

## Pygmy copperhead

The pygmy copperhead occurs throughout the Mount Lofty ranges and is rare on Fleurieu peninsula. None have ever been found in the Lakes area.

This small species is closely related to its larger lowland cousin which occurs in the south east of South Australia and other parts of Australia. It is a light to dark grey dorsally and is not a coppery color as the name suggests. The coppery coloration is restricted to the lowland and highland forms. It is mainly a lizard feeder. .

The venom from the species is poorly studied; however it is assumed it is similar in activity to that of the lowland copperhead *Austrelaps superbus*. It does have similar overall toxicity in mice to that of the lowland copperhead.

The lowland copperhead venom has an anticoagulant activity whereby it inhibits the aggregation of platelets. The venom like that of the red bellied black snake also has a complement activator which reduces the ability of the immune system to mount a defence. Deaths from copperhead bites are rare and it is even more unlikely as a result of a pygmy copperhead bite.



Pygmy copperhead snake

## Living with snakes

Whilst there is always the risk of snake bite in this region, it is very low and these snakes can live quite happily and in harmony with us. Dangerous snakes will flee when approached by humans or domestic animals in nearly all cases. In captivity dangerous snakes become tolerant of human interaction and it is hoped newly planned studies will show whether it is better or not to leave snakes where they are rather than have them removed thereby allowing new snakes that are unfamiliar with humans, to colonise.

## What to do if bitten

Consider all snake bites as potentially fatal and seek immediate medical assistance. Follow the following plan:

1. Immediately apply the pressure immobilization first aid.  
See [www.venomsupplies.com](http://www.venomsupplies.com)
2. Call an ambulance or be taken to the nearest hospital.
3. If possible get someone to advise the hospital of your imminent arrival.

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## Dangerous snakes of the Lakes Area & Fleurieu Peninsula



Common brown snake (darker colour)

**Common brown snake**

**Red bellied black snake**

**Tiger snake**

**Pygmy copperhead**

Prepared by Lakes Hub - adapted from *Dangerous Snakes of the Lakes Area and Fleurieu Peninsula* by Peter Mirtschin

## Common brown snake

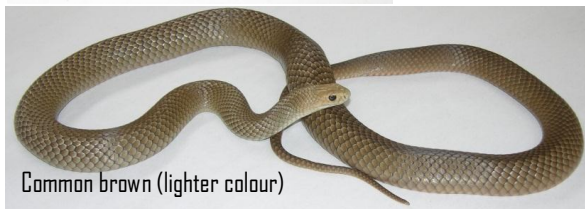
Brown snakes are a highly successful species and have probably held their own or even increased in numbers due to the changes man has made to the environment. They feed on introduced rats & mice, and also a range of native lizards, mammals, frogs and occasional birds.

The venom from brown snakes is highly deadly. The main components in the venom are clotting factors and neurotoxins. In most human cases of brown snake envenoming, a clotting disturbance will be registered.

Sometimes people have incoagulable blood. This is serious as it can and has led to cerebral haemorrhage. The neurotoxins prevent our brain operating our muscles. There are 2 main types of neurotoxins and they both can cause loss of muscle control and breathing difficulties. In most human brown snake bite cases, the neurotoxins don't have any effect however they have in some cases. With domestic pets, the story is different. Most cats and dogs seriously bitten by brown snakes present with some degree of paralysis. They can have their front or back or all legs paralyzed. Loss of control of other functions can occur but is more difficult to recognize for lay people.



Common brown (juvenile)



Common brown (lighter colour)

## Tiger snake

Tiger snakes used to be very common throughout the lake region but are far less common today. They occupy swamps, watercourses and areas with relatively higher rainfall. Frogs are the key for their survival. Whilst the adult tiger snakes can happily survive on many types of food – frogs, mice, rats, eels, lizards and birds, the juveniles require an abundance of small frogs and tadpoles.

Tiger snake bite is very serious. Although the venom is less toxic than brown snake venom (in mice). Because of the higher venom yields untreated tiger snake bites are more likely to be fatal in both humans and animals.

The neurotoxins can cause early symptoms such as speech difficulties, drooping eyelids and swallowing difficulties. Later the more serious effects such as breathing difficulties and then total loss of that function due to failure of the nerves to stimulate the diaphragm. As with brown snake venom a potent clotting activator is present which can cause compromised clotting function. The third most serious effect of tiger snake bites is the presence of myotoxic components in the venom causing muscle breakdown. The components of muscle

breakdown can cause renal dis-function.



Tiger snakes



## Red bellied black snake

Red bellied black snakes like tiger snakes are confined to watercourses, swamps and areas of relatively high rainfall. They often occur side by side with tiger snakes in this region but also occupy areas where no tiger snakes occur. Like tiger snakes as juveniles they have a high dependence on frogs but will eat other foods such as small lizards just as readily. Their numbers have also declined like tiger snakes as result of all the water issues.

The venom of red bellied black snakes is less deadly than brown snake or tiger snake venom (in mice) and no human fatalities have been recorded since antivenom has been available. The one death that was recorded before antivenom availability is questionable. Black snake bites however are an extremely unpleasant experience. Many bites do not require antivenom but the patient will probably undergo a prolonged period of discomfort and nausea.



Red bellied black snakes

