

## Elapid snakes Family Elapidae

SNAKES with fixed hollow fangs in their jaws that are used to inject venom that mainly affects the nervous system. In Singapore, they are represented by cobras, coral snakes, kraits and sea snakes.

### Cobras *Naja* and *Ophiophagus* spp.

Highly venomous snakes which, when threatened, confront their enemy by raising the fore part of the body and flattening the neck. Two species are present in Singapore, both with largely diurnal and terrestrial habits. The equatorial spitting cobra (*Naja sumatrana*) is common, and may be found around human habitation. It is almost entirely black, grows to about 1 m in length, and feeds mainly on RODENTS and other small animals. This cobra has the ability to eject venom from its fangs for over a metre, which can cause extreme discomfort to the target if the venom enters the eyes. The king cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) can reach almost 6 m in length, and is the world's longest venomous snake. Adults are brown or olive, while juveniles are black with narrow yellow bands. It is rare, occurring in forests and scrubland, and feeds on other snakes and MONITOR LIZARDS. King cobras are unique among snakes in that they build a nest

of dead leaves in which a clutch of eggs is laid. The mother guards the nest until the eggs hatch.

### Coral snakes *Calliophis* spp.

Snakes which possess small heads, slender bodies and bright colours to warn potential predators of their toxicity. Their diet consists mainly of other snakes. Three species are recorded locally, and the banded Malayan coral snake (*Calliophis intestinalis*), dark brown with a red dorsal stripe, seems to be the most common. When disturbed, it flattens its body and flips over to display its white-and-black banded underside and black-and-red banded tail. It occurs in forests, as well as in suburban gardens, and grows to a length of 71 cm. The blue Malayan coral snake (*C. bivirgatus*) has a dark blue back with light blue lateral stripes, and its head, tail and underside are vivid red. This beautiful animal inhabits mature forests, and grows to a length of 1.8 m.

### Kraits *Bungarus* spp.

Nocturnal snakes that live on the ground, and specialise in eating other snakes. Two species are known from Singapore. The banded krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*) grows to 1.5 m in total length, and is boldly marked with black and yellow bands of similar width throughout its body, which appears triangular in cross-section.

It seems to be rare locally, and has been found mainly along the coast, often in mangroves. There are no confirmed recent records of the black-and-white banded Malayan krait (*B. candidus*) in Singapore.

### Sea snakes

Snakes that live almost entirely in the marine environment. They have characteristic short, flattened, paddle-shaped tails for swimming. Most sea snakes bear live young underwater. Although they are known to absorb oxygen in the water through their skin, all sea snakes still need to come to the surface to breathe. Most sea snakes are known to be highly venomous. Eleven species from 8 genera are recorded from the estuaries and sea around Singapore, but they are rarely seen. The amphibious sea snake or yellow-lipped sea krait (*Laticauda colubrina*) is one of the regularly seen species. It is unusual among sea snakes in that it often comes ashore, and lays eggs on land. It grows to a length of 1.4 m, and frequents coral reefs and rocky shore, feeding on FISH (mainly EELS). The wholly aquatic marbled sea snake (*Aipysurus eydouxii*) and short sea snake (*Lapemis curtus*), which do not exceed 1 m in length, are also sometimes seen. The remaining species belong to the genera *Astrotia*, *Enhydrina*, *Hydrophis*, *Microcephalophis* and *Pelamis*. ■ MC/KL



The equatorial spitting cobra (*Naja sumatrana*) is known for its ability to eject venom from its fangs when threatened. Its prey, however, is usually killed with a venomous bite.



The banded Malayan coral snake (*Calliophis intestinalis*) is highly venomous and when threatened, would reveal its black-and-red banded tail as a warning of its toxicity.



The banded krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*) has a tail with a blunt tip and a distinctive pattern of broad black and pale yellow-coloured bars along the body.



Yellow-lipped sea kraits (*Laticauda colubrina*) are marine snakes that come onto land to rest and lay eggs.