DIRECTIVES FOR THE SAFETY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE KEEPING OF POISONOUS SNAKES.

By: A.B. van Woerkom, Volkerakstraat 19-bis,
3522 RB Utrecht, The Netherlands, and
P.B. Stoel, Verlengde Hoogravenseweg 165,
3525 BE Utrecht, The Netherlands.

The following aspects are imperative:

1. The safety of the specimen or species
2. The safety of the keeper
3. The safety of the neighbourhood
4. Animal trade.

1. THE SAFETY OF THE SPECIMEN OR SPECIES

a. Legislation on threatened exotic animals (in the Netherlands, Law B.U.D.; in the U.K. "Endangered Species: Import & Export" lists).

b. Decrees on import and export.
Points a and b regulate in an outstanding way the trade in threatened species so there seems no need to discuss them further here.

c. Laws relating to the protection of animals.
These relate to:
- feeding:
Whilst no exact data relating to food type, quantity, or frequency of offering can be given, it is obvious that enough of the correct type of food must be offered at acceptable intervals.
- housing:
The cages and substructures must be firmly built, and one must be able to work in and around the cages easily.

- hygiene:
  It must be easy to carry out routine cleansing, disinfection and water replenishment operations

d. Transportation.

Poisonous snakes should be transported in a red linen or cotton bag which should be much longer than wide. The base should have a free border of ten to twenty cm i.e. the bottom seam should be at least this distance from the end of the material to allow the bag to be safely inverted. The packer should automatically check seams and stitching prior to packing snakes in bags.

Closure of the bag should be by twisting the top side, turning the top side over and tying securely around the double thickness with rope. Care should be excercised during handling such bags containing venomous snakes.

The snake in this bag should be transported in a polystyrene box. If more than one specimen is housed in each box, then each bag should be clearly labeled, and cardboard separators should be included between each bag.

The box must be clearly sealed, and a card must be affixed to indicate the exact contents of each bag in the box. The statement LIVING ANIMALS: VENOMOUS SNAKES should be affixed indelibly to every surface of the box.

2. THE SAFETY OF THE KEEPER

a. Experience and knowledge.

- one must have some knowledge of how

to safely handle a poisonous snake.
- one must know about the reactions and habits of the poisonous snake in question.
- one must know exactly which procedures are necessary in the event of an accident (see Sutherland, 1985).
- one should have at least a five year experience with non-poisonous snakes before one can start to keep weakly poisonous snakes, such as *Trimeresurus sp.*, *Causus sp.*, *Atheris sp.*, *Vipera ursinii*, *Vipera aspis*, etc.
- after a three year experience with weakly poisonous snakes, one can start keeping other poisonous snakes too.

It is almost impossible to judge whether someone can start keeping poisonous snakes safely. Yet, some "points in favour" can be observed:
- *sufficient knowledge;*
- *proof of having been keeping non-poisonous snakes for five years;*
- *no escapes during the last five years;*
- *membership of a society, such as the Dutch Snake Society;*
- *subscription to a journal of a society (e.g. Litteratura Serpentium);*
- *contacts with other experienced keepers of poisonous snakes.*

b. One should possess suitable cleaning and catching equipment.

c. First aid.

- one should have for each type of poisonous snake a card with instructions on how to act in case of emergency.
- on the card one should mention the name and address of the nearest doctor and of the nearest hospital where suitable assistance can be given.
- one could arrange that in the hospital antisera (as indicated by the owner of the snakes) will be kept in stock.
- one should stock at home sufficient first-aid expedients for direct use in a suitable place, mentioned on the card. These expedients should be fit for the "bandage method" (see Sutherland, 1985) and/or for the conventional method (tourniquet, etc.). A manual in the language of the country should be added.

3. THE SAFETY OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

a. Escape-free cage.

- no chinks, therefore no sash-windows, unless the chink between the panes has been filled by a fixed enclosure.
- no possibility to jerk between, for instance, a stone or branch and the panes.
- application of a suitable lock, so that the cage is unaccessible to unauthorised persons.
- the cage should be constructed in such a way that in normal everyday situations it will be crack- and shock-proof, and not subjected to

distortion.

b. Escape-free room.

If the cages are placed in a specially fitted up room, then this can be considered as an animal residence, so that the demands as formulated in 3a can be taken less severely.

- no chinks under the door, through which a small snake could be able to escape.
- no grating with chinks, unless substantially covered by wire gauze.
- a suitable wire gauze screen if windows are to be opened.
- no escaping possibilities through the smoke-hole of a stove.

4. ANIMAL TRADE

- sale only by really specialised dealers, which means only those with a section for the sale of reptiles, with staff having specialist knowledge of poisonous snakes.
- demands for shops as in 1 (c and d), 2 (a, b and c) and 3 (a).
- no sale to persons under age.

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