BREEDING BEHAVIOUR OF *LIASIS CHILDRENI*.

By: Bertus van der Heijden, Lepelstraat 8, 5446 AH Wanroy, The Netherlands.

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HOUSING

The females live in a glass terrarium measuring 50x50x60 cm (lxwxh). Each male lives in his own glass terrarium of 50x50x50 cm. The females terrarium has floor heating: the terrarium for the males has no floor heating. The floor is covered with paper, and there is a turned-over flower pot as a hiding place, a water dish and a branch for climbing. The terraria are further heated and lit by a 15 Watt bulb. The temperature is about 25^{0}C (day and night).

CARE

The females are fed as often and as much as they want and their food consists of rats (halfgrown) and all sizes of mice. The females grew very fast and were firm to the touch. I was somewhat worried thay thay might get too fat, but as their length was still increasing and they did not show any signs of laziness, I kept on feeding them at a high rate. The males got rather less food and their size was smaller than the females, but not their length. The males were housed separately as they immediately start fighting when being in the same terrarium and really bite each other; it is not just a ritual. Although I never found any wounds because of these bites.

MATING AND PREGNANCY

Every other week in December and January I put one of the males in the terrarium with the females and almost at once mating took place and often during the week. At the end of January the urge to mate with the males grew less and I left one of the males with the females until I was sure she was with eggs.
Here I talk all the time of one female as the other one is a year younger and not yet sexually mature. The female with eggs kept on eating up to one month before laying the eggs although I decreased the size of the prey.
When I was convinced she was with eggs I made a space in the terrarium where she could lay her eggs (a box with boiled-out peat dust, covered with filter cotton wool and this box is covered by a turned-over flower pot with a hole in it).
The snake almost immediately crawled into the box and stayed there.
The breeding room was placed above the floor heating which made the temperature in the peat dust 29°C (and in the flower pot 28°C).

BREEDING BEHAVIOUR

On the morning of 16 April the eggs were laid, it was a big clutch of eggs with the female wound around. It was impossible to count the number of eggs and at first I estimated it to be 15.
Because I saw one unfertile egg and supposed that as this was the first time there should be more in the clutch, I estimated the number of good eggs to be from ten to thirteen. On the second day I was seized by fright as I saw that the female had left the eggs and was lying on the bottom of the terrarium on the heating cushion. My first reaction was to pick up the snake and hold it with its head be-

fore the hole in the flower pot and hope that she would go in and cover the eggs again. She immediately did this flicking her tongue vehemently. When I checked on her again in the afternoon she had left the eggs again. Urging her she covered the eggs again. The next morning she had left the eggs again and this time I decided to wait and see what she would do and if necessary I would place the eggs in an incubator. After about twenty minutes she started moving again and flicking her tongue vigorously she disappeared into the flower pot. The thermometer on the edge of the eggs showed 34^{0}C.

On that day the female left the eggs about every other four hours, she warmed herself for about fifteen minutes on the hottest spot of the terrarium and went back to the eggs again. Every time the snake covered the eggs nicely so I decided to leave it at that. Up to the end the snake kept on showing this behaviour. Muscle contractions that can be well observed with *Chondropython* and *Liasis albertisii* were never seen with *Liasis childreni* and every time the temperature of the eggs dropped from 34^{0}C back to 30^{0}C, the snake went away to warm itself up.

I was not quite sure of the condition the eggs were in as the big clutch from the start got smaller and smaller and the eggs started to shrivel. The humidity was high all the time, on average round about 90%, obtained by spraying a lot.

After 45 days the first snake hatched and after four more days there were not ten to thirteen but eighteen young snakes. The female had laid nineteen eggs one of which was infertile. All the hatchlings except four weighed 9 to 10 g. One weighed 11 g, two 8 g and one 7 g. This last one died after a week. All the young shed their skin within the first week and had to be force-fed.

The day the female left the eggs she ate two, four week-old rats.

Translation: René van Marle.