

Identification of Snakes

Identification of a snake brought with a snakebite victim can be difficult for someone who is unfamiliar with snakes. The notes below explain some of the terms used and parts of the snake that need to be examined to make an identification. Reading this section first will make the Flow Chart easier to understand.

Caution:
Do not handle live snakes. Even if apparently dead, they may be capable of a reflex bite.

Figure 1: Land snakes possess cylindrical tails, circular in cross-section, that taper to a point (b). Sea snakes have paddle-shaped tails flattened side-to-side (a). (The non-venomous Uropeltids and blind snakes have blunt tails.)

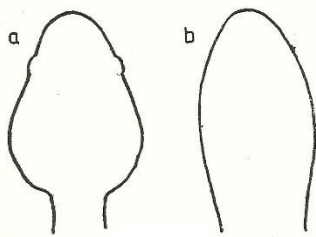
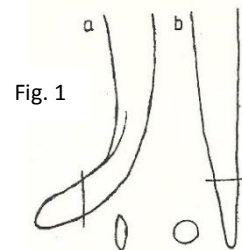


Figure 2: Head shape can be triangular, with a well-defined neck (a), or oval (spatula-shaped) with an ill-defined neck (b).

Figure 3: Heads can be covered with small scales similar to those covering the body (a), or covered with enlarged scales quite different from body scales (b).

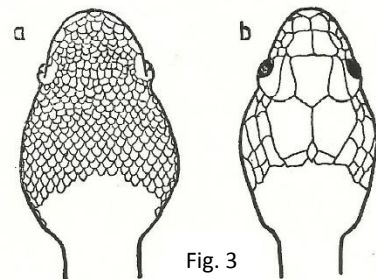


Figure 4: Most snakes have equal-sized scales on the upper part of the body. The kraits, however, have enlarged mid-line (vertebral) scales.

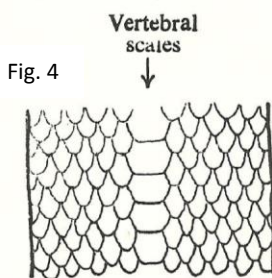


Figure 5: The scales on the underside of the body may extend the full width of the body (b), or they may be narrower (a).

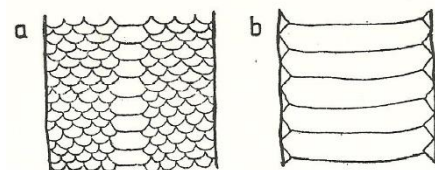


Figure 6: Scales on the underside of the tail, behind the vent (cloacal opening), are termed sub-caudal scales. They may be divided (a) or undivided (b).

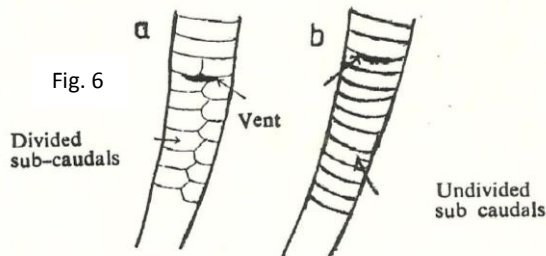
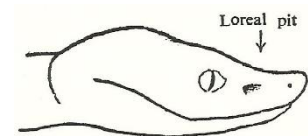


Figure 7: The pit-vipers have a pit (loreal pit) between the eye and nostril on both sides.



Drawings by Jayindra Fernando

Fig. 7