

VENOMOUS CREATURES¹

“A general awareness, respect and basic knowledge of these creatures are our main defences. If we are aware of their behaviour and habitats we cannot only avoid but also anticipate potential contact with these creatures”.

Cyprus has a wide variety of venomous creatures that you may not have encountered before. This is not to say that you are going to come across any of the following, but it is important that you are aware of their existence, what they are capable of doing and what precautions should be taken.

SNAKES

The Blunt Nose Viper – This strong snake can grow up to 2 metres long, grey to light brown in colour, yellow tip at the end of the tail, heart shaped head with a blunt nose. It has small cat-like eyes and fangs at the front of the mouth.



The Blunt Nosed Viper

The viper is mainly active during the day apart from the warmer months of July and August when it will hunt at night. The viper's venom can be toxic to humans and the victim should receive immediate first-aid and medical assistance.

The Montpellier – This venomous snake can grow up to 2 metres in length. It is a very slender snake with large eyes on a long head. It is grey and olive in colour with many adults having scattered spots. Fangs are at the back of the mouth so a severe bite is unlikely.

This snake lives in warm dry environments with plant cover in which it will hide if threatened, but if provoked will bite. The Montpellier feeds on lizards, other snakes and birds.

If humans are bitten the venom will cause stiffness and numbing of the limb which usually passes in a few hours.



The Montpellier

¹ RAF Akrotiri New Arrivals Welcome Pack [Extract]- '*Staying Healthy in Cyprus*'

The Cat Snake – This is a small snake, only growing up to 1 metre in length. It is usually grey or beige in colour with an obvious black spot or 'collar' behind its head with square patches on its back. This slender snake has a flat head with small cat like eyes.



The Cat Snake

This snake is found in stony places and mainly hunts at dusk. It can be active in both the warmer months and during the day in the winter. Although this snake is venomous, the mouth is too small to be effectively used against humans, but may be able to bite some small pets.

It is important to remember that a snake is often more frightened of you than you are of it. It is sensible to assume that any snake you see could be a venomous one and to avoid it.



The following preventative measures should be adopted against snakes:

Keeping gardens and surrounding areas free from undergrowth and refuse will remove the habitat and food for both snakes and their prey – rodents.

Ensure there are no points of access through which a snake can enter accommodation. Snakes can get through very small holes, so it is imperative that all openings around water pipes, electrical outlets and windows/doors are sealed.

Woodpiles and other items being stored around the house/garden should be kept at least 18 inches off the ground to deny shelter for the snake.

DO NOT pick anything up with your hands without checking underneath first.

Rats and mice are a favourite food source for snakes, so if you think you have a rodent infestation report it as soon as possible.

Strict lead control when walking dogs on the 'bondu' area is advisable.

If walking/running in bondu areas stick to defined paths, making snake sightings easier. Walking with a heavy tread and making noise should ensure snakes move away as you approach.

It is imperative that children are taught to move away from any snakes and inform an adult of the sighting.

What to do if you come across a snake....

KEEP ALL PERSONEL AND PETS AT A DISTANCE. Leave the snake alone and it may disappear on its own accord. As snakes are frightened of loud, sudden noise and vibrations making a noise may encourage them to leave. If it remains and poses a threat, then CALL THE SBA POLICE who can assist with its removal.



There are only 5 – 10 snakebites to humans reported annually across the island. Although snakebites are extremely rare, it is important that personnel are aware of the immediate action to take should a snake bite someone:

Reassure the casualty.

Identify the bite site and pour water over the bite to wash it out. Do not rub, cut, apply any creams or attempt to suck the venom out.

DO NOT apply a tourniquet.

Remove any restrictive garments or jewellery.

Limit the movement of the individual and if possible immobilise the limb that has been bitten.

Do not attempt to catch the snake for identification purposes.

Seek medical attention immediately.