

Do Red-bellied Black Snakes gobble up all the Brown Snakes or chase them away?

Contrary to the belief of many, Browns and Red-bellied Blacks **will** sleep together. Blacks do not go around gobbling up all the Brown snakes. That is just nonsense parroted by people who like repeating what others have said for years. Yes a Black will eat a smaller Brown but so will a large Brown eat a small Black. Mainland Tigers on the other hand seldom eat snakes. It is very rare for Tiger snakes to eat another snake; it is not impossible but very rare.

When you parrot somebody it might be useful to first get some insight into what you are parroting. There is a group of snakes referred to as the Black snake complex. These snakes are a little more opportunistic in their eating habits than many other snakes so they are quite happy to eat other snakes.

Although a Brown will eat a snake it does prefer to eat mice. A large Copperhead could quite easily eat a small Red-bellied black or Brown or any other small snake, skink or gecko. To say that by having Blacks around the place will mean less Browns or Tigers in the area is just nonsense. As one farmer once said to me “If Blacks eat all the other snakes how is it that I’ve seen Blacks and Browns sleeping together on the channel bank?”

The truth is that of course Blacks can eat Browns but so can Browns eat Blacks or any other snake for that matter if the food item is smaller than the Brown and the Brown is hungry it may eat it; otherwise Browns are quite happy to sleep together with any other snake.

The whole idea of Blacks keeping Browns away is generally based on ignorance because mostly, they live in different parts of the country to each other. Blacks must live within cooee of water and they prefer the water to be flowing water. Browns don’t need to live close to water. So, most of the Browns that encounter Blacks are just coming for a drink, then back they go to where the grain is because that is where the mice are. It is hard for Blacks to live in true Brown snake country.

So of course, if there are Blacks around you’ll not see many Browns because where Blacks live is not where Browns usually live. It is just like tearing up little bits of paper and dropping them around the place to keep the elephants away. If you try that i’ll bet you don’t see many elephants in the neighbourhood.

Remember also that a venomous snake does not know it is venomous, it knows nothing. If you frighten it and if it cannot get away it can bite, but it has no intention of killing you, it does not know what that means. You are supposed to be intelligent, it is not intelligent. You can learn things about the world; it cannot set out to learn anything.

All that a Brown snake really wants to do is to steal your mice and be left alone.

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