

THAMNOPHIS, PART IV: *THAMNOPHIS RADIX HAYDENI*.

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DISTRIBUTION

Thamnophis radix haydeni appears in central North-America, to be precise in the states Minnesota, western Iowa and northwestern Missouri up to the West of the Rocky Mountains (see map I).

DESCRIPTION

Thamnophis radix haydeni is a rather large *Thamnophis*-species. The females are larger than the males, averaging respectively 110 and 80 cm. The females are of a more robust build than the slender males, and also have a shorter tail than them. The colour of *Thamnophis radix haydeni* is yellow green to brown with a yellow white underside. As in most *Thamnophis*-species, they have three longitudinal stripes. The cream to yellow stripes on both flanks run over the third and fourth scale rows. The colour of the mid-dorsal stripe can vary from yellow to orange. *Thamnophis radix haydeni* has, 21 dorsal scale rows.

THE TERRARIUM AND ITS FURNISHING

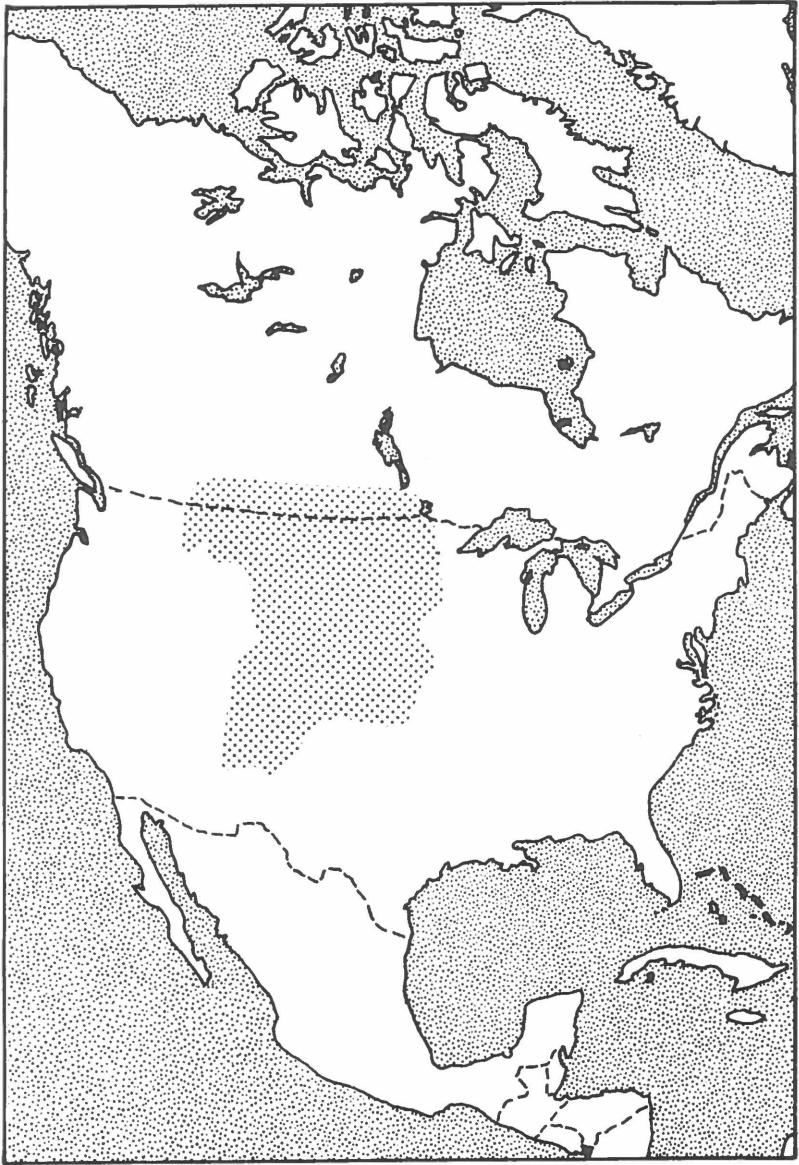
For these animals I used a terrarium that is 130 cm long, 40 cm deep and 40 cm high. Over the whole length is an illumination-hood in which a fluorescent tube of 25 Watt is mounted. A filament

Lamp of 60 Watt, which is connected to a thermostat, functions as heat-source. During six months the temperature is 35°C in the hottest area of the terrarium, while in the cooler areas of the terrarium the temperature is about 25°C. In October I slowly lower the temperature to room temperature (15°C) and maintain the animals at this temperature until February. In March I slowly increase the temperature till it reaches the summer values again. In this way I give the snakes a rest-period, although I never let them hibernate. During the rest-period I keep the males and the females separated from each other: in March I put them together again.

Thamnophis radix haydeni is a water loving snake, and consequently the terrarium has a large water bowl of 40 cm long, 20 cm deep and 10 cm high. The substrate consists of peatdust. The terrarium is further furnished with some tree-stumps, and branches to give the snakes the opportunity to climb, at the highest point I have mounted a piece of tree-bark to give the snakes a place where they can sunbathe under the filament lamp. A hiding place is provided in the form of a little box of 35 cm long, 10 cm deep and 5 cm high with a lid on it in which a hole is made. The box is half filled with saw dust. It is willingly used by the *Thamnophis*, particularly the females, in the evening when the illumination is shut off by a timeswitch

In the terrarium I have placed plastic plants. Real plants die very quickly in my experience, due to the warmth in the terrarium and also due to the climbing capers of the snakes in it.

The terrarium is completed with some pieces of lava stones, which are used by the snakes when they slough.



Map 1. Distribution area of *Thamnophis radix haydeni*.

FOOD

I mainly give my snakes smelts that are injected with a vitamin preparation. Additionally the snakes get earthworms and live fishes (roach) which you can buy in angling-sport shops. Sporadically my animals get a few strips of lamb-heart; not too much, because it is more difficult to digest than smelt. Small rodents are also part of their diet. I feed my *Thamnophis radix haydeni* by hand. However, it takes a while before they are used to this.

THE REPRODUCTION

The copulation of *Thamnophis radix haydeni* is basically the same as in other *Thamnophis*-species: the male crawls on the back of the female and twines his tail around that of the female. In this way he tries to push his cloaca against the female's cloaca to gain entrance with his hemipenis. This snake species copulates on the ground as well as in the branches. When they choose the last variant, it can happen that they fall down and have to separate from each other. Usually they attempt a new copulation effort in the course of the day or the evening.

When the young are born, it is quite a job to find them back in the terrarium, because they hide themselves everywhere. I always take the, about 15 cm long, young away from the parents, because it can happen that they are eaten by the parents. This has never happened with my snakes as far as I know.

After a few days they start to eat. Initially I give them earthworms, because this food is easily accepted. Later I give them small smelts, that are injected with a vitamin-preparation. I keep the good- and the less-good eaters apart from each

other in the beginning. It has never been necessary to force-feed my young of this species.

CONCLUSION

In my view *Thamnophis radix haydeni* was very aggressive during feeding, in contradiction to my other *Thamnophis*-species. I have done them away in 1986.

The next time I will discuss *Thamnophis radix butleri*.