

BREEDING THE AMAZON TREE BOA (CORALLUS ENY-  
DRIS ENYDRIS).

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INTRODUCTION

Amazon tree boas are in the same genus as the hard to obtain emerald tree boa (*Corallus caninus*) and the rarer annulated boa (*Corallus annulatus*). The more northerly occurring Cook's tree boa, *Corallus enydris cooki* is found from Nicaragua south into central Venezuela and also on Trinidad and several of its neighbouring islands (Freiberg, 1982; MacLain, 1983; Schwartz, 1975). *Corallus enydris enydris* is found in southern Venezuela, the Guiana's, and in a wide band across the center of South America. The subspecies differ in that *Corallus enydris cooki* has rounded blotches (when they occur) and more than 50 scale rows, while *Corallus enydris enydris* has angled blotches and less than 50 scale rows (Bartlett, 1986). Although the captive personality of these snakes ranges from grudging acceptance of handling to downright unfriendliness, they seem to survive quite well in captivity and a number of people have been successful in breeding them.

While not an ideal "pet", Amazon tree boas are extremely interesting to study, both in their habits and genetics, and are relatively inexpensive. They are also very attractive, with a blocky, triangular head, large elliptical-pupilled eyes, and a range of colours including grey, brown, orange, red, yellow and green. All of these colours

may even be found in the same litter. Furthermore, the colours may change as the snakes grow. Individual animals may be solid in colour, lightly spotted, or heavily spotted and predicting the outcome of a mating is pretty much impossible (results of several matings are detailed by Bartlett (1986)). Amazon grow to five or six feet long, but have the slender build of an arboreal species. Heat sensing pits are very obvious on upper and lower labials, producing an "eyeshine" like effect when caught in the beam of a flashlight. Handling is best done with snake hooks to avoid injury to the animal's mouths due to inaccurate strikes. Although the teeth are long, probably for capturing birds, bites are not really serious. They do, however, bleed rather freely (Winstel, 1985).

#### MY ANIMALS

My animals, which most likely originated in Surinam, are housed in a plywood cage about 75x60x75 cm (lxwxh). The hinged front has a large "plexiglas" window. There are two ventilation ports in the cage top, 10x10 cm and 25x30 cm. These are covered with plastic needlepoint canvas and 0.6 cm wire mesh (canvas on the inside for smoothness, wire mesh for strength). A 15 Watt fluorescent Vitalite sits over the larger port. Cage furnishings include a dish pan hide box, two branches wired to the cage sides, some plastic plants, a live *Sansevieria* plant, a brick, a large flat water pan, and a flat plate Nodrog heater adhered to a piece of plexiglas for strength and covered by a sand bag to distribute the heat. A piece of aquarium airline tubing is run from a vibrator pump (mounted to room wall, not cage) through a hole in the cage side and into the water pan. The pump is run 24 hours a day to agitate the water and increase cage humidity. The Vitalite is

on a 12-hour daylight cycle timer. Room temperature reaches 27-30°C during the summer and is steady at 23°C during the winter. The heater runs at about 29°C and is unplugged in the summer. Newspaper was the original substrate, but was later changed to cypress mulch. The cage was misted 1-2 times a day whenever possible.

The beige coloured female feeds on mice, rats, and day-old birds (chicks). Each gets one or two animals per week. From July 1985 through August 1986, the female ate fairly regularly. From September throughout her pregnancy, she fasted. The male ate irregularly from July 1985 to spring 1986, then accepted food regularly thereafter.

#### PREGNANCY

No unusual behaviour was observed until 13 February 1986. That evening the male was seen to have two coils wrapped entirely around the female's body about 10 cm apart. The animals' vents were not in contact and the snakes were not disturbed. The same relative positions were noted again several days later, but no actual copulation was observed. On 28 March, the male was removed and placed in a separate cage as an inducement to feed better. He was returned to the female's cage on 25 June. Near the end of August, the female seemed very swollen about 2/3 of the way back. She also stopped feeding, became very excitable, sometimes striking from the back of the cage when the door was opened, and seemed to spend most of the time, day and night, on the heater. By 9 November, the body swelling seemed to lessen at the original point but increased from there to the vent. Starting about this time, the female began spending morning mornings in the hide box and afternoons and early evenings on the heater. Her "belly" stayed large, but the areas on either side of the spine seemed

to shrink.

## BIRTH

I had heard that the end of October was a likely birth time and Mattison (1986) lists the gestation period as 200 days. Assuming the last possible copulation date to be 28 March, this would place the birthdate just about at 20 October. Time passed, but the female's habits remained the same.

I had heard that many snakes shed their skin just before egg-laying or giving birth, but no shed was in sight. In early November, the female's colour darkened and a dark postocular stripe appeared. Then one evening (10 December, 1986) I happened to look in the cage and there they were - nine tiny tree boas crawling around the cage. The male was opaque and trying to sleep coiled on a plant. Then a final bulge was observed moving along the female's body and a tenth little snake emerged, surrounded by the clear birth membrane. Several more contractions passed along the female's body, but no more young were born. Over the next five days, she ate four mice. Assuming a late March mating, this gives a gestation of at least 250 days. Considering the relatively cool room temperature, it is unlikely that the litter was produced by a late June mating (about 160 days gestation).

Five (half) of the young were a reddish salmon colour above and below with slight shadows of dark blotches and head stripes. The other five were black with a double zig-zag red line down the back and reddish reticulations along the sides. Their bellies were orange speckled with black and the heads were black and orange striped. Approximate total lengths were about 21 inches and all snakes appeared to be perfectly normal except for a tiny knob on the tail tip of one black specimen. Based

on tail/snout-vent ratios, I estimated there to be three males, three females and four "unknowns". After their first sheds, I will try to check sex determination this way against the subcaudal scale counts.

#### REFERENCES

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