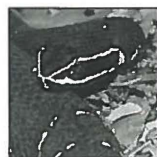




*A column for short
herpetological contributions.*

HERPETOLOGIA



'More haste less speed'

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Since 1987 I keep and breed reptiles as a hobby. This hobby started with the keeping of frogs and has extended with time and I now keep many different reptile species.

In 1993 I got fascinated by venomous snakes. I still think venomous snakes are the most fascinating reptiles that exist. I was determined to start keeping and breeding them. My first venomous snakes were a couple of *Trimeresurus albolabris* and after a successful breeding attempt my hobby just expanded.

In april 1996 I obtained a couple of semi-adult *Agkistrodon bilineatus* which I kept in a terrarium of 80x50x50 cm (lxdxh). The previous owner had warned me for their aggressive behaviour and relatively strong haemotoxic venom.

On June 14 1996 I noticed some faeces in the waterbowl of my *Agkistrodon bilineatus*. That day I did not have a lot of time for my hobby but at 12.00 o'clock I decided to quickly change the water (very wrong). Instead of using a pair of forceps - something I normally do - I did this with my bare hands (very wrong). I opened the glass door of the terrarium and put my right hand

in to take the waterbowl out. The male *Agkistrodon bilineatus* was laying close behind the waterbowl and moved forward very quickly and bit my hand twice. I immediately felt his fangs in my upper hand close to my second and third finger. Of course I was frightened and immediately pulled back my hand and closed the glass door. Fortunately my wife was at home and she immediately brought me to the hospital.

Directly after the bite a small swelling appeared which turned blue and a little amount of blood came out. Reaching the first aid station the swelling had grown bigger and started to become painful. I told the doctor what had happened and he did everything he could to help me.

At 12.10 my whole hand was stiff and swollen and the pain became more intense. Before I was taken to the intensive care ward they took X-ray photo's from my heart and lungs. At 12.30 I was at the intensive care, and in the meantime the doctors had decided to order an antiserum from the zoo 'Artis' in Amsterdam.

At 2.00 p.m. I was given four ampoules of polyvalent antiserum, in the presence of four doctors and three nurses. This supervision was necessary because of the possibility that I would suffer heart-failure or get into a shock. Luckily this did not happen but in the meantime my hand had become strongly swollen up to and above my wrist. That afternoon I had intense pains in

my hand and arm that were difficult to alleviate. At 02.00 a.m. that night another four ampoules of antiserum were administered. The swelling of my right arm lasted until the evening of the next day. My upper arm had a circumference of 43 cms, normally this is 31 cms. I was afraid for gangrene in my arm and hand when not enough oxygen would be transported into my arm because of the swelling. Luckily this did not happen and my arm and hand were saved.

At June 15 the pain finally decreased. My arm had turned bright yellow and my veins were bright red. On Monday June 17 I was discharged from the intensive care and was taken to a regular ward. From Tuesday June 18 on the swelling in my hand and arm slowly decreased, however, the place of the bite and the area in between my second and third finger had become numb. On Saturday June 21 I was released from the hospital. I still had pain in my wrist and under- and upper

arm but that should go away. Up to now, Wednesday July 3 I still have a lump at the place of the bite and this is, together with the first two phalanges of my second and third finger, still numb.

Keeping venomous snakes is a hobby in which you **always** need to stay alert.

Translation from Dutch by Fons Sleijpen

Agkistrodon bilineatus bilineatus.



Photo: G. Maccbiavelli