HERPETOLOGIA

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BREEDING THE BALL PYTHON, *PYTHON REGIUS* (Shaw 1802) UNDER NATURAL CONDITIONS

By Karim Temara, Gustave Schildknechtstr 76, 1020 Brussels, Belgium

English correction by John Weir.

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Ball pythons *(Python regius)* caught in the wild are not easy to breed in captivity because they need a long period to adapt to captivity and to start feeding. Captive bred ball pythons on the other hand are good feeders and their docile nature and relative small size make them interesting animals for herpetoculturists. This means that there is a great demand for them from the pet trade and it is therefore necessary to increase the number of captive-bred ball pythons available.

In my opinion the best way to breed snakes is to respect their ecology. Therefore I attempted to keep them under the correct environmental conditions, the most important being temperature and rainfall, other important conditions being photoperiod and food cycles.

The age of both imported animals was not known but they were without any doubt sexually mature. The male was about 90 cm in length and the female reached about 110 cm. Both animals were kept separately in their own full glass terrarium 70x45x60 cm (lxwxh). The climatic conditions in the terraria were adapted to the conditions as they occur in the grasslands of West Africa. During the dry season, i.e. from November to February, daytime temperatures sometimes reached 32°C and were lowered to 22°C during the night. During the rest of the year a temperature of 29°C was provided with a drop to 27°C at night. The photoperiod was 16 hours of light and 8 hours of night. Between November and February these periods were reversed. Water was always present but only in very small quantity during the dry season.

During the prebreeding conditioning period (from early November till late February) food was given sparsely and during these four months the female was placed in the cage of the male several times a month. The male refused all food during the four months of conditioning whilst the female accepted food until early February and began to refuse items from the 9th of February until one month after laying her eggs. After the 11th of February the female was separated from the male and she laid seven white eggs on the 6th of May. All eggs hatched after 66 days and the young were in good health. The sex-ratio was three males and four females.

In nature environmental factors like temperature and rainfall might be important to induce mating. The importance of the photoperiod is not well known. In my opinion the combination of this kind of environmental data can be helpful in order to produce as many captive-bred reptiles as possible. This will hopefully help to stop imports.