**THE DEATH ADDER** **Factsheet**

The death adder (Acanthophis antarcticus) is a highly venomous snake that is native to Australia and New Guinea. It is rated as Vulnerable in the Granite Belt region.

LOCATION:

Death Adders are found in Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

**DESCRIPTION:**

It is easily recognised by:

* triangular-shaped head
* short stout body
* thin tail
* size ranges from 40-100 cm
* colour varies from grey to rich reddish-brown, usually with irregular dark crossbands and dark bars on the lips

Common Death Adder

* underside is whitish with black or brown flecks, while the tail-tip is cream or black.
* have relatively large fangs and toxic venom which is fatal without medical aid in most cases.

**BEHAVIOUR:**

* an inactive snake
* spends much of its time lying concealed under loose sand, leaf litter or low foliage.
* may be active by day (diurnal) but is most commonly around at night (nocturnal) when moving between shelter sites.
* an ambush predator, waiting for prey to come to it rather than actively searching as do most Australian snakes.
* when lying in wait, the body is coiled with the tail tip near the mouth while the segmented tail tip is wriggled like a worm or caterpillar to lure prey.
* Individuals burrow into sand or leaf litter or hide under overhanging foliage.

**HABITAT:**

* found in a wide variety of well-drained habitats, including rainforests and wet sclerophyll forests, woodland, shrublands, grasslands and coastal heathlands,
* prefer habitats with lots of leaf litter.

**FOOD:**

* frogs, lizards, birds, and adults also eat small mammals
* quickly injects prey with venom and waits for it to die before eating.

**BREEDING and YOUNG:**

* mating usually occurs in spring.
* females reproduce only every second year.
* may give birth to up to 24 live young.
* Young are born in February or March

**ADAPTATIONS:**

* Camouflage - leaf litter, and bushes provide excellent concealment as the death adder’s markings and colour blend in well.
* Although a fairly inactive snake, it strikes rapidly - the fastest of any Australian snake.
* wriggly tail lures in rodents, lizards and birds who think the tail is a worm or caterpillar.
* Ambush hunting allows the snake to be safely concealed
* Its strong venom quickly kills prey
* Specialised organs call heat-sensing pits all ow the snake to detect nearby body heat of prey, even in darkness.

**THREATS**

* Road kills
* Eating toxic cane toads in northern areas of Queensland.
* Destruction and loss of habitat (clearing)
* Natural disasters such as fires
* Trampling by livestock
* Preyed upon by feral cats, foxes and pigs
* Deliberate killing of snakes
* Death from taking poisoned rodents

**STATUS**

* Considered rare in some places.
* Listed as vulnerable in the granite belt region.
* While it is a widespread snake, it is facing increased threat from the ongoing cane toad invasion. This is a concern. The cane toad eats the baby death adders while the adults eat the cane toad and are poisoned by the toxic glands on their skin.
* Although cane toads are not a problem in the Granite Belt, it is probable that they will be here eventually. They are a highly adaptable species.

**References:**

n<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/reptiles/common-death-adder/>

[Online Zoological Collections of Australian](https://ozcam.ala.org.au/occurrences/search?taxa=Acanthophis%20antarcticus" \l "tab_mapView)

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