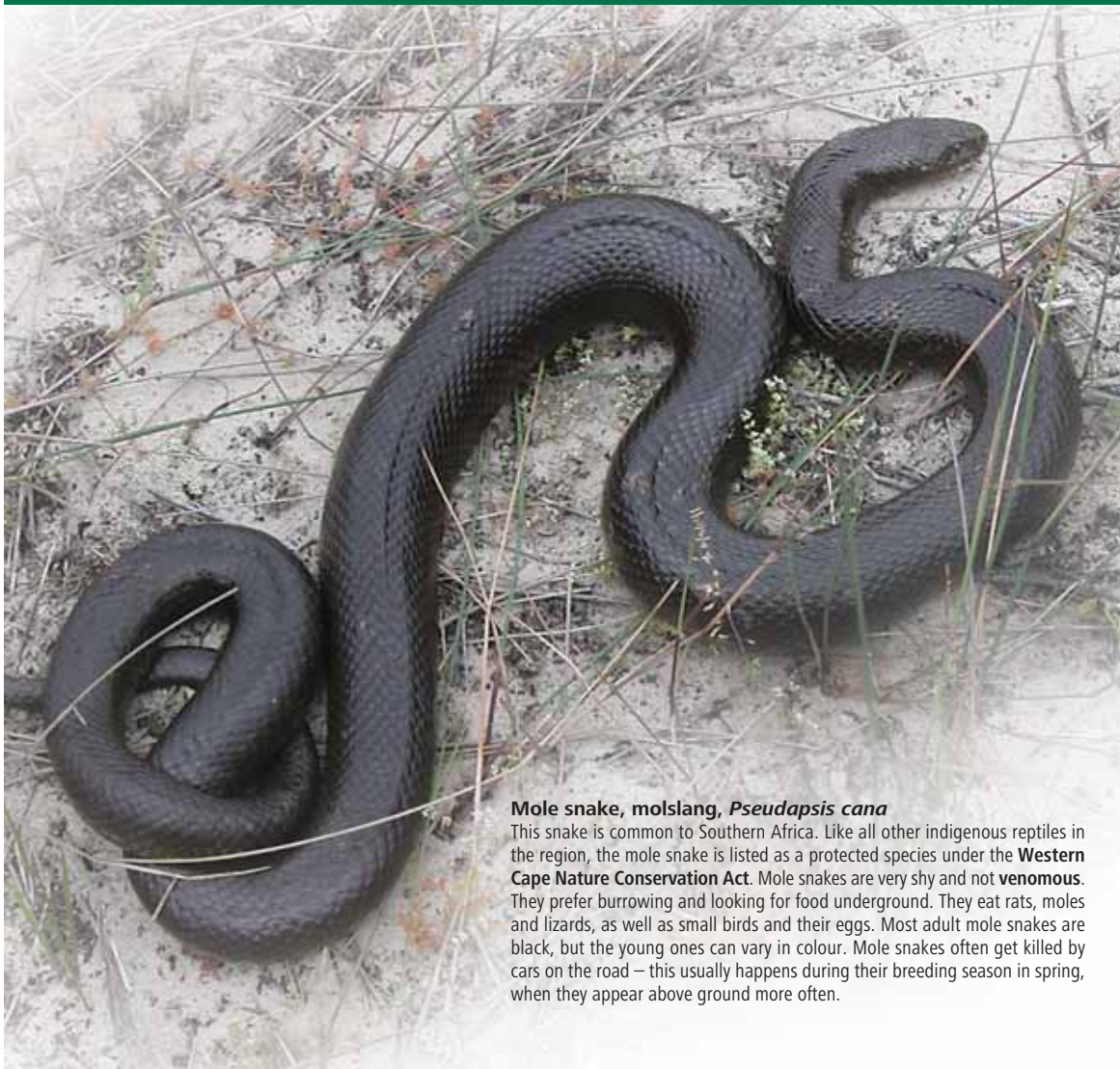


# Creatures of Harmony Flats



**Mole snake, molslang, *Pseudapsis cana***  
This snake is common to Southern Africa. Like all other indigenous reptiles in the region, the mole snake is listed as a protected species under the **Western Cape Nature Conservation Act**. Mole snakes are very shy and **not venomous**. They prefer burrowing and looking for food underground. They eat rats, moles and lizards, as well as small birds and their eggs. Most adult mole snakes are black, but the young ones can vary in colour. Mole snakes often get killed by cars on the road – this usually happens during their breeding season in spring, when they appear above ground more often.



**Spotted skaapsteker, gevlekte skaapsteker, *Psammophylax rhombeatus***  
This harmless snake is common in the Western Cape, and is often found in moist areas. It is not really dangerous, because its venom is quite weak. Even though the snake is often found in sheep kraals, its venom cannot kill sheep. It eats lizards, frogs and small **rodents**. It has rows of dark brown spots on the olive-brown background of its head and body. Its belly is bluish-grey, and some even have orange or red spots on the sides of the belly and neck.

## Keep our animals safe

- Birds and reptiles become extinct when they lose their habitat.
- If Harmony Flats loses its butterflies, seeds, flowers or any other part of its biodiversity, many of the birds and reptiles will have no food or nesting material.
- Birds and reptiles also prefer to eat and breed in indigenous gardens and reserves. That is why it is so important to protect our indigenous flora and fauna.
- Frequent fires are a main threat to the animals living in Harmony Flats, and contribute to their extinction. Never start fires – and report any fire you see.
- Dogs are not allowed in the nature reserve, as they disturb the wildlife, and sometimes even destroy rare and endangered plant species.
- Littering and other pollution is another threat to the animals of Harmony Flats. Animals can injure themselves on sharp objects, like broken glass and scrap metal, and dangerous substances can harm and even kill plants and animals.

## Learn the lingo

- **biodiversity** – the variety of different forms of life, like humans, plants and animals, and the way they live together, plus all natural systems through which they survive
- **caterpillars** – small, wormlike creature (the larva of the butterfly) that feeds on plant leaves
- **digest** – changed into a form that so the body can absorb the nutrients
- **ecosystem** – all forms of life and the environment, working together as systems in nature
- **endemic** – found nowhere else in the world
- **extinct** – no longer existing
- **faeces** – solid waste passed from the body through the bowel
- **flora and fauna** – plant and animal life
- **fossil** – remains of an animal or plant of long ago that have been preserved in rock or ice
- **habitat** – space where plants and animals live and breed
- **indigenous** – plants and animals that naturally belong in an area
- **invasive alien vegetation** – plants and animal types that do not naturally belong in an area, but take over the living space of indigenous species
- **predators** – animals that live by killing and eating other animals
- **rodents** – small plant-eating animals with strong sharp teeth
- **scute** – a shield-like plate protecting a turtle/tortoise
- **venomous** – poisonous
- **Western Cape Nature Conservation Act** – law by which the government of the province manages nature conservation



**Common slug-eater, tabakrolletjie/gewone slakvreter, *Duberia lutrix***  
This snake is harmless. They have no venom, and they do not bite – not even when they feel threatened. As its name shows, it eats slugs and snails, which makes it a garden's best friend. These snakes prefer to stay in damp areas where slugs and snails are found. The common slug-eater is a small brown snake with grey sides. A thin black line separates the sides and back, while another black line separates the sides and the white edges of the belly. The middle of the belly is usually a yellowish-brown colour. Its Afrikaans name, 'tabakrolletjie' (tobacco roll), comes from the slug-eater's habit of rolling up tightly and hiding its head when it feels threatened.



**Geometric tortoise, suurpootjieskilpad, *Psammobates geometricus***  
The geometric tortoise prefers the Southwestern Cape's alluvium fynbos and renosterveld areas. They have a yellow head, neck and limbs, and the top of their scutes are raised like tents. Each scute also has a yellow star on a brown or black background. These sensitive animals need specific food and living conditions. They are seriously threatened by **invasive alien vegetation**, fires and changes to their **habitat**. Many years ago, the Harmony Flats area was home to a group of rare geometric tortoises. Unfortunately, the geometric tortoise is now **extinct** here, mostly because of people's interference and frequent fires.

## Tortoise tales

South Africa, especially the Cape, has the most tortoise species in the world. Of the 40 tortoise species that exist, 12 are found in South Africa, and 6 of these are endemic to the Western Cape. This is because of the various habitats that are found here.

Tortoises have been around since the time of dinosaurs. **Fossil** records show that tortoises have not changed much in the past 200 million years! All South African tortoise species are protected by law. This means that you cannot collect, keep, sell or remove any tortoises from their habitat, and that they must be left alone. If you find a tortoise in danger, please contact your nearest nature conservation office.

Tortoises have no teeth, but they use their sharp-edged, horny beaks to tear and chew food. They mostly eat plants, but sometimes also nibble on bones, snails, insects and **faeces**. Tortoise droppings often have seeds in them, as tortoises do not completely **digest** their food. This helps to spread seeds and create new plant life.

The tortoise's shell is made out of keratin, the same material as your finger nails. This means that tortoises can feel your touch on their shell, and therefore it is better to leave them alone.

## Padlopers

Padloper tortoises are endemic to Southern Africa. The four types of padlopers found in the Western Cape are the smallest tortoises around; they never really grow longer than 15 cm. They have flat shells, and their scutes do not have knobs. The parrot-beaked tortoise of Harmony Flats belongs to this species. The other three padlopers are the Karoo padloper, the Greater padloper and the Southern speckled padloper.

If padlopers accidentally end up on their backside, they can quickly turn themselves over again because of their strong legs and light weight. Other tortoises usually cannot do this, and could even die if they are left lying in the sun and heat.

### Parrot-beaked tortoise, gewone padloper, *Homopus areolatus*

This tortoise is **endemic** to South Africa, and eats grasses, herbs and shrubs. They are good climbers, and easily walk up steep slopes. The parrot-beaked tortoise is small in size, usually no more than 10 cm long, with a hooked beak like a parrot's, four claws on each of the front and back feet, and an olive-coloured shell with reddish-brown centres to the **scute**. Parrot-beaked tortoises mate and lay their eggs (2–4 eggs each year) in spring and early summer, and the eggs hatch when the first winter rains fall. Fires, pet dogs and illegal collectors are big threats to these tortoises.



**Painted lady, sondagsrokkie, *Vanessa cardui***  
This is one of the most widespread butterflies in the world, and it is found on all continents except South America and Australasia. It occurs in all parts of South Africa, including most suburban gardens. Its wings are orange and brown on the upper side, with duller shades of brown and grey at the bottom. The front edge of the forewing is black, with a white bar and small white spots. When the painted lady is sitting down with its wings folded together, you can see four small eyespots on the back wing. These eyespots are there to scare predators away.



**Common African monarch, melkboskoeënapper, *Danaus chrysippus***  
This butterfly species, which has been around for thousands of years, has a substance in its body that makes **predators** vomit when they eat it, and most predators therefore avoid it. This substance comes from the food plants that the **caterpillars** feed on. People say that is why the common African monarch is such a slow flyer – it does not have to fly away from predators. It has a wingspan of 7–8 cm. The body is black with white spots, and the wings are yellowish-brown, with a white band on the black tips. From December to late May, these butterflies can be seen everywhere in the Cape Peninsula, but can also be found at other times.



**Silver-bottom brown, silwerbruin, *Pseudonympha magus***  
This butterfly is endemic to Southern Africa. It likes open grassy spaces and damp areas, and the Cape Flats is one of its favourite spots. It has a wingspan of 4–4.5 cm, and a pale silver-grey back wing that looks silvery white when it flies. It flies slowly over grassy patches, and settles on flowers or on the ground to feed. It can be seen throughout the summer months.

For more information, go to [www.capetown.gov.za/environment](http://www.capetown.gov.za/environment).

### CONTACT INFORMATION

CONSERVATION TEAM: 021 514 4189  
or [harmonyflatsnr@capetown.gov.za](mailto:harmonyflatsnr@capetown.gov.za)  
FIRE DEPARTMENT: 021 590 1900  
EMERGENCY SERVICES: 021 480 7700



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