



Photo credit: Guido Bonetti

Scientific Name:

Telescopus fallax

English:

Cat Snake, Soosan Snake

Maltese:

it-teleskopu, il-qattus

Native to East Europe and the Mediterranean region, the Cat Snake is a rare species of snake inhabiting areas with rocks and boulders. It inhabits urban areas, including public gardens, fortifications, and private residences.

This species may reach a length of up to 1m. It is a slender snake, with a broad and flattened head. The Cat Snake is generally ash-grey, brown or yellowish-brown in appearance, with darker patches along its body. Contrary to the Leopard Snake, this species' eyes have vertical pupils that look rather like slits; hence the name 'cat snake' and '*il-qattus*'. This species dislikes extreme temperature, and for this reason it is nocturnal; hunting at night, whilst seeking refuge under rocks throughout the day. During winter, it forages for lizards and small mice at dusk. The Cat Snake first weakens its prey by means of constriction. It then injects venom into its prey by means of fangs, and then swallows them whole. The venom only affects small animals.

The Cat Snake was first recorded in Malta in 1894. It was believed that the species was originally imported, and that it was largely restricted to urban areas. However, recent studies suggest that the Cat snake is native and far more widespread than previously thought. Whilst enjoying a favourable conservation status in the Maltese Islands, the Cat Snake is often persecuted due to the popular belief that snakes are dangerous to humans. This species is protected through national, international and EU legislation.