



SEA SNAKES OF INDIA

Sea snakes are specialized, venomous reptiles adapted to marine life, with over 25 species found in India's coastal waters and coral reefs. They belong to two families: Elapidae (true sea snakes) and Laticaudidae (sea kraits). With laterally compressed bodies and paddle-like tails, they excel in water and can absorb oxygen through their skin, reducing the need to surface for air. These snakes are important for marine ecosystems, preying on fish and invertebrates, which helps maintain ecological balance. However, they face threats from bycatch, habitat degradation, and pollution, making conservation efforts crucial to their survival in Indian waters.

DIET

Sea snakes have diverse feeding strategies, primarily preying on small fish, eels, and crustaceans using potent venom. The Blue-banded Sea Krait focuses on sea eels and mudskippers, while the hook-nosed sea snake and Yellow-lipped Sea Krait are generalists. Sea Kraits forage in coral reefs and return to land for digestion, whereas true sea snakes do not. Their specialized foraging techniques and chemosensory abilities highlight their crucial ecological role in maintaining marine ecosystem balance.



Hook-nosed sea snake

REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY

Sea snakes have two main reproductive strategies. Sea kraits (*Laticauda spp.*) are oviparous, laying eggs on land and returning to coastal areas to nest. Most true sea snakes, however, are ovoviviparous, giving birth to live young in the ocean, which allows them to complete their life cycle at sea. They typically produce 10 to 30 offspring each breeding cycle, but their generally low reproductive rates make them vulnerable to human-induced threats.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Sea snakes in India inhabit various marine environments, from coral reefs, mangroves, and estuaries, with some species venturing into open oceans. Coastal species like the beaked sea snake (*Hydrophis schistosus*) thrive in shallow waters and estuaries, tolerating varying salinity. Coral reef species, such as the banded sea krait (*Laticauda colubrina*), are semi-aquatic and come ashore to rest and breed. Pelagic species, like the yellow-bellied sea snake (*Hydrophis platurus*), drift in open oceans, travelling long distances with ocean currents.



Yellow sea snake



Blue-banded sea krait



Scan the QR to access our outreach materials!