

Reincarnation: The Return of Tut

*Beatty Dimit,
Pacific Northwest Herpetological
Society*

From the town of Stoneham, Massachusetts comes an object lesson in responsible herp-keeping. Anthony Ferrari, a resident of that burg, says he "likes to live on the edge", according to an article in the *Boston Globe*. In this article, run August 13 1996, *Globe* correspondent Pamela Ferdinand describes how "on edge" the whole town has become since his banded Egyptian Cobra, "Tut", was so mischievous as to wander from his front yard when let out to "sunbathe". A week later, he informed the police of the disappearance, saying he had assumed it was dead. One can understand Ferrari's reluctance to alert the authorities, as he had not complied with Massachusetts State law's requirement of a permit for keeping a venomous snake, and was therefore subject to a fine of \$50.00 or more, or a maximum of 30 days in jail. Leslie Morrison, of the *New England Herp. Society* is quoted as having said the "penalty" for being bitten, assuming antivenin was at hand, could be hospitalization for up to a month at a cost of up to \$10,000.00.

All of this takes on a new dimension when you know that Mr. Ferrari lives(d?) across the street from the local elementary school, and summer vacation was winding down. Hunting for a dangerous animal is an unfair temptation to subject preteens to at that stage of boredom. Among the humorous (to all but one, perhaps) aspects of the ensuing alert was a rubber snake draped over a flower pot to scare birds away - a representative of the local constabulary lacked the birds' option and had to try to apprehend the "critter", while wind, or some other force, caused the tail to

move about in parody of life. Two days later, Ms. Ferdinand did a follow-up article with some details:

- the cobra was purchased through a REPTILES magazine ad;
- federal wildlife laws could up the ante to a \$250,000.00 fine and up to 5 years in prison, as the animal came from out-of-state;
- Ferrari, whose name he changed from Barry Corbett, has a lawyer for a father and vice-versa;
- Tut, along with having yard privileges, enjoyed the local night life - Ferrari had taken him to a nightclub to show him to an exotic dancer who kept snakes herself;
- police, on top of posting "beware of snake" signs and searching as well as they could, advised citizens to use a carbon dioxide fire extinguisher to immobilize Tut until authorities arrive.

On August 16, the *Globe* ran a tongue-in-cheek article by one Patricia Smith, suggesting a Stoneham town motto of "Welcome to Stoneham - the town that looks down". She also theorizes on the hormonal relationships between changing one's name to Ferrari and precipitating such a crisis, while crediting the snake non-keeper with needing a prop for his singles bar line: Hey, babe, wanna feel my snake?

Ultimately, the snake was found. November 6 saw yet another article in the *Globe* announcing the capture IN A CLASSROOM that day, and saying it had been turned over to a "snake expert" till the powers decided what to do with it.

The next day an article by Jordana Hart disclosed that the cobra was found by a fourth grader who was about to reach for his lunch when he realized he had a sala-

mi sandwich with snake. While the students ate in the cafeteria, a teacher trapped it under a recycling bin. Tut, tut, Tut. Ferrari was finally arraigned on the federal charge.

In the overview, a pair of statements in the first article stood out for me. That one opened by saying that Tut was "only the latest in a series of dangerous pet snakes" in this guy's collection. A few paragraphs later, Ms. Ferdinand says: "Unknown to neighbors, he had kept boa constrictors and pythons".

It is unfortunate that such idiocy shows its face from time to time within our avocation, but also that the press can not be satisfied, even with so sensational story as this, without milking it for the extra thrill of bringing in the boids as cut from the same cloth as the Elapids. That, though, is showbiz.