

SNAKE AVERSION TRAINING COMES TO PAYSON

By Rebecca Wiles

Through the courtesy of Payson Parks and Recreation and P.A.W.S., the local dog park club, Jay Amos of Snakebrakes brought his show to town by offering rattlesnake aversion training in the small dog area of the Payson Bark Park. More than 35 people signed up and had their pets effectively trained to avoid rattlesnakes.

There are several different techniques to teaching snake aversion to dogs and the method Snakebrakes uses is to milk and de-fang their snakes prior to a training session. They transport the snakes to the community sessions in individual coolers, for temperature control and privacy, and each snake even has his name printed on his cooler. If they expect to be training a large number of dogs, they may bring more than one snake to reduce over-stressing any one of their charges.

The snake is placed, coiled, on the ground or on a burlap sack and Jay passes close to it with the leashed, e-collared, dog. The dog is allowed to get a good look and smell and hear the sound of the rattle before Jay quickly vibrates the e-collar and whisks the dog away. Again, they approach the snake and, again, briskly run away after the dog gets a sense of the snake. After multiple passes, if the dog still shows an interest in assertively approaching a rattlesnake, Jay will give him a quick, mild shock from the e-collar. At this point, usually, the dog will refuse to go anywhere near the rattlesnake. Some dogs have a natural aversion to rattlesnakes and train quickly while others may take a little more time to get the message.

When Jay is confident that the dog has learned to avoid rattlesnakes, he allows the pet owner to take the leash and try to approach the snake with his dog. Time after time, it was observed that the dog could not get away from the snake fast enough, sometimes even going so far as to block his owner from approaching the snake as well!

The entire process, for one dog, takes about 10 minutes and Jay advises that the animal be tested again, in a year, to make certain that the training imprinted properly. After that, it should be good for life.

There are many snake avoidance companies which can be found by Google-ing “snake avoidance classes in Arizona.” Snakebrakes hails out of Ashfork, AZ but they offer what they call “Snakebrake Parties” for ten or more dogs so they can actually bring their service to you. Find them on Snakebrakes, on Facebook or call Lianna at: 928-707-3038.

If you do any hiking in the forest with your dog, you will be glad you did!