

# All oiled up

**Jan-Cor Jacobs**  
**W.A. Vultostraat 62**  
**3523 TX Utrecht, The Netherlands**  
**E-mail: [ess-secretary@wxs.nl](mailto:ess-secretary@wxs.nl)**

'Blood mites are no fun' and 'Experiences with two methods to control snake-mites' were the titles above two articles in the first issue of *Litteratura Serpentina* this year. Indeed, there is nothing funny about snake-mites and unfortunately, sooner or later every snake keeper will have his or her own experiences with eradication methods.

I have also had my experiences with snake mites. Fortunately these were quite some years ago but after reading the two articles the memories soon came back to me. Especially when I read about the use of pesticides, something not without risk, I decided to start up my word-processor. This is because when the infestation is not too big, there are some simple methods to get rid of these pests.

I suffered from snake-mites when I had just started snake keeping. The terrarium with a size of 90 x 40 x 40 cm was placed in a shed and was inhabited by two garter snakes, *Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*. One day I noticed tiny dots crawling on the white water bowl. I had no idea what they could be ... so I left it. Then the tiny little dots crawled onto the snakes, started to feed on their blood and soon they developed into blood red droplets. Then even for a layman it was obvious that my snakes were infested with snake mites.

At the end of the seventies, books on reptiles were rather scarce and in my bookcase there were maybe only three books. One of them was the Guide for the terrarium ('Gids voor het terrarium') by Harry van

Meeuwen and Dieter Lilje. In this book I found a useful tip against ecto-parasites. The use of olive oil or cod-liver oil ointment. The infested animals should be rubbed with the oil, which will effectively form an airtight seal around the parasites. The mites will suffocate and after about half an hour they can be carefully removed using forceps. The authors recommend repeating the treatment after a few weeks. Unfortunately I did not have any olive oil or cod-liver oil ointment in the house, so I used some salad oil instead. Using a brush, the snakes were rubbed in oil until they gleamed.

The big advantage is evident, the snake is kept free of all toxic pesticides. The big disadvantage is also clear, the mites that are not on the snake but in the terrarium is not harmed in any way. This is where the middle course offers an solution, disinfect the terrarium with dichlorvos, trichlorfon or any other pesticide to get rid of the mites, and put the affected snake during this period in a clean container, for instance a fauna box. In this way, the snakes can easily be cured from mites and ticks, without getting them in direct contact with any pesticides.

*Translation: René van der Vlugt*  
*Corrections: Mark Wootten*

Remark from the corrector:

I would add a comment to this article, based on my experience of Dichlorvos and Oil treatments:

- 1 Please note that Dichlorvos is a carcinogen and should not be used indiscriminately. Some species such as *Gonyosoma* react very badly to Dichlorvos.
- 2 Extensive use of oil can have a softening effect on the snakes skin and have the disconcerting effect of the scales lifting off. This is temporary and will be rectified when the snake sloughs.

*Mark Wootten*

