

BREEDING THE GREY RATSNAKE.

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PREFACE

The Grey ratsnake (*Elaphe obsoleta spiloides*) also called the 'Oak snake', is a medium sized snake. According to literature the animals can reach a length of about 210 cm, however, most animals will not reach this length.

The basic colour of this snake is light to dark grey with lightbrown to black blotches along the dorsal body surface. The Grey ratsnake originates from southwest Georgia up to Louisiana, and from the Gulf of Mexico up to Indiana.

MY ANIMALS

My animals , whose ages are unknown, are 160 cm (the male) and 145 cm (the female) in length. They are fed with mice, rats and frozen chicks. The male in particular prefers the frozen chicks. He even refused to eat anything else for over two years.

The animals are active by day and move around a lot. They are housed in a terrarium of 80x60x150 cm (lxwxh). The terrarium is decorated with some branches for climbing, a drinking trough, and a shelf in which the technical equipment for the lighting has been fixed.

Both animals enjoy laying on this shelf especially after they have eaten. Furthermore, the terrarium is decorated with some plastic plants and is heated by an 80 Watt bulb.

BREEDING

I stopped feeding my animals at the beginning of October 1988. I reduced the lighting and heating in November and all of a sudden I noticed a mating on 5 January 1989 without increasing the time of lighting or the heating. The only difference was that I installed central heating just before the mating took place, which stopped the animals from cooling down. Apparently this was enough to start the animals mating. After mating the female ate only one more time.

I assume that due to this the female did not have much fat reserve because on 7 and 8 February she all of a sudden laid 2 infertile eggs and on 14 February 6 eggs, two out of which were again infertile.

The eggs were incubated at temperatures between 27° and 29°C. No eggs had hatched on 18 April. On this day I made some small incisions in all of the eggs. I was stupid enough to open up one egg completely: this egg contained a fully grown juvenile which was alive, but died the next day. The other eggs hatched on 22 and 23 April.

THE JUVENILES

In contrast to juveniles of other subspecies of *Elaphe obsoleta* the offspring of the Grey ratsnake is identical in design and colouration to its parents. Another way of putting it is: juveniles of most subspecies of *Elaphe obsoleta* resemble one another but as they grow older their colour changes and for the most part they lose their design.

After shedding the three juveniles of this year all ate on their own. Two of them stopped feeding again and one died on 5 June. Last year juveniles ate pink mice and pieces of chicken fillet.