LAMPROPELTIS MEXICANA MEXICANA IN THE TERRARIUM

By: Hans van der Eerden, Kempkeshoeve 43, 5262 NV Vught, The Netherlands.

Contents: Introduction: The species - Way of life - Purchase - Care - Winter rest - Copulations - Why no result? - Prospects for 1991 - References.

* * *

INTRODUCTION: THE SPECIES

Formerly *Lampropeltis mexicana* contained four subspecies: *Lampropeltis mexicana mexicana*, *Lampropeltis mexicana greeri*, *Lampropeltis mexicana thayeri* and *Lampropeltis mexicana alterna* (with two types). Nowadays *Lampropeltis alterna* has been separated from the *mexicana*-group and *Lampropeltis mexicana* no longer has subspecies. However, there are some clearly distinguished varieties within the species, each with its own distribution area.

I think it is best to keep these varieties in their "pure form" and not to interbreed them. For ease keepers and breeders of this species therefore still speak of *Lampropeltis mexicana greeri*, *Lampropeltis mexicana thayeri* and *Lampropeltis mexicana mexicana*. This publication deals with the last mentioned form.

WAY OF LIFE

Lampropeltis mexicana lives in dry areas but not in real deserts. Dry woodland area forms the typical habitat. The species hunts for small mammals and reptiles and is mainly nocturnal.

PURCHASE

On 15 October 1988, during the Snake Day in Utrecht, I bought a pair of 1988 hatchlings from a breeder from the United States of America. The male that I chose was the smallest specimen the breeder had with him, but it was surely the nicest one.

CARE

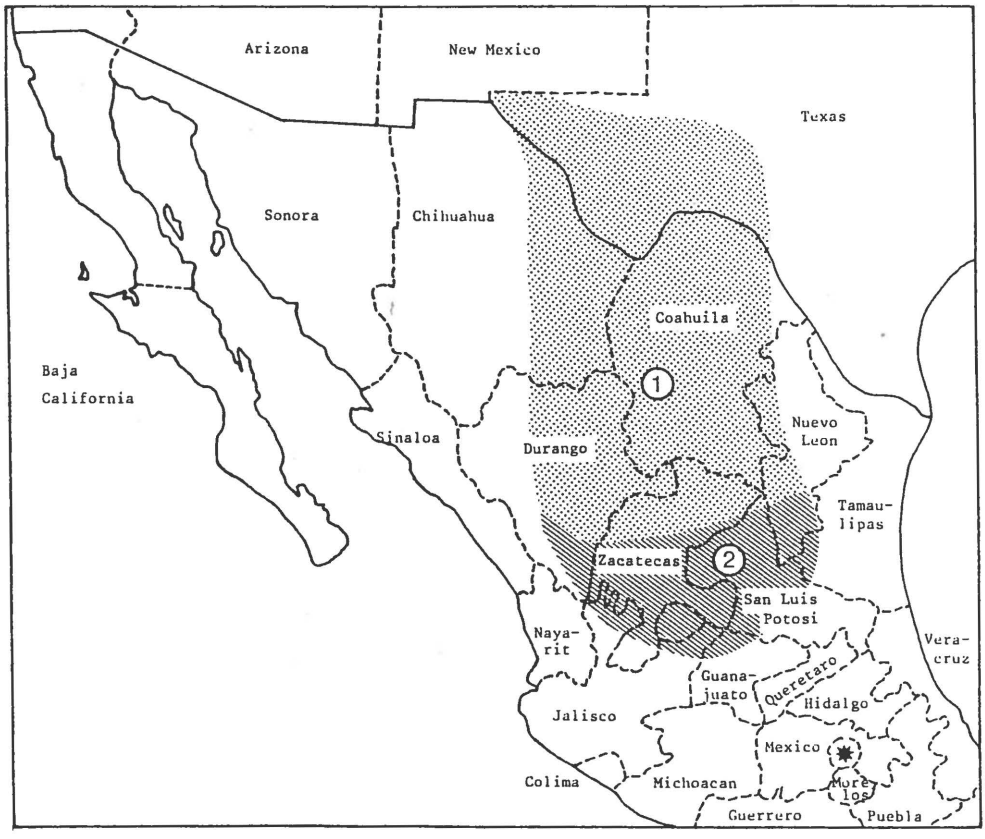
For the first few months that the animals were in my possession, the young snakes were kept separately in small containers, which were situated above a heating cable. The substrate of the containers consisted of white tissue paper. A plastic margarine tub with humid paper served as a hiding place. No drinking bowl was used because the snakes could drink the water that evaporated from the margarine tub and condensed against the walls of the terrarium.

The animals thrived under these conditions and grew well. They were fed on nest mice. The male initially preferred prey that had been deep frozen, but later on he also ate fresh prey.

Foto 1: Lampropeltis mexicana mexicana, vrouwtje, etend, female, eating; foto H. v.d. Eerden.

Foto 2: Lampropeltis mexicana mexicana, juvenile; foto H. v.d. Eerden.

After some time the snakes were moved each to a terrarium of 55x40x40 cm (lxwxh) with a substrate of aquarium gravel, and furnishedwith a little trunk, a stone and a water dish. A light bulb of 25 Watt served as lighting and heating.



Map 1: Distribution area of *1: Lampropeltis alterna; 2: Lampropeltis mexicana*

WINTER REST

From November 1989 onwards the snakes were no longer fed. They then measured about 70 cm (the male) and about 80 cm (the female). The male weighed 155 g and the female 200 g.

The animals rested from 30 November until 9 January. During this period the temperature fluctuated from 14 to 18°C. Water was always available.

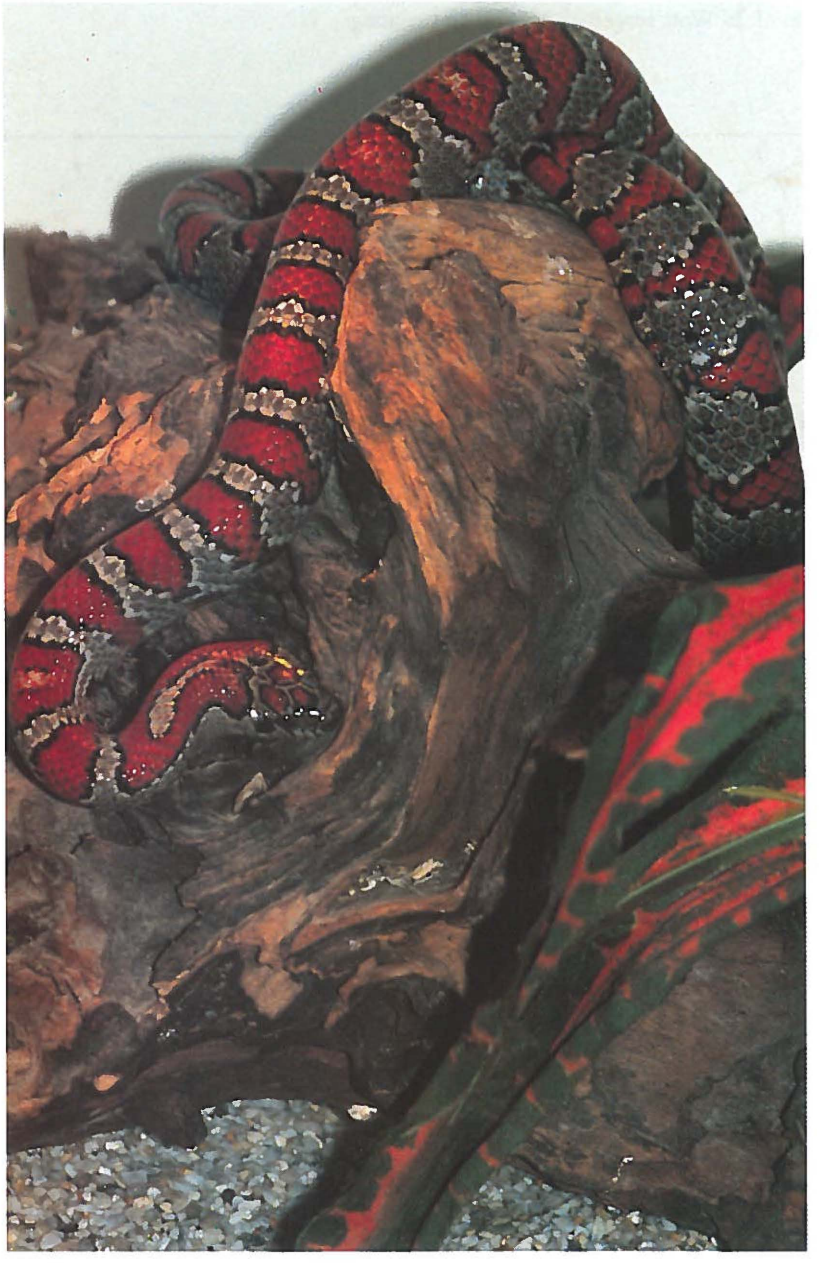


Foto 3: Lampropeltis mexicana mexicana, mannetje, male
foto H. v.d. Eerden.

COPULATIONS

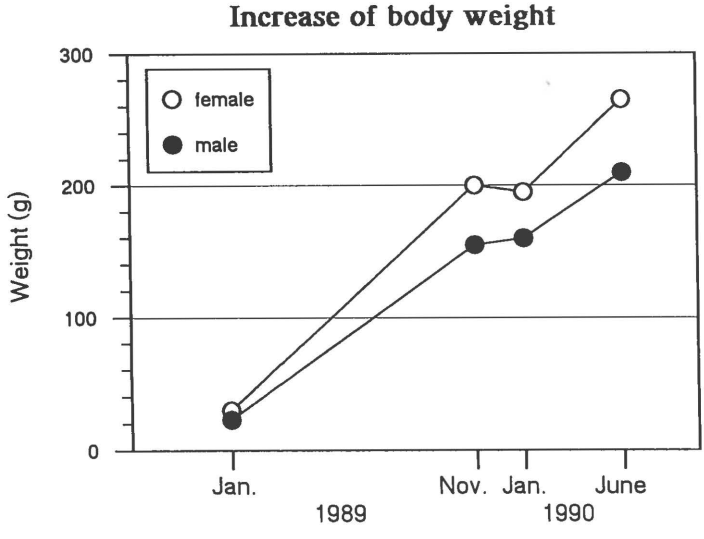
On 9 January 1990 the lamps were turned on again and the period of lighting and heating was increased from 0 to 15 hours per day. The male ate a half grown mouse for the first time following cooling off on 11 January and the female three large nest mice on 14 January.

After the winter rest the male weighed about 160 g and the female about 195 g. The female sloughed for the first time again on 2 February, whereafter the male was placed in her terrarium. Nothing happened immediately.

On 4 February the male sloughed and from then on several copulations were observed:

6 February in the evening
10 February in the morning
15 February in the evening
19 February in the morning
21 February in the morning

On 27 February the male was removed to his own terrarium. After the next sloughing of the female, on 31 March, I put a container filled with humid wood shavings into her terrarium. Right from the beginning I found her in this container almost continuously. She continued eating but I only offered her nest mice.



By mid-May she had not yet deposited her eggs. Therefore I decided to offer her an adult mouse, which was seized and swallowed immediately. Since then she smoothly ate adult mice and I forgot the idea of reproducing from these snakes this year.

WHY NO RESULT ?

Here I will list several causes which could possibly be the reason, or a combination of reasons, for the failure of my snakes to reproduce.

Quality of the prey. From the moment of purchase the male only ate prey that had been deep frozen. It could be that he sustained a deficiency for this reason, that negatively influenced the fertility.

Body weight. The animals were very small in the year preceding copulation, and the base of a good reproductive result is grounded in the foregoing year. On 27 January 1989 the male only weighed about 23 g and on 26 November 155 g. The female on 8 January 1989 weighed 30 g and on 30 November 200 g.

Winter rest. The short period of winter rest (30 November 1989 to 9 January 1990) could have played a role.

PROSPECTS FOR 1991.

This year I will give the snakes a winter rest of at least three months. The animals also are bigger now: on 3 June 1990 the male weighed 210 g, the female 265 g. The male is only offered live or freshly killed prey. If there are breeding results in 1991 I will of course report them in this magazine.

REFERENCES

Gehlbach, Frederick R., 1967. Lampropeltis mexicana. Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles. American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. Pp. 55.1-55.2.

Markel, Ronald G., 1990. Kingsnakes and Milksnakes. T.F.H. Publications, Inc. Ltd., Neptune City, New Jersey, U.S.A.

Translation: Anton van Woerkom.