



SNAKES AS CARRION EATERS!

*Erik Nijhof,
Reiger 32,
9781 XA Bedum,
the Netherlands.*

■ INTRODUCTION

In general people believe that all snakes are predators, that they only catch living prey which they only consume after killing. Sometimes they eat their prey while it's still alive. By exception snakes might eat carrion. The only example from literature that I know is

Agkistrodon piscivorus. It was new to me that other snakes are carrion eaters too.

■ THE EXCURSION

I am working as a teacher with children who have learning problems. I change my way of teaching regular to keep these children interested. I decided to take them out on excursions into the countryside. One of these excursions took us out to an area with a high population of vipers (*Vipera berus*). It was our goal to find and catch a viper. There

Vipera berus, adult male, recently sloughed. (From: G. Naulleau, *Les serpents de France*, page 40)



was the possibility that we wouldn't find a snake after hours of searching. But I took the risk knowing that vipers were common in this area, it was 20 degrees Centigrade and it was the month of May.

Within 5 minutes we found the first viper: an adult female eating some kind of bird with the size of an adult blackbird! The head and the intestines of this carrion-bird were missing.

This prey was obviously much too large for her. I decided to unhook her and let her go. Within 30 minutes we found two other vipers (a male and another female). Three snakes in half an hour; not bad at all!!

■ EPILOGUE

After such an observation some questions remain:

- Did the viper only go for the smell and did she overlook the size of this carrion-bird?
- How did she start eating if the head of the bird was missing?
- Did she loose her manners by eating a carrion-bird because of extreme hunger?

Maybe you have ever observed something like I describe here. Write about it, our magazine can use some articles.

translated from Dutch by Gijs van Aken.