

BREEDING THE BURMESE PYTHON *PYTHON MOLURUS BIVITTATUS*

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The following method for the breeding of Burmese Pythons is just one of many, but it proved to be successful. My pair of Burmese Pythons is made up of a 3 m male, and a 3.8 m female. On 10 October 1980 the female was separated from the male. At the same time both animals were cooled down to 22°C at night, with daytime temperature of 24°C. Both animals are normally remained at 29°C year around.

The two pythons were left separated until 15 November 1980 when the female was introduced to the male. The male immediately began sensing the female with his tongue but no signs of courtship were observed.

The first observed breeding was on 8 February 1981. This was a full twelve weeks after they had been rejoined. During the next twelve days, copulation was observed eleven times. In at least half of these instances spur stimulation by the male was also observed. The male would crawl over the back of the female and move his spurs back and forth over the posterior third of the female's body.

Although the first observed breeding was not until 8 February 1981, I feel that they must have bred before this. The reason being that egg laying occurred on 13 April 1981 assuming a gestation period of at least 100 days the first breeding would occur no later than 3 January 1981.

On 13 April 1981 at 8:00 a.m. the female was found coiled around a cluster of 25 eggs. These eggs were removed and placed in incubators that had been previously set up and adjusted for 32°C. The heat source used was light bulbs. The bulbs were wired to wafer thermostats. One of the incubators was a 15 gallon aquarium with a glass top, the other was a wooden box (60 by 40 cm) lined with plastic. It too had a glass top.

Within three hours an additional 19 eggs had been laid bringing the total clutch size to 44 eggs. Twenty of these eggs were placed in the 15 gallon aquarium. The substrate was moist paper towels. A layer of damp towels was also used to cover the eggs. In the second incubator there were three plastic shoeboxes filled with damp peat moss. Six eggs were buried in each shoebox. The remaining six eggs were left with the female in a small plastic swimming pool half filled with damp peat moss. She coiled tightly around the eggs and began twitching her body in order to raise the temperature inside her coils.

It was hoped that she would incubate these eggs until they hatched but after two days she had loosened her coils and some of the eggs had slipped out. All six eggs were taken from the female and placed in the incubator with damp paper towels. Out of the total clutch four eggs were considerably smaller than the rest and were found to be slugs (infertile eggs).

On 23 April 1981 three of the eggs that were in peat moss went bad. Each was cut open and found to contain a dead embryo. By 13 May an additional seven eggs from the peat moss had gone bad. These eggs were also fertile. Of the thirty remaining eggs fifteen were taken to the University of Toledo for research purposes. This left fifteen eggs, eight of which were in peat moss, the other seven were on paper towels.

The eggs in the peat moss did not look very good and were transferred to damp paper towels in the hope that they would do better, but eventually they too went bad leaving only the seven eggs on the paper towels.

On 10 June the first of these eggs hatched and the hatchling was 57.5 cm long. The incubation period for this egg was 57 days, very close to the expected 60 day period. The second egg hatched on 13 June after a 60 day incubation period. The remaining five eggs hatched by 15 June. Within ten days of hatching all of the babies had sloughed. By 5 July each had accepted a medium size mouse. Four days later they each ate two mice. After a second sloughing they will be fed two mice every ten days to two weeks depending on the growth rate.

This year another attempt will be made to breed these pythons, however, all of the eggs will be incubated on paper towels, as peat moss did not seem to work very well at all.