

IDENTIFICATION OF SNAKES BY MEANS OF "FINGER-
PRINTS".

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Burglary and theft of snakes have been frequent recently in Holland. How is it possible to secure one's snakes against burglary? Installation of a burglar alarm might be the obvious answer. However, this does not assure 100% protection against burglary. If stolen snakes are recovered, it is very difficult to prove juridicially that they are your individuals. Every animal has its own markings and I assume that everyone who keeps snakes will be able to recognize his own animals. Legally however, this recognition factor will not be conclusive evidence, and demonstrative proof is needed. This however is relatively easy. Just like fingerprints of human beings are never identical, the scalation on snakes is never identical. I maintain a book in which I have reserved a few pages for each animal. For each slough I preserve the upper side of the head and stick it in the book. Every time I write down the date on which the snake sloughed. If one studies these sloughings carefully, one will conclude that there are several differences between sloughings of individuals within the same species. Compare for example the pictures of two *Liasis mackloti*. On the top of the frontal scale (picture 1) we see a small scale that is missing in the other snake. Furthermore, the shapes of the frontal scales are not equal. Next to the parietal scale (picture 2) there is a scale which is missing in the other snake. Again there are differences in the form of the parietal scales. Not all animals have the same scales on their head.

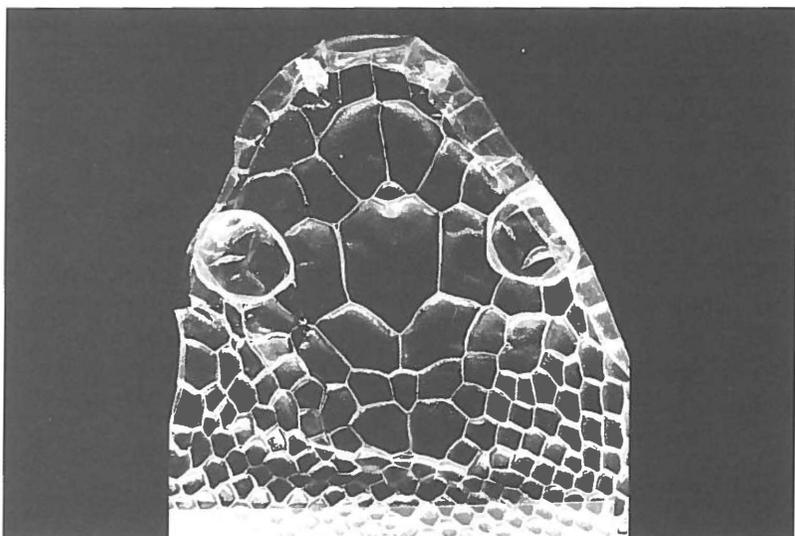


Foto 1. *Liasis mackloti*. Foto: Ron Kivit.

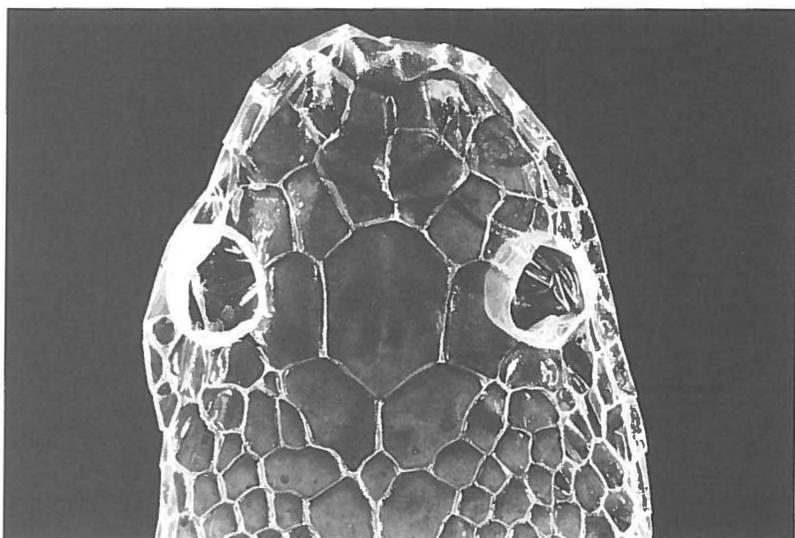


Foto 2. *Liasis mackloti*. Foto: Ron Kivit.

Boa constrictor for example has only small, fine scales on its head. All animals however can be recognized by the rostral scales with the rostral groove where the tongue slips through. If they have big head scales like *Corallus caninus*, then the identification is far easier. In the same way there will be differences in form and size of the nasal, internasal, subocular and supralabial scales. Comparison and if necessary measurement can show this, so that an independant expert can legally prove which snakes are your specimens. It is recommended that you keep the book separate from the terrarium, so that the thief will not

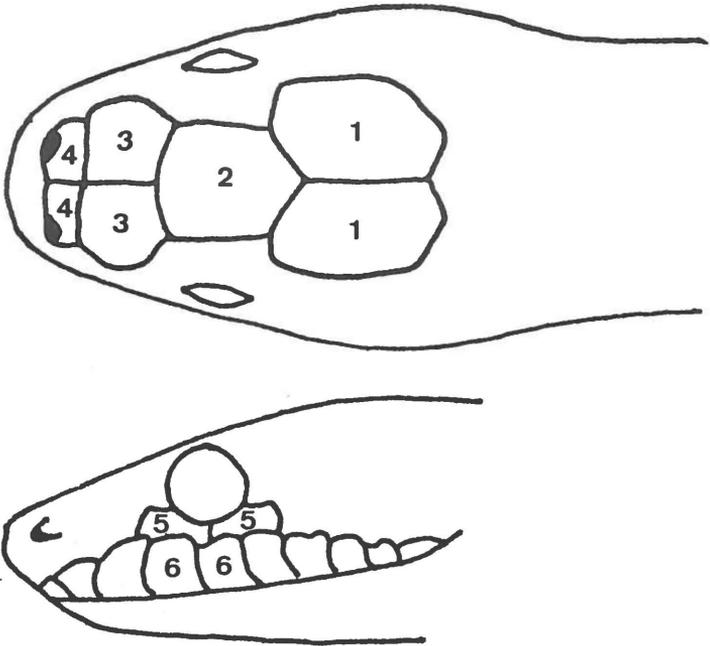


Fig. 1. The most important head shields.
 1 = parietal 4 = nasal
 2 = frontal 5 = subocular
 3 = prefrontal 6 = supralabial

pick up the book and take it with him while stealing the snakes.

REFERENCES

Stoel, P.B., 1982. The identification of snakes from their scalation. *Litteratura Serpentina*, Vol. 2 (5): 216-225.

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