
SENSITIVE TO STRESS OR NOT, THAT IS THE QUESTION

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INTRODUCTION

In August 1988 three captive bred asps (*Vipera asips*) came into my possession. All three of them refused to eat live or dead pink-mice. At first even cut-up pink-mice were ignored by two of them.

After many failed efforts they at last started to eat bits of pink-mice. After eating bits of pink-mice for some time they started to eat cut-up mice and even live-ones. At this moment they even ate pink-rats.

One of the juveniles grew very fast from the beginning fast, another normally, while the third one was always eating later and less often, thus this animal was smaller than the other two. Twice this has led to a close encounter for this animal.

PANIC

The first event took place after I had put same pink-mice in the terrarium and right after this made a phonecall. Five minutes later I looked in the terrarium and saw to my bewilderment that one quarter of the small snake had disappeared inside the biggest one. This didn't seem to be his favored place as he was struggling fiercely.

Teasing with a snake-hook had no result. Although it seems exaggerated, a slight panic took hold of me (sounds good) because I would rather have three than two asps. Quickly I put on my gloves and tried to pull the animals apart. This didn't succeed either. Only when I threw the contents of the water-trough over them did the bigger one opened his mouth. The little one still had a hold on a pink-mouse. He shook his head a couple of times and imperturbable ate the pink-mouse as if nothing had happened!

THE SECOND ROUND

Knowing now what could happen I kept a good eye on them from that moment at feeding-time. Even so, a second event took place which was, at least for me, even more close.

When at one time all three of them had eaten I noticed after about fifteen minutes that the big one was eaten his little brother again. This time however the last one had disappeared for three-quarters of its length. Only his back-end was hanging out. Teasing didn't help nor the water-trough. Apparently we all get used to everything. At last I held them under the cold tap which had the required result. The small one seemed pretty shaken and was just lying still in its corner.

As the big one still seemed hungry I gave it a pink-rat. He had just started on this when the small one came out of its corner and started to pull on the back-end of the pink-rat! He dragged the rat and at first his big brother across the terrarium. But the big one was keen enough to let go. The small one dragged its rat further away and

when I opened the terrarium to take away the, in my opinion, too big rat he suddenly crawled backwards over the edge and dropped on the floor. He imperturbable kept on eating the rat until it had completely gone.

CONCLUSION

This has proved that in future I shall need to keep a keen eye on my asps while they are eating and even after, so that no accidents will occur.

I am under the impression that after all these events my smallest asp isn't easily shocked!

Translation : René van Marle.