



AELIANUS

The Roman scientist Aelianus lived in the second century AD (160 – 230). He is the author of a book that, had it been published in English, probably would have been titled “On the peculiarities of animals”. The work consists of seventeen so-called books in which randomly all kinds of facts on many different animals are listed. Aelianus collected these facts from Greek scientists of which some, like the famous Aristoteles, had recorded personal observations of animals in the wild. Observation to which, over time, many strange notes were added. Also on snakes Aelianus had much to say. In the coming issues of *Litteratura Serpentina* you may now and again find a small piece of information on snakes, taken from Aelianus. Particularly so whenever we need a small piece of text to fill a page. For those who are interested in the works of Aelianus: all text is taken from ‘Aelian, On the characteristics of animals’, with an English translation by A. F. Scholfield. In three volumes. Loeb Classical Library. London. 1971 (I), 1969 (II), 1972 (III).

The male Viper couples with the female by wrapping himself round her. And she allows her mate to do this without resenting it at all. When however they have finished their act of love, the bride in reward for his embraces repays her husband with a treacherous show of affection, for she fastens on his neck and bites it off, head and all. So he dies, while she conceives and becomes pregnant. But she produces not eggs but live young ones, which immediately act in accordance with their nature at its worst. At any rate they gnaw through their mother’s belly and forthwith emerge and avenge their father. What then, my dramatist friends, have your Oresteses and your Alcmaeons to say to this?

(Aelian, *On the characteristics of animals*. With an English translation by A. F. Scholfield. In three volumes. Loeb Classical Library. London, 1971, 24)



The curious fertilization and birth of a viper. (From: M. Nissenson en S. Jonas, *Snake Charm*, page 76. Harley 4751 Manuscript, folio 60r., ca 1230-1240).