



Title: Venomous Snake Handling

SOP Number: 079

Purpose: To insure the highest possible level of safety whenever venomous snakes must be handled in order to clean cages, add water and/or feed the animals or when collecting in the field.

ANIMAL HANDLING IN THE VENOMOUS SNAKE ROOM

- A. All cages with venomous snakes are locked. Keys to cages are kept by the Animal Lab Technician, ACS Manager and the Principle Investigator.
- B. ACS Staff will provide daily observation of all snakes; the Principle Investigator or Graduate Students will periodically observe animals and will provide all husbandry. If snakes need to be removed from cages at least one additional person will always be present when cages are opened for feeding and care. Only people skilled at handling venomous snakes will be allowed to work with them.
- C. Once the cage is unlocked, the glass will be moved to allow access to the animal. A set of at least 40 inch snake tongs (preferably Midwest Gentle Giant M-1) will be used to grab the animal midbody and gently lower it into a 5 gallon screw cap plastic bucket (used to ship paint). As one person holds the snake with tongs in the bottom of the bucket, a second person holding the middle of the screw top will cover the opening and then as the snake is released by the person with tongs, they will be removed from the bucket and the top will be screwed down.
- D. After watering, cage cleaning and/or feeding is completed, the top will be carefully unscrewed (always holding the middle of the top so that the snake does not have easy access to the person holding it) and the person with tongs will grab the snake mid body and put it back in the cage. Using a second set of tongs the glass or plexiglass will be pushed to a position where the snake cannot come through the opening and then finally the cage will be completely closed by hand and the lock replaced.

VENOMOUS ANIMAL HANDLING IN THE FIELD

- A. When encountered in the field venomous snakes should be carefully caught with tongs as above.
- B. The major difference is that the snake will eventually be placed in a snake bag (aka pillowcase); this bag will **initially** be draped over the kind of 5 gallon plastic bucket used in the venomous snake room (see above).
- C. After catching the animal with tongs, the snake is placed in the bag that has been draped over the bucket and is restrained with the tongs
- D. Using another set of tongs lift the top of the bag containing the animal up; disengage the tongs holding the animal and secure the top of the bag using tongs so the animal cannot get out the top of the bag
- E. Using those tongs at the top of the bag, rotate the bag rapidly in a circle so that the animal is kept in the bottom of the bag.

- F. Put the bag on the ground and using a pole or another set of tongs place the pole across the neck of the bag above the snake so that it cannot escape
- G. Tie the top of the bag into a knot. Using tongs grab the bag just below the knot and lower the bag into a 5 gallon plastic bucket. With holes made in the top of the bucket so that the animal can breathe, seal the top of the bucket. The bucket with the bagged animal inside can now be safely carried by hand using the bucket handle or placed in a vehicle for transport.
- H. Sometimes the animal might only need to be taken a short distance (say 10-20 m) and released. Both tongs and a snake hook can be used together to grab the animal and take it such a short distance. If the animal is going to be released at a site further away, then it is better to keep it in the bag (in the bucket) and take it to the desired release point. At the site of release, unscrew the top of the bucket and remove the bag with the tongs. Placing the tongs and/or hook on the neck of the bag above the snake and holding a foot on the end of the tongs/hook, untie the bag and then remove the tongs or hook. At this point pick up a corner of the bottom of the bag (opposite of where the snake is) with tongs and gently allow the snake to exit the mouth of the bag by elevating the corner that the tongs are holding. The animal should just exit the bag. If once released, the snake turns towards the person releasing the animal, it can always be pushed away from gently with tongs or hook. If the snake continues to advance in your direction (an extremely rare event), simply back up, understanding that as one of my students stated: “no New World pit viper can catch you if you are backing away (nor do they want to)”.

HEALTH CARE IN CASE OF A BITE

If an individual is bitten by a venomous snake during either handling in the field or venomous snake room, call 911 and refer to **SOP032 – SNAKE BITE**;

Persons to Contact in Case of Emergency

Dr. Tiffanie Brooks, Attending Veterinarian, Animal Care Services.
806-834-8588 Office
806-239-2120 Cell Phone

Dr. Paul Stonum, ACS Clinical Veterinarian
806-834-7373 Office
660-562-4425 Cell

Sydnee Woodman, Manager, Animal Care Services.
806-834-2872 Office
602-758-0670 Cell Phone

Dr. Lou Densmore, Professor, Biological Sciences
806-834-6479 Office
806-438-8028 Cell Phone

Chair, Biological Sciences



Texas Tech University
Office of the Vice President for Research

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee™

806-742-2715 Office

- A. Provide all the above information to the veterinarian and you will be advised and authorized on what action you should take.