



# Field Herpetology Etiquette

Searching for reptiles and amphibians in their natural habitat can be an educational and rewarding pastime. However, over-collecting for the pet trade, habitat destruction, and emerging diseases are all very real threats to our herpetological fauna. Before you venture out, please consider the following tips.

***It is our responsibility to protect both the animals and their habitat.***

## Know the Laws

- Most states have laws and regulations regarding the possession of reptiles and amphibians. *It is your responsibility to know and understand relevant laws and regulations* for the location you wish to search. Be sure you have a collecting permit if needed. State laws and regulations are available on the websites of most state wildlife agencies.
- Know which species are listed as threatened or endangered. Do not pursue these species. Threatened and endangered species are listed for a reason – disturbing them or their habitat may retard their recovery.
- Realize that laws may be different for private vs. state and federal lands (e.g. refuges).
- Respect all 'no trespassing' and 'private land' signs.

## Protect the Animals

- Return all animals as closely as possible to their collection site.
- To avoid crushing animals, replace cover objects (logs, rocks, etc.) before releasing the animal.
- When handling amphibians, especially if sharing them with a group, protect them from drying by holding them in plastic bags or other containers.
- Before handling amphibians, be sure to remove any lotions, sanitizers, or sunscreens from your hands. These can be absorbed through amphibian skin.
- Do not disclose sensitive location information. Be particularly careful about posting your exploits on the internet! You may be responsible and law-abiding but others who read an internet post may not be.
- Disinfect, Disinfect, Disinfect! To prevent the spread of disease between sites, make sure that you thoroughly clean anything that comes in contact with animals or soils such as nets, boots, containers, etc. Do not reuse plastic bags.

**Disinfect foot wear and collection equipment by soaking in a bleach solution (3%) for 1 minute.**

**Disinfect instruments in 70% Ethanol solution for 1 minute.**

**Disinfect cloth & clothes by washing in hot water for 30 minutes.**

## **Protect the Habitat**

- Return cover objects to their original position.
- Do not tear apart logs or strip bark from trees.
- Tread lightly in sensitive habitats - stay on boardwalks or trails where possible.
- Be sure to wash mud and vegetation off boots, boats, and other gear to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- Do not disturb research sites. This includes traps or cover tins you may come across. Stay out of areas you know are being used for research.

## **Protect Yourself and Others**

- Be able to identify venomous species. Do not handle venomous species unless you have the appropriate training.
- Wash your hands after handling amphibians – their skin toxins can cause irritation to sensitive skin such as eyes and noses.
- Lift cover objects towards you so that if there is a venomous snake, there is a barrier between it and your legs.
- Do not move large cover objects that may roll or crush your own feet or someone else's.
- If road herping, be sure you have reflective clothing and headlamps or flashlights. Be sure to stop at safe pull-offs or on roads where your vehicle can be easily seen by other motorists.

## **Be a good liaison between the herpetology community and the public**

- Be open with landowners and others you encounter during your foray. People are usually excited to hear about your search and may not know what species are in their area.
- When visiting public or managed lands, take the time to stop and talk to park personnel. They may be able to point you in the right direction and your finds may be of interest to them as well.
- When talking with others or showing specimens, be sure to model good ethics and etiquette. Treat both the animals and public with respect.
- Share your data with researchers and agencies.

As a final tip, remember this litmus test: "If law enforcement was to suddenly appear, would I change my behavior?" If you answer yes, you are doing something wrong.



# Field Herpetology Etiquette Resources

The following book, available from PARC, can help you learn more about field herpetology techniques, including proper handling procedures:

Graeter, G. J., K. A. Buhlmann, L. R. Wilkinson, and J. W. Gibbons (Eds.). 2012. *Inventory and Monitoring: Recommended Techniques for Reptiles and Amphibians*. Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Technical Publication IM-1, Birmingham, Alabama

## **Additional resources:**

Germano, J. M. and Bishop, P. J. (2009), Suitability of Amphibians and Reptiles for Translocation. *Conservation Biology*, 23: 7–15.

Johnson M, Berger L, Philips L, Speare R (2003) Fungicidal effects of chemical disinfectants, UV light, desiccation and heat on the amphibian chytrid, *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*. *Dis Aquat Organ* 57: 255–260.

Kast, John and Hanna N (2008) Hygiene and Disease Control: Field and Captivity, chapter 2, in *Amphibian Husbandry Resource Guide*, America Zoological Association Amphibian Taxon Group.

Ross L. Goldingay and David A. Newell. 2000. Experimental Rock Outcrops Reveal Continuing Habitat Disturbance for an Endangered Australian Snake. *Conservation Biology* 14:1908-1912

Speare R, Berger L, Skerratt LF, Alford R, Mendez D, Cashins S, Kenyon N, Hauselberger K, Rowley J. Hygiene protocol for handling amphibians in field studies. Online document: [www.jcu.edu.au/school/phtm/PHTM/frogs/field-hygiene.doc](http://www.jcu.edu.au/school/phtm/PHTM/frogs/field-hygiene.doc). 8 October 2004.

**For additional herpetological resources, visit Midwest PARC at [www.mwparc.org](http://www.mwparc.org)**

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