

# INFORMATION SHEET

## CALM 3011.03 **PYGMY COPPERHEAD** (*Austrelaps labialis*)

### History & Distribution

The Pygmy Copperhead is a very secretive snake, and the distribution of the species is still unclear as relatively few records exist. It is currently known from Kangaroo Island, the Piccadilly Valley region of the Southern Mount Lofty Ranges and scattered localities on the Fleurieu Peninsula. However, it is likely that populations exist in suitable cool areas of the Mount Lofty Ranges to the north of the current known range.

### Description & Ecology

The Pygmy Copperhead is a relatively small snake, averaging around 50cm and weight 70 grams. It is a dull dark olive grey in colour (not glossy like a red bellied black snake), with a dark brown head. It is most easily recognised by the barred pattern on the lip scales (see picture). Pygmy Copperheads are active during the day, and eat small skinks and frogs. This snake is a shy, secretive species, and so whilst their bite may be considered dangerous, cases of humans being bitten are very rare.



Pygmy Copperhead snake (*Austrelaps labialis*)

### Habitat

Pygmy Copperheads favour a patchy habitat offering both protective cover (usually dense vegetation) and more open areas offering access to sunlight in which to bask. They are usually seen sunning themselves on the verges of thick Eucalypt forest, particularly where there are native tussock grasses and sedges present. These tussocky grasses offer shelter for the snakes from both predators and the cold

temperatures of winter. These tussock grasses are also important for many other animals, including small skinks (for shelter), and butterflies and seed eating birds (for food).

### Conservation & Threats

The primary threat to many fauna species in the Adelaide Hills, including the Pygmy Copperhead, is the clearance and alteration of habitat. Feral animals, particularly cats and foxes, may also prey upon these rare snakes. Conversion of rough pasture with native grass cover to carefully tended vineyards, which are less likely to support copperheads, also poses a threat. There are a number of actions landholders can take to make their properties more friendly for all of our native wildlife.

- Seek proper technical advice before undertaking any major work on your property, especially large scale weed control.
- When revegetating areas, use a wide variety of understorey plants, including native grasses and sedges.
- Get to know what wildlife exists in your local area and on your own property. If there is a National Park or other reserve nearby try and obtain species lists from the relevant authority.
- Monitor the presence of feral animals, like cats and foxes, and contact your local Animal & Plant Control Board officer for assistance with control. Remember to keep your own dogs and cats locked up at night.

For more information contact AHC Natural Resource Management Unit on 8408 0400.