

# **F**OR A MOMENT I STOOD STAGGERED

**A. Wijnen,  
Buizerdstraat 6, 5451  
XX Mill, The Netherlands**

Sunday morning around ten. We had just returned from a trip to the South of Germany where we had had a meeting with three fellow snake keepers. This because I was interested in some colour morphs of *Acrantophis madagascariensis*. In the book by R. Roos is a picture of a magnificent animal. In my opinion a beautiful dyed picture. That colour morph we could not find however we did find a pair *Python curtus bongersmai* that were as red as a tomato so they went home with us. I was very pleased with them. At that moment it was nearly midnight and we were about 100 km south of Munich. Our driver was able to keep his eyes

open till about one o'clock, then we had to stop to sleep for some hours in the car. So around ten in the morning we arrived at my house. My plan was to quickly put the snakes where they belong and then spend some hours on the couch. When I opened the door of the snake room I noticed this typical smell that I immediately associated with baby snakes being born. Okay, lets have a look then. All I could see was a big mess with in the middle one baby lying on its back while the mother was lying in a far corner. I was not very happy with this situation and I went out to get a bag to clean things up. I took the young out and then my friend cried out "it's got two heads!!!". I had not yet noticed it but he was right.. I was astonished and it even was alive. So, better put her apart which is what we did. The little animal quickly buried itself



*Acrantophis dumerili*. Photo by A. Wijnen





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in the turf. Behind the mother another seven young were hiding, each of them much bigger and with only one head.

The first two months the two-headed young was not very keen on food. Since also a couple of young *Chondropython viridis* did not yet eat well all were fed using the syringe and you could almost see the young *Acrantophis* grow. She knew exactly what she wanted: a warm place be it dry of damp. After her second slough she readily accepted young mice. I was curious to see how she would handle food but I was afraid that it would disturb her too much. Some mice down the road I could no longer restrain myself. It turned out she grabbed the mouse with her right head but was hindered in this by the left head. Fortunately that


head was not interested in food at all. The left head reacted completely independent of the right one. One wonders what goes on in those heads, both figuratively and literally. My vet really wanted to have a look inside her but I am afraid that the vets will have to wait until she is dead.

The year after, the same mother kept under identical conditions, gave birth to nine normal young. At this moment my two-headed one has moved to the U.S.A.

Something about the *Dumerilli* in general. It is a Boa that occurs on Madagascar. Comparing the zanzinia and also *Acrantophis madagascariensis* it is clear that they are related although each species has evolved and adapted under its own con-



*Acrantophis dumerili*. Photo by A. Wijnen



ditions. My animals are quiet and curious by nature and they like their privacy. So far I have not yet given them any medication. They are always keen on food especially after giving birth (and a gestation period of six months). How can you tell when an animal is gravid?? They can be a slightly darker colour. Everywhere in the terrarium you will start to find little pieces of urea, no longer these large chunks. After a few months of cooling down in the autumn you don't have to tell my males what they have to do with a female. Two males with one female is not such a good idea. They will try everything to chase away the other one and strangling and biting is normal then. Talking about horniness, I once placed a male with the female

and when he was only half in the terrarium she had already urinated all over his head.

So when are the babies born?? My animals deliver approximately one week after sloughing, either very early in the morning or late at night. I want to emphasise that other animals can be totally different in their behaviour and reactions. This will depend on their origin, character and conditions under which they are kept. Give them either high or low humidity, cool or warm and you can discover a lot about these animals and get a lot of satisfaction from them.

Translation from Dutch by *René van der Vlugt*

