

# MHS Hands-On Policy

MHS provides a public service by exposing the general public to various reptiles and amphibians for the purpose of educating them about the natural history, the characteristics, and the biological value of reptiles and amphibians. This should be an enjoyable experience for the animal handler as well as the public. The following policy will ensure safety for the public, the handler, and the animal(s).

For purposes of definition:

a **Hands-On Event** is any event sanctioned by the MHS Board, in which participating MHS members allow the public to come in contact with live animals.

a **Promotional Event** is any event sanctioned by the MHS Board, whose main function is promoting the MHS. Live animals may be on display but there is no public contact with the animals.

## 1.0 Event Oversight

- 1.1 The Education Chair will oversee Hands-On Events and report directly to the MHS Board of Directors.
- 1.2 All events shall be supervised by the Education Chair or a member of the Education Committee (Event coordinator) designated by the Education Chair.
- 1.3 The Site coordinators will maintain a copy of the current MHS Hands-on Policy and insurance certificate at all Hands-On Events.
- 1.4 A copy of the Hands On Participant Rules will be signed and dated by every participating MHS member for each year. Participants under 18 years of age will also have this policy signed by their parent or legal guardian.
- 1.5 All Participants working directly with animals or supplying animals for a MHS hands on event will provide a copy of a current proof of insurance to be kept on file (i.e., an Insurance Declaration). MHS will store these in a secure lock box until they expire and then they will be destroyed.
- 1.6 Site Coordinators are responsible for enforcing the policies of the MHS, organizing the set-up and clean-up of the MHS displays, obtaining the required forms from the membership. They have the responsibility of filling out an event report and returning it and any money collected to the Education chair.
- 1.7 Site Coordinators have the absolute right to remove animals and/or MHS volunteers that do not adhere to these policies, up to and including having the person escorted from the grounds. An animal may be removed if it becomes agitated, appears ill or conditions are not favorable for it.
- 1.8 Site Coordinators will provide appropriate instructions to the public for proper hygiene after touching animals. This may include directions to hand washing facilities or providing hand sanitizers at the display.

## 2.0 Participants of MHS Hands-On Events

- 2.1 All participants must be current members of MHS in good standing.
- 2.2 All participants will be in compliance with 1.4 and 1.5
- 2.3 Participants 15 years of age and under will be under the direct supervision of a parent or guardian.
- 2.4 Participants 16 to 18 years of age may participate as individuals under the direct supervision of designated adult MHS member and must have a written permission slip on file signed by their parent or legal guardian.

## 3.0 Animal Handling and Personal contact at MHS Hands-On Events

- 3.1 No crocodylians, viperids, elapids, atractaspids, or helodermatids will be allowed at any hands-on event, excepting the display of native rattlesnakes at the State Fair. Any lizards over 3 feet or snakes over 10 feet should be cleared with the event coordinator in advance of the event.
- 3.2 No animals that have been in the owners' possession for less than 30 days; sick or injured animals; animals in shed; recently fed; or animals with parasites will be used at a Hands-On Event. The Event coordinator has the right to remove any animal that exhibits any of these traits. Animals under one year of age or found to be in shed should not be in contact with the public.
- 3.3 Any animal known to secrete toxic skin substances must be displayed in such a manner that the public does not come in contact with it.

- 3.4 Public safety is of utmost importance. Animals used at events where public contact is involved must be under full control at all times, wherein the animal's movements are restricted by an enclosed space or handler. Animals exhibiting aggressive behavior shall not come in contact with the public.
- 3.5 Participants will never allow the public to touch or come into contact with the head of a display animal(s).
- 3.6 Participants will never allow the public to take control of a display animal.
- 3.7 Participants will always demonstrate safe handling practices when in public. Draping an animal around the neck or on the head and face is not allowed. Snakes over six feet in length may be controlled over one shoulder only with the approval of the site coordinator.
- 3.8 All lizards capable of fast movement will be harnessed or enclosed while in public so as to eliminate the possibility of escape into a crowd. When a lizard is harnessed, participants will maintain control of an attached leash.
- 3.9 Participants will always handle animals with respect and dignity.
- 3.10 The public will be treated respectfully at all times.
- 3.11 Participants must recognize that some people are extremely afraid of reptiles and/or amphibians. At no time will a participant attempt to force their animal on a member of the public.
- 3.12 Animals will be exhibited only at the display sites of the event. Participants are not to enter or leave the area without first concealing their animal(s). Preferred methods would be by bagging and/or boxing. Remove animals from containers while away from the public eye to check the animal and its current disposition before displaying it.
- 3.13 Display cages, if used, must be of sturdy design and capable of being securely locked if not attended.
- 3.14 Participants should handle only one animal at a time when presenting to the public. If they are temporarily holding another animal, they should step away from the public.
- 3.15 **Snake Walk** is a special hands-on display used at Como Cottage only with the approval of the Cottage Chair.
  - 3.15.1 A Snake Walk will consist of a snake over 6 feet and no less than two participants 16 years of age or older. It will occur outside of the fence but within the direct sightline of Como Cottage.
  - 3.15.2 Control of the animal will be maintained with one participant guarding the head of the animal with a wooden staff and one participant guarding the tail of the animal with a wooden staff. The public will be allowed to touch the middle of the snake and prevented from touching the head or tail of the snake.
- 3.16 **Tortoise Walk** is a special hands-on display used at Como Cottage only with the approval of the Cottage Chair.
  - 3.16.1 A Tortoise Walk display will consist of a tortoise larger than 12 inches carapace in length and one participant 16 years of age or older with a wooden staff.
  - 3.16.2 The participant will guard the animal with a wooden staff to prevent the public from coming into contact with the head or taking control of the tortoise while walking the event grounds.
  - 3.16.3 The tortoise will be prevented from entering the booths or shops of other vendors or any stage areas.

#### **In the Event of a Bite**

- 3.17 If a **member** is bitten: **remain calm**. Slowly move away from the public, so as not to draw attention. Then immediately put the animal away for the rest of the day. Quietly ask for help if needed and attend to the injury in private. Contact the site coordinator and follow their instructions.
- 3.18 If a **person other than a member** is bitten, **remain calm**. Apologize for your mistake and get the site coordinator to attend to the person and fill out an incident report. Put your animal away and do not bring it to another event.

#### **4.0 Failure to Comply**

- 4.1 Failure to comply with MHS Hands-On policy may result in suspension of participation privileges at MHS Hands-On Events.
- 4.2 Repeated violations of the policy may result in permanent loss of participation privileges at MHS Hands-On Events.
- 4.3 Suspension for failure to comply with this policy will be enforced by the Event coordinator or Hands-On Chair.
- 4.4 Participation suspension may be appealed to the MHS Board of Directors.

#### **5.0 Acceptance of Liability**

- 5.1 All Volunteers working with live animals need to be aware that they are liable if an animal bite or scratch occurs. The requirement of proof of insurance is for the protection of the volunteer as well as the protection of MHS. Failure to be insured does not protect the volunteer from liability and could result in personal lawsuit in the event of a scratch or bite.
- 5.2 In the event of an incident, the volunteer's insurance will provide the first line of coverage, and then the insurance held by MHS will act as secondary.
- 5.3 MHS strongly suggests speaking with your insurance company about your coverage to be sure you will be covered. If there is an incident, there is potential for the volunteer, the organization, and even the venue to face litigation.

## 6.0 Hold Harmless

- 6.1 When volunteering at an MHS event, the volunteer is agreeing to hold both the animal's owner and MHS harmless if they are bitten or scratched by another member's animal. This holds true if they are handling the animal with the owner's permission, or in any other form of contact.

## 7.0 Special Events

MHS provides an educational service for special events requested by government, schools and community organizations. The events may include demonstrations with live reptiles and amphibians showing proper handling techniques and information on Natural History, housing and care. Some events may require experience or knowledge greater than that needed for General Hands-Ons. These Special Events must be approved by the Board of Directors and are under the control of designated coordinators that report to the board under the same terms as committee chairs.

### 7.0 Categories of Special Events

#### 7.1 Participants of MHS Special Hands-On Events

- 7.1.1 All participants must be current members of MHS in good standing.
- 7.1.2 All participants will be in compliance with section 1.4
- 7.1.3 The Hands-On Chair should select a group of MHS volunteers that qualify for these types of events. Once the event is approved by the Board, the chair can organize the number of volunteers needed for the event.

7.2 **Adoption Intake Night** is under the supervision of the Adoption Chair and follows the policies of the Adoption Committee approved by the Board of Directors.

7.3 **Como Cottage** is under the supervision of the designated Cottage chair but is considered a Hands-On event for the sake of insurance and governance. The Cottage chair is responsible for enforcing the policies of the MHS and Mid-America Festivals Inc. as stated in our contract. The Cottage chair will be included in Education committee discussions of policy changes.

7.4 **State Fair** is under the supervision of the State Fair Chair but is considered a Hands-On event for the sake of insurance and governance. The State Fair Chair is responsible for enforcing the policies of the MHS and the DNR and State Fair hosts. State Fair follows the MHS policies for Display events (7.6.1 and 7.6.2) under the Hands-On Policy.

7.5 **Training sessions** are under the supervision of the Education Chair. Training Sessions are events where the MHS has been asked to train individuals in proper techniques. This may include, catching, restraining, holding, examining, and housing the animals. Participants are expected to take control of the animals under the guidance of an approved MHS volunteer.

7.6 **Presentations** are under the supervision of the Education Chair. Presentations are events requesting a short lecture given by one or two individuals for a designated time frame. They may include classroom programs, school field trip events, scout programs, etc. The MHS presenter may work with the requesting organization to prepare a program relevant to the host's event. The MHS presenter reports to the Education Chair as described in Section 1.5.

7.6.1 **Contact Display events** are programs where animals are present and the audience may come into contact with them. They follow the Hands-On Policy noted above.

7.6.2 **Non-contact Display events** are programs where animals are only on display. There is no public contact. They follow the Hands-On Policy noted above unless there is a Board approved procedure for the defined

event and may include the following exception: Venomous animals may be displayed in a securely locked container and only with prior approval by the Site Coordinator.

- 7.7 **Expo Booths** are a promotional event under the supervision of the Education Chair. Expo Booths represent the MHS at pet expos in the region. Participants at Expo Booths educate the public about the MHS, about native reptiles and amphibians, and about appropriate care of captive reptiles and amphibians. Participants displaying live animals will follow the Hands-On Policy noted above. Animals may be made available for adoption at an Expo Booth with approval of the Adoptions Chair and are further subject to any policies and procedures established by the Adoptions Committee.
- 7.8 **Critter of the Month** is a presentation given by an MHS member to the attendants of an MHS General Meeting and is under the supervision of the Education Chair in coordination with the Vice President. Participants presenting live animals will follow the Hands-on Policy noted above.