REPRODUCTION OF THE CHILDRENS PYTHON *(LIASIS CHILDRENI)* IN A TERRARIUM.

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INTRODUCTION

The Childrens python inhabits the Australian continent, and reaches a maximum length of about 1.60 m. This article describes the successful reproduction of this species.

HOUSING THE SNAKES

Five sexually mature Childrens Pythons were kept in a glass terrarium, 80 litres in volume, from the end of July 1972. Three were males, two were females; the biggest animal was a male of 1.10 m, the smallest a female of 70 cm. The terrarium was lit by electric bulbs and received direct sunlight by way of a window.
The electric bulbs were lit daily for 2-4 hours, all other warmth and light was by the sun, dependent on the season. The fitting up was kept simple. The bottom was covered with sphagnum moss, and reversed flower-pots served as hiding places. The temperature fluctuated during the day between 29-30°C, and dropped by night to 16-25°C.
Small mice were offered as food, and twice weekly a multivitamin preparation was added to the water. In mid-October the terrarium was put in a differ-

ent place where the only illumination was 2-4 hours of neon-light. Day temperature was 28°C, and at night it was 24°C. Nothing else in the terrarium was altered.

COPULATION AND GESTATION

Copulation had already been observed in September, before the terrarium was moved. Further copulation with both of the females was observed irregularly until the end of February. During this period the males were involved in ritual fighting. At the beginning of March the females refused food, which was, however, not considered as a sign of pregnancy as they were feeding sporadically anyhow.
At the end of March, and in the beginning of April, they suddenly adopted a strange position, almost like a narrow spiral with the head at the top. The body was twisted lengthways and in such a way that the abdominal scales, as well as the spotted flanks and back, could be seen from above. We had no explanation for this position. It was only later that we were informed by Hans Boos, the reptile keeper of the Taronga Zoo at Sydney, that this position is normal for pregnant *Liasis childreni*.

THE EGGS AND INCUBATION

On April 18th we saw a fresh clutch of 9 eggs, lying on a small pile of sphagnum, tightly enclosed by the female. The animal was placed, along with the eggs, in a glass terrarium 20 litres in volume; the bottom was covered with paper only, and a large water container was provided. Whilst cleaning the first terrarium we found a second unattended clutch of eggs under the sphagnum. They were placed in a glass jar to incubate them arti-

ficially. However, when we found the eggs they were already dried out, and they decayed within a fortnight. On opening the eggs we found dead embryos in each of them. The other female coiled around the eggs in the incubating terrarium. Through the glass bottom we could see that whilst the female coiled around the eggs, she lifted them from the bottom by taking them in a deep hollow formed by the hind part of her body.
The temperature in the terrarium fluctuated between 27.2 and 31°C, with a mean value of 28.8°C. It was covered by a glass window to keep the humidity high. Several times we tried to measure the temperature between the coils of the snake's body, but without succes. The female left her eggs, as soon as we tried to introduce the measuring device, only to return as soon as it was removed. So we measured the temperature in the terrarium, to see if there was any difference between this, and the room temperature, as a higher temperature in the terrarium would signify production of heat in the terrarium by the female. However, no difference was observed. This agrees with the observations of Hans Boos who could not establish if there was an increase of temperature in his breeding females of *Liasis childreni*.

THE HATCHING

Two eggs decayed after 20 and 25 days respectively, but were not removed. On June 22nd nicks were present in 3 eggs, and later on 3 young appeared. The next day 3 others hatched. The last egg was opened, and contained a completely developed embryo, dead with deformations of the spinal column. The first sloughing took place a week after hatching, and the female accepted food immediately after she was taken out of the incubating terrarium.

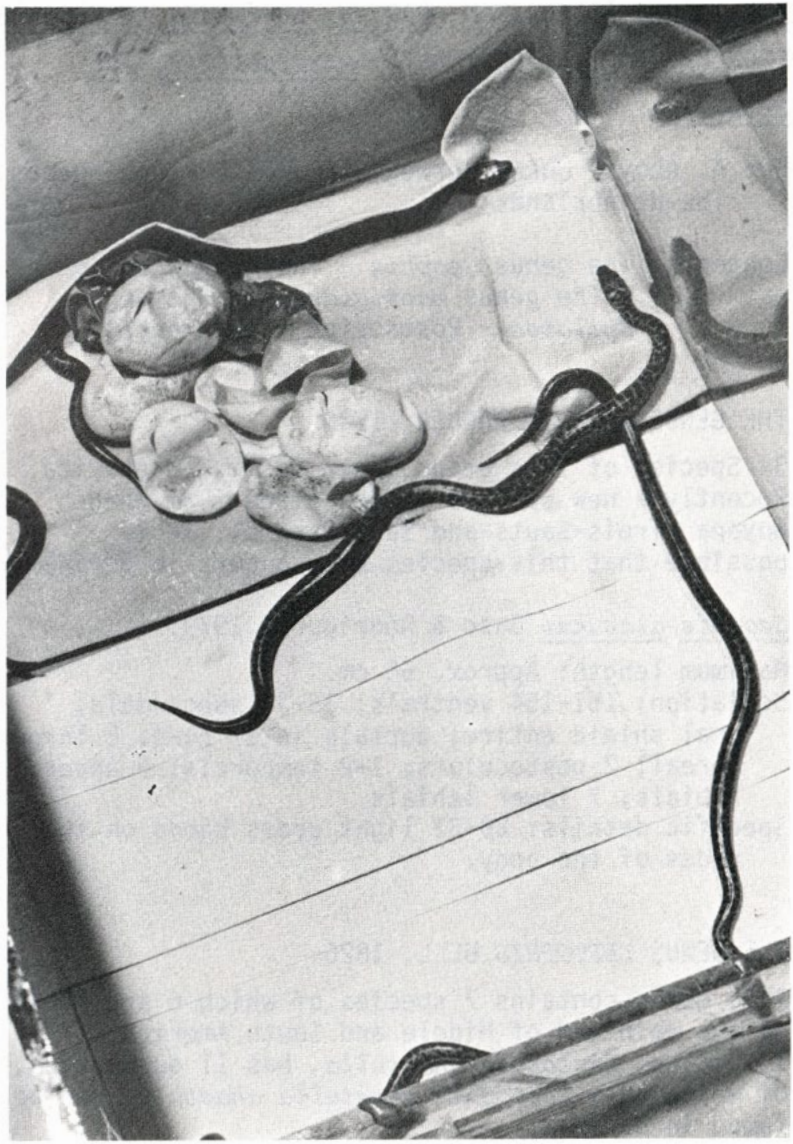


Fig. 1. Jongen van / Hatchlings of *Liasis childreni*.
Foto: Diergaarde Blijdorp / Blijdorp Zoo, Rotterdam.