

## Snakes

### **Habu viper / *Protobothrops flavoviridis* / Habu / ハブ**

The habu is a venomous pit viper that is king of the food chain on Amami-Oshima. It is found everywhere, from populated areas to the mountains, and from ground level to the tops of trees as it searches for its prey. Large specimens reach a length of 2 meters, and the record-setting length to date is 2.43 meters. The habu is well camouflaged, with varying striped patterns of olive, brown, and yellow. It attacks its prey by forming an “S” shape and then striking a distance of up to two-thirds its own length. It paralyzes prey with a powerful venom that dissolves proteins and damages the circulatory system, and then swallows its meal whole. The habu is most active at night, and its diet is varied, ranging from mammals and birds to frogs and lizards. Bites from a habu are not life-threatening to humans if medical care is received promptly, but they are very painful and can have long-term effects.

### **Hime habu viper / *Ovophis okinavensis* / Hime habu / ヒメハブ**

The Japanese name of this endemic venomous snake means “princess habu,” but it should not be confused with its more dangerous relative. Like the habu viper, it is nocturnal, with a varied diet of mammals, birds, and amphibians. Unlike the habu, however, it stays on the ground, is less venomous, and is very sluggish. (In the Ryukyu dialect it is sometimes called *nibuya*, meaning a lazy, sleepy person.) The hime habu viper is also shorter (80 centimeters) and plumper than the habu, and the pattern on its body is brown with dark brown or green patches. Frogs make up most of its diet, and in the winter it travels along mountain streams in search of groups of frogs gathering to spawn. Incidents of humans bitten by this snake are extremely rare, but it is venomous and should be treated with respect.

### **Amami coral snake / *Sinomicrurus japonicas japonicus* / Hyan / ヒヤン**

This attractive coral snake, which has dark-brown bands on an orange body, is rarely seen in its habitat in the forests of Amami-Oshima. A relative of the cobra, it is short (30 to 60 centimeters), thin, and venomous. Its mouth is far too small, however, to be dangerous to humans. It feeds mainly on earthworms.

### **Ryukyu green snake / *Cyclophiops semicarinatus* / Ryukyu aohebi / リュウキュウアオヘビ**

This non-venomous species is the most frequently seen snake on Amami-Oshima, where it is found from the flatlands to the mountains, near homes and on forest floors. Its color varies, but it is generally yellowish green or greenish brown with dark vertical stripes and a white or yellow abdomen. It grows to a length of 70 to 80 centimeters, and its staple food is earthworms and small animals.