

# CHONDROPYTHONS FROM BANGKOK?

*Joachim Bulian*

Mr. Deng's Siam Farm in Bangkok was always worth a visit for snake keepers with a special interest in Asian snakes. Apart from a great variety in reptiles and amphibians from all over Southeast Asia, one could also get information from well-informed staff assistants on behaviour and natural biotopes of the animals on sale. For instance one of the members of the staff who worked on Siam Farm was Merel J. Cox, the author of 'Snakes of Thailand'. The closing down of the Siam Farm several years ago was a great loss, since a source of first class information and a first class dealer of reptiles and amphibians disappeared.

Surprisingly, a new market for reptiles has developed in Bangkok over the last two years. This market can be found on the Suanjatujak weekend market, just opposite of the Morchit bus station. On this enormous market all kinds of animals were used to be sold, mainly fish, birds, dogs, cats and rodents. Only one dealer sold snakes, mainly *Boiga dendrophila*, *Boiga cyanea*, *Ahaetulla prasina* and *Chrysopelea ornata*. Most of these animals however were in bad condition due to the lack of knowledge of the dealer.

Two years ago this situation changed, when a young

Thai imported *Iguana iguana* into Thailand, bred them and sold the young animals on the market. They were an instant success, maybe because of the film 'Jurassic Park'. Young iguanas with a length of about 60 cm were sold for 2000 baht (about £ 45,-). The interest in the iguanas was so big that even the Bangkok Post published a full page on the reptiles on the market. This caused other reptile dealers to come to the market and also sell iguanas and other reptiles.

During my last visit in January 1996 I was surprised to see a market comparable in size to regular reptile markets in Europe. Amongst the reptiles for sale were:

**Giant snakes**

*Chondropython viridis*  
*Liasis albertisii*  
*Liasis amethystinus*  
*Liasis mackloti*  
*Morelia argus variegata*  
*Python molurus*  
*bivitatus (albino)*

**other snakes**

*Boiga cyanea*  
*Boiga dendrophila*  
*Chrysopela ornata*  
*Elaphe guttata*  
*Elaphe obsoleta*  
*Lampropeltis getulus*  
*Ahaetulla prasina*

**turtles**

*Geochelone elongata*  
*Testudo graeca*  
*Geoemyda spinosa*

**lizards**

*Iguana iguana*  
*Heloderma horridum*

As far as I could tell almost all snakes were in a good condition. Because I am especially interested in giant snakes, I asked for some prices. I was surprised to hear that almost all dealers asked the same price: 6000 baht for giant snakes. That is about £ 145. One dealer asked 8000 baht for a *Chondropython*, but this species was almost completely blue. Of course, these prices were not fixed, as usual in Thailand, and one has to bargain for a lower price.

It is clear that the enthusiasm for keeping reptiles is increasing in Thailand and it can be expected that this market will develop.

Readers of this article who would like to go to the market in Thailand, have to be warned that all animals are offered without the Cites-documents. This makes legal import into Europe impossible.

Another problem I would like to mention is the breeding of *Iguana iguana* in Thailand which could lead to falsification of the natural fauna in this country. Friends living in Thailand have already seen the first iguanas living freely in the suburbs of Bangkok. It might be feared that

just like in Florida some twenty years ago, a wild population will develop.

*Translation from Dutch by Jan-Cor Jacobs.*