

# DANGEROUS SNAKES

Of the 2,900 snakes known to man, only 600 are known to be venomous; and within these only a few have venom strong enough to harm anything as large as a human. Many snakebites go unreported, especially in developing countries but it is believed that as many as 2.5 million bites occur every year, with roughly 125,000 actually being fatal (resulting in death). Other snakes are constrictors, and tend to be larger, using their strength to slowly strangle their prey. However, no evidence has been found of a human fatality of this nature! Here are some of the more dangerous snakes. Learn a little more about snakes in general on page 5.



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## Indian Python

As the name suggests this species can be found in a number of countries in Asia, and is the largest snake in India. The average length is 4m, with the longest on record at 5.85m. They are slow-moving animals and tend to travel in straight lines. Their prey can be mammal, bird or reptile, and is killed by constriction and then swallowed headfirst. Some prey may be quite large and because they are swallowed whole, may take a while to digest. During this time the snake will limit its movement, even regurgitating (throwing up) the meal if disturbed.

## Anaconda

This large snake is found in the northern part of South America, and is the world's heaviest snake. It can grow to 10m in length and weigh as much as 250kg. It lives in bodies of water such as rivers and pools, mostly in the tropical rainforest. It catches its prey by lurking in the undergrowth at the shallow edges, and surprising animals as they drink. This snake is a constrictor, which means that it winds its body around its prey and squeezes until they can no longer breathe.



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## Coral Snakes

Over 65 different species of coral snake have been identified all over the world, with many in North and South America. Each has a slight variation of the red, yellow and black coloured banding; and all of these are venomous, with hollow and fixed fangs to inject their prey. Most species are very elusive, spending most of their time on the forest floor amongst the leaf-litter. They are not aggressive, however a bite to a human may be fatal if it happens; with symptoms starting at slurred speech and ending in paralysis (loss of feeling and movement).

## King Cobra

This striking snake is found in Asia and tends to avoid contact with humans as much as possible. It can reach 5m in length and is one of the largest venomous snakes, using one third of its body to stand 1.5m tall when threatened. In this position cobras also expand their ribs to form a narrow hood to make themselves appear larger. This species is specially adapted to hunt other snakes.

Photo by Jeff Servoss US Fish & Wildlife Service



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## Western Diamondback Rattlesnake

This snake is found in the southern parts of North America, and is responsible for a number of fatal human and livestock bites. Its name comes from the section at the very end of its tail, which is made up of as many as 10 loose segments (these are added to with age) and which rattle when it is moved to scare off any approaching threats. These snakes have long-hinged fangs which flip forward for the highly venomous bite, and heat-sensitive "pits" between their eyes and nostrils to detect their warm-blooded prey.

Text by Jenna Poole

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