

# Whip Snakes and Marsh Snakes

## Fact Sheet



Yellow-faced Whip Snake. Image: QM, Jeff Wright.

Brisbane supports a rich snake fauna, with more than 20 different species in the suburbs and peripheral bushland. Several species are at home in the human environment and can be found even in the most densely settled areas. Two of more commonly encountered species can be identified by their distinctive facial markings

### Yellow-faced Whip Snake

The Yellow-faced Whip Snake (*Demansia psammophis*) is a swift, alert species with a slender whip-like body, large eyes and acute vision. The body is bluish-grey to olive-green with a rusty flush or a pair of rusty stripes on the neck and fore-body. The eyes are margined with narrow cream rims and below each eye, a dark comma-shaped streak curves back to the corners of the mouth. Adult length is about 0.75 m, although most specimens are smaller.

Yellow-faced Whip Snakes are the greyhounds of the snake world. They are active by day, and rely on a combination of sharp eyesight and lightning speed to locate, pursue and capture the skinks on which they feed.

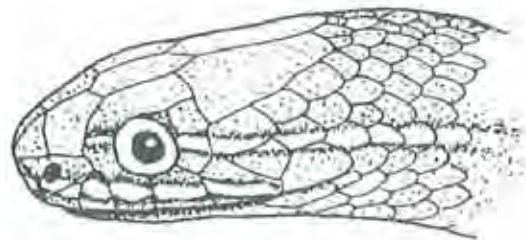
When moving, a whip snake characteristically pauses frequently, raises its head high and keenly surveys its surroundings. Whip snakes are ground-dwellers

Yellow-faced Whip Snakes are egg-layers. They are unusual in that the females often deposit their clutches communally, sometimes returning to the same site over consecutive seasons. At one such site, the remains of more than 500 eggs were found and it seems likely that the site had been utilised over several seasons. Large numbers of whip snakes are known to aggregate during winter.

Such aggregations may occasionally occur under a building slab, or other artificial shelter. The sudden emergence of many snakes over a short period may cause some consternation to home-owners.

Yellow-faced Whip Snakes and their relatives extend over

much of Australia. While plentiful in most habitats, they tend to avoid moist areas with dense, lush vegetation in favour of drier, open sites. For this reason, Yellow-faced Whip Snakes are rare in rainforests, although they may sometimes be found along roads or tracks through these areas. They are abundant in all Brisbane suburbs.



Marsh Snake

### Marsh Snake

The Marsh Snake (*Hemiaspis signata*) can be recognised by the two distinctive narrow white lines on the face; one along the upper lip and one from the eye to the side of the neck. Colour ranges from pale olive to black above, and dark grey to black below. Adults reach 0.7m, but most specimens are smaller than this.

While not seen quite as frequently as the whip snake, the Marsh Snake is a relatively common species in parts of Brisbane, particularly in moist habitats such as swamps, creek banks and rainforests. Well-watered gardens provide excellent habitats for Marsh Snakes.

Like the whip snakes, Marsh Snakes are active by day, but sometimes forage at night during very hot or rainy weather. Food consists of skinks and frogs. Marsh snakes produce litters of 4-20 (usually 10-12) live young. They are

restricted to eastern Australia, occurring in three separate populations: from south-eastern New South Wales to south-eastern Queensland; in mid-eastern Queensland; and in north-eastern Queensland. Each population is isolated from its neighbour by a broad belt of dry terrain that acts as a barrier to this moisture-loving snake.

### **Are they dangerous?**

Yellow-faced Whip Snakes and Marsh Snakes can deliver painful bites and should be treated with caution. Medical advice should be obtained following a bite from any venomous snake. Snakes will generally not behave in an aggressive manner unless molested and it is best to leave snakes alone. Like all reptiles they are protected fauna in Queensland.

### **Further information**

Ryan, M. (Ed.), 2007. *Wildlife of Greater Brisbane*. Queensland Museum, Brisbane.

**Author:** Steve Wilson & Patrick Couper

Queensland Museum  
PO Box 3300, SOUTH BRISBANE QLD 4101  
Phone: (07) 3840 7555  
<http://www.qm.qld.gov.au/>