

# BEWARE OF THE VENOMOUS HABU SNAKE!

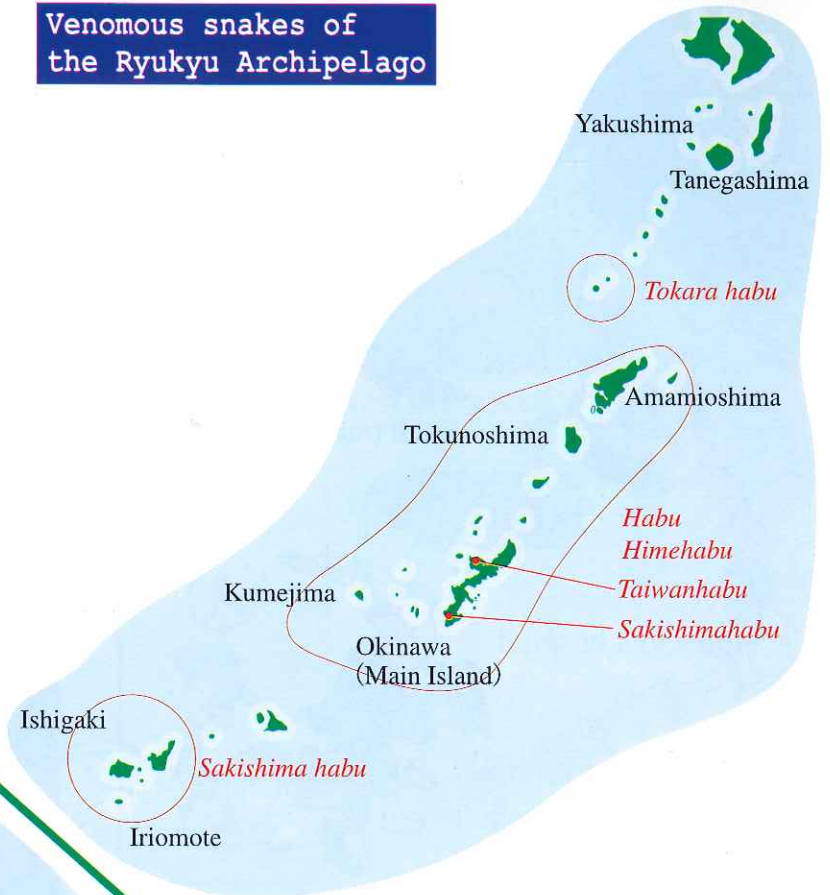
Department of Health and Welfare of Okinawa Prefecture

## Distribution of habu in the Ryukyu Archipelago

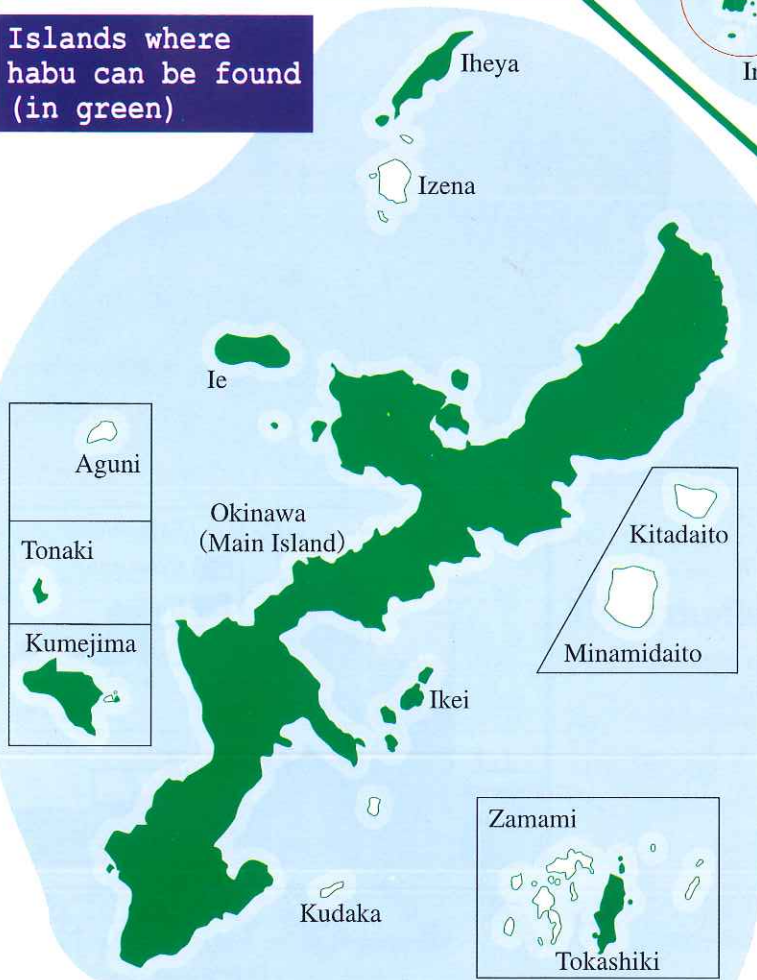
There are 22 species of snakes to be found in Okinawa Prefecture. Most of these are valuable snakes restricted to the Ryukyu Archipelago. Among the 8 species of venomous snakes, only 4, the *habu*, *himehabu*, *sakishimahabu* and *taiwanhabu* are dangerous. The other snakes in Okinawa are not harmful to humans. It is helpful to remember that the snake is an important member of the natural world we inhabit.

The *taiwanhabu* was originally a native of the Asian Continent and Taiwan, but was brought over to the northern part of Okinawa and escaped from captivity into the wild and began to breed there. The *sakishimahabu* has been introduced to the southern part of Okinawa.

## Venomous snakes of the Ryukyu Archipelago



## Islands where habu can be found (in green)

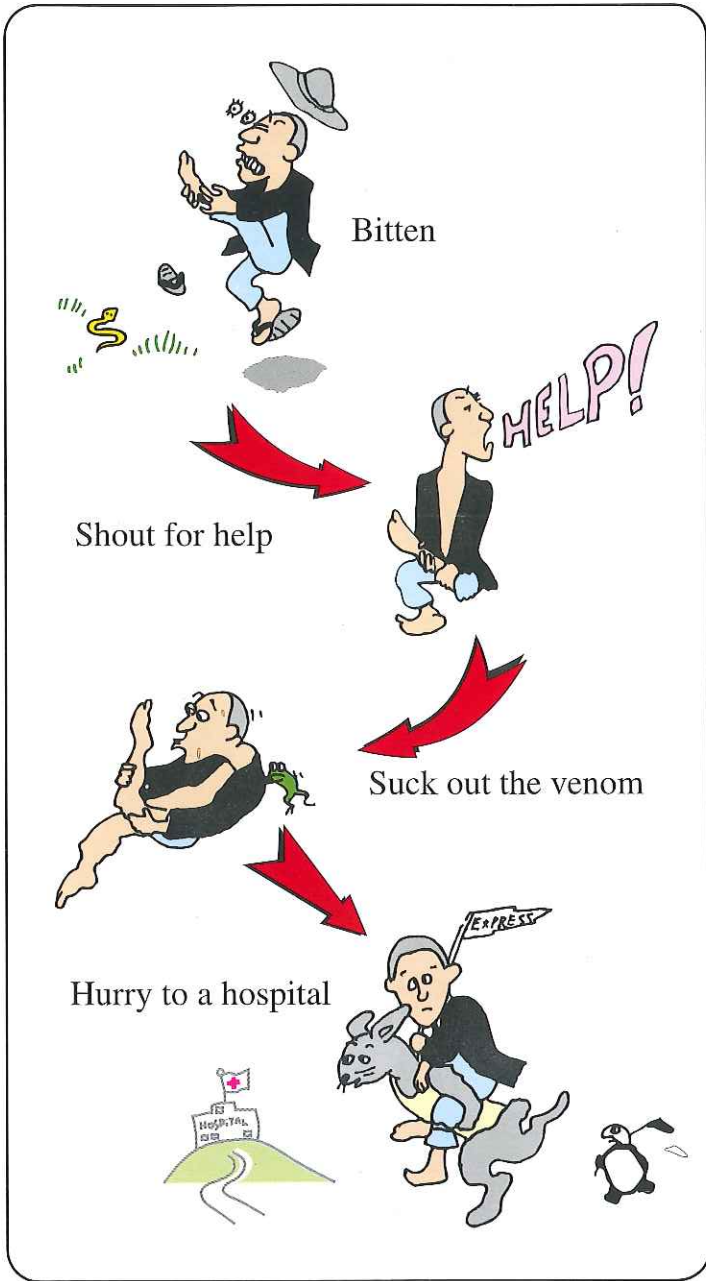


## On which of the Okinawan Islands can habu be found?

There are over 50 islands in the Ryukyu Archipelago, and no *habu* exist on some of them for example, Miyako and Yonaguni. It has been said that if one looks at a map of Okinawa, each island with *habu* is in turn followed by one without *habu*. However, if you look at the map shown on the left, you can see that there is actually no particular order or pattern involved.

People often ask in which habitats of Okinawa one can find *habu*. Unfortunately there is no easy answer to this question. It is possible to find *habu* in mountains, parks, farming fields and anywhere where there is grass or trees.

Because the *habu* is a nocturnal snake, it will rarely be seen in open spaces during daylight hours, although it can be found in trees, thickets, woods and other places shielded from sunlight.



## What to do if bitten

1. Check to see if the snake is actually a *habu*.
2. If you lose sight of the snake, carefully examine the snake bite. If it is a bite from a *habu*, blood will ooze from the fang marks, with the wound gradually swelling and becoming very painful. If this does not occur, the bite is not likely to be that of a *habu*.

## When you are certain you have been bitten by a *habu*

1. Shout for help.
2. Suck the blood out from the wound with your mouth repeatedly. Some of the venom will thus be sucked out with the blood.
3. Get someone to take you to a hospital as soon as possible and try to be inactive.
4. If there is no way of getting help, walk to the nearest place where there are people. Do not run. If you run, the venom will be sure to spread further throughout the body. It is advisable to carry a *habu* venom extractor with you.



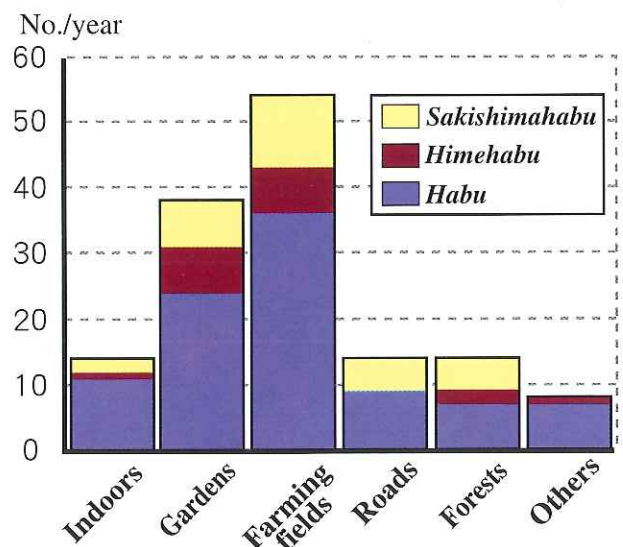
Carrying a *habu* venom extractor is advisable.

## Injuries inflicted by *habu*

Thirty years ago there were over 400 cases of *habu* bites in Okinawa Prefecture, several of which proved fatal. Fortunately, thanks to the development of methods to control *habu*, cases have recently dropped to around 120. Of these, 90 were caused by the *habu*, 20 by the *sakishimahabu* and 10 by the *himehabu*. With improvements in treatment methods, few fatalities have occurred.

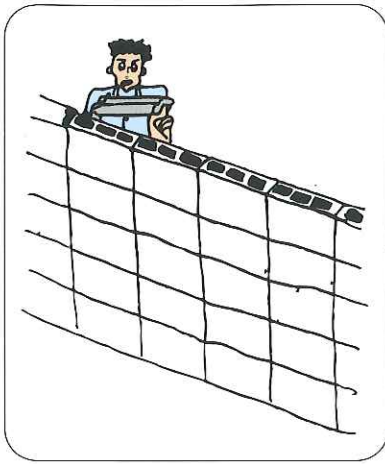
Most *habu* bites occur in farming fields—around 40% of the total. A high proportion (30%) of bites also occur inside rooms and in gardens. Another harm that the *habu* inflicts is psychological. It keeps people who have to be in the *habu*'s environments worried at all times.

## Locations of *habu* bites

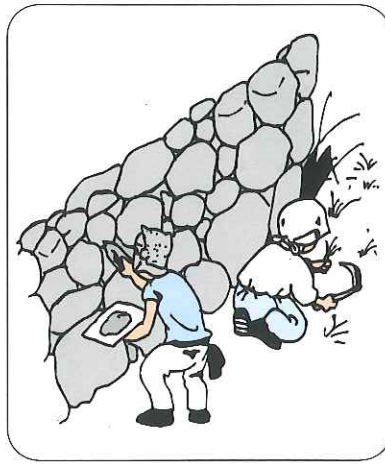


# Ways to protect yourself against habu

1. Get rid of all possible places where *habu* might hide. 2. Block all possible means of entry that *habu* may use. 3. Remove any remaining *habu*. 4. Devise ways of preventing *habu* bites in farming fields or outdoors. Devise your own ways of protecting yourself from *habu*!



Surround your home with a wall higher than 1 m.



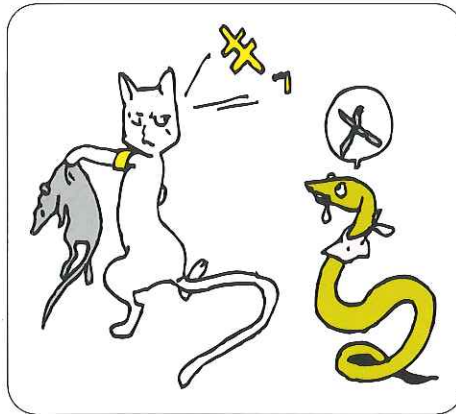
Fill in gaps in stone walls.



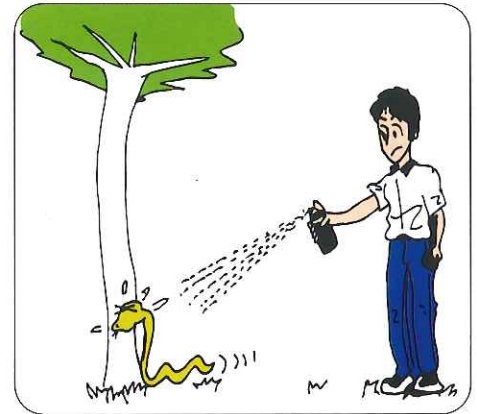
Surround a villages with nylon net fences.



Install outside lighting around your home.



Destroy any rodents.



Also destroy any *habu* that appear with anti-*habu* spray.



*Habu* in farming fields and homes can be removed using *habu*-traps.



When outdoors, always carry a venom extractor with you.



Act with caution when entering woods and thickets.

## Information and advice on habu:

Pharmaceutical Affairs and Sanitation Division,  
Department of Health and Welfare of  
Okinawa Prefecture

(098) 866-2215

Habu Study Section, Okinawa Prefectural  
Institute of Health and Environment

(098) 946-6710

Okinawa Public Health Association

(098) 945-2686

Public Health Centers, or the

Habu Section in each local government office

# DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

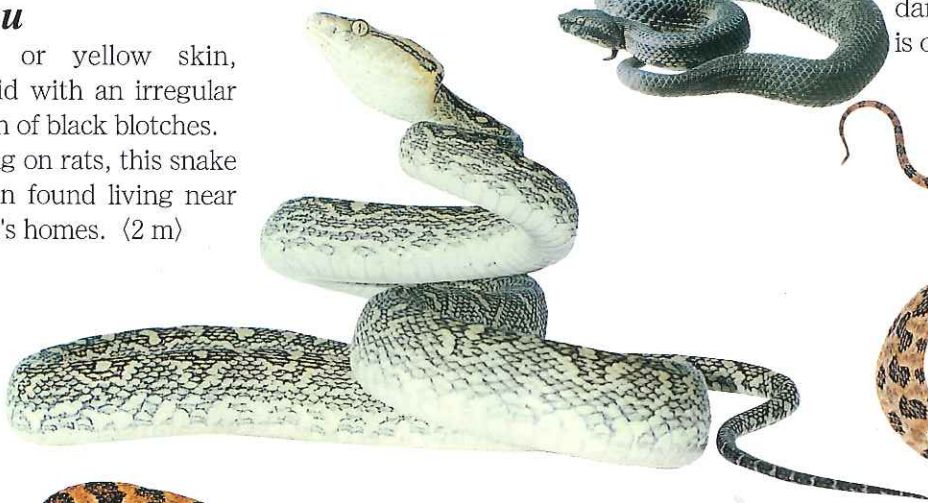
## Snakes to be found on Okinawa

〈Maximum length〉

### Dangerous venomous snakes

#### *Habu*

White or yellow skin, overlaid with an irregular pattern of black blotches. Preying on rats, this snake is often found living near people's homes. 〈2 m〉



#### *Himehabu*

Grey or brown skin, overlaid with dark blotches. Frogs being its prey, it is often found close to water. 〈80 cm〉



#### *Taiwanhabu*

Closely resembles the *sakishimahabu*. Native to Taiwan and the Asian Continent, it has escaped from captivity into the wild and can now be found in the eastern part of the Motobu Peninsula. 〈130 cm〉

### Less harmful venomous snakes



#### *Sakishimahabu*

Skin is brown, overlaid with a dark brown zig-zag pattern. Originally found in the Yaeyama Islands, but has since moved to Itoman City and the southern part of Okinawa. 〈120 cm〉



#### *Pryer's keelback snake*

Black skin, overlaid with white horizontal stripes and spots. Frogs being its prey, it is often found close to water. 〈110 cm〉

#### *Okinawa coral snake*

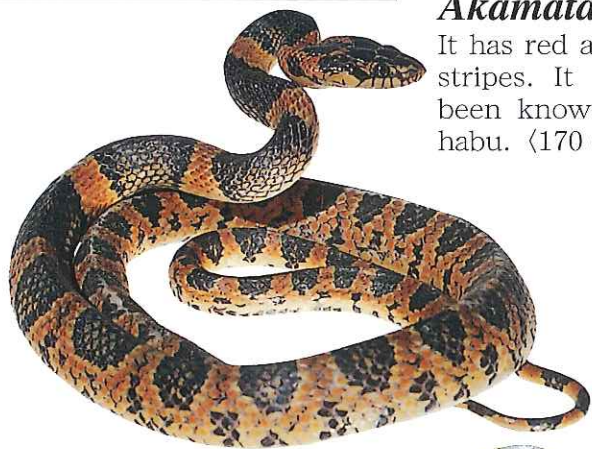
An attractive looking snake, with orange skin overlaid with black vertical stripes and white horizontal stripes. 〈60 cm〉



### Non-venomous snakes

#### *Akamata*

It has red and black stripes. It has also been known to eat habu. 〈170 cm〉



#### *Brahminy blind snake*

Shiny grey skin. Lives in the soil and preys on ants. Resembles a worm. 〈15 cm〉

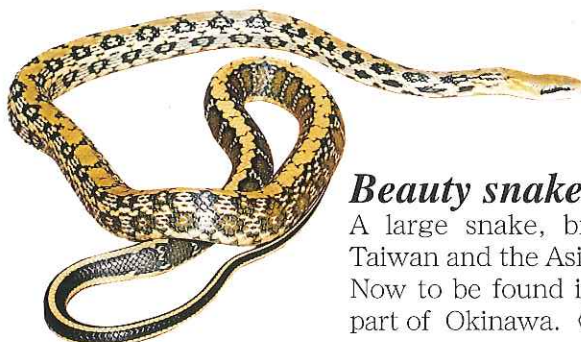
#### *Amami odd-scaled snake*

Dark brown back with a yellow underbelly. It lives among fallen leaves and preys on worms. 〈50 cm〉



#### *Ryukyu green snake*

Green back and a yellow underbelly. It preys on worms. 〈90 cm〉



#### *Beauty snake*

A large snake, brought from Taiwan and the Asian Continent. Now to be found in the central part of Okinawa. 〈3 m〉