

# Snakes and snake-like lizards of the Hamilton Region

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This article is a brief summary of the most likely species of snakes and snake-like lizards that may be encountered in our region. There are not many species here but since juveniles may be encountered it is not always easy to tell what species may have been seen.

1. **Tiger Snake** (*Notechis scutatus*) – the transverse bands on the body are not always obvious and colour is variable from light brown to black. The underside is yellowish. This is probably the most common snake seen since it occurs in most habitats and is also a good swimmer. If disturbed the snake may become aggressive, flaring its neck and striking towards the intruder. Back off! The venom contains a potent neurotoxin and a bite can be lethal if aid is not available. Do not go bare-legged into its habitat! The snake bears live young.
2. **Copperhead** (*Australaps superba*) – this has a yellowish underside and a copperish-reddish flare to the side (see photo). The back is usually a charcoal grey, sometimes blackish. It is not aggressive unless provoked – I have never been threatened or seen the neck-flattening pose that Tiger Snakes will indulge in but it has been reported. This species is one of the most likely to be seen, since it occurs in many habitats. A bite can be dangerous since the venom containing a neurotoxin and haemolytic properties. The snake bears many live young.
3. **Red-bellied Black Snake** (*Pseuechis porphyriacus*) – this long (up to 2 m), thick snake has a lovely reddish flare on the sides – a beautiful sight. Its preferred habitat is a wet environment (rivers and swamps) but it is not uncommon in other areas where there is cover. I saw one near the northern Grampians, stopping the vehicle just in time to avoid running over what had seemed to be a shadow or a long, thick stick lying across the entire width of the track (see photo). The venom contains a neurotoxin and a bite can be dangerous but rarely fatal to humans. The snake bears live young.
4. **Common Brown Snake** (*Pseudonaja textilis*) – less likely. This species is variable in colour, usually an olive-brown but may be greyish on top and yellowish under. Juveniles may be banded. It is very fast-moving and aggressive if provoked. The venom contains a neurotoxin and also chemicals with both blood-destroying properties – it is a dangerous and deadly snake that is best left alone. It is not commonly reported near Hamilton as it prefers drier areas. This species is an egg-layer.
5. **Little whip snake** (*Unechis flagellum*) – this small snake has a greyish back and a dark blotch on the top of the head. It grows to about 0.4 m. It is usually only seen when disturbed from the earth or from under logs or rocks. I have seen this species in the Grampians and along the Wannon River. The snake has venom but is harmless to humans. It bears a few live young.
6. **White-lipped Snake** (*Drysdalia coronoides*) – the distinctive feature of this small snake is a black and a white streak along the side of the face. It grows to about 0.5 m. It is usually nocturnal and thus rarely seen. . It is not dangerous to humans. The snake bears live young.
7. **Burton's Legless Lizard** (*Lialis burtonis*) – up to 0.6 m. The lizard is striped on sides and back and has a narrow, pointed snout. One should also be able to see ear openings in legless lizards (not present in snakes). I have seen this species elsewhere in Australia but not in our area, although it probably is here. The lizard is harmless to humans.
8. **Common Scaly Foot** (*Pygopus lepidopodus*) – grows to 0.6 m. I have not seen this species in our area but it probably is here. Apparently it may be identified by its broad fleshy tongue, used often to clean the transparent scale that covers the eyes. The lizard is harmless to humans.
9. **Striped Legless Lizard** (*Delmar impar*) – this lizard has stripes along its side and back (see photo). This threatened species is found in grasslands in our area. I have not seen any specimens longer than 0.2-0.3 m – and they do not loiter around to be seen! Usually they are well hidden in tussocks or litter and only seen when digging or overturning rocks or logs. The lizard is harmless to humans. It reproduces by laying eggs.
10. **Striped Worm Lizard** (*Aprasia striolata*) – this is also a threatened species that may occur here. They are very similar to Legless Lizards in shape, length and behaviour (see photo). The lizard is non-venomous.
11. **Blind Snakes** (*Ramphotyphlops* spp) – both *R. nigrescens* and *R. proximus* (**Woodland Blind Snake**) occur in the Dundas Tableland area. I have not seen either species. The latter is a threatened species, 0.5-0.7 m long, brown on top and fading through pink to a white ventral surface. The snout is short and blunt, as is the tail tip, and the body is smooth and shiny, worm-like. The genus are non-venomous burrowing snakes. The snakes reproduce by laying eggs.



Left: A Copperhead Snake hunting a frog in a bush at Lake Monebeong in 2004.

Below: Little Whip Snake in the Grampians in 2002.



Above: A Striped Legless Lizard from Dundonnell Rd in 2006.



Above: A Red-bellied Black Snake on a track north of the Grampians in 1990.



Left: A Striped Worm-lizard at Myaring Bridge, south of Casterton, in 1996.