

LIVING WITH TIGER SNAKES

FAMILY: Elapidae (Front-fanged venomous land snakes)

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Notechis scutatus*

DESCRIPTION: A large, stout snake with broad, blunt head. Adults grow up to 1.2 metres. Scales around body are in 17 or 19 rows and scales beneath tail are undivided (the dugite has divided scales). Tiger snakes are commonly thought to be all banded though this is not always true. The main colouration features of the Western Tiger Snake is a dark-brown to black body with a cream, orange or yellow belly. Bands if present, may be narrow or broad and the same colour as the belly. Due to cooler temperatures on the south coast tiger snakes are generally darker than around Perth. Juveniles are similarly coloured.

DISTRIBUTION: Tiger snakes are confined to Australia's cool regions that include Tasmania, southeastern Australia and parts of South Australia. The Western Tiger Snake is found north to Jurien and east to Israelite Bay. It also occurs on Garden and Carnac Islands.

HABITAT: The Western Tiger Snake prefers damp environments associated with streams, swamps, lakes and rivers. They can be occasionally encountered in well-timbered habitats.

DIET: Tiger Snakes feed mainly on frogs, but will consume lizards, mammals and young birds. Tiger Snakes will climb low bushes to raid bird nests.

REPRODUCTION: The Western Tiger Snake produces live young with up to 40 being born in autumn/early winter. This coincides with the emergence of baby frogs. Adult males are extremely active during the breeding season as they track down females by following an invisible scent trail with their tongue.

FURTHER INFORMATION: On the Western Tiger Snake and other reptiles, please refer to *Reptiles and Frogs of the Perth Region*. 1995 (Reprinted 2000) University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA.

FIRST AID: In the event of snakebite or suspected bite, the patient should be transported by ambulance to hospital. It is best to go to hospital (where antivenene is stored) rather than to a doctor's surgery. Even if you only suspect that somebody has been bitten, go straight to hospital rather than wait for symptoms to develop - it is better to be under observation there than at home. This applies particularly to babies and toddlers too young to know or say whether they have been bitten. If you find a snake near your baby, you should take the child to hospital for observation.

Keep the patient at rest, lying down while waiting for the ambulance. Do not allow the patient to walk or run around, and do not give alcohol or any stimulant such as coffee, which might increase the rate of circulation. Anybody bitten while alone should walk, not run, for help.

IF BITTEN:

- Immediately apply a firm, broad bandage over the bite and as much of the bitten limb as possible. If no bandage is available use any article of clothing eg. shirt, pantyhose etc. Leave this in place until full medical facilities are reached, even if this takes several hours.
- Immobilise the affected limb, with a splint (use whatever is available).
- Call an ambulance.
- Keep the patient at rest and reassure them that the treatment is delaying the spread of venom.
- Transport the patient by ambulance to hospital.



Herdsmen Lake Regional Park is home to many native species of wildlife. One of these is the venomous Tiger Snake. At Herdsmen Lake, because of the proximity of housing, tiger snakes can occasionally be encountered in places where they are most unwelcome. During their instinctive drive to locate food, shelter or a mate, a suburban garden or swimming pool may become another part of their environment. If you encounter a Tiger Snake on your property, do not attempt to remove it. Contact the Department of Conservation and Land Management (phone 9334 0333) who will provide contact phone numbers of your nearest "snakebuster". Remember that snakebusters are a voluntary service and a small donation towards fuel is always appreciated. The snakebuster will often ask you to keep an eye on the snake from a safe distance, until he or she arrives. If the snake is inside the house, attempt to secure it in a room by blocking gaps at the bottom of closed doors with towels and clothing.

When cornered or surprised a Tiger Snake will defend itself by occasionally standing its ground, flattening its neck and raising its head. This behaviour is an intimidation or bluff tactic, rather than a sign of aggression. Tiger Snakes will flee if given the opportunity and are reluctant to bite unless touched or trodden on.

Tiger Snakes are very cold tolerant, meaning they can be active even during winter on fine sunny days. They dislike hot weather, preferring to move around at night. In areas where tiger snakes occur, always wear closed shoes and at night carry a torch to illuminate the ground in front of you.

All snakes should be left alone and treated with respect. Tiger Snakes are dangerously venomous, capable of delivering a bite requiring antivenene treatment from a hospital. It is important to learn the correct first-aid technique for snakebite.