

Snouted Cobra *Naja annulifera*

OTHER NAMES

Previously known as the Egyptian Cobra
Wipneuskobra (A)
Bosveldkapel (A)

Length: Adults average 1,2–1,8 m but may reach, or exceed, 2,5 m.

Scale count: Midbody scales are in 19 rows (rarely 21) with 175–203 ventrals. There are 51–65 paired subcaudals and the anal shield is entire. There are 7 (sometimes 8) upper labials that do not enter the eye, and 8 or 9 (rarely 10) lower labials, as well as 1 preocular (sometimes 2) and 2 (sometimes 1 or 3) postoculars. Temporals are variable, 1 + 2 or 1 + 3.

Colour: Above, yellowish to greyish brown, dark brown or blue-black. Below, yellow with darker mottles. A banded phase occurs throughout the range and is blue-black with 7–11 yellow to yellow-brown crossbars, the lighter bands being half the width of the darker bands. The latter colour phase is more common in males. Below, yellow mottled with black. A darker throat band is present and is usually more conspicuous in juveniles.

Preferred habitat: Arid and moist savanna; common in lowveld and bushveld areas.

Habits: One of Africa's largest cobras, it often occupies a permanent home in a termite mound where it will reside for years if not disturbed. It is active at night, foraging for food from dusk onwards, often venturing into poultry runs. It likes to bask in the morning sun, usually near its retreat into which it will withdraw if disturbed.

It is not an aggressive snake, but will assume a formidable posture if cornered. Large adults are able to lift as much as half a metre of the body off the ground while spreading a wide, impressive hood. This snake will, however, disappear down the nearest hole or crevice if given the opportunity. Like the Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*) it may pretend to be dead if threatened, but this is rare. It does not spit its venom.

Similar species: May be confused with other cobras including the Forest Cobra (*Naja melanoleuca*) and the Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*) (although their distributions differ), the Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*), the brown variety of the Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*), the Mole Snake (*Pseudaspis cana*) and some of the larger grass snakes.

Enemies: Birds of prey and other snakes.

Food and feeding: Toads, rodents, birds and their eggs, lizards and other snakes, especially Puff Adders (*Bitis arietans*). Often raids poultry runs and can become a nuisance.

Reproduction: Oviparous, laying 8–33 eggs (47–60 x 25–35 mm) in early summer. The young average 22–34 cm.

Danger to man: A large cobra with a high venom yield. Bites readily when confronted. Substantial quantities of antivenom may be required in serious cases.

Venom: A potent neurotoxic venom that affects breathing and, in untreated cases, may cause respiratory failure and death. Initial symptoms often include a burning pain and swelling that may result in blistering. Typically, victims are bitten on the lower leg, usually at night.

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

