

SEVEN YEARS EXPERIENCE WITH *PYTHON REGIUS*

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INTRODUCTION

It gives me pleasure to tell you about my experiences with *Python regius*. On this occasion I won't go into detail regarding their regions of origin or biotope, but wish to discuss the experiences relating to seven years of keeping this species.

Like many people the first snake I bought was a *Python regius*. The reason I started with this species is because you often see them at dealers on sale at a reasonable price. Also, their non-aggressive nature resulted in my decision to buy *Python regius*. Despite these facts, I don't think that this species is an ideal snake for beginners. Wild caught specimens may fast for long periods, and up to seven months is no exception. For someone who has just started keeping snakes this really can be a disaster.

TERRARIA

All of the animals are kept in different tanks. Not all of these tanks are the same size, though on average the size is 60x50x50 cm (lwxh). In my opinion these snakes do not need a larger terrarium because normally they are very quiet and passive, and are satisfied with a smaller tank. The temperature is dependant upon the season (between 24°C and 28°C) with a maximum of 32°C beneath the heat source. A secure hiding place is indispensable for these snakes. I offer my specimens a flat terracotta shell with an opening at one side.. The animals use these hides constantly. As these shells are rather low to the floor the animals feel very safe. The tanks are simply decorated, using newspaper for the substrate, a water bowl, a piece of wood to aid sloughing, and the shell hide.

OBTAINING SPECIMENS

The specimens of *Python regius* that you find at dealers are often in a very bad condition. These animals are imported in very large numbers from their native African countries of origin. In general it is very likely that they have been kept under very poor conditions prior to export, and this is probably the reason they experience poor sloughing and are infested by many parasites. Also, they are often suffering from skin infections or wounds. In spite of this these snakes are usually very strong. I bought my first *Python regius* in September 1986, and this was also the first snake I had ever bought. This snake had all of the above problems and was heavily infested with internal parasites. Despite this bad start I bought my second *Python regius* in December of the same year.. This animal had the same problems and also mouth rot. There are no visible

differences between the two sexes and the only way to determine the sex is by probing, but this has its risks, especially with young specimens.

BREEDING RESULTS

The first matings between the snakes were observed in August of 1987. During the first year I had experimented with light, temperature and humidity, but from later experiences this does not appear to be necessary. For a few years now the light has been operated by a photo-cell, so the seasonal changes are readily perceived by the snakes.

The first year when breeding occurred the eggs were laid around early June 1988, whilst the first matings had been observed in August of the previous year. This long period before the fertilization of the eggs took place must be due to either sperm storage (*Amphigonia retardata*) or matings observed at a later date.

In the event of successful breeding taking place I offered the female a flat terracotta shell, on top of which was placed a flowerpot with a side opening and these were then placed on top of a plastic shell that could be filled with water. For a substrate I used 2/3 peatdust and 1/3 sphagnum moss. The temperature was maintained at 29°C to 34°C by an Elstein spotlight. The temperature inside the terrarium was dependant upon the room temperature. The humidity ranged between 50% and 80% and was attained by spraying the tank every day.

During the early stages of incubation the female regularly left the eggs to heat herself beneath the spotlight, but always returned to the eggs after a few minutes. I have also observed this method of 'warming-up' during subsequent years, even up until a few days before the eggs have hatched.

The incubation period lasted between 55-61 days, and from each of four annual breedings the clutches numbered 5 eggs. Five juveniles hatched from the first clutch also. The average weight of the young from the first clutch was 80 g to 90 g, and from the second clutch 50 g to 60 g.

The incubation of the third clutch was not without problems, and only 2 of the 5 eggs hatched. Two of the eggs were infertile, and the third contained identical twins, but only one of these survived. The fourth egg was slit but the youngster failed to emerge. The fifth egg was open to reveal a live youngster but it wasn't fully developed and was still attached to a large yolk sac. Incidentally, this youngster survived.

The last (fourth) clutch of eggs was incubated artificially in an incubator. The average temperature was between 29°C to 30°C and the humidity between 70% and 90%. The eggs lay threequarter buried in small cut pieces of foam that were used for the incubation medium. This clutch hatched after 68 days, a slightly longer period of incubation than for those eggs brooded by the female in previous years. All of the eggs from this last clutch hatched, and the young were placed in separate small containers with a water bowl and a hiding place.

Normally after ten days the young have sloughed and started to feed on small mice. Usually the young are easy to feed without any problems (no rule without exceptions). If you feed them well from the beginning, moving them on to another owner is no problem.

I would like to remark that the adult male refused to feed after a period of fasting until I noticed that he was interested by the smell of a rat I was feeding to another snake. From that moment on he began feeding on rats, which, in the past, he had always refused to eat. Even now he only eats rats and refuses to eat mice, his preferred food prior to feeding on rats.

In 1991 some of my snakes were involved in an experiment involving pregnancy research in snakes. This research was an initiative of Dr. Marc Maas, and involved observing snakes for several months using echographs (Ultrasound). This check-up took place every two weeks to record changes in the snake and was carried out at the University 'De Uithof' in Utrecht. To avoid risks I decided not to use the adult female *Python regius* as the permanent research snake.

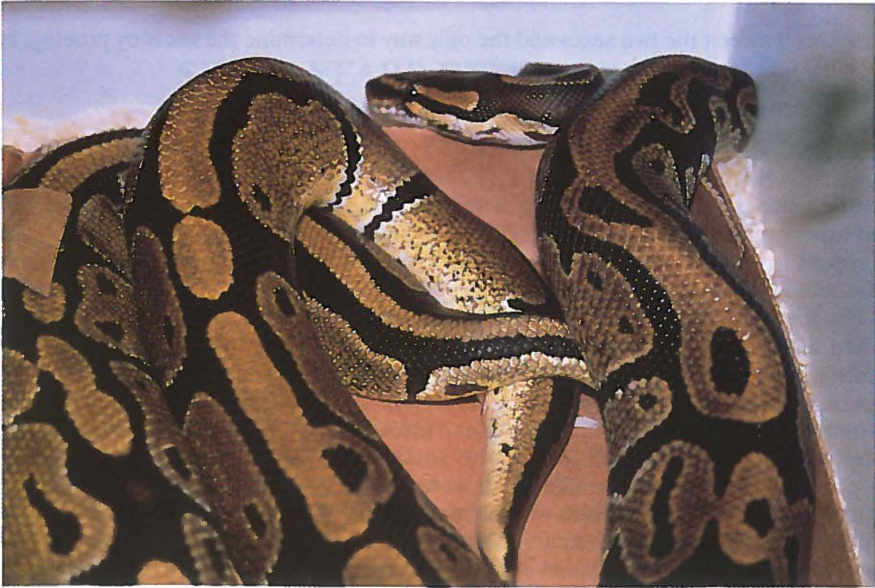


Foto 1: *Python regius*, in copula.
Foto C.M. Langeveld.

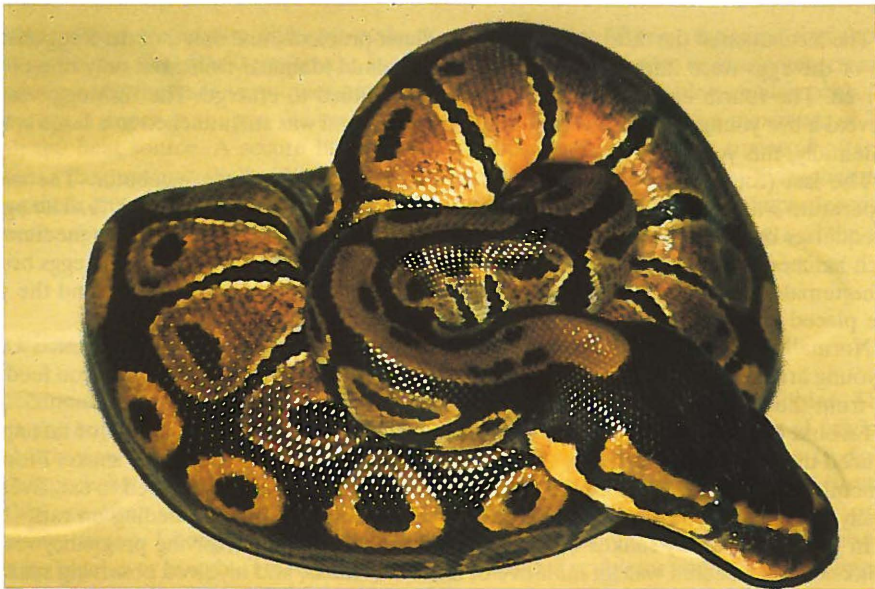


Foto 2: *Python regius*, jong dier vlak na geboorte,
juvenile just after birth. Foto C.M. Langeveld.

From the occasions that the snake was subjected to echographs this had no effect on her eggs, and all the eggs she laid hatched successfully and the young were also healthy and didn't suffer any visible damage from the invisible sonic waves. The second snake that was involved in this research subsequently proved not to be gravid, and so her involvement was discontinued. Other snakes of mine that were involved in these experiments gave birth to young, or laid eggs without any problems or complications.

The purpose of this article is to interest other snake keepers in *Python regius* because despite the fact that large numbers can be found at dealers only a few people attempt to breed from them.

It is sad to know that hundreds of these snakes are imported in single shipments and most of them seem doomed to die, because one thing that is certain is that they are beautiful snakes.

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