

Rhombic Night Adder

Causus rhombeatus

OTHER NAMES

Common Night Adder (E)
Gewone Nagadder (A)
Nyoka yasebusuku (Z)
Unomofuthwana (X)

Length: Adults average 30–60 cm, with a maximum length of about 1 m. In KwaZulu-Natal specimens are generally larger than those found elsewhere.

Scale count: Midbody scales usually in 17–19 rows (sometimes 15–23) with 134–155 ventrals, and 20–33 subcaudals, either paired or single. The anal shield is entire. There are 6 upper labials (rarely 7) that do not enter the eye, 9 or 10 lower labials (but this is variable), 2–3 preoculars and 1–2 postoculars. Temporals are usually 2 + 3 but may be 2 + 4; 2 + 2 or 3 + 3.

Colour: Above, varying shades of light grey, olive, or light to pinkish brown with a series of large rhombic markings (sometimes encircled with white) on the back and tail. The head has a distinct dark brown or black forward-pointing V-shaped marking, the apex of which extends to between the eyes. Below, pearly white to yellowish or light grey, with or without dark mottling. Juveniles are usually blackish below.

Preferred habitat: Favours damp environments in moist savanna, lowland forest and fynbos, where it seeks refuge in old termite mounds, under logs and large flat stones, and among building rubble. Often found close to dams and rivers and human dwellings.

Habits: The Rhombic Night Adder is a docile snake that moves off if given the choice. It is largely terrestrial and slow moving. If cornered or provoked, it will inflate its body with air, coil up and also hiss aggressively, striking violently at the same time. It is fond of basking during the day and hunts in the evenings. In its search for food, this snake will often venture close to, or even into, farmsteads and houses. It has very long venom glands that extend back into the neck region.

Similar species: May be confused with the harmless Rhombic Egg-eater (*Dasypeltis scabra*), as they have similar markings. The Night Adder, however, has a short, thicker body with a flat head on which black

V-shaped markings are clearly visible.

The Rhombic Egg-eater may have 2 or 3 fragmented V-shaped markings on the neck behind the head.

Enemies: Preyed upon by a number of other snakes, monitor lizards (*Varanus* spp.), and predatory birds.

Food and feeding: This snake has poor eyesight and relies heavily on smell to locate its prey. It feeds almost exclusively on toads and frogs, including rain frogs (*Breviceps* spp.). Frequents houses to feed on toads that prey on insects attracted by light. The hatchlings are known to feed on tadpoles.

Reproduction: Oviparous, laying 7–26 eggs 2 or 3 times a year. The eggs, measuring 26–37 x 14–20 mm, stick together and form a small bundle. The young measure 13–16 cm. *Causus* is the only egg-laying genus of the adder group.

Danger to man: The venom is only mildly cytotoxic and generally not dangerous to man. No human deaths have been recorded to date.

Venom: Cytotoxic, causing pain and swelling and occasionally local necrosis. May cause acute discomfort in some cases. Though antivenom is effective against the venom of this snake, it is generally not required. In spite of the relatively low toxicity of the venom, bites should not be treated lightly.

First-aid procedures: If you are sure that a Rhombic Night Adder was responsible for the bite, get the victim to a doctor where the bite must be treated symptomatically. Painkillers may be required. Otherwise see first-aid treatment on page 42.

Information courtesy of *A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa*, written by Johan Marais and published by Random House Struik. For more information visit www.reptileventures.com

