

## BACKGROUND

Volunteers of Wildcare Australia Inc. may be involved with venomous snakes in the course of rescue and rehabilitation activities. The purpose of this Policy is to outline the safety precautions that must be undertaken to ensure the safe provision of rescue and rehabilitation for venomous snakes.

## DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy, snakes are categorised as non-venomous, mildly venomous and highly venomous. The term 'venomous snake' refers to both mildly and highly venomous snakes.

Non-venomous snakes include (but are not limited to):-

- Coastal Carpet Python
- Spotted Python
- Common Tree Snake
- Keelback
- Blind Snakes

Mildly venomous snakes include (but are not limited to):-

- Brown Tree Snake
- Yellow-faced Whip Snake
- Golden-crowned Snake
- White-crowned Snake
- Dwarf-crowned Snake
- Marsh Snake

Highly venomous snakes include (but are not limited to):-

- Eastern Brown Snake
- Red-bellied Black Snake
- Small-eyed Snake
- Rough-scaled Snake
- Eastern Tiger Snake
- Common Death Adder
- Coastal Taipan
- All Sea Snakes (not covered under Wildcare's Rehabilitation Permit)

## VENOMOUS SNAKE RESCUES

The Wildcare *Safety Management Manual* includes information regarding appropriate safety measures to be taken when rescuing venomous snakes. All Wildcare members who rescue and/or rehabilitate venomous snakes must make themselves familiar with the contents of the *Safety Management Manual* and abide by them.

Venomous snake rescue is a high-risk activity which is potentially life-threatening. Therefore, only rescuers approved by the Wildcare President will be included on the venomous snake rescue list. To be considered for the venomous snake rescue list, the applicant must have:

- completed recent training from a reputable venomous snake trainer
- a current first-aid certificate
- experience in working with snakes
- a proven track record in rescuing non-venomous snakes with Wildcare
- suitable snake rescue and handling equipment

To apply to be a venomous snake rescuer, members must submit a *Rescue Application Form*, and provide evidence of meeting the above requirements.

## HANDLING VENOMOUS SNAKES

Venomous snakes must only be handled for the purposes of rescue or rehabilitation in the presence of a second person (a 'spotter'). This person should be capable of providing first aid and contacting emergency services, should a bite occur. The spotter should have access to a charged, working telephone, a snake bite first-aid kit and should be aware of the species of snake being handled.

Only appropriate tools must be used when handling venomous snakes. This includes hooks, snake bags, pinning tools, humane grippers/tongs and snake restraint tubes.. The size of equipment should be suitable for the individual snake being handled, and all equipment should be examined prior to use to ensure it is in good working order. A first-aid kit must always be present and easily accessible when dealing with venomous snakes.

Before attempting to rescue or handle a venomous snake, careful planning should occur, to ensure the right equipment is available, not just for the planned activity, but also for the unexpected worst-case scenario.

Members must not rescue or handle venomous snakes whilst under the influence of alcohol, or any medication that could affect their coordination or reflexes.

## HOUSING

Enclosures used for housing a venomous snake must be approved by the Wildcare Venomous Snake Coordinator.

The enclosure must:

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## **Venomous Snake Policy**

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- be top opening;
- be lockable (with either a lock/key or bracket/padlock) on all access points to the enclosure;
- be in good condition;
- be placed on the ground to reduce the risk of an above-knee bite when accessing the enclosure;
- display an approved Wildcare sign when in use that includes:
  - the wording ‘DANGER – VENOMOUS SNAKE’
  - the name of the species being contained; and
- have minimal furnishings to allow for easy access to the snake (minimum standard to include a disposal hide (i.e. cardboard box), water bowl and a branch for arboreal species).

In the event of uncertainty as to whether the enclosure is appropriate, it must not be used for housing venomous snakes.

All other housing requirements, such as heating, UVB and enclosure size can be found in the Wildcare manual, *Introduction to Caring for Snakes*.

All venomous snake enclosures must be kept in such a manner as to prevent unlicensed persons (including housemates, children and visitors) from accessing the snake, for example, keeping the enclosure in a lockable room. For rehabilitators who live alone, or with a trusted adult, this requirement is at the individual rehabilitator’s discretion.

The room in which venomous snakes are housed must have a secure door to prevent a loose snake escaping the room, including underneath the door.

A Wildcare *First Aid for Snakebites* poster should be affixed in a visible location directly outside the room where a venomous snake is housed, in close proximity to the first-aid kit.

## CLEANING OF ENCLOSURES AND EQUIPMENT

As envenomation can occur from venom-contaminated objects, or from a lost fang, great care must be taken in the cleaning process.

The cleaning of venomous snake enclosures and rescue equipment must be done in the presence of a ‘spotter’. A ‘spotter’ is defined as a responsible adult who is familiar with modern first aid procedures for snake bite.

High quality, disposable latex gloves should be worn when handling any item from within the enclosure.

Metholated spirits is known to neutralise snake venom, and can be used to spray envenomated objects before cleaning.

All items disposed of from the enclosure must be discarded appropriately.

## FIRST AID

Venomous snake rescuers and rehabilitators must hold a current first-aid certification. Ideally the spotter should also have this certification. If not, the spotter should have a good understanding of modern first-aid techniques for snake bites.

A snake bite first-aid kit must be easily accessible to the spotter during venomous snake rescues.

A snake bite first-aid kit should be located directly OUTSIDE the room where a venomous snake is housed, which should be accompanied by Wildcare *First Aid for Snake Bites* poster.

Any instances of a snake bite occurring must be reported to the Wildcare Venomous Snake Coordinator as soon as practical.

## VETERINARY APPOINTMENTS

For venomous snakes, only dedicated wildlife hospitals should be considered for veterinary treatment. Venomous snake rescuers and rehabilitators should be aware of, and respect the protocol of each individual wildlife hospital, and should always phone in advance of admitting a venomous snake. Be aware that on some occasions, a qualified snake handler in the hospital may not be available, and delays in venomous snakes being treated are not uncommon. For recheck appointments, at least 24 hours' notice should be given.

In most circumstances, the hospital will treat the snake as unidentified, until one of their qualified handlers has identified the snake. This is not due to a lack of trust in the ability of the snake rescuer/handler to identify the snake, but is simply the standard protocol for all snakes being admitted to wildlife hospitals.

## TRANSPORTATION

When transporting a venomous snake for any purpose, the snake must be in a secure, locked container.

Appropriate containers should include the following features:-

- Containers should include a clear Perspex or high quality plastic viewing window.
- The container must be secured by way of a padlock (key or combination) or secured zip-ties. In the case of a keyed padlock, the key must not be left in the padlock.
- A container that contains a 'lip' of at least 20mm around the top of the enclosure under the lid, is preferred to prevent easy escape by the snake.
- If the snake is placed into a cloth snake bag at the time of rescue, it may remain bagged but must still be secured in a secure, locked container.
- When transporting a venomous snake, an approved Wildcare sign must be affixed securely to the top of the enclosure that reads:  
"Danger – Venomous Snake" with the species being transported written underneath.

- Any warning sign, should be removed from the transport container, or clearly marked with the word “*empty*” when not in use to prevent unnecessary delays in the event of an accident.

All containers used for the transportation of venomous snakes, must be approved by the Wildcare Venomous Snake Coordinator prior to use.

To enable the efficient identification of snakes at a wildlife hospital, it is preferred that snakes are contained in a secure container with a viewing window, as opposed to a cloth bag which renders the snake non-visible. However, if it is safer for the rescuer to ‘bag’ the snake at the point of rescue, then it should remain bagged. Re-housing a venomous snake should not be attempted unless absolutely necessary.

## VENOMOUS SNAKE PERMIT ENDORSEMENTS

For information on the requirements for obtaining a Permit Endorsement for venomous snakes from Wildcare, please see the Wildcare *Specialised Permits Policy*.