



Expert Statements

Below are some statements from independent, nationally and world-renowned academic and professional experts in snake conservation and welfare about the unsustainability and cruelty of rattlesnake roundups.

Phillip Arena, BSc (Hons), PhD

is an independent consultant herpetologist trained in the anatomy and physiology of reptiles. An awarded scholar and member of the Australian Science Communicators, he has contributed to the conservation, health and welfare of reptiles worldwide.

Rattlesnakes need to be celebrated not decimated and rattlesnake roundups are not the mark of a progressive nation.

Rattlesnake roundups represent a senseless, primitive and barbaric disregard for the environment, serving to disrupt local ecosystems at all levels. With removal of such high numbers of efficient predators, prey animals such as rodents flourish, with the potential to spread disease and which also have a major impact on grain production and storage.

Rattlesnakes themselves are prey for raptorial birds such as hawks, eagles and roadrunners and other non-venomous species of snake. Killing rattlesnakes is simply killing North America's ecosystems, including many iconic species.

Countless habitats and microhabitats are destroyed through the overturning of rocks and other forms of cover that provide areas of refuge, food and moisture.

Animal burrows are filled with gasoline or ammonia, regardless of the inhabitants, resulting in the death of many other species of invertebrate, reptile, bird and mammal. Many non-venomous species of snake are killed and rattlesnakes exposed to gasoline, if they survive the sensationalist roundup events, experience reduced lifespans. In addition, burrows are excavated through manual means, including the use of explosives.

Every rattlesnake that is killed, will, in the long term, have an impact on the stability of ecosystems, and future generations of humans who will look back at history, stunned that such environmental abuse was allowed to continue unabated.

D. Bruce Means, PhD

is President and Executive Director of the Coastal Plains Institute and Land Conservancy (CPI) and Courtesy Professor, Department of Biological Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida. His main research interests center on fire ecology, longleaf pine ecosystem, amphibians and reptiles, rare and endangered species, and biodiversity of the southeastern U. S. Coastal Plain and lost world tepuis (mesas) of South America.

There is no doubt that roundups strongly depress local populations.

Roundups do not promote wildlife appreciation; there are no hunting regulations to insure that populations or even the different species are not wiped out; and they promote very negative stereotypes that some animals are more 'lowly' than others and can be mistreated.

Advocates for Snake Preservation

www.snakes.ngo

David A. Steen, PhD.

is an Assistant Research Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Auburn University who works closely with the Alabama Natural Heritage Program and the Auburn University Museum of Natural History to study wildlife ecology in the southeastern United States and beyond.

It is a national embarrassment that our society continues to celebrate the unregulated collection and wanton killing of wildlife; nothing epitomizes this practice more than rattlesnake roundups. I cringe in disgust at the gory spectacles that take place at some of these events.

The animals of North America are an integral part of unique cultural and natural heritage; I look forward to the day that we treat them with the respect they deserve. I find rattlesnake roundups to be indefensible whether one is concerned with the welfare of individual animals, the integrity of natural ecosystems, or the health of wild rattlesnake populations. I lament what we are teaching future generations about our relationship with the world around us.

Clifford Warwick, PGDipMedSci CBiol CSci EurProBiol FOCAE FRSB

is a Consultant Biologist & Medical Scientist with the Emergent Disease Foundation (UK). He holds a postgraduate diploma in primary healthcare and medical science, a charter award in biology, a charter award in science and is a registered European Professional Biologist. Since the early 1980s, he has specialized in reptile biology, welfare and protection.

To many unfamiliar observers, rattlesnake roundups must seem akin to a moronic and ghastly reenactment of debased and pointless violence long since morally assigned to ancient history. Yet, the senseless slaughter of rattlesnakes recurs year on year with tedious inevitability, fueled by ignorant irreverence for animals as individuals and the environment as a whole. Rattlesnake roundups thrive on an anti-snake brainwashed public all too eager to gloat at the demise of sensitive and sentient animals that peacefully reside in North American dens and brushlands, as they – unlike their human aggressors – quietly and holistically contribute to the ecological wellbeing of their terrain.

No aspect of snake collection, handling, transport or storage is considerate or humane, as fearful animals endure bruises, broken bones, starvation and dehydration. And the last stage in the lives of these animals is served with nothing less than disdain or malice, as snakes are decapitated by people whose sense of compassion is as detached as the heads of their unfortunate victims. For three decades, the decapitation of snakes has been known to be inhumane because, unlike humans and many other mammals, snake brain tissue is slow to succumb to cessation of blood supply and oxygen – leaving the reptiles fully conscience, traumatised and in incomprehensible pain.

Removing many tons of helpful predators from nature annually is unscientific, unjustified and unsustainable. But the ecological implications of rattlesnake collection go well beyond the species. Every rock overturned, every bush uprooted and every den gassed or hit with explosives, represents another act of effrontery to the local ecosystem. Each shaded area, protective plant or secluded crevice performs vital preservation of microhabitats – cloistering moisture and playing home to a diversity of species. That rattlesnake roundups have existed so long is not a good testimony to tradition, but a demonstration of mindless destruction.

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The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists

is an international society of about 2,000 professional scientists who specialize in the biology and conservation of fishes, amphibians, and reptiles.

“Roundups promote overexploitation of natural populations of wildlife, unnecessary killing and inhumane treatment of individual animals, degradation of habitat, and promotion of outdated attitudes toward important elements of America’s natural heritage. Found nowhere but in the Americas, and especially diverse in the United States, the more than thirty species of rattlesnakes comprise a distinctive component of North America’s biodiversity, and one that is increasingly imperiled.”

“Our forefathers viewed the rattlesnake as a symbol of strength and independence, a perception that deserves to be encouraged once again. The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists supports an end to traditional rattlesnake roundups.”

(Mushinsky and Savitzky, et al. 2006. Position of The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists Concerning Rattlesnake Conservation and Roundups. Available online: www.asih.org/sites/default/files/documents/resources/pprattlesnake.pdf)

Jack Weir, PhD

is Professor of Philosophy at Morehead State University whose research interests include ethics, environmental ethics, and animal ethics.

“Rattlesnakes occupy an essential niche in rural ecosystems, especially semi-arid ranch ecosystems and usually pose little actual threat to either humans or livestock. Moreover, long-term profitability, species diversity, and control of other agriculturally harmful species warrant allowing the rattlesnakes to reach population densities consistent with the availability of food supplies in the ranch ecosystem. The roundups generate unecological attitudes of domination and destruction of nature and the wild.” (Weir, Jack. 1992. The Sweetwater rattlesnake round-up: a case study in environmental ethics. Conservation Biology 6: 116-127.)