

FALSE PREGNANCY IN A BOA CONSTRICTOR.

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THE TERRARIUM

The terrarium (170x95x200 cm) is made of wood and has cavity walls which are filled with insulation material. On the left side there is a window of 70x160 cm, on the front side there is a window of 150x100 cm and a sash-window of 150x100 cm. The walls and ceiling are entirely wainscoted with small branches which have been sawn through lengthwise. Three larger branches, which also have been sawn through longitudinally, can be used by the snakes as resting places. Furthermore, there are five large branches for climbing. The terrarium also contains a large water-basin. The floor has been covered with foamvinyl. An 8 Watt SL lamp gives enough light. The heating is provided by an electric hot-air heater which is thermostatically controlled. During the summer the temperature ranges between a minimum of 20°C, and a maximum of 30°C. In the winter the minimum temperature is 22°C, the maximum temperature is 28°C. In the floor of the terrarium an aluminium board has been installed. Under this board there is a 100 Watt floor heater that automatically starts heating when the temperature (for whatever reason) drops below 20°C.

THE SNAKES

The terrarium is inhabited by four boas: male 1

is five years old and has a length of 190 cm; male 2 is three years old and has a length of 150 cm. The female snakes are three and two years old and are 190 and 130 cm respectively.

THE MATING

Male 1 was sexually active from 13 October 1985 onwards; he constantly crept through the terrarium and I found strings of sperm in the water-basin. On 14 October 1985 he lay on female 1. He continuously scratched with his spurs over her entire body. His head rested upon her head and he brushed all the time from the left to the right; this went on day and night until 20 October 1985. Wherever she went, he went too, riding on her back. From 20 October 1985 until 6 December 1985 their behaviour was normal again; they ate and sloughed normally. But I was surprised to see him lying upon her again on 7 December 1985. He had wound his tail around the females tail and his hemipenis had penetrated the females cloaca. How long the mating lasted is not known.

FALSE PREGNANCY

Prior to mating, female 1 was always an avid feeder, but subsequently refused all food offered. On 15 February 1986 she ate a dead rat, but only after having been urged to do so for a long time. Initially she only ate a little, but she grew thicker and thicker. From 22 December 1985 onwards she ate very irregularly. After she had killed a rat, it sometimes took fifteen to twenty minutes before she started eating. During these months she also became very irritable. From 10 July 1986 onwards, one could notice fast internal movements in her abdomen. On 17 July she

lay with her abdomen in a position suitable for giving birth. The cloaca was opened and one could see spasmodic movements. This lasted for about fifteen minutes. On 18 July 1986 she sloughed. From 27 July 1986 onwards she started to eat normally again. From 27 July to 12 September her abdomen shrunk until it regained its normal size. On 12 September 1986 two X-rays were taken, but nothing could be found on them. It is the author's belief that the female was too young to be sexually mature, but did obviously react to sexual stimulations to mate. Indeed, she did have all the symptoms of pregnancy. Thus, false pregnancy is possible in *Boa constrictor*.

Translation: Jan Cor Jacobs.