



Position Statement on Rattlesnake round ups

Adopted June 2017

The Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) condemns rattlesnake roundups as an inhumane, ecologically damaging, and unsustainable practice that could be replaced with family friendly events that humanely use captive snakes to educate the public about the biology and conservation of these unique predators.

Rattlesnake roundups, or rattlesnake rodeos, have been a tradition in some parts of the United States since the first half of the 20th century. They originated based on the misaligned belief that rattlesnakes are an unneeded pest. We now know this is not true, and instead rattlesnakes maintain a critical role in the ecosystem. Rattlesnake roundups have historically collected large numbers of snakes in an environmentally damaging, non-sustainable manner, specifically focusing on the largest, breeding sized snakes.^{3,6} Some key concerns of the ARAV are:

Collection techniques:

- Often snakes are collected from communal dens or burrows that are shared with a variety of other animals including tortoises and other species of snakes. To drive the snakes out for collection, chemicals such as gasoline are poured into the den. This harms or kills many non-target species that also inhabit den cavities, in addition to leaving chemicals in the environment that may do lasting ecological harm.^{2,11} Up to 350 mammalian and reptilian species are known to use these burrows, making this practice ecologically devastating.^{8,12}
- To have the high numbers needed for roundup events, snakes must be collected over a period of time. The rattlesnakes are often held in unsanitary and inhumane conditions for weeks to months before an event, with resultant injuries, malnourishment and overcrowding contributing to the inhumane conditions these snakes are maintained in until the time of the roundup.³ Often their mouths are sewn shut without anesthesia preventing normal food and water consumption.³

Non-sustainable practice:

- The population impact of rattlesnake collection is substantial, with hundreds of rattlesnakes collected from the wild to produce the up to 24,000 pounds of meat collected for a single event.^{1,9,10,13} Past estimates of the annual harvest of all rattlesnakes in the United States exceeded 125,000 snakes per year.^{10,13} Harvest for rattlesnake roundup events has been suggested to be a cause of the decline of Eastern diamondback numbers in the Southeastern US, and is a concern for other species collected.⁶ Rattlesnakes are an apex predator in the environment. They are a key to ecosystem health with their role controlling prey species populations. Additionally, small rattlesnakes themselves are food sources for other animals, so removing the smaller snakes may affect multiple species.

Inhumane activities at round-ups:

- Many roundups subject the snakes to painful and inhumane practices ranging from holding in packed and dirty conditions, to decapitation, to skinning snakes alive.^{4,13}



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- It is recognized that snakes possess similar pain sensing nervous tissue as mammals so activities such as live skinning or eviscerations should be considered extremely painful.^{5,7}
- Rattlesnakes are sometimes milked for venom with the justification that the venom will be used to make anti-venom.^{2,6} Venom milking in a non-acclimatized snake is stressful, and as the venom frequently is not collected by anti-venom industry standards, in most cases it is not suitable for scientific use.⁸

Due to these concerns, the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) condemns rattlesnake roundups as an ecologically damaging, unsustainable, and inhumane practice that could be replaced with family friendly events that humanely use captive snakes to educate the public about the biology and conservation of these unique predators.

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