



Foto 1. *Eryx conicus*, in copula. Foto: John van der Pols.



Foto 2. *Eryx conicus*, juvenile. Foto: Hans Swaak.

CARE AND BREEDING OF *ERYX CONICUS*.

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INTRODUCTION

In the family *Boidae* the Sand boa's (genus *Eryx*) are relatively small snakes. They live mainly in the warm, sandy regions of south-eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Adult specimens reach a length of 45-120 cm. Their food consists of small mammals, lizards, birds and insects. One species of the genus is the rough-keeled Sand boa (*Eryx conicus* Schneider, 1801). The area of distribution is the dry regions of Western Pakistan and South India above 30°NB. The sub-species *Eryx conicus brevis*, a dwarf form is found on the island Sri Lanka. *Eryx conicus* has a stout, cylindrical body. The epithet 'rough-keeled' is due to the dorsal scales which are strongly keeled on the hind part, especially on the short tail. The ground colour is brownish-grey or yellowish. The dorsal markings consist of a row of large, dark brown blotches, often uniting and sometimes forming a zig-zag line. On the sides there are numerous larger and smaller blotches. The colour of the belly is yellowish to white with grey mottling. Males of this species reach a total length of about 48 cm, females about 94 cm.

CARE

Eryx conicus is generally unproblematic in captivity, though some specimens are ready to bite if touched. Food consists of sub-adult mice and young rats, they regularly refuse to feed for some weeks. All animals in my breeding stock of two

males and three females are of wild origin. Consequently it is hard to determine their age. All the specimens have been in captivity for a number of years. The animals are kept in a glass vivarium of 150x40x35 (lwxhxh). Heating and light are provided by a 25 Watt reflector lamp and a bulb of 25 or 15 Watt (depending on the desired temperature). The vivarium contains rock-faces made of epoxy-resin and pieces of fossilized wood. On the floor is a 7 cm deep stratum of dry silver-sand. The average temperatures are 31°C by day and 20°C by night. The average daily light period is 16 hours.

BREEDING

I bred these boa's in 1986 and 1988. After the summer periods during which I maintained the above temperatures and light period, I lowered the daily temperature to about 24°C from the beginning of October on, by using lamps with a lower wattage. Also, the day length was changed from 16 to 9 hours. In the beginning of November I turned off heating and light, and in mid-November the animals were all separately placed in a plastic container with small ventilation holes. The bottom was covered with a 10 cm deep stratum of chips of wood. The animals were housed in a cool dusky place till January. The mean temperature was 12°C. From the beginning of January the animals were put back in the vivarium. During the first month the temperature was slowly raised to 28°C and the light period to 16 hours. Already during the first days I observed the first mating efforts. The mating period lasted until the end of April. Copulations were observed by day as well as by night. The males refused food during the whole period. It was notable that during copulation the male tried to push the female's tail above the sand as high as possible. During the last period of their pregnancy the females were lying with the back of

their bodies partially turned sideways. Furthermore, they were basking under the lamps. The young were born from the beginning of July to the end of August. Their average weight was 13 g, their average length 20 cm. In 1986 there were two litters of 10, in 1988 one of 9 young. In 1984 and 1985 there were three breeding failures. The animals were then kept in a vivarium with floor heating. About mid-June the females laid dark yellow infertile eggs measuring 17x52 mm. From my experience I tend to believe that it is better to heat the cage by means of light bulbs and spotlights, thus avoiding a permanently even bottom-temperature.