

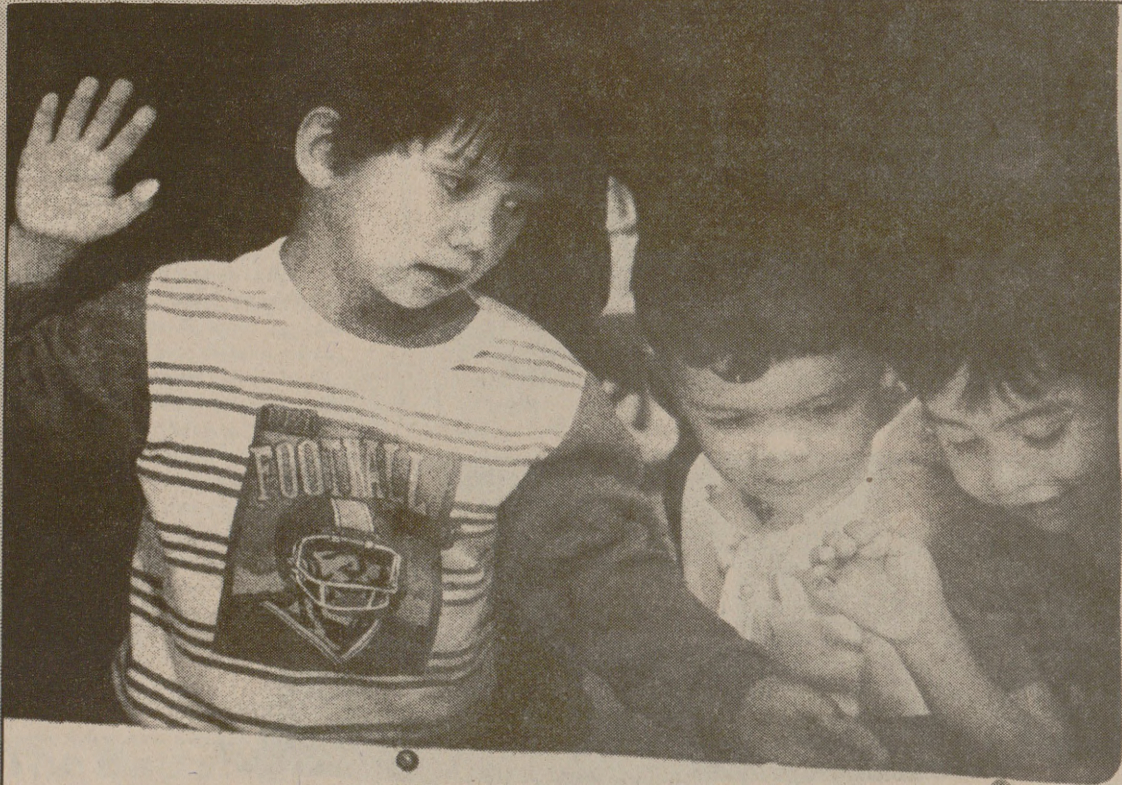
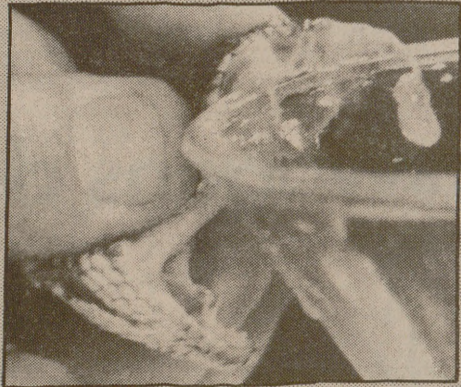
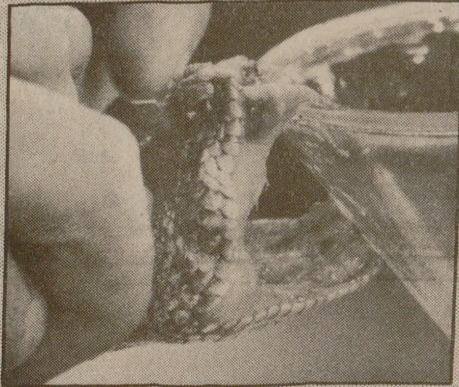
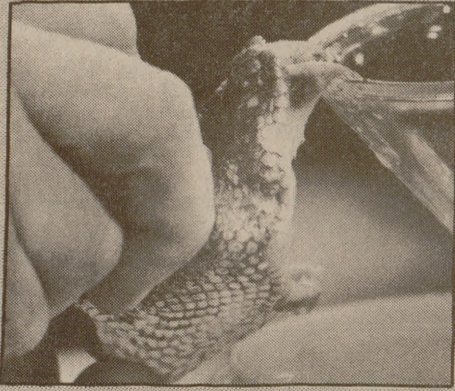
Diamonds in the ruff

What do you do with 3,126 pounds of rattlesnakes? West Texas ranchers took them to the 32nd Annual World's Largest Rattlesnake Roundup in Sweetwater, Texas, held earlier this month.

Ranchers hunt, trap, milk and skin Western diamondback rattlesnakes around Sweetwater for the roundup's trophies and prizes.

For three days this year, 30,000 spectators took part in rattlesnake safety demonstrations and guided tours to snake habitats. They treated themselves to fried rattlesnake and rattlesnake curios sold on the floor of the coliseum that houses the roundup.

The money raised from the annual event goes to support the Sweetwater Jaycees.



Clockwise from top right: A Jaycee stirs up hundreds of snakes in a holding pit making the snakes move around so the smaller snakes can breathe. A buyer from Rare Skins Inc. measures the length of a diamondback skin. Three boys watch a snake move up the wall of the safety demonstration pit through a protective plexiglass window. A snake is milked by forcing it to bite a vile while a handler squeezes its venom out.

Photos and Text by Mike C. Mulvey

