



**Reptilia Zoo & Education Centre**  
2501 Rutherford Road, Vaughan  
ON, Canada, L4K 2N6  
905 761 6223

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## **Reptilia Zoo – London Facility Statement of Intent**

### **As Requested by:**

**Heather Chapman, MLEO (C), CMM II**

Manager, Municipal Law Enforcement Services

Community By-laws, Public Compliance and Animal Services

Development and Compliance Services - City of London

### **1. Rescued animals vs captured – percentage of each, and what is the rationale behind the captured?**

Reptilia does not purposely remove animals from the wild for its animal collection. Reptilia carefully considers the number of animals we can provide an excellent standard of care for, and what species are needed to forward our mandate of education and conservation. Reptilia is proud to house a large diversity of animals of which 75% are rescues/surrenders, 10% are born in our facilities and 15% come from other accredited facilities.

Reptilia only takes in/breeds animals if they forward the company's mandate of education and conservation. Any species bred in captivity are those which are uncommon species which are unlikely to be surrendered by the public.

Rescued/surrendered animals are often obtained as a result of unwanted pets from members of the public, or given to Reptilia by public organizations such as Animal Services, OSPCA, MNR and Environment Canada. Through partnerships with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Environment Canada, and the OSPCA, Reptilia has provided homes for many animals who were destined for the illegal pet trade/confiscated from poachers and smugglers by authorities. By housing these animals at Reptilia, we are able to educate the public on the importance of conservation and appropriate pet ownership. Over the years Reptilia's educational programs have encouraged members of the community to practice responsible pet ownership, empathy for animal welfare and to partake in ecological and conservation-based initiatives.

In addition to our permanent collection, in which there is limited space, Reptilia has been operating an Adoption Program since 2016, and has found forever families for just under 100 common pet species. The program has been highly successful, with only two animals returning to the program due to unforeseen circumstances, the rest are now living happy lives with their new families upon Reptilia's annual check-up on our adopted animals. The adoption program allows animals to have a second chance for a quality of life through our vetting the future owners to ensure they will provide the animals proper care and health.

At this time, Reptilia does not function as an animal wildlife and rehabilitation centre and does not capture or release any animals/wildlife. In the event Reptilia takes part in captive breeding and reintroduction programs in the future, we will follow all Provincial and Federal legislation, MNR/CAZA and SSP Policies.



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## **2. Venomous bites – anti venom – who has it, how can Londoners be assured it is available in case of an emergency?**

Reptilia will have adequate anti-venom onsite to treat a bite from a venomous snake housed in its collection. The anti-venom is kept onsite in a climate-controlled fridge and in the event of a bite would travel with the victim to the closest hospital for administration. All Reptilia facilities develop a relationship with local hospitals and share our snake bite protocols should an emergency arise.

Any cast working with a venomous species is required to wear a lanyard with a species-specific ID of and anti-venom information. Should an incident occur, the anti-venom required is easily identifiable via the lanyard. Reptilia also keeps snakebite first aid kits, epinephrine and emergency protocols with our anti venom.

Additional anti venom beyond a Reptilia's stock can be obtained from: Other Reptilia facilities, West Parry Sound Health Centre, Sick Kids Hospital, Toronto Zoo, Buffalo Zoo, and Toledo Zoo.

Anti-venom is sourced from various vendors across the world and is replaced according to shelf life provided by the manufacturer. Import is regulated by a Special Access Programme.

Cast Members go through an extensive training and clearance process to be allowed to work with and have access to venomous species. Cast members only have access to the specific species they have been cleared on. The public has no access to venomous animals.

Preventative measures in our training protocol have ensured that in the last 26 years of operations, not a single venomous bite has occurred.

## **3. Capture plan – what does Reptilia have in place should a reptile escape? Will there be local resources expected to be utilized in a capture plan (eg. Animal Control, Humane Society, Police, Fire etc.)**

For the safety and comfort of the animals, Guests, and Cast Members, Reptilia's goal is to keep animals securely in their home enclosures. Animals are homed either on exhibit or in animal holding rooms (for outreach, hospitalization or quarantine purposes.)

Within exhibits, enclosures are built to prevent escape, and are checked regularly for security. Exhibits that have doors that open towards the public, house harmless animals used in our educational interaction programming, and are locked unless a zookeeper is present. Exhibits that house dangerous animals have no access from the public areas. Instead, they open into a secured corridor that is accessible only by lock and key to Cast Members. Exhibits housing dangerous animals are individually locked, and only Cast Members that have clearance on those species have access to them. The corridors are secured so that animals cannot escape even if they were to get loose from their exhibit through the access door. Warning lights outside the corridors inform Cast Members if a dangerous exhibit is currently being accessed, and the corridor cannot be entered at that time. Small, harmless animals remain in their exhibits when being cleaned. Venomous animals are placed into locked and labelled holding containers and large snakes or crocodilians remain in their enclosures but with the exhibit doors closed and the corridor on lockdown.

Within animal holding rooms, animals have individual, secure enclosures. Venomous species are locked and labelled as such, with only authorized handlers being able to access them. If an animal were to escape from an enclosure, the room is secure and escape proof (for example, permanent barriers are



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placed against the bottom of doors, drains are covered, doors are always kept closed, etc.), so the animal cannot access other areas of the facility.

The facility itself is entirely indoors, has a double door entrance system where the doors are never propped open, making escape from the building unrealistic, even if all other measures were to fail. The facility is inspected daily to ensure no animal holding areas are compromised and that all animals are safely in their habitats.

In the event of a minor or major reptile escape of any kind, local resources would not be required, as Reptilia houses the expertise to safely capture, handle and transport any animal species that we maintain. Although never having to employ our skills with our own collection, we have captured loose caiman, pythons, boas and venomous snakes on behalf of Toronto Police and Animal Services in the Greater Toronto Area, the event of animals found outside, in buildings or during busts.

#### **4. Spread of Infectious disease (Zoonoses) – what measures does Reptilia take to prevent this?**

By definition a zoonoses or zoonotic disease is a disease that can transfer between a nonhuman animal to a human, or vice versa.

Reptiles are a great species choice for educational outreach programs, as they are so distantly related to humans, that the diseases shared between are far fewer than those shared between humans and other mammals. This protects both Cast Members and Guests, but also the animals as well!

However this does not mean there is a complete absence of risk. How much of a risk reptiles pose to humans is a source of a lot of debate. Those who do not like animals or the use of animals in programming often tend to over-inflate the risks, but on the opposite end, animal institutions and reptile hobbyists tend to trivialize or claim that there is no risk at all, where the reality is likely somewhere in the middle.

##### Zoonotic Risks from Reptiles

**Bacterial** – There are a small handful of bacteria that may be passed from reptile to human. Reptiles are not the only source of infection, as most can come from other animals, food and water sources as well. Those most at risk tend to be those who consume reptiles, and those who work with them in close quarters.

**Salmonella** – This bacteria is likely the most famous reptilian zoonoses. Almost 1000 serotypes of salmonella have been identified in reptiles, many of which can infect humans and exist without causing disease in the reptile host. Furthermore, salmonella has an amazing ability to sit dormant for long periods, and may be shed transiently from an infected reptile. The bacteria is even known to coat eggs as they are laid, passing on to future offspring. Although most commonly associated with turtles, other reptiles can also be carriers. Infection can be serious, especially in very young children and the immunocompromised. Although symptoms are typically like a nasty bout of the flu, in extreme cases they can lead to meningitis or brain abscesses. Fortunately infection is relatively rare and can be fairly easily mitigated by basic hygienic practices. The vast majority of reported salmonella cases in humans (>97%) are not related to reptiles



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Other possible but rarely reported zoonoses include *Aeromonas spp.*, *Campylobacter spp.*, *Edwardsiella spp.*, *Escherichia spp.*, *Mycobacterium spp.*, *Pasteurella spp.*, *Proteus spp.*, *Staphylococcus spp.*, *Streptococcus spp.*

Fungal – There are fungal agents that have been cultured on reptiles that can be infectious to humans, however at this point in time, direct transmission has not been documented. These include *Aspergillus spp.*, *Dermatophilus spp.* and *Trichophyton spp.*

Viral – Reptiles may provide reservoirs for some viruses such as West Nile and Equine Encephalitis however this would not effect reptiles housed indoors

Accidental intermediate parasite hosts – A few parasites can enter and encyst in humans if they come into contact. These situations are rare and typically do not result in problems. Common exposure is from eating uncooked reptile or amphibian. Examples *Cryptosporium spp.* and *Coccidea spp.*

#### Zoonoses Management

Reptilia's animals are typically captive born and bred and pass through a quarantine before they enter the rest of the collection and join outreach programs of any kind, highly diminishing chance of carrying a zoonotic disease. Reptilia has strict standards of care including for cleanliness and disinfection, which goes a long way to prevent disease from forming and spreading. Reptilia performs regular health checks and parasite checks on animals in the collection. Sick animals do not travel for programming and animals that test positive for parasites are treated. Reptilia feeds frozen thawed prey, which is less likely to harbor zoonoses. Any animal that dies receives a Post Mortem, which will help indicate if there are potential zoonotic factors present. Reptilia treats all turtle species with routine dewormers twice yearly, as these reptiles carry a higher risk of transmission to both humans and other reptiles. Cast Members are supplied with PPE and taught the benefits of using protective equipment. They are also obligated to wash their hands and clothing regularly, and always after contact with feces, food items or sick animals. Guests are asked to wash their hands before and after coming in contact with animals. They are also asked not to eat during contact and particularly for little ones, not to touch their face. Reptilia Cast Members bring sanitizer with them to offsite events, in the event other hand washing opportunities are not readily available. Wounds should be properly cleaned, covered and kept away from containments during healing. Do not eat raw reptile flesh.

Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

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