

Protocols & Guidelines to be followed for Snake Rescue & Rehabilitation in Odisha–2017

- Issued on 23 April 2017



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Cover photograph:

A scene just before rescue, a cobra watching while 2 pet dogs barking.

Back photograph:

Cobra on termite mound.

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Preface

Snakebite is a burden on developing countries and India tops the list of snakebite deaths in the entire world. Snake rescuers across the world play a vital role in reducing human-snake conflict. The snake rescuers contribute immensely to the society and so do in Odisha. However, despite their noble work many rescuers faced the whip of Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 due to violation of the law. Many rescuers had lost their lives due to snakebite.

A comprehensive safety and educative protocol exclusively meant for the snake rescue and rehabilitation was lacking In Odisha. Snake Helpline had taken an initiative and prepared an 8-point safety guideline protocol on snake rescue & rehabilitation for the snake rescuers of the state. A one-day workshop on safety for snake related issues with stakeholders was organized on 23 April 2017 in the conference hall of the Orissa Veterinary Council, Sahidnagar, Bhubaneswar. The stake holders from different fraternities such as forest officers, doctors, veterinarians and snake rescuers had participated. An 8-point safety protocol was formulated and named as “Protocols & Guidelines to be Followed for Snake Rescue & Rehabilitation in Odisha”.

The rescuers of Odisha are strictly advised not to post such photographs with snakes showing bravery/affection/cruelty in social media following the directive of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau vide File No: 12-23/WCCB/2014/No.-06/2051 dated 30th December, 2014.

The resource persons participated in the protocol meeting were K. L. Purohoit, Asst. Director, Nandankanan Biological Park; Ashok Mishra, ACF, City Forest Division; Binod Acharjya, RO, Bhubaneswar Range; Gobinda Biswal, RO, Mancheswar Range; Dr. Biswadeep Jena, Asst. Prof., Veterinary Surgery & Radiology; Dr. Siba Prasad Parida, Zoologist; Dr. J. Rao, Deputy Director, State Institute of Health & Family Welfare; Dr. S.R. Singh, Asst. Prof., FMT, AIIMS. Around 50 rescuers across the state had also participated.

I hope a strict obedience of this protocol shall help the snake rescuers to avoid unnecessary snakebite accidents.

Best of luck to all the snake-rescuers of Odisha.

Date – 23 April 2017
Bhubaneswar

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Subhendu Mallik".

Subhendu Mallik,
General Secretary, Snake Helpline
& Honorary Wildlife Warden, Khordha District

Protocols & Guidelines to be Followed 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 having the necessary permission from competent authority.
- 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.

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. Rescue is also essential in case the life of humans or the snake is in danger.
- 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.
- 2.4. Use snake hooks and tongs in a humane manner so as to give minimum stress to the snake.
- 2.5. Avoid snake to snake contact. Follow the 'one snake, one bag' rule.
- 2.6. 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.
- 2.7. 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.
- 2.8. Do not use plastic bottles or jars.
- 2.9. Avoid alcohol and any other materials of intoxication.
- 2.10. Don't allow bystanders to handle any snake.
- 2.11. Avoid curious handling of dead snakes. A dead snake can deliver a single bite through reflex action of the muscles.
- 2.12. Rescuers should avoid wearing rings and other limb adorning ornaments (LAO) as they can lead to potentially dangerous complication in case of venomous snake bite.
- 2.13. The overall handling and rescue should be done in a serious manner with utmost care and concern for both the snake and humans. Casual attitude, bravado and stunts are to be strictly avoided.

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 dangerous law and order situation which may ensue. Rescuers may choose their nearest release location in consultation with the local forest officials.

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 direct supervision of the forest department.
- 4.3. If the snake is to be kept under observation for treatment it should be kept under direct 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 (Johnson, 2011).
- 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 ideally be 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. Photography may be done during release for documentation purpose.
- 5.6. 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 bandage to wrap towards the upper proximity of the limb.
- 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 bystander to 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.
- 6.6. Maintaining a good co-ordination with local hospital authorities is also desirable.

7. Documentation

- 7.1. Maintain records of rescue and update it with local forest Range Officer.
- 7.2. The record shall contain the name, address, date, contact number of the caller, species of snake, release etc. If possible, keep the signature of the beneficiary may be kept.

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.). You can inform the local RO about your activity through WhatsApp or by any other mean.
- 8.3. Snakes are scheduled animals under WL(P)A. The rescue activity needs the permission of the Chief Wild Life Warden of the State.
- 8.4. The rescuers shall apply for the necessary permission to the CWLW through their local Wild Life Warden (DFO). Snake Helpline may recommend the names of their volunteers to get the necessary permission.
- 8.5. 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.

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



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