Snakes likely to be found at UCT

Common Slug Eater (*Duberria lutrix*)

Scientific name:
Duberria lutrix (Family: Lamprophiidae – Pseudoxyrhophiinae).

Common names:
Slug Eater, Common Slug Eater, Tabakrolletjie

Size: 10cm (birth) – 40cm (max.)

Distribution:
Throughout South Africa with the exception of the Northern Cape and North West Province, preferring the wetter / damper areas. They are found throughout the Cape Town Metro, where they have adapted very well to the suburban garden environment.

Description:
Small snakes, often described as “baby” snakes for that very reason. Their colour is variable, from a dark reddish-brown to light brown on top; often with a darker, more greyish brown on the flanks and a light yellow belly, sometimes with silvery-grey borders. Many specimens have a dark line, with varying levels of interruption, down the spine. Their eyes have round pupils and the insides of their mouths are black.

Habits:
Slug Eaters tend to prefer damp locations which is where slugs and snails are likely to occur. Thanks to the introduction of exotic slugs and snails, gardens with irrigation and compost, they are one of the few snake species that have not just adapted, but have actually benefitted from the suburban habitats that humans have created. They may be found in leaf litter, under rocks or other debris, or in compost heaps. Their docile and inoffensive nature together with useful pest control services they provide should make them one of the most welcome creatures in any garden!
They defend themselves by releasing a strong and pungent dark-coloured musk. Sometimes they may try to roll up into a spiral (hence the common name “Tabakrolletjie”) or play dead.

Prey:
Slugs and snails, but especially slugs. They track down the slugs and snails by following the slime trails they leave.

Venom:
None. They seldom even attempt to bite and are unable to pierce human skin even if they did.

Brown Water Snake (*Lycodonomorphus rufulus*)

Scientific name:
Lycodonomorphus rufulus (Family: Lamprophiidae – Lamprophiinae).

Common names:
Brown Water Snake, Common Brown Water Snake, Common Water Snake, Izilenzi, Iwsamanzi Elimdubu

Size: 15cm (birth) – 80cm (max.)

Distribution:
Throughout South Africa with the exception of the drier areas. Mostly found near water (rivers, wetlands, vleis, etc). They are found throughout the Cape Town Metro, especially near to wetlands. In suburbia they are particularly fond of gardens with fish ponds and other such suitable water sources.

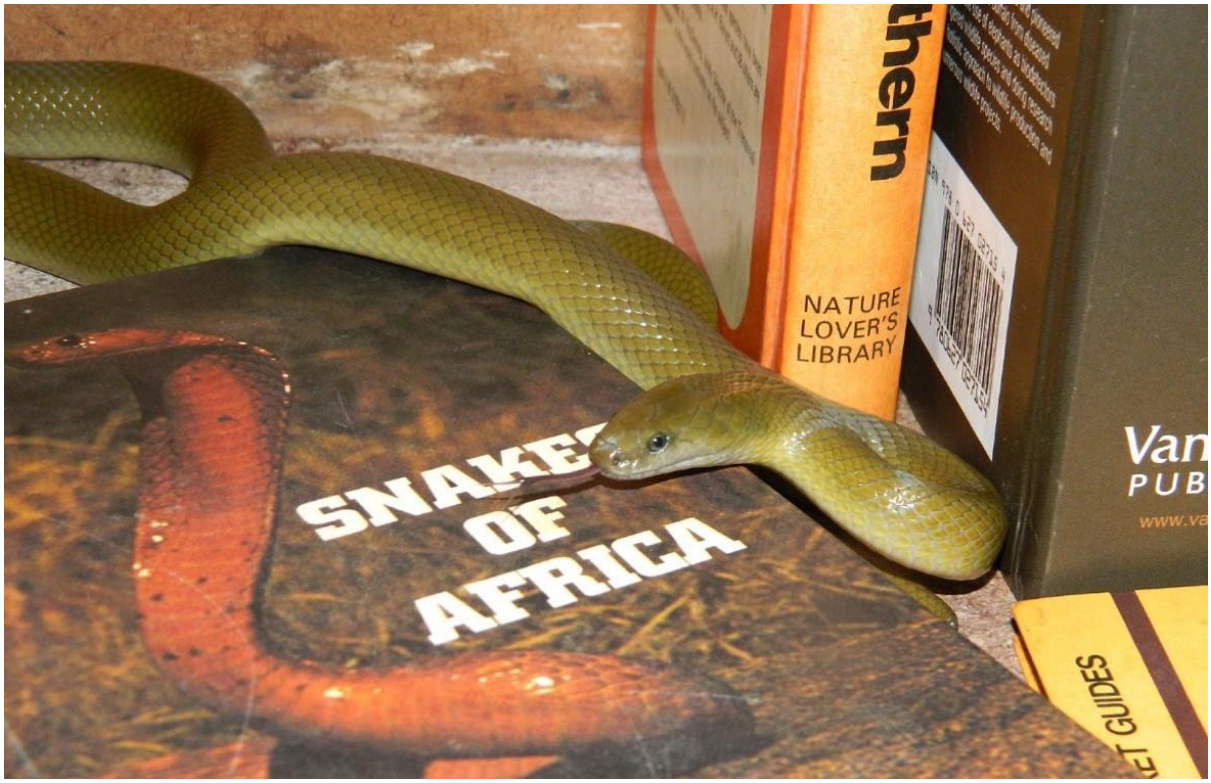
Description:
Generally thin snakes with long tails. The dorsal colouration ranges from grey to brown to olive green. The underside is usually light in colour, often with an orange or pink tinge, while others are creamy white (specimens from the Koue Bokkeveld have an almost black belly). The lighter belly colouration extends to the lower and upper lips where the lower part of the eye forms an indentation in the colour scheme. They eyes are relatively large and usually orange to orange-brown in colour. They may be confused with Olive House Snakes (*Lycodonomorphus inornatus*), but the nose of the Olive House Snake is blunter, the eyes are smaller and lack the orange colouration, and the lighter ventral colouration does not extend to the upper lip. Olive House Snakes also lack the orange to pinkish colouration on the belly.

Habits:
They are mostly nocturnal but may sometimes be found hunting near or in water systems during the day. They are excellent swimmers. They are shy and nervous, quick moving, and very docile.

Prey:
Frogs, toads, tadpoles, fish. May also take small rodents.

Venom:
None. Seldom even attempts to bite and unable to harm a human even if it does.

Olive House Snake (*Lycodonomorphus inornatus*)



Scientific name:
Lycodonomorphus inornatus (Family: Lamprophiidae – Lamprophiinae).

Common names:
Olive House Snake, Olive Snake, Olive Ground Snake, Olive Night Snake, Black House Snake.

Size:
20cm (birth) – 120cm (max.)

Distribution:
Found throughout the wetter areas of South Africa: from the South Western Cape through to Northern KZN, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Gauteng; and throughout the City of Cape Town Metro.

Description:
Plain olive-coloured snakes with creamy bellies (dorsal shades may vary, and some may even be brown to dark brown). The cream colouration of the ventrals often extends to the lower jaw – probably the most distinctive feature of this snake. The eyes are of average size and the pupils are round. They may be confused with Brown Water Snakes (*Lycodonomorphus rufulus*) but the nose is blunter, the eyes are smaller and lack the orange to orange-brown colouration, and the lighter ventrals seldom extend to the upper lip.

Habits:
They are mostly nocturnal but may sometimes be found out and about on cool overcast days. They are fond of debris such as rubble and wood piles. They are also often found in compost heaps, rotting logs and inside retaining walls and gabions. As the common name suggests, they are often found around human habitation and are one of the few snakes that

has managed to adapt to and even thrive in an urban and suburban environment. They are excellent climbers.
They are one of the most docile snakes around and very seldom attempt to bite, even under harassment. This, plus the excellent rodent control services they provide, should make them a welcome component of any suburban garden.

Prey:
Opportunistic generalists: rodents, frogs, lizards and other snakes (including sometimes other Olive House Snakes).

Venom:
None. They seldom even attempt to bite and are unable to harm a human even if they do. A large one might be able to pierce the skin and draw blood with their teeth, but they are incapable of more than that.

Herald Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

Scientific name:
Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia (Family: Colubridae – Colubrinae).

Common names:
Herald Snake, Red-lipped Herald

Size: 15cm (birth) – 80cm (max.)

Distribution:
Found throughout South Africa with the exceptions of the drier areas of the Northern Cape and North West. They are found throughout the Cape Town Metro, especially near to wetlands or other seasonally damp areas.

Description:
Usually an olive to brownish-green with fairly random white flecks on the body. The head has a distinctive black patch on either side, extending from temporal area behind the eyes to the neck (behind the parietal scales). It may join at this point. The extent of this black marking is variable between individuals, but is almost always present in this species.
The scales on the upper lip are sometimes orange to red in colour, giving this snake one of its common names, but this is not always present. In many cases the upper lip is pale in colour, as is the case with many of the Herald snakes found in the CoCT metro area.
The eyes are large and have slit pupils.

Habits:
They are mostly nocturnal, occasionally being found on cool overcast mornings. Like most snakes they are shy and nervous, but when harassed their defensive display can be quite impressive: they may coil up and flatten their heads into an adder-like arrow shape (causing them to be confused with adders and sometimes cobras). Once in defensive mode, they may execute mock strikes.

Prey:
Mostly frogs and toads.

Venom:
A rear-fanged snake with a mild venom that has almost no effect on humans. It may require a large specimen to chew for a while to produce any notable symptoms. Symptoms may include slight swelling and pain around the bite site with bleeding (more than would be expected from such a bite – which would suggest haemotoxic properties). The venom has not been well studied and its properties remain largely unknown.

Harlequin Snake (*Homoroselaps lacteus*)

Scientific name:
Homoroselaps lacteus (Family: Lamprophiidae – Atractaspidinae).

Common names:
Harlequin Snake; Spotted Harlequin Snake.

Size: 15cm (birth) – 60cm (max.)

Distribution:
Throughout South Africa with the exception of the drier areas (Northern Cape, North West and Great Karoo). They are found throughout the CoCT metro area, appearing to be most abundant in the South Peninsula and Atlantic Seaboard.

Description:
Normally small, thin snakes with rough black and yellow banding and with a broad, broken orange stripe running down the spine. The head is usually black with the orange stripe thinning at the back of the head, and with a yellow wedge behind the eyes. The spotted version of this snake is dark in colour with numerous, fairly evenly spaced yellow or white dots and a dotted yellow line down the spine – the thickness of which depends on the individual specimen.

Habits:
Mostly fossorial, meaning they are seldom seen. They may also be found under logs, rocks and in old termitaria. They are shy and nervous snakes that are very reluctant to bite. When exposed they may thrash about and make jerky movements and try to cover their heads beneath their bodies.

Prey:
Other reptiles, particularly blind snakes, worm snakes and fossorial lizards.

Venom:
The venom is mild and has not been well studied. Symptoms may include slight pain and

swelling around the bite site. In extreme cases, the pain and swelling may extend right up the bitten arm, the lymph nodes may become painful and swollen, and the patient may feel generally lethargic. The symptoms usually abate after a few days, or up to a week in extreme cases. The fangs are small and fixed in the front of the mouth (resulting in these snakes once being classified as elapids) and they generally have to chew in order to inject a sufficient amount of venom to be of consequence.

Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*)

Scientific name:
Naja nivea (Family: Elapidae – Elapinae).

Common names:
Cape Cobra

Size:
35cm (birth) – 200cm (max). The largest specimen found so far measured 231cm and weighed 1.8kg (Phelps, 2006); the largest one found by us measured just over 180cm and weighed 1.2kg.

Distribution:
Throughout the Western and Northern Cape, as well as the western halves of the Eastern Cape, Free State and the North West Province. Their distribution extends into the southern half of Namibia and south western Botswana. They are found throughout the City of Cape

Town Metro area near all sufficiently sized natural areas. Some have even been found deep inside suburbia, but it is suspected that these are stowaways.

Description:
Juveniles are almost always a light brown in colour with black specks on the body. There is a dark band on the underside of the neck which fades with age. Adult colouration is highly variable, from almost black to light caramel, plain coloured to mottled and speckled varieties. The most common colour morphs in the Cape Town Metro area are the dark and light speckled varieties, and the light to dark plain brown and copper-coloured varieties. A few yellow, caramel and black ones have also been found, but they appear to be less frequent in the CoCT metro.
Their bodies are round to triangular in shape. Their heads are fairly prominent; they have blunt-ish noses and large scales behind the eyes (compared with a Mole Snake, which has a sharp nose and small scales behind the eyes). The scales are smooth and the eyes have round pupils.

Habits:
Cape Cobras are diurnal snakes that prefer warmer temperatures. They may spend a lot of time basking near their retreats, often with their hoods spread to maximise their surface area. They are active and opportunistic hunters within their home ranges, and are as happy in trees as they are on the ground.
They are nervous and skittish snakes, and if disturbed, will flee at the first chance they get. They have a reputation for being dangerous and aggressive, for standing their ground and biting readily, but these allegations are mostly sensationalism: only when exposed and/or cornered and harassed, with no chance to escape will some – and only some – display such behaviour. In such circumstances, they will then stand with their hoods spread, but will quickly drop again if they can no longer detect the threat. Under extreme harassment, they may open their mouths and make short lunges at their attacker, and further attempts to harm or harass the snake may only then result in a strike with intent. As with other snakes, each cobra is an individual and has an individual personality: some are quite quick to display defensive behaviour, while others will not display any at all. Sometimes when initially disturbed, they may emit a deep, hollow hiss. Some will musk. Juvenile Cape Cobras tend to be more defensive than the adults, and are normally very quick to stand up and hood when cornered.
When on the move, Cape Cobras are inquisitive snakes – a habit which has sometimes ended up with them entering houses or stowing away in car engines, where they are then sometimes transported deep into suburban areas. While this does not happen often, it does tend to occur more with Cape Cobras than with most other snakes in the region. Once translocated outside of their home ranges, they are particularly vulnerable and may travel long distances. Their habits of sometimes entering houses has unfortunately resulted in some human-snake conflict situations, and has on occasion resulted in people getting bitten. But it is in the nature of these snakes to be inquisitive and opportunistic which accidentally results in such conflict situations – there is no malice involved; and children are not on the menu (as has been ludicrously suggested by some quarters). The snake can be safely relocated back outside by a snake catcher.

Prey:
Opportunistic generalists: rodents, amphibians, birds, lizards and other snakes. There are even records of Cape Cobras eating carrion (other snakes killed on the road), as well as instances of cannibalism (Phelps, 2007).

Venom:
Cape Cobras' venom is predominantly a potent neurotoxin, consisting of both post-synaptic (mostly) and pre-synaptic (to a lesser degree) neurotoxic components. Some specimens may also have minor cytotoxic components to their venom. Like most snakes, the variation

between venom components, as well as toxicity, is variable from individual to individual, even within the same populations. Cape Cobras have short, fixed front fangs. They dry bite fairly often.
Symptoms:
Humans – Most bites occur on the hands and lower limbs. The bite site is not overly painful and there may or may not be a slight swelling. The first symptom of envenomation is often a metallic taste in the mouth. This may then be followed by a tingling sensation around the lips, increasing paralysis of the tongue, increased salivation and difficulty in swallowing. The patient may experience drowsiness and dizziness, the pupils of the eyes may dilate and the eyelids close (ptosis). Sweating, nausea and vomiting are also possible. The patient may then suffer increasing flaccid paralysis, experience increasing difficulty breathing and may lose consciousness. Convulsions and coma are also possible and death is usually due to respiratory failure. Untreated or poorly treated envenomations may be fatal, so envenomations from Cape Cobras should be regarded as extreme medical emergencies. The onset of severe symptoms can be very rapid, occurring in as little as 30 minutes in extreme cases, and death can potentially occur within 8 hours after a bite. However, with fast and effective treatment, most patients survive and recover within a few days, as long as there are no complications.
Dogs – Most dogs are bitten in the face and neck area. Unfortunately dogs are particularly susceptible to Cape Cobra venom and most do not survive, many not even making it to the vet on time. The symptoms present themselves in much the same way as they do for humans, but usually progress far more rapidly. However, with fast and effective treatment, there is still every chance that the dog will survive, especially if the amount of venom injected was not substantial.
First aid:
Try to remain calm (easier said than done, but it is important). Then get to hospital (or get the patient to hospital) as quickly as possible. Do not attempt to drive yourself as becoming dizzy or losing consciousness behind the wheel of the car will likely have far worse consequences than that of the venom. It is advisable to use a crepe or pressure bandage to bind the limb from the site of the bite towards the heart fairly tightly, as one would for a sprained ankle (but do not use a tourniquet). This will help slow the venom.
If the patient stops breathing, artificial respiration will be required.

Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*)

Scientific name:
Bitis arietans (Family: Viperidae – Viperinae).

Common names:
Puff Adder

Size:
20cm (birth) – 140cm (max.) Weight around 2kg, but may be heavier (the heaviest I've caught has been 2.2kg). East African Puff Adders may reach up to 180cm and up to 6kg. Males tend to be longer, females tend to be heavier.

Distribution:
Common throughout South Africa. In the CoCT metro areas, they are most common nearer to the mountains, where they are the most common snake species. They are far less common on the Cape Flats, except in the Rondevlei/Zeekoevlei area where they are more abundant thanks to good conservation efforts.

Description:
Heavy bodied snakes. In the CoCT metro, they range from light to dark brown, sometimes greenish brown (although much of this depends on how recently they've shed). Their most distinctive marks are a series of light-coloured backward facing chevrons running down the back until about halfway to the tail, where they dissipate into a series of bands and other random markings. There is a distinctive thin line running between the eyes (roughly the same colour as the chevrons) and a series of spots on the back of the head making up a distinctive symmetrical pattern. Two bands, one light (behind the eye) and one dark (in front of the eye) extend from the eye level to the upper lip. It is more than likely that these patterns are unique to each snake, like a kind of fingerprint. The colouration makes for ideal camouflage.
The head is large and triangular, and covered by numerous small scales. The eye is small and has a vertically elliptical pupil which can dilate in low-light conditions. The nostrils are large and are situated near the top of the snout. The dorsal scales are strongly keeled, giving the snake a rough appearance. Males can be distinguished from females by the tail – the males have longer tails, while the females have short tails tapering quickly to a point.

Habits:
Puff Adders are ambush predators that lie in wait for prey rather than hunt. This makes people think they are lazy, where in fact they better described as “tactically inactive”. They may make additional use of “bait” to lure prey – such as their tails (caudal luring) or their tongues (lingual luring) (Glaudas, 2017). They are also able to camouflage themselves chemically as well as visually (Miller et al., 2015). They can, however, move swiftly if they need, and their strike is one of the fastest of all snakes. They are also mistakenly called “aggressive” and “dangerous”, but they are in fact neither. When approached they will lie dead still and hope that they are not spotted. Even when harassed or trodden on, they still do not react, as any reaction on their part will give their position away. Only when they know for sure that they've been spotted do they react; sometimes by moving off and sometimes by hissing loudly. Under extreme provocation, they may pull their heads back, nose facing down, ready to strike, or even execute a mock strike. In behavioural tests I've (Vard Aman) conducted on Puff Adders, 85% kept still when approached, 5% hissed and only 1% struck; under harassment, 60% tried to get away 15% hissed and 3% struck (overall figures, not taking into account other factors such as vegetation cover – under the cover of thick vegetation, 100% kept still when approached and none hissed or struck). It is therefor likely that if you have been hiking, you would have walked passed a lot of Puff Adders and not known that they were even there. They are NOT dangerous or aggressive snakes, however, they are willing to defend themselves if need be and they can do so quite well! They can also be a little unpredictable at times and can occasionally go through sudden personality changes, so even timid Puff Adders are best left alone and not tampered with or harmed.
Puff Adders tend to be crepuscular to nocturnal in summer in most of South Africa, but due the cooler climate in the CoCT metro area, they are mostly diurnal. In winter, they may come out to bask if there are a few warm days in a row. They are most active in spring when the males are out looking for females and may sometimes be seen sparring with rival males. Females give birth to live young in late summer, up to 50 young may be born.

Prey:
Mostly rodents, but they'll take amphibians and lizards too.

Venom:
Puff Adders' venom is predominantly a potent cytotoxin, causing cell and tissue destruction. The venom also contains prothrombin and clotting factors, haemorrhagins (which cause internal and external bleeding) and disintegrins (which inhibits platelet aggregation) (Strydom et al., 2016). Some individuals may also have a post-synaptic neurotoxic component, though this may be insignificant (Vulfius et al., 2011). Like many species of snake, the exact venom composition between individuals may vary, sometimes considerably, even within the same

population groups (Currier et al., 2010). The venom yield is high and can be delivered deeply by their long, hinged syringe-like front fangs. They seldom dry bite.
Symptoms:
Humans – Most bites occur on the hands or lower legs. Bites are followed by immediate burning pain (which will steadily increase) followed by extreme swelling and blistering of the skin. Extensive tissue damage is likely with possible necrosis, and if incorrectly or not adequately treated may result in the loss of a digit or even limb. Fatalities are rare, but recovery is slow.
Dogs – Most dogs are bitten on the face or neck area. Bites to face will cause extreme swelling with bleeding from the nose, but pain appears to be minimal. Most dogs survive and recover quickly. There may, however, be complications: such as the extreme swelling blocking the upper airway – most fatalities from Puff Adder bites are due to this. There is also a risk of hypotensive shock (Leisewitz et al., 2004).
First aid:
Try to remain calm (easier said than done, but it is important). Uncover the bite area and remove any restrictive clothing or jewellery and get to hospital as soon as possible. Do not use a pressure bandage as this will restrict swelling and end up causing more damage. The venom is slow acting, but the longer the patient delays getting treatment, the more extensive the damage will be. Do not try to cut around the bite area as this will cause more damage and increase the risk of infection. Trying to suck out venom, or applying electric shocks, or using various “old-wives tale” or “traditional” remedies does not work and should be avoided. Avoid alcohol too.

Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)

Scientific name:
Dispholidus typus (Family: Colubridae – Colubrinae).

Common names:
Boomslang

Size:
35cm (birth) – 200cm (max).

Distribution:
Found throughout the Western and Eastern Cape. Further upcountry, it is (or rather may be) replaced by a different subspecies, *Dispholidus typus viridis*, although work is still in progress regarding the taxonomic status of the two different subspecies. They are found throughout the City of Cape Town Metropolitan area anywhere near wild areas, especially nearer to the mountain.

Description:
Juveniles are thin-bodied with larger heads, and typically have a two-tone colouration: dark grey/brown on top and light grey/brown below, often with darker spots down the flanks and sometimes with a yellow-orange throat. The eye is large and green in colour.
As they grow, the colours morph into the adult forms. In the Western Cape, the males are dark brown to black on top with bright yellow to yellowish green underneath, while the female are two-tone dark brown on top and light brown underneath. While this is regarded as a

general rule of thumb when it comes to distinguishing males from females, this is not always the case and several “egg laying males” have turned up.
The eyes remain large but darken with age, and the pupils are round and large – this snake has excellent eyesight.
The dorsal scales are keeled.

Habits:
Boomslang are diurnal and habitual snakes that tend to be familiar with their home ranges. They are fast and nervous, but also very shy and docile, and will seldom allow close approach. They are extremely reluctant to bite, even under harassment. This makes Boomslang an easy snake to co-exist with, and should ideally be left in peace to go about their daily business because, if left alone, they present no danger to people or their pets (despite their potent venom). When cornered and threatened, the Boomslang may inflate its throat and neck to almost double its size as a threat display. This is a warning that should be heeded as are the threat displays of any other snake.
Boomslang are mostly arboreal – living in trees and shrubs – but do sometimes come down to the ground too. In suburban areas they have a particular fondness for thick hedges through which they can move safely and undetected.
They sometimes pop their head out above the foliage for better vision (to detect both prey and predators) and will sometimes bob their heads up and down, emulating the wind in the foliage.

Prey:
Lizards and chameleons, birds (especially chicks) as well as on occasion birds’ eggs, and sometimes frogs and toads. Small rodents are eaten too, but they are not the Boomslang’s favourite meal and will only be taken if the snake is either hungry or if the opportunity presents itself. Some Boomslang may become specialist feeders.

Venom:
Boomslang possess a very potent haemotoxin, consisting of procoagulants activating clotting factors II and X (Vaughan-Scott & Lobetti, 1995) causing consumptive coagulopathy, haemorrhagins causing internal haemorrhage, and disintegrins causing platelet and fibrinogen degradation. The venom may or may not contain haemolysins – evidence for that is currently insufficient, but it is most likely that they do not.
Boomslang dry bite fairly often. It should also be noted that they do not need to chew and can deliver a bite to anywhere on the body as they can open their mouth to almost 180 degrees.
It is sometimes stated that drop for drop the Boomslang possesses the most potent venom of any African snake, but while the venom is indeed extremely potent, this claim should be viewed with extreme caution as adequate and accurate testing methods are insufficient and have far too many variables to reach such definite conclusions.
Symptoms:
Humans – The venom is slow acting as consumptive coagulopathy takes place, taking up to 24 for symptoms to show. The first symptom is often light-headedness followed by an increasingly severe headache. Bleeding (often watery) from the site of the fang marks will also occur, as well as bleeding from the nose, gums, any scratches or wounds, and other body orifices. As the blood vessels rupture, large areas of bruising will begin to appear beneath the skin. Internal damage may be extensive, especially to the kidneys, due to massive internal haemorrhaging. If untreated or poorly treated, Boomslang envenomation can be fatal, and it is not a pleasant death.
Dogs – The symptoms are the same as for humans, but the onset of symptoms may be quicker. Bleeding from the fang marks may begin almost immediately in some cases (Hoole & Goddard, 2007). If the bite was not witnessed, it may be confused with the symptoms of the ingestion of anticoagulant rat poisons or acute haemorrhagic diseases (looking for fang punctures may help here).

First Aid and treatment:
Get to hospital as soon as possible. Even if it appears that there are no symptoms the doctors will test for coagulopathy, and should envenomation be detected, 1-2 vials of monovalent Boomslang antivenom may be administered (this may be expensive but it will be effective). In the absence of sufficient early treatment, whole blood transfusions will be required.

Mole Snake (*Pseudaspis cana*)

Scientific name:
Pseudaspis cana (Family: Lamprophiidae – Pseudaspidinae).

Common names:
Mole Snake

Size: 20cm (birth) – 210cm (max.)

Distribution:
Throughout South Africa. In the Cape Town Metro area, they are most abundant on the Cape Flats and the West Coast.

Description:
Juveniles are grey to light brown with distinct dark rhombic zig-zag markings down the back. There are white spots down the flanks. As they get older these markings gradually fade (there are exceptions though). Adults can vary from light brown to black. The scales are smooth, but there have been some exceptions that have keeled scales. The pupils are

round. They have small heads for a snake of their size, ending in a sharp nose, and the scales behind the eyes are small (compared with a Cape Cobra, which has a blunt nose and large scales behind the eyes). Their bodies are strong and cylindrical – the largest and heaviest snake in the Western Cape.

Habits:
Diurnal. They like sandy areas where they can use the burrows of mole rats and other rodents. They spend most of their time underground, but like to come out to bask. If flight isn't an option they can be defensive when disturbed, when they may emit a stereotypical snake hiss, coil up, and mock strike. While they are powerful constrictors, they also employ a biting technique which involves slicing with a sharp cutting edge on the back of the teeth on their lower jaw – useful for killing prey in tight spaces underground where constricting isn't possible, as well as giving them an advantage when it comes to killing prey items, such as large rats and mole rats that can easily inflict damaging bites in return. Unlike most other snakes, males will bite each other when fighting – old males often have many battle scars. They give birth to live young in late summer, up to 40 at a time.

Prey:
Rodents, especially rats and mole rats (making them an especially important species both ecologically and for agriculture). They will also take bird's eggs if the opportunity arises, but they are an opportunistic snack rather than a main part of their diet.

Venom:
None. However their teeth are sharp and in the worst case scenario where a bite from a large adult slices the wound may require stitches.

What to do if you see a snake

First of all, where is the snake?

If the snake is along the boundaries, in thick bush, with easy access to the mountain side, then the snake should just be left alone as it poses no threat. There they are a fact of life:

they're part of the environment and play an important role in pest rodent control. They are elusive and cryptic animals that only pose a threat to humans if they are tampered with.

If, however, it is in the campus itself; along a road; under a car; on the sports field; or any place where it may present a risk of human-wildlife conflict, then it will need to be relocated. To do this, a snake catcher can be called to safely remove the snake. Cape Snake Conservation can assist with this service (082 539 4452 / 084 328 1001), either directly or by putting the caller in touch with the nearest competent and permitted snake catcher. In the meantime, the snake should be observed from a safe distance (3m or so will do, although more skittish snakes like Boomslang or Cape Cobras should be observed from a greater distance). The snake should not be tampered with, although if the observer feels confident enough to throw a blanket or a bucket (if such items are available) over the snake, this will help to prevent the snake from moving off. The snake can then be safely relocated to the nearest safe wild area.

References

Currier, R.B., Harrison, R.A., Rowley, P.D., Laing, G.D. & Wagstaff, S.C. 2010. *Intra-specific variation in venom of the African Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*): Differential expression and activity of snake venom metalloproteinases (SVMPs).* Toxicon 55 (2010) 864–873

Glaudas, X. & Alexander, G.J. 2017. *A lure at both ends: aggressive visual mimicry signals and prey-specific luring behaviour in an ambush-foraging snake*. Behav. Ecol. & Sociobio. (doi:10.1007/s00265-016-2244-6)

Hoole, M. & Goddard, A. 2007. *Boomslang envenomation in 2 dogs in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*. Jl S.Afr.vet.Ass. (2007) 78(1): 49–51

Leisewitz, A.L., Blaylock, R.S., Kettner, F., Goodhead, A., Goddard, A., & Schoeman, J.P. 2004. *The diagnosis and management of snakebite in dogs – a southern African perspective*. Jl S.Afr.vet.Ass. (2004) 75(1): 7–13

Miller, A.K., Maritz, B., McKay, S., Glaudas, X. & Alexander, G.J. 2015. *An ambusher's arsenal: chemical crypsis in the puff adder (*Bitis arietans*).* Proc. R. Soc. B 282: 20152182.

Phelps, T. 2006. Naja nivea – *maximum size*. Natural History Notes.

Phelps, T. 2007. *Observations of the Cape cobra,* Naja nivea *(Serpentes: Elapidae) in the DeHoop Nature Reserve, Western Cape Province, South Africa*. Herpetological Bulletin 99 [2007] 29-35

Strydom, M., Bester, J., Sthembile, M. & Pretorius, E. 2016. *The effect of physiological levels of South African puff adder (*Bitis arietans*) snake venom on blood cells: an in vitro model.* Sci. Rep. 6, 35988; doi: 10.1038/srep35988.

Vulfius, C.A., Gorbacheva, E.V., Starkov, V.G., Osipov, A.V., Kasheverov, I.E., Andreeva, T.V., Astashev, M.E., Tsetlin, V.I. & Utkin, Y.N. 2011. *An unusual phospholipase A2 from puff adder* Bitis arietans *venom – a novel blocker of nicotinic acetylcholine receptors*. Toxicon 57 (2011) 787–793

Vaughan-Scott, T. & Lobetti, R. G. 1995. *Boomslang envenomation in a dog*. Jl S.Afr.vet.Ass. (1995) 66: 265–267