Tools of the Trade

Snake hook

Name: Jason Hainke.
Job: Reptile and invertebrate manager.
Where: WILD LIFE Sydney Zoo.
Why is it important? I had my first experience with a pet snake at 10, and at 34 I am doing it for a living. The hook is at the end of a long handle, and it’s used to gently pick the snake up and move it. If I need to clean a cage, or do a rescue in the wild, I use the hook to keep the head away from me, and move the animal safely. If you’re used to it, it’s not that bad, but in any job you can have mishaps; you can get a paper cut as an accountant. My job is dangerous if you’re not paying attention, but not if you’re properly trained and your movements are deliberate.
What do your colleagues think? My colleagues think the snake hook is great; it keeps us alive and healthy. When you get to the stage of handling venomous snakes, you’ve had some practice with the hook on the non-venomous ones, but when you are learning your instinct is to run or throw it if it moves funny; you need to detach a little and be logical, and get rid of the emotions. If I’m instructing someone I make sure we have a chat and do a dry run first.
Unusual moment? Most of us who have snake hooks make our own, either because we prefer a bigger or smaller hook. I use old golf club handles. If I have a bad day on the course, I end up with a new hook!

Sue White

Handle with care ... Jason Hainke.
Photo: Edwina Pickles