snake breeder

The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts

IN THIS ISSUE...

* **THE CHILDREN'S PYTHON, *Liasis childreni*, with NOTES ON CAPTIVE BREEDING**

Canadian snake keeper Scott Allen describes his success with the Children's Python.



Liasis childreni Photo: Roy Stockwell

* **EXPERIENCES WITH BURMESE PYTHONS, PART II**

Mark Hatcher continues his article about Oscar the Burmese Python.

* **INFO**

A brief guide to the contents of the latest editions of Reptile Keeper International, Litteratura Serpentium and Royal News.

* **BOOK REVIEWS**

Reviews of The Care and Maintenance of the Green Iguana and Digest for the Successful Terrarium.

* **CLASSIFIED ADVERTS**

This month's issue includes advertisements for Royal Pythons, Boa Constrictors, Burmese Pythons, Brazilian Rainbow Boas, Egyptian Sand Boas, Corn Snakes, Grey Rat Snakes, red worms and the amazing Gambian Dwarf Crocodile Rescue Project T-Shirts! If you have surplus animals for sale why not take advantage of our free classified section.

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Snake Breeder

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We always need articles and news items for Snake Breeder. The number of people keeping reptiles is growing rapidly and many newcomers to the hobby may benefit from your advice, experience or tips. Don't worry about minor points such as speeling or . punctuation - we'll sort that out. In return for your contribution we'll send you five free copies of the newsletter containing your article. Your favourite aunt or uncle will view you in a new light when you present them with a copy of Snake Breeder containing your work. We look forward to hearing from you - soon!

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Snake Breeder
November 1990 11/90

The Children's Python, *Liasis childreni*, with Notes on Captive Breeding by Scott Allen 3

Info: Snakes in Print & Miscellaneous 6

Experiences with Burmese Pythons, Part II by Mark Hatcher 8

Book Reviews 11

Classified Adverts 12

Cover photograph by Roy Stockwell - *Liasis childreni* with a clutch of 13 eggs.

NEW SUBSCRIPTIONS & RENEWALS

Welcome to the following readers who have recently subscribed to Snake Breeder or renewed their subscriptions.

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Snake Keeper Back Issues

We can still supply back issues of our previous publication, Snake Keeper. If you would like a list of contents and prices telephone (0494) 722769 or write to Snake Keeper Publishing (Back Issues), 159 Stanley Hill, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9EY.

The Children's Python, *Liasis childreni* (Gray, 1842), with Notes on Captive Breeding

by Scott Allen

Taxonomy:
The taxonomy of Australian pythons is currently in a state of upheaval. In the last five years, Children's Pythons have been referred to as *Liasis childreni* (Smith, 1985), *Morelia childreni* (Storr, Smith & Johnstone, 1986) and *Bothrochilus childreni* (Wilson & Knowles, 1988; Hoser, 1989). As well, McDowell, 1975 suggested merging *Liasis* with *Python*. As these taxonomic problems are beyond the scope of this paper I will use *Liasis childreni* which is still the commonly accepted designation.

Description:
The Childrens' Python is one of the smallest pythons, reaching a length of 1 to 1.7 metres. The dorsal colour is a dark purplish brown with numerous darker, smooth-edged blotches. Occasional unmarked specimens are found in the western part of their range. The ventral surface is white to cream with an opalescent sheen.

Habitat:
This is primarily a ground-dwelling python found in humid and sub-humid areas of northern Australia. This nocturnal snake is found in a wide range of habitats from desert to monsoon forests. It is one of the most common snake species in the areas in which it is found.

Biology:
Small mammals and ground nesting birds make up the major part of the diet. Small lizards and frogs are occasionally taken, especially by young specimens. Breeding in the wild usually takes place in the spring with an average clutch of about twelve eggs being produced in the summer. Eggs are frequently deposited inside termite mounds or under rotting logs and are usually 'incubated' by the female as in other pythons. The young hatch out in about two to four months (Hoser, 1989). The young are about 25cm in length and similar in colour to adults, though somewhat brighter with a more pronounced pattern.

Captive Husbandry:
Due to its small size, the Children's Python is one of the easiest pythons to keep and breed in captivity. A cage measuring 60 x 30 x 30cm with a few pieces of tree bark or other form of hide area is sufficient for one or two adults. A water bowl of sufficient size for soaking in is used occasionally when the snakes are due to slough. A temperature of 24 to 28° C with a drop to about 20° C at night is suitable. I found that my specimens preferred to use the hide areas at the cooler end of the cage. *L. childreni* is prone to obesity in captivity. A meal of one adult mouse every week to two weeks is sufficient. This feeding regime can be increased a little for a couple of months before cooling the animals for breeding.

Breeding:
Two pairs of adult *L. childreni* were used for this study. The snakes were maintained separately at 27° C on a 14:10 hour day/night cycle. The temperature in their cages would drop to about 21° C at night. Light and heat were

controlled by using incandescent bulbs of varying wattage, depending on the ambient temperature. All four snakes were housed together in various combinations for various time periods, beginning on the 29th of November 1989. Breeding groups were heavily misted with cool water two to three times weekly, just before the cage lights went off at night. No courtship was ever observed. Occasionally if two males were together in a group, one would bite the other and immediately let go. Copulation was observed on numerous occasions from the 29th of November 1989 to the 12th of December 1989 involving both males but only one female. No interest was ever shown by either male in female number two. The snakes were separated on the 30th of December 1989 after no copulation had been observed for two weeks. Female number one started to show some swelling in the posterior region by mid February 1990 and by mid March was definitely gravid. Eggs could be felt by gentle palpation of the ventral surface. She was frequently observed basking upside down under the lamp in her cage. She continued to take small meals right up to the 3rd of April 1990. A plastic box with an entrance hole and half filled with sphagnum moss was provided. On the 21st of April 1990 16 eggs were deposited in the box. Four appeared to be infertile and three of the remaining 12 were only about half the size of the others. Some of the eggs were adherent in clumps of two or three but the remainder were separate.

Incubation:
An incubator had been prepared by installing a one gallon jar filled with water in a styrofoam box. A submersible aquarium heater was placed in the jar of water and set to provide a temperature of 32° C. Evaporation from the gallon jar provided the necessary humidity. The eggs, which the female had attempted to coil around and 'brood', were removed from the female's cage and placed in a plastic shoe box, half filled with damp sphagnum moss. The eggs were nearly covered with this moss, and the box was placed in the incubator. The cover was periodically removed from the shoe box to check the eggs for mould or dehydration. It was never necessary to add water to the shoe box although the gallon jar required frequent topping-up. All 16 eggs were incubated initially and infertile or dead eggs were discarded as they showed definite signs of decomposition. A number of dead eggs remained adhered to fertile eggs without causing any harm. On the 9th of June 1990 the first egg slit and by the 11th of June 1990 seven young had emerged. The two remaining eggs were opened revealing full term, dead embryos.

Care of Neonates:
Six hatchlings measured from 200 to 240mm and were coloured and patterned identical to the adults. One hatchling was badly kinked for its entire length but appeared to be the same size and colour as the others. The neonates were housed individually in plastic tubs on damp sphagnum moss with a small water bowl. First ecdysis had occurred in all young by the 22nd of June 1990. No interest was shown in feeding until the 14th of July 1990 but by the 31st of July the six healthy young were feeding on their own

Table I Data on Captive Breeding of *Liasis childreni*

Copulation	Nov-Dec	Apr-Aug	Apr-Aug	---	Oct-Mar	Oct-Feb	Sep-Jan
Oviposition	21/4	Feb-Jun	Feb-Jun	Apr-Dec	28/5,4/6, 19/5,16/4	16/4	9/4,12/4,30/5
No. of Eggs	16(1)	---	---	11 1 clutch	9, 11, 9, 12	10	15, 20, 21
No. Hatched	7	55%	75%	100% 1 clutch	8, 11, 5, 11	6	13, 18, 18
Inc. Temp.	32°C	27-30°C	30-32°C	24-30°C	28-31°C	31°C	30-32°C
Hatch. Date(2)	9/6	Dec-Feb	Dec-Feb	Jun-Aug	24/7,1/8, 18/7,9/6	1/6	23/5,28/5,15/7
No. of Clutches	1	---	---	---	4	1	3
Source	author	Ross, 1978	Ross, 1978	Ross, 1978	McClain, 1980	Chiras 1982	Stockwell (3)

(1) 12 fertile, 4 infertile
(2) Date hatching of individual clutch commenced, usually 2-3 days for all eggs to hatch
(3) R. Stockwell, personal communication

on live newborn mice.

Discussion:
Although no copulation was observed involving female number two, she did show some signs of posterior swelling about the same time as female number one. At one point she was thought to be gravid. She went off her food for some time and continued to gain weight but then began to lose it only to resume feeding again. I think now, that female number two was ovulating and should have been left with a male, even though no courtship or mating activity was ever observed.

Two of the small eggs did finally grow and normal-sized young hatched out of them. The other was infertile from the beginning.

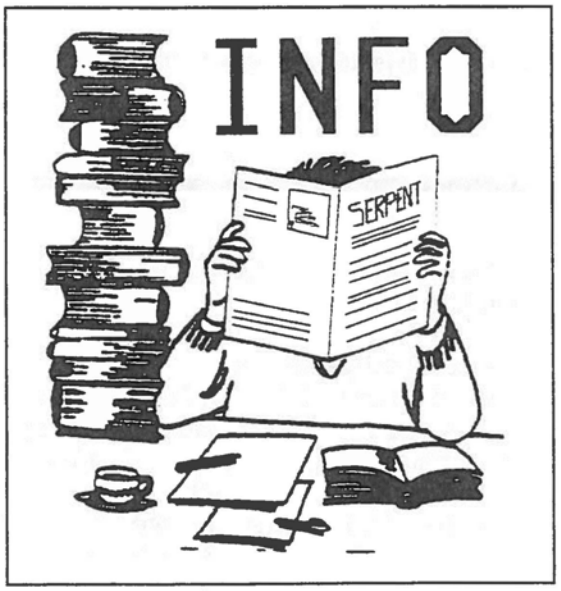
Acknowledgements:
I am gratefully indebted to Roy Stockwell for much helpful information on breeding Children's Pythons and incubating eggs as well as the use of data and photographs from his private collection. Thomas A Huff of the Reptile Breeding Foundation, Picton, Ontario, Canada graciously lent specimens for this study.

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SNAKES IN PRINT

Reptile Keeper International
Number 6 (A4)
Northern Herpetological Society
8 Bromley Gardens, Battle Hill, Wallsend, North Tyneside, NE28 9BS.

Boas of the Genus *Eryx*, Part II by Jon Flynn. (3 pages.) Second part of this article covering adaptability and availability and captive management of *Eryx jaculus turcicus*.

The Genus *Natrix* and the Viperine Snake, *Natrix maura* by Dr Dieter Schmidt. (3 pages.) Berlin based snake keeper's brief guide to *Natrix* including details of the new form recently discovered by Soviet herpetologists, *Natrix megalocephala*, commonly known as the Kolchis Snake. The feeding and care of *Natrix maura* is covered in detail.

Successful Breeding of the Bull Snake, *Pituophis melanoleucus sayii* by Hans van der Eerden. (1 page.) Even very busy Bull Snake owners should have no problem in finding time to read and digest the contents of this account of the acquisition, housing, mating & egg-laying of this snake. Nearly everything you wanted to know about Bull Snakes on slightly less than

one A4 page.

Litteratura Serpentium
Volume 10 No 4 - Aug 1990
Dutch Snake Society
Pauwenweld 18, 2727 DE Zoetermeer, The Netherlands.
Telephone 079-416592.

Sensitive to Stress or Not by Peet Smetsers. (3 pages.) A humorous tale of three different sized *Vipera aspis*, the smallest of which kept allowing itself to be eaten by its largest companion.

Breeding *Vipera mauritanica mauritanica* by Andre Weima. (5 pages including 2 colour pictures.) Introduction, housing and breeding including details of egg-laying (40 laid, early July) and serum to be used in case of mishaps.

Things Worth Knowing About *Candoia carinata carinata* and *Candoia carinata paulsoni* by P Jacobs. (1½ pages.) Following problems with getting these snakes to feed the author tried goldfish with great success.

Care and Breeding of *Sistrurus miliaris barbouri*, the Barbours Pygmy Rattlesnake by Peet Smetsers. (9 pages including 2 colour pictures.) The author has successfully kept pygmy rattlesnakes for 2½ years and describes the species, distribution, habitat, behaviour, food and successful breeding resulting in 10 young.

Royal News
Volume 2 No. 3 A5
Lee Bowler, 37 Sixty Acres, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Bucks HP16 0PE.

It's the Little Things That Count by Frank Lundburg. (6 pages.) Useful checklist for *Python regius* owners offers useful tips on anticipating the unexpected by Idaho Herpetological Society Newsletter Editor and recently elected President.

MISCELLANEOUS

FAUNA OFFENCES
On the 31st of May 1990, at Proserpine Magistrates Court, David Neal of Queensland was convicted on charges under sections 54(1)(a) and 62(7) of the Fauna Conservation Act 1974-89 of keeping, taking and moving Protected Fauna. The fauna involved were 4 Carpet Pythons, *Morelia spilota variegata*, 5 Children's Pythons, *Liasis childreni*, 2 Brown Tree Snakes, *Boiga irregularis* and 1 Diamond Python, *Morelia spilota spilota*. All the animals were seized and returned to the wild, apart from the Diamond Python which was retained by the Queensland National Parks & Wildlife Service. Neal was placed on a good behaviour bond for six months. (Reproduced from Traffic Bulletin, Vol. 11 No. 4, the Journal of the international TRAFFIC Network.)

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Experiences with Burmese Pythons, Part II

by Mark Hatcher

Oscar had always been an active snake and I had become used to this behaviour over the past couple of years. He would often climb to the top of the cage and, not being the world's greatest climber, fall the eight feet to the floor. This looked and sounded horrific and worried me greatly having read how sensitive snakes are to bruising. Whether these falls influenced or even caused the illness that led to his death in December 1989 is difficult to say but I feel (having seen three other pythons behave similarly in the same cage without coming to any harm) that they did not play a significant part. It is however an important consideration in building tall cages for this species.

On the 22nd of October 1989 Oscar took a rat and then spat it out. Assuming he was becoming finicky about his food in the lead-up to the breeding season (as he had done for the previous two years) his mouth wasn't checked for another week when the same thing happened. My first problem was trying to open his mouth. The only text I could find on how to do this was in Diseases of the Reptilia (edited by Cooper & Jackson) where the advice given was to use a finger to prise the jaws open. This I thought rather bold as did the veterinary surgeon when I suggested this method to him. I found I could open the snake's mouth slightly by applying firm pressure just behind the point where the jaws hinge. A small patch of necrotic stomatitis or mouth rot could be seen on the lower jaw. This I assumed had occurred whilst Oscar pushed against the door which he had been doing for some time.

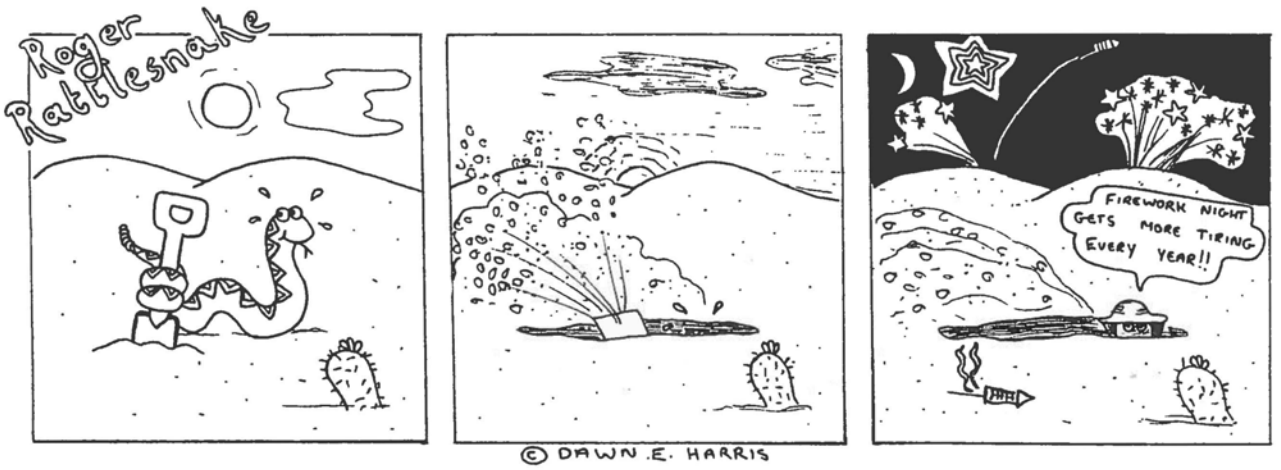
Not knowing of any vets specialising in reptiles I was forced to contact my local vet who agreed to come and see Oscar. He managed to open the snake's mouth (which was more than I could do) with a tool used for giving pills to cows. He took a swab of the infected area for culture and, having read an extract from one of my books, supplied me with the antibiotic Ampicillin plus Pevidine and hydrogen peroxide (for cleansing lesions). The Ampicillin was given orally at 15mg/kg bodyweight for three days until the results of the bacterial cultures came back. These showed the presence of three bacteria, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Klebsiella oxytoca* and a *Proteus ssp.* The most profuse of these was *Pseudomonas aeruginosa.* It was decided to change the antibiotic to Oxytetracycline to which the *Pseudomonas* should have been sensitive. The treatment now consisted of washing the lesions daily with Pevidine and hydrogen peroxide and giving Oxytetracycline at 50mg/kg bodyweight. The Ampicillin was a thick viscous liquid which could be squeezed via a syringe into the back of the mouth and relied upon to go down, unlike the Oxytetracycline which was a relatively insoluble powder and had to be given as a suspension in water via a stomach tube connected to a large syringe. If this was put in the back of the mouth it simply came straight back out. Giving the drug by stomach tube required two people (preferably

more). One person knelt over the front third of the snake and took a firm hold behind the head. If this was not done it was found to be impossible to control the snake's movements. The snake's mouth was then opened and a piece of plastic placed across the back of the mouth to act as a gag and to stop it closing. The tube connected to the filled syringe was placed in the back of the mouth being careful to avoid the trachea; the tube was about ¼" wide, flexible and had its end rounded and filed smooth with about 12 inches lubricated with petroleum jelly. The tube was pushed gently down the oesophagus expelling a small volume of liquid at the same time. It is necessary to relax the grip on the snake's neck as the tube goes past. When approximately 12 inches of the tube had been pushed in, the solution was expelled from the syringe. It is important that air equal to the internal volume of the tube is in the syringe to flush all the fluid out. The tube is then carefully removed.

By the 15th of December I had found a specialist vet in Cambridge and on the 16th she operated on Oscar's mouth which by then was badly infected. When he was returned to me most of the infected tissue had been excised and his mouth was still bleeding. I continued treating the wounds with Betadine (similar to Pevidine). On the morning of the 19th the snake started convulsing and died before the vet could be called to put him down. The vet thought that death was probably due to the snake's debilitated condition and inability to withstand anaesthesia.

During the onset of Oscar's illness I had the opportunity to buy a female 12' Burmese Python. After careful consideration the snake, subsequently named Lilo Lil, was purchased on the 5th of November and quarantined away from Oscar. At this point I hoped there would still be a chance of breeding them if Oscar had improved quickly. After Oscar's death the main vivarium he had been in was washed thoroughly with a strong solution of Savlon. The vivarium was sprayed copiously with a spray gun to disinfect every nook and cranny. On the 27th of February I experienced a nasty case of *déjà vu* when Lil picked up a rat several times and dropped it each time. I had visions of another prolonged illness followed by another death. She was immediately taken to the vet in Cambridge who injected Tylosin at 25mg/kg bodyweight intramuscularly and gave instructions that the mouth lesions were to be cleansed daily with Betadine. After another three injections, at two to three day intervals, the lesions had disappeared and feeding recommenced on the 10th of March. I am certain that early diagnosis and treatment by a specialist vet stopped this illness following the same course as the previous one.

By this time it looked certain that I would have to wait until the following year to breed Burmese Pythons. Then in late May I answered an advert for a pair of Burmese Pythons. I soon discovered that the female (Bonnie) was gravid and was due to lay her eggs within a couple of weeks. After consulting with the vet I decided that the risk of transporting her the 50 miles home was acceptable. On the 4th of March I collected



Bonnie and Clyde.

My plans of quarantining all new snakes unfortunately had to be altered in order to keep Bonnie alone for egg-laying. The cage was therefore partitioned with Bonnie on one side and Clyde and Lil on the other. That evening Bonnie settled as soon as she had been put into the vivarium. By this time she was undergoing spasmodic contractions and had been (so I was told) for several days. The other two snakes continued to race around the cage until the early hours of the morning. Since having more than one snake in the same cage I have noticed that the snake's dispositions have improved and they no longer hiss at every movement made and are much easier to handle.

Having read all the literature I possessed on incubation techniques (three articles) I decided, mainly through fear of removing the eggs from a python of unknown temperament, that it would be best/safest to let her incubate them herself. Therefore following the advice given by Chris and Marcia Martin in Snake Keeper, Volume I, Number 12 a box filled with small stones was placed in the vivarium. For the next two days the snake carefully avoided this area and on the 7th May started to deposit her eggs on the substrate of newspaper, between the wall and the box.

Egg-laying commenced, after several hours wandering restlessly around the vivarium, some time around 6pm on the 7th of May and continued until 11.30pm the same evening. The time interval between each egg started at five minutes and by the end had reached 30 minutes. At that time I estimated 30 eggs had been laid. One of the last eggs to be laid was about half the size of the rest and was not as white as the others. This egg I assumed to be infertile and as it was on the edge of the pile it was removed without upsetting the mother and placed in an incubator.

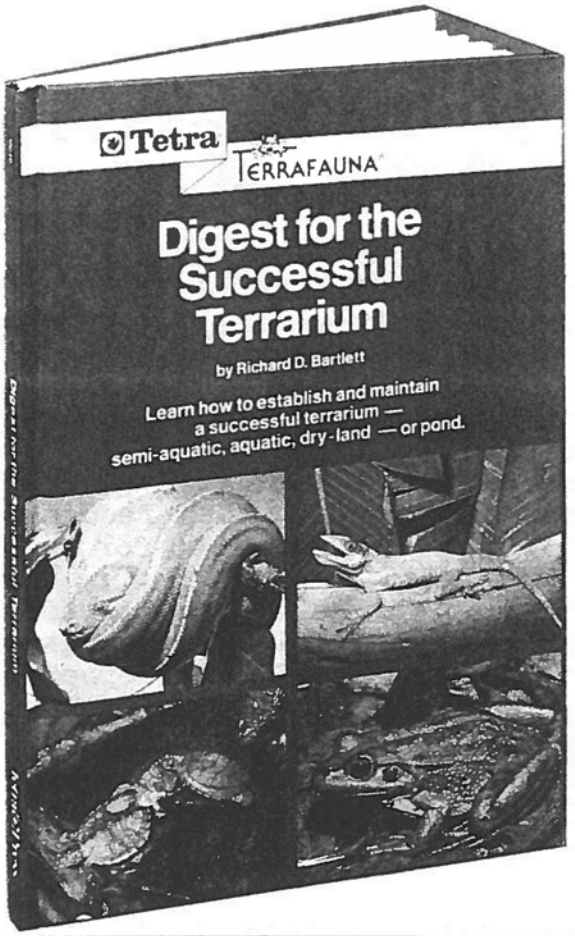
The next problem I encountered was keeping the humidity high. Due to the good ventilation and an error in the hygrometer I found it necessary to spray several pints of water every couple of hours to keep the humidity between 80 and 85%. Two days later after recalibrating the hygrometers I found that they were both reading 15 to 20% too low. Spraying was reduced to 3 or 4 times a day and towels were hung in the cage to increase the surface area from which evaporation could take place.

* Continued next month

Book Review

Digest for the Successful Terrarium

by Richard D Bartlett
Published by Tetra Press
ISBN 3-89356-035-1
80 pages £3.95



In a competition for the worst book title of 1990 this publication would surely finish in the top ten. Despite the title this thinly-disguised catalogue for Tetra products is an attractive hard-backed book with very good colour photographs by the author and John Tashjian. Snakes hardly get a mention but lizard and frog keepers might find it attractive at the price. The author has studied reptiles for many years, contributed to many herpetological publications and, in 1978, started the Reptilian Breeding and Research Institute.

The General Care and Maintenance of the Green Iguana

by Philippe de Vosjoli
Published by Advanced Vivarium Systems, PO Box 408, Lakeside, CA 92040, USA.
32 pages

This title, one of four published to date, was the first in a series of herpetological publications penned by the founder of the American Federation of Herpetoculturists, the organization which produces The Vivarium. The other three titles are guides to Horned Frogs, White's Tree Frogs and the Right Way to Feed Insect-Eating Lizards. Not much to interest serpent lovers so far but a guide to Royal Pythons is promised soon. Reasonably priced, very informative and well written, the booklet on the Green Iguana offers most of the information you need from Selecting an Iguana through Housing and General Maintenance to Breeding. A detailed chapter on Feeding including vitamin and mineral supplements will hopefully prevent much need to refer to the chapter on Disorders and Diseases. P de Vosjoli has produced a useful guide for iguana owners; let us hope that the forthcoming Royal Python booklet follows the standard set by the first four titles.

(Available in the UK from Jerry Cole, 6 Salisbury Terrace, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JT, Tel: (03004) 738 at £3.40p each including postage.)



CLASSIFIED ADVERTS

FOR SALE

Two **Royal Pythons**, 3′ & 4′, £65 and £75. **Bullsnake**, 6-7′, £65. All feeding well. Telephone (068688) 333 (Kerry).

Pair of **Boa Constrictors**. Male, 6½′, light phase. Female 7′, particularly beautiful, almost cream in colour. Both feeding well on dead rats. £300 for the pair. Also 6′ x 2′ x 2′ vivarium for sale with lights, ceramic heater and thermostat for £100 if needed. Telephone Chris on (0691) 778395 (North Wales/Shropshire border).

Hatchling **Corn Snakes**. £10 each. Phone Graham on (0494) 726175 (Bucks).

Male **Burmese Python**, 6-7′. Good feeder on frozen food. Good temperament. Free vivarium 6′ x 1½′ x 2′ approximately with ceramic trough heater and thermostat. Will deliver locally. £110 ono. Phone Bryan (0375) 382682 (day) or (03752) 3233 (evenings).

200 Red worms £2.40p plus 70p first class postage. 200 brandlings £2.40p plus 70p first class postage. David Silvester, 188 Wrens Hill Road, Wrens Nest Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3SF.

Male **Indian Python**, 7½′, including vivarium and accessories. £150. Phone (0889) 575173 (Rugeley).

Pair of captive bred young **Brazilian Rainbow Boas**, *Epicrates cenchria cenchria*. £385 pair. Captive bred baby **Egyptian Sand Boas**, *Eryx colubrinus colubrinus*. Telephone Mark Johnson on Bristol (0272) 853894.

Carolina **Corn Snake** hatchlings. Feeding well. £15 each. Phone (0394) 271500 (Felixstowe).

Burmese Pythons. Friendly and in excellent condition. Female, 14½′, £160. Male, 9′, £140. Both feed well on dead food. Phone Mike on (081) 886 9962 or (081) 361 8336.

Male **Boa Constrictor**, 4′. Feeding on dead rats, £110. Male amelanistic **Corn Snake**, 4′, £90. Pair of young **Grey Rat Snakes**, £30. Telephone (0524) 64849.

1990 captive-bred **Corn Snakes**. Feeding well on dead pinkies. £15 each. Telephone Richard Brown on (0279) 445254 (Essex).

Burmese Python, 8-9′, male. Very tame. Vivarium (6′) with ceramic heater, electronic thermostat and lighting. £250. Phone (0380) 729521 (Devizes).

WANTED

Male *Thamnophis sirtalis* (**Common Garter Snake**) around 2 to 3 years old. David Silvester, 188 Wrens Hill Road, Wrens Nest Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3SF.

Male *Coluber jugularis*. Phone Snake Breeder on (0494) 722769.

MISCELLANEOUS

Still available...Gambian Dwarf Crocodile Rescue Project T-Shirts, only £6 each. New style, black on white. Large or extra large. Please send your cheque (payable to Dwarf Crocodile Fund) for £6 in respect of each t-shirt to 10 Burnett Park, Harlow, Essex CM19 4SD.