

THAMNOPHIS, PART II: THAMNOPHIS SIRTALIS SIMILIS.

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### DISTRIBUTION

*Thamnophis sirtalis similis* is found in Peninsular Florida, in the Wakolla-area up to the Withlacoochee river (see map 1).

### DESCRIPTION

Both males and females of this *Thamnophis*-subspecies are between 90 and 125 cm long. In general the females are more robust than the males. The colour is mostly darkbrown with a dull-yellow or beige-brown dorsal stripe. The bluish lateral stripes run over the second and third scale-rows. The colour of the ventral surface is bluish. In general the animals have seven upper labial scales. Just like *Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis* they have nineteen scale-rows. This subspecies also has a single anal scale.

### THE TERRARIUM AND ITS DECORATION

The terrarium in which I keep these snakes measures 75x50x65 cm (lxwxh). Over the total length of the terrarium I have mounted a fluorescent lamp as a light-source. As a heat-source a lamp of 25 Watt is used - during the summer this burns the whole day (about 15 hours). In this way the temper-

perature from April to the beginning of September is about 35°C or higher in the hottest parts of the terrarium. In the lower parts of the terrarium the temperature is about 25°C during the day. At night the temperature falls to room temperature. During the winter months the heat-source is switched off. During this period room temperature prevails in the terrarium which gives the snakes a sort of winter rest.

Forty cm above the bottom I have mounted a shelf that is used for sunbathing. The terrarium is provided with a large watertank: 40x15x6 cm (lwxh). The substrate is peatdust. The watertank is placed on a plateau to prevent the snakes from polluting their drinking water with peatdust. The animals like to climb. For that reason I have placed a few stumps in the terrarium; they are able to hide under pieces of corkbark that are also present in the terrarium. I have tried to make the terrarium look attractive by placing some plastic plants in it. My experience is that real plants die very fast. This is partly because the temperature is too high for ordinary plants, but also because the snakes use them to climb and sunbathe in them.

## FOOD

I principally give my snakes smelt with Gistocal or Carnicon sprinkled over it. Not all *Thamnophis* species want to eat this, so every now and then they also get whiting or, sporadically earthworms.

## THE REPRODUCTION

The male tries to perform the usual actions; he climbs on the back of the female and entwines her tail with his tail. In this way he tries to push



Map 1. Distribution area of *Tharmophis sirtalis similis*.

his cloaca against her cloaca with the intention to bring in his hemipenis. The copulation can take place on the floor as well as in the branches. In the last case it sometimes happens that they both fall down. Mostly they continue mating on the ground, but when the lust for that moment is over, you can see new attempts in the course of the day or the evening.

As soon as the young have crawled out of the egg-membrane they hide themselves all over the terrarium. I always take the about 22 cm long young away from the parents and place them in a separate terrarium. It seems that there is a possibility that the parents look at their young as food and eat them, whether by mistake or not. Personally I have never had this experience with my snakes. After a few days they start to eat. In the beginning I feed them with smelt that is cut in little pieces, always with Gistocal or Carnicon sprinkled over it. After a while I give them small smelts, also with Gistocal or Carnicon on them. I never had to force-feed my young.

#### FINAL COMMENTS

The *Thamnophis sirtalis similis* is active during the summer as well as during the winter, because they do not hibernate. Sometimes they are also called *Thamnophis sirtalis floridana*, but this is not right in my opinion. I would appreciate it when someone gives me an elucidation about this. The next article will deal with *Thamnophis sauritus proximus*.

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Translation: Fons Sleijpen.