

The wonders of the Kimberley

A glimpse at its unique environment. *'Snakes alive'*

(by Brian Kane)



Even the bravest of us can turn to jelly when unexpectedly confronted with a venomous snake. Such a situation is sure to get the heart pumping and the adrenalin flowing. Living in the heat of the Kimberley goes hand in hand with the snake's love of warmth and so our chances of such an encounter are greater.

There are 89 species of land snakes known to inhabit WA, of these the majority are venomous but considered too small to be harmful to humans. Only 12 are considered dangerously venomous and capable of inflicting a bite that requires anti-venom treatment.

The Western Brown or Gwardar is quite an aggressive snake, especially around October onwards when it comes out from hibernation. It can vary widely in colour but is often orange speckled and brown with a black head and fully grown is about a metre and a half long. Often found near human dwellings this snake can rise up in a menacing fashion when cornered, as a nearby neighbour of mine found out. She spent some anguished minutes standing on the bonnet of her car.



The Mulga or King Brown is said to be reasonably docile until it is stirred up and then will become very aggressive and unpredictable. It is commonly found in the Kimberley and often in urban areas.

(King Brown snake - photo BK).

The Northern Death Adder is quite a small, stout snake and is a master of camouflage. It pays to look where you are walking in the hot months as these reptiles can be easily stepped on.

The Whip snake is found in the Kimberley and is reputed to be the fastest Australian snake. There are two types: the olive and the yellow faced which also has a black head.

At times people claim to have seen the coastal Taipan in the Kimberley but it is easy to confuse it with other snakes. Australia's most deadly snake has an awesome reputation for its great size, large fangs and the toxicity of its venom.

At a safe distance many people find snakes fascinating but in most cases in terms of safety and conservation, we would be ill advised to try to kill them. It would be better to let them quietly slip away if possible.