

## AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

<b>SOP No:</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>SOP</b>	<b>Snakes</b>
<b>Scientific Name:</b>	<b>Varies</b>
<b>Category:</b>	<b>2 or 3</b>
<b>Approval Level:</b>	Category 2: School Principal may delegate Category 3: School Principal may <b>NOT</b> delegate
<b>Authority:</b>	<b>Government Schools</b> – Department for Education and Childhood Development Animal Ethics Committee <b>Independent and Catholic Schools</b> – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC)
<b>Authority Approval Date:</b>	1 August 2010
<b>Last Update:</b>	18 December 2018
<b>Disclaimer:</b>	<i>This document may be updated at any time. You should check the web site regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the relevant AEC.</i>
<b>Licensing Requirement:</b>	May apply to some species. Reptiles require a license - 'Keep and Sell' Permit, before keeping or breeding is permitted. Check the Department for Environment and Water web site when considering a reptile. <a href="http://www.environment.sa.gov.au">http://www.environment.sa.gov.au</a> Reptiles must be obtained from a licensed keepers breeding stock.
<b>Compliance Requirement:</b>	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal. It is recommended that this Standard Operating Procedure be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.

### General Information:

Snakes are reptiles and, unlike birds or mammals, are cold-blooded creatures whose body temperature changes as the air temperature changes. Snakes are in two main groups venomous and non-venomous. NO venomous snakes must be kept on any site. Most of the varieties of pythons sold in licensed outlets respond well to handling. Other types require a dedicated keeper and specialised facilities and should not be attempted.

Snakes have an unwarranted reputation and suffer terribly from humans killing them and from destruction of their habitats worldwide. Many are now endangered.

Snakes have scales and feed on a diet of live food. They kill their prey by squeezing it. Once their prey is dead they swallow it whole. They move by slithering along the ground or through the tree branches. They have no eyelids or external ears.

There are approximately 140 land snakes and 30 sea snakes in Australia of which about 100 are poisonous with only about a dozen who can kill humans. Many species are endangered and snakes must not be collected from the wild, as it is illegal without a 'Take' or 'Rescue' Permit.

They are tolerant of human handling but are not affectionate animals. They should not be carried around. They can be defensive and bite. They are very food orientated and may attempt to bite anything that moves – including fingers! Never spray chemicals or fumes near snake enclosures.

Reptiles need specialised care – caging and food. The site should consider its capacity to store-frozen mice or rats on site safely and hygienically. Please remember it is against the Animal Welfare Act for live mice and rats to be fed to reptiles. Check the species thoroughly that you are interested in keeping to ensure you can provide for its needs. Also note the length of the lifespan for reptiles is considerable and means the animal needs care for several decades. They are not a short-term option. The information in this fact sheet is generic.

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### Physical Attributes:

- **Size (adult):** They can vary from 30cms up to several metres in length. Children's Pythons grow up to a metre and Carpet Pythons can grow up to 4 metres.
- **Weight (adult):** Varies with species.
- **Life span:** Varies with species but many live for 10-15 years, Carpet Pythons can live for 20 years, Children's Pythons for 30 years.
- **Sexual maturity:** Varies with species. Carpet Pythons are mature at 3 years.
- **Gestation period:** Varies. Carpet Pythons incubate their eggs for 10-15 weeks.
- **Number of offspring:** Varies. Carpet Pythons lay up to 18 eggs and Children's Pythons lay 7 eggs.

### Behaviour:

- **Normal:** Depending on the species there will be variations in the activity levels of reptiles. They should however appear alert, eat well and have good condition to their body and scales. They should shed their skins at regular intervals.
- **Socialisation:** Many reptiles live solitary lives but some smaller species may live in colonies. Snakes should generally be kept on their own or have been together from a young age.
- **Activity levels (hibernation etc):** Many reptiles come out during the heat of the day to warm themselves. Others are nocturnal. Many species hibernate during the cooler winter months. In spring they are particularly active as it is mating time.

### Environment:

- **Space:** At a minimum the snake should be able to comfortably move around the enclosure, climb and turn freely. The enclosure should be of a reasonable length and at least half as wide.
  - A glass or glass fronted timber tank.
  - Ventilated top for tank.
  - Light fitting and UV bulb (for heating and to simulate sunlight).
  - Thermometer.
  - Water and food dishes.
  - Landscape materials, eg soil, branches, leaf litter and rocks.
  - The size of the tank will determine the number and type of snakes kept.
- **Movement:** Snakes slither along the ground and through trees. They can support their weight while seeking out an object to crawl onto or up. They can move and climb very rapidly. They use their tongue to detect smells. They can feel vibrations.
- **Water:** Clean water must always be available. Although they can get moisture from their food never let the water pot dry out. Water dishes should be shallow large heavy containers as snakes may get in the pot.
- **Temperature:** Snakes like to soak up heat from their environment – and can often be found 'sunning' themselves. Once the tank has been landscaped, attach the heater to the lid at one end of the tank, over the rocks or branches. This provides a 'hot spot' at one end and a cooler area at the other. The air temperature in the tank should be 24 - 27°C. Keep the tank away from direct sun, which will increase the temperature.
- **Lighting:** Snakes like to be dark for at least 10-12 hours a day. The heat source should not produce excessive light.
- **Covering:** All enclosures must have a mesh covering.
- **Shelter:** The enclosure should provide an area for refuge from heating, lights, action and other snakes. This can be created with plants, logs and rocky overhangs.
- **Cleaning:** Uneaten food should be removed the day after feeding. Water should be changed daily. Any faeces or soiled areas should be removed every few days. The whole enclosure should be cleaned once a term. Soils and items used in creating a natural environment should be cleaned and changed at this time. Creating a 'new' design in the space will stimulate the snake to re explore.

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### Feeding:

- **Diet:** When keeping snakes they require recently killed frozen food such as mice or rats. Small invertebrates can be fed live to young snakes eg crickets. Frozen mice and rats need to be thawed and warmed gently in warm water before feeding.
- **Daily requirements:** Snakes eat a large amount of food at a time and then take a long time to digest it. Some species can unhinge their jaws to consume very large prey. Young snakes can be fed once a week – 7-10 small newborn mice or crickets, juvenile snakes every 7-10 days – 1 large mouse and adult snakes every 2-3 weeks – 2 large mice or one rat. Allow the snake a few undisturbed days to digest its food.
- **Supplementary feeding:** Should not be required.
- **Equipment:** Large flat heavy water bowls. Tongs to hold food.

### Breeding:

- **Mating:** Snakes will mate when both sexes are ready in spring with birth occurring in early summer.
- **Pregnancy:** The female python lays eggs in hollow logs or dens where she curls around the eggs to incubate them.
- **Fate planning:** Breeding should not occur on sites but any stock must be re homed. They must NEVER be released into the environment, as this may not be their suitable habitat.

### Handling:

- **Human:** Scoop up the snake gently. Use one hand to hold its head and the other to support its body. Never hold with one hand and always support their body. Larger snakes may need two adults to support its weight. Ensure they are handled in an enclosed area to avoid them escaping.
- **Equipment:** A large soft net bag should be used for capture or moving snakes.
- **Transporting:** Snakes should be moved in ventilated carry boxes or cages. Transport quickly and do not leave unattended or allow the snake to over heat.
- **Children:** Should not handle snakes however they can touch them gently avoiding the head area. Observation only. Children should not tap on glass.

### Hygiene:

Thoroughly wash hands with soap and running water for at least 10-15 seconds after working or handling any animals. Dry hands with clean paper, cloth towel or air dryer. Turn off the tap with the paper towel if possible.

All reptiles have the potential to transmit diseases. Keeping their enclosures clean and using good hygiene should assist with this. A range of protozoa and bacteria infections such as Salmonella sp can occur.

Follow first aid procedures should a bite occur.

### Signs of illness:

#### Indicators:

- Not flicking its tongue.
- Abrasions.
- Mite infestation – place a pest strip in the cage but out of the snakes reach.
- Appears lethargic, weight loss, lumps or swellings, difficulty moving, skin changes, infections, wounds.
- Dull skin.
- Not drinking or eating.
- Vomiting.
- Shedding problems.

### Treatments:

Assistance from a veterinarian should be sought for confirmation of conditions and treatment options.

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<b>Euthanasia:</b>	When an illness or injury is such that recovery is unlikely then the animal must be euthanised by a veterinarian. Any death must be reported to the Animal Ethics Committee using the appropriate form (see section relating to ADVERSE EVENTS). Forms are available on the relevant websites.
<b>Disposal/fate planning:</b>	When no longer required snakes must be re homed. They must NEVER be released into the environment. Bodies must be disposed of correctly in accordance with local council regulations.
<b>Holiday and weekend care:</b>	Snakes should not be rostered off site. They need to be checked and fed regularly over weekends and holiday periods.
<b>Approved activities:</b>	Observation
<b>Resources:</b>	<a href="http://www.reptilepark.com.au">www.reptilepark.com.au</a> <a href="http://www.australiazoo.com.au">www.australiazoo.com.au</a> <a href="http://www.australianexplorer.com">www.australianexplorer.com</a>