

# **A**N ADULT *NAJA KAOUHTIA* WITHOUT A TONGUE

*Johan Mavromichalis*

A few years ago I acquired an adult pair of albino *Naja kaouthia*. The former owner told me the animals weren't in very good condition, they both had severe cold. The male had some condition, but I immediately noticed the female had a swollen nose, there was also white fluid oozing from her nostrils.

In the specific cobra defense posture she looked even more out of condition, it was also hard for her to maintain that position.

As a precaution I immediately treated the animals for flagellates. I placed them in separate containers, and kept the temperature in the terraria at a constant 32 °C, with 90% humidity.

After 6 weeks of recovery I fed the male, this was successful, and from that day on he has fared well, eating every prey item offered.

The female didn't make any progress during those six weeks, although it seemed that the fluid from her nose was a bit clearer. I therefore decided to force feed her with a cocktail of vitamins normally used for humans; a multi-vitamin preparation from the local chemists, to which I added minerals such as zinc, selenium and extra vitamin C. I added the latter for its viral inhibiting factor.

She kept losing weight so I force fed her with naked rat-pups, lubricated with egg albumen. Unfortunately she regurgitated them.

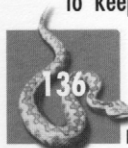
It was only then I noticed that she had no tongue! I hadn't seen it before and I doubted if I would be able to keep her alive. Because, as we all know, the

tongue is not only used as a means of picking up scent to locate food, but also to remove material such as wood chips or sand from the animals mouth. After I discovered her handicap I gave her newspaper as a substrate, from then on I never had to clean her mouth again.

When, after 12 weeks she looked very emaciated I decided on a different approach. I bought a can of cat food (mousse) and added a raw egg and some calcium (Gistocal). I fed this mush by using a syringe and a catheter. I started by giving her 20 cc each week. She didn't regurgitate the mush, so after a month I raised the amount to 50 cc. I also tried to tempt her by placing pre-killed prey in front of her hide-box, but she didn't show any interest in the mice, rat pups or chicks I offered her, not even after I damaged the noses of the prey animals.

Finally after 6 months the fluid from her nose was gone. I tried to feed her live prey, but she refused to eat, although I could see by her defensive pose, she was much stronger and more alert. I had already resigned myself to the fact that I would have to force feed her for her entire life, but for me her sheer beauty would have compensated that. I would only force feed her once every two weeks, and I have done so for a year and a half without any problems. In the mean time someone told me about a Burmese python he bought, this animal also had no tongue, and died prematurely without ever eating.

Then it occurred to me that when I fed her neighbours, two *Naja nivea*, the female *Naja kaouthia* began to show interest in the live mice.. So I decided to offer her a live mouse, she immediately grabbed it behind the head, and held on to it until it died. After she had swallowed it I gave her a second



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mouse, which she grabbed in the same way, only this time she started eating it from the hind legs forward, but due to her size (approx. 1 meter) this posed no problems.

I decided to leave her and wait to see if she would digest the mice properly. The temperature in the tank was about 30°C, dropping to 21 degrees at night. Everything went according to fashion, and the next time I fed her she ate 4 mice.

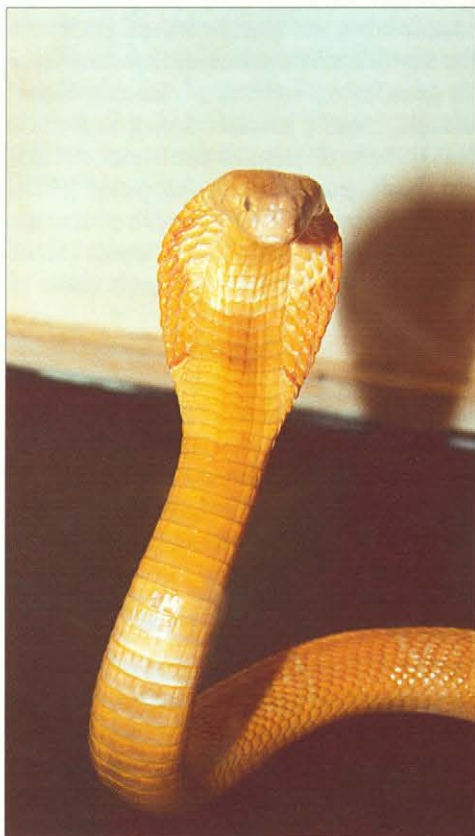
Now after two and a half years she regularly eats mice, although not always live ones. Her appearance is great but she almost spends all of her time in her hiding box. I really have to attract her attention when I feed her. When I place more than one prey item in her tank there are always some remaining dead mice left which she has bitten only to let go of and bite another one. It also occurred that if the mouse bit back, and she let go of it, she wasn't able to track it. It seems she really needs visual stimulation to trace her prey. If I (by using a long forceps) move a dead mouse in front of her she will eat it.

I give her water by placing her body in the water, so she can surely find it.



Her handicap has made her very reclusive, she never crawls around searching for prey. It seems she knows that I will attract her attention at feeding time, and she accepts her life the way it is. I'm not sure if I can breed this pair. I don't know whether the loss of her tongue occurred due to an accident or infection. In my opinion it does not seem to be genetic.

*Translation: Peter Schilperoord  
Corrections: Lawrence Smith*



*The Naja Kaouhtia without a tongue.  
Photo by Marcel van der Voort.*