

GLUE TRAPS: AN APPRAISAL OF THEIR USE IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS OF PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

Along with several others in Western Australia I hold a licence to remove nuisance reptiles from houses and backyards. Most other states also have provision for the catch and release of such reptiles. A problem that I often come up against is the uncatchable snake or lizard. It is always there when I am not and never there when I am. It basks in the same place every day but knows when the catcher is on the way. It lives beneath a massive slab of concrete, or amongst boulders that form the foundation of the building, or in a wall cavity. The householder is having an anxiety attack and gives you a look which says "you are not much good at what you do". They then go on to inform you that they should have taken the Agricultural Department's advice and put out a narrow-necked bottle containing a little milk to trap the elusive reptile!

In 1987 I read an article (Knight, 1986) from North America on the capture of snakes in residential areas using glue traps. These are plastic trays of non-toxic glue that will release with the application of vegetable oil (household cooking oil). Whether they work or not on Australia's reptiles was yet to be ascertained, but it would at least allow me to suggest to the householder an alternative course of action. At the time I could not locate an Australian supplier so I contacted J.T. Eaton & Co., Inc., Ohio direct and they kindly forwarded me samples of the various sized glue traps.

APPRAISAL

The trap I found most suitable was designed for catching rats. It measures 241 x 127mm and contains glue to a depth of about 7mm. Although to date I have always used these traps separately they could be used in tandem (2 or more tied together) to trap larger lizards and snakes. The success rate of 30% in catching the target reptile is not much below my success rate of about 45% for locating and physically catching the beast by hand. In Perth the species most commonly found around buildings is the Dugite (*Pseudonaja affinis*), a very mobile, nomadic snake that rarely stays still for long.

The largest snake I have caught using a single glue trap of the above sizes was a 1.2 metre Dugite. Only the other day an adult King Skink (*Ergernia kingii*) with a total length of about 60cm was caught after it had been mistaken for a snake. It was living beneath the concrete floor of an office and only the head poking out or the tail going in had been sighted. Within an hour of the trap being positioned it was stuck. The smallest reptile trapped inadvertently was the skink *Menetia greyii*.

Once the animal is trapped the owner of the property can notify you to come and remove it. A little vegetable oil poured over the animal where it contacts the glue allows it to come away quite easily. This in turn destroys the trap, however, as they are intended to be discarded along with the trapped pest and are quite cheap to purchase, this is no real problem. Any excess glue can be removed from the skin of the reptile with this same oil prior to its release.

When positioning the glue traps one must take into consideration any household pets like cats and dogs. If pets are free-ranged in the area then the traps are best placed beneath half sections of PVC pipe or similar. I will not set traps inside aviaries for obvious reasons - imagine some rare finch stuck fast. The owner would not be impressed, even if the stress did not kill

the bird, it would end up with bald patches. I doubt if a stuck bird could be removed without leaving many feathers behind. Little children can be a concern also. They could become sticky from head to toe. Furthermore, just imagine you had been successful in trapping a venomous snake, and the youngster has unhindered access to it: the stuck snake is not going to be real friendly!

Two or more glue traps are positioned around the entrance to the hole being frequented by the target, or in the area where it has been observed basking. If it crawls out of a wall cavity I find with snakes, but not with lizards, that they move out along the wall, so position a trap either side of the hole in contact with the wall. Although with either group it pays to have a third trap directly in front. These traps can be used in ceiling spaces, directly on the ceiling or on rafters, in external roof gutters where local Black-headed Monitors (*Varanus tristis*) like to bask, or any other place where a nuisance reptile may have taken up residence.

During late February through to mid April large numbers of juvenile Dugites occur within industrial areas. Many find their way into factories and, though generally unlikely to pose much of a problem, cause some concern. Several glue traps placed at intervals against the internal walls allow ongoing trapping. Several of these hatchlings may get caught on the one glue trap. The time a trap can be left in position is dependent on the amount of dust and other rubbish settling on or blowing onto the glue. I have left traps for up to two weeks in protected positions but do not recommend more than about a week. As with any trap used to secure and hold living animals they must be checked daily so that both the target and non-target animals can be subjected to minimal stress.

The traps have a hole on one corner to allow them to be secured by string to a stake or something else nearby. They sell for about \$10 a pair and today are available from some stock suppliers and commercial bird dealers. As an integral part of the reptile catchers equipment I rate them number one. Not only do they allow you to catch the elusive individual but, more importantly, allow you to offer a method of trapping to a concerned resident that *works* while you are not there.

GLUE TRAPS are imported by Globe Chemicals & Trading Pty Ltd, 441 West Botany Road, Kogarah, NSW 2217 and their Queensland address is 14 Ammie Street, Rocklea 4106 (07) 277 3999. They are available in Western Australia from Robert Lintons Pty Ltd, 55 Canning Highway, Vic Park 6100 (09) 361 6922.

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REFERENCE

Knight, J.E. 1986. A humane method for removing snakes from dwellings. *Wildl. Soc. Bul.* 14: 301-303.