



Guidance on the keeping of Venomous Snakes and Lizards

Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004



1. **Species Names**

SNAKES

Colubridae of the genera *Atractaspis*, *Malpolon*, *Psammophis* and *Thelatornis*

and of the species *Boiga dendrophila*,

Dispholidus typus,

Rhabdophis subminiatus,

and *Rhabdophis tigrinus*

Family **Elapidae**

Family **Viperidae**

Mole vipers and certain rear-fanged venomous snakes (including the moila and Montpellier snakes, sand snakes, twig snakes, the mangrove (otherwise known as the yellow-ringed catsnake), the boomslang, the red-necked keelback and the yamakagashi (otherwise known as the Japanese tiger-snake)).

Certain front-fanged venomous snakes (including cobras, coral snakes, the desert black snake, kraits, mambas, sea snakes and all Australian poisonous snakes (including the death adders)).

Certain front-fanged venomous snakes (including adders, the barba amarilla, the bushmaster, the copperhead, the fer-de-lance, moccasins, rattlesnakes and vipers).

	LIZARDS	Family	
		<i>Helodermatidae</i>	Gila monsters and the Mexican beaded lizard.
2.	Additional information	All members of the genera, families and species listed are included in the Schedule to the Order. This includes the European adder. Captive requirements for sea snakes, such as searaits, that are included in the genera listed in paragraph 1 may vary from this guidance. Further information should be sought from the Department of the Environment before a licence application is made.	
3.	Housing overview	Snakes must be housed in locked tanks (vivaria) kept inside a locked room. The room housing the reptiles must be “snake proof”, to prevent accidental escape. Venomous lizards may be kept in vivaria or fine mesh wire cages with a solid floor. Some hobbyists have previously kept venomous snakes in stackable plastic boxes. This is not appropriate as long-term accommodation and is not recommended.	
4.	Keeping experience	In order to protect the welfare of the reptiles being kept, keepers must be able to demonstrate a good knowledge of husbandry and safe handling of the species they wish to keep. Visitors must NOT be allowed to handle the reptiles. There should normally be a second named person nominated and included on the licence who is competent to care for the animals should the owner be absent or incapacitated.	

Housing Recommendations

- 5. Construction** Reptiles, and snakes particularly, have the ability to squeeze through very small gaps; therefore vivaria must be solidly constructed, with lockable lids, and covered ventilation holes. It is recommended that the door to the reptile room has a viewing window, through which the keeper can see all the vivaria before entering the room.
- 6. Size** The minimum recommended space per animal depends on the animal's size. Larger snakes and lizards need more room than smaller snakes.

In addition to the space required by the animals themselves, there must also be sufficient room for the keeper to safely reach into the tank with snake tongs to remove the animals.

Snakes and Heloderm lizards tend not to be very active, so as long as there is enough space for them to move, reach food, get warm and cool down, then the space is adequate.

Approximate minimum guidelines are as follows:

Snake length	Tank size
Up to 1 metre (3 feet)	40 litres (10 gallons)
1-2 metres (3-6 feet)	80 litres (20 gallons)
2.25-3 metres (7-10 feet)	120 litres (30 gallons)
Over 3 metres (10 feet)	200 litres (55 gallons)
Gila monster and Beaded lizard	Minimum recommended enclosure size is 0.9m x 0.9m (3ft x 3ft) with a height of at least 45cm (1.5 ft).

- 7. Temperature** Tropical species, such as the majority of snakes and the lizards on the Schedule, should be kept at temperatures between 20°C - 35°C. The keeper should ensure that the correct temperature is maintained for the species kept. A heat source should be provided at one end of the vivarium, creating a temperature gradient. The heat source should be insulated so that neither the reptile nor the reptile keeper is at risk of burns.

Any electrical appliances used, such as heaters, should be checked regularly to reduce the risk of fire caused by faulty equipment.

- 8. Lighting** Reptiles require full spectrum lighting during daylight hours. This should be provided by a full spectrum light bulb, or a UV light appropriate for reptiles (replaced yearly).

- 9. Ventilation** Ambient humidity of reptile enclosures is important to the animal's health. A humidity level between 50 % and 75 % for tropical snakes is recommended. The humidity requirements for desert species may be lower, and should be appropriate for the species kept. There should be means to measure and adjust humidity if necessary.

If ventilation is required, an appropriate system should be installed and covered with mesh to prevent escape.

- 10. Drainage** The substrate used in the vivaria should allow spilled water to drain away from the reptile, and must be replaced regularly, so as not to become sodden or fouled with faeces. Any faecal material must be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.
- 11. Cleanliness** Faeces and food debris should be removed promptly. Vivaria, water bowls, and other furniture should be disinfected regularly.
- 12. Social dynamics and behavioural considerations** While it is possible to keep different species of snake together, it is not recommended. In the wild, even snakes of the same species spend most of their life on their own.

Keeping venomous snakes in the same vivarium increases the risk to the keeper during handling time, the risk while feeding, and while cleaning the vivarium.

It is acceptable to keep several reptile species in individual enclosures in the same room.

13. Prevention of escape

Reptile rooms should have no open fireplace, and no gaps in the walls at all. Any ventilation ducts must be securely covered with a fine mesh to prevent animals escaping. Any windows should be sealed shut.

In order to prevent escape from the room, it is recommended that a viewing window be installed into the door, through which the keeper can observe the room before entering. A 30 cm (1 ft) high lip at the bottom of the door (which the keeper must step over) will help to prevent an animal escaping from the room as the door is opened.

The door to the room must be closed before animals are handled.

Vivaria housing snakes should have solid sides, floor and top, with no gaps and covered air holes, and all vivaria and cages should be locked unless access is necessary.

14. Food, drink and bedding

These snakes and lizards should be fed whole dead rodents of appropriate size for the reptile concerned. Tongs or grabbers should be used to place the food in the vivarium. Food should never be placed by hand.

Humidity is very important for tropical reptiles, and there must be fresh water available at all times.

Vivaria should have a substrate that is easily replaced, and that the reptiles will not swallow or eat inadvertently.

- 15. Visiting interval**

The animals must be monitored at appropriate intervals, normally at least once every 24 hours.
- 16. Exercise and enrichment**

The provision of enrichment for the animals is desirable. For snakes and lizards, this could include something to climb, a water dish large enough to bathe in and a lockable, and removable, 'hide box' which provides shelter for the reptiles, and allows safe containment while cleaning the vivarium.

A stone or branch is recommended for reptiles to rub against while shedding their skin.

Heloderm lizards may enjoy digging, and can be provided with a suitable substrate for this if space allows.
- 17. Protective equipment**

Snake tongs or a snake hook, leather gloves, and goggles or a solid visor, may be necessary for handling venomous reptiles.
- 18. Provision for moving the animal(s)**

Some contingency for safely moving animals should be in place in case veterinary attention is required, or in the event of an emergency. A solid lockable box, such as the hide box from the reptile's tank is recommended as a method of transport, although a plastic box with a lockable, snap-on lid may also be used. A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify restrictions on the movement of these animals and procedures to be followed.

19. Emergency planning

There should be a written contingency plan in place to be used in the event of an emergency, for example fire, flood, animal escape or injury to the keeper.

The greatest danger from venomous reptiles is posed to the keepers themselves. The contingency plan should include the details of who to contact at a local hospital in case of being bitten, and what the procedure is to deal with venomous bites, and this should be clearly displayed inside the room.

20. Notification Requirements

A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify procedures to be followed in the event of an escape and on the provision of information to the Emergency Services (e.g. the Fire Service) on the dangerous wild animals being kept.

You are required to notify the Department of the Environment of any intentions to breed the animals.

When a licence is issued to keep venomous species, it is required that keepers must notify the local hospital in writing of which species are being kept, to allow the medical staff to research appropriate anti-venoms.

21. Prevention and control of spread of infectious disease

The keeper should provide details of their veterinary arrangements with a practice prepared to treat the species kept. A schedule of veterinary care, including routine parasite control is essential.

Arrangements should be in place for the emergency humane euthanasia and safe disposal of the species held. The venom of these species may still be harmful even after the animal is dead.

There are no transmissible diseases that pose a major threat to the public, provided there is no direct contact with the snakes or their by-products. Keepers should be aware of the risk of salmonellosis from handling snakes or lizards, which they in turn could pass on to family members if good hygiene is not observed. Thorough hand washing following the handling or cleaning out of any reptile is recommended.

Explanatory Notes

These notes have been produced to provide people wishing to keep dangerous wild animals with guidance on the requirements they may have to meet. In determining whether or not a licence should be issued, the Department of the Environment will consider the information provided by the applicant when applying for a licence. The Department will also arrange for a suitably qualified person to carry out an inspection of the premises at which the animal or animals will be kept and the inspector's report will also be taken into consideration. It is at the Department's discretion to waive certain recommendations, or add additional ones, to the guidance provided in this document. There is a right to appeal within 21 days if a licence is refused or if the applicant contests conditions applied to a licence.

Contact Information

For further information on the Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, contact the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Biodiversity Unit on (028) 9056 9557

For CITES enquiries:

Wildlife Licensing and Registration
Service
Global Wildlife Division
**Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs**
Zone 1/17 Temple Quay House
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For rabies quarantine enquiries:

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Food and Rural Affairs**
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