

FORCE-



FEEDING

J. van Tessel,
Tijnstraat 3, 3551 GK Utrecht, The
Netherlands. Ph.: +31-30-2432695.

Those who read the issues of *Litteratura Serpentina* with a special interest for everything that needs to be done in order to get starving snakes or snakes with feeding problems to eat, cannot fully avoid the impression that the worst thing for a snake keeper to happen would be to have thirty-odd young of which not a single one wants to eat. Or that his larger animals contract a disease which wreaks havoc with their appetite. Or that he has acquired a rare snake of which he is not able to find out its food preference, while in the meantime that animal really has to eat something. In that case, there is no alternative but to start experimenting with different kinds of prey animals, whereby - let's be honest - you have to resort to all kinds of nasty methods: cutting up, skull crushing, smearing out their innards, only the tails, going about using a pinky pump and lots of other misery. And all those force-feeding techniques can have the nasty side-effect of unwantedly damaging the throat- and oesophagus area of the snake, and that

despite all your efforts you may still see your snake slowly die. And if I would not read those stories in *Litteratura Serpentina*, I would hear them from people who come to me to get their prey animals.

I have thought about the problem of force-feeding and I think I found something which is friendly to the snake and which avoids the harsh treatment of prey animals. I came upon the idea of making capsules, of which I will specify the contents below:

- white fishmeal
- shrimpmeal
- wheat- and cornflour
- carotenes
- alpha-starch (carbohydrates)
- calcium carbonate

Photo by M. van der Pal



Holding down the snake.

- rice
- bran
- oil
- copper sulphates
- vitamin A, E, D, E12 supplements
- zinc oxide

Force-feeding can be a tricky business. However, by handling the snake as illustrated in the photographs it is simple: you let the snake crawl through a plastic tube (suited to its girth and length); at the front you fasten the upper- and lower jaw onto the braces shown on the photograph. Through this opening you can easily administer the capsule that has been described above, or medicines. It seems to me that this kind of method is also recommendable - either with or without the help of stump tweezers - for venomous snakes. The capsule is made of gelatine (powdered bone-meal) which is soluble in water. To ease swallowing it is advisable to put a little olive-, sunflower-, or salad oil onto it. When the snake has swallowed the capsule, it can just drink some water afterwards.

I tested this method by experiment. I bought six snakes; I force-fed three of them with capsules, the other three were fed normal mice, and this was done for three months. I could not find any differences between the two groups with regard to faeces, growth or sloughing. Afterwards I continued feeding mice to all six animals and that did not seem to be too hard a change for those snakes that had been fed capsules until then.

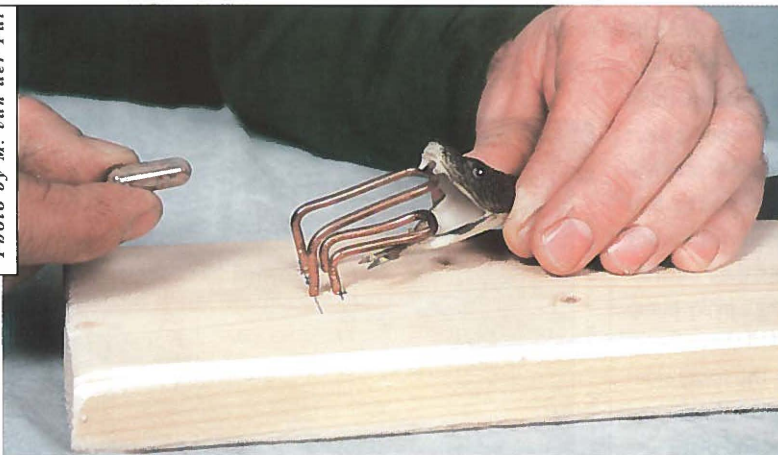
■ FORCE-FEEDING TONGS

While I am still on this subject, I might as well tell something about another idea of mine, which does not really belong in a magazine that deals exclusively with snakes, but which might be of interest to some readers: force-feeding tongs for tortoises (see drawing). You use the tongs in the following way: take the tortoise in your hand and tickle it under its chin, hopefully it will open its mouth. If tickling is unsuccessful, you can try it with the back of a small spoon, for example. Then, if its mouth

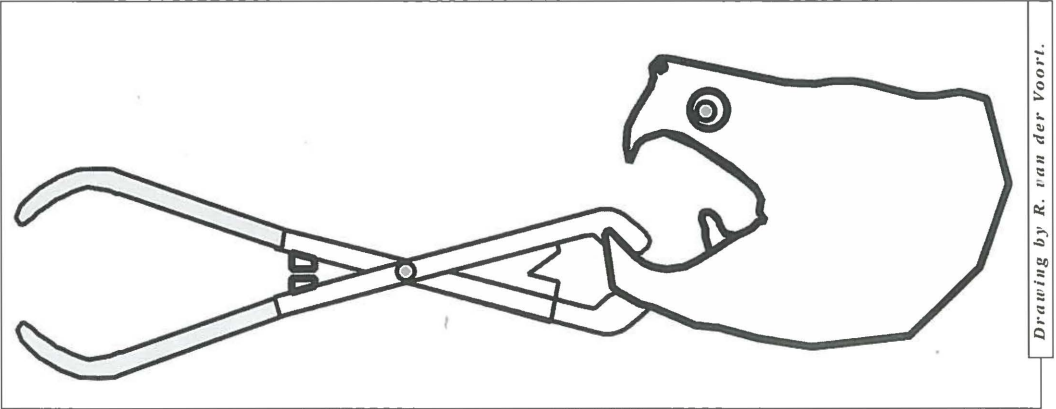
is open, you put the narrow part of the tongs in its mouth, and the big part underneath the chin. Close the tongs carefully, and gently pull the head outside. You can then administer the force-feeding or the medicines.

Such tongs are available in every hardware shop as pliers or pointed tongs. You have to bend such tongs a little bit yourself to adjust

Photo by M. van der Pal



Administering the capsule



Drawing by R. van der Voort.

Holding the tortoise

it to the size of the tortoise. It is to be recommended you make sure by way of an adjustable little screw, that you will not be able to squeeze the tongs so tightly in your enthusiasm that you crush the jaws of the tortoise that way.

I want to offer my thanks to the firm of Pruyt Hillen B.V. for offering the capsules. I am open to your findings and remarks.

Translation from Dutch by Astrid Gomes.