

I see little black insects moving on the snake. What are they?

The parasites that you see are called mites. They are the reptile keepers nightmare. If you see any on a snake, the snake should be removed from the rest of your collection. Mite infestations spread rapidly.

Clean the cage out thoroughly with bleach solution water and throw away cage decorations, or soak them for a long time in a bleach solution.

There are numerous schools of thought to get rid of mites on your snake. The older method is to leave a small piece of Vapona in a cage for a few days, then remove it for a few days. You continue this for approximately a month to 6 weeks and the infestation should be gone. However you must place the Vapona in a container so the snake cannot touch the strip. Ensure the holes punched into the container are too small for the snake to get in it. When the Vapona is in the cage, remove the water bowl, and replace it when you remove the Vapona.

Another method is to wash the cage out as described, and then to spray "Front Line" onto a cloth and let the snake crawl through the damp cloth. Ensure that you cover the entire snake. Mites generally hide under the scales and come out at night. As soon as they do, they will be killed. It is advisable to treat the snake once a week for 6 weeks to ensure that any of the eggs that were laid, have now hatched and have been killed before they were able to lay eggs.

There are other commercially available products for mite control as well as products that a vet can supply. Severe mite infestations can lead to your snakes death and it should never be left untreated.

In Conclusion

Keep your snake in a clean environment at temperatures that suit the species you have. Feed it regularly to ensure that it maintains its health and grows at a normal rate. The cage should be kept as clean as possible to reduce the risk of any parasites or diseases.

Make sure the snake has somewhere to hide, water is always available and there is adequate space for the specimen. Also ensure you have a log or rock in the cage to assist the snake in shedding.

Any new snakes should be quarantined for a month or two to ensure you do not bring any parasites into your established collection, which can prove detrimental.

Who do I contact if there is a 'Problem Snake'?

Firstly **Don't Kill it!!** Make sure someone watches the snake and call us to come and remove it.

What else does our company do?

We are not restricted to 'problem snake' removal, and provide the following services:-

- **Educational Talks**
- **Shows** and promotional displays
- **Courses**
 - Snake Handling
 - Snake Identification
- **Tortoise Husbandry**
- Sale of **Reptile Accessories**:-
 - Snake Handling & Sexing Equipment
 - Snake Cages
 - Reptile food, mice, rats & rabbits
 - Husbandry Books—IBCS Series



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Education of Today's Generations
To preserve Tomorrows reptiles

A BASIC GUIDE TO SNAKE HUSBANDRY



One of our captive bred yearling Puff Adders (*Bitis arietans arietans*) - Potently Cytotoxic (Cell destroying venom). Distinguished by the 'chevron' markings down the back.

Although care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this brochure, the writer takes no responsibility as to the accuracy of the information contained herein and it shall at all times remain the responsibility of the reader to verify such information.

This is a guide to general husbandry. Information on the specific species you are planning to keep must be obtained to ensure that the specific needs of that specimen are met.

The first question is what snake you plan to keep. Some species are highly specialised and should be left to professional keepers. Choose a species you like the look of, but also one that you can properly care for. Caution should be taken with venomous snakes or large constrictors. They are both a major responsibility, and both can be potentially dangerous to your and others' safety. If you are going to keep venomous snakes, ensure that you are correctly taught how to handle them and have the correct equipment.

From where should I obtain a snake?

Ensure that you have the cage set-up for the specific species you have chosen. It is preferable to obtain a specimen from a reptile breeder rather than pet shops. The prices are normally cheaper, but you are more likely to get a healthy specimen and be given previous feeding logs and information of the snake. It is beneficial to get a hatchling as you know how old the snake is. Buying adults can be risky as you do not know it's past.

Otherwise, go to reptile based pet shops as they are more geared up and have better knowledge of the various species. It is beneficial to take someone with you who has knowledge on snakes to check that it is healthy.

If you are going to keep indigenous snakes you must be a member of a herpetological association in order to be able to get the permits to keep the snake. It is illegal to sell indigenous snakes or to keep any indigenous reptile without a permit.

I have the cage & the snake, where to from here?

When you have bought the snake, take it home and place it in the cage & preferably leave it alone for a few days. Snakes generally stress quite easily, and should be left alone to acclimatise to their new surroundings.

What about feeding?

Hatchlings can be fed twice a week. You feed them suitably sized prey. As a rule of thumb the food should not be bigger than the widest part of the snake. It is ok to place

live pinks into the cage and let the snake take it naturally.

One must never feed two snakes in the same cage. It is possible for both snakes to grab the same mouse and one will more than likely land up swallowing the other. In this case you have certainly lost one snake, but it is not uncommon for the other one to die as well.

As your snake grows you can feed bigger prey. As soon as the rodent has teeth it should be humanely pre-killed before feeding. This is to ensure that the rodent cannot inflict any harm on your snake, or even kill it.

Snakes that are sub-adult to adult can be fed once a week instead, but fed larger prey, and possibly even a few rodents at a time. Our Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*) for example eats 3-4 adult mice a week.

Snakes like Burmese Pythons (*Python molurus bivittatus*) will eventually need to be fed rabbits or similar food two or 3 times a month.

If you are feeding venomous snakes make sure you use tongs or long forceps to ensure your hand is not mistaken for food.

Can I handle after feeding?

It is not recommended to handle the snake after it has eaten. You should leave it for a few days first so the snake can digest the meal. You can handle for short periods once the 'bulge' has reduced. Normally after 3-4 days you can handle the snake with out the risk of regurgitation.

What is regurgitation?

If the cage is too hot so the food actually rots before it gets digested, or the cage is too cold for the snake to digest the meal they will regurgitate the meal. They 'throw-up'. Other factors that can cause this is excessive stress or handling before the meal is digested. It can also occur when too large meal is fed and they cannot digest the food. In this case they can selectively regurgitate part of the meal, e.g. one of the two mice fed.

One must clean this out as soon as possible. It does unfortunately smell terrible, but the longer you leave it the worse it gets for you and the more unhygienic for the snake. After regurgitation do not feed the snake for 10-14 days and then offer smaller food and ensure your cage temperatures are correct.

If the problem continues seek veterinary assistance or advice from more advanced keepers.

The eyes have gone a different colour?

It is called going into the "blue". As the snake grows it is required to shed it's old skin. The greater the growth rate, the more they shed. When they are going to shed they will often refuse to eat. Normally the skin becomes darker and dull. Soon after this the eyes become opaque and have a blue tinge. A liquid develops between the new and old skin, which the old skin absorbs. This is to allow easy shedding. During this time you should not handle the snake and the humidity should be slightly higher than usual.

The eyes will then clear and normally within a few days the snake will shed. In most snakes this will come off as one piece inside out. When the snake has shed you must check that the eye caps came off and the end piece of the tail. If not you must remove it, or seek the assistance of more experienced keepers.

When should I clean the cage?

Ideally the cage should be cleaned as soon as the snake defecates. The method varies depending on your chosen substrate. If you are using anything like newspaper or fibre-grass it is easier to remove everything, wash the cage down and replace with clean substrate. If you are using gravel, scoop out the defecation and any wet gravel and spray the area with a good disinfectant. If you are keeping venomous snakes, take the snake out first and then clean, even if you are just scooping out some gravel

What should I use to clean the cage?

You can use commercially available products if you choose. I use Repti-Med Steri-Clean in my cages, but there are numerous other products on the market. Alternatively you can use warm water with a 10% bleach solution. Once you have cleaned with either method allow the cage to stand open for a while to remove any fumes.

How do I clean Cage Decorations?

If you are using plastic plants and smaller decorations, you can place them in a bucket with warm water & 10% bleach. Allow them to soak for at least 15-20 minutes, and ensure they are totally sub-merged. Take them out and rinse with water and leave them out to dry. Once dry replace them in the cage. Large decorations are a bit more problematic. If possible soak any logs or rocks in a pool for a few days, turning the logs to ensure all areas are covered with chlorine water.