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## Responsible Giant Snake Ownership

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A large proportion of the public has a fear of snakes. A much smaller proportion of the public is fascinated by snakes and keep them as pets. Unfortunately irrational fear of snakes and rare tragic deaths associated with giant constrictors have given many local legislatures the incentive to restrict ownership of these animals. It makes no difference that other more common pets, such as horses and dogs, kill far more people. People generally disdain snakes and legislation outlawing large constrictors is easy to pass. Therefore it is incumbent upon owners of large snakes to act responsibly and heed the following guidelines offered by the American Federation of Herpetoculturists:

- 1) Snakes should not be displayed in public where people would **not** reasonably expect to see them. Do not force your snake on someone who might not want to see it.
- 2) Transport snakes in a safe manner that precludes escape and keeps them out of sight. For example, put them in a bag, put the bag in a box or in another bag.
- 3) Keep snakes over 8 feet in length in a secure cage that has some sort of locking mechanism. The cage should be inside a room with a door so that in the unlikely event the snake should get out of the cage it would still be contained within the room.
- 4) When handling any of the giant snakes (green anaconda, Indian and Burmese pythons, African rock pythons, reticulated pythons and amethystine pythons) over 8 feet or 30 pounds, a second person should be present or within calling distance. This is extremely important and should be observed by even the most experienced snake handler.
- 5) Minors should seek parental consent before obtaining giant snakes to ensure proper housing, maintenance, and supervision. No store should sell giant snakes without providing local regulations and guidelines for responsible maintenance.
- 6) Establish a set feeding routine that is distinct from your cleaning or handling routines. The author recommends using a shift cage for feeding. A plastic trash can with locking handles and numerous ventilation holes drilled into it works well as a shift cage. When feeding assist the snake into the shift cage with a large snake hook. Inside the shift cage can be the pre-killed prey item. Avoid offering prey with one's own hand. Do not enter your snake's cage with a prey item on you or already in the cage. Avoid cleaning or handling your snake during feeding or after handling prey items.
- 7) Keep in mind that, just as with dogs, owners of large constrictors may be held liable for the treatment and trauma inflicted upon someone by their snake's bite.

**Be responsible!** Irresponsible snake ownership not only creates problems for you, but for other people who, like yourself, enjoy keeping these snakes. Insist others act in a responsible manner. People want to take away your right to own these animals. Do not add fuel to their fire.