



HABITAT cont'd

Other marine life that mimics sea snake patterns include snake eels, which are fish as opposed to reptiles. There are at least 12 different species of snake eels mimicking sea snake colourations. In the Indo-Pacific and Pacific regions alone, you'll find snake eels such as the Banded or Harlequin Snake Eel, most often mistaken as a sea snake. It's found in numerous regions from the Cook Islands, French Polynesia and Hawaii to the Maldives, Mauritius, Reunion, Mozambique and Tanzania. Add to that the Spotted, Saddled, Magnificent, Sharptail, Many-Eyed, Blotched, Napoleon, Convict, Half-Banded and the Tiger Snake Eel, with the latter seen in the Galapagos, Socorro Islands and elsewhere.

A special mention is the Snake Blenny, a fish that mimics the Snake Eel that mimics the Banded Sea Snake.

Reports have come to light in the press of striped sea snakes outside their normal habitat range, such as in Tahiti and the Cook Islands. The reports mention nesting on land, thus making it doubtful that they were snake eels. The belief is that the sea snakes were stowaways that sneaked aboard on an inter-island yacht or ship. Like Bull Sharks, sea snakes have also been seen 100 miles from the sea up river.

Even some types of Moray Eels mimic sea snakes to ward off predators. Such as the Tiger, Snowflake and the Zebra Moray Eels, with the latter inhabiting Southern Baja, Mexico and from Guatemala to Colombia and even as far as the North East of South Africa, including the Red Sea. Perhaps this explains why although striped sea snakes are not generally found in the Red Sea, Cousteau's experiments showed that stripes had an affect on sharks in that region.

In terms of colouration, the stripes of sea snakes can vary due to diet and the influence of ocean pollution, where white hues can swing from beige to blue-ish tones. Certain Olive Sea Snakes sometimes can be seen with stripes. At depth, the Yellow Bellied Sea Snake will appear black and white, due to the absorption of the colour spectrum underwater. In fact, their tails are often pale yellow to white with black contrasting markings.

Beware that sea snakes stranded on the beach that appear dead or dying are often only feigning death. Even dead, their reflex can deliver a venomous bite. Despite rumours, sea snake fangs are long enough to pierce some wetsuits. Though generally shy and not known to be aggressive, they will display protective behaviour during mating season especially on land while nesting.

The etymology of the term "krait" dates back to the 19th century, originally derived from the Hindu "karait" and adopted during British colonial times. Sea kraits belong to the same Hydrophiinae family as sea snakes.