

SNAKES

The Brazilian Snakes Project

In 2005 in Brazil, the Ministry of Health reported 100,000 contacts of humans with venomous animals. According to the Ministry of Health, each year encounters with humans include 20,000 by snakes, 5,000 by spiders and 8,000 by scorpions, causing death, temporary or permanent incapacitation.

According to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, snakes bite approximately 20,000 humans each year. According to the World Health Organization, globally, each year 4.5 million humans are bitten by snakes. As many as 50 to 75% of those bitten require treatment to prevent death, amputations or permanent sequel.

In countries inhabited by venomous insects and reptiles, the animals do not leave when towns and cities develop. Consequently, humans living in areas where venomous creatures proliferate are frequently in danger of injury or death. Snakes and spiders happily take residence inside houses in the middle of Brazilian cities: finding poisonous spiders in beds at night is not unusual.

The Brazilian Snakes Project is a multi-media communications project aimed at identifying the snakes of Brazil. The Project maintains an internet site, <http://www.brazilian-snakes.com>, and plans to pub-



What To DO if You or Someone Else is Bitten by a Snake

1. If you or someone you know are bitten, try to see and remember the color and shape of the snake, which can help with treatment of the snake bite.
2. Keep the bitten person still and calm. This can slow down the spread of venom if the snake is poisonous.
3. Seek medical attention as soon as possible.
4. Call local emergency Medical Services.
5. Apply first aid if you cannot get the person to the hospital right away.
 - a. Lay or sit the person down with the bite below the level of the heart.
 - b. Tell him or her to stay calm and still.
 - c. Cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing.

What NOT To Do if You or Someone Else is Bitten by a Snake

1. Do not pick up the snake or try to trap it (this may put you or someone else at risk for a bite).
2. Do not apply a tourniquet.
3. Do not slash the wound with a knife.
4. Do not suck out the venom.
5. Do not apply ice or immerse the wound in water.
6. Do not drink alcohol as a pain killer.
7. Do not drink caffeinated beverages.

From the United States Centers for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov>

lish a printed field manual, a printed children's book and a DVD, in both Portuguese and English.

The main goal of the Brazilian Snakes Project is to prepare a database so that the right treatment can be quickly made available when a human is injured by vipers, snakes, spiders, centipedes, scorpions, caterpillars. The database will also enable differentiation between non-venomous animals and venomous animals before humans are injured.

The main reasons for embarking on the Project are first, to protect and treat victims injured by venomous animals, and second, to protect the ecology of Brazil. Snakes have an important ecological function in controlling the population of rodents, rats and insects and hence make a large contribution to preventing illnesses and epidemics. Brazil needs its snakes, but Brazil also needs its humans to be safe and co-exist with snakes and other venomous animals. Understanding the snakes, understanding what to do when humans are injured, having the

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availability of anti-venom in hospitals within travelling distance of injured humans: these are all goals of the Snake Project which can only be achieved by education and amassing a database on the snakes.

Brazil is known to have 326 species of snakes, of these are 56 venomous. The Project has an ambitious scope: to photograph in controlled settings each known venomous snake in Brazil, as well as approximately 100 non-venomous snakes. Each animal will have his descriptive page with necessary information for supply subsidies in vital and immediate decision-making, as well additional facts about habitat, habits, ways of preservation and care.

The organizers have amassed a large number of letters in support of it from hospitals and other institutions throughout Brazil, <http://www.brazilian-snakes.com/recomendation-letters.html>. So far, these hospitals number 27, and each hospital represents a large population center.

By Fernando Bergamaschi de Souza

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The Snake Project needs funds to continue.

