**Snake Awareness Day**

**Last Weekend of September**

**Why are snakes so important?**

**Snakes are vital predators within many ecosystems.**

**Snakes are prey to other snakes, mammals and birds.**

Rodents are prolific breeders and can cause damage to crops and property; snakes help to control rodent populations.

Snakes are found in a range of ecosystems:

- **Terrestrial**
- **Arboreal**
- **Fossorial (burrowing)**
- **Marine**

- Gaboon adder
- Natal green snake
- Stiletto snake
- Yellow-bellied sea snake

They balance food webs in all these ecosystems.
What are the threats to snakes in South Africa?

Habitat loss affects snakes directly and indirectly through reduction in prey availability and fragmentation of populations.

Road kill: Snakes are killed while crossing or basking on warm roads.

Over harvesting: Many are captured for the pet trade, for food, skins or for traditional medicine.

Poison: People use poison to kill rodents. When the snake eats the rodent, it dies.

Humans & pets: Snakes are threatened by humans through fear and intolerance. Domestic pets such as cats and dogs also kill large numbers of snakes.

Scary statistics: Some snake populations are locally extinct because of the threats listed here.

Almost 10% of Southern African snake species are threatened with extinction.

We need to do more research to work out the conservation status of many snake species.
The Truth about Snakes

Less than 10% of southern African snake species are deadly venomous.

Snakes are shy animals that avoid contact with humans.

A snake’s natural response is to flee, but they will defend themselves if they are under threat.

If we leave snakes alone and treat them with respect, our chances of being bitten are greatly reduced.

Safety

Never pick up a snake if you don’t know what species it is, even if it looks dead.

Always wear shoes when walking outside at night.

Use a torch to ensure that you do not stand on a snake.

Keep Calm

Watch where you put your hands when climbing a tree or gardening.

If you see a snake, do not move towards it, remain calm and call someone for help.

If you are bitten, keep calm and go to the nearest hospital.
If you encounter a snake in your home or garden and would like it removed, please consult your nearest snake handler: www.africansnakebiteinstitute.com

**HEAVIEST SNAKE**  
GREEN ANACONDA

A snake in South America measured 5.2 metres and weighed 227 kilograms.

**THE BIG FIVE**

**LONGEST SNAKE**  
RETIRED PYTHON

A Reticulated python in Southeast Asia measured 10 metres.

**LONGEST VENOMOUS SNAKE**  
KING COBRA

A King cobra at the London Zoo measured 5.71 metres.

**LONGEST FANGS**  
GABOON ADDER

Produces the most venom. The fangs grow to 2.5 cm.

**FASTEST SNAKE**  
BLACK MAMBA

Reaches speeds of 16-19 km per hour.

Don’t kill snakes

Don’t use poison to kill rodents

Share the truth about snakes with your family and friends and encourage them to care for snakes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Fact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you kill a snake, its partner will seek revenge on you.</td>
<td>Snakes are solitary animals and do not live with partners or families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you are bitten by a snake, you need to run to water and drink before the snake does.</td>
<td>This myth is thought to originate from when older women spent time at the river collecting water or washing clothes. If a child ran to the water to drink, they would know that the child had been bitten by a snake. Running after being bitten by a snake is not a good idea as it will speed the movement of the venom through the lymphatic system.</td>
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<td>Snakes will drink milk offered to them.</td>
<td>Snakes do not drink milk.</td>
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<td>Strong drain cleaning products can repel snakes.</td>
<td>There is no substance known to repel snakes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You have 5 minutes to live if you are bitten by a snake.</td>
<td>The amount of time it takes to see symptoms of envenomation varies among individuals. Using the correct first aid treatment for snake bites and getting the victim to hospital promptly is important.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snakes have venom in their tails which can be injected into you.</td>
<td>Some snakes have a sharp scale covering the tip of the tail which can poke an attacker, making them think that they have been bitten. Venom can only be injected by the snake’s fangs.</td>
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