

## MYTHS SURROUNDING SNAKES

**MYTH 1: Bites from baby venomous snakes are more dangerous than those from adults because they always deliver a full dose of venom.**



The legend goes that young snakes have not yet learned how to control the amount of venom they inject. They are therefore more dangerous than adult snakes, which will restrict the amount of venom they use in a bite or “dry bite”.

This is simply untrue and all the evidence points towards bites from adults being more severe. Tests have shown that juvenile snakes can control their venom just as much as adults. Furthermore let's consider the following factors: adults have significantly larger fangs to deliver their venom and considerably more venom available than a juvenile. Therefore if a juvenile has venom glands only big enough to hold a 2ml of venom compared to an adult that can hold 30ml or more, then the bite from an adult will always have the potential to be more severe.

I presume the reason this myth came into existence was to dissuade people from having a carefree attitude towards the potential dangers of a juvenile snake. The moral of the story is to treat every snake as a potentially dangerous and never expose your self to a situation where a snake of any size can bite you.

### **MYTH 2: If you see a snake they'll always be more**

Although it is possible to see more than one snake, for the most part this statement is untrue. Snakes are solitary animals for most of their lives so generally you will only ever encounter individuals. The following situations do bring snakes together at times;

- Breeding: Sexually mature males cover large distances actively seeking out females in breeding season (Approximately September to November).
- Certain female species like the Red-bellied Black Snake have been observed sheltering together during later stages of pregnancy, however they stay in close proximity to their shelter site making it extremely rare for the average person to stumble across.
- Some species of snake such as the Brown Tree Snake have been observed sharing roof spaces with up to 10 other individuals, however this is also uncommon for the

- average member of the public to encounter.
- Some snakes, for example the Yellow-faced Whip Snake are known to lay their eggs in a communal nesting site; therefore it may be possible (but very rare) for the general public to witness them hatching.
  - If you lived near good snake habitat you might see more than one snake in a day or night during particularly good conditions, for example on particularly on hot nights or warm weather following rain.
  - If you discovered a live birth site or a freshly hatched clutch of eggs soon after the event, but again the likelihood of this is extremely low.

Moral of the story: Snakes are solitary animals so treat every snake as an individual and don't let your fears exacerbate with old myths like this one.

### **MYTH 3: An angry snake will chase you**



This myth has an element of legitimacy but for the most part is exacerbated by frightened individuals who were unfortunate enough to startle a dormant or otherwise unaware snake. More often than not, when someone encounters a snake, both the person and the snake are caught off-guard, so both enter into a state of panic at the same time. Like the frightened person, the snake also has a sudden reaction to flee, and it picks the quickest escape route. Sometimes that avenue of escape is the same for both the human and the reptile. This leads to tall stories exaggerated by fear that a snake “chased” them.

The element of truth to this story is whereby a person misinterprets a snake's defensive behaviour for chase. When startled, snakes often feel threatened and may exhibit defensive behaviour towards the antagonist. This behaviour may include advancing towards the person in a defensive posture: The Eastern Brown is well known for this however it is mostly bluff aimed at scaring away the antagonist similar to a cobra rising up and flattening its hood. If you remove yourself from the close proximity of the snake, or in a lot of instances simply stop moving, it will realise you are not a threat and move off.

### **MYTH 4: King Browns are Brown Snakes**

This isn't exactly a myth however a popular misconception among the public is that King Browns and Eastern Browns are the same animal. In actual fact they are two completely different snakes with equally different venom. The Eastern Brown is part of the **Brown** snake family called Pseudonaja, and the King Brown (or by its correct name: the Mulga snake) is part of the **Black** snake family called Pseudechis (same family as the Red-

bellied Black). I assume the confusion stems from the Mulga sometimes having a coppery colour similar to that of some Eastern Browns instead of being black in colour like the family name suggest. The two snakes also share some of the same distribution around Australia, though Mulgas (King Browns) don't occur on the Sunshine Coast. You would need to travel inland west of Dalby to find the nearest Mulga snakes.

#### **MYTH 5: Venomous snakes can't climb**

All snakes can climb to varying degrees, some are just more suited to this behaviour due to the type of prey and shelter they seek. Snakes that live in elevated habitats such as trees are referred to as "Arboreal" (tree dwelling). They include Pythons and Tree Snakes and they are excellent climbers. It is important to note that the Brown Tree Snake is venomous and arboreal.

Snakes that shelter and hunt prey on the ground are referred to as "Terrestrial" (ground dwelling). These include The Taipan, Eastern Brown and Red-bellied black snake to list a few. Due to these snake being referred to as "ground dwelling" some people incorrectly assume they do not climb and therefore presume all venomous snakes don't climb. This is incorrect. Snakes such as the Eastern Brown and particularly the Tiger snake have been encountered on top of fences, in low branches of trees, on the roofs of houses, and in nesting boxes high up in bird aviaries; Proof that venomous snake can and do climb.