

Snakes of Sri Lanka



Scales

- ❑ Body of the snake is covered with scales
- ❑ Very important in identification
- ❑ Number
 - Size
 - Colour
 - Arrangement
- ❑ Scales of different parts of the body are given different names

Head scale

Enlarged head scales

Most of the elapids
Most of the non poisonous

Non enlarged scales (shields)

Body scales

Scales covering the body (neck to anus) two types

Tail scales

In sub caudal there are 2 types of arrangement

Feebly poisonous snakes

- Rare flanged
- Low toxicity
- Venom injecting mechanism is relatively insufficient to inject a sufficient quantity
- Produce mild symptoms pain swelling, local, reactions no fatality

Snakes habits

- Carnivorous feed on rats, frog, geodes , lizards bird eggs etc.,
- Venomous snakes use their venom to immobilized the prey
- Snakes bite when they are bitter - frightened & exited
- Non venomous snakes have tooth but no flangs

Character	Elapids	Vipers
1.Head	(a) Shape, like a spoon ie: spatula shaped (b) Scales - enlarged	Taaingular Small
2.Body	slender	Stout
3.Tail	long	Stout

ELAPSIDES

General features

- * **Belongs to elapidae**
- * **Long snakes, especially the tail**
- * **Head** – spatula or spoon shaped
 - scales are enlarged
- * **Vertibrals** are also enlarged
- * **Subcaudals** are uniserial
- * **Oviparous**
- * **Posses** grooved flangs
- * **Venom** – neurotoxic
- * **Corneal** - circular

Cobra - *Naja naja naja*

- Long dark brown snake
- Active during day time diurnal
- Found all over Sri Lanka
- Commonly found near human habitations
- Inoffensive snake only attacks if provoked
- Attempt to move away from the sight



- Lacks most of the features of an elapids
- Eg: vertebrals are enlarged
- Subcaudale bi-serial



- Can be easily identified by the characteristic “3” like marking situated on a loose fold of skin on the neck (of the dorsal side)
- When excited this fold expands into a hood
- Cobra is the only snake to have this



♀ → oviparous → 12-40 eggs

Young cobra more dangerous
alert
excitable
strikes repeatly

Young also posses venom

- Venom - mainly neurotoxic & cardiotoxic

- 3/4 of death

- Lots of pain → swelling → local bite below the
knee necrosis

220cm

upto 1500cm

At the site

CEYLON KRAIT

Scientific name : *Bungarus ceylonicus*

Sinhala name: Mudu Karawala (මුදු කරවලා) English name: Sri Lankan (Ceylon) krait

Average length = 60cm



- Prefers cool, moist, habitat (wet & intermediate zone)
- Nocturnal snake, day time in & out of houses
- Blackish brown snake with white bands on the body (dorsal surface)
- Bands extend to the ventral surface, Others not (but they are dorsal)
- Vertebrae enlarged

- Feed mainly on other small snakes
- Inoffensive snake – under great provocation
→ bites
- Highly venomous → mainly neurotoxic kraits
- (Ceylon & India) – 17% death's
- Bites usually → little or no reactions

INDIAN KRAIT

Scientific name : *Bungarus caeruleus*

Sinhala name: Thel Karawala (තෙල් කරවලා)

English name: Indian krait

Average length = 75cm



- Bluish black colour snake
- It was an oily (glossy) shiney appearance
- Has paired white bands on the dorsal surface
- Belly is uniformly white
- Has general features of an elapid

SLENDER CORAL SNAKE

Scientific name : *Calliophis melaanurus*

Sinhala name: Depath naya (දෙපත්ත
නයා)

English name: Slender Coral Snake

Average length = 30 cm



- Vertebrals are enlarged
- Mainly found in dry zone :low: countries
- In offensive snake – closely associated with human dwellings
- Nocturnal in habitats
- Highly potent neurotoxic venomum



V I P E R S

General feature

- Short – stout snakes – tail is short
- Head – flat triangular
- Scales not enlarged
- Viviparous
- Canalized flanges
- Venom – vasculotoxin
- (Russell's viper → neurotoxic effects)
- Subcoudals biseral
- 2 types
 - true vipers
 - pit vipers

True Vipers

Russell's Viper
Saw scaled Viper

Pit Vipers

Green pit Viper
Hump nosed Viper

Russell's viper

Scientific name : *Vipera russelli*

Sinhala name : Thith polonga

English name : Russell's viper

Average Length = 90 cm



- Largest & most widely distributed viper in Sri Lanka
- Found near human habitation
- Lazy sluggish snake
- Nocturnal in habitats
- Triangular head well differentiated neck
- 2 light colour lines which meet at the tip of the snout to form a V

- Highly poisonous 40% of deaths due to this snake in Sri Lanka
- Attacks on provocation with force & determination
- Movable canalized flangs
- Venom vasculotoxic as well as neurotoxic
- Brown in colour, has 3 rows of black elliptical markings running along the length of the snake

- 22-30 sp
- Belly is whitish yellow in colour
- Size 60cm
- Dorsally brown
- 6-97 youngs
- 1800m upto
- Poisoning effects mainly due to neurotoxic

Without loreal pits

a) Sub caudals are divided

Vipera russelli

Russels viper

b) Sub caudals are undivided

Echis carinatus

Saw scaled viper

With loreal pits

a) Head scales enlarged

Hypanale hyp

Hypanale nepa

Humped nosed viper

b) Head scales not enlarged

Trimensuru trig

Green pit

Saw scaled viper

Scientific name : *Echis carinata carinata*

Sinhala name : Veli polonga (වෙලි පොලංගා)

English name : Saw scaled viper



- Small viper 25cm
- Very active, vicious aggressive snake
- Sandy brown in colour
- White cross or birds foot mark over the dorsal surface of the neck
- Strikes on slightest provocation
- When disturbed, it rubs the coils against each other producing a hissing noise (characteristic)
- Found in the north & eastern costal region of Sri Lanka

Pit vipers

There is a pit (loreal - pit) situated between the eye & nostrils

This is a thermoreceptive organ that help the snake to detect the warm blooded prey from the distance in darkness

Green pit viper

Scientific name: *Trimeresurus trigonocephalus*

Sinhala name : Pala polonga (pɪ̃ @p̃ɪ̃<̃)

English name : Green pit viper

Average Length = 750 mm



- Bright green in colour with black markings
- Arboreal nocturnal snake (associated with trees)
- Sluggish snake - strikes when aroused
- Common in rain forest area, plantations etc.
- Venom causes local pain & swelling no reported deaths. (No fatalities)
- Have general features of a viper
- No. hump, vertebral small, subcaudals - biserial

Hump nosed viper

Scientific name : *Hypnale hypnale*

Sinhala name : Polonthelissa, Kunakatuwa

English name : Hump nosed viper

Average Length = 375 mm



- Widely distributed in Sri Lanka. Very common in this area - Galle
- Brown in colour with dark brown & black markings, highly variable colour variation
- Nocturnal snakes hide under leaves stones during day time
- Fatal cases - so far reported causes severe local reactions pain & swellings - antibiotics + paracetamol sufficient

- Characteristic feature is the upturned snout (hump)
- Dorsally grey yellow brown to salmon pink in colour
- Unlike other vipers - head scales are enlarged, closely resembles the cat snake m'Ól'
- Fatalities

Other common snakes

Family - colubridae (colubrides)

- This family comprises the largest group of the snake sp in this country
- 47sp belong to this family. Majority non-poisonous
- 11sp rear flanged feebly poisonous
- Commonly encountered
- Some feebly poisonous snakes
- These snakes are nearly all diurnal very active with large heads & eyes

Feebly Poisonous Snakes

Eg: Cat snake m`Ól`

Whip snakes a#h#éLI`,a#S²LI`

Genus - *Boiga*

- Arboreal , nocturnal , active snakes
- Their venom is feebly toxic cause local effects
- Rear flagged
- 4 sp. found in Sri Lanka
- 2 common sp. *Boiga forsteni* (largest)

Boiga ceylonesis (commonest)

- They mimic the vipers specially the hump nosed viper
- Eyes large with vertical pupil is called cat snake
- Lump shaped markings on occiput

- External appearance
- Long snake, no lump, no loreal pit
- Long tail
- Head, spatula shaped
- Large eyes
- In Sri Lanka believed to be deadly poisonous
cat snakes are usually found in pair

Whip Snake

Scientific name : *Dryoptis nasutus*

Sinhala name : Ahaetulla

English name : Whip Snake



- Arboreal, diurnal, active snakes
- Bright green in colour
- Fierce & vicious snake
- Head shape - very characteristic
- Longer, narrow acutely pointed snout

- Venom feebly toxic-local reactions colouration & shape
- Excellent common flage (can hide easily)
- Believed to strike at the eye
- (Sinhalese nake false belief)
- Non poisonous Colurbrides Commonly found in Sri Lnka

Rat Snake

Scientific name : *Coluber mucosus maximus*

Sinhala name : Garendiya (ගරේන්දියා)

English name : Rat Snake



- Common non-poisonous snake
- Largest colabrides in Sri Lanka
- Found in & out of houses
- Diurnal, alert & active
- Fierced when provoked
- Colour vary - green, brown, yellow
- Sometimes resembles cobra
(eyes are larger than cobra)

Ceylon Wolf Snake

Scientific name : *Cercaspis carinatus*

Sinhala name : Dara Karawala (දරා කරවලා)

English name : Ceylon Wolf Snake



- Rather common snake
- Resembles the Ceylon krait
- Vertebrae not enlarged
(only different to Ceylon krait)
- Sub caudals uniserial
- Get the bands in belly

Common Wolf Snake

Scientific name : *Lycoden aulicus*

Sinhala name : Kunu Mee Karawala
(කුණු මී කැරවල)

English name : Common Wolf Snake



- Very common, nocturnal, non-venomous snake
- Resembles the ceylon krait
- Vertibral are not enlarged
- Belly is white
- Sub caudals divided
- White bands on the dorsal surface but does not extend to the ventral surface

- Diurnal, gentle, non venomous snake
- Commonly seen
- Two yellow or buff colour dorsolateral stripes run from neck to tail tip
- Rough scaled

Python

Scientific name : *Python molurus molurus*

Sinhala name : Kunu Mee Karawala
(කුණු මී කැරවල)

English name : Python



- Family - baidae
- Only sp in Sri Lanka
- Large snake with massive cylindrical bodies
- Non venomous
- Kill the prey by constricting
- Body has 3 rows of quadrate markings
- Young python resembles the russel's viper