

Snake Control

*Excerpts from
Wildlife Leaflet 345*

Case

*S
544.3
.N9
A8
no. 228*

NDAC Extension Service, Fargo
NORTH DAKOTA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

NDSU LIBRARIES

Snake Control

Before starting snake control, it is important to estimate the cost of the method you have selected, and to decide whether or not the expense and effort are justified. Too often control is practiced when it is neither needed nor economical.

If extensive outdoor control is considered, it is advisable to get the opinion of your state fish or game experts on the merits of the program. Such advice may save much money by increasing effectiveness of the program or by preventing needless if not undesirable control. It is also wise to find out what kind of snake is making the trouble and to learn something of its habits.

PERSISTENT KILLING

Often the most practical way to control snakes is to club or shoot them when they are found. This is the best way to get rid of troublesome individuals around a house. Continual killing of all snakes seen in a limited area can greatly reduce their numbers.

Venomous snakes are scarce enough in many localities that persistent searching and killing can keep them thinned out. It may eliminate them if they have few suitable areas in which to live in the vicinity.

REMOVAL OF FOOD AND COVER

Snakes can be discouraged from staying about grounds and buildings by getting rid of food and cover attractive to them. Many snakes like to feed on mice and rats, so it is advisable to rodent-proof buildings and to keep rodents from food supplies. Directions for rodent-proofing can be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bismarck, N. Dak. or NDAC Extension Service, State College Station, Fargo.

Closely mowed lawns and fields are less favorable to snakes than areas of tall grass, weeds and brush. Snakes like to hide under boards, flat rocks, trash piles and similar materials. Eliminate such shelter and the premises will be much less inviting to them.

This approach may not be practical around farms, but is of real value at suburban dwellings, summer homes and resorts. Along water margins, snakes hide under driftwood, rocks and old boats. They sun on logs, old jetties, or brush hanging over water. They are seldom seen on clean, open beaches where they are exposed to enemies.

SNAKES IN HOUSES

Snakes occasionally enter houses, sometimes by accident, sometimes when searching for hibernating quarters or hunting mice. They are almost always of harmless kinds. There is no need to fear that they will breed in the house, but they have been known to lay eggs in or under foundations.

The problem is to get rid of the snake that has been seen and to prevent others from entering. If the snake can be found, disposing of it is simple.

Often, however, a snake hides before it can be killed. A trick that sometimes works in locating such snakes is to put wet cloths on the floor near where the snake is thought to be, and then cover the wet cloths with dry cloths or burlap bags. Snakes like moisture and shelter, so they tend to crawl under or between the cloths. Those found there can be disposed of.

Another measure that has been used is to dust 50 percent DDT powder on the floor next to the wall, into cracks and onto ledges. This approach has not been tested experimentally, but it is known that DDT is very poisonous to reptiles. It is not likely that snakes will continue to live in a basement or attic heavily treated with DDT. DDT powder also kills mice and many kinds of insects. It should not be used where it may contaminate food, or where people are likely to stir up and breathe much of the dust, or where children or pets can get into it.

If these methods do not succeed within a few days, you will have to decide whether it is worth while to fumigate the building. From a practical view, one or two harmless snakes (that may have left the house already) do not justify the expense and trouble of fumigation, but this may be necessary for the peace of mind of a member of the family. A local exterminator should be employed if fumigation is done.

To keep other snakes from getting in the house, all points where they might enter must be blocked. This may be difficult and costly but is the only solution known. The main things to remember are that snakes can pass through extremely small openings. They usually get in near or below ground level. Cellar doors, windows, and screens must fit tightly. Walls and floors should be searched for crevices.

Masonry of foundations, fireplaces and chimneys should be inspected and if necessary pointed up or coated with cement. Spaces around pipes that go through outside walls can be plugged. Galvanized screen can be fastened over drains or ventilators, or even over large areas of loose construction that otherwise could be made snakeproof only at great expense.

POISONED WATER

A plague of gartersnakes at Inwood, Manitoba, apparently was stopped by use of water poisoned with nicotine. The method probably worked there only because of drouth conditions. It is worth trying in arid regions and during unusually dry periods elsewhere. A mixture of 1 part of 40 percent nicotine sulfate (sold commonly as trade-named insecticide) to about 250 parts of water was used. Shallow metal trays nearly filled with the solution were placed in areas of snake concentrations. A screen to keep livestock and birds from the poison was held a short distance above each tray by stapling it to stakes driven in the ground. Two days after the trays were exposed the area around them was littered with hundreds of dead snakes, and no living snakes were seen in the village.

FUMIGATION OF BURROWS

Rattlesnakes often rest or hibernate in burrows made by other animals. They can be killed there easily with crude calcium cyanide. About 2 tablespoonsful of cyanide are placed in a single heap, deep in the burrow, by means of a long handled ladle. All entrances to the burrow are tightly stopped with sod or rock; loose soil will not serve because it may cover the cyanide. Hydrocyanic gas is formed and diffuses through the burrow, remaining effective for several hours. This method works under a wide range of conditions, but may be unsatisfactory in rainy weather or when snakes are hibernating. Larger amounts of cyanide should be used in very large burrows or small caves. In general, 2 tablespoonsful of cyanide are enough for 5 cubic feet.

Remember, cyanide and its gas are deadly to man and domestic animals. Store it in a safe place in an airtight container and use only in open air.

Extensive gassing of burrows should not be done unless strongly needed, for many furbearers and other forms of wildlife are certain to be killed.

Prepared by;
Wayne J. Colberg,
Extension Service Entomologist
Mark D. Worcester,
Ass't District Agent
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

EXTENSION SERVICE
E. J. Haslerud, Director
NORTH DAKOTA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATING
Fargo, North Dakota
Distributed in furtherance of Acts
of Congress May and June 30, 1914.