

World's Largest Spitting Cobra Identified

Naja ashei has enough venom to kill 15 to 20 people.

Photos courtesy of Anthony Childs

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Click photos to enlargeThe world's largest spitting cobra has been identified. The cobra was discovered in Kenya in 2004, but only recently classified as a distinct species. It was initially identified as a brown variation of the black-necked spitting cobra (*Naja nigricollis*).

The new species was finally verified through blood and tissue samples by Wolfgang Wuster at the University of Bangor in Wales and published earlier this year in the scientific journal, *Zootaxa* by Wuster and Donald Bradley.

Naja Ashei, was named after James Ashe who founded the Bio-Ken Snake Farm, Watamu on the Kenyan coast. The cobra has produced 6.2 ml of liquid venom in one milking. Naja ashei can reach almost 9 feet and has enough venom to kill 15 to 20 people in a single bite.

The implications of this newly identified species go beyond scientific discovery. Snake bite treatment depends entirely on having the right antivenom. Until now, bites from this snake have not been treated as effectively as possible due to inaccurate dosage. Specific antivenom for this snake can now be produced and lives can be saved.

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