HEALTH & DISEASES



This column is taken care of by the "Studygroup for Diseases and the Optimum Keeping and Breeding of Terrarium Animals" of the Belgian Society "Terra". If there is a question concerning health or diseases, feel free to contact the president of the Studygroup: Mr. Hugo Claessen, Arthur Sterckstraat 18, B-2600 Berchem, Belgium. He will try to answer your question in this column to the benefit of all members.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING A NEW SNAKE.

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The question is often put, how can one be sure of buying a healthy snake in a petshop or from another snake keeper. This article is not restricted to a series of points to which you have to pay attention to get a fair impression of the health of a snake, but also mentions other aspects which are of importance when purchasing a snake.

Before you procure a snake you have to consider some general points:

1. Do you have an appropriate terrarium ready for the snake? Are you aware of the possible size

and the duration of life of the snake?
2. Are you well informed about the requirements of the snake regarding light, temperature, humidity, etc?
3. Are you able to provide the snake with suitable food, now and in the future? Will this become a problem when the snake has grown in length, in respect of time, money, and emotions of the family?
4. Do you realise, that a snake means that your hobby costs time in care and maintenance of your animals? Does this present problems during your vacation?

The final success of a purchase will not be determined solely by positive or negative points of the animal, but also by the knowledge and attitude of the purchaser. The death of a sick animal is usually shifted on to the dealer, while it could have been an easy to treat illness, in which case the purchaser clearly has failed in his duty.
It is clear that when visible defects are noticed, one has to weigh up the risk in buying the animal. This will be influenced by the experience of the purchaser and the existing relation with the dealer.
The best key to buying new snakes is your own experience. When one regularly observes his animals, he will progessively get better impression of other, similar snakes. It is the total impression one gets of an animal at a moment in time that determines if they are able to treat the snake for visible defects.
A great difficulty remains in that many defects or diseases are only visible externally in the very last stage and that a lot of lesser diseases may become fatal after some time without appropriate treatment.
Never skip a quarantaine period of three months

for a new snake, either bought from a dealer or from another terrarium keeper. Even the care of somebody elses reptiles during his vacation is not without risk.

We now list some points to which one has to pay attention when interested in a special new snake. It is recommended when interested in a species of which you have no experience, to take an expert with you.
One must take into account that the points listed below are not the same for all species or families which makes it difficult to compose a complete list.

1. A snake should not be too thin. When the skeleton is clearly visible, it indicates that the snake has not eaten for a long time, either because the owner has withheld food from the snake, or because the animal is ill.
2. The snake should be creeping about the terrarium tongue-flicking curiously and trying to escape.
3. The snake should lie coiled up. A snake, which lies at full length when it sleeps or rests is suspect. In such a case one should note if the snake keeps its mouth open, or makes pumping movements with its body (pneumonia).
4. A snake which is seized should try to free itself. There has to be motion in the snake from the head to the tip of the tail. When one pinches the tip of the tail the snake should react immediately.
5. The lower part of the body (stomach and intestine) must not look blown up, or feel weak and soft. One should check for constipation (hardened feces in the intestine) for which the region of the intestine has to be palpated for hard swellings.
6. The mouth has to be checked for mouthrot, it should be clean and free of slime and inflammation. Snake keepers without experience are dis-

couraged from buying snakes with mouthrot. In mouthrot the mouth is red (bloody) with a white cheese-like substance around the teeth.

7. The snake has to be checked for ticks and mites. When the eyes are pressed backwards this is the result of many mites under the rim of the eye. But this point should not be a reason for not buying a snake.
8. When one seizes a snake the cloaca should be clean. In many cases some feces will be excreted when the snake is seized. The feces should look solid and not smell too much. It would be ideal to examine the feces on the spot, although one or two flagellates or worm eggs will not say too much.

For the experienced snake keeper it is not necessary to take notice of all the above points as it is possible for an expert to revive a snake which is in a somewhat worser condition. The best advise we can give to an unexperienced snake keeper is to take an expert with him, and only to buy a snake, which he trusts completely. This should save him the disappointment of the eventual death of a sick animal.