

Our Wildlife

FACTSHEET

Eastern Brown Snake

No:

3

Introduction

Snakes are fascinating animals. From the way they move to the way they eat, they are truly unique.

The Eastern Brown Snake is highly venomous and are extremely dangerous to humans and pets. However, they're an important part of our natural environment that needs to be respected and conserved.

Scientific name

Pseudonaja textilis

Did you know?

Brown Snakes detect their prey by sensing movement and smell.

They flick their tongue in and out to 'taste' the air through a special organ in the roof of their mouth called the 'Jacobson's Organ'. This helps them to find prey.

Brown Snake venom has evolved to allow them to kill fast moving prey quickly, reducing the chance of injury to the snake.

Brown Snakes can dislocate their jaw to swallow their prey. Their skin can also stretch to allow food to pass into their stomach.

Description

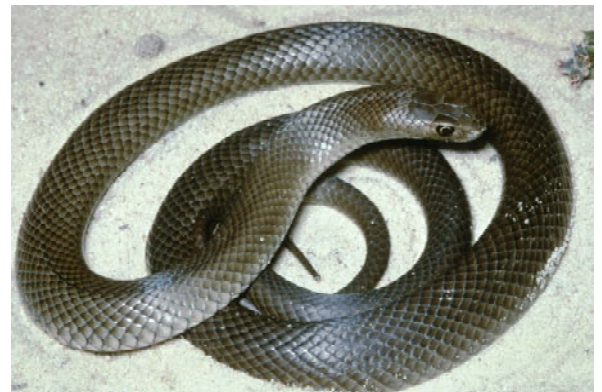
The Eastern Brown Snake is a large and slender snake; its upper surface is usually pale brown to dark brown and uniform in colour.

The underbelly ranges from cream, yellow or grey with orange blotches, and often with darker markings towards the tail.

Juveniles usually have a black mark on their head, a black band across the neck and sometimes prominent narrow black bands on their body. Lower surfaces are marked with scattered orange to brown blotches.

The average length of a Brown Snake is about

1.5m, but they can grow up to 2.4m long. Males generally grow larger than females.



Eastern Brown Snake © I. McCann DSE 2008

Diet

Brown Snakes eat mostly mice and rats but also feed on small vertebrates, other reptiles and frogs.

Brown Snakes have lean muscular bodies which allow them to strike fast moving prey. Brown Snakes move quickly to strike their prey and may coil around it until it dies. Once the prey has died, Brown Snakes eat it whole.

Powerful chemicals in their venom help break down prey in their stomach. Warmth from the sun also aids in digestion of food.

Habitat

Brown Snakes are found in a variety of habitats, but usually prefer open dry areas.

They are a ground dwelling snake that's active mainly in the daytime. In hot weather they can move around at night, but usually retreat to shelter.

Brown Snakes shelter in hollow logs, rock crevices, unused animal burrows and under rubbish around buildings. They have adapted well to farmed, grazed and semi-urban environments.

Never attempt to approach or handle a snake.

All snakes should be considered venomous and highly dangerous.

If bitten by a snake **dial 000 immediately.**

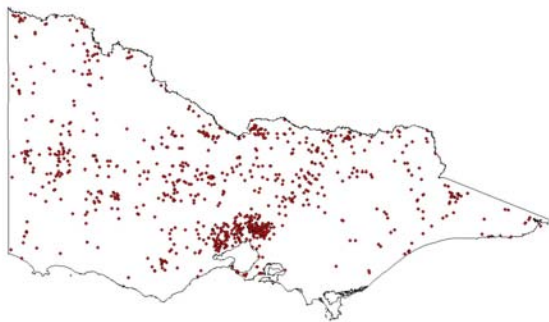
Brown Snakes cannot maintain a constant body temperature without help from the environment. This means that they use the sun's warmth to raise their body temperature.

They spend the duration of the cold weather in shelter.

Distribution

Brown Snakes are widespread throughout the dry areas of Australia, including Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and south-eastern South Australia.

In Victoria, Brown Snakes are found over most areas, excluding higher altitudes.



Recorded occurrences in Victoria

[Data Source: 'VBA_FAUNA25' and 'VBA_FAUNA100', August 2010 © The State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment]

Breeding

Brown Snakes mate in spring, after males aggressively compete for a chance with a female.

Females lay between 20-40 eggs in a clutch. Their eggs are oval in shape and have a leathery shell.

Female Brown Snakes stay in the nest site for up to five weeks after laying their eggs, defending them against predators. The nest site is usually close to their over-winter site.

The juvenile snakes hatch about 11 weeks after laying. They are about the size of a human hand when they hatch.

What you can do to help!

Remember that snakes are an important part of the ecosystem; they act as predators, reducing populations of overabundant pest species such as rats and mice.

Snakes normally avoid people, but if they feel threatened, disturbed or surprised, they are more likely to attack. If provoked or cornered, Brown Snakes can be extremely aggressive.

All Brown Snakes should be regarded as highly venomous and dangerous to humans.

If you want to reduce the chance of encountering a snake around your home, you can modify the area to make it less desirable for snakes. For example keep grass very short and remove piles of rubbish and wood.

Never attempt to move a snake yourself. If there are unwanted snakes near your home, call DSE's Customer Service Centre on 136 186 and ask for a list of snake controllers in your area. These people are licensed to safely remove the reptile from the area.

Snakes are protected under the *Wildlife Act 1975*. Do not attempt to kill a snake; it is illegal and you are more likely to get hurt.

Further reading

Cogger, H.G., (2000), *Reptiles and amphibians of Australia (6th ed.)*, Reed New Holland, Sydney.

Wilson, S.K. and Knowles, D.G., (1988), *Australia's reptiles*, Collins, Sydney.

Never attempt to approach or handle a snake.

All snakes should be considered venomous and highly dangerous.

If bitten by a snake **dial 000 immediately.**