highly venomous but not aggressive
- Diurnal (active during the day)
- Eats other reptiles and mammals
- Terrestrial
- Head indistinct from its body
- Very quick mover
- Not always brown but can be silver, greenish or rusty coloured, with babies being banded.

