



HERPETOLOGIA

A column for short herpetological contributions

DIFFICULTIES WITH OBTAINING SERA

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The fact that in The Netherlands venomous snakes are much easier to come by than serum may seem odd to some but it is the sad truth. Recently we had a conversation with our physician - who is well aware of the fact that we own both venomous and non-venomous snakes - after which we were given a tourniquet but for serum he directed us to the local pharmacist.

When we visited the pharmacist and told him that we would like to obtain serum he looked at us in utter disbelief. So on our next visit to him we made sure to take some proof, things like breeding reports and some literature on snake bites and their treatment. Among this was a book published by the American Navy that deals with these matters in great detail. However, he was not at all interested as in his opinion he, as a pharmacist, was very capable of dealing with these matters. However, he did ask us for a complete list of all the venomous snakes we owned at that time. This list included - at the beginning of 1995 - sixteen different species and subspecies of cobras and green and black mambas. Everybody who is familiar with the potency of the venom of Elapidae knows that in case of a bite the serum must be available immediately.

One week later we returned to the pharmacist. We were told that he had sent our list to the Amsterdam Zoo 'Artis' but that he had not yet received an answer. Two weeks later there was still no answer and we were told that the experts from 'Artis' could not be hastened. At this moment, one and a half years and about 30 young cobras later, we still have not had any word from our pharmacist.

We wonder if there are other people - in The Netherlands and abroad - who have experiences (positive or negative) with obtaining serum. When it turns out that for non-professionals it is difficult or even impossible to obtain sera, maybe the Snake Society can play a role in this matter. In the end the Society has a broader view on the number of people that own venomous snakes. Furthermore there is increasing legislation on the keeping of snakes and by optimising the availability of sera we can show that we are capable of dealing with our hobby in a safe and responsible way. If you have any experiences with obtaining sera we would really appreciate it if you would contact us.

*Translation from Dutch by René van der Vlugt.
English corrections by Mark Wootten.*