

RATTLESNAKE AVOIDANCE TRAINING

Rattlesnake avoidance training has been proven to be safe, humane and effective in helping to prevent a dog from being bitten by a rattlesnake. Rattlesnakes can be found almost anywhere and their bites are quite common, dangerous and usually very expensive to treat IF the animal survives.

Gina Gables, owner of Ma & Paw Kennel since 1991, has been training dogs professionally for over 26 years. She specializes in behavior modification and problem solving for pet dogs *and* their owners. Gina personally trains every dog to recognize and avoid the scent, sound and sight of rattlesnakes it becomes aware of. She has a special understanding of animal behavior and her experience and sensitivity allows the dogs to be humanely treated during the training process. She possesses the ability, and willingness to work with dogs that are shy, fearful, aggressive, unfocused, hyper-obedient, or that have separation anxiety. EVERY dog is treated as an individual and will be given as much time as he/she needs to reach a comfortable state of mind!

Gina personally trains every dog to recognize and avoid the scent, sound and sight of rattlesnakes it becomes aware of. Gina has partnered with professional Herpetologists and Biologist Steve Gardener & his son John Gardner to supply, muzzle, handle and protect the welfare of the rattlesnakes.

Steve Gardner is a graduate from the University of California at Riverside with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Herpetology and has over 30 years of experience as a Wildlife Ecologist and Herpetologist. He is qualified and has been authorized by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services to perform focused desert tortoise surveys and handling for the purpose of relocation and scientific research at management level. He was a Desert Tortoise Survey Workshop Field Instructor in 1993-94. He has performed biological surveys and monitoring for sensitive and endangered wildlife species in California, Arizona and Nevada.

John Gardner is a biological field assistant/monitor certified by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services with 12 years of field experience.

Steve and John take great care of these snakes for our use. The snakes receive mice on a regular schedule and bottled spring water. They maintain the snakes' wellbeing 24/7. On training days, Steve and John muzzle the snakes, which is no easy task. We are grateful that these two men put their own lives at risk to ensure the safety of our dogs.

Our FIRST priority is the comfort and safety of all involved, dogs, humans and snakes. For the most effective training we use live rattlesnakes which have been DOUBLE muzzled to prevent

them from being able to bite. Every precaution is taken to minimize danger to dogs, humans and snakes. The training takes place in a controlled environment using a remote training collar (either vibrate, spray or static shock) adjusted specifically to **each** dogs' temperament, personality and physical response characteristics. Gina will use only the minimum level of stimulation necessary to achieve the desired results. The program consists of walking through our mock trail course consisting of at least 6-9 stations. The trainer accompanied by the owner walk the dog on a leash to various staging areas:

FIRST STATION: The WHOLE picture: First we take your dog up to a live 'rattling' rattlesnake. We make several approaches including from the downwind side, making sure your dog gets an opportunity to commit to memory the sight, sound & scent of the whole snake before we begin to teach it to avoid. After this 'introduction', each time the dog shows an interest in approaching the snake the remote training collar will be activated. When avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we proceed to the next station.

SECOND STATION: Smell Recognition

To teach your dog to recognize & avoid the specific smell of a rattlesnake we will then introduce the dog to just the **scent** of rattlesnake with no visual or sound present. FYI: Rattlesnakes smell different than nonvenomous species of snakes due to the presence of the venom. Each time the dog shows an interest in approaching the scent, the remote training collar will be activated. When avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we proceed to the next station.

THIRD STATION: Sound Recognition

To teach your dog to recognize and avoid the sound of a rattlesnake the trainer accompanied by the owner will bring your dog to the next training area where your dog will be introduced to just the **sound** of a rattlesnake. The remote training collar will be activated each time the dog shows interest in investigating the sound of the rattle. When avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we proceed to the next station.

FOURTH STATION: Sight Recognition

To teach your dog to avoid the sight of a rattlesnake when they can't hear or smell it the dog be brought to the next staging area to be introduced to just the **sight** of a live rattlesnake. This snake is not rattling and we approach it from up wind so there is no clue present by scent. Stimulation will occur when your dog shows an interest in the presence of the snake. Again when avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we proceed to the next phase.

Your dog will then have multiple more opportunities to again be exposed to all the above stimuli in separate locations on the course to help ensure that your dog makes a negative association and displays avoidance behavior toward the correct stimulus (sight sound or scent of the snake).

Finally... we go thru the final test area. Your dog is held on leash by our staff and you will walk to a designated area with the rattlesnake between the dog and you. We release your dog to come to you and he should demonstrate his newly trained response by either going WAAAY around the snake to get to you or refusing to go past it at all. If you have more than one dog or friends who hike together we can test the dogs in a group to rule out pack mentality setting in should they encounter a rattlesnake when out with their buddy. We don't want them to be emboldened by the presence of their buddy & think they can take the snake on now that they have it outnumbered.

During the training, please:

- 1- Be quiet... Keep the talking and questions to a minimum. Your dog needs to be able to concentrate on learning, NOT your voice. You will have a chance to ask questions at the end.**
- 2- pay attention to the trainer's specific instructions (Cont....)**

3- pay attention your dogs' body language (this can later alert *you* to the presence of a rattlesnake.)

**** We believe the best learning is accomplished by having the dogs experience the training twice the first year, then annual test/refreshers after that. We do this to help solidify the training by helping the dogs to generalize their RAT training since animals are very situational learners and tend to not generalize well. We also suggest that the trainings be done at different locations so the dogs can get an opportunity to generalize the training and not think rattlesnakes only exist at the one and only place they may have ever encountered them (our training).**