

Professional Snake Safety Report for Residents of Camargue

Introduction: Snake Activity in Westlake and Muizenberg During Summer

As a pest control operator serving the Westlake and Muizenberg areas of Cape Town, it is essential to address a growing concern among residents: the increased presence of snakes during the active summer season. With the onset of warmer weather, snakes become more active, venturing from their natural habitats into residential complexes in search of food, water, and shelter. This report aims to provide residents with a comprehensive understanding of the types of snakes commonly encountered in these areas, the dangers they pose to people and pets, the reasons for their attraction to residential properties, and practical, effective prevention and safety strategies. The goal is to empower residents with knowledge and actionable advice, ensuring safety while respecting the ecological role of snakes in our environment.

Seasonal Patterns: Why Summer Brings More Snakes

Snake activity in the Western Cape, including Westlake and Muizenberg, peaks from October through April, with the highest visibility during the hot, dry months of late spring and summer. Snakes are ectothermic (cold-blooded), meaning their body temperature and activity levels are directly influenced by environmental temperatures. As the weather warms, snakes emerge from winter dormancy to hunt, mate, and seek new territories. This seasonal surge is further intensified by climate variability, with recent years seeing longer, hotter summers and more frequent heatwaves, which extend the period of heightened snake activity and increase the likelihood of encounters in residential areas.

Main Cause of Concern: Church of Christ

With the lack of proper pest control and poor waste management services witnessed, the main cause of snake activity in the area is the property currently known as the Church of Christ. The slaughter of animals and improper discarding of organic waste in the river area plays a huge factor. Discarded animal waste such as carcasses, blood, offal, and other slaughter byproducts attract various pests including flies, rodents, and scavengers. The over population of rats and mice attract predators like snakes. Tall grass and poor gardening of the property is providing the perfect habitat for snakes. The canal next to both properties, are a water source for rats, mice and the snakes. Several snake holes have been spotted on the banks of the waterway. These pests can carry and spread diseases to humans, such as Salmonella, Leptospirosis, Tularemia, Hantavirus, and E. coli infections.

Types of Snakes in Westlake and Muizenberg

Overview of Local Snake Diversity

Cape Town and its southern suburbs, including Westlake and Muizenberg, are home to approximately 26 snake species. Of these, a small number are highly venomous and pose a significant risk to humans and pets, while the majority are either mildly venomous or completely harmless. Understanding which species are likely to be encountered is crucial for effective risk management and peace of mind.

Table 1: Common Snakes of Westlake and Muizenberg

Snake Name	Venom Status	Typical Habitat	Risk to Humans/Pets	Notable Features
Cape Cobra (<i>Naja nivea</i>)	Highly venomous	Fynbos, gardens, open areas	Severe, potentially fatal	Variable color, spreads hood
Puff Adder (<i>Bitis arietans</i>)	Highly venomous	Grasslands, gardens, paths	Severe, potentially fatal	Thick body, excellent camouflage
Boomslang (<i>Dispholidus typus</i>)	Highly venomous	Trees, shrubs, gardens	Severe, potentially fatal	Large eyes, arboreal, shy
Berg Adder (<i>Bitis atropos</i>)	Highly venomous	Rocky, fynbos, higher ground	Moderate, neurotoxic venom	Short, stocky, variable color
Mole Snake (<i>Pseudaspis cana</i>)	Non-venomous	Gardens, burrows, open areas	Bites can be severe	Large, robust, variable color
Brown House Snake (<i>Boaedon capensis</i>)	Non-venomous	Gardens, homes, outbuildings	None (mild bite)	Brown with white head stripes
Spotted Skaapsteker (<i>Psammophylax rhombeatus</i>)	Mildly venomous	Grass, gardens	Mild, not dangerous	Spotted pattern
Herald Snake (<i>Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia</i>)	Mildly venomous	Damp, gardens, ponds	Mild, not dangerous	Red/orange lips, dark head
Common Egg-eater (<i>Dasypeltis scabra</i>)	Non-venomous	Gardens, bush, compost	None	Mimics puff adder, eats eggs
Common Slug-eater (<i>Duberria lutrix</i>)	Non-venomous	Damp gardens, compost	None	Small, stocky, eats slugs/snails

Highly Venomous Snakes

Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*)

The Cape Cobra is considered the most dangerous snake in the Western Cape and is frequently encountered in suburban gardens, open spaces, and even inside homes during the summer months. Its venom is potently neurotoxic, affecting the nervous system and potentially causing respiratory failure within an hour if untreated. The Cape Cobra is highly variable in color, ranging from bright yellow to dark brown or black, and is known for its defensive hood display. It is active during the day and will bite readily if threatened or cornered.

Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*)

The Puff Adder is responsible for the majority of serious snakebite incidents in South Africa due to its widespread distribution, excellent camouflage, and tendency to remain motionless when approached. Its cytotoxic venom causes severe pain, swelling, tissue damage, and, in rare cases, can be fatal. Puff Adders are often found basking on paths, in gardens, or under debris, and are most active during early mornings and late afternoons.

Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)

The Boomslang is a shy, tree-dwelling snake with a powerful haemotoxic venom that affects blood clotting and can cause fatal internal bleeding if left untreated. Bites are rare, as the Boomslang is generally unaggressive and prefers to avoid humans. Males are typically green with black or blue scales, while females are brown or olive. The Boomslang is most often encountered in trees and dense shrubbery.

Berg Adder (*Bitis atropos*)

The Berg Adder is less commonly encountered but is present in fynbos-rich and rocky areas, including higher ground and sometimes at sea level in the Western Cape. Its venom is largely neurotoxic, and while bites are uncommon, they can cause prolonged sensory effects. The Berg Adder is short, stocky, and variable in color, often sheltering under rocks or grass tussocks.

Mildly Venomous and Non-Venomous Snakes

Mole Snake (*Pseudaspis cana*)

The Mole Snake is a large, robust, non-venomous constrictor that is common in the Western Cape, especially in gardens and open areas. While it poses no venom risk, its bite can be severe and may require medical attention due to its sharp teeth. Mole Snakes are often mistaken for Cape Cobras due to their size and coloration but are valuable for controlling rodent populations.

Brown House Snake (*Boaedon capensis*)

This non-venomous snake is widespread and frequently found in suburban gardens, homes, and outbuildings. It is easily recognized by two white lines running down the sides of its head. Brown House Snakes are harmless to humans and pets and are beneficial for controlling rodents and small pests.

Spotted Skaapsteker (*Psammophylax rhombeatus*)

The Spotted Skaapsteker is mildly venomous but not dangerous to humans or pets. It is a fast-moving snake commonly found in grasslands and gardens, preying on small rodents and lizards.

Herald Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

Also known as the Red-lipped Snake, the Herald Snake is mildly venomous but not considered dangerous. It is often found in damp areas, gardens, and near water features, feeding primarily on frogs and small lizards.

Common Egg-eater (*Dasypeltis scabra*) and Common Slug-eater (*Duberria lutrix*)

Both species are non-venomous and completely harmless. The Egg-eater mimics the Puff Adder in appearance and defensive behavior but feeds exclusively on bird eggs, while the Slug-eater is a small, stocky snake that preys on slugs and snails, making it a gardener's ally.

Summary Table: Venomous vs. Non-Venomous Snakes

Category	Example Species	Risk Level	Typical Reaction to Humans
Highly Venomous	Cape Cobra, Puff Adder, Boomslang, Berg Adder	Severe (potentially fatal)	Defensive, may bite if threatened
Mildly Venomous	Spotted Skaapsteker, Herald Snake, Karoo Sand Snake	Mild, not dangerous	Will bite if handled, not life-threatening
Non-Venomous	Mole Snake, Brown House Snake, Egg-eater, Slug-eater	None (bite may cause minor injury)	Defensive, will flee or bite if provoked

It is important to note that even non-venomous snakes can bite if handled or threatened, and all snakes should be treated with caution and respect.

Dangers Posed by Snakes to Residents and Pets

Risks to Humans

The primary danger posed by snakes in residential areas is the risk of venomous bites, which can result in severe medical emergencies. The Cape Cobra and Puff Adder are responsible for the majority of serious snakebite incidents in the Western Cape, with symptoms ranging from pain and swelling to respiratory failure and, in rare cases, death if not treated promptly. The Boomslang, while less likely to bite, can cause fatal internal bleeding if medical attention is delayed.

Most snakebites occur when people accidentally step on or disturb a snake, often while gardening, walking in tall grass, or reaching into hidden areas. Children are particularly vulnerable due to their curiosity and smaller size, which can result in more severe envenomation relative to body weight.

Risks to Pets

Pets, especially dogs, are at significant risk of snakebite due to their inquisitive nature and tendency to investigate or attack snakes. Dogs are often bitten on the head, neck, or shoulders, which can lead to rapid venom absorption and severe symptoms. Cats, being more agile and cautious, are less frequently bitten but can still be at risk, particularly if they hunt or play with snakes.

Symptoms of snakebite in pets include sudden pain and swelling at the bite site, lethargy, difficulty breathing, bleeding, vomiting, and, in severe cases, collapse or death. Immediate veterinary attention is critical, as antivenom may be required for survival, especially in cases involving Cape Cobras or Puff Adders.

Additional Hazards

Beyond bites, snakes can pose other hazards in residential settings:

- **Health risks from droppings:** Snake feces can carry harmful bacteria, posing a risk of infection, especially in areas where children or pets play.
- **Psychological stress:** The presence of snakes can cause significant anxiety and distress for residents, particularly those with a fear of snakes (ophidiophobia).
- **Property damage:** Snakes may enter homes, garages, or outbuildings in search of shelter, potentially causing damage or creating nests in insulation, storage areas, or HVAC systems.

Why Snakes Are Attracted to Residential Complexes

Food Sources

The most significant attractant for snakes is the availability of food, primarily rodents such as mice and rats, as well as frogs, lizards, birds, and insects. Residential complexes often provide abundant food sources due to:

- Poor waste management, which attracts rodents.
- Bird feeders and pet food left outdoors, which draw rodents and small mammals.
- Compost heaps and unkempt gardens, which harbor insects, slugs, and other prey.

Where there is a rodent problem, snakes are likely to follow, as they are natural predators and play a vital role in controlling pest populations.

Shelter and Hiding Spots

Snakes seek out environments that offer shelter from predators, temperature extremes, and human disturbance. Common hiding places in residential complexes include:

- Tall grass, dense shrubbery, and overgrown gardens.
- Piles of leaves, firewood, rocks, or building materials.
- Cluttered garages, storage sheds, and basements.
- Gaps under decks, patios, or porches.
- Compost heaps and mulch beds.
- Cracks or holes in foundations, walls, or around utility pipes.

These features provide the cool, damp, and secluded microhabitats that snakes need for resting, digesting food, and laying eggs.

Water and Climate

Snakes require water for hydration and are attracted to properties with accessible water sources, such as ponds, swimming pools, birdbaths, or leaky outdoor faucets. During droughts or heatwaves, snakes may venture into gardens and homes in search of moisture.

The Mediterranean climate of Cape Town, with its hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters, creates ideal conditions for snake activity. As climate change drives longer, hotter summers and more frequent droughts, snakes are increasingly forced to seek food and water in urban areas.

Human Activity and Landscaping

Certain human behaviors and landscaping choices can inadvertently make residential complexes more attractive to snakes:

- Poorly maintained gardens with dense vegetation and debris.
- Overwatering lawns, which attracts frogs and insects.
- Construction and land clearing, which displace snakes from natural habitats.

- Leaving pet food and water bowls outside.
- Storing firewood, building materials, or clutter near the home.

By understanding these attractants, residents can take proactive steps to make their properties less appealing to snakes.

Signs of Snake Presence on Properties

Early detection of snake activity is crucial for effective prevention and safety. The following signs may indicate that snakes are present on your property:

- **Shed skins:** Snakes regularly shed their skin as they grow. Finding a translucent, scaly skin in gardens, along fences, or under debris is a clear sign of recent snake activity.
- **Slither tracks:** Smooth, wavy lines in dust, sand, or soft soil indicate a snake has passed through the area.
- **Snake droppings:** Snake feces are typically dark with a chalky white cap and may contain fur, bones, or insect parts from their prey.
- **Small, rounded holes:** Snakes often use abandoned rodent burrows or create their own entry points under foundations, decks, or in gardens.
- **Unusual pet behavior:** Dogs or cats may bark, sniff, or paw at specific spots where snakes are hiding.
- **Sudden decrease in rodent or frog populations:** A noticeable drop in small animal activity may indicate the presence of a predator, such as a snake.
- **Sightings of baby snakes or eggs:** Finding snake eggs or juvenile snakes suggests that a snake has established a breeding site on the property.

If any of these signs are observed, it is advisable to contact a professional pest control operator or snake removal expert for assessment and safe intervention.

Practical Prevention and Exclusion Methods for Complexes

Yard and Garden Maintenance

- **Keep grass short and trim vegetation:** Regularly mow lawns, trim bushes, and remove overgrown plants to eliminate hiding spots for snakes and their prey.
- **Remove debris and clutter:** Clear away piles of leaves, firewood, rocks, and building materials from around the home and communal areas. Store firewood and materials off the ground and away from walls.
- **Maintain compost heaps and mulch beds:** Use enclosed compost bins and avoid excessive mulch, which can attract rodents and provide shelter for snakes.
- **Prune shrubs and trees:** Keep branches trimmed away from balconies, sliding doors, and windows to prevent snakes from accessing upper levels.

Property Exclusion and Proofing

- **Seal entry points:** Inspect the foundation, walls, doors, windows, and vents for gaps or cracks. Use weather-stripping, caulk, or mesh screens to seal openings as small as 6mm, as both rodents and snakes can squeeze through surprisingly small spaces.
- **Snake Repellent:** Consider snake-proof, with professional grade snake repellent around the perimeter of the complex, especially in areas adjacent to natural habitats or water sources.
- **Secure communal areas:** Ensure that communal storage rooms, garages, and utility areas are kept tidy and free of clutter. Install door sweeps and screens on vents and windows.

Water and Waste Management

- **Eliminate standing water:** Fix leaky outdoor faucets, hoses, and irrigation systems. Keep swimming pools and ponds well maintained and free of excessive vegetation.
- **Manage waste effectively:** Use rodent-proof bins with tight-fitting lids for garbage and compost. Remove food waste promptly and avoid leaving pet food or birdseed outdoors.

Landscaping Choices

- **Opt for less dense ground cover:** Use gravel or stone mulch instead of organic materials, which retain moisture and attract prey animals.
- **Create clear zones:** Maintain a 6-inch mulch- or gravel-free zone around the foundation to discourage snakes from approaching the building.

Rodent Control and Integrated Pest Management

Rodent infestations are the leading cause of snake presence in residential areas. An integrated pest management (IPM) approach is essential:

- **Identify and eliminate rodent entry points:** Seal holes, cracks, and gaps in walls, roofs, and around utility pipes.
 - **Maintain cleanliness:** Store food in sealed containers, clean up crumbs and spills promptly, and declutter storage areas to remove nesting sites for rodents.
 - **Use professional rodent control services:** Engage licensed pest control operators to assess, treat, and monitor rodent populations using safe, eco-friendly methods.
 - **Educate residents:** Inform all residents about the importance of proper waste management and food storage to prevent attracting rodents and, by extension, snakes.
 - **Bait Station:** Installing bait station for rat and mice would drastically improve the elimination of the snake primary food source. A professional pest control operator should check bait station regularly, to track and monitor rat and mice movement and keep the units filled.
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Safe Response and Emergency Actions for Snake Encounters

What to Do If You Encounter a Snake

- **Remain calm:** Do not panic or make sudden movements. Most snakes will not attack unless provoked or threatened.
- **Keep a safe distance:** Stay at least 3–5 meters away from the snake. Do not attempt to touch, catch, or kill it, as this is when most bites occur.
- **Monitor the snake:** If possible, keep an eye on the snake's location until a professional arrives. This helps ensure safe and effective removal.
- **Contact a professional:** Call a licensed snake removal expert or pest control operator for safe, humane relocation. Save local snake catcher numbers on your phone for quick access.
- **Do not try to kill the snake:** Killing snakes is dangerous, illegal in many cases, and disrupts the local ecosystem. Most snakes are protected by law and play a vital role in controlling pests.

Emergency Actions for Snakebite

If a snakebite occurs:

- **Call for medical help immediately:** Get the victim to the nearest hospital or trauma unit as quickly as possible. Time is critical, especially for bites from Cape Cobras, Puff Adders, or Boomslangs.
- **Keep the victim calm and still:** Movement increases the spread of venom. Immobilize the affected limb and keep it below heart level if possible.
- **Remove tight clothing and jewelry:** Swelling may occur rapidly, so remove rings, bracelets, or tight clothing from the affected area.
- **Do not cut, suck, or apply a tourniquet:** These methods are ineffective and can cause more harm than good.
- **If possible, identify the snake:** Take a photo from a safe distance or remember its appearance to assist medical staff in selecting the correct antivenom.
- **For venom in the eyes:** If spat at by a spitting snake, rinse the eyes with clean water for at least 15–20 minutes and seek medical attention.

Emergency Contacts

- **Tygerberg Poison Information Centre:** 0861 555 777
- **Netcare Ambulance:** 082 911
- **ER24 Ambulance:** 084 124
- **Provincial Ambulance:** 10177/112
- **African Snakebite Institute:** +27 (0)82 494 2039
- **Local Snake Catchers:** Save contact details for rapid response (e.g., Shaun McLeod: 082 532 5033; Tyrone Ping: 084 492 2542).

Professional Removal and Humane Handling Practices

Why Professional Removal Is Essential

Attempting to remove or kill a snake yourself is dangerous and often illegal. Professional snake handlers are trained to identify species, assess risks, and use specialized equipment to capture and relocate snakes safely and humanely. They also help identify and address the underlying attractants that brought the snake to your property in the first place.

Humane and Eco-Friendly Solutions

Professional pest control operators and snake removers use eco-friendly and humane methods, ensuring that snakes are not harmed and are relocated to suitable habitats away from human settlements. This approach protects both residents and the environment, maintaining the ecological balance and supporting biodiversity.

Legal Requirements

In the Western Cape, all snake removers are required by law to hold a valid catch and release permit issued by CapeNature, valid for one year. This ensures that removals are conducted ethically, safely, and in compliance with conservation regulations. Residents should always verify that any snake remover they contact is properly licensed.

Legal and Environmental Considerations

Conservation Laws

Snakes are protected under South African and Western Cape conservation laws. It is illegal to kill, capture, or keep indigenous snakes without the appropriate permits. The City of Cape Town's Animal Keeping By-law and provincial ordinances regulate the keeping, removal, and relocation of wild animals, including snakes, to ensure humane treatment and ecological sustainability.

Environmental Impact

Snakes play a crucial role in controlling rodent and pest populations, contributing to the health of local ecosystems. Removing or killing snakes disrupts this balance and can lead to increased pest problems. Residents are encouraged to adopt coexistence strategies, focusing on prevention and professional intervention rather than eradication.

Common Hiding Places in Apartment Complexes and Communal Areas

Understanding where snakes are likely to hide can help residents and property managers implement targeted prevention measures. Common hiding places include:

- **Under decks, patios, and porches:** These areas provide cool, dark shelter.
- **In tall grass, dense shrubbery, and overgrown gardens:** Ideal for both snakes and their prey.
- **Piles of firewood, rocks, or building materials:** Offer protection from predators and temperature extremes.
- **Compost heaps, mulch beds, and leaf piles:** Attract prey and provide moisture.
- **Basements, crawl spaces, and storage rooms:** Especially if cluttered or poorly sealed.
- **Gaps or cracks in foundations, walls, or around utility pipes:** Entry points for both rodents and snakes.
- **Near water features, ponds, or swimming pools:** Attract snakes seeking hydration and prey.

Regular inspection and maintenance of these areas are key to reducing the risk of snake encounters.

Pet Safety Measures and Training for Residents

Prevention Strategies

- **Keep pets on a leash:** When walking dogs in areas where snakes may be present, keep them on a leash and avoid tall grass, undergrowth, or known snake habitats.
- **Supervise outdoor play:** Do not allow pets to roam unsupervised in gardens, especially during peak snake activity months.
- **Maintain a clean yard:** Remove potential hiding spots and keep grass short to reduce the likelihood of encounters.
- **Educate yourself and your family:** Learn to recognize local venomous snakes and teach children and pets to avoid them.

Emergency Response for Pets

- **If bitten, seek immediate veterinary care:** Snakebites in pets require urgent attention. Do not attempt home remedies; transport your pet to the nearest veterinary clinic as quickly as possible.
- **Keep the pet calm and immobilized:** Carry the animal if possible to slow the spread of venom.
- **Provide information to the vet:** If you know the type of snake or have a photo, share this with the veterinarian to assist in treatment.

Training and Awareness

- **Pet training:** Consider training dogs to avoid snakes using professional aversion techniques.
 - **Community education:** Share information about snake risks and prevention with all residents, including pet owners.
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Community Education and Resident Communication Strategies

Raising Awareness

Education is the most effective tool for reducing fear and promoting safe coexistence with snakes. Complex managers and residents should:

- **Distribute educational materials:** Provide leaflets, posters, or digital resources on local snake species, prevention tips, and emergency contacts.
- **Host awareness sessions:** Invite pest control operators or snake experts to conduct workshops or talks for residents, focusing on identification, safety, and first aid.
- **Promote reporting:** Encourage residents to report snake sightings promptly to management or designated snake catchers.

Communication Channels

- **Establish a central contact point:** Designate a resident or staff member as the point of contact for snake-related issues.
- **Use digital platforms:** Share updates, tips, and emergency information via email, WhatsApp groups, or community notice boards.
- **Regular reminders:** Issue seasonal reminders at the start of snake season, highlighting prevention measures and emergency procedures.

Collaboration with Professionals

- **Partner with licensed pest control and snake removal services:** Ensure rapid response and expert advice for all snake encounters.
 - **Engage with local conservation authorities:** Stay informed about legal requirements and best practices for humane snake management.
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Professional Grade Snake Repellent vs Domestic Over-the-Counter Snake Repellent Spray

- Professional grade snake repellents are typically formulated with stronger, EPA-registered active ingredients designed for larger-scale or commercial use, offering longer-lasting and more effective snake deterrence.
- These repellents often come in granular or concentrated forms that cover larger areas and may require specialized application techniques.
- Domestic over-the-counter snake repellent sprays are generally milder, designed for smaller residential areas, and may use natural or less potent chemicals.
- Over-the-counter sprays are easier to apply but may require more frequent reapplication and might not be as effective against all snake species.
- Professional repellents may also include additional features such as weather resistance and broader pest control capabilities.
- Choosing between the two depends on the severity of the snake problem, area size, and safety considerations for pets and children.

Conclusion: Proactive Safety and Coexistence

Snakes are an integral part of the Cape Town ecosystem, providing essential pest control and contributing to biodiversity. However, their presence in residential areas, especially during the active summer season, poses real risks to residents and pets. By understanding the types of snakes found in Westlake and Muizenberg, recognizing the dangers, they pose, and implementing practical prevention and exclusion strategies, residents can significantly reduce the likelihood of unwanted encounters.

Key takeaways include:

- **Maintain tidy, well-managed gardens and communal areas.**
- **Seal entry points and eliminate hiding spots.**
- **Control rodent populations through integrated pest management.**
- **Respond calmly and safely to snake sightings; never attempt removal yourself.**
- **Educate all residents and promote clear communication and rapid reporting.**
- **Engage professional, licensed snake removal and pest control services for humane, effective solutions.**

By working together as a community and staying informed, residents of Westlake and Muizenberg can enjoy a safer, more comfortable living environment while respecting the vital role that snakes play in our natural world.

For further information, emergency contacts, or to arrange a professional inspection or awareness session, please contact us on 072 681 0036 or 063 668 7695. We do offer industrial grade snake repellent services in the Muizenberg area.