

SNAKES IN PORTUGAL

By & copyright to Steve Robinson
9th December 2023

I need to start this piece by stating that I spent 30+ years of my life in Africa & most of that time was spent living & working in the true wilderness areas of Africa where seriously venomous snakes were an almost daily issue & over those years I obviously became at least acquainted with them but was never especially scared of them. I was however, always extremely respectful of them.

Many/most people are at least uncomfortable around snakes & in some parts of the world, for very good reason but here in Portugal the vast majority of snakes are either non venomous or only mildly venomous & there are very few species of snake native to Portugal that are liable to give a healthy adult any serious problems and although relatively rare the one you are most likely to encounter is the Lataste's Viper & it's easily identifiable by the **rhino horn like protuberance** on his nose & for those who know African snakes very often looks remarkably like the African puff adder but fortunately is nowhere near as venomous.

Don't ever go solely by colour, skin pattern or anything else because as you'll see in the images & videos below (and others on the internet) there's often not much easily identifiable difference between the species & my advice would be never to expect an accurate identification to be made from a photograph only & such 'positive claims' from the vast majority of people should be treated as dubious to say the least & I for one will never make such a positive identification from a photo only.

NOTE:

Any snake bite should be treated like the bite of any wild animal. It is advised to at least clean & disinfect the wound and consult a doctor if any symptoms arise.

Snake activity peaks in the summer months but it's not impossible to come across them at any time of year & I've twice found young snakes in our courtyard on Christmas day & I have in the past, caught & relocated snakes quite literally every month of the year. They will however tend be a lot more lethargic in colder temperatures & winter months.

If you do come across any snake here in Portugal the best thing to do is not to panic & there's rarely any need to even disturb it, let alone kill it just for being a snake & doing what snakes do & in many ways, the snakes here are very useful to have around the property as mice & rats often make up a significant part of their diet which is a good reason to leave them the heck alone if you come across them in areas such as adegas, outbuildings or gardens.

If you need to move a snake in a relatively open area then it can usually be done quite easily with a long handled broom and/or a long garden cane & all you have to do is just gently & patiently guide it the way you want it to go but the bigger problem is often more about spotting them in the first place as they often take shelter or hibernate in places such as wood piles & loose hay or straw & on more than one occasion, I've accidentally picked one up in a handful of such & have to admit that's a heart stopping moment. Lol & if you do have to get close to one of our serpentine friends then it might be a good idea to don gloves & wellington boots before you start the job though.

It is also possible to buy a set of snake tongs and/or snake hook from sources such as amazon.es or de & both have their place **but if you do choose to do that then I strongly suggest you at least seek advice & training from an experienced snake handler on their proper use** & one tip I will give is if you do use such tools to catch snakes then it is advisable to keep the snake on or close to the ground as much as you can which keeps them calm but raise them off the ground more than a few centimetres & they quickly become highly agitated & if you need to contain them for a 'relocation journey' then better to bag them in a sack or seed bag rather than try to put them in a bucket & lid & if you want to be doubly secure then bag them, tie the top & then put the sealed bag in the bucket with lid on top & I keep tongs, sack, bucket & lid with air holes drilled in the lid & snake tongs handy in my garage at all times.

If you're really uncomfortable moving them yourself that then I'm sure that if you call the GNR, Bombeiros or your local vet on a NON emergency number then I'm sure they'll probably have contact details for someone you can call to move it for you.

NOTE:

There's rarely if ever any reason to treat any indigenous snake here with fear but there is always a reason to treat them with respect because if nothing else, there's always the remote possibility that some halfwit (Yes. Such idiots really do exist!) just might have released a non-native, seriously venomous snake into the wild because they have decided they no longer want it but there are no snakes indigenous to Portugal that have anything like the aggression & venom of snakes such as the mambas of Africa or the rattlesnake of north America.

<http://iberianature.com/wildworld/guides/wildlife-of-portugal/snakes-of-portugal/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1iUk9bFnok>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISCYIVAdciw>

If you want to learn more about snakes in Portugal then a really fantastic & well informed page is Cobras De Portugal which can be found at:

https://www.facebook.com/cobrasdeportugal/?_tn=kCH-R&eid=ARCdXLVygv-QVRV5vGBcmIJFBTmoB2HLSCdSQv_UFcB8HjA-C5S4zasNUmyJocQH-9TqpUOTsU1JV5B2&hc_ref=ARR8hTHA9UrNqas0cEV21Ym1KzeINFWnf5S4i-IF6U7chEu1mEwf70YN_SneJ17uhTk&ref=nf_target

You might also find the websites below to be of interest:

<https://www.craigrogers.photography/snakes-of-portugal/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_reptiles_of_Portugal

The image below is a mature, non-venomous ladder snake that I caught & relocated in mid December 2023.

