

# **Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife***

## **SAFETY PORTFOLIO**

### **Safety & Awareness with Venomous Snakes training courses/workshops/seminars**

#### **1. Safety of trainers, participants, other client staff and public**

##### **Duty of Care**

Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife* is conscious that it has a duty of care to participants, client staff not involved in a training course, contracting trainers assisting with a course and people who may be utilising a public area used for training.

Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife's* duty of care is achieved by

- Providing, as far as practicable, a training environment that is safe, employing the most stringent safety requirements when working with venomous snakes
- Providing superior information, training tools and equipment, and guidance and supervision of participants to ensure a consistently safe working environment
- Demonstrating a total commitment to safety by personal example, and encouragement for others to follow suit when working with venomous or other snakes

**Since courses started in 1993 when they have been conducted around Australia with Geoff Coombe present, there has never been a snakebite accident to trainer(s), participants or any other persons.**

Two trainers attend all interstate courses for safety and practical purposes. ***This requirement will not be negotiated.***

##### **Protective Clothing**

**All participants *must wear suitable long trousers and appropriate leather boots*** when engaged in practical exercises. These are examined for suitability prior to exposure to a venomous snake. Any person unable to adhere to these requirements is not permitted to become involved in any of the practical elements of a course. Leather gaiters are supplied and all participants must wear them when in the vicinity of a venomous snake..

##### **Tools and Equipment**

**Participants are trained with tools made for the purpose** by Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife* and designed specifically to restrain or capture Australian elapid snakes. Sets of tools are available for purchase. Other equipment is also used when appropriate.

**Participants of basic courses are taught to catch snakes with a snake hook and catching bag.** They are expressly **not** taught to work with venomous snakes by “tailing” them with their hands. Such techniques are available in the advanced course.

### **Staff and/or Public Notification**

**Standard "Danger: Do Not Enter" warning tape is available** when any practical training using venomous snakes is conducted outside if other employees, contractors or public are likely to approach the training area. Labels are provided to be placed on all doors of the training venue, to advise other employees, public and after-hours cleaning contractors, what the room is being used for.

### **Containment of Snakes**

**Venomous snakes are moved to and from interstate training venues** in labelled boxes/bags secured within a locked and labelled insulated container with relevant permits attached. During a course, snakes are contained in labelled plastic bins or tubs supplied by the client.

## **2. Risk assessment and risk reduction**

**Due to the protective clothing worn by participants and trainers, and the catching technique used in training courses, the risk of an effective snake bite is minimal.** Most Australian venomous snakes have fangs which are small compared to those of overseas vipers and cannot normally bite through suitable trousers (eg jeans) and leather boots.

Further, due to the training method there is no reason for participants to expose unprotected skin to a potential snake bite.

Another integral component of all courses is that participants are shown, and then become involved in how various venomous snakes react to the close presence of a human. This has the added benefit of participants knowing what to do when a snake is in their proximity, so reducing the risk of reacting negatively (and dangerously) in an encounter.

### **Acceptance of Risk**

**All participants are required to acknowledge and sign a "Waiver of Liability/Acceptance of Risk" form** which states "that participation in Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife* activities has certain risks including but not limited to:

- Participating in activities in the close proximity of live venomous snakes (family Elapidae);
- Using tools and equipment made for the purpose of restraining, capturing or confining venomous snakes;
- Sustaining an accidental bite from a live venomous snake which may result in physical or psychological injury"

This document makes participants aware of potential risks in working with venomous snakes, and that they have a responsibility for their own actions.

### 3. Safety planning includes these learning outcomes

#### At the conclusion of the course participants will

- Understand the implications of coming into contact with a venomous snake.  
*Covers zoonoses, personal hygiene, and essential rules for working with venomous snakes, including when not to become in any way involved*
- Be able to efficiently apply the current first aid for snakebite, and understand the importance of medical management of snakebite.  
*Ensures that participants know and have practiced first aid, and are aware of the consequences of snakebite. Participants must be able to competently apply first aid before they are exposed to any venomous snakes*
- Have a sound understanding of snake hazards and risk management in the workplace.  
*Helps participants identify potential hazards in their particular workplace; which individuals may be at greatest risk of snakebite; the need for emergency response planning; and development of appropriate policies for dealing with snakes*

### 4. Information

**The principal of Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife* (Geoff Coombe) has regular contact with Professor Julian White, Clinical Toxinologist** at the Women's & Children's Hospital (North Adelaide, South Australia) and Chris Cotton, Intensive Care Paramedic with the SA Ambulance Service. Such liaison ensures that advice and knowledge relating to first aid and medical management of snakebite (by any species of venomous snake) is accurate and up to date (see Appendix IV).

Furthermore, immediate communication with the Clinical Toxinologist is usually possible in the unlikely event of an accident.

**Information that is imparted about venomous snakes is as current as possible.** This is realised by membership of state, Australian and international herpetology and toxinology societies.

**The principal of Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife* has had practical experience** with and has acquired empirical knowledge of venomous snakes since 1971 both in the field and in captivity.

Attendance by Geoff Coombe (and practical presentations by him of venomous snakes) at every Clinical Toxinology short course in Adelaide (for Australian and international medical delegates) since their inception in 1997, is another way of maintaining current knowledge and liaison with specialists in this field.

**Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife* has been a subscriber to the Clinical Toxinology Resources Website** ([www.toxinology.com](http://www.toxinology.com)) since its inception in mid 2002.

## 1. Insurance and permits

**Geoff Coombe's *Living with Wildlife* maintains public and products liability insurance** (\$10 million) for anywhere in Australia. Insurance to cover snakebite accident is not available.

**Geoff Coombe holds a specialist permit** (for any species of Australian venomous snake) as issued by the South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources (permit number S845).

**All export and import (and other) permits** as issued by the relevant state or territory wildlife agency are obtained for interstate training courses.

**Wildlife Ethics approval** from the South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources has been obtained, as has a **licence for Teaching, Research or Experimentation** as required under the SA Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

## 2. Emergency Response Plan

### 1. SNAKE ESCAPE

#### 1.1 Inside an (occupied) building

- 1.1.1 At all times the safety and welfare of the organisation's staff, contractors or visiting public shall be paramount.
- 1.1.2 The room in which the snake is believed to be, or where the snake was last seen, must be isolated from the rest of the building by closing all doors, and ensuring that the snake cannot exit under any door.
- 1.1.3 The Manager of the organisation, or the person acting in the manager's position at the time, is to be notified of the escape as soon as is practicable.
- 1.1.4 If possible a suitably experienced person shall watch where the snake was last seen.
- 1.1.5 The training course will be temporarily put on hold.
- 1.1.6 Any staff of the organisation not involved in the training course is to be advised to keep away from the area.
- 1.1.7 The instructor will immediately assess the situation and consider any help from suitably experienced personnel of the organisation.
- 1.1.8 Appropriate tools, torches, first aid bandages etc, as necessary, will be accessed, if not already available, for all persons involved in the search.
- 1.1.9 The instructor will co-ordinate the search, with the organisation's staff if applicable, and will continue until the snake is located.

#### 1.2 Outside an (occupied) building, but in its vicinity

- 1.2.1 At all times the safety and welfare of the organisation's staff, contractors or visiting public shall be paramount.
- 1.2.2 An experienced person shall stay in the immediate vicinity of the area where the snake was last seen.
- 1.2.3 The Manager or person acting shall be notified as soon as practicable.
- 1.2.4 The training course will be temporarily put on hold.
- 1.2.5 Any staff of the organisation not involved in the training course is to be advised to keep away from the area in question.
- 1.2.6 The instructor will engage any suitably experienced staff of the organisation to assist in a search for the escaped snake, with the approval of the manager or person acting.

- 1.2.7 Appropriate tools and first aid bandages etc will be accessed, for all persons involved in the search.
- 1.2.8 The instructor will co-ordinate the search, and continue until the snake is found, or until there is a reasonable expectation that the snake cannot be located.
- 1.2.9 Any search for the snake will not be called off until the manager or person acting has been consulted.
- 1.2.10 The appropriate authorities shall be advised of the incident if the snake cannot be found.

## 2. SNAKE BITE ACCIDENT

- 2.1 The offending snake is to be immediately and safely contained by the instructor.
- 2.2 First aid is to follow the pressure-immobilisation technique based on details in the Toxinology website: [www.toxinology.com](http://www.toxinology.com) (see Appendix IV).
- 2.3 The most appropriate emergency service is to be immediately called, no matter how slight the injury may seem, *especially if the bite is from any species of brown snake*.
- 2.4 The following details should be given to the emergency service's operator:
  - 2.4.1 Species of snake involved
  - 2.4.2 Exact location of the incident
  - 2.4.3 Time bite occurred
  - 2.4.4 Where the bite occurred on the body
  - 2.4.5 Type of bite (eg glancing, full, multiple bites)
  - 2.4.6 Time when first aid was applied
  - 2.4.7 Mobile telephone number of the instructor (if applicable)
  - 2.4.8 Any other information required by the emergency service
- 2.5 First aid DRABC procedures are to be followed, as required by the circumstances.
- 2.6 The Manager, or person acting in the manager's position, is to be notified of the accident as soon as is practicable.
- 2.7 If possible the patient should not move, or may be carried to the organisation's sick room, or a location where they can lay down comfortably, until the emergency service arrives.
- 2.8 The instructor is to remain with the bitten person until transport arrives.
- 2.9 If an ambulance is not available, or is significantly delayed, then action taken will follow advice from the emergency service operator. Road transport in a non-emergency vehicle will only be used as advised by the emergency service.
- 2.10 In this event (point 2.9) the nearest hospital should be notified of the accident, with the same details as in 2.4 above.
- 2.11 Telephone Professor Julian White, Clinical Toxinologist (0419825029) for advice.
- 2.12 All normal procedures of the organisation regarding an accident are to be followed.
- 2.13 A full report is to be given to the manager or person acting as soon after the accident as is possible.

*This Emergency Response Plan has been formulated with the assistance of Professor Julian White, Clinical Toxinologist, Women's & Children's Hospital, North Adelaide, South Australia 5006  
April 2005, updated September 2011*