



MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM FIELD OFFICERS  
GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH PROBLEM SNAKES (and people).



**Division of Research and Planning  
Directorate of Scientific Services  
Ministry of Environment and Tourism  
P/Bag 13306  
Windhoek**

## Summary and checklist

- Many snake problems can be solved without leaving the office.
- Evaluate the situation critically before making a site visit.
- Although it is the duty of MET to provide reliable and useful advice on dealing with problem animals, it is not the duty of MET to solve those problems – this is the responsibility of the land owner/occupier.
- Do not make a site visit unless you have assurance that the snake will be there – and that the problem can be resolved.
- Do not get involved unless you have the confidence and skills to deal with snakes – they are often large, aggressive and some are very dangerous.
- Always give advice on how to discourage snakes from staying around homesteads & buildings.
- Always give advice on the ecological role of snakes. They are not inherently evil, and like all problem animals, it is only the occasional individual that is a problem.
- If a site visit is necessary, take at least one trustworthy colleague and the following equipment: snake hook, drum with lid, length of PVC tube (and stoppers), face mask, and a hessian bag (with no holes).
- While on site, encourage people to become self-reliant, so subsequent site visits are not necessary.
- Release snake at least 3 km from closest habitation.

By definition, a snake is not a problem unless it is interacting with people, and the people perceive the encounter to be a problem. So, "problem snakes" have two variable components - snakes **and** people.

### **Aspects of the people problem:**

- Since some species of snakes are very dangerous, people have every reason to fear them – from an evolutionary point-of-view, those who did not avoid snakes, did not live long enough to produce children.
- Although many people recognize puff adders, cobras, boomslangs and black mambas as highly dangerous snakes, most people cannot distinguish between potentially harmful species and harmless species. The result of this ignorance is a default judgment that all snakes are dangerous (guilty until proven innocent). Although this is not an environmentally-friendly approach, it is a safe strategy for people. However, it should also be remembered that a surprisingly high proportion of snake-bite cases happen when people are trying to kill snakes.
- Many people have an exaggerated and irrational fear of all snakes, and no amount of information is going to solve their problems – these are the people who demand that MET remove all snakes from their region. The potential danger from a particular snake is not the issue at all.
- Many Namibians believe the GRN is responsible for solving all their problems, and since the MET is the agency dealing with wildlife, they believe snakes are our responsibility as well. Responsibility, in fact, resides with the owner or resident of the property.
- The majority of snake problems are not urgent, as in "there is a cobra in my house and it is trying to bite my children". It is most often of this type; "I saw a snake in the field across the street, yesterday, and you must do something....."
- The Ministry has an obligation to provide people with useful and reliable information on wildlife and environmental issues, and to encourage and advise people so they become self-sufficient in regards to solving problem animal issues. However, it is not our duty to deal with snake problems. Dealing with problem snakes should be considered as a public relations exercise only. The problem with this approach though, is once people hear that MET will remove problem snakes, then it soon becomes a full-time job – there are lots of snakes, as well as people who hate them out there. It is better to encourage a culture of self reliance.

### **Aspects of the snake problem**

- About 90 species of snakes occur in Namibia, and only 17 species are very dangerous. So over 80% of species are not dangerous. However, it is true that most large snakes encountered are dangerous (pythons being the exception). See last page of this guide for summarized information on Namibian snakes.
- Snakes do not live in pairs – they are solitary (they pair only long enough to mate – usually once a year). Therefore, there is no danger that if one is killed, then the mate will still be around.
- Snakes give birth to live young, or lay eggs. Birthing may therefore result in a number of baby snakes occurring in a small area at the same time. This is a temporary situation as snakes disperse quickly after birth.
- Most problem snakes are just passing through; either they are looking for food or mates, and if you leave them alone, they will keep on moving and not be seen again. This is especially true if the habitat around the buildings/homestead is not snake-friendly.

- Black mambas are an exception to the above – they often take up permanent residence in a hole or anthill, and will live in these places for years. In these circumstances, an individual black mambas can pose a real threat to a community.
- Large Southern African Pythons, with a maximum length approaching 6 m, can be problematic as they eat small stock, or rest on water tank ball valves, thus causing wastage of water. This species is listed as PROTECTED GAME in our ordinance, and therefore can only be killed if it is an immediate threat to people or livestock. However, depending on the attitudes of staff in the field offices, these animals can also be captured live and transferred to areas where they would not pose the same problems or at least would be tolerated – like a game farm or conservancy (but in the same general area).
- The largest snake in Namibia is the Southern African Python, and they grow to 5 - 5,5 m. Constant and insistent reports of 15 – 25m snakes have not been substantiated, and it is highly unlikely that they do exist. MET investigation of these reports can be rationalized as a public relations exercise only.
- The Ministry has an obligation to protect snakes from indiscriminate killing. Snakes are important components in all Namibian eco-systems, and are protected in the legislation. Genuine problem snakes may of course be killed at any time.

### **HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM – before leaving the office**

When people first contact you, find out as much as possible about the problem - with the intention of solving the problem without needing to make a site visit. Remember, most problems are about people, not snakes:

- Ask them to describe the snake. Maybe it is a species which you realize is harmless (for instance a python, house snake, wolf snake, mole snake or whip/sand snake). Statistically, MOST problem snakes are not dangerous. If the snake is harmless, this information can sometimes be used to diffuse the situation. The poster "Venomous Snakes of Namibia" may help you to make this determination. Also remember, no striped Namibian snakes are dangerous.
- Ask about the actual problem; is the snake threatening people, stealing chicken eggs, or is it a problem just because it is there?
- Often, snakes are seen going into densely packed garages and storerooms. The building owner does not want to get near the structure, but he expects MET to unpack the structure to search for an unspecified snake. This is dangerous. This is an example of the type of situation which should be sorted out without making a site visit (sympathetic, but firm no). Suggest leaving the doors open so the snake can leave on its own.
- Some snake reports are based on spoor only. It is not usually worthwhile to investigate these incidences, as the spoor proves the animal was moving - and it probably kept on moving right out of the area. At times, leguaans and large plated lizards can produce a spoor similar to snakes; no Namibian lizard is dangerous although leguaans can give a nasty bite.
- When was the snake last seen? Many problem snakes are only reported to the MET days or even weeks after being seen (in which case they are long gone, as is the problem). As a rule, investigating a snake problem more than an hour after the snake was last seen will be a fruitless exercise. So, be sure there is a reasonable chance of recovering the snake (for instance, it is shut in a room) before taking the trouble of making a site visit.
- When the snake was seen more than hour ago, assure the complainant that the snake is probably gone, and that they can contact you if they see it again; this solves 75% of snake problems.

- In some cases, however, the public relations value of a site visit may override the normal practical considerations, for instance in the case of a school. Always use a site visit as an opportunity to lecture on the virtue of snakes as components of the natural environment (snakes feed on rodents, which people also complain about).
- Some people report repeated sightings, but on questioning, it is apparent that more than one snake is involved. Sometimes you will receive a long description of snakes seen over a 10-year period; be patient and sympathetic.
- If people are unreasonable and insistent in your office/on the telephone, then they will be the same when you make a site visit, and nothing will satisfy them; even catching a snake will not address all their concerns. Better to give them the bad news in your office and save the time and kms of a site visit
- Always use these personal encounters with people to inform them about the ecological value of snakes, how to deal with problem snakes themselves, and how to discourage snakes from staying around houses.

### **DISCOURAGING SNAKES FROM STAYING AROUND HOUSES AND OTHER BUILDINGS AND YARDS**

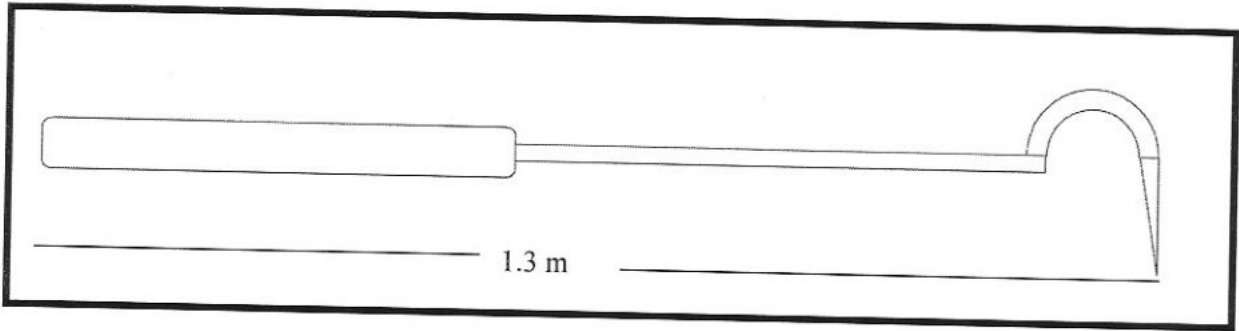
When conducting a site visit, or talking with people in your office, you can offer this information. Always use a site visit as an opportunity to provide information (you don't want to have to go out there again for the next snake).

- There are no chemicals, muti or potions which effectively repel Namibian snakes. Likewise, traps are also generally ineffective in Namibia.
- Snakes require hiding places, so, keeping the premises clean and tidy will go a long way towards discouraging snakes to stay. Do not allow rubbish, junk and vegetation to build up.
- Cats are very good at keeping snakes away. Some dogs are also good, but generally not as effective as cats.
- Many snakes are attracted to buildings because there are often rodents around buildings. Store foodstuffs, grains and animal feed in secure containers – so they do not attract rodents (snake food). Cats can help keep rodent pests under control as well.

### **CATCHING SNAKES - TOOLS OF THE TRADE**

It is best to prepare for all possibilities, especially if you don't know the species of snake you will be dealing with.

- There are specialized commercial tools, called snake tongs or snake grabbers. However, they are not available in southern Africa, and must be imported. They are handy for grabbing snakes from underneath beds, but take some skill and practice to use effectively. If you squeeze too hard for instance, then a docile snake becomes very agitated – and potentially much more dangerous to handle. Homemade snake grabbers are easy to make - the jaws and handle apparatus can, for instance, be carved from hardwood. Do now loan out snake grabbers – it is difficult to get people to return them. Commercial braii tongs can be modified to grab snakes, but they are too short to use on many species. The jaws should be rounded and smoothed and padded with rubber so as not to hurt the snake (which results in a thrashing snake which is difficult to control).



*Figure 1. Snake sticks can be made in an array of shapes and sizes.*

- Snake sticks (or snake hooks) are the standard tools for handling all dangerous and biting snakes. See figure 1. They are easily constructed from 6-8 mm round mild steel, and attached to a wooden handle. They should be light enough to be used with one hand. The end of the hook should be tapered so it can be easily slid under a snake without snagging, but not so sharp that you can poke a hole in the snake. This tool is used to manipulate snakes on the ground (see figure 3, lift snakes off the ground (to drop travel containers), and also to pin the heads of bad-tempered biting snakes. You don't buy snake sticks, you make them yourself.
- Snake nooses are made by attaching a strap of leather (about 20-30mm wide) at the end of a 2m pole. The strap forms a loop at the end of the stick, and the end of the leather extends to the other end of the stick so it can be manipulated – it takes two hands to manipulate this tool. It works by sliding the loop over the snake's head, then pulling the loop tight to secure the snake, optimally about midbody.  
  
This always results in a very angry thrashing snake. A major fault is that it is not always easy to loosen the loop when you want to release the snake, but at least the snake is held very securely. These nooses are easily home-made.
- A length of PVC water tube (black pipe), 50 mm or more in diameter, and about 3m long makes a cheap and effective trap; old used pipe can be used. Block one end securely, and have another plug ready to plug the other end once the snake is inside (see figure 5). Optimally, use the plastic plugs which are commercially-available for this pipe – and drill 10mm holes in each end for air to pass through. These traps are so easy to make, that you can make several, and have one in your vehicle at all times. You can even loan them out, and it is no great loss when they are never returned. Larger sizes of black pipe are needed for large mambas and cobras. Very large sizes of plastic sewage and water pipes can even be found which will accommodate large pythons (although plugging the ends will take some initiative).
- When catching spitting cobras, you should wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Your eyes need protective headgear; goggles, workshop face shields, welding helmets with a clear visor, or even a motorcycle helmet will do the job (venom can be easily washed off equipment and clothes with soap and water). Figure 3 shows a snake wrangler fully protected, except he forgot his gloves.
- Large plastic drums, paint tins and buckets and plastic rubbish bins, tombo drums, all with tight fitting-lids, can be used to contain and transport snakes. Cardboard cartons can also be used, but they are not as secure, and need special attention to make them secure enough. Generally, these containers do not need air holes if the snake will be released within a few days (the snake does not need food or water during this period either).
- Cloth bags such as pillow slips and bank money bags are excellent for transporting small snakes, and hessian bags are required for large snakes. Make sure all bags are free of

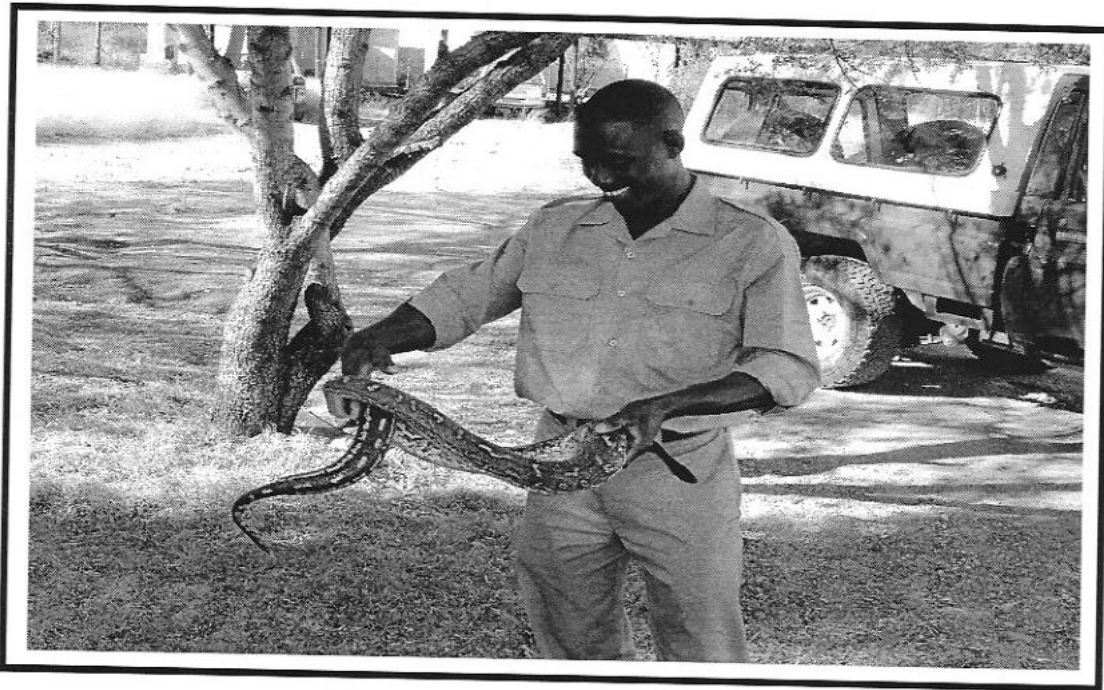
holes, even small ones. Snakes will work at a small hole until it is big enough for them to escape (usually in your office or vehicle).

- As described under the section on dealing with black mambas, shooting the snake with a shotgun is the recommended method; the larger the gauge the better. If you travel with an official firearm, be sure to also be in possession of the official MET Authorization.
- Funnel traps can be made from metal mosquito gauze or expanded metal, and the best have a funnel at each end. They must be placed up close to a wall, so the wall acts to guide the snake through the funnel and into the trap. Funnel traps can be effective for individual snakes that have been seen several times in the same area. Around buildings, snakes usually crawl close to walls. This information can be given to people with problem snakes, and they can make their own funnel traps. The MET should not bother with funnel traps
- Sticky glue boards, for the control of rodent pests, are available commercially in the pest control sections of large shops, and especially veterinary supply agencies. Single boards are too small for most snakes, so it is advisable to make a base board, and fasten four glue boards to the base board – producing a much larger contact area. These are set, as with funnel traps, on the ground along walls, so the wall act as a drift fence. Glue boards just hold the snake, disposal is still a problem – read the directions. As above, the MET can recommend this solution, but it is up to the public to purchase their own glue boards.

### ON-SITE VISIT – before catching the snake

- Again, do not bother with an on-site inspection unless there is a good chance of success. If the complaint is old, the snake was last seen going down a hole, seen crawling under a building, fleeing straight off into the veld, or into a packed storeroom, rather stay in the office. The best conditions are when there is a person who is watching the snake and will point it out when you arrive at the scene.
- Sometimes snakes can be driven out of hole a with petrol: insert a length of flexible hosepipe as far down the hole as possible and then pour in ½ -litre petrol. Pull hose out. Give snake 15 minutes to emerge although often they do not.
- Two people are more efficient than one at catching snakes, and it is safer in the case of dangerous species. In the case of large pythons, take several reliable colleagues – about one for each meter of snake.
- Snakes are cold-blooded, and are therefore sluggish on cold mornings; this is the best time to catch them. If you wait until midday when it is hot (and this timing is often unavoidable) then the snake will be most active, aggressive and difficult.
- Before leaving the office, make sure you have a facemask (for spitting cobras), a snake stick (figure 1), and a drum- sized container with a tight fitting lid, a length of appropriately-sized PVC water pipe (see figure 5), and a cloth bag – like a hessian bag or pillow slip (check for holes, before the snake does).
- After arriving at the site, the first thing you will need to do is locate and identify the snake- - this will determine how to proceed. **If there is any doubt about the identity of the snake, you must assume it is highly venomous.**
- Do not get involved with problem snakes unless you have the confidence to deal with dangerous snakes – you invariable have a large critical audience, especially in the communal areas. Rather refuse “snake duty” than disgrace the MET, and possibly end up in the hospital as well.

- As a rule, MET staff should never handle with their hands dangerous or potentially dangerous snakes.

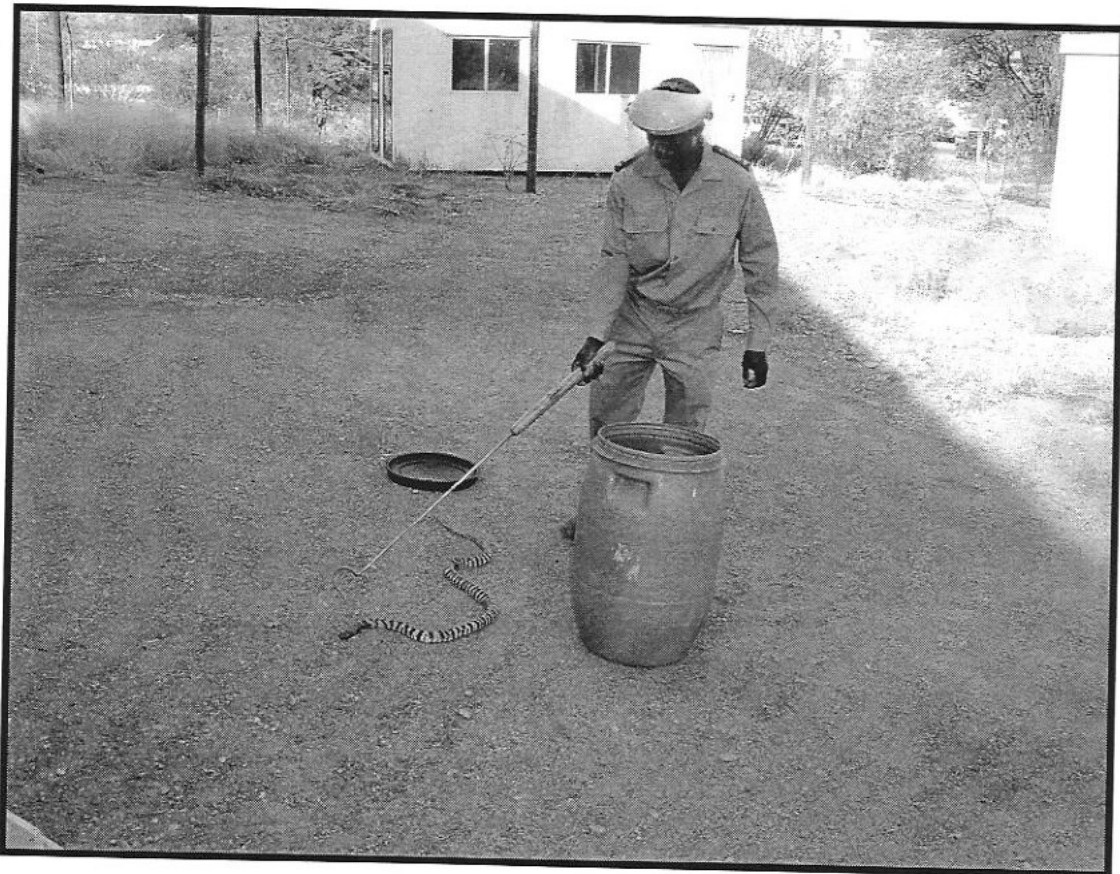


*Figure 2. Snakes which are placid and not dangerous can just be picked up with your hands. Be sure to support the snake's body at several points, and control it, but do not restrain it.*

- If the snake is in a place where it can easily move into thick vegetation or under a building (and therefore escape), it is usually best to try to first move the snake into an open spot where it can be manipulated without the possibility of escape. This is usually done by scooping up the snake with the snake hook.
- If it is a species that you recognize and you are absolutely sure it is not dangerous, then the easiest method is to just grab the snake with your hand and place into the container or cloth bag. Non-dangerous and non-aggressive snakes can just be scooped up and supported with your hands. (Figure 2) A placid snake will respond well to this treatment, whereas if you try to restrain it, it may panic and becomes aggressive. Do not attempt this with a dangerous snake, no matter how placid it seems.
- Some non-dangerous snakes readily bite (for example mole snakes, skaapstekers, and whip & sand snakes), so gloves and long-sleeved bush jackets will help prevent nasty bites (which can become infected if not treated). However, never restrain a snake's head with a gloved hand – you do not have enough sensitivity through the glove and you may hurt the snake.
- An easy and effective way to bag a non-dangerous but evil-tempered snake, is like this; grasp, with your best hand the bottom of an empty cloth bag. Now, with your hand still holding the bottom of the bag, roll the bag up and over your arm like a giant condom. Now, grab the snake with your bagged hand and then roll the top of the bag down your arm, so the snake is at the bottom inside of the bag, and your hand is outside.
- Secure the top of the bag (wire is best), release your grip on the snake and the snake is loose but secured inside the bag.



- Also, when dealing with non-dangerous, but bad-tempered snakes, and which are not too quick, the head can be pinned to the ground, with a stick or snake hook. Once the head is immobile the snake is grasped just behind the head with your hand– so it can't bite. When lifting the snake from the ground, always support the body with your other hand as the snake may hurt itself if held only by the head. Also, do not hold the head too tight, as the bones in the head are fragile and can be easily damaged. This is the method used by professional snake handlers for venomous snakes, and they are frequently bitten, so it is not so fail-safe. So don't try this method with dangerous or potentially dangerous snakes. In practice, most snakes can be moved without any physical contact.
- If the snake is on a flat surface, a container can be placed over the top of the snake. Then, a piece of flat tin or board can be slid along the ground under the snake, and under the container – and thereby isolating the snake within the container. Then just upright the container, making sure the flat-plate stays in place. Fasten flat-plate to top of container and snake is secured inside the container.
- The snake hook (figure 1) is the standard tool for catching snakes. It works on the principle that if a snake is lifted off the ground, then it is reluctant to fall off, so it balances itself (figure 4).
- It is important to support the snake in the middle, in order to encourage the snake to stay on the hook. Often snakes are so excited that they make no effort to stay on the hook and keep falling off. In this situation, the solution is to work the snake on the ground until it tires and slows down (figure 3).
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*Figure 3. The snake stick is used to manipulate the snake on the ground, and is better than the grabber or noose because it does not restrain, and therefore panic the snake.*

- Once off the ground, and settled/balanced on the hook, the snake is then lifted up and just dumped into the traveling container (figure 4).

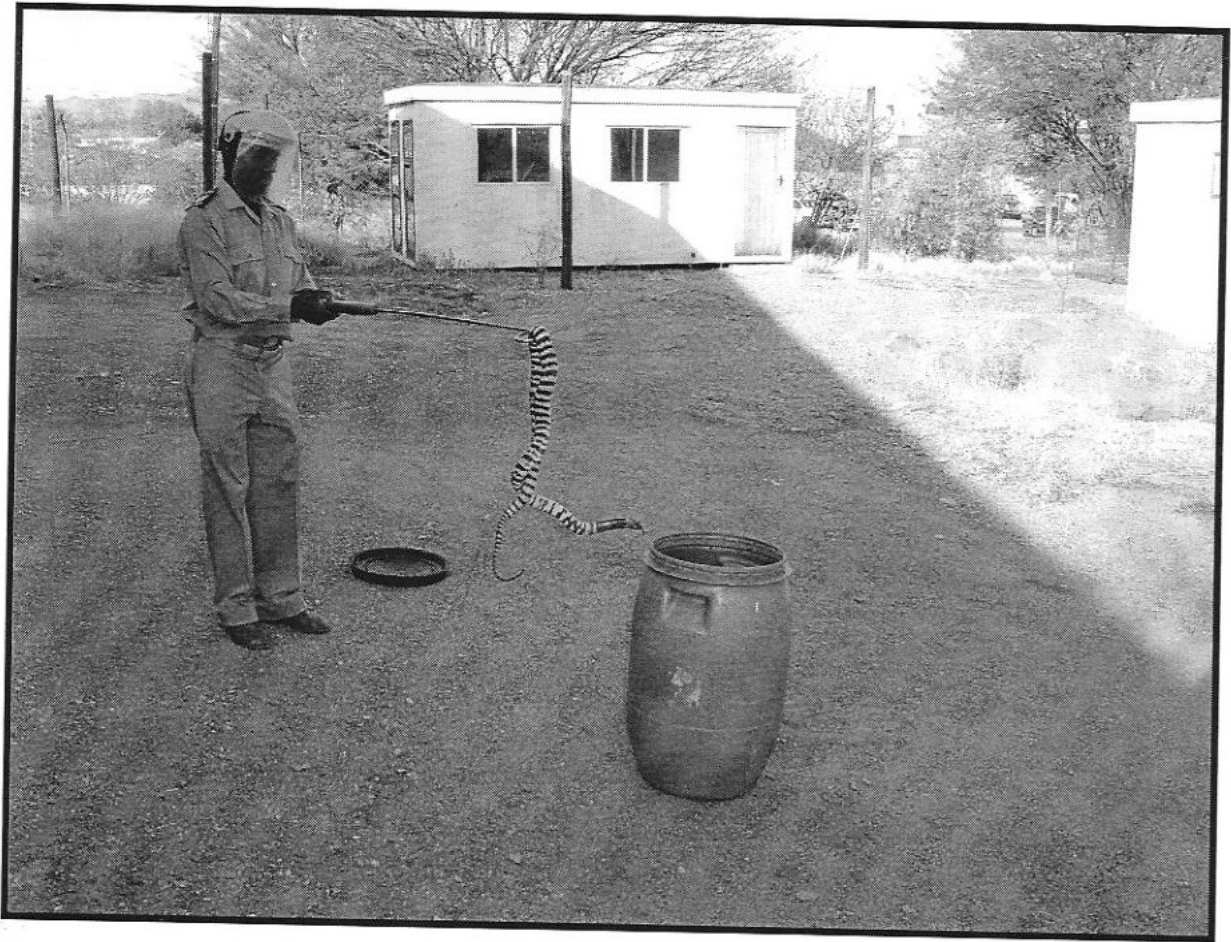


Figure 4. *The balanced snake is then lifted and gently dropped into the traveling container.*

- Often, the PVC tube is the easiest method, especially inside houses. This device works like this: Lay the tube on the floor or ground and push the open end towards the head of the snake (figure 5).  
With or without the use of the snake hook, encourage the snake to go into the open pipe. Usually the snake thinks it is a hole and they go in to escape your harassment. Once the snake is inside, the end can be plugged, and the snake is secured.  
The snake is then transported to the release-site in the tube – but be sure and keep it out of the sun as the black plastic will heat up quickly, and kill the snake inside.



Figure 5. Snake is encouraged to go into plastic pipe.

- A variation on this method is to lay a pillow slip, or other bag out neatly on the ground and prop open the open end with a short stick and stones in the corners, creating an open tent (figures 6 & 7) – then, using the snake hook, the snake is encouraged to crawl into the bag – which it perceives as a safe haven. Once inside the bag, close and secure the open end with wire.

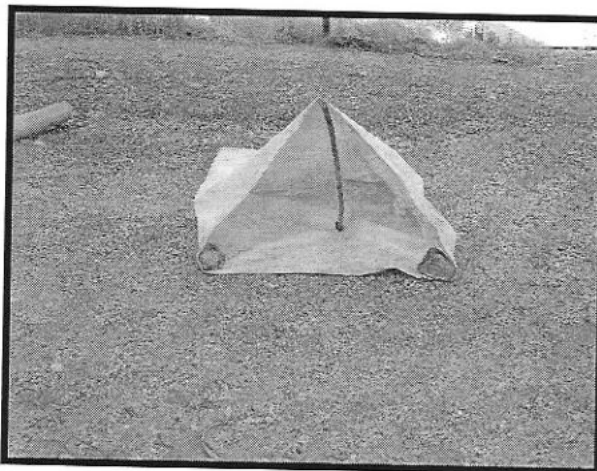


Figure 6. This is a safe haven from a snake's perspective.

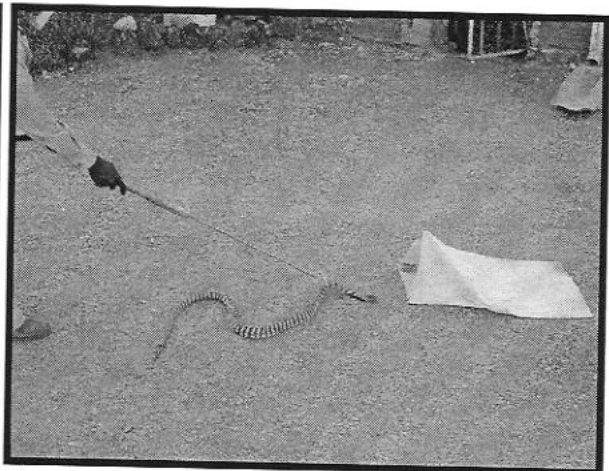


Figure 7. Encourage snake to crawl into Bag.

## SPECIAL CASES

### Black mambas

Since this species is highly venomous, very quick, large and at times very aggressive, it is the most dangerous snake in Namibia. We do not recommend that MET personnel attempt to catch large adults alive. Problem black mambas are best shot with a shotgun. However, be sure of the accuracy of the first shot, as a wounded black mamba is even more dangerous than a healthy one.

If the shotgun method is not an option (for instance, the snake is behind the stereo in the sitting room), then the PVC pipe method is also sometimes effective – despite the black mamba's evil reputation, they are usually very willing to take an escape route if one is offered.

### Spitting cobras

In addition to a serious bite (though rarely fatal), spitting cobras (three species in Namibia) spit venom, aimed at your eyes, which can cause temporary blindness and other serious complications (if you are spat in the eye, immediately wash out with any mild liquid and go immediately to a clinic or hospital). When dealing with spitting cobras, always wear protective headgear. It is also best to wear gloves, and long sleeved shirts and pants – to protect skin from venom spray. However, if venom does come in contact with your skin, it is not a big problem, as long as it is washed off with soap & water as soon as possible.

Spitting cobras are generally slow snakes and are easy to capture using the normal techniques.

**Pythons** are Protected species, therefore it is worthwhile to catch them and translocate to another place. Pythons are not venomous, but they readily bite (often causing infection if not treated), and of course very large ones are very difficult to handle. Always take reliable and trustworthy colleagues when attempting to catch a large python.

One way to catch a large python is to grab it and wrestle it into a hessian bag. The first step is to grab the snake behind the head in order to prevent the snake from biting.

There are two basic ways to secure the head without being bitten; firstly, throw a bag or piece of cloth (shirt or bush jacket will do) over the head of the snake – this will tend to calm the snake, and they are reluctant to strike if they cannot see. Slowly move your hand under the cloth and grab the snake behind the head (you need to remember where the head was before you covered it up). Because the snake cannot see, there should be little initial resistance. The other method is used for a snake that is out in the open and being aggressive; hold a hessian bag out in front of you and approach the snake, and allow it to strike at, and bite the bag. As soon as the snake hits the bag, immediately wrap the bag around the snake's head, and thereby preventing it from biting.

In either situation, you are now holding a very angry snake by the head (with both hands) and now you must depend on friends and colleagues to grab lengths of snake and control it. If you do not have this extra help the python will quickly wrap around you and start strangling you. Four or five people would be needed to control a large python.

### **Never attempt to catch a large python on your own.**

Now, the object is to wrestle the snake into a hessian bag – which has been previously checked to be strong and secure – even small holes will eventually allow the snake to escape. One person is needed to do nothing except hold the bag open, and another to hold the head. Start guiding the snake into the bag tail first, and proceed until just the head remains outside.

The person holding the head then puts his hands and upper arms (still holding the snake's head) into the bag, while a colleague holds the bag closed around his arms. With one swift movement, release the snake's head and extract his arms, and the colleague quickly closes the bag. Tie shut with wire, and the python is bagged and ready to travel. Rather use bags to transport large pythons than drums.

The second way to catch a large python is by using a piece of PVC tubing which is thick and long enough to contain the snake. The procedure is the same as described in the section on PVC tube traps.

## SHOOTING SNAKES - THE FINAL SOLUTION

The picture of the fake snake on top of the stereo system on the front cover is ment to catch your attention, but the actual situation is also not that uncommon. It may be nearly impossible, in this situation, to safely remove dangerous snakes, especially if the snake can get into inaccessible air-spaces, which are common in many built-in cabinets. Spraying or squirting a noxious fluid like petrol or bug spray may induce a snake to leave a hiding place and give you a chance to restrain and remove it. Often, however, this only drives the snake further into hiding. You need to weigh up the possible damage the fluid will cause against just letting the snake leave on it's own time (in Windhoek, a situation like this was resolved when the house owner went to the coast for a long weekend, and leaving all the windows open. On return, the black mamba was gone).

If all other efforts are unsuccessful and a decision is made to shoot such a snake, let the owner do it, so you are not liable for any damages or for breaking any municipal laws – most municipalities do not allow discharging firearms within their jurisdiction – pass these risks on to the house owner.

Shot shells are best to use when killing snakes, as opposed to solids, and shots shells are available in .22 caliber up to and including 12 guage. However MET officers rarely have access to either shot shells or the appropriate firearm. If shooting snakes is a regular occurrence in your area, for instance removing black mambas which are terrorizing rural communities, then you should apply to obtain a suitable firearm and shot shells through your district office; district offices should already have firearms for problem animal control, but maybe not shotguns. Officers should try to make due with whatever weapons are already available in the MET. If a motivation can be made to purchase, then a .410 bore with 7 1/2, 8 or 9 shot would be recommended.

Any shooting of snakes must be done with a reasonable assurance of killing the snake outright. Unless you are an exceptional shot, do not try to shoot dangerous snakes with solids at great distance (for example black mamba on an anthill) – because you are afraid to get closer. You are much more likely to wound it. Rather walk up to within a few meters and do the job with a shotgun. A wounded snake becomes very dangerous; a worst-case scenareo is wounding a black mamba, which then goes on to attack people and livestock – and the MET may be held liable.

The use of shot over solid ammunition cannot be over-emphasized:

- 1). The killing zone with a solid is limited to the diameter of the bullet, whereas with shot, the zone can be over 1 m in diameter.
- 2). It is not necessary to get as close to the snake, ie. accuracy is less a factor when using shot.
- 3). Shot dissipates within a few meters, but solids can go on to damage property, people and livestock for some distance.

Again, if you are not confident to handle the situation, just do not get involved in the first place.

### **KEEPING AND MAINTAINING THE SNAKE BEFORE RELEASE.**

Snakes have low metabolic rates, and are generally very hardy. Therefore, they do not need the daily maintenance as do mammals and birds. For this reason, a snake can be kept in a container without water or food for up to two weeks without ill effects. However the container must have air holes, and be kept in a cool place at all times. Cloth bags allow enough air to circulate. Never keep a snake in a cage with wire mesh – as they will rub their snout raw on the mesh. If snakes are kept for over two weeks, then they would need water, but it is best to release snakes as soon as possible after capture. This is best done on the same trip that the snake was captured.

### **RELEASING SNAKES**

When traveling to the release site, do not leave the container holding the snake in the sun.

Remember, you are an environmentalist, and snakes are part of the environment, so release the snake, unharmed, where it has the best chance to adjust and not run into people again. As a rule, places with thick vegetation, at least 3 km away from the closest habitation would be good.

### **Snake bite**

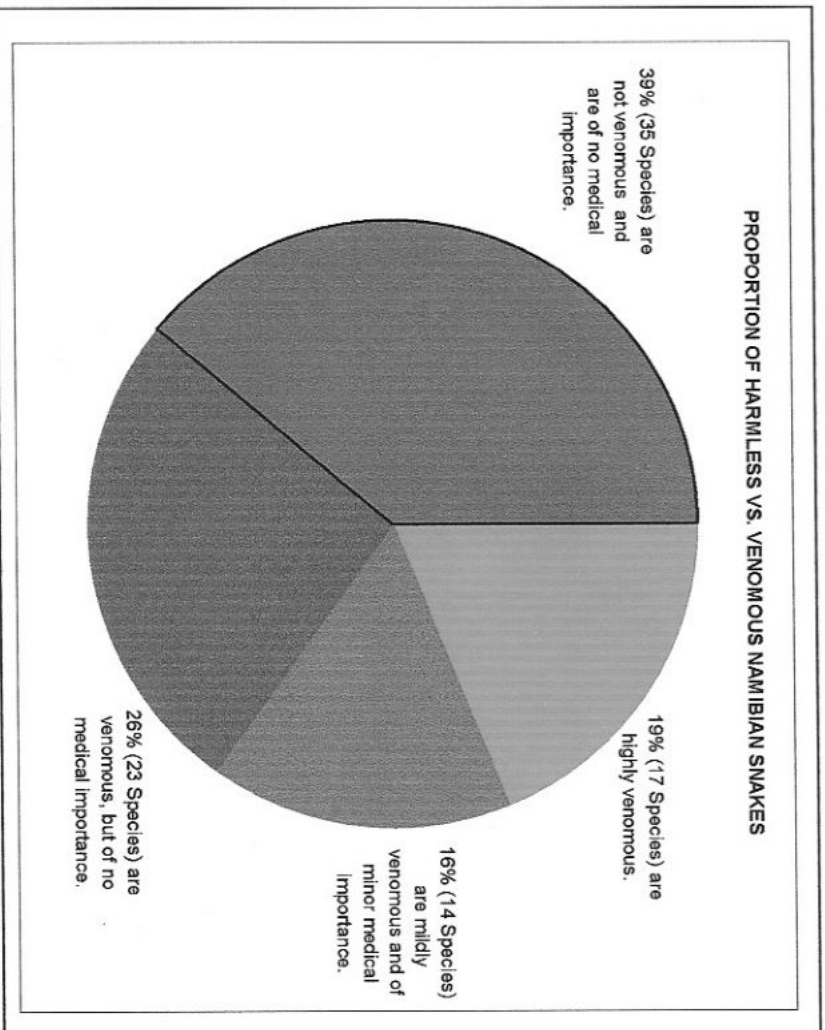
Lastly, if things have gone very wrong, and you are bitten by a snake you believe could be venomous, then you need to take immediate action:

- Kill the snake and take it with you for identification (treatment will be determined by the species of snake),
- Wrap the limb with a pressure bandage (firm wrapping which does not stop circulation)
- Immobilize and elevate limb, minimize all body movement,
- Have a colleague immediately drive you to the nearest clinic or hospital.

“Snakes have more right to be terrified of man than man of snakes. But whereas a snake does not know enough to be afraid, a man’s fear is usually due to ignorance”

## NAMIBIAN SNAKES.

There are eight families of snakes in Namibia, containing about 89 species, and new species are found every few years. The majority of Namibian snakes are not dangerous to man, although large venomous snakes are very visible, giving the impression that they are in the majority.



- Two species are protected in Namibia: The Southern African Python (*Python natalensis*), and the Dwarf Python (*Python anchietae*). Neither species is currently threatened in Namibia, but they could be vulnerable to the international pet and skin trade and populations are not high.

**“Snakes have more right to be afraid of man, than man of snakes. But whereas a snake does not know enough to be afraid, a man’s fear is usually due to ignorance” (Pope).**

- No species of snake are poisonous i.e. dangerous to eat.
- The majority of Namibian venomous snakes are not immediately life-threatening, but a few are: the Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*) Angolan Cobra (*Naja anchietae*) and the Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polyepis*).
- The other species of venomous snakes are of far less medical importance, as either they rarely bite, or the bite can easily be treated in time, assuming the victim seeks medical help immediately.
- Snakes are natural components of Namibia’s ecosystems, they play important, although ill - defined, ecological roles. Snakes should not be indiscriminately killed. Also, remember that many people receive snakebites when attempting to kill snakes.
- The greatest threat to Namibia’s snakes is habitat alteration: anything that alters the natural vegetation (therefore the primary energy source). Examples are large-scale agriculture, bush encroachment, desertification and deforestation.
- Wetland - dependent species, found along the northern rivers, are particularly threatened due to the alteration of this habitat.