

Guidelines for Snake Rescue and Release in Maharashtra

Background:

'Snake friends', or individuals who can handle live snakes, are found across the state of Maharashtra. Unfortunately, many of these youngsters lack experience and training in proper snake handling methods and snake rescue protocols. Though they attend snake rescue calls and often become local celebrities, they unnecessarily handle live snakes and perform risky stunts that they document on social media. There have been innumerable cases where such dangerous stunts with venomous snakes have cost people their lives. Public also needs to be educated that most of the snakes are not dangerous. Rather snakes play a major role in the eco system. They render pest control services by controlling the rodent population. Rodents not only spread diseases like leptospirosis but also consume a substantial amount of food grains that humans store for daily consumption. Also, by feeding on other animals like amphibians, birds and reptiles, snakes play a role in maintaining the balance of an eco system.

Due to ignorance and lack of information, snakes create much fear amongst the general population. In such a scenario, any individual who knows how to handle a snake becomes a celebrity. Often, this status becomes a hurdle in the way of taking strict action against unethical handlers and rescuers, and enforcing the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972. It is also true that in many instances the Forest Department depends on local rescuers to address snake-human conflict situations. This is because internal expertise within the department is not available at all places every time, which makes on-field enforcement difficult at the ground level. Many a time, a serious disconnect have been noticed between the community of snake friends and forest staff. Therefore, the guideline has become necessary.

2. Scope:

Following guidelines are being formulated after consulting field functionaries and experienced NGOs in this field. These guidelines are specific to activities related to snake rescue and release. They do not cover topics of venom extraction, anti-venom manufacturing, and crimes related to snake and snake venom trade. These subjects are addressed in the Wild Life Protection Act (1972), and such incidences can be dealt by authorized Forest Officers of the area.

3. Objectives:

- i) To regulate snake rescue activities through local Forest Department offices and establish a network of responsible snake friends in each region.
- ii) To create standard formats for documentation to be submitted to the forest department.

4. Guidelines :

I) To become Volunteers :

- i) Person interested in voluntary snake conservation activities can submit his details in form (Annexure-II) to the local Deputy Conservator of Forest/Divisional Forest Officer/ Sub Divisional Forest Officer, Concerned Officer after scrutiny and satisfaction include the name of such person in the list prepared for the knowledge of the people.
- ii) The person submitting his name should have sufficient training scientific knowledge about snake and experience of handling snakes of the area.
- iii) Such enlisted volunteers should not only rescue and handle snakes but also get involved regularly in public awareness about importance of snakes role in nature conservation.
- iv) Such enlisted volunteers will not be paid any remuneration for their services by the forest department, as these are rendered voluntarily. However, actual expenses rendered by the rescuer may be reimbursed.

II) Before Snake Rescue :

- i) When attending a rescue call, study the situation and identify whether there is a need for rescue at all. Most often, the snake and humans are not under any threat. Usually, the mere appearance of a snake triggers panic in people. Stick around till the snake moves away, safe from any public action. A decision making tree to attend rescue calls is given in Annexure- I
- ii) Gathering Information :
 - a) Reassure the caller and ask them to calm down
 - b) Immediately transfer the call to another rescuer if you cannot attend it.
 - c) Get description of the snake as well as area/site where it has been spotted.
 - d) Record the address and nearby, prominent landmark to reduce the time spent looking for the place. The contact details of the caller must be recorded
- iii) Briefing the Caller :
 - a) Brief the caller on steps to be taken till the rescue site can be reached
 - b) Ask them to keep track of the snake from a distance, if it's moving
 - c) Emphasize that they should not attempt to kill or capture the snake on their own
 - d) Ask them not to disturb the snake if it's resting.

- e) Ask them to keep everyone away, except one person who is monitoring the snake.
- f) Give them an approximate response time

III) During Actual Rescue :

- i) On site activities :
 - a) Instruct all the people present to clear the area.
 - b) Ensure that proper lighting is available. If needed, arrange for it.
 - c) Check handling equipment and relevant accessories and personal protection equipment. Keep all required tools ready before starting the actual restraining procedure
 - d) Make an assessment of the situation and decide whether it is necessary to intervene.
 - e) Capture the snake as per the guidelines.
- ii) Necessary equipment like (hooks, tongs, tubes and pipes) are essential for safe handling.
- iii) In a scenario wherein the snake is in a conflict situation with danger to its life or danger to the people around it, use safe bagging techniques, learnt during the training, to bag the snake and ventilated. After bagging the snake, put it into a protective case/box for transportation.
- iv) Special care has to be taken while rescuing snakes that are injured and snakes that might have recently eaten. In such cases, handling must be minimized and a dark towel, pipe or tubing capture method should be used rather than tongs or hooks.
- v) Work in pairs whenever possible. Try to restrict handling to two instances, once while bagging the snake and the second while releasing it.
- vi) Concentrate on the rescue at hand and avoid taking videos, talking on the phone or addressing the crowd during the rescue.
- vii) Keep all onlookers at a safe distance so as to avoid accidents.
- viii) Speak to the gathered crowd about the snake that was captured, its habitat and its ecology. Explain how people can co-exist with snakes by making simple changes to their immediate surroundings.
- ix) **Do not attend any rescue calls under the influence of drugs or alcohol.**

IV) Dos & Don'ts while releasing rescued snakes

- i) If the snake is fit for release then do it without delay, within 24 hours of rescue, under the guidance and supervision of the Forest Department.
- ii) Keep records of the rescue and release in a prescribed format. See Annexure III (Include the photographs of the snake either before rescue or after rescue for location/habitat identification).
- iii) In case of non-venomous snakes, try to release it as close to the rescue site as possible, a little away from human habitation.
- iv) In case of venomous snakes, the local forest department and the snake rescuer should identify and designate a release site within the local geography. These sites should be changed periodically, with a break of at least 30 days between releases at the same site.
- v) All releases should be made as per the reported activity time of the particular snake. For example, nocturnal snakes should be released at night and snakes that are active during the day should be released in the daytime. Very high temperatures and harsh sunlight should be avoided during release. Rescued snakes should be released in nature immediately.
- vi) Do not attend any release under the influence of drugs or alcohol.**

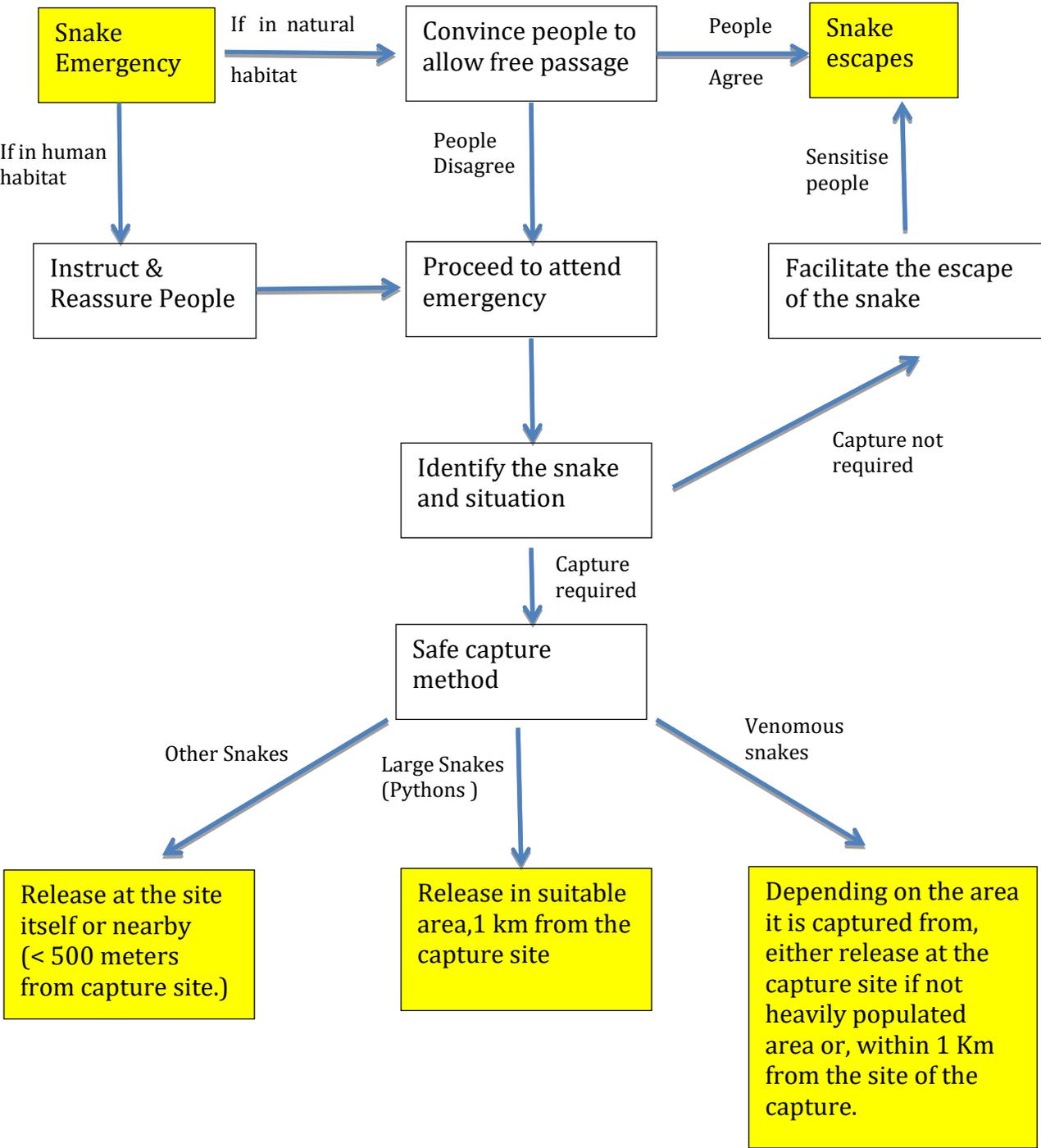
5. Do Not

- i) Keep live snakes in captivity, except for medical treatment. If medical treatment is required, it should be administered under the supervision of the local forest department.
- ii) Indulge in live snake shows. Any such action will be booked under the relevant clauses of the Wild Life Protection Act (1972).
- iii) Unnecessarily handle rescued snakes. Handling puts snakes under more stress and can lead to diseases and in extreme cases death of the reptile.

6. Important points to note

- i) Get acquainted with the First Aid procedures in case of a venomous snakebite and always carry "Safe Rescuer" cards with you. (Annexure- IV)

ANNEXURE -I
Decision making tree in Snake emergency situation



ANNEXURE- II

Application for enlisting name as Snake Rescuers.

Name :

Address :

Blood Group:

Mobile number:

Educational Background:

Certification / training details :

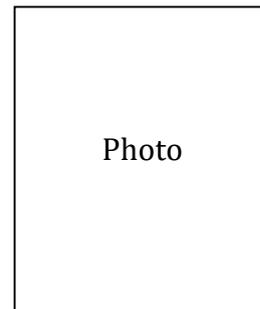
(It involved in association with some NGOs, give details)

Any significant medical history (e.g. Asthma or allergy to drugs / bites)

Reference of at least Honorary Wildlife Warden or Forest Officer or NGO working in field of snakes with contact details

Signature :

Date :



Please indorse Government issued ID Proof

ANNEXURE -III

Rescue & Release Form

Reference No : _____

Date: _____

Name & Address of the person who called :

Phone No:

Location of the animal :

Species:

Size - Adult/juvenile :

Injuries if any :

Medical care needed:

Captivity details if any :

Date of rescue :

Date of release :

Rescuers name & Address :

Notes :

Release date, time and Venue :

Condition of animal at the time of release :

Forest department Seal & Signature

ANNEXURE -IV

SAFE RESCUER CARD (to be kept with rescuer)

SAFE RESCUER CARD	
Name :	Emergency Contact:
Blood group :	Address:
IN CASE OF SNAKEBITE EMERGENCIES	
First Aid -	Don'ts
All snakes are not venomous – so every snakebite is not going to result in death. Even a venomous bite is not always fatal.	Do not eat or drink anything unless okayed by medical sources
Immobilise - Keep the snake bite victim calm. Keep them still and quiet.	Don't allow the victim to engage in strenuous physical activity.
Restrict movement and keep the affected area at or below heart level to reduce the flow of venom.	Don't use your mouth to extract venom
Remove constricting clothing and jewellery.	Do not cut across the bite mark with a blade
Carry the victim to the nearest hospital as soon as possible.	Do not wash the wound
Inform the doctor of any symptoms such as drooping eyelids, blurred vision, nausea etc. that manifests.	Do not pick up the snake or try to trap it (this may put you or someone else at risk of being bitten).
Doctor's helpline: +91	Do not apply either hot or cold packs
	Don't apply a tourniquet.