



How to Find an Escaped Snake (or Other Reptile)

One very commonly asked question or request for advice among pet owners and keepers with reptiles that is asked both online and in person is what to do or where to look for an escaped pet snake. In a vast majority of instances, escapes happen due to human error with regards to using an improper enclosure or setup for snakes that is not sealed adequately, has large enough gaps to allow for escape, is otherwise not escape proof, or even leaving the enclosure door or top open. Small snakes especially (such as many of the colubrids such as corn snakes, king snakes, milk snakes, and rat snakes) are especially adept at finding their way through small spaces and being able to escape.

Although they are not guaranteed to work in finding your snake in every situation or circumstance, this article will provide some additional tips and information about understanding a snake's biology when it comes to them escaping that can better increase your likelihood of locating your missing pet. Assuming you live in a structurally sound residence with no open doors, windows, or other openings or gaps large enough for a snake to potentially be able to make its way through and outside, this article will primarily cover how to locate a snake indoors. Responsible pet ownership should always be the first preventative measure with regards to escapes. In not doing so, an animal's health and welfare can often be compromised (especially if the animal is going to be exposed to environments outside of its optimal temperature zone), as well as generate additional negative publicity towards these animals and the hobby/industry everyone wishes to avoid. With this said, here are some tips and information about better being able to locate your missing snake or other reptile when it does happen, and how to prevent it from occurring again in the future.

- Reptiles, and snakes especially, are escape artists. Always conduct your research before acquiring any animal, including researching and understanding the proper enclosure or setup required for that animal. There are many plastic, PVC, fiberglass, and other injection molded caging or caging systems specifically designed and manufactured for snakes to be secure, lockable, and escape proof, and are also adequately ventilated. If using a glass terrarium for snakes, always ensure that there is a properly fitted screen or other top secured to the

enclosure. Items such as boards, bricks, rocks, cage clips, or other makeshift latches or devices are not suitable means for preventing escapes.

- Open top enclosures may be suitable for other animals generally not known to be able to climb glass or enclosure walls or sides (such as turtles, tortoises, and many lizards), but some care and common sense should still be used to prevent opportunities where these animals could possibly climb or otherwise leverage themselves to be able to get outside of an enclosure (such as branches, walls or sides of inadequate height or dimensions, etc).
- Check everywhere inside the enclosure for any possible hiding places. Small snakes especially are adept at concealing themselves in unconventional locations inside the enclosure such as under substrate or carpeting (if being used), under water bowls or other furnishings, upper or lower lips or rims of enclosures, behind any wallpapers or backdrops, within any lighting or heating shrouds, or other places of the like.
- Minimize or remove any other possible disturbances that could impede your chances of locating your snake. These can include unnecessarily loud noises, activity, other household pets, etc.
- Most snakes, including those that are traditionally believed to be diurnal, will often be more active at night, or crepuscular (active during the dawn or dusk hours). Many snakes (and other reptiles) will travel along walls and baseboards rather than traverse across open areas of the residence. Begin your searches during these dawn, dusk, or nighttime hours starting from the immediate vicinity of the animal's enclosure. Search behind, within, on top of, underneath, or around the base of the enclosure, as well as any nearby cabinets, bookcases, dressers, couches, beds & mattresses, sofas, chairs, or other furniture as well as closets, bathrooms, laundry rooms, or other smaller rooms of the like.
- Most of these animals prefer dark, secure, and ideally warm hiding areas (as all reptiles are ectothermic animals, meaning they cannot generate their own body heat, but instead must rely on external or ambient temperatures to regulate their bodily temperatures). Furniture, appliances, and other devices that generate at least some heat may also be worth checking. These can include any stoves, refrigerators, space heaters, laundry and dryer machines, or other kitchen/household appliances. Using an adequately powered flashlight and/or handheld inspection mirror can often help increase visibility in tight and/or otherwise dark spaces where a snake may potentially be able to hide.
- There are a lot of other methods or old and outdated information which still is commonly found on the Internet, such as the "putting down flour to track the snake's location", or using various kinds of live "traps" to find one's snake or other reptile. However, there are not really any "traps" which, in general, reliably work for snakes or other reptiles, and most of these other methods require high levels of effort, with little to no guarantees that they will work in finding your snake or other reptile.
- If, or once your lost animal has been found and reunited, what should you do next? Are there any special care requirements it will need to become re-established and re-acclimated? This depends largely on the animal, and how long it has been missing. Ensure that the animal is still properly hydrated, especially if it is a sensitive or delicate species such as amphibians prone to drying out relatively quickly without the necessary humidity, water, or moisture. Also depending on the animal, and how long it has been missing, providing a potentially needed meal shortly thereafter may also be recommended, especially if the animal has been missing for a considerable period of time and has visibly and noticeably lost weight. Also look for any other

injuries or abnormalities which may have taken place during the animal's escape. Prolonged exposure to temperatures outside of the animal's enclosure are also often a concern for many more tropical to sub-tropical species, and respiratory infections and other possible health issues should be more closely watched for and monitored. Finally, animals may often become dirty after being on the lam, and a good cleaning and soaking will not only help clean them up again, but provide additional hydration as well. Given these steps, your animal will hopefully be able to shortly thereafter become re-established into its normal care routine.

- To conclude, these are many of the most commonly utilized tips, tricks, and information used in helping to locate an escaped snake. While the purpose of this article is certainly not to condone or encourage escapes or to negatively reflect on keeping these animals and the hobby as a whole, it should be stressed that that accidents and mistakes can and do happen even among those who may be long time pet owners or keepers (we are ultimately only human), with the take away message ultimately being to learn from these cases and prevent similar situations from happening again when they do occur. There is really no set time frame for when an animal can be expected to be found or be turned up, or even guarantee that the animal will be found, although in this regard, remaining calm, and thinking rationally and positively can often help during the process (an escaped animal may be found within a few minutes of searching all of the way up to turning up unexpectedly many months or even a year or two later). With this said, it is the hope that this article will serve as an answer and a resource to the commonly asked question of what to do and where to look for your pet snake (or other reptile) when it goes missing.

Tips for Outdoor Escapees

While taking your reptile outside for some more natural UV rays, or even just for fun might seem like a fun idea, they oftentimes can end up lost or escaping if they are not closely supervised, or if they happen to be housed in outdoor enclosures that are no escape-proof. Although relatively less likely to happen than with dogs or cats, many such pet reptiles are reported as lost or missing on a weekly basis due to this.

If your reptile escapes outside, or if you have reason to believe it may have, do not necessarily panic. Begin searching as soon as possible, and be sure to check under, within, on top of, or around any nearby natural or artificial debris around your home or property, as many reptiles are secretive and may use these as basking or hiding sources. Also consider that many reptiles are nocturnal or crepuscular (active at dawn or dusk), and may be more likely to be seen basking or moving about during these times.

- Always ensure that any outdoor housing or enclosures are adequately escape proof and reinforced. Many reptiles are much more adept at climbing or digging, or even breaking their way out than can be expected, especially large turtles and tortoises, which can be extremely powerful. Also always closely supervise and monitor any animals that are taken outside for any reason. Even relatively docile and slow moving animals can move surprisingly quickly when they want to, and become lost if not closely controlled or supervised.

- Some reptiles, such as many turtles and tortoises, are active wanderers, and may be less likely to stay near, or within the immediate area they have escaped from. In these cases, enlisting the help of others in the community, such as neighbors and others may help to expand access to the possible search areas in which to help find your missing pet. A number of different methods, often those same ones which can be used to alert the larger community of other missing pets, may be used, and can include signs and flyers posted around the community, at local businesses, residences, and other areas, local newspapers and community announcement boards, and local reptile enthusiast, community and homeowner association, and other similar social media groups and websites.
- Consider microchipping your pet, if appropriate for the species, so that if found, it may be more quickly and easily reunited. Microchipping can be performed by your local reptile or exotic animal veterinarian. Also consider keeping current, and up to date photos and descriptions of your pet(s) including any unique or distinguishing colors/patterns/morphs, other identifying physical features. These steps to raise awareness will help prove ownership of any missing pets, and make it more difficult for any unscrupulous individuals to claim ownership if they were found, or stolen.
- Additional lost or missing pet databases and resources are also often available through most local animal shelters, humane societies, and other websites, organizations, and resources. These may be used at one's best discretion in notifying neighbors and the general public, but are often not just for cats and dogs. Be sure to check these resources regularly as well.