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Cerastes cerastes (Linnaeus, 1758) - Sahara Desert, Tunisia

***Cerastes cerastes* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Reptilia Serpentes).** The desert horned viper *Cerastes cerastes* - a venomous snake native of the desert of North Africa - is present in Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia, South Morocco, SW Arabian Peninsula and SW Israel. The average total length ranges from 30 to 60 cm (tail included). The females are larger than males, but males have heads and eyes larger than the females. The body is robust, cylindrical and depressed, narrow neck, thick midsection, tapering tail. One of the most distinctive characteristic of this species is the presence of supraorbital horns; however, these may be reduced in size or absent. The colour pattern consists of a yellowish, pale grey, pinkish, reddish, or pale brown ground colour that almost always matches the substrate colour where the animal is found. Dorsally, a series of dark, semi-rectangular blotches runs the length of the body. These blotches may or may not be fused into crossbars. The belly is usually white, and the tail, which may have a black tip, is usually thin. The desert horned viper prefers dry, sandy areas with sparse rock outcroppings and doesn't like coarse sand. Occasionally, it is found around oases and up to an altitude of 1.500 m. Cooler temperatures, with annual averages of 20 °C or less, are preferred. *Cerastes cerastes*, like all snakes, is a meat eater; it preys primarily on lizard but also on mammals and birds that inhabit its arid environment. It often lies in ambush, just beneath the sand with only its horns and eyes exposed, ready to escape from its cover and strike its victim with stunning swiftness (photos by Mauro Grano).

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