

SNAKES IN AVIARIES

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Although I have not had snakes in my aviaries, as I live in the middle of Whyalla, as a licensed snake catcher I have removed quite a few from other peoples' properties. Snakes are protected in South Australia, but can be humanely destroyed if they are a danger and cannot be re-located safely.

Most people who get bitten by snakes are snake owners (the fancy name is Herpetologist) The second most common way to be bitten by a snake is trying to kill it. A cornered, threatened snake is very dangerous and fast.

What to do with snakes in aviaries, etc.

If you are not experienced with snakes, call a snake catcher. Have someone watch the snake while you 'phone the snake catcher. If you live in an area with snakes, have the local snake catcher's phone number by the phone. Your local council should have his details. By having someone watch the snake it will be easy to find and catch.

If you have a power problem you call an electrician - like electricity snakes can be life threatening so call an expert.

What to do if you are bitten

Don't panic. Today hospitals are well equipped to handle snakebites. Don't wipe the excess venom off the puncture wound as venom on the skin can be tested to find out exactly what type of snake it is. Visual descriptions of snakes are unreliable. Brown snakes can be black or banded and colour can vary greatly. Do not try to kill the snake for identification; it will be highly agitated and will have plenty of venom left. Different snakes have different types of poison so the right antivenene has to be used. Place a pressure bandage around the bite site. Call an ambulance. It is a good idea to do a first aid course and have a medical kit ready. Remember, don't panic.

How to deter snakes from your aviaries

Snakes need three basic things - food, water and shelter. Keeping the rat and mouse population down is the best way to discourage snakes. Dripping taps on hot days are beacons to snakes. Washers are cheap and will save water. Spray systems are great for birds and with good drainage should not create

puddles. Sheets of tin lying on the ground, sleepers, etc., make good homes for snakes. Clean, tidy, rodent proof aviaries are less likely to attract snakes.

This is fine for parrot breeders living in town; planted finch aviaries are more likely to have snake problems. The main trouble is that Snakes are thin enough to be able to go through ½” finch wire. I have seen snakes with a bellyful of mice get caught in the wire trying to get out of an aviary. Aviary doors can sometimes be pushed slightly open from the outside giving snakes enough room to get in.

I have also heard of quite large snakes being found inside bait boxes. Mouse and rat holes also provide homes for snakes and entry into aviaries. Snakes, especially pythons are very good climbers so may be able to enter aviaries through the flutes in corrugated iron roofs. These can be squashed down or blocked off with wire mesh.

Snakes and birds do not mix so tidying up the yard and trying to control rodents is a good way to try to prevent snake problems.

It's strange how some people react over snakes. I once had a call to remove a Western Brown snake from a garden. I was looking for the house number when I saw a man on the roof of his house. I stopped and asked him for directions (all houses should have large numbers on them!) It turned out the snake was in his backyard. When I went around the back, found his son was on the garage roof. They were keeping an eye on the snake, like they had been asked to. I would not advise people to climb onto their roofs, especially when nervous about snakes!

Finally - Snakes as Predators

I have included the following article that I wrote several years ago. On the 4th of June 1993 I went on an aviary bus trip to Yorke Peninsula SA for the weekend. One of the many bird-keepers I met bred kookaburras, as do several people there. This particular lady had a snake brought to her which had been killed in a nearby field. As she was about to take fillets off it for her kookaburras she noticed a bulge in it, so she cut the 3 1/2 ft Eastern Brown open. Inside were 21 mice and 16 eggs. She gave me a photo of the snake. I guess it must have gone down a mouse hole and eaten every mouse it came across and it had a large store of fat tissue. The Yorke Peninsula had a mouse plague at the time: bird-keepers were poisoning 200 mice a night, the Port Giles grain silo's board was paying out a thousand man hours a week in wages to clear away dead mice. Maybe if snakes were not killed on sight, as they often are, they could help control mouse numbers. Now mice are controlled

with baits and poisons such as Strychnine, and anything that eats the dead baited mice is also likely to die, reducing the mice natural predators even more. As has been said "Snakes should be the farmers' best friend".