

What do experts mean with 'scale counting' and how does it help to identify snakes?

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There are many ways to identify a snake. Colour, size, behaviour, location, body shape, head shape, tail shape, etcetera. One very important 'tool' in identification is to perform a 'scale count'. But what does that mean? This poster explains several different scales, on different places on the snake's body. In addition, it gives images of types of scales. By practicing with this on (photos of) snakes you can train yourself in using scale counting to ID snakes.

Parietal scales: scales on top of the head. *Are they present or not? How many are there? What shape do they have?*

Temporal scales: scales between the parietals and the upper labial scales. *How many are there? How are they arranged (e.g. 1+1, 1+2, 2+2 etc)?*

Pre-ocular scales: the scales before the eye, touching the eye. *How many scales are touching the front of the eye?*

Post-ocular scales: the scales before the eye, touching the eye. *How many scales are touching the rear of the eye?*

Upper labial scales: the scales that form the upper lip. *How many scales form the upper lip?*

Upper labial scales touching the eye: the upper lip scales that touch the eye. *How many upper lip scales touch the eye and which one, counting from front? (in the image it's 2: nr. 4 and 5)*

Dorsal scales
Ventral scales

Another way to identify a snake is analysing the cloacal area and tail. Look at:

- Is the cloacal shield entire (above) or divided (below)?
- Is there one row of scales after the cloacal (above) or are there two (below)?
- Are ventrals and subcaudals keeled or not?

Ventrals **caudal** **subcaudals**

Keeled ventrals **Caudal divided** **Subcaudals paired**

One of the ways to identify a snake is counting the body scales. This needs to be done *mid-body*, from the ventral scales (= belly scales) on the left, to the ventral scales on the right. This way, the dorsal scales (the scales on the back of the snake) are counted.

Parietal scales

Pre-oculars: 1

Temporal scales: 2+2+3

Post-oculars: 2

Upper labials: 9

Upper labials touching eye: 3, (Nr 4, 5, 6)

Dorsal scales (keeled)
Keel
Ventral scales

Ventral scales
Dorsal scales
Smooth (non-keeled) ventrals
Caudal entire
Subcaudals paired