

Working with Giants

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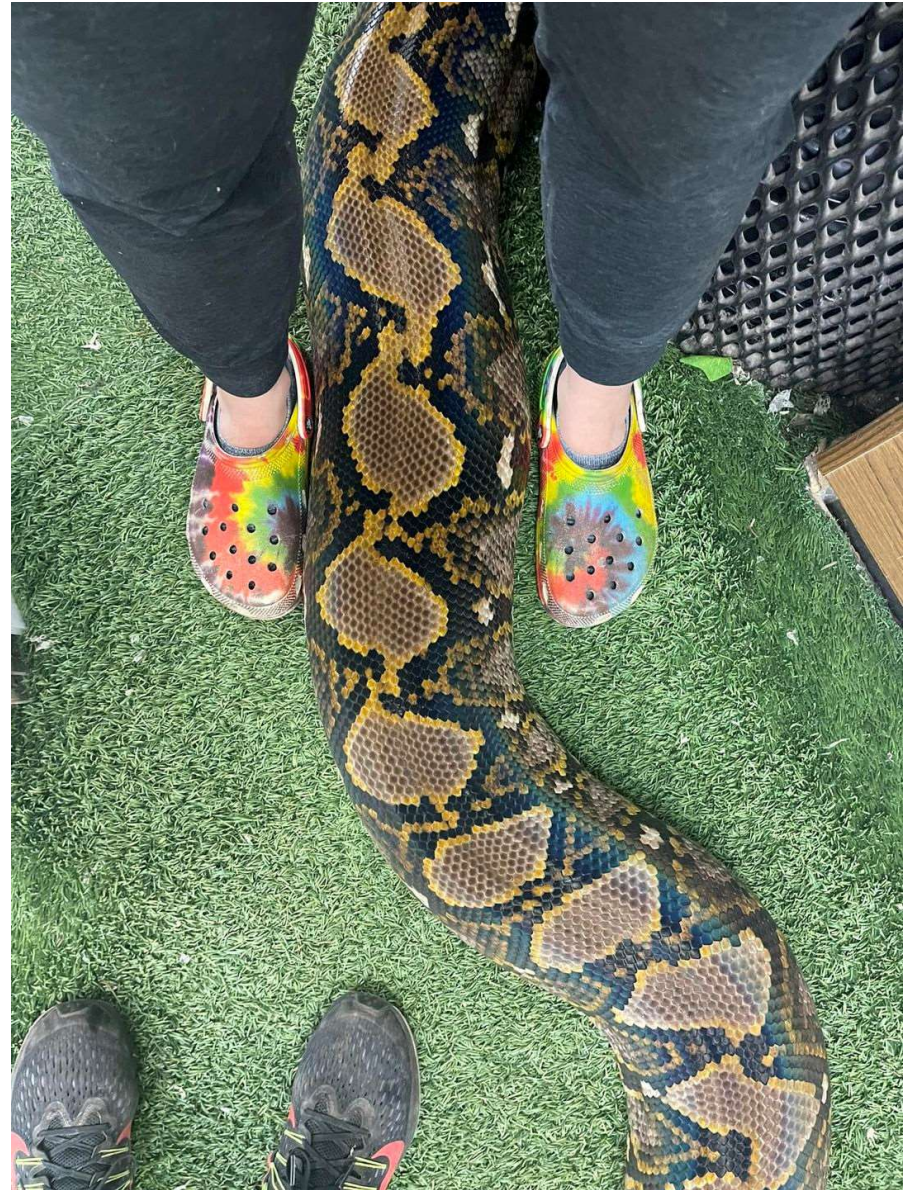
A Retirement Home for Snakes
www.snakehaus.com

Topics:

1. **Who's who: people, snakes, laws**
2. **Snake Behavior**
3. **Handling techniques and tools**
4. **Husbandry**
5. **Case Reviews**

Notes can be found at:

<https://www.snakehaus.com/frontpage/education/lectures/wsuvth-working-with-giants/>



Who are we?

Sara Mayes DVM: Mountain View Animal Hospital, Snohomish

Nicky Finch DVM: WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital

Kami Wasilchen LVT: Cascade Animal Clinic, Monroe

Mirko Mayes: Facility Coordinator Blue Pearl, Kirkland



501(c)(3) Non-profit & 509(a)(2) Public Charity
Snakes that are difficult to place or rehome

What do we do? *giants*



What do we do?

Medical



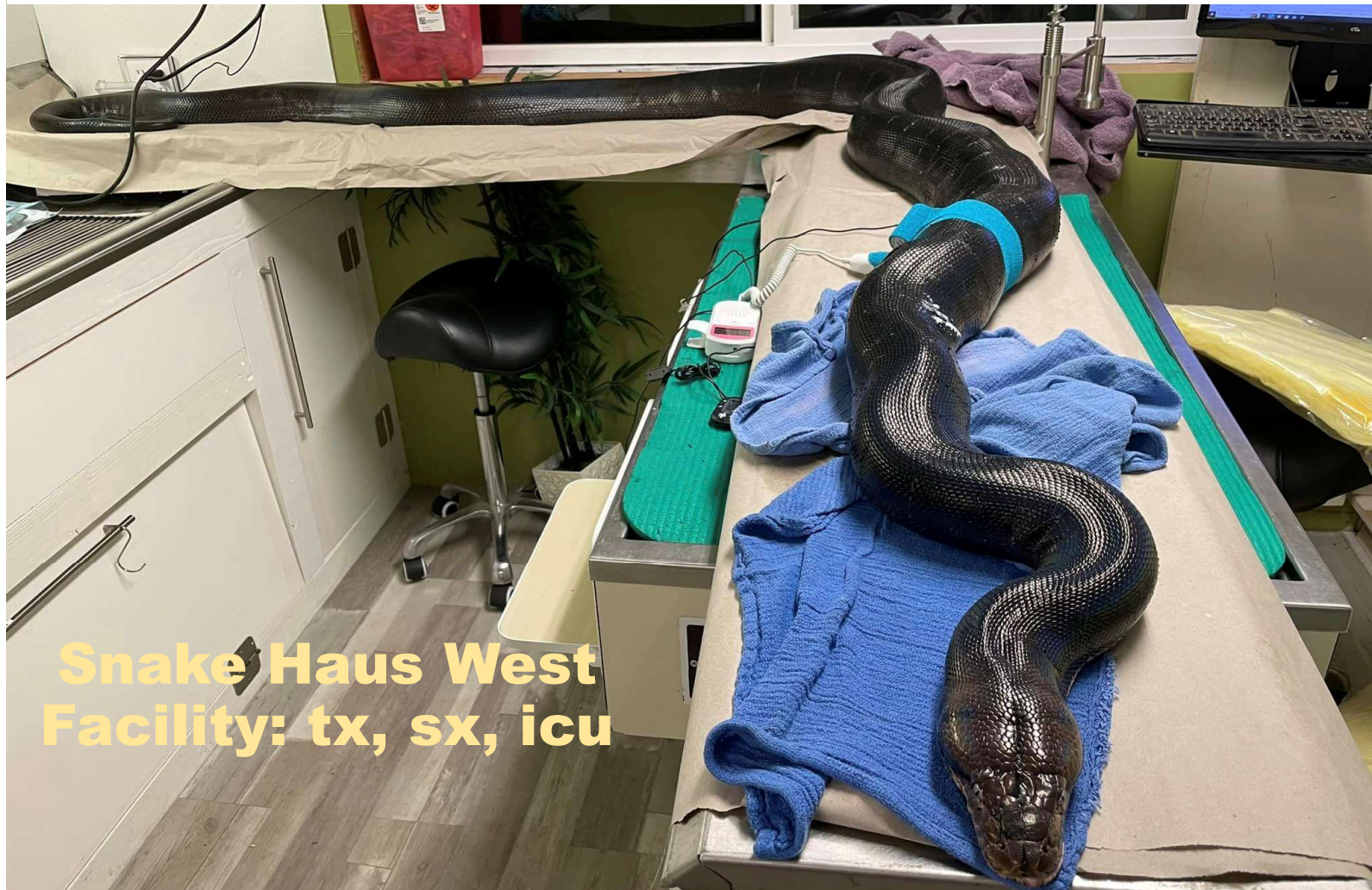
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Behavioral



What do we do? *surgery*



**Snake Haus West
Facility: tx, sx, icu**



Common Pet Snakes

Common Pet Snakes

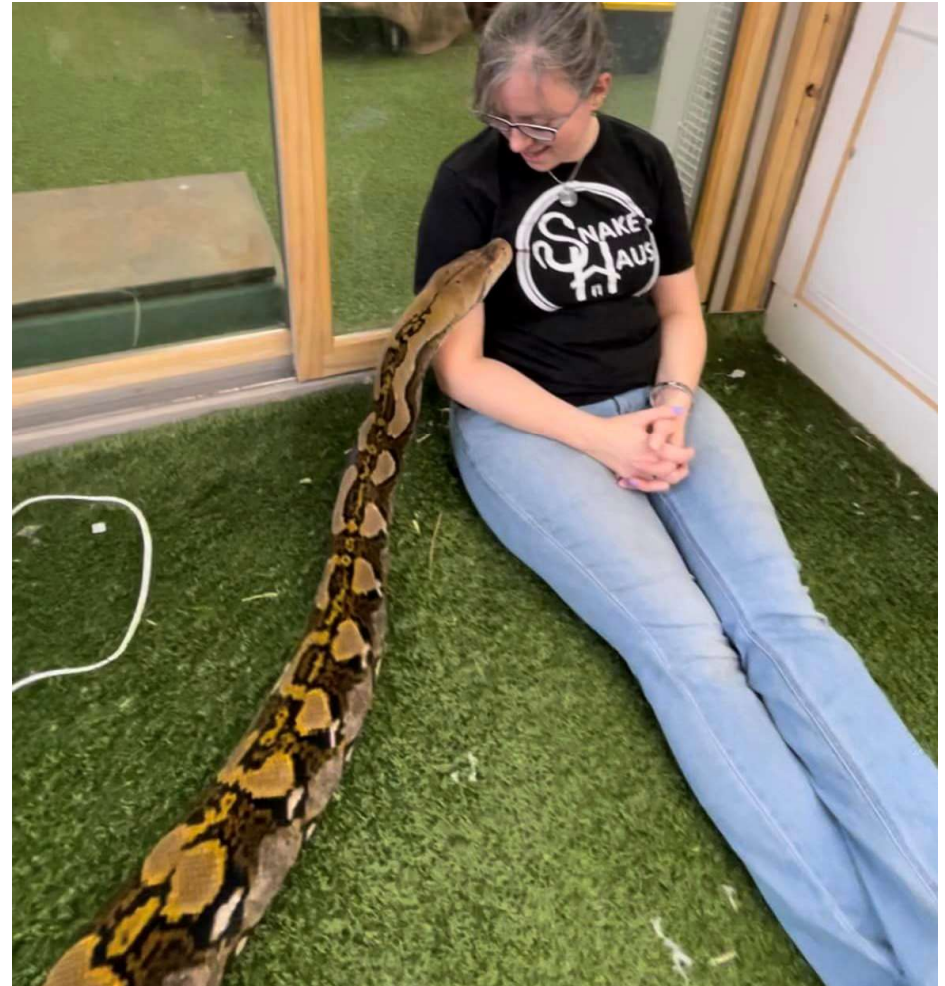
- Colubrids
- Ball Pythons
- Carpets, Bloods

Giants

- Boas (the BCC's and the Colombians)
- Reticulated Python
- Burmese Python
- Anacondas

Venomous *NOT COVERED*

- **Rear fang:** Mangrove, Asian Vine Snake, False Water Cobra, Garter Snake, Hog Nose, **Boomslang**
- **Front fang:** Copperhead, Vipers Cobra, Rattlesnake, etc



Illegal reptiles: front fang venomous, water species, or native

- RCW [16.30.010](#)

- **Definitions.**

(1) "Animal control authority" means an entity acting alone or in concert with other local governmental units for enforcement of the animal control laws of the city, county, and state and the shelter and welfare of animals.

(2) "Potentially dangerous wild animal" means one of the following types of animals, whether bred in the wild or in captivity, and any or all hybrids thereof:

(a) Class mammalia

(i) Order carnivora

(A) Family felidae, only lions, tigers, captive-bred cougars, jaguars, cheetahs, leopards, snow leopards, and clouded leopards;

(B) Family canidae, wolves, excluding wolf-hybrids;

(C) Family ursidae, all bears;

(D) Family hyaenidae, such as hyenas;

(ii) Order perissodactyla, only rhinoceroses;

(iii) Order primates, all nonhuman primate species;

(iv) Order proboscidae, all elephants [elephant] species;

(b) Class reptilia

(i) Order squamata

(A) Family atractaspidae, all species;

(B) Family colubridae, only **dispholidus typus**; - **The Boomslang** (*the only rear fang on this list*)

(C) Family **elapidae**, all species, such as **cobras, mambas, kraits, coral snakes, and Australian tiger snakes**;

(D) Family hydrophiidae, all species, such as sea snakes;

(E) Family varanidae, only water monitors and crocodile monitors;

(F) Family **viperidae**, all species, such as **rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, bushmasters, puff adders, and gaboon vipers**;

(ii) Order crocodilia, all species, such as crocodiles, alligators, caimans, and gavials.

(3) "Person" means any individual, partnership, corporation, organization, trade or professional association, firm, limited liability company, joint venture, association, trust, estate, or any other legal entity, and any officer, member, shareholder, director, employee, agent, or representative thereof.

(4) "Possessor" means any person who owns, possesses, keeps, harbors, brings into the state, or has custody or control of a potentially dangerous wild animal.

(5) "Wildlife sanctuary" means a nonprofit organization, as described in RCW [84.36.800](#), that cares for animals defined as potentially dangerous and:

(a) No activity that is not inherent to the animal's nature, natural conduct, or the animal in its natural habitat is conducted;

(b) No commercial activity involving an animal occurs including, but not limited to, the sale of or trade in animals, animal parts, animal by-products, or animal offspring, or the sale of photographic opportunities involving an animal, or the use of an animal for any type of entertainment purpose;

(c) No unescorted public visitations or direct contact between the public and an animal; or

(d) No breeding of animals occurs in the facility.

MOST CITIES – size restrictions

Back to common PETS: Who's who?

Boas: the Americas

- Boas
- Anacondas

Pythons: Africa, Asia, Aus

- Retics & Burms
- Ball Pythons
- Carpets



Colubrids: every continent except Antarctica

Snake Behavior

Habituated vs Domesticated

- Have learned to tolerate us
- Not social animals
- Will avoid you unless they sense food
- Give them an escape route instead of cornering them

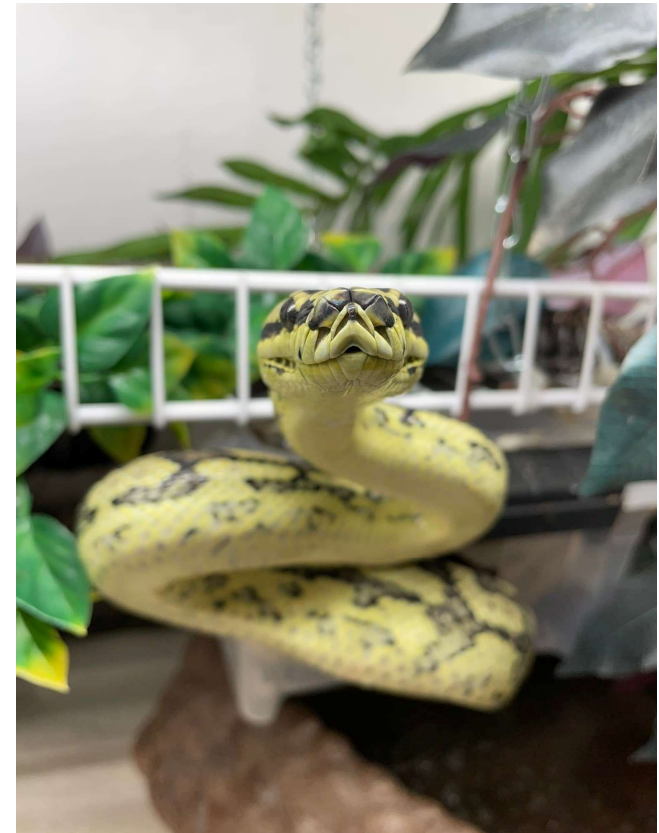
Fight or Flight:

give them the option to flee and they will take it



Body Language: indicates intent

- **Eye contact:** assume the worst and act accordingly
 - direct eye contact means “I’m hungry”
- **Body Posture:** very important!!
 - S shape to body
 - Front 1/3 elevated off the ground
- **Moving towards or away**
- **Tongue flick:** tasting the air
 - Tells you they’re awake and interested



Snake Bites: no big deal. . .



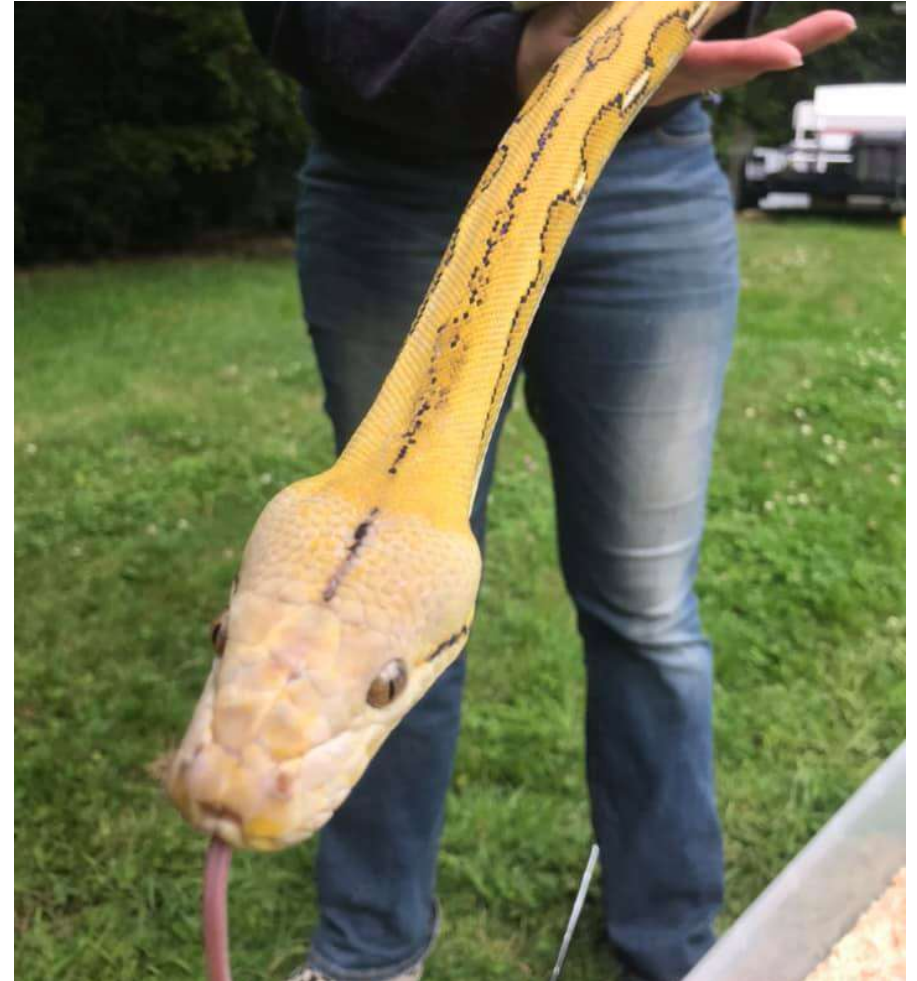
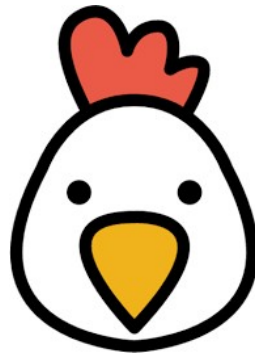
Snake Bites: how to avoid

Proper Preparation pppp 😊

- **Use a hook:** communicate and judge their mind set
- **Wash your hands:** don't smell like food

Adjust for their behavioral needs:

- Offer hides
- Go slow
- Give the snake an escape route
- Hands off capture is possible



Snake Bites: what to do

Types of Bites:

- **Defense:** false strike or strike and let go
 - Back off and give animal somewhere to hide
- **Food:** strike, hold on, and wrap
 - Hold still; do not pull your hand back
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Hold head behind the neck once they let go
 - Cover the snake with a towel
 - Unwrap backwards from the tail up
- **Fight Mode:** some males will fight via a bite delivery that can cause lacerations
 - Requires gentle handling! Don't push back just try to steer them.
 - Respond better to female handlers



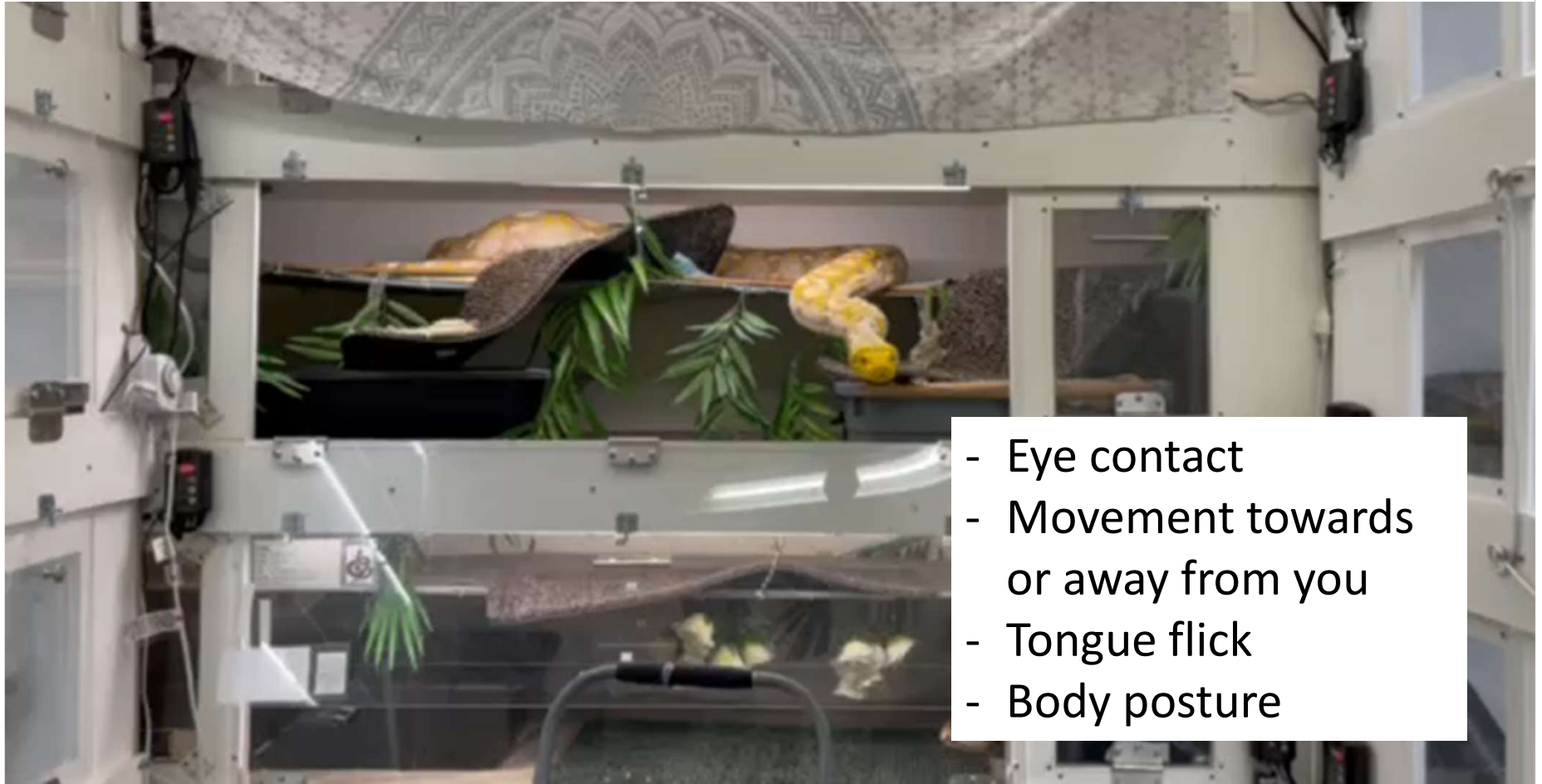
Handling Tools

- Hook
- Hide
- Towels
- Thin gloves
- Plastic tub
- Clean hands
- Time and patience
- Close observation and flexibility

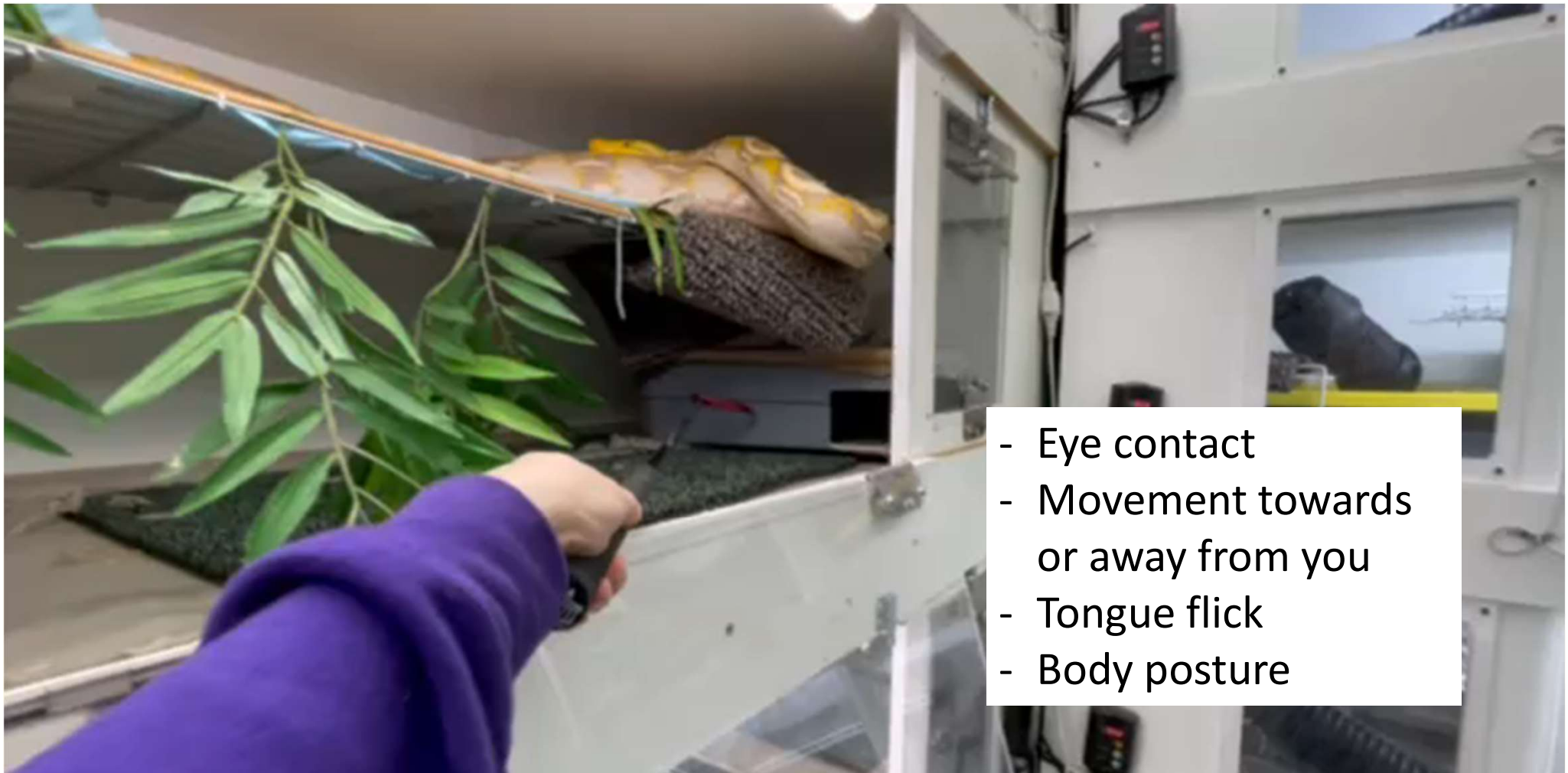


*Training should not start until the animal feels safe inside their enclosure

Body Language



Body language



- Eye contact
- Movement towards or away from you
- Tongue flick
- Body posture

Hook

A communication tool:

- **Ambush predator:** use hook to wake them up before reaching in
- **Break the food drive:** smell and heat signature
- **Applied behavioral pressures:** elicit a desired response and reward
- **Redirection:** steering rather than forced movement



Hides

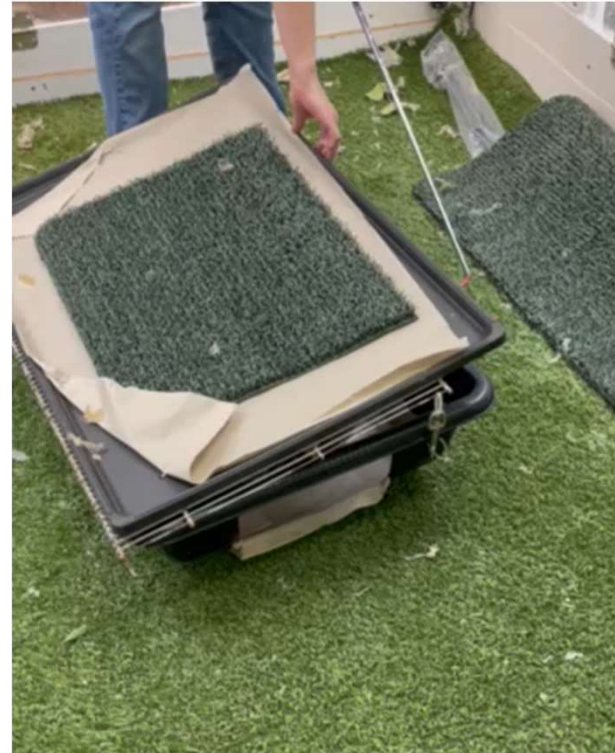
Positive thigmotaxis

- security blanket for the animal
- Reward for redirection w/ hook
- Stress free handling
- Elicits cooperation from the animal
- Vital for moving giants around
- Feeding bin?



Transportation tub

- Hiding: Go slow, be polite, say hello
- Ambush predator: Give them a chance to look around
- Ask them to cooperate



- Eye contact
- Movement towards or away from you
- Tongue flick
- Body posture

Gloves



Towel



Safe Handling for Giants

Size Matters: One person for every 6' of snake

Respect the animal:

- Say hello first and make sure they are awake
- Give them time to look at where they are and think
- Invite them out: must give them somewhere to go
- Avoid the head and tail
- Be strong but gentle

No snake scarves: one shoulder only

Training

Applied Behavioral Pressure: choice-based handling

- 1) Putting a gentle pressure on the animal that elicits a response
- 2) Adjust that pressure until you see the desired response or behavior
- 3) Once they comply the pressure stops
 - cessation of the pressure is the reward
- 4) Slowly change the pressures to teach new behaviors

VIDEO

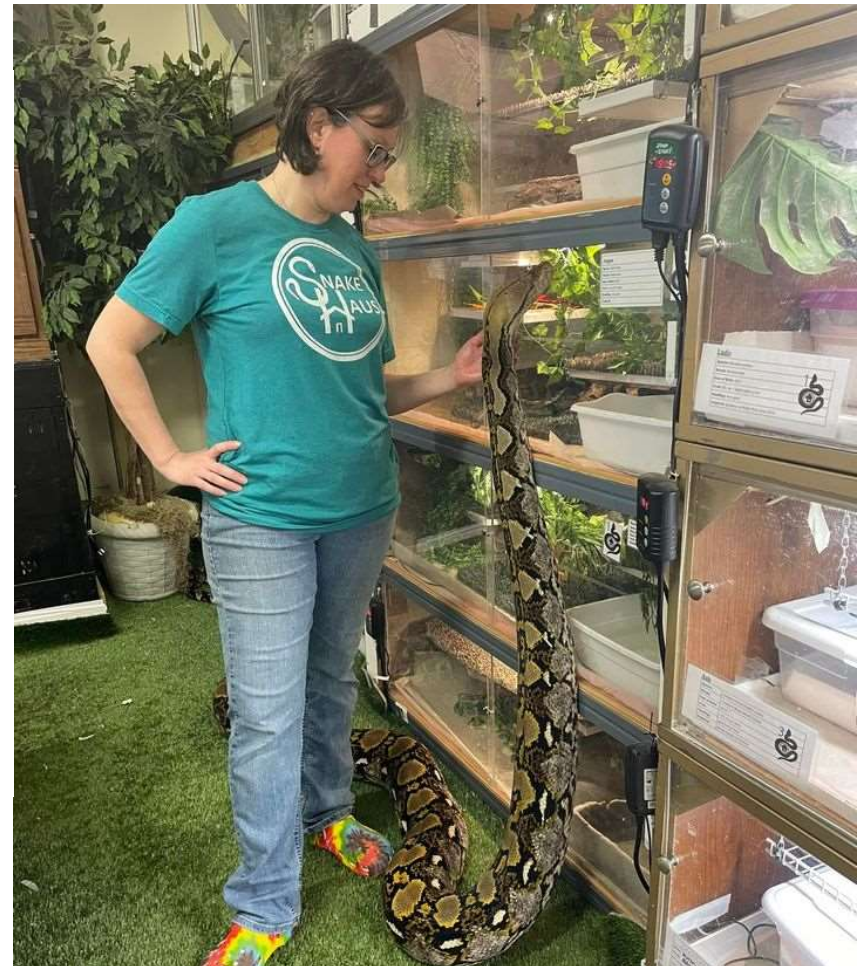
Hook training with Cello: <https://youtu.be/B4emglk5crl>

Husbandry for Giants

Husbandry

- Enclosure size
- Heat
- Water
- Food
- Hides

Same principles as smaller snakes but more difficult to achieve.



How big of a snake can fit in here?

**12x3
feet**



Enclosure Length + width \geq length of the snake

55 gallon aquarium:

Length 48"

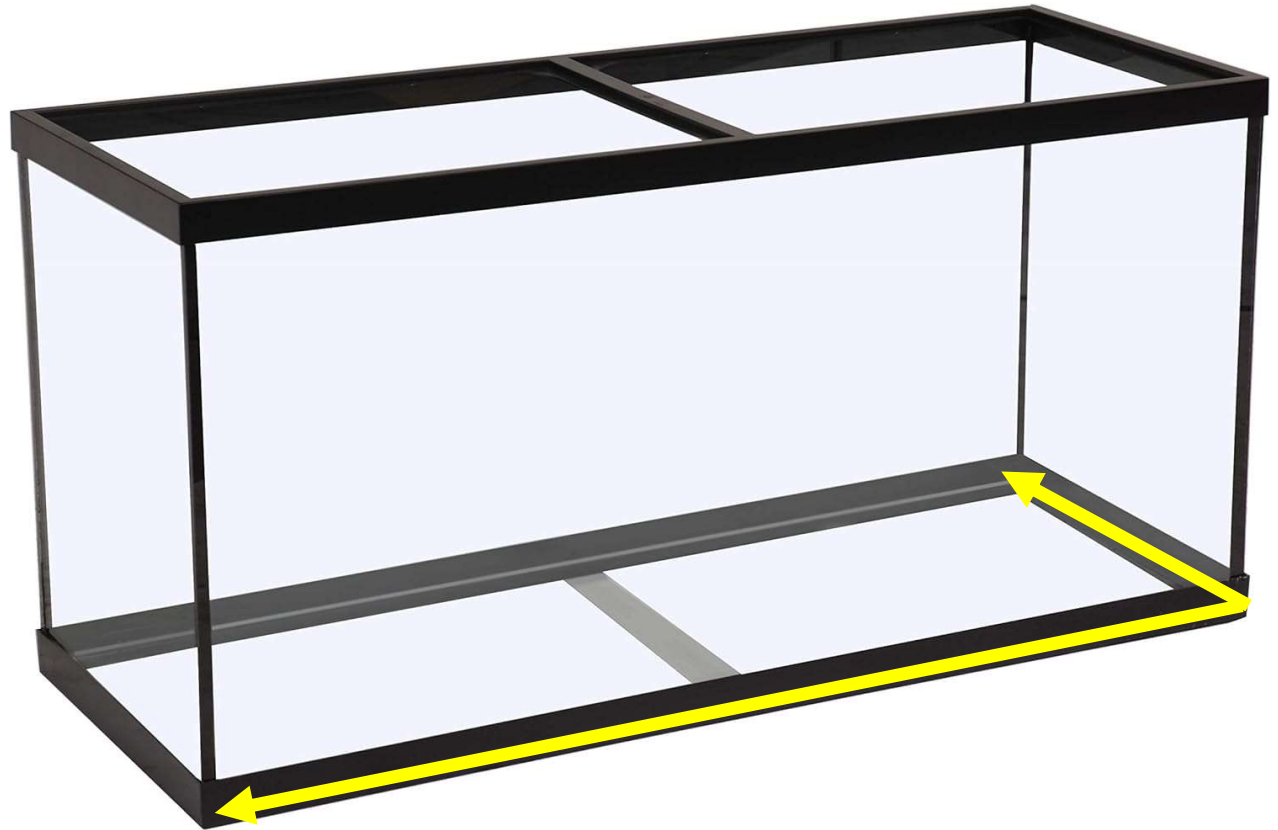
Width 13"

Height 20"

Maximum occupant length:

????

5 feet



Most adult ball pythons and boas will outgrow this!

Enclosure options



- Animal Plastics: <https://apcages.com>
- Boaphile: <https://boaphileplastics.com/>
- Vision cages: <https://www.visionproducts.us>
- Reptilekages <https://reptilekages.com>
- Zen Habitats: <https://www.zenhabitats.com>
- Reptile Basics: <https://www.reptilebasics.com/reptile-cages/>
- Apex Reptile: <https://apexreptile.com/>
- Black Box Cages: <https://www.blackboxcages.com/collections/cages>
- Dubia: <https://dubiaroaches.com/collections/reptile-enclosures>
- Focus Cubed Habitats: <https://focuscubedhabitats.com/>
- Cornel's World: <https://www.cornelsworld.com/>
- Custom Reptile Habitats: <https://customreptilehabitats.com/>
- Build your own: <https://www.snakehaus.com/.../build-your-own-enclosure/>
- Snakes in Tanks: <https://www.snakehaus.com/.../snakes-in-tanks-please-stop/>

****NOTE* some of these come with SCREEN TOPS and will need to be modified;
screen tops are really dangerous for many reasons.***

Please read the article listed as the last link for more details on that topic.

Screen Top Aquariums: bad for snakes

- **Humidity control:** heat rises and takes water vapor with it
- **Temperature regulation:** heat exits out the top
- **Scale rot and respiratory disease:** evaporation from dirty substrate
- **Feeling of exposure:** clear on all sides
- **Nose damage:** trying to get out the top
- **Handling from above:** predators approach from above – stress
- **Inappropriate dimensions:** too narrow front to back, too tall
- **Danger from other animals:** cats, dogs, etc

This is the most common type of enclosure used. It can be done but requires significant work to be done well.

www.snakehaus.com/frontpage/education/snakes-in-tanks-please-stop/



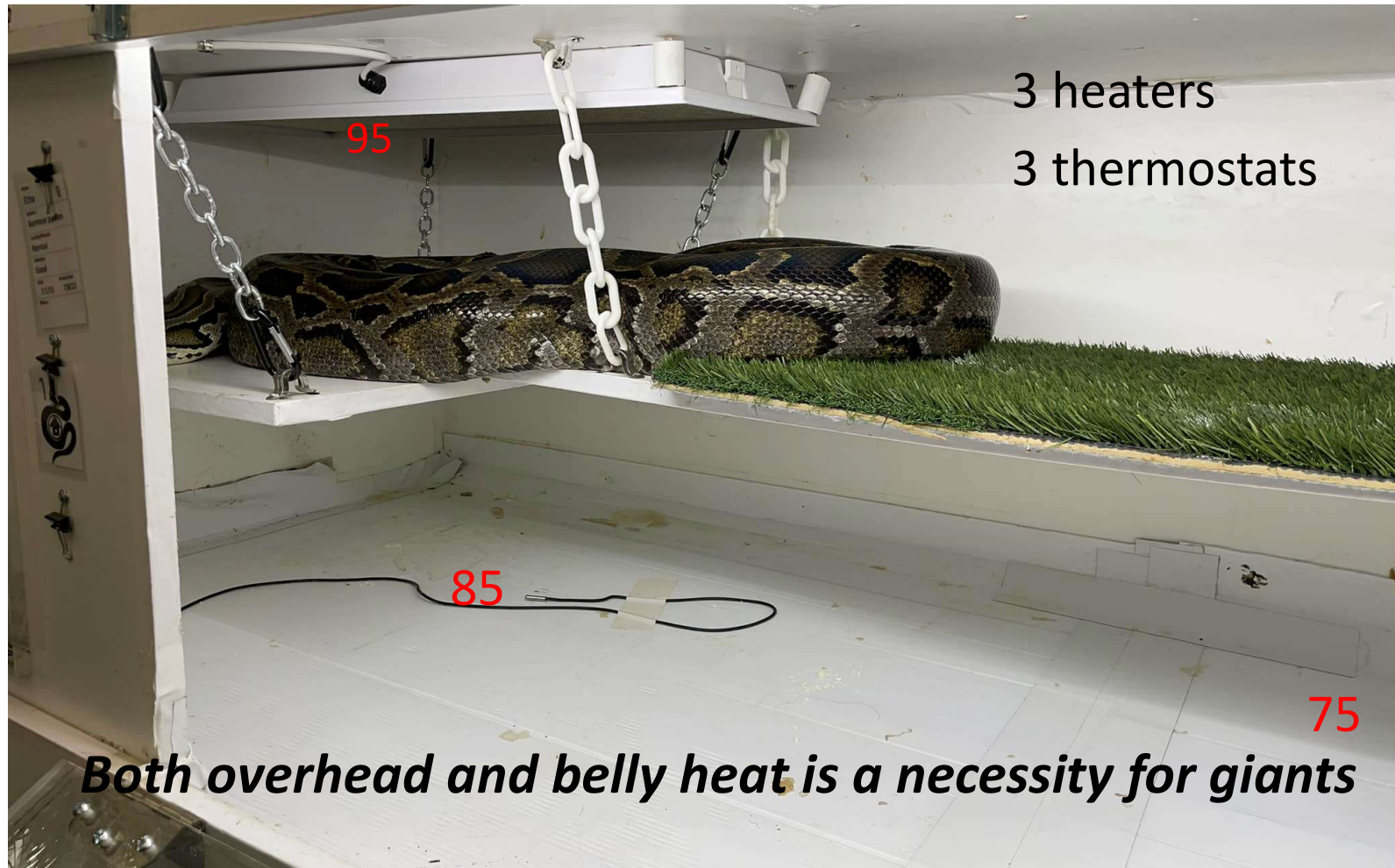
Exercise

Need a space where they can stretch and move

- Safe
- Escape proof
- Controlled
- Room to move



Heat for Giants



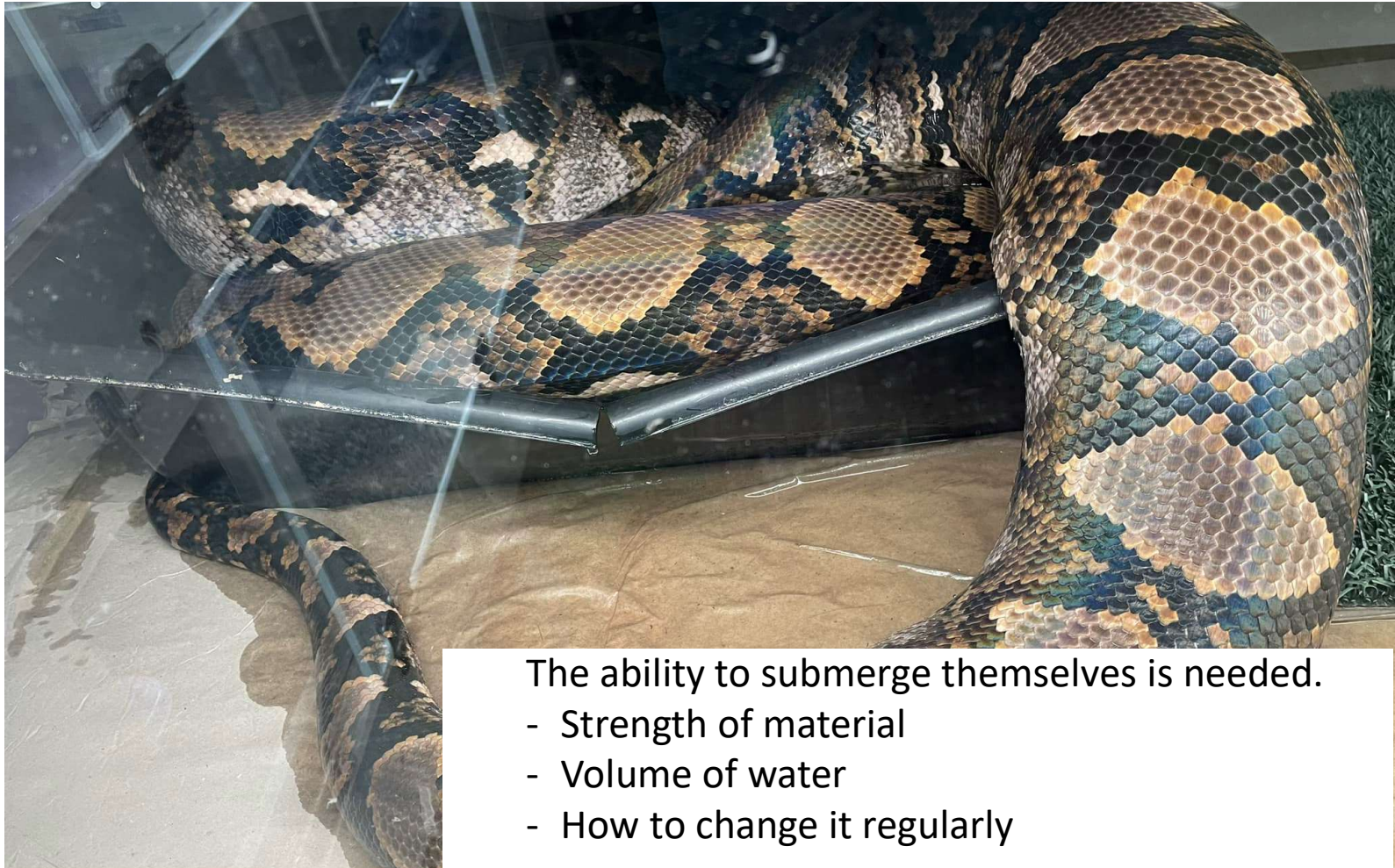
Heat for Giants



- Air flow and heat dissipation
- Protect heater from water
- Protect snake from burns

Both overhead and belly heat is a necessity for giants

Water for Giants



The ability to submerge themselves is needed.

- Strength of material
- Volume of water
- How to change it regularly

Water for Giants



The ability to submerge themselves is needed for skin health.



Food for Giants

- 8-15lb rabbits
- q4-8 weeks
- 2 people needed
- Winter fast
- Frozen/thawed

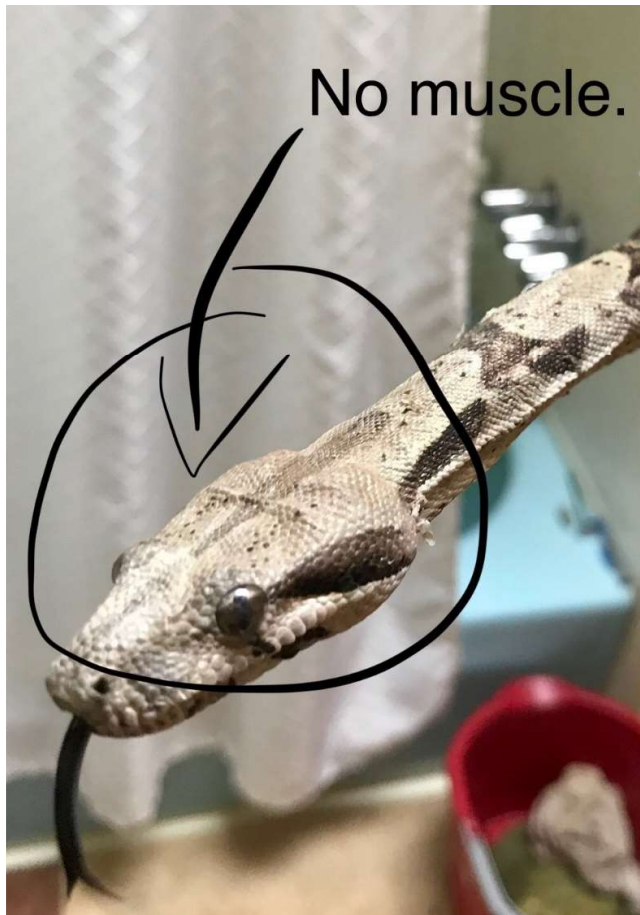


Hides for Giants

- Positive thigmotaxis
- Training and handling tool



Case Reviews: poor BCS or dehydration → neglect



Injuries: → husbandry changes + vet visit



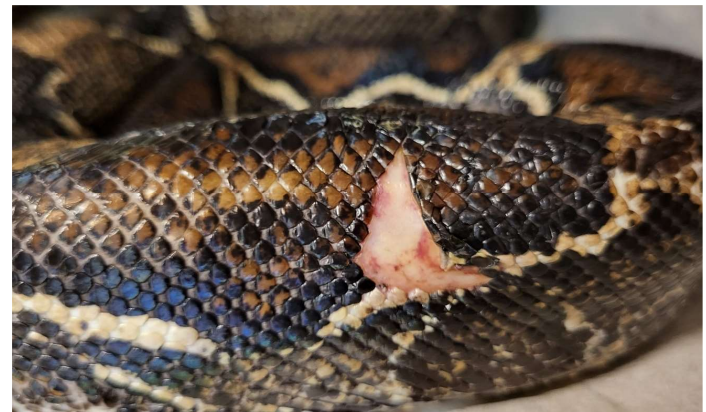
Burn



Scale Rot, Poor skin health, behavior



Rub spot – stuck shed or behavioral



Laceration – partial or full thickness

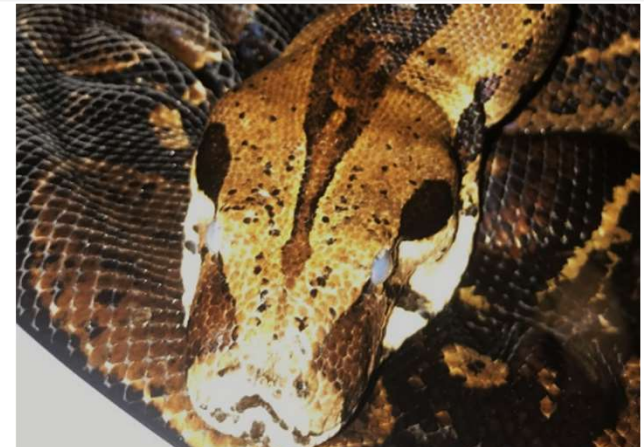
SCARS: healed

no treatment needed



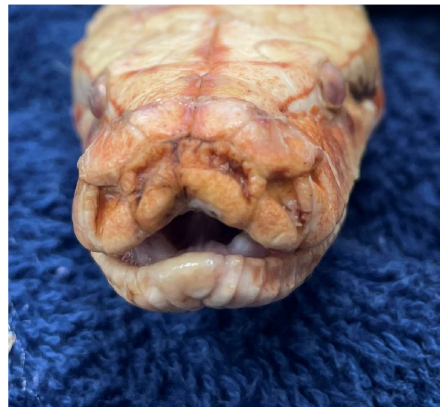
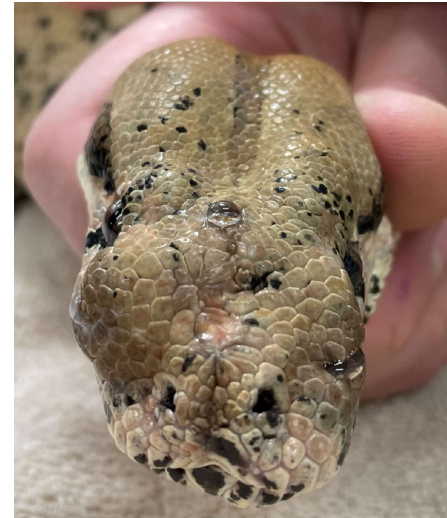
Eye Infections:

→ can you tell which one needs a vet visit?



Mouth injury or infection:

**Immediate husbandry changes
AND
vet visit**



Stomatitis:

Don't forget to look inside the mouth



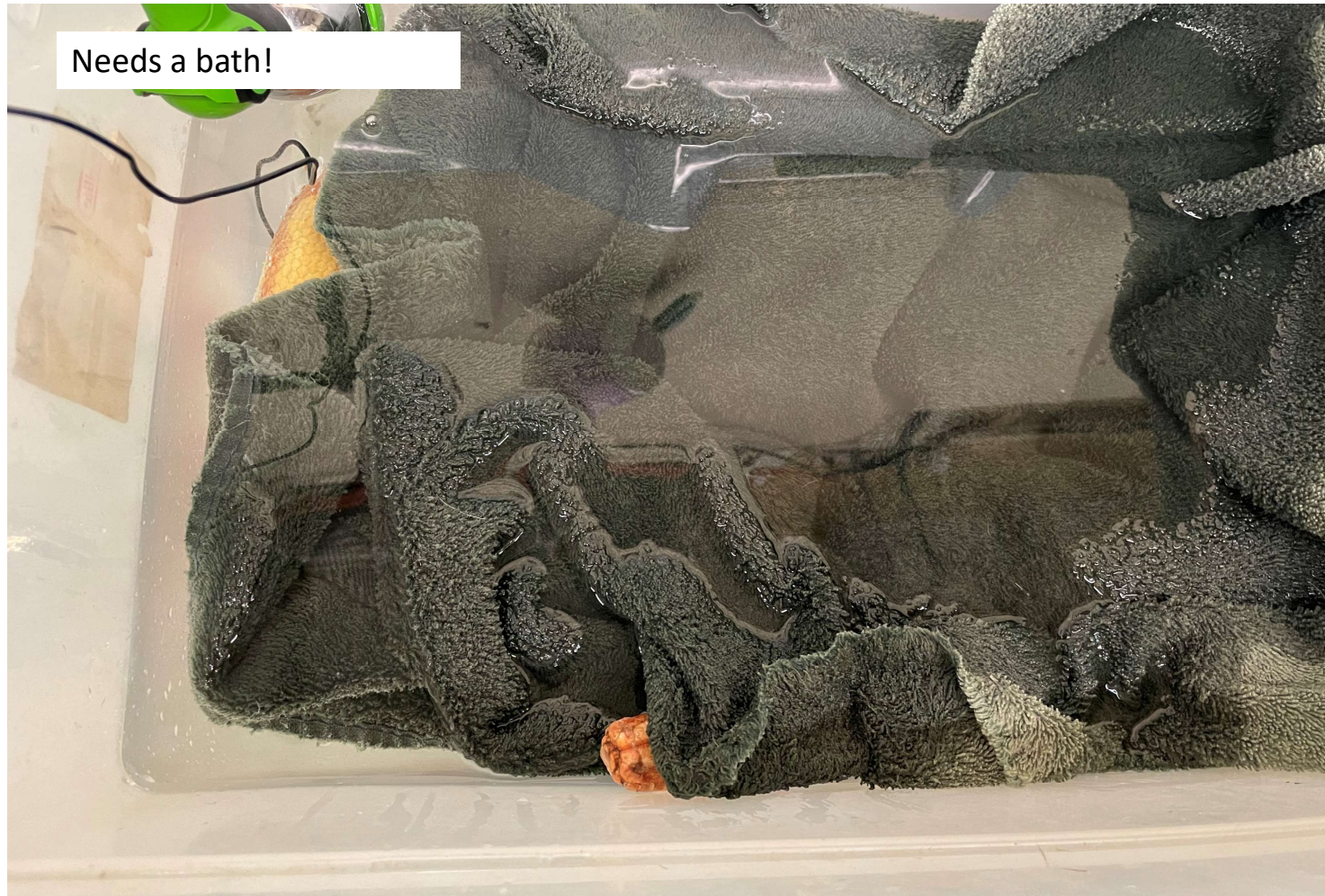
Retained Shed: husbandy



Retained Shed: husbandy



Retained Shed: just add water

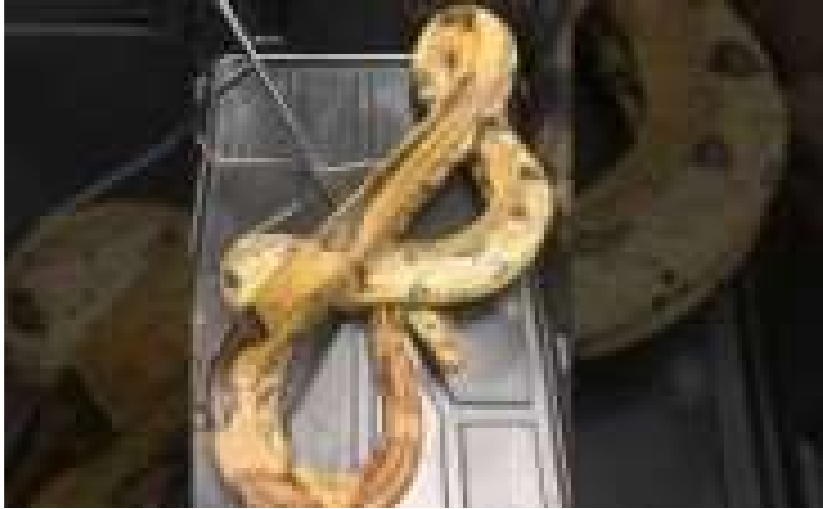


NOT retained shed



Inclusion Body Disease - euthanasia

Behavior or illness?



Neurological deficits: vet visit needed



Coughing: vet visit needed



Self harm: husbandry



Abnormal perching: husbandry

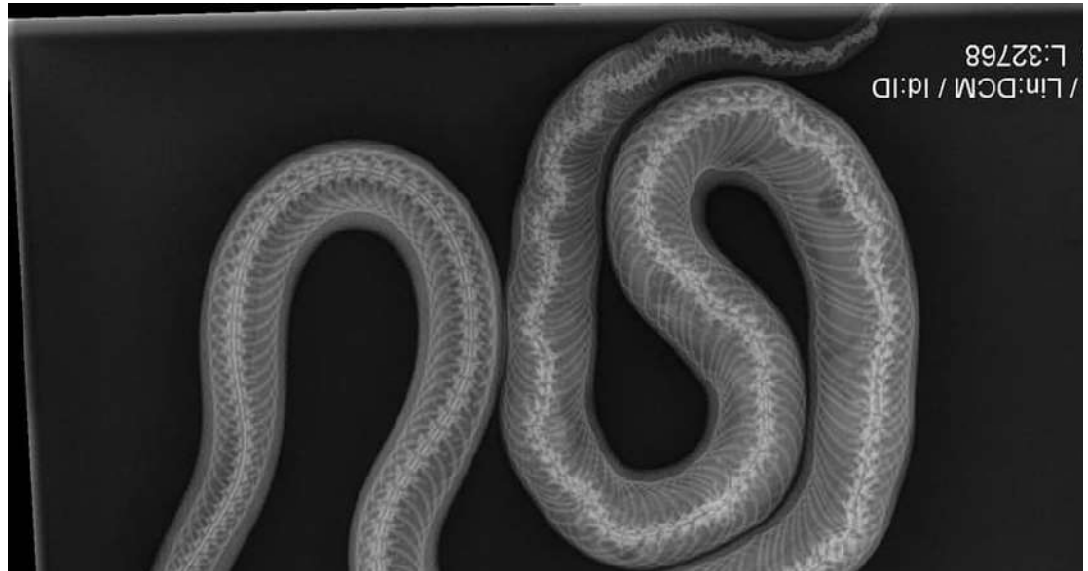


Pushing: husbandry

Lumps and Bumps: chronic illness



Lumps and Bumps: chronic illness



LIVE FOOD: immediate husbandry change; PLEASE PREVENT THIS!



VIEWER DISCRETION ADVISED

Safe Handling for Giants

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- Invite them out: must give them somewhere to go
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Thank You for caring about snakes!

Website:

www.snakehaus.com

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/snakehaus>

YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/@snakehaus>

Email:

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