# AN UNINTENTIONAL BREEDING OF WATER PYTHONS *LIASIS FUSCUS* IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

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In August 1991 I had in my collection, two Water Pythons. One was approximately 180 cm in length and the other 150 cm. At this stage I did not know the sex of either snake and having had no previous experience in sexing snakes I did not try for fear of injuring them. These snakes, as is all of my collection, are housed in individual cages. I prefer to keep them this way as any health problems are then isolated.

The cages are constructed from plywood, with a glass front, and measure 100x60x50. The back is pegboard and the top opening lid is also made from pegboard and is on a timber frame. The cages are painted with a gloss paint and white tablecloth paper is used to line the bottom of the cage. Branches for climbing are driftwood and adorned with artificial plants for cosmetic reasons cnly. The hide boxes are made from plastic cooking bowls, turned upside down, with an appropriate sized entrance hole cut in each.

Each cage is fitted with one 40 watt light globe. The light sockets are fitted through each cage lid and boxes are constructed, as in Fig.l, to surround the globes to prevent any body burns. These covers are screwed to the cage lid and have a hinged section on the front to allow easy access to replace blown globes. The hinged section, as well as the bottom

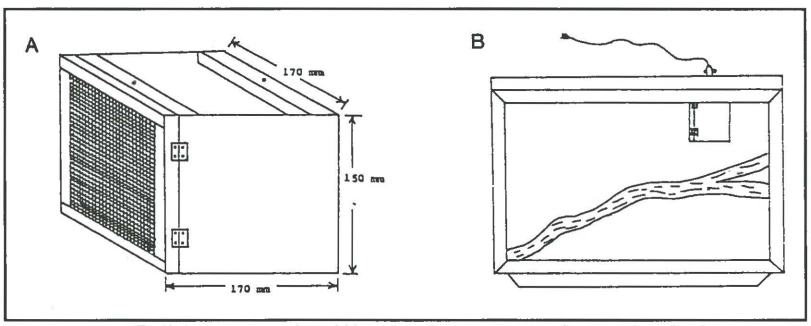


Figure 1A en 1B: light protector box (A); nylon flyscreen gauze is placed at the front, bootm and back of the box. The top of the box is screwed to the lid of the terrarium.

and rear of these covers are covered with nylon flyscreen. Whilst these lights are used for warmth on the few winter nights that they are required, their main purpose is to provid better viewing. In Fig.2 the overall view of the light/heat source is shown. One Sunday, early August 1991, I was in the process of cleaning out my cages when I noticed the lid of one of my Water Pythons cages was damaged and required immediate repairs. To do this I was compelled to place both Water Pythons together in the same cage. They were left together for about 2 weeks, the time taken to repair and repaint the damaged cage. After this period they were seperated and nothing more was thought about it.

About mid October, the larger of the two snakes (which I now know to be a female) started to refuse food. I was not overly concerned as the snake did not appear ill in any way but it was noted as unusual. Having not bred snakes before, I had no suspicion that it might be gravid. Towards the end of November I noticed it appearing to lay half on its side, slightly 'belly up'. It was at this time that I had my suspicions that it was gravid.

On returning home from work on Friday 29th November '91, I went to check on my snakes, as is normal, and discovered, to my delight, that the Water Python had laid 10 eggs. Now I was faced with the problem of what to do with the eggs - leave them with the female - or remove them for artificial incubation. I did not have an incubator as such, but on phoning a couple of herp friends I decided to artificially incubate them.

I went to the local hardware shop and purchased an ordinary styrofoam esky. I then placed the following in it, each layer about 40mm. Blue metal, coarse gravel, fine gravel, sand and finally peat moss. (see Fig. 2).

A length of garden hose was placed in one corner of the esky and sunk through the substrate to the level of the blue metal. The hose was then cut off about 25mm above the peat moss. This hose allowed water to be poured into the substrate to help with moisture and humidity. A plug, made from a cork, was used to close off the hose to prevent the hatchlings from crawling down it.

The eggs were removed from the coils of the female and placed in the esky, on top of the peat moss. A small amount of water, approximately 100 ml, was then poured down the hose and the inside walls of the esky were misted with a hand spray and the lid then placed on the esky. It was then placed on a shelf in the snake shed. From then on I misted

Foto 1: *Liasis fuscus*. Jong. Hatchling.
Foto: Brian Barnett.

the inside walls of the esky every couple of days and poured a small amount of water down the hose every fortnight.

I did not have a thermometer in the esky and at no stage was water sprayed directly onto the eggs. Also, at no time was any artificial heat source used to incubate the eggs. Temperatures in North Queensland, at that time of the year, are high, ranging from a minimum in the low twenties (°C) to a high in the mid-high thirties (°C).

Humidity at that time of the year is usually around 90%. All that was left to do now was to wait and hope.

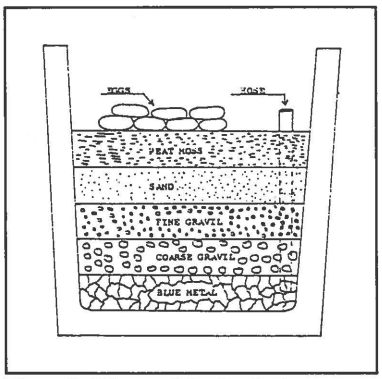


Figure 2: Esky used for incubation.

On the 24th February 1992, 86 days after laying, the first egg was found to be split wit a head protruding. Two more hatched on the 25th and by the evening of the 28th all but three of the eggs had hatched. On the 2nd March I opened the remaining eggs and found that they had not developed and were solidified.

All seven juveniles were healthy although one did have a slight spinal deformity near the cloaca.

One mistake that I did make at the time of hatching, although I didn't realize at the time, was to house all of the newborn in one cage. By three weeks of age, all had sloughed and food in the form of small mice was offered but all had refused to eat. One week later and the ones that I had retained for my own collection still refused to eat.

It was at this time that I contacted Simon Kortlang who then suggested that I purchase some plastic lunch boxes, or similar, and seperate the young as the first step in getting them to feed.

This I did and in the plastic boxes I placed small plastic lids for water containers and a small cardboard hide box. Just before dark, I placed a small dead mouse in each of the containers, just outside the entrance to the hide box. I then turned out the shed lights and shut the doors, resulting in total darkness. When I went check to the containers a couple of hours later, success, they had all eaten. Since then they have never looked back.

I owe this success to Simon and Ray Fields of Townsville for their advice and direction given without hesitation.

This breeding may have been unintentional and purely accidental but the end result was still the same. My aim in this article, is to encourage others, whether you have simple or elaborate facilities to have a go. You may be pleasantly surprised at the end result. We can all learn from one and other and the value of knowdledge both gaining it and sharing it is priceless.

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