

THE 'STRIKING' CORAL SNAKE

One of the most colourful, yet one of the deadliest snakes in the Amazon rainforest, the coral snake, known as 'Naka Naka' to the local tribespeople, belongs to the cobra family.

Classification

Snakes belong to the reptile animal class - other reptiles include lizards, crocodiles and turtles. Reptiles are **cold-blooded**, which means they cannot make their own body heat. They can only control their body temperature by moving to a suitable environment. They have no feathers to keep them warm or sweat glands to cool them down. Instead, they must rely on the warm sun, shady crevices and cool waters to do this. Coral snakes also belong to the **elapidae** family, a group of highly venomous snakes.

Characteristics

There are over seventy species of coral snake. They are mostly tri-coloured, with brightly coloured bands of red, yellow and black. They have a slender body with shiny skin, and in the case of the 'Naka Naka', grow to between 45cm and 50cm long. Coral snakes differ from other snakes in that they have round pupils; their small eyes are set within a blunt black head. Short hollow fangs inject their prey with the second strongest venom after that of the Black Mamba.



The coral snakes' distinctive markings serve as a deterrent to other animals.

Did You know? The coral snake was named by early explorers, who compared their brightly coloured scales to the ocean corals they discovered on their voyages.

Habitat

Coral snakes are very versatile and can live on the damp, dark forest floor or high up in the forest canopy. Shy, non-aggressive and rarely spotted, they like to hide amongst dense rotting leaves and in tree stumps. A large proportion of their time is spent underground in holes, often dug by other animals. They are also very adept at burrowing their own holes, when under threat.

Diet

Mammals, birds, frogs, lizards and other snakes are amongst their prey. These tend to be reasonably small, as once paralysed by the potent **neurotoxic** venom, the meal is swallowed whole!

Predators

Snakes are the main food source for birds of prey, such as the Harpy Eagle, although its colourful markings act as a natural defence, warning others that it is poisonous and thus deterring many predators. When threatened, they curl up the tip of their tail to confuse the aggressor, making it impossible to distinguish between the head and the tail.

Did you know? Most venomous snakes are immune to their own venom. However, coral snakes will die if bitten by another coral snake.

Offspring

Female coral snakes normally lay 3-5 eggs, which take 2-3 months to hatch. Once born, the hatchlings are abandoned - however, they are born with venom stronger than their parents, so they can protect themselves. A baby snake is called a **snakelet**.