

THE COMMON KRAIT

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The common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*) is a highly venomous snake found in the Indian subcontinent. It is one of the most dangerous snakes in India and is part of the "big four" group responsible for the majority of snakebite cases in the region. The common krait's venom is neurotoxic, affecting the nervous system, and its bites can be fatal without timely medical intervention.

Taxonomy and Classification

- Family: Elapidae
- Genus: Bungarus
- Species: Bungarus caeruleus

Description

- **Size:** The common krait typically grows to about 1 to 1.75 meters (3.3 to 5.7 feet) in length, though some individuals can reach up to 2 meters (6.6 feet).

- **Coloration:** It has a smooth, shiny black or bluish-black body with thin, white crossbands, especially on the posterior half. The ventral side is white or pale. Young kraits usually have more distinct banding, which fades with age.
- **Head:** The head is relatively small, barely distinguishable from the neck, and the eyes are small with round pupils.

Habitat and Distribution

- **Native Range:** The common krait is widely distributed across the Indian subcontinent, including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal.
- **Habitat:** It inhabits a range of environments, including forests, grasslands, agricultural areas, and human settlements. Kraits are often found near water sources, such as rivers, lakes, and ponds, but can also be found in dry areas.

Behavior and Diet

- **Nocturnal:** The common krait is primarily nocturnal and is rarely seen during the day. At night, it becomes active and hunts for prey.
- **Diet:** Kraits feed primarily on other snakes, including venomous species, but also eat small mammals, lizards, frogs, and occasionally fish.

- They are cannibalistic, meaning they sometimes eat other kraits.
- **Defensive Behavior:** During the day, kraits are generally sluggish and do not actively bite unless provoked. However, at night, they are more aggressive. When threatened, they may hide their head under their coils and may not strike immediately. Their bite is painless and often unnoticed, which can delay treatment.

Venom

- **Type:** Neurotoxic venom
- **Effects:** The venom primarily affects the nervous system, leading to paralysis. Symptoms include muscle weakness, difficulty breathing, and paralysis of respiratory muscles, which can result in death if untreated.
- **Mortality:** Bites from common kraits can be fatal if not treated with antivenom in time, as the neurotoxic effects can cause respiratory failure. Since the bite is often painless and unnoticed during sleep, victims may not realize they've been bitten until symptoms develop.

Reproduction

- **Breeding Season:** Common kraits typically breed during the rainy season.
- **Egg-laying:** Females lay between 6 to 12 eggs in a hidden, protected location such as under leaf litter or in rodent burrows. The eggs hatch after an incubation period of around 2 to 3 months.
- **Parental Care:** There is no parental care after the eggs are laid.

Conservation Status

- **IUCN Status:** Least Concern.
- **Population:** The common krait has a stable population due to its adaptability to various habitats, including those impacted by humans.

Ecological Role: As a predator, the common krait plays a significant role in controlling the populations of other snakes, rodents, and small animals. By preying on these animals, it helps to balance the ecosystems where it is found.

Human Interaction: The common krait is responsible for many snakebite incidents, especially in rural areas. People are often bitten during the night while they sleep, as kraits may enter homes in search of prey. Due to the nature of the bite being painless and unnoticed, there is often a delay in seeking medical treatment, making the snake especially dangerous.

First Aid for Krait Bites

- Immobilize the affected limb to slow venom spread.
- Seek immediate medical attention.
- **Antivenom:** The only effective treatment for krait bites is the administration of antivenom at a medical facility.

Cultural Significance

Despite its danger, the common krait is respected in many cultures, as snakes hold symbolic importance in folklore and religion throughout the Indian subcontinent. In summary, the common krait is a highly venomous and nocturnal snake with significant medical and ecological importance. Its neurotoxic venom makes it one of the deadliest snakes in its range, but it plays a key role in controlling small animal populations.