SUCCESSFUL BREEDING OF TEXAS RAT SNAKE (*ELAPHE OBSOLETA LINDHEIMERI*).

By: J.L.A. van der Eerden, Kempkeshoeve 27,
5262 NV Vught, The Netherlands.

Contents: Distribution - Description - The Texas rat snake in the terrarium - The terrarium - Copulation and breeding.

DISTRIBUTION

The Texas rat snake is found from the Pearl and Mississippi rivers westwards through Louisiana to central Texas. This snake is at home in all kinds of habitats: swamps, forests, river-valleys and rocky areas.

DESCRIPTION

The Texas rat snake reaches a length of 107-215 cm. It is a spotted snake with often little contrast between spots and ground colour. The spots are usually brownish to black, the ground colour is grey to yellowish. The head is often black. The skin between the scales may be red. The red may also be present on the edge of the scales. Individually they can vary a lot. The juveniles are grey with large, dark spots. They have a clear line between the eyes and a line from the eye to the corner of the mouth. The young of *Elaphe obsoleta lindheimeri* are easily distinguished from other subspecies by their colour and markings. They are also more robust.

THE TEXAS RAT SNAKE IN THE TERRARIUM

Of my two specimens the male is the larger (about

175 cm) and the heavier. He is dark coloured with little contrast between the ground colour and the spots.
The female is smaller and slender. Her ground colour is greyish yellow with strongly contrasted, grey-black spots. Her head is grey. There is a lot of red between the scales.
The keeping of the animals has no difficulties. They eat well and are fairly active. I feed them with mice, small rats and quails.

THE TERRARIUM

The terrarium is made of glass and measures 120x50 x75 cm (lxwxh). On the bottom is a mixture of peat and litter, a few stubs and climbing-branches. In the climbing-branches are a few plastic plants. Living plants are destroyed by the snakes or eaten by the feed-animals. The water container is fixed, because the snakes would throw it over if it stood loose. In one corner of the terrarium there is bottom-heating. On the back wall and on one side-wall cork is attached. The other side window can be opened. The terrarium is lighted and heated with a fluorescent lamp (60 cm long) and a reflector-bulb (60 Watt). Between the lamp and the terrarium is gauze.

COPULATION AND BREEDING

The male crawled on the back of the female while making shaking movements. At first the female tried to escape, but eventually they copulated. They lay next to and on each other, while their tails were twisted around each other. At this period the female ate a lot.
The first copulation, seen on 21 June 1984, lasted 22 minutes, the second, seen on 25 June, 17 minutes. The female refused to eat from 5 July.

She sloughed on 21 July and laid 12 eggs on 2 August. After one week she accepted food again. The eggs were put in an incubator. On the bottom was coarse pebbles with a layer water, on this a layer of fine-grained aquarium gravel in which the eggs were buried. A lamp in the middle of the incubator kept the eggs in the middle at 28-29^{o}C, a little cooler on the sides. The eggs in the middle hatched first on 7 October 1984. The last young left its egg on 18 October 1984.
The young did not have to be force-fed, though some did not eat for a few weeks. The appetite of the young varied strongly.