

## Snake Bite Preparedness, Don't Lose Your Faithful Guardian to Snake By Catherine Emanuel

So, recently I was reading an excerpt from an article written by Mr. Peter Wells<sup>1</sup>, from the Anatolian Shepherd Dog Club of the U.K. It was a brief excerpt about an Anatolian Shepherd Dog (ASD) skillfully killing a snake. Sadly, this reminded of the last twelve months where I watched two dogs die from these rodent eating friends.

Unfortunately, when dealing with the working dog one must relate the health of the animal to its surroundings. A livestock working dog is exposed to the elements of the weather and quite often is forced to battle with the local wildlife, i.e., deer, fox, snakes, spiders, coyotes, etc. One must keep in mind that the wildlife is not always limited to what is visible from your back door. Actually, in the wild it is in a creature's best interest to camouflage itself to the naked eye. Quite often these dangerous camouflaged creatures are not just a threat to the livestock guarding dog, but the family guarding dog and the backyard pet as well.

The fact is we are unable to completely control the environment in which we raise our guardians, and that is one of the many reasons we raise Anatolians. The fact is that we ask our faithful guardians to take on this task so that we do not have to. Sadly, this does put them at risk for injury.

When comparing the dangers of a coyote threat to a snake threat, it seems obvious which creature your animal should be wary of; however, this is not always the case. Although, here in the U.S., we are not known for our venomous snakes; we do have them. And although the ASD is not known for its use against snakes, they will attempt to kill them. Luckily, this breed is intelligent and sharp witted. As you would swat a slow moving roach, the ASD strikes fast and with power, frequently killing snakes that cross their paths. Unfortunately, sometimes the snake bites first or in the process of meeting its fate. This is when aggressive thinking, pre-planning and quick reactions are instrumental to the survival of the ASD after a snake bite.

### Before the Bite

Before the snake bite occurs there are a couple of things that a dog owner can do to prevent a bite from becoming a tragedy.

The first thing to do is to identify the snake risk in your geographic region and assess the danger level accordingly. For example, although Mountain Rattlers and Copperheads are indigenous to my region, the true threat to my animals is the copperhead. They are slower moving, do not have a loud alarming mechanism, like a rattler, and the bite is less likely to be identified immediately, therefore less likely to have immediate treatment. However, in a more desert-like region rattle snakes may pose the greater threat.

Non-venomous snakes can be found in almost every region of the U.S, while venomous snakes are more common throughout the south and southwest regions.

The majority of venomous snakes in the U.S. are from the family called pit vipers. Copperheads, which range from Massachusetts to Texas, are just one example of a snake from this family. A table of the characteristics of some of the more common venomous snakes of the U.S. and their range is presented below .<sup>2</sup>



Cottonmouth Snake<sup>3</sup>

Snake Type	Common Characteristics	Range
Copperhead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copper, reddish color</li> <li>• Color varies with locality</li> <li>• Gregarious in nature</li> </ul>	Massachusetts to Texas
Cottonmouth (Water Moccasin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large, olive to black in color</li> <li>• When ready to strike it opens its mouth showing the white “cottonmouth”</li> <li>• Found mostly in water</li> <li>• Assertive in nature</li> </ul>	Virginia to Texas, Florida
Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dark brown or black diamonds outlined in yellow</li> <li>• Willing to stand their ground, but will often rattle while backing away</li> </ul>	Florida up to North Carolina
Eastern Coral Snake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red, yellow and black bands</li> <li>• Mostly underground, arid climates</li> <li>• Bites are neurotoxic</li> </ul>	Florida up to North Carolina and west to Texas

Once you have identified the snake threat in your area, it is time to pre-plan for the worst. Everyone with a working dog should have a canine first aid kit. In this kit, there are a couple of items that should be maintained in the event of a snake bite to your canine companion: cleansing solution (i.e., betadine or Nolvasan<sup>®</sup>), bandaging material, benadryl and antibiotic ointment .<sup>4</sup>

After the Bite

Now you are prepared, however, identification of the bite is just as critical. The toxicity of an individual snakebite depends on several factors: species of snake, age of snake (i.e., younger snakes are more likely to release all of their venom in one bite, while older snakes often release more venom through multiple bites), location of snake bite and volume of venom introduced into the victim. Quite often location of the bite impedes quick diagnosis due to coat coverage. The diagnosis of the bite is indicated by visualizing bruising, observing discomfort at the site, swelling, nausea, weakness and/or shock. Venomous snake bites often have two distinct puncture sites, while non-venomous snake bites are identified by a U-shaped mark at the site. Coral snake bites are often unidentifiable, drooping eyelids may be the first key of envenomation. Non-venomous snake bites, although not fatal, can cause discomfort and infection and, should also be monitored. Unfortunately, the ASD is a particularly stoic breed; therefore, unless you observe the incident it may go unnoticed until the symptoms are severe.

Now the snake has been identified, the bite has been identified, first aid is indicated. If the bite is fresh, allow the site to bleed for 15-30 seconds to allow excessive venom to drain from the site. Clean the site. Follow the list of snakebite DOs<sup>4, 5</sup>.

#### DO:

- Keep you animal calm;
- Drain or squeeze excessive venom from the site;
- Note the time of the bite (if known);
- Treat for shock (if necessary);
- Use warm compresses (if appropriate)
- Apply antibiotic ointment to the site;
- If on a limb, apply a pressure bandage; and
- Contact your veterinarian immediately and be aggressive.

#### DON'T:

- Use a tourniquet;
- Suck the wound;
- Use ice on the wound;
- Cut the wound; or
- Use alcohol.

According to Terry Terlap, DMV<sup>6</sup> antibiotics are always indicated after an identified snakebite. Administration of a broad spectrum antibiotic that provides gram negative coverage recommended. An abscess is much easier to prevent than to treat. However, this should be discussed with your treating veterinarian.

Although we are closing another snake season it is not too late to prepare for next season. Don't let

a treatable bite become a fatality.

<sup>1</sup>

Wells, Peter, Working Anatolians - Snake story. Online article *first printed in* *OUR DOGS*. ANATOLIAN SHEPHERD DOGS BREED NOTES WEEK COMMENCING: 12 January 2001. <<http://www.anadolu-coban-koepgi.com/bn/breednotes60.html>>.

<sup>2</sup>

Conant, R., Stebbins, R., and J. Collins. *Peterson First Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1992. Pages 118-125.

<sup>3</sup>

Conant, R., Stebbins, R., and J. Collins. *Peterson First Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1992. Page 121.

<sup>4</sup>

Pinney, C. *The Complete Home Veterinary Guide*. New York: McGraw Hill. Third Edition. Pages 613, 625-626.

<sup>5</sup>

“Venomous Snake Bites.” University of Florida. National AG Safety Database. [www.cdc.gov.nasd.docs](http://www.cdc.gov.nasd.docs).

<sup>6</sup>

Terlap, T., DVM. Sports Medicine Program Newsletter. Winter 1996.