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Occupational safety Protocols for Snake Rescue & Rehabilitation in Odisha

1. Pre-requisites for snake rescue

1.1. Snake rescue is a task of great responsibility and risk. **It should be undertaken by trained, experienced and physically fit persons**.
1.2. Wear ankle protected shoes and full pants (Denim pants are preferable).
1.3. Carry along all the handling equipment, bags, torch etc.
1.4. Collect as much information on the location and situation about the snake from the distressed household.
1.5. Give valuable tips to the persons in distress regarding the safety precautions.
1.6. **Obey the traffic rules while driving.**
1.7. Training on identification of snakes, safe handling, first-aid management after snakebite, state/national/international laws involving snakes, Basic Life Support etc. are mandatory.

2. Snake handling, restraining & safety measures

2.1. Rescue the snake only when there is a clear case of conflict between the snake and humans or domestic animals.
2.2. Never disturb a snake in the wild or in places where there is no human habitation or movement.
2.3. Avoid head gripping of snakes unless it is warranted.
2.4. **Use snake hooks and tongs in a humane manner** so as to give minimum stress to the snake.
2,5. **Don't use Killer-tongs with locking mechanism**; they can actually damage the spine of the snakes. We ban the killer-tongs-tongs in snake handling.
2.6. Avoid snake to snake contact. Follow the **'one snake, one bag'** rule.
2.7. Once the snake is successfully bagged, secure the bag and never open it for the onlookers or enthusiasts. It should be opened only at the release site. The vehicle with the snake bag inside should not be kept under direct sun. The bag should also be kept at a safe distance to avoid accidental contact with the human body.
2.8. **Try to disperse crowd and ask people maintain a safe distance** and give space for rescue. **Keep the pets away** if present from the rescue area which may cause distraction.
2.9. **Do not use plastic water bottles or chocolate jars**.
2.10. **Do not use gloves while handling snakes**; many venomous bites occurred through gloves. Gloves give false sense of security.
2.11. **Avoid alcohol and any other materials of intoxication.**
2.12. **Don't allow bystanders to handle any snake.**
2.13. **Avoid curious handling of dead snakes.** A dead snake can deliver a single bite through reflex action of the muscles.
2.14**. Rescuers should avoid wearing rings and other limb adorning ornaments (LAO),** it can lead to potentially dangerous complication in case of venomous snake bite.

3. Relocation

3.1. **The snakes shall be released within 12 hrs. of the rescue.**
3.2. The snakes must be released at a time of day that enables it to immediately investigate its environment. The optimal release time for most diurnal animals is approximately one hour after dawn and for most nocturnal animals is approximately one hour after dusk.
3.3. If the snake is already confined in a bottle by public, **don't let the plastic litter the environment while releasing**.
3.4. Snakes can be released in a suitable environment which contains appropriate habitat and adequate food resources and is inhabited by members of the same species.
3.5. **Snakes must not be released into a national park/sanctuary** unless the snake is earlier encountered in the national park and prior approval has been obtained from the authority.
3.6. Though scientists advise the release of snakes within 1 km from the point of capture to maximize their chance of survival, this is not always possible in Odisha due to public protests and possible law and order situation which may ensue. Snakes can be released in the nearest suitable natural habitat for release.

4. Treatment of injured snakes

4.1. The injured snakes should be taken to the local Veterinary Assistant Surgeon (VAS) for treatment.
4.2. For further treatment, the snake may be brought to OUAT, Bhubaneswar under the supervision of the local forest staff.
4.3. If the snake is to be kept under observation for treatment it should be kept under the supervision of the local Range Officer (RO).
4.4. **The transparent restraining tube should be used for restraining.**
4.5. **A veterinarian who has an earlier experience of treating snakes**/reptiles should be preferred for examination and treatment.
4.6. **The rescuer should not write his/her own name in place of the owner**. All the wild animals are the property of Forest Department in India. The guardian/custodian of the snake should be the local Range Officer (RO).

5. Photography of snakes

5.1. **Snakes are neither models nor props**. Hence a snake should be photographed only for record keeping and identification.
5.2. Avoid public intrusions in the form of photography or videography on rescue site.
5.3. Photography may be allowed to public when the snake has bit a person and the photograph is to be sent to a doctor for identification.
5.4. **Photography showing or encouraging daredevilry and stunts should be strictly avoided**.
5.5. **No selfie with snakes** (or any Indian wildlife for that matter) is permitted

6. First aid in case of snakebite

6.1. **Immediately remove the rings and other limb adorning ornaments** (LAO) if present on the bitten limb. These LAOs act as virtual tourniquet and can exacerbate the local effects of envenoming in case of venomous snake bite.
6.2. Use the crepe/elastic bandage to wrap lightly towards the upper proximity of the limb. No need to insert any wooden splint or whatsoever.
6.3. Inform at least one of your local colleagues about the mishap immediately. The responsible colleague should then inform the seniors and also the victim's parents about the mishap and counsel them.
6.4. Try to avoid driving after snakebite. You can request a bystander to drive your bike to take you take to the nearest hospital where snake bite treatment is available.
6.5. The snake if captured and bagged should be carried to the hospital for the Identification; no time should be wasted for the capture of the snake only.

7. Documentation

7.1. Maintain records of rescue and release.
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8. Legal Issues

8.1. Strictly adhere to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
8.2. Involve forest officials in snake related activities (rescue/release/treatment etc.). A rescuer can also inform the local RO about his/her activity through WhatsApp.
8.3. Snakes are protected under WL(P)A. The rescue activity needs the permission of the Chief Wild Life Warden of the State.
8.4. **Do not post any photos showing bravery/stunts/selfies with snakes on social media.** This is regarded as a violation of WL(P)A, 1972 in India by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) vide File No: 12-23/WCCB/2014/No.-06/2051 dated 30th December, 2014.
8.5. **Do not allow/facilitate persons from outside the states to handle snakes inside Odisha** without the written permission from the Chief Wildlife Warden of Odisha.

9. Ethics:

9.1. The overall handling and rescue should be done is a serious manner with utmost care and concern for both the snake and humans. Casual attitude, bravado and stunts are to be strictly avoided.
9.2. No need to disturb a snake when it is in the process of preying on a wild animal. The rescuer should not worry when a python is swallowing a jackal or deer in wild.
9.10. Do not use snake as a weapon of crime.

NB: *This protocol and guidelines may be amended time to time with feedback from the forest officials, doctors, veterinarians, rescuers and the common public of the state of Odisha.*