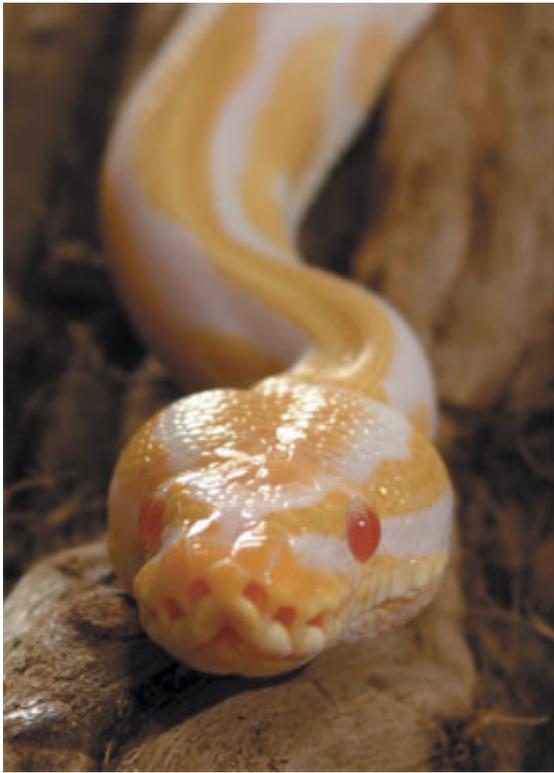


Mites & Ticks on Snakes: What to Do

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how to **recognize & remove** mites & ticks

Ticks and mites are the most common external parasites found on snakes and can pose a real threat to the health of your snake. Both ticks and mites feed on blood and severe infestations may cause anemia, leaving the snake weakened and susceptible to disease.

Furthermore, they can transmit a number of diseases including various protozoan parasites.

Immediate signs of tick infestations include abnormal shedding or localized areas of irritation while the scales of snakes parasitized by mites may be pitted or crusty with small hemorrhages. [Mite infestations](#) reach numbers much greater than tick infestations and may cause snakes to have a dull appearance. Affected animals may be depressed, lose their appetite and can be found rubbing themselves or soaking in water for long periods of time.

Diagnosis

Since adult ticks and mites are visible with the naked eye, infestations are fairly easy to diagnose. Though heavy tick and mite infestations are most commonly found on recently imported, wild-caught snakes or snakes kept in crowded unsanitary conditions, it's a good idea to carefully inspect your snake on a daily basis for these parasites as well as anything out of the ordinary.

Ticks and mites are usually found buried under the scales or near the eyes, mouth and nostrils of snakes. Mites tend to be slightly more difficult to diagnose since they are much smaller than ticks and look like tiny black or red dots.

Treatment

Though the owner can perform some tick and mite treatments, always consult with a veterinarian first if your pet snake shows signs of anemia or weakness. Have your veterinarian treat or recommend the best course of action for your snake.

Ticks can be manually removed using small forceps or tweezers. If there are ticks near the mouth, nostrils, or any other sensitive areas, have a veterinarian remove the parasites for you.



1. Grab the tick by the mouthpart right where it is entering the skin. Do not grab the tick by the body or head since it may break off and the mouthpart may remain lodged in the skin.
2. Without jerking, pull firmly and steadily in an outward, extracting motion. Do not twist the tick while pulling.
3. After removing the tick, place it in a jar of alcohol to kill the tick. Flushing ticks down the toilet do not kill them.
4. After removing all the ticks, wash your hands thoroughly.



Avoid using your fingers to remove or dispose ticks to prevent contact with potentially harmful, disease-carrying ticks. Do not crush ticks with your fingers. The fluids may contain and transmit disease.

Mite infestations can be treated in a variety of ways, including the use of insecticides/pesticides. These chemicals can be hazardous to your snake so always consult with your veterinarian first.

- Water baths - Soak your snake in a lukewarm water bath for 20 minutes. The attached mites will drown but mites on the head or areas that were not submerged will not be affected.
- Olive oil - Olive oil can be applied to the entire animal. It works by smothering the mites but this method can be messy.
- Pyrethroids - Pyrethroids are synthetic variations of the insecticide pyrethrin, which is found naturally in chrysanthemums. Pyrethroids generally kill mites in a shorter period of time and have longer residual activity. Resmethrin, a pyrethroid, at a concentration of 0.35% is found in commercial sprays and is effective and generally safer for use in reptiles than pyrethrins, if used according to directions. Spray the animal with the product, avoiding the mouth and eyes. Then rinse the product off under running lukewarm water. Do not leave the product on the animal or toxicity may result. Rinsing the animal off will remove the pyrethroid and the dead mites.

The treatment of your snake is only the first step. It is just as important to rid your snake's environment of ticks and mites to prevent re-infestation. It does not make sense to put your treated and clean snake back into an infested home. Properly clean and sanitize your snake's environment with a diluted bleach solution (1-3 ounces of household bleach to one quart of water). Regular and proper [cage maintenance](#) will help keep your snake's home clean and minimize the likelihood of harboring external parasites. Always quarantine new additions for at least one month to prevent ticks and mites from affecting your other reptiles.