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SOME EXPERIENCES WITH THE SHORT-TAILED  
PYTHON, *PYTHON CURTUS*.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since December 1988 I have kept some short-tailed or blood pythons as they are sometimes called due to their colour. The experiences I encountered with these animals I would like to share with other snake-lovers so they may benefit from this information.

I will not discuss appearances nor the habitat of short-tailed pythons, for anyone who is interested in this kind of information can find all he wants in Grzimek-encyclopedia part VI or 'Schlangen im Terrarium' by Trutnau.

## HOUSING

Although short-tailed pythons are known to be marsh dwellers and there are people who keep them successfully in this way, my own experiences with a marsh vivarium are not very good.

When I bought a couple of wild-caught animals at the end of 1988, I was advised to house them in a marsh vivarium. The

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contents of this vivarium consisted of a layer of wood shavings of about 15 cm thick kept moist by spraying the vivarium once a day.

This method seems to have been especially successful in the U.S.A.

As *Python curtus* is known to be a shy snake I tried to disturb the animals as little as possible checking on them only once a week. The other days of the week I only saw their snouts sticking out of the wood shavings. In this manner one can of course check their respiration. I found, as I checked them about the fourth time, that the animals had small swellings under the scales. They proved to have a mould infection. The male especially was in a bad condition. He also had a mould infection in his mouth.

Immediately I put both animals in a completely dry vivarium. Its contents consisted of a newspaper on the floor, a cardboard box as a hiding place and a small stone drinking trough. As a heat source I used a 80 Watt bulb.

#### TREATMENT

After consulting a veterinarian it was decided to give the animals antibiotics; a combination of nystatine oral suspension and amicol (chloramfenicol) once a day intramuscular for three days. It was also decided to bathe the animals once a day in a solution of potassium permanganate against skin moulding. After about four days an improvement in the situation was clearly noticeable. Therefore I decided to continue with the nystatine and the potas

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sium permanganate only. The treatment ended after about two weeks, after which both animals were completely recovered.

## FOOD

Unfortunately I still had not succeeded in getting the animals to eat. The short-tailed python is known to be a troublesome feeder. I tried every possible known way to get them to eat. I will give some examples:

rats - big and small ones, white and coloured, dead and alive, even rubbed with a chicken; mice - dead and alive, white and coloured ones; guinea pigs - dead and alive; rabbits - dead and alive; small chickens - dead; grouse - dead and alive; gerbils - dead and alive; hamsters - dead and alive. It was all in vain.

Of course it is of the utmost importance that the animals have a period of rest after every effort, one or two days before another try.

In spite of all my attempts I did not succeed in getting them eating. Now I can say that not only the animals were stressed but their keeper was too!

As a last attempt I tried a mature dwarf hen and indeed, the female literally took off from her hiding place, grabbed the chicken, strangled it and ate it. I watched all of this astonished.

The male still does not eat. If anyone has some suggestions I would like to hear it.

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## COPULATIONS

In the meantime I got another male; an animal of about 1.5 m long and weighing 8 kg. This animal regularly ate rats and hamsters. At September 1th, 1989 I put this male in the vivarium with the female which is 1.3 m long and weighing 5.5 kg. To my surprise I witnessed a copulation of both animals at September 3rd. More copulations occurred at 12 September, at 9, 10 and 18 October and at 26 November 1989.

After these dates I observed some mating efforts but never again a true copulation between these animals.

After meeting with the female for the first time the male refused all food completely. The female stopped eating after the first copulation.

One can not see from the outside, if the female is developing eggs, but she is not getting any thinner.

Because I am afraid to disturb something I stopped weighing the animals. In any case, if there are some developments (good or bad) I will put pen to paper.

## SUMMARIZING

The story that short-tailed pythons can not be kept in the same manner as other larger pythons is not completely true, bearing in mind that I myself have only a couple of experiences with these snakes and can not say what is right and what is wrong. I must say that it is important to write down one's experiences as much as possible and to exchange information with each other any way.

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In the end we all share the same interest: to see that the animals we have in our care get the best possible attendance and treatment. It is my hope that someone might benefit from this information. If anyone has suggestions or ideas I would be most interested to hear them.

#### REFERENCES

- Grzimek, B., 1973. The lives of Animals, Part VI, Reptiles. Utrecht, 1973.
- Trutnau, L., 1988. Schlangen im Terrarium I. Verlag Eugen Ulmer, Stuttgart, 1988.