



Toolbox Talk – Animal Encounters Visit

General information:

- The animals participating in our demonstrations are cared for in a loving home environment and this care is extended to our exhibitions.
- It is important all the animals, big and small, are given the opportunity to participate and be handled in a manner suitable to their species and temperament.
- Those people interacting with our animals will be briefed before handling on the proper way to interact with each animal on an individual basis.
- As many people do exhibit phobias of some of the animals we display, it may be advisable to inform those children, parents or other attendees of the animals likely to be present. It is our intention to educate and encourage everyone to fall in love with our friendly animals and promote conservation. However, we are always mindful that many people feel a great deal of anxiety when faced with these animals. In order to avoid causing distress to anyone we would like everyone attending to be aware of the animals that are likely to be present.

For organisers:

- Andrea's Animals requires a safe, quiet space to securely store animals in their containers prior to exhibition.
- Where possible we should be located indoors.
- If the event is located outdoors our pitch should be positioned away from any sound systems and have access to an electricity supply or informed in advance if none is available.
- If no power supply is available we will take steps to ensure the animals are provided with adequate heating/shade.
- If the event is outdoors a space of 4mx4m should be allowed for our set up.
- All participants engaging with the animals should be briefed where possible on expected behaviours during interaction.
- Hand washing facilities should be available where possible.
- Antibacterial hand sanitiser must be used by anyone handling the animals before and after interaction.

For participants:

- All of our animals can be startled by sudden movements or loud noises. It is therefore important all participants are made aware prior to interaction of the impact they can have on the animals.
- All participants should clean their hands prior to and following handling of all animals.
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Useful points to remember for animals

Snakes:

- Snakes should be handled gently with no pressure applied by hands. The best way to handle these is with arms outstretched to mimic a tree branch. The snakes will naturally hold on to limbs and this can sometimes include a squeeze.
- The Royal Pythons pose no threat in their squeeze of humans so participants should not be alarmed if they are hugged tightly by these animals.
- The Burmese Pythons are heavy and strong. Although they look fearsome they are calm and slow. They can however squeeze tightly sometimes. This can be alarming but please be assured, all handling will be supervised closely and there is minimal risk as these snakes are very well socialised and tame.
- The corn snakes are much smaller but much faster. Participants can be surprised at the speed and unless confident, can sometimes panic. A handler will be closely supervising on a 1-2-1 basis (as always) and take over should the speed or movement be overwhelming.
- The snakes can be handled over the shoulder with supervision as this provides a very comfortable hold for both the animal and the participant. It's also a great opportunity for photos! Occasionally these animals may manoeuvre themselves nearer the neck for a more comfortable position. This can seem alarming at first but is nothing to panic about. Interactions will be supervised AT ALL TIMES so there is no risk to the participants involved. The snakes enjoy the warmth of our exposed skin and that is most often our neck area.
- If our larger snake is being handled (over 10ft) an additional handler will be available to supervise and handle the snake when necessary. This snake is larger and therefore stronger so additional care will be taken. Safety for all is our number one priority!
- Whether our smallest or largest snakes, all participants are supervised one to one at all times.
- All snakes should be stroked in the direction of their scales – from head to tail. Stroking in the other direction can cause distress and discomfort to the animal.

Bearded Dragon:

- Our Bearded Dragon is super sociable and loves a head scratch and a quiet, calm cuddle.
- She does have sharp claws as this is how they negotiate around their natural environment.
- She enjoys being at a position of height such as on shoulders, or sometimes on top of a head!
- To avoid any scratches to skin a towel can be provided by us or brought along by each participant.
- She does love having a secure texture to hold on to and will often seek this out to feel safe.
- She most often will sit on a chest with a gentle hand behind her back.
- In small groups she can be placed on a floor and fed live food or salad if her feeding regime fits in with this scenario.
- All handling is on a one to one basis.

Hermann's Tortoise:

- Our tortoise is only 3 years old and they can live to over 100 years!
- Due to her age she can be a little shy at times but is very motivated by food.
- Because of this, she is not too keen on being handled by strangers but is ok to be placed on the ground with lots of yummy treats around her. Where this is possible a group interaction will be provided or her enclosure will be brought along for participants to observe her natural behaviour.
- She also enjoys the occasional head scratch.
- Interactions are closely observed. Although she looks tough, her shell can be delicate and her skin even more so. Because of this any handling is always on a one to one basis.
- This species can hibernate and although we prefer her not to, it cannot always be controlled. If she does decide to rest over the winter she will be unavailable between November – March.

Crested Gecko:

- This miniature reptile can be quite shy but is cuddly and agile when given the opportunity.
- He can be a little skittish so will be handled by staff and shown to participants rather than offered to them to handle.
- He can jump surprisingly far when he puts his mind to it!
- This little guy will often cuddle up inside his coconut and settle into a sleep. But he can also be found climbing upside down in his enclosure with his sticky feet being shown off to all observers!
- Very close observation is a must with this little guy.
- If a participant is very keen to have a photo with our gecko, this can be arranged. Our handlers will try to position the animal on the participant, duck out of the way for the photo, and then safely remove him. This should minimise the chance of the gecko jumping and potentially injuring himself.

Giant Land Snails:

- We have a combination of normal and albino land snails.
- There is some discussion that these snails can transmit disease through touch, although this is generally regarded as only possible from wild specimens. All our snails are captive bred in the UK and do not go outside on the ground.
- However, we do request that these creatures are only handled with a lettuce leaf between the animal and the participant's hand.
- These animals are very susceptible to absorbing all sorts of toxins from our skin so it protects both the animal and the participant.
- When appropriate these animals will be placed on a flat surface and fed their favourite food: cucumber! Participants can then watch as these amazing animals engage in their natural foraging behaviour.

Giant Hissing Cockroaches:

- These animals may have a nasty reputation but they are in fact the clean example of the cockroach community!
- This species have no wings so can be safely handled and often settle into a motionless state when held calmly.
- They enjoy hiding almost all the time so can sometimes be hard to spot in an enclosure.
- When first picked up or put down this species can shoot out a puff of air that sounds like a 'hiss'. This is a defensive behaviour and is completely harmless. However, to avoid any stress to the animal we try to manoeuvre them as quickly as possible.
- Where participants are very excitable or frightened a member of staff will step in to remove the animal if we fear it is at risk of harm. We will always observe on a one to one basis.

Stick Insects:

- We have various species of stick insects, all with their own personalities.
- These animals are extremely delicate and are best handled by crawling up a very still hand and arm.
- They will naturally seek a high environment like a head or shoulder as in the wild they would climb trees and shrubs.
- Some of the specimens can wriggle a little so we will try to select the calmest animals.
- This cannot be guaranteed as the animals will be rotated for handling and exhibition.
- Some of the larger insects have leg spikes, similar to a thorn bush. When threatened they can rub these against a hand which can be a little painful, especially for younger handlers. A long sleeve is preferable, or participants can use a towel they bring with them, or a towel we provide.

- Where participants are very excitable or frightened a member of staff will step in to remove the animal if we fear it is at risk of harm.
- All handling is closely observed on a one to one basis.

Giant Millipedes:

- These amazing animals with up to 400 legs can be both fascinating and tickly.
- They do not move fast so don't usually startle participants but they are closely observed on a one to one basis.
- This species are known to excrete when handled. This is a common occurrence but can, on occasion, create a skin reaction on those handling. We will supply a towel to those requesting one or people are welcome to bring their own, of course.
- As with all animals, participants should thoroughly wash their hands before and after handling.
- These guys have an incredible 'Velcro' like ability to hold on with their legs and handlers can experience this when the animals are attached to fabric.

African Pygmy Hedgehog:

- Snowball is a shy little one who takes some time to come out of her ball to explore.
- Her nose is so sensitive we ask she is not handled by anyone wearing cologne or perfume as this can cause a reaction in her tiny lungs.
- She is happy to interact with those she is familiar with but when held by a stranger will take some time to come out of her ball.
- We find it best to handle her ourselves or allow her to explore in an enclosure to demonstrate him to an audience.
- As Snowball is nocturnal she is extra shy on very sunny days and often prefers a dark room to feel more comfortable.

Tarantulas:

- These animals are extremely delicate and also venomous.
- Therefore, they are not handled by members of the public, only by our experienced team for demonstration purposes.
- The tarantulas are all 'New World' species. This means they can flick urticating hairs which can cause irritation to skin and eyes should they make contact.
- This can be mitigated by the handlers assessing the animals before taking them out to events, informing attendees to remain a safe distance away and reading the spiders' body language during demonstrations.