

# ANIMAL HANDLING GUIDELINES

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Only the General Curator, Education staff, or Animal Care staff may teach animal handling to an individual. Training will be in a hands-on session. **No animal may be used by a person who has not been previously approved in handling that particular animal.** All new animals require individual instructions before being handled.

## RULES

- 1. Set yourself up to succeed.**
  - a. Get a transfer/transport crate prepared before you open an enclosure.**
  - b. Make it easy on yourself to get an animal in or out. Think ergonomically.**
  - c. Clear pathways in advance so you will have a clear walking path.**
  - d. Remove jewelry, pins, etc. before handling.**
  - e. Be sure all outside doors are closed before removing any animal from enclosures!**
- 2. Report any unusual symptoms you notice while handling an animal.** Symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, cuts, falls, lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, etc. should be reported to zoo staff immediately.
- 3. You are in control. You decide if, when, and where the animal may be touched.** Be sure the animal is fully aware of you and calm before handling. Control the animal's head position/direction at ALL times. Remember, some animals may need to eliminate shortly after becoming active (5-20 minutes). To help calm the animal, keep the front legs level with the back. **DO NOT** roll the animal back in a way that may make it feel as if its abdomen is exposed to possible attack. If possible, keep your hand or arm under its belly and chest.
- 4. Do not expose animals to extreme heat or cold.** Do not use any of the animals outdoors if the temperature is below 45 degrees. There are temperature guidelines for each species posted in the Habitat. Invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, tropical mammals, and tropical birds are particularly sensitive to cold. The only exception is transportation to/from a vehicle if exposure to outside temperatures will be minimal. Always cover carriers if it's cold.
- 5. Wash hands before, between, and after handling animals.** Use antimicrobial soap or waterless disinfectant. A series of zoonotic diseases can be spread by our animals. Try to handle reptiles before birds or mammals. Always wash hands before handling a snake. This will help prevent the snake from mistaking your skin for lunch. They smell better than see.
- 6. If the public touches ANY animal they MUST use disinfectant** after the last animal is presented. Make sure they rub disinfectant on their hands for 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice) and allow it to air dry. It's the air drying that kills any bacteria.
- 7. NO touching of any reptile is allowed for anyone under the age of 5, or in a health care facility or hospital.** This is federal law! Health impaired individuals and young children are at extremely high risk for becoming seriously ill from touching ANY animal.

8. **Do not apply hand lotion or perfume before animal handling.** The animals may not like it, or they may like it too much! When handling amphibians, always wash hands and arms all the way up to your elbows. Sunscreen and insect repellent can KILL an amphibian!
  9. **You need to feel comfortable with the animal you are handling.** They can sense anxiety and will become anxious/defensive themselves. Ask for more training if you feel fear.
  10. **Always support the full body weight of the animal.** DO NOT ever let an animal “dangle”; it will stress them out. Additionally, holding any animal only by the tail or legs can injure it.
  11. **When handling animals, maintain control and direction of the animal’s head.** Keep audiences away from the animal’s face and head. Attempt to control the animal with only one hand when practical. A free hand can prove valuable in opening doors, demonstrating the proper way to touch the animal, and in holding back onlookers.
  12. **Know your animal’s behavior before you take it out. Put it away at the first sign of stress.** Common signs of stress include yawning, restlessness, nibbling, scratching, etc.
  13. **Do not allow any animal to run or fly loose.** Do not let animals crawl on a table or floor. They should be inside an exercise pen with newspapers if getting exercise.
  14. **Be sure enclosures are locked after returning animals.**
  15. **Visitors can NOT hold any zoo animal EVER!!** It is against zoo policy for insurance reasons and the safety of the animal.
  16. **Always line carriers with newspapers or towels when transporting animals.**
  17. **Clean, disinfect, and return carriers to their proper location after using them.**
- ADDITIONAL JUNIOR ZOOCREW RULES**
18. **JZC must have a qualified adult handler present when handling ANY animal.**
  19. **JZC cannot handle an animal they are not trained to handle.**



## TEACHABLE MOMENTS

1. When you take any animal out on zoo grounds, you must take its crate with you in case of emergency. The only exception is for a very short walk in the immediate vicinity of the Habitat or raptor mews.
2. Animals are **MAGNETS** for attention. The welfare of the animal takes precedence over anything else. Position yourself to protect the animal from unwanted advances from the public. Have your back against something solid so people cannot walk up behind you.
3. If taking an amphibian, take a small bottle of “frog water” with you so you can mist the animal. If taking a raptor out, take a bottle of tap water to mist their feet with.
4. **NO touching of any reptile is allowed for anyone under the age of 5. Use your best judgment on assessing a child’s age.**
5. Visitors should have all food put away if you are going to let them touch an animal. **ALWAYS** have a visitor use hand sanitizer after they touch an animal and remind them to wash their hands before they eat anything.
6. Clean, disinfect, and return carriers to their proper location after using them.

## ANTICIPATE PROBLEMS

Fear of some animals (for example, snakes or spiders) is common. Announce your species before presenting it. Let a teacher know in advance in case they have students who are fearful.

While presenting an animal in a crowd, position yourself such that people cannot crowd behind you, in order to protect the animal from reaching hands. Always know where your animal is. This is especially important with predators such as the New Guinea singing dogs.

Divert “overachievers” – people who insist on monopolizing your time. Try to change the subject or find something to talk about that they do not know.

Bites are to be reported immediately. **KEEP THE PERSON INVOLVED THERE UNTIL A STAFF MEMBER CAN TALK TO THEM** – preferably someone from Administration. This is extremely important as only a senior staff member can fill out an accident report.

Report any problems to staff. If you have problems with the staff (rude, unhelpful, etc.) then report it to Administration.

