

THE HUSBANDRY AND BREEDING OF THE ROSY BOA LICHAMURA TRIVIRGATA ROSEOFUSCA (COPE, 1861).

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INTRODUCTION

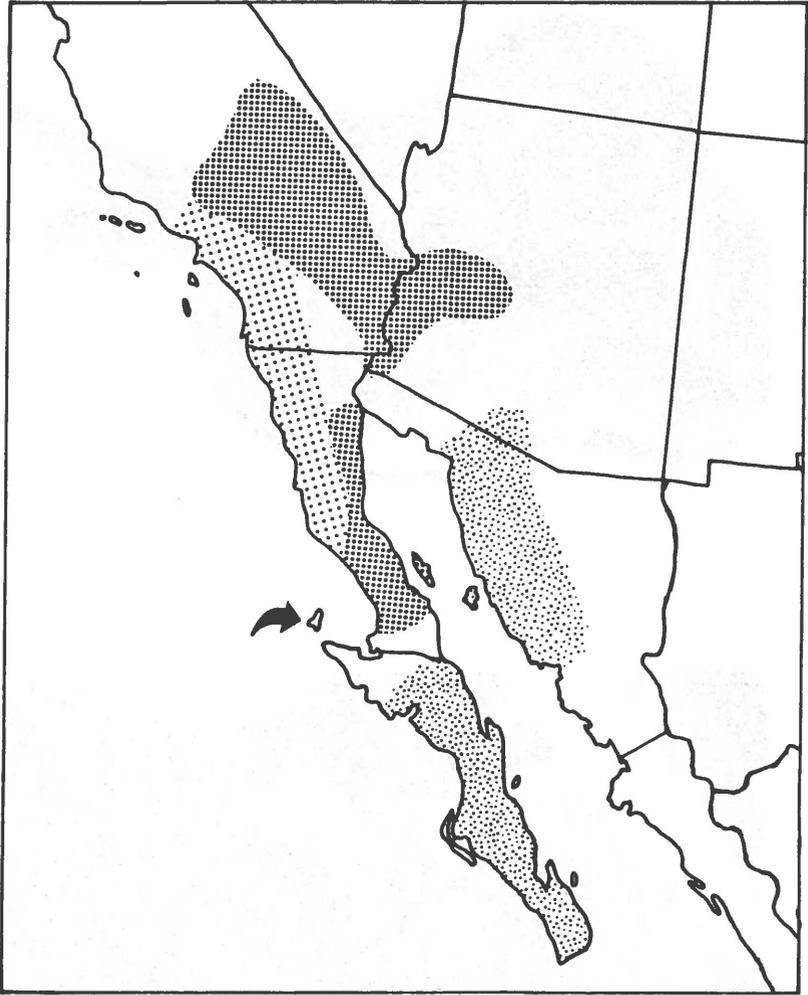
Lichamura trivirgata roseofusca is a relatively small-sized representative of the boid family; adult females reaching a maximum length of only 105 cm (Switak, 1981). This docile species is often active both at night and during the day and usually adjusts quickly to life in captivity, making it a fine pet.

DISTRIBUTION

Lichamura trivirgata roseofusca can be found in the coastal regions of southern California, in an area stretching down into the northern parts of Baja California (Mexico). Another subspecies, *Lichamura trivirgata gracia*, shares some parts of *Lichamura trivirgata roseofusca*'s eastern territory; subsequently an intermediate form of the two can be found in the overlapping area (Klauber, 1933). *Lichamura trivirgata roseofusca* can be found at altitudes of up to 1500 m (Wright & Wright, 1957).

SYSTEMATICS

The scalation of *Lichamura trivirgata roseofusca*



Lichanura trivirgata trivirgata



Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca



Lichanura trivirgata gracia



Lichanura trivirgata bostici

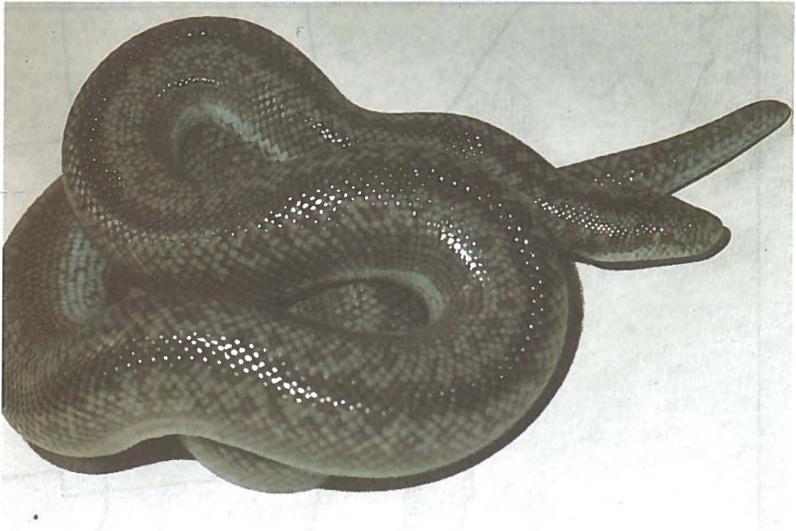


Fig. 1. *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca*. Foto: J. van der Pols.



Fig. 2. *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca*, juv. Foto: J. van der Pols.

is as follows: 33-45 dorsal scale rows, 218-232 ventral plates and 39-49 subcaudals. The species *Lichanura trivirgata* includes four subspecies: *Lichanura trivirgata trivirgata* (Cope, 1861), *Lichanura trivirgata gracia* (Klauber, 1931), *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca* (Cope, 1868) and *Lichanura trivirgata bostici* (Ottley, 1978). This last subspecies is found on Cedros Island (see map). During the last few years, several American reptile breeders have added two new 'subspecies' to their price lists: *Lichanura trivirgata myriolepis* and *Lichanura trivirgata intermedia*. The former has not yet been officially described, but since its characteristics are consistent and sufficiently different from the other subspecies, it will probably soon be recognized as a separate subspecies (Ottley in Bartlett, 1986). As for *Lichanura trivirgata intermedia*, it is apparently an intergrade between *Lichanura trivirgata trivirgata* and *Lichanura trivirgata myriolepis* (Bartlett, 1986). The genus *Lichanura*, along with the genera *Charina*, *Eryx* and *Congaliophis*, are members of a separate subfamily within the family *Boidae*.

ETYMOLOGY

Lichanura is derived from two Greek words: *Lichanos* (index finger) and *Oura* (tail). The name *trivirgata* is a composite latin word meaning 'Three stripes'.

PURCHASE

On 24 December 1982, I acquired a female *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca* measuring 75 cm and weighing 250 g. One and a half years later she had gained 150 g in weight, but had not increased in length. According to Mazzarella (1974), an adult *Lichanura*

trivirgata roseofusca hardly increases in length at all. On 8 July 1983, I received a male *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca*. This specimen also measured 75 cm in length, but only weighed 190 g; 60 g less than the female had weighed on receipt. The sex of this species is easily determined by the presence of spurs in males and the lack of these in females.

Both snakes were found in the area directly around San Diego (California). Specimens from this region are characterized by a silver to blue-grey ground-colour with three irregular but distinct dark-brown stripes. In the United States, this subspecies is often referred to as the 'Borrego Rosy Boa'. Specimens found closer to the coast have a darker ground-colour and a less distinct pattern.

CAPTIVITY

The snakes are housed in separate cages measuring 60x30x36 cm (lxwxh). Both cages are furnished with a few strong branches and two removable wooden platforms. The substrate on the floor of the cage consists of a mixture of wood-shavings and strips of newspaper. A flowerpot is used as a hiding place. A water dish is placed on one of the platforms for good measure, even though it is not visited very often. The lighting consists of a 15 Watt lightbulb, which also functions as a heat-source during the day. Ventilation occurs through two perforated metal strips above and below at the front of the cage. The temperature varies from 23^oC at night to 30^oC during the day with a maximum of 33^oC under the lightbulb.

CARE

Keeping *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca* poses few

problems. They are curious animals by nature and hardly ever bite. Their diet is made up of litter-to half-grown mice and juvenile rats up to 20 g in weight. Relatively large meals often result in regurgitation. Females are generally more voracious feeders than males, however I personally believe males should be kept 'lean' anyhow because over-feeding can lead to obesity and lethargy.

MATING/PREGNANCY

In order to induce *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca* to mate, it is necessary to cool them for a few months during the winter (Switak, 1981). On 1 December both specimens were put in separate boxes which were partially perforated for ventilation. The temperature varied from 12°C to 15°C and a water dish was placed in with the snakes for one day in every fourteen days.

On 1 February the snakes were put back in their own separate cages and the amount of daylight was lengthened from 8 to 16 hours shortly afterwards. On 3 May the male was put in with the female whereupon he immediately began attempting to mate with her. Only once was I able to observe an actual copulation (28 May), although there were probably other occasions.

In June the male was put back in his own cage and in July the female's body began to swell visibly. The swelling started from roughly mid-body and terminated about 7 cm above the anal-opening. Food was accepted throughout the entire pregnancy, although this consisted solely of litter-mice. Larger prey was constricted, but not eaten. Also, her behavioural pattern hardly changed at all during pregnancy; at most she would stay under the light-bulb to warm herself up a little longer than usual each morning. However, there are cases documented in which female Rosy boas arranged them-

selves in a coiled-up position during pregnancy, much like a female python incubating its eggs (Kurfess, 1969).

THE YOUNG

On 29 September the female gave birth to four live young. They first appeared wrapped in a membrane from which they freed themselves within a few minutes. Each new-born snake was placed in separate 'macrolon' containers with a water dish and a cardboard hide-box. Each juvenile was about 35 cm long and had an average weight of about 30 g: a relatively large size compared to their mother. In contrast to their parents, they were very nervous or aggressive and struck at anything moving within reach. This behaviour disappeared with time. All four of the young sloughed between 4 and 8 October. Three of them had already accepted pinky-mice before this time. The fourth began eating a few days after its first slough. After a while, I sold three of the young but kept one of them, a male, for myself. This individual is developing well: ten months after birth it weighed 130 g.

AFTERWORD

The following year the female gave birth again: this time five young were born. I believe healthy female Rosy boas are perfectly capable of giving birth every year without any problem; they eat so well that they return to their original weight within a few months.

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