

A CASE OF MULTIPLE EGG CLUTCHES IN AN AFRICAN BROWN HOUSE SNAKE (*LAMPROPHIS FULIGINOSUS*)

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INTRODUCTION

This African snake has scientifically been called both *Lamprophis fuliginosus* and *Boaedon fuliginosus*, it belongs to the subfamily *Lycodontinae*. It is a small snake, which is able to reach a length of about 100-120cm (39.4 - 47.2 inches). It is very common in Africa, where it is widespread from southern Egypt and Morocco as far as all areas of South Africa.

It is adaptable to different environments. It is possible to find it in savannah, in steppe and, often, in urban areas (houses and buildings). This last habitat explains the common name. The African house snake preys upon lizards and, especially, rodents. It is able to swallow very large prey. It is oviparous and is prolific, it can lay up to 25 eggs, also multiple clutches are not unusual in this snake.

CAPTIVITY

The African house snake is not exacting regarding its cage. I keep my snakes (one male and one female) in simple fauna-boxes, made of plastic. Generally I keep them separately. I use newspaper as a substrate and some bark as hide-boxes. In the cage there is also a small container with water. The temperature range is 22°C to 30°C

(71.6-86°F) and the humidity is about 70%. I give mice as food, both alive and dead. These snakes are great eaters of rodents.

FIRST CLUTCH

My friend put both snakes in the same cage during September 1998. Mating happened at the end of the same month. During the gestation he offered only pinkies. The female stopped eating at the beginning of November. 7 eggs were laid on the 24th November 1998.

He incubated the eggs in an artificial incubator ("au bain marie"), with a temperature of 29°C (84.2°F) and a humidity of 100%. After 65 days all eggs hatched, the young measured 20-22cm (7.8-8.6 inches). They sloughed after 5 days and they fed on pinkies.

SECOND CLUTCH

My friend gave me his pair of African house snakes in March 1999. From the first mating, both snakes were kept in separate cages and therefore never mated again. The female stopped feeding during July 1999 and laid 9 eggs on the 1st of August 1999. I incubated the eggs in my artificial incubator ("au bain marie") with a temperature of 28-30°C (82.4-86°F) and a humidity of 80-100%. The incubation was shorter than for the first clutch, it was only 49 days. Just 3 eggs hatched, the others were sterile. The three young measured 20-22cm (7.8-8.6 inches) like the first generation. They sloughed after 12 days.



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Lamprophis fuliginosus

BREEDING DATA

<i>Date of mating</i>	<i>Date of laying</i>	<i>Date of birth</i>
25-30 / 09 / 1998	24 / 11 / 1998	28 / 01 / 1999
-	01 / 08 / 1999	18 / 09 / 1999

	<i>Gestation (days)</i>	<i>Incubation (days)</i>	<i>No. eggs</i>	<i>No. young</i>
First clutch	55-60	65	7	7
Second clutch	*	49	9	3

(*) It is impossible to know the gestation of the second clutch as it is a case of sperm retention.

CONCLUSION

This is a case of multiple clutching in the African house snake. The basic mechanism of this particular reproductive strategy is sperm retention. This is usual in many reptiles. Which need to mate just one time, to be able to lay fertile eggs in different clutches. Sperm retention is advantageous, as it enables the number of fertile clutches to be increased, without further male and female interaction.

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Corrections by Mark Wootten