

# SOME OBSERVATIONS ON DEKAY'S WORM-EATING SNAKE, *STORERIA DEKAYI VICTA*

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## INTRODUCTION

About 12 years ago my brother and I accidentally came into possession of a female specimen of the North-American worm-eating snake, *Storeria dekayi*. Determination showed that this was the subspecies *Storeria dekayi victa*. Some time later we also acquired a male, which we put in with the female in an attempt to breed them. Unfortunately the female died after a while and we were forced to get another specimen. This new female turned out to be gravid. In this article I would like to describe this fascinating snake.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL

*Storeria dekayi victa* is a small, brown snake, which, on average, reaches a maximum length of about 50 cm. The markings on the back consist of two longitudinal rows of small, dark spots. On the neck the snake has two rings, a light one behind the head followed by a dark-brown ring. The head is small, about the width of the body. The ventral colour varies from light brown to grey with the occasional dark spot.

## NATURAL HABITAT

This snake can be found from the Southern tip of Florida to the swamps of Okifenokee. It is

mainly found in swampy areas near small lakes, ponds and streams, where it hides in vegetation like the water hyacinths that grow there.

*Storeria dekayi* mainly feeds on worms, snails, small salamanders and insects. The prey is not constricted, but usually swallowed alive.

## IN THE TERRARIUM

*Storeria dekayi victa* is quite a shy animal that hides under leaves, rocks and bark at the least disturbance. I have housed our animals in a terrarium of 50x30x30 cm (l x w x h). The bottom of the terrarium is covered with boiled coarse sand on which I have placed large and small pieces of bark.

Because the head of this snake is small, it is hardly capable of biting the hand of the owner and doesn't do this often. When it feels threatened, the snake will flatten its body followed by mock attacks.

Because this snake is a shy, nocturnal hunter, it isn't a very attractive animal for the terrarium as far as that is concerned. It does remain fascinating to see how the snake ingests the prey it has caught.

## REPRODUCTION IN THE TERRARIUM

As mentioned at the beginning of this story, the second female was gravid at the moment it was acquired. *Storeria dekayi* is ovoviviparous. We





witnessed the birth of the young. The female crawled restlessly around the whole terrarium, looking for a suitable place to give birth, not only under the pieces of bark that were scattered around the terrarium, but also beneath the water bowl that was placed on the sand. She finally chose that spot to give birth to her eleven young.

From the moment of birth the markings of the young are identical to those of the parents. The only difference is the colour, light grey with a lightly coloured ring in the neck. The light grey gradually turns browner with time.

Unfortunately the young were so small and fragile, that they perished shortly after being born. Some were eaten by the adults, who may have mistaken them for prey. The rest died as a consequence of being moved to another cage.

The moment I noticed the parents were eating the young, I moved the remaining animals to another terrarium. Shortly after that they also perished. We don't know the true reason for their deaths, but it could be that the animals were not viable from the beginning. Another possible reason could be that we removed the young from the terrarium, thereby wounding them in such a way that they died.

#### CONCLUSION:

*Storeria dekayi victa* is an attractive looking snake, easy to keep and adapts quite well to the terrarium. People who want to breed this snake will be faced with the difficult task of raising the young.

#### LITERATURE

Ashton jr, R.E., and Ashton, P. Handbook of the Reptiles and Amphibians of Florida (The Snakes), pp.132-133.

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*Translation from Dutch by Ron Winkler  
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