



Volunteer Program

ASI Volunteer Program

The African Snakebite Institute receives regular requests regarding volunteer work, largely from people who are passionate about reptiles and would like to gain more experience. We are the leading training provider in Africa and run professional public courses at various venues throughout South Africa. Due to the large number of requests, we have a structured volunteer program, which we expect all volunteers to follow.

What are the requirements to become an ASI volunteer?

1. Volunteers need to complete the online volunteer form, so that we can add all their details to our database.
2. The minimum age for volunteers is 21 years old.
3. Prior to volunteering, all volunteers are required to have completed an ASI Snake Awareness, First Aid for Snakebite and Venomous Snake Handling Course as well as a Venomous Snake Handling Bootcamp. Having attended an Advanced Venomous Snake Handling course is a bonus but is not mandatory.
4. In addition to the above, volunteers must familiarise themselves with the contents of Johan Mariais' latest books *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa*, *A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa*, the *ASI Snakes app*, *ASI Product List*, as well as a selection of scientific papers that deal with snakebite, scorpion sting and spider bite. (Link to these papers can be found here: <http://bit.ly/29ddf9z>)
5. Whilst volunteering, all volunteers will wear an ASI 'Team Member' T-shirt which will be supplied at cost price, as well as a name badge / label.

Volunteer Opportunities

We run a monthly "Public Snake Awareness and Venomous Snake Handling" course at Cradle Moon Lakeside Lodge (or S.A. Hunters off Zambezi Road, Pretoria North) on a Saturday, as well as a Snake Handling Bootcamp, Advanced Snake Handling or Advanced First Aid course on the Sunday. Additional public courses are held at Exotic Animal World in Cape Town, PheZulu Safari Park in Durban, and various locations in Zululand, Hoedspruit, Nelspruit and elsewhere in South Africa.

Corporate training is also offered throughout South Africa (and elsewhere in Africa) and volunteers are occasionally invited to assist during such training.



The African Snakebite Institute participates in various expos including the SOS² Reptile Expo at Emperor's Palace, Huntex at Gallagher Estate and the South African 4x4 & Outdoor Show in Centurion. During these exhibitions, the ASI courses are marketed to members of the public and products are displayed to sell. Two volunteers will be used at each of these expos, and ASI covers their entrance into the venue as well as a light lunch.

ASI Course Volunteer Duties

Volunteers will be scheduled by ASI and will be rotated to allow as many volunteers as possible to participate. Duties will be clearly stipulated, and all volunteers will be expected to adhere to the requirements. Those that fail to comply with volunteer requirements or who do not arrive when scheduled to volunteer will be removed from the volunteer program.

The day starts at 07:30 sharp when merchandise is taken into the classroom, unpacked, and displayed for sale. **All** merchandise in containers must be unpacked and displayed. The digital projector is set up and everything must be in place by 08:15 latest.

Arriving delegates are welcomed, asked to sign the attendance register and pointed to the seating area and shown where they can help themselves to tea and coffee.

All delegates must complete the attendance register, and every delegate must be given a stick-on name label. Delegates who are below 18 years of age need to have a parent / guardian sign their course indemnity form.

Once the course starts, volunteers will be expected to attend the course in the same manner as delegates, but to keep an eye on delegates and to assist where required. Volunteers are expected to assist and not disrupt the class in any way. Disruptive behaviour includes unnecessary socialising and constantly texting during the course.

During the tea and lunch breaks, volunteers will be expected to circulate amongst delegates to ensure that they have received their refreshments/meals and that there is sufficient refreshments/meals, crockery, and cutlery. Any shortages must be reported to the venue's staff member attending to the course on the day.

Merchandise sales will be made available during the tea and lunch breaks as well as after the handling session. Volunteers will be provided with a printed catalogue and must make themselves available to assist delegates with questions they may have regarding equipment and books or course contents and make recommendations based on their needs.

At the end of the theory session, volunteers will hand out test papers and may assist delegates with questions in the test as needed. Upon completion of the test and while everyone breaks for lunch, the test papers must be marked using the quick marking program.

After lunch, volunteers will assist to carry out the snakes and handling equipment and set up for the handling session.

Whilst the handling sessions are in progress, volunteers are expected to assist as and when requested. We maintain high safety protocols during venomous snake training, and the volunteers must not interfere unnecessarily with the snake handling session or with the delegates doing the snake handling, unless specifically asked to do so by the trainer.



Upon completion of the handling session, volunteers will be expected to assist with handing out certificates and posters, as well as assist with sales and thereafter the packing up of the equipment and carrying everything to the vehicle if required.

Course Photographs

Competent photographers are welcome to volunteer to take photographs of delegates during the snake handling session. All photographers will be clearly briefed on what is required. The photographs (if taken with the volunteer's own camera and not one of the ASI cameras) must be uploaded onto Dropbox and will be made available to delegates to use in whatever manner they choose.

General

Volunteers will qualify for discounts on ASI products as well as additional courses offered by the African Snakebite Institute.

As this is a volunteering programme – volunteers agree that they commit their time and attendance without promise of remuneration. Basic expenses relating to the volunteering activities will be covered as stipulated.

Rules

1. Only volunteers that are scheduled to assist may be present during courses. ASI will cover their conservation fee (at Cradle Moon) as well as a light lunch. Volunteers that are not on duty are welcome to socialise during the lunch break but will have to do so at their own expense.
2. Volunteers are expected to commit their full attention to the smooth operation of the various functions on the day. We therefore do not allow any children, family, friends, or spouses to accompany them to the courses.
3. All the snakes used during the courses are under permit and this includes transport permits. Under no circumstances will volunteers be permitted to bring along any snakes or other wildlife for that matter.
4. All volunteers are expected to assist with equipment sales, and need to learn the ASI products, POS System (a user-friendly app) and how to operate a card machine (Yoco).
5. All volunteers and trainers who carry weapons (firearms, knives, etc) are expected to conceal their weapons for the duration of the course.
6. Keep it professional. We have a wide range of delegates from several different demographics at our courses. Crude jokes, inappropriate comments and unfitting physical contact are strictly prohibited. Humour and jokes must be kept to an absolute minimum as it quickly turns into a circus if jokes are made too often.



Snake Handling Training Protocols:

1. Be gentle with the snakes.

It is important to slow down handling and work gently with the snakes. When delegates see trainers working calmly with the snakes, it calms them down a lot. There should be no need for the snakes to be hurt during our handling sessions. There's no space on our courses for nonchalant or careless behaviour like dropping snakes off hooks, or swiping snakes with hooks, pinching in tongs, or raking snakes – these practises have the potential to damage the snakes. When lifting a snake with tongs, do so slowly and gently. Our handling protocols will be communicated clearly and no deviation from our standard protocols will be allowed.

2. Never use live snakes for bad example demonstrations.

We don't demonstrate pinching snakes in tongs – and if we see pinching happening when delegates are handling, get them to immediately set the snake down and start again. If you need to demonstrate how tongs pinch, do so with a rubber/rope snake. (This should be done before the delegates get to work with tongs).

3. Keep an eye on the snake and delegate.

When training in a group, make sure you are always watching what the delegate is doing – don't let yourself be distracted by questions from other delegates. Eyes should always be on the snake. You can get back to delegates with answers once the safe is safely contained – doing so also lets the rest of the group hear the question and answer.

4. Avoid interfering with the delegate doing the handling as much as possible.

Rather use your voice to guide them, than constantly sticking your tong/hook in and trying to take the snake away or control the situation completely. Let them have a turn without constant interference. Never place your hand on the snake hook/snake tong of any delegate while they are in the process of catching or lifting a snake. If necessary, rather let them put the snake down and show them what you want them to do. Never use snake tongs to interfere with a snake or to remove it from a delegate while they are busy handling it. At no stage should two sets of snake tongs be on a snake.

5. Keep humour to a minimum and avoid babbling.

Often the delegates are nervous and trying to diffuse that with humour doesn't work too well. Rather stick to clear handling instructions. Keep excess communication and advice to an absolute minimum when delegates are doing practical.

6. Use the delegates names.

Most delegates wear name tags, and it makes them feel hugely important if you refer to them by name when handling.

7. Control volunteers and the crowd.

It is the trainer's responsibility to control volunteers (and hangers-on) who become too animated and try give instructions from the side-line. There should only be one trainer per group and no side-line instruction to the delegates or banter with the rest of the group is necessary. Snake handling training is an important time to focus. If there are talkative members of the group, approach them when the snake is contained and ask them to please quieten down, so the rest of the group can focus.

