



TIGER SNAKES

Tiger snakes are amongst the best known of Australia's venomous snakes, mainly because of their wide distribution in the southern states where the first European settlers started their farming and grazing practices. Historical records show that tiger snakes were indiscriminately killed on farms by the hundreds, if not thousands, along the Murray–Darling basin where they were once abundant. That is not the case today. Well known tiger snake habitats around Lake George and Glen Innes in New South Wales or Shepparton in Victoria, where I ventured to collect tiger snakes in the early 1970s for venom extraction, are more or less 'snake free' now. Many of those habitats were converted into hobby farms or were over-grazed by sheep and cattle, and therefore rendered totally uninhabitable to snakes and other wildlife.

Tiger snakes are not offensive and certainly don't deserve the reputation of being aggressive. Although 18 people have

been killed and many more bitten by tiger snakes, this horrifying statistic can be explained – humans encroached on the snake's habitats in a massive way.

Tiger snake venom is one of the most potent in the world. Its main component – a neurotoxin – affects the nervous system, and a solid bite from an adult tiger snake can lead to rapid deterioration of the victim's health followed by paralysis and death if untreated.

Like many other species, tiger snakes are also quite variable in colour and pattern. Typically, tiger snakes are brown with dark bands across their bodies, hence the common name. However, the base colour can also be grey, black, yellow or olive brown with or without bands. The further south in their distribution range, the darker they are, and in some places, particularly on the islands off the south coast, the tiger snakes are jet black.