

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**FOREST, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE DEPARTMENT**

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No. FE-WL-MISC-0011-2018 / 16890 / FE & CC, Date. 09.08.23

From:

Shri Deben Kumar Pradhan, IAS  
Additional Secretary to Government.

To

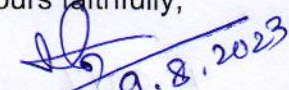
The ACS -cum -Special Relief Commissioner ,Odisha  
The Additional Chief Secretary to Govt., Revenue & DM Department,  
The PCCF & HoFF, Odisha,  
The PCCF (Wildlife) & Chief Wildlife Warden, Odisha,  
The Managing Director, Odisha State Disaster Management Authority,  
All RCCFs, Odisha,  
All Collectors, Odisha,  
All DFOs

**Sub: Guidelines for the Rescue and Release of Snakes from the Human Dominated Areas by Snake Handlers.**

Sir,

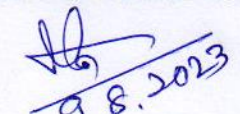
I am directed to enclose herewith the copy of the **Guidelines for the Rescue and Release of Snakes from the Human Dominated Areas by Snake Handlers** approved by Government for information and necessary follow up action .

Yours faithfully,

  
Additional Secretary to Government.

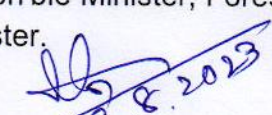
Memo No. 16891 / FE & CC, Date- 09.08.23

Copy along with copy of the guidelines forwarded to P.S to Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha for kind information of Hon'ble Chief Minister.

  
Additional Secretary to Government.

Memo No. 16892 / FE & CC, Date- 09.08.23

Copy along with copy of the guidelines forwarded to P.S to Hon'ble Minister, Forest, Environment & Climate Change for kind information of Hon'ble Minister.

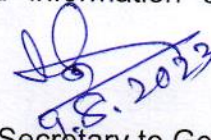
  
Additional Secretary to Government.





Memo No. 16893 / FE & CC, Date- 09.08.23

Copy along with copy of the guidelines forwarded to P.S to Hon'ble Minister, Hon'ble Minister Revenue & Disaster Management for kind information of Hon'ble Minister.



Additional Secretary to Government.

Memo No. 16894 / FE & CC, Date- 09.08.23

Copy along with copy of the guidelines forwarded to PS to Chief Secretary, Odisha for kind information of Chief Secretary.



Additional Secretary to Government.

Memo No. 16895 / FE & CC, Date- 09.08.23

Copy along with copy of the guidelines forwarded to the P.S. to Additional Chief Secretary to Government, FE & CC Department. for kind information of Additional Chief Secretary.



Additional Secretary to Government.

Memo No. 16896 / FE & CC, Date- 09.08.23

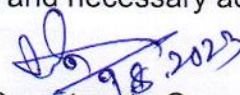
Copy along with copy of the guidelines forwarded to all Departments/All HoDs of Departments for kind information and necessary action.



Additional Secretary to Government.

Memo No. 16897 / FE & CC, Date- 09.08.23

Copy along with copy of the guidelines forwarded to PCCF cum PD OFSDP/ PCCF (KL) ,Odisha/ CE RPRC/ PCCF- cum -CE, CDA/ MD OFDC Ltd/ Director Environment-cum-Special Secretary , FE & CC Department / OSD- cum- Special Secretary /All Additional Secretary of FE & CC Department for information and necessary action.



Additional Secretary to Government.





# **FOREST, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE DEPARTMENT**

**Government of Odisha**

## **Guidelines for the Rescue and Release of Snakes from the Human Dominated Areas by Snake Handlers**

**Supported By:**





## GUIDELINES FOR THE RESCUE AND RELEASE OF SNAKES FROM THE HUMAN DOMINATED AREAS BY CERTIFIED SNAKE HANDLERS

### 1. Background

Odisha located in the eastern coast of India has about 34% of its land covered in undulated forests. Snakes are found in abundance in most of these forests and are an integral part of the ecosystem. Apart from this, snakes are also found in human inhabited areas due to deforestation and agricultural and forest-based professions. Incidents of snakebites are common in Odisha and have been certified as a State disaster under the disaster management authority. 40% of total disaster deaths are attributed to snakebites alone in Odisha. In the last 7 years, Odisha has had approximately 6351 incidents of snakebites. Though not all snakes are venomous, they too may cause injury and distress to human life. Some of the common snakes found in Odisha include Cobra (Naga), Monocled Cobra, Spectacled Cobra, Common Indian Krait (Chiti Sapa), Banded Krait (Rana Sap), Russell's Viper (Chandan Boda Sap), Pond Snake, Rat Snake.

Snakebites from venomous snakes cause fatalities and therefore the presence of snake creates panic among people. They may be unable to identify the snake as venomous or not and therefore may be fearful of an attack. Not all snakes are venomous or attack. But when snakes are captured after a snakebite is reported, the panic amongst people may lead to its killing. It is at such times that the administrative machinery must come into action and rescue the snake before it is killed.

Under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, all the venomous snakes and non-venomous snake species found in India are listed in Schedule I, II & IV and hunting or attempt to hunt any such species is an offence. As per Sec. 2 (16) (a) — (c) of the Act, *hunting includes capturing, killing, poisoning, snaring, or trapping of any wild animal and every attempt to do so, driving any wild animal, injuring or destroying or taking any part of the body of any such animal, or in the case of wild birds or reptiles, damaging the eggs of such birds or reptiles, or disturbing the eggs of such birds or reptiles.*

The Forest Department is the agency tasked to implement the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in the State. Department



functionaries in the field man the calls/complaints on the helpline number from the public when snakes are found in their homestead or surrounding areas. But the lack of human resources in effective redressal and limits in accessing these areas where such incidents are reported, make it necessary to take the assistance of snake catchers in the snake rescue operations. Though most of the snake catchers are skilled and are known to act in a responsible manner by understanding the ecology and behaviour of the snakes some of their actions have come under scrutiny due to allegations of unscientific approaches (not taking protective measures, doing stunts and displaying snakes in public that leads to unwanted stress to the animal, and risks their own lives and that of the people around them).

Section 11 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 states that the Chief Wildlife Warden, or the authorised officer may permit any person to hunt any wild animal if he is satisfied that such animal has become dangerous to human life.

It is under these circumstances that the Odisha Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department issues the following guidelines.

## **2. Scope**

The guidelines below are intended to provide more accountability to the process of rescuing snakes from human dominated areas and releasing them back to their natural habitat.

- i. Henceforth only the Certified Snake Handlers are permitted to carry out all the snake rescue and release operations in the State, by following these guidelines, failing which will invite penal actions as per the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- ii. Rescue of snakes shall be attempted only in such cases where their presence is a threat to life. For e.g. Inside the house or in close vicinity of its presence is life threatening.
- iii. Rescue of snakes must be limited to the snakes entering the human habitation irrespective of whether venomous or non-venomous.



- iv. Odisha Forest Department may use the services of Certified Snake Handlers to create awareness in the local population on the ecological importance of snakes, identification of snakes and how to avoid snake bites.
- v. The Certified Snake Handlers are volunteers and Odisha Forest Department will not have any obligation for effecting any payment towards their services.
- vi. Any one causing hindrance to completion of rescue by a Certified Snake Handler, as per these guidelines, is liable to penal action. Creating mob panic, showing off the rescued snake(s) publicly and any other public display with the snakes, even by the Snake Handler himself, will be liable to penal action.

### **3. Objectives**

- i. To create a pool of trained and certified Snake Handlers throughout the State of Odisha so as to bring more accountability, responsibility and professionalism in the handling of snakes
- ii. To ensure that rescue and release of snakes is carried out in a safe and scientific manner, taking into account their behavioral patterns and ecological needs as well as the well being of human beings.
- iii. To create a database of all incidents of rescue and release of snakes in the State and to maintain and update it.
- iv. To ensure that no illegalities or malpractices may occur with rescued snakes

### **4. Application to be a Certified Snake Handler**

- i. Interested individuals, of not more than 65 years of age, shall be called to apply for certification as snake handlers, through advertisements in local newspapers and through the official website of the Forest department
- ii. The application in the format given as **Annexure I**, shall be submitted by skilled and experienced snake handlers, to the ACF of the Forest Division authorized by DFO. The curriculum for Beat Forest Officers at State Forest Training Institutes will include sessions on safe handling of snakes. Department staff with such skill and



acumen may also apply in the same format to the concerned officers, through proper channel.

- iii. ACF authorized by the DFO will receive the applications and objectively scrutinize the same through a committee headed by him (the said committee comprising of experts will be constituted by DFO) and submit the select list of Snake Handlers to the DFO for certification. Following parameters shall be considered and given due credit accordingly for the selection process:
  - a) Number of rescue operations already conducted by the applicant
  - b) Issues or allegations raised against the applicant in connection with previous snake rescue and relief operations
  - c) Age, health and conduct of the applicant: Healthy individuals, without known alcoholism or such behavioural traits shall be chosen against others.
- iv. The short-listed Snake Handlers shall be called for a mandatory training on safe and scientific handling of snakes.

## **5. Training and Certification**

- i. Mandatory training for two-days on safe and scientific handling of snakes may be given to the shortlisted Snake Handlers by experts as per **Annexure II**.
- ii. On the successful completion of training, the Snake Handlers will be given certification as per the Section 11 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The format for certification is provided in **Annexure III**.
- iii. Certification will be valid for 5 years from the date of issue. Renewal of certification shall follow the same procedure as afresh.
- iv. DFO cum Wildlife Warden of respective Division will issue certificate and shall reserve the rights to withdraw/ cancel the certification issued to any of the snake handlers, if it is found



that the certified snake handler is involved in any illegal or unethical practices or otherwise.

#### **6. Publicizing the details of Certified Snake Handlers**

Details of the Certified Snake Handlers shall be provided to various Local Self Government institutions, all officers of Forest Department, Fire & Rescue Services, local Police Stations etc., to ensure immediate contact and access to the nearest Snake Handler in response to an incident. The list shall also be uploaded in the official website of the Forest Department and other related websites.

#### **7. Duties and Responsibilities of Certified Snake handlers**

- i. To respond to all genuine calls/requests informing about the presence of snakes in human habitations.
- ii. To inform the Divisional Control room and the concerned Forest Range Officer regarding the incident and about the call / request received together with his identity before going for rescue.
- iii. To inform the caller about the immediate precautions to be taken to avoid injury/fatality to humans as well as to the snake and to provide the following instructions to the caller, before reaching the place of incidence:
  - a. Not to disturb the snake if it is resting
  - b. Observing the movement of the snake from a safe distance if it is moving.
  - c. Not to capture the snake on their own, injure or kill the snake out of panic.
  - d. If the presence of snake is in the natural environment, where it doesn't pose any direct threat to human life, if it is feasible, to leave the snake to escape on its own.
  - e. To obtain a photograph of the snake from the caller, wherever it is feasible, for quick identification.
  - f. To inform the caller, the approximate time to reach the site.



- iv. To ensure the safety of people by asking the onlookers and other people to move away, once the snake handler reaches the place of incident.
- v. To protect themselves with required protective gear and safety equipment.
- vi. To use appropriate light source like head torch or handheld torches during the rescue operation, in places where there is no sufficient light.
- vii. To handle the snakes in a professional way as defined by the Forest Department and as specified during the training, by using proper tools and equipment and also by adapting the handling method most suited for the snake to be rescued.
- viii. To set the rescue kit properly before handling the snake.
- ix. To handle the snake safely and transfer it in to the snake bag in a way so as to cause minimum trauma to the snake and without causing injury or death of snake. Usage of tongs for capture of snakes should be discouraged and eventually stopped.
- x. To take special care and adapt safe bagging methods like use of dark towels, pipe or tubing method, while rescue of snakes that are injured, that are gravid and those that might have recently fed, with a conspicuous stomach bulge.
- xi. To focus at their task and not get distracted themselves by talking over phone, taking videos, addressing the crowd etc.
- xii. Snakes in male-combat/mating/feeding must be monitored closely without disturbing and rescue attempted later, only if unavoidable.
- xiii. Incubating snakes with eggs should not be disturbed to the maximum possible extent.
- xiv. Not to open the rescued snake for public display or entertainment.
- xv. To avail immediate first aid for self and also to provide the same for the affected individual, followed by urgent professional medical



care, if any incidents of snake bite occurs during the rescue operation.

- xvi. To create basic awareness among the people on the role of snakes in an ecosystem and also that all the snakes are not venomous and need not be captured. Awareness creation should not be done by exhibiting the snake in public.
- xvii. To explain to the residents the identification of common snakes, precautions to avoid snakes entering the house and first aid in case of snake bite.
- xviii. Not to recommend to the public any unproven substance to keep away the snakes or recommend any unscientific treatment protocols.
- xix. To fill in and submit the proforma in the format given as **Annexure IV**, to the ACF of the Forest Division authorized by DFO. Once the specified App for tracking snake rescue is in place, details shall be entered through the same.

#### **8. Considerations of release of rescued snakes**

- i. All rescued snakes shall be released as soon as possible and in the mandatory presence of officials of the Forest Department.
- ii. If the rescued snake is injured, it will be released only after assessment of its health and fitness in consultation with the officials of the Forest Department.
- iii. If the snake appears to be a non-native species, it shall not be released, but handed over to the Forest Department.
- iv. Based on an assessment of the snake species, its ecology and behaviour and the accessibility to a natural habitat that best suits the species, the location for the release of the rescued snake shall be determined.
- v. It is vital that rescued snakes may not be repeatedly released in the same area to avoid disturbing the local ecological balance.
- vi. Rescued snakes of same or different species must not be released simultaneously at the same release point.



## **9. Duties and Responsibilities of the Forest Department Staff**

- i. Division control room on receiving information from certified snake handlers shall inform concerned FG/ Forester/ FR regarding the rescue operation. And, such operations shall be carried out preferably in presence of any of the above designated Forest Officers.
- ii. All data of snake rescues and release done at the District level may be compiled on a monthly basis by ACF of the Forest Division authorized by DFO.
- iii. Subject of availability, the logistics required for rescue operations may be provided to the snake handler by the local Forest personnel on getting specific request to this effect.
- iv. The Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) and other field units of the Forest Department; reputed wildlife experts and veterinarians dealing with snake rescue may make arrangements for observing and providing treatment to injured snakes, till they are fit to be released into their natural habitat.

## **10. Maintenance of Rescue and Release Data base**

Assistant Conservators of Forests shall maintain and update the Division wise database on the snake rescue and release operations in their areas of jurisdiction based on the formats submitted by the certified snake handlers. The proforma for maintaining District wise database is given in **Annexure V**. Monthly abstract will be submitted to the Chief Wildlife Warden.

## **11. Insurance to the Certified Snake Handlers**

The Certified Snake Handlers shall be provided protection under Group insurance coverage by OSDMA.

## **12. Essential tool kit for Snake Rescue and Release**

Essential tool kits as given in **Annexure VI** shall be provided from OSDMA funding.



## Application for Certified Snake Handler

Name of the applicant	•	
Age and gender	•	
Permanent address		
Present address		
ID proof (Type & No)	•	(Self-attested copy to be submitted along with)
Educational Qualification	•	
Fresh application/Renewal		
Details of past rescue and release operations	•	
Whether involved in any forest offence, police case etc.? If so, details and present status	• •	
Blood Group		
Any recurring disease/health condition for which continuous medication is adopted	• •	

I declare that the above given details are true to the best of my knowledge and also submit that if I am selected as a Certified Snake Handler by the Odisha Forest Department, I shall abide by all the related laws and guidelines and directions of concerned officers and that I shall never attend any snake rescue or release operation in an inebriated state. I also declare that I am volunteering my service without expectation of any remuneration and also fully understanding the risk involved in the process.

Place • .....Name.....

Date • .....Signature .....



**Topics to be covered in the 2 Day Training for the Shortlisted Snake Handlers**

<b>SI. No</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1.	Objective of the training
2.	Snakes of Odisha (Pattern, Scallation) Basic Biology, Morphology and Ecology, behaviour and their role in the ecosystem
3.	Scientific Classification of snakes and Basic Taxonomy, Identification of Snakes, Distribution, Types (Venomous- Mildly Venomous— Non-Venomous)
4.	Snake bites-identifying species from bites, Impact on health, mode of action of different toxins
5.	Overview of human - snake conflict in the State, safe living with snakes & Role and responsibility of Certified Snake Handlers
6.	Emergency First Aid
7.	Snake Rescue- Science, principles and common methods —Field Session (Various aspects of rescuing snakes, Good and bad rescue practices)
8.	Personal safety —preparedness
9.	Use of tools and equipments
10.	Important legal aspects and guidelines with respect to snake catching and release
11.	Assessment of the learning during the workshop
12.	Feed back on effectiveness of this training



**Annexure III**

**Odisha Forest, Environment and Climate Change**

**CERTIFICATE**

Passport size  
photograph of  
Certified Snake  
handler attested  
by officer issuing  
certification

Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department of Odisha .....  
recognizes that Shri/ Ms .....

..... (name), of ..... ..

..... (address) is a Certified Snake Handler for rescue of  
snakes endangering lives in habitations and for release of the same to  
appropriate habitats as per the guidelines issued in this regard.

His/ her Certification code is ..... and validity of  
this certification is for 5 years from the date of issue.

This Certification / Snake Handler shall abide by all the relevant  
provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act and the Rules framed therein under.

Place ..... Signature .....

Date.

Name. ....

Designation. ....

District .....

SEAL



**Annexure IV****Proforma to be submitted by the Certified Snake Handler to the ACF (SF)  
after each rescue and release operation**

1.	Species of snake	
2.	Quantity	
3.	Male/Female/Gravid/with laid eggs	
4.	Location of incident	
5.	District	
6.	Name & Contact details of the person who informed the incident	
7.	Date and time of rescue call	
8.	Date and time of rescue	
9.	Reasons for delay, if any to effect the rescue	
10.	Any trouble while rescuing/releasing	
11.	Forest officer contacted to inform the incident	
12.	Any casualty occurred prior to/while/after rescue/release	
13.	Condition of rescued snake?	
14.	Whether released/not?	
15.	If not, the reasons	
16.	If released, details of location of release	
17.	Condition of snake at the time of release	
18.	Name & Certification code of the Certified Snake Handler	
19.	Signature of Certified Snake Handler	

For Office Use

*Verified the entries made by the Certified Snake Handler and are found correct.*

ACF of the Forest Division authorized by DFO.

Date:

District .....



**Format of District wise Snake Rescue and Release database**

<b>SI. No</b>	<b>Date &amp; Place of Rescue</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>Venomous / Non venomous</b>	<b>Quantity (Number)</b>	<b>Rescuer Code</b>	<b>Date &amp; Place of Release</b>	<b>Any allegations / complaints recorded</b>	<b>Any other Remarks (Eggs/ Injury etc)</b>



**Tool Kit**

1. PVC Pipe & Bag
2. First Aid Kit
3. Torch/Headlamp
4. Snake bite Bandage
5. Snake hooks, Handled Frame with Cloth Bag of 2.5X0.8 m
6. Snake Bags — for smaller and medium size should be at least 1mX 0.5 m; For larger snakes, it should be at least 2m X 0.8 m, made of cloth with dark colour preferably dark green, dark blue or black.
7. Personal Protective Equipments