

Aipysurus laevis

Steven Garwood, 2002

Authority: Lacepede, 1804

Common Name: Olive sea snake

Description (Cogger 1994; Greene 1997; Mirtschin and Davis 1992). The largest member of the genus, with a distinctive head and a robust body. Average size is 1.2 meters, however, the species has been known to reach lengths of more than 2.0 meters. Coloration is highly variable with specimens being dorsally dark brown or purplish-brown fading to paler brown on the ventral surface. Most specimens have creamy white scales scattered over their body. The vertical compressed tail is mostly creamy white with a brown dorsal ridge. The tail has photoreceptors for detecting light movement while the snake forages in the coral for prey. Body scales are smooth and imbricate. They are arranged in rows of between 21-25 scales with the anal scale being divided. Snakes have valvular nostrils, which allow them to dive, while the tongue protrudes via a notch in the rostral scale for smelling a prey's location.

Similar species (Cogger 1994; Shine 1991): *A. laevis* is very similar to another member of its Genus *Aipysurus pooleorum*.

Range (Cogger 1994): Lives on reefs in the tropical coastal waters of northern Australia. From Brisbane on the east coast all the way around to Shark bay on the west coast is the range of the Olive sea snake. Extra limits are New Guinea and the Coral Sea.

Ecology and behaviour (Cogger 1994; Greene 1997; Ehmann 1992; Shine 1991): Commonly found inhabiting coral reefs, lagoons, coral patches and rocky shores to depths ranging between 5 and 45 meters where they forage for their prey. They are generalized predators on fish, their eggs, cuttlefish prawns, and crabs. Can cover a distance of 500 meters during a dive and stay submerged for 26 minutes. Foraging for prey occurs both day and night, snakes try to catch sleeping fish sheltering in the coral maze. One of the most common snakes found associated with the shallow reef. Very curious around divers and this curiosity was thought to be an aggressive trait. Uses constriction to hold captured prey whilst injecting venom, which contains proteolytic enzymes. These enzymes start digesting the prey from the inside, while the saliva starts digestion exteriorly.

Breeding biology (Burns and Heatwole 2000; Greene 1997; Mirtschin and Davis 1992): There is sexual dimorphism in size, with females being bigger than males. They lie on the seafloor while copulating after performing a pelagic courtship, which can include several males competing for a single female. They are live bearing snakes that don't require land for egg-laying. Produce 2-5 young, which grow at a rate of 0.22-0.95 cm/month. Males will reach sexual maturity in their third year, while females will take four years. Olive sea snakes can live to be about 15 years old.

Literature cited:

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