

Rehab Easy Reference Sheet

Caring for Snakes

South-east Queensland is home to many species of snakes, including several of the most venomous snakes in the world. Wildlife carers must be able to accurately identify snakes in order to be able to confidently rescue and care for them.

Do I need a Permit to care for snakes?

Yes. You will need a REHABILITATION PERMIT to care for non-venomous snakes. A Rehabilitation Permit can be obtained from a licensed wildlife care group such as Wildcare. In order to care for venomous species, you need to undertake specialised training with an accredited snake handler/trainer. You may then be eligible to apply to Wildcare for a permit for venomous snakes.

Remember all Australian native wildlife is protected in Queensland. You cannot keep them without an appropriate Licence.

Do I have to do any training to care for snakes?

Yes. Snakes have specialised dietary and housing needs. You must be competent in your identification and handling skills. You must also have a good understanding of their biology, be able to recognise signs of illness and be able to provide emergency care to them.

In Wildcare, you will need to complete the following training workshops in order to care for snakes:-

- Orientation Program – compulsory for all members
- Rescue and First Aid for Native Wildlife (Basic) - compulsory for all members
- Wildlife Habitat and Plant Identification
- Introduction to Caring for Lizards
- Introduction to Caring for Snakes

Is caring for snakes difficult?

Caring for common species of non-venomous snakes is a specialised area of reptile rehabilitation. Generally, you will care for common lizard species before progressing to care for non-venomous snakes. Like all of our native wildlife, they do have specialised requirements.

Remember:-

- Snakes are ectothermic so they have **specific heating and lighting requirements** - you need to be able to provide this.
- They are **quiet** – they are suitable for people in units or high-density residential areas where noise needs to be kept to a minimum.
- One of their greatest **predators** is domestic pets – they cannot be housed near domestic dogs or cats but because they are housed in specially-built reptile enclosures, they can easily be kept in a separate room away from domestic animals.
- Snakes require **feeding once or twice a week**.
- Snakes are generally **slow to heal** so may require longer time in care than mammals or birds with similar injuries.
- If you have captive/pet reptiles, you need to ensure that they are kept separate from any wild reptiles in order to eliminate the spread of disease to wild populations and also to protect your own pets.

Snakes can be difficult to handle and there is a risk of being bitten – good handling skills are essential!

Remember, we raise to RELEASE!

We must care for wildlife in a way that ensures their survival once returned to the wild.

What equipment do I need to care for snakes?

Snakes need to be housed and cared for during rehabilitation to prevent further injury, prevent escape, minimise stress and to allow them to display their natural behaviour.

A few things we must consider when housing snakes include:-

- Providing an appropriate heat source and access to UVB light is paramount in the successful rehabilitation of all reptile species.
- Most commercially made reptile enclosures are suitable for housing most common species of snakes.
- Most common species of non-venomous snakes, such as pythons, will eat commercially-bred native rodents (sourced frozen) however some species, such as tree snakes, have a more specialised diet.
- During the final stages of rehabilitation, long-term patients will require access to an outdoor enclosure to enable them to re-develop their muscle tone. Some wildlife volunteers specialise in this final stage of rehabilitation.
- All enclosures must be suitable to the species of snake being housed and must include suitable natural branches and other fixtures (particularly for arboreal species) to imitate as closely as possible their natural habitat.

Below is a brief overview of some of the equipment that snakes require. The Wildcare reptile training workshop and manual covers their requirements in more detail.

Rescue Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality deep plastic storage tub with a secure clip-on lid in a variety of sizes • Clean, second-hand towels to line transport carrier • Quantity of clean pillow cases for transporting • Snake handling hook and bag.
Adult Snakes <i>Critical Care Stage</i> <i>Intermediate Care Stage</i> <i>Pre-Release and Final Rehabilitation Stage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose-built reptile enclosure with UVB light and appropriate heat lamp • Shallow ceramic bowl for water • Size of enclosures will depend on the species of snake but will range from 0.6m L x 0.3m W x 0.5m H to 1.2m L x 0.5m W x 0.5m H • As above • Size of enclosures will depend on the species of snake but will range from 0.9m L x 0.6m W x 0.5m H to 1.8m L x 1.5m W x 1.7m H • Fittings will depend upon the species and are outlined in the Wildcare reptile training course and manual • Large outdoor enclosure that must include adequate amount of direct sun along with some areas where access to shade is possible • Size will vary depending upon species but will range in size up to 2.0m L x 2.0m W x 2.0m H • Enclosure must include a variety of natural branches and substrate to allow for display of natural behavior. • Large water container suitable to species.

Critical Care Stage - designed to reduce an animal's level of physical activity for a short period of time and to provide easy access for monitoring, treatment and feeding.

Intermediate Care Stage – allows sufficient space for some physical activity while enabling the animal to be readily caught for monitoring and treatment.

Pre-Release/Final Rehabilitation Stage – allows an animal to regain better physical condition, display natural behaviour, acclimatise to normal weather conditions and reduce human contact.

The measurements for enclosures listed above are sourced from the *Code of Practice – Care of Sick, Injured and Orphaned Protected Animals in Queensland* (EHP). In some circumstances, Wildcare's housing requirements exceed the CoP suggestions.