
THAMNOPHIS, PART VII: *THAMNOPHIS CYRTOPSIS*
COLLARIS.

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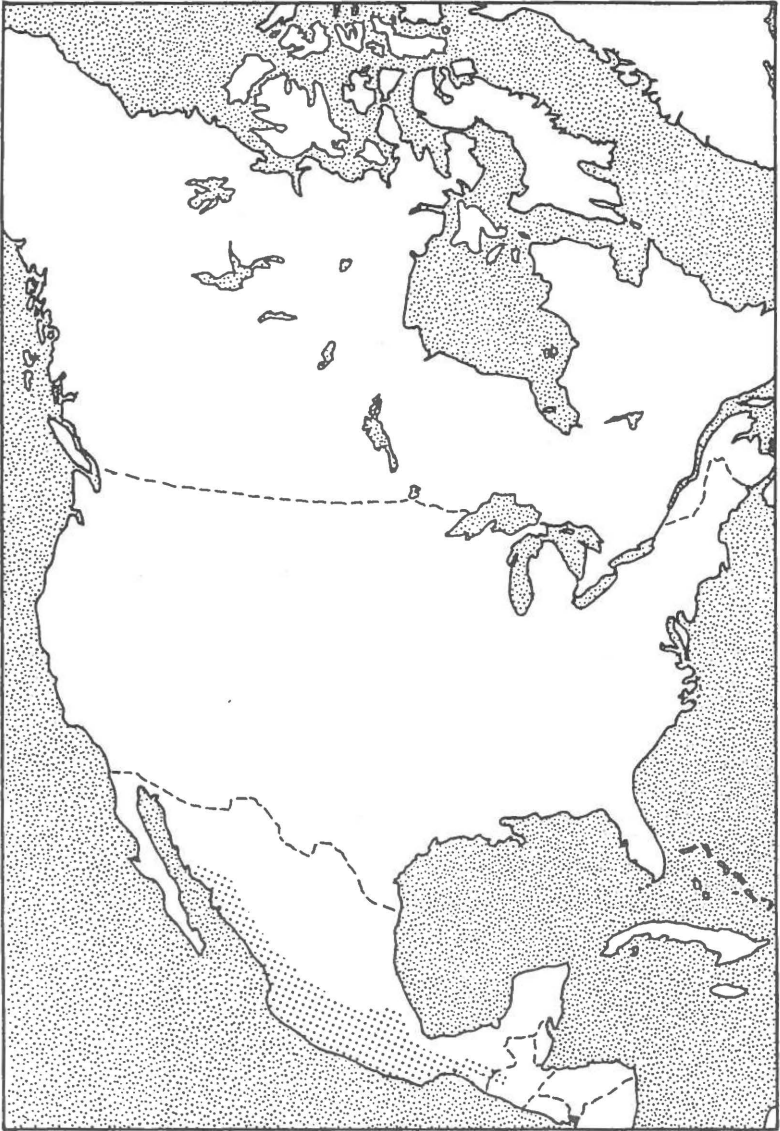
DISTRIBUTION

The species *Thamnophis cyrtopsis* can be split into the subspecies *Thamnophis cyrtopsis collaris*, which has a limited distribution area (Guanajuato) in Mexico, and two other subspecies in the U.S.A., namely *Thamnophis cyrtopsis cyrtopsis* and *Thamnophis cyrtopsis ocellata*.

DESCRIPTION

Thamnophis cyrtopsis is of very slender build, comparable with that of *Thamnophis sauritus*, but with a somewhat shorter tail which forms about a quarter of the body length. The head is large, with large eyes. The maximum length is about 70 cm.

In the other subspecies *Thamnophis cyrtopsis cyrtopsis* and *Thamnophis cyrtopsis ocellata* you will find on the neck, behind the head, two clear, black spots; between these spots and the angles of the mouth there is a whitish area. This is not so in *Thamnophis cyrtopsis collaris*. The upper side of the head is grey or brownish. The mostly brown to black back sometimes has a checkered pattern of spots which is clearly accentuated near the head, but the further you go backwards, the less sharp



Map 1. Distribution area of *Thamnophis cyrtopsis collaris*.

this pattern becomes. Over the back runs an easy visible stripe. The first three scale rows are pale-coloured and usually have a pattern that differs of that of other scale rows. These scale rows also show an irregular, narrow, black pattern. remarkable is a relatively large row of black markings along the edge of the first scale row and the belly scales.

HABITAT

Little is known about this subspecies except that it is generally found near water, although it is also sometimes found far away from water during the summer period. It is likely that the habitat preference will not differ strongly from that of the other subspecies. In the 1950's *Thamnophis cyrtopsis cyrtopsis* was far and away the most frequently seen snake in many canyons and mountain rivers in the north of Arizona. There this subspecies seemed to prefer mountainous and hilly areas in the neighbourhood of water. The food of *Thamnophis cyrtopsis cyrtopsis* consists of fish, frogs and tadpoles.

THE TERRARIUM

I keep this species in a terrarium of 30x40x50 cm (lxwxh) with peat dust on the bottom. In it is a relatively large water bowl with a diameter of 15 cm. Some branches give the snakes the opportunity to climb. On the sides of the terrarium I have mounted some small shelves, so that the animals can lay a little closer to the heat source, which consists of a filament lamp of 15 Watt. The animals regularly warm themselves near this lamp during the day. An upside down flowerpot gives the snakes the opportunity to retreat, which they do

every now and then during the day.

THE ANIMALS

Currently I am in possession of three specimens: a large female that I have owned for three years and a younger couple that I have owned for about one year. The precise age of the snakes is difficult to estimate.

FOOD

I mainly feed these snakes with smelt with a vitamin preparation sprinkled over it. Occasionally they receive whiting or earthworms.

REPRODUCTION

Just as with the other garter snakes the breeding season falls in spring. The copulation ritual is the same as for other species. The number of young per litter varies between 7 and 25. The rearing of young with small pieces of fish seems to be unproblematic. I have not yet bred with these snakes. This winter they have not really gone into hibernation, but I did bring the illumination from 13-14 hours during the summer down to 6 hours during the winter period. On the face of it, this seemed to be enough to act as a stimulant, because the first copulation inclinations have already been observed.

CONCLUSION

This was the last *Thamnophis*-species that I wanted to discuss. I am always grateful for the favour of

your remarks or considerations on the species discussed and for information about garter snakes.

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Translation: Fons Sleijpen.