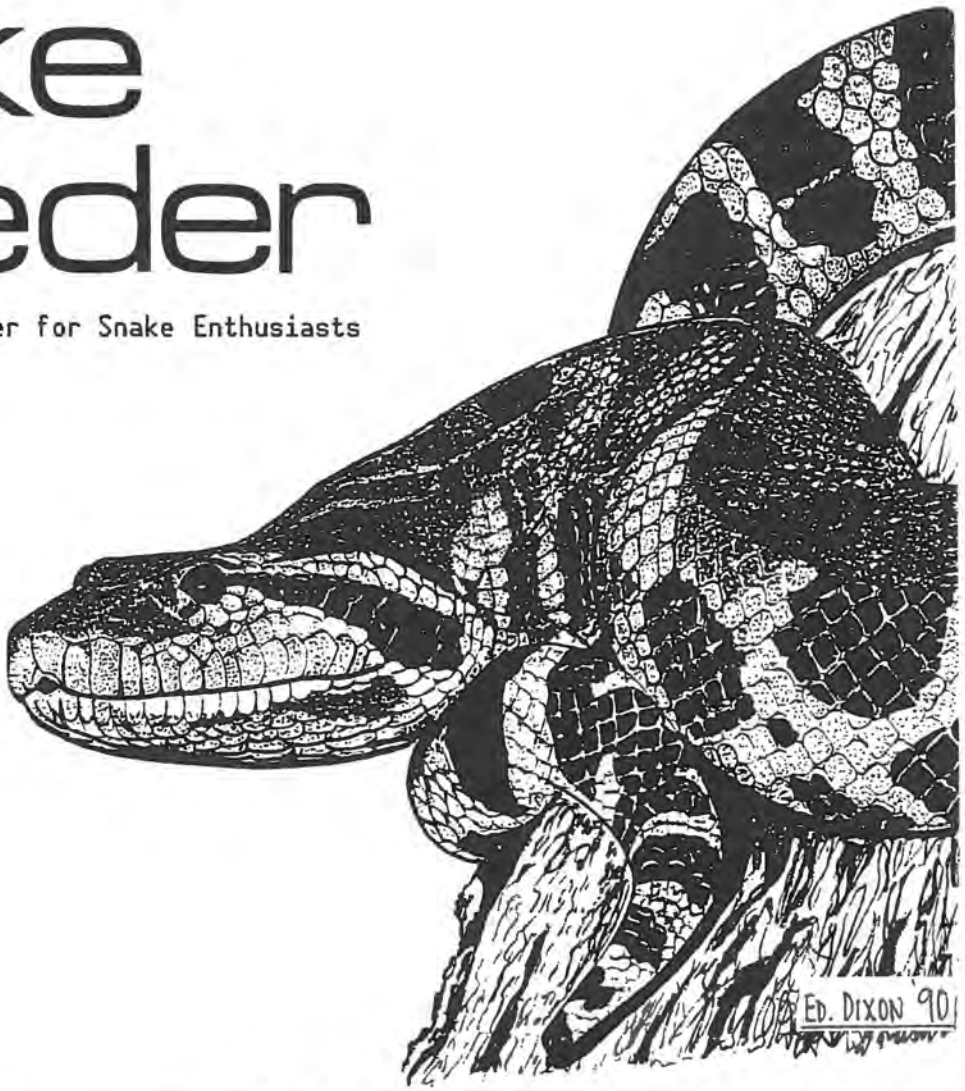
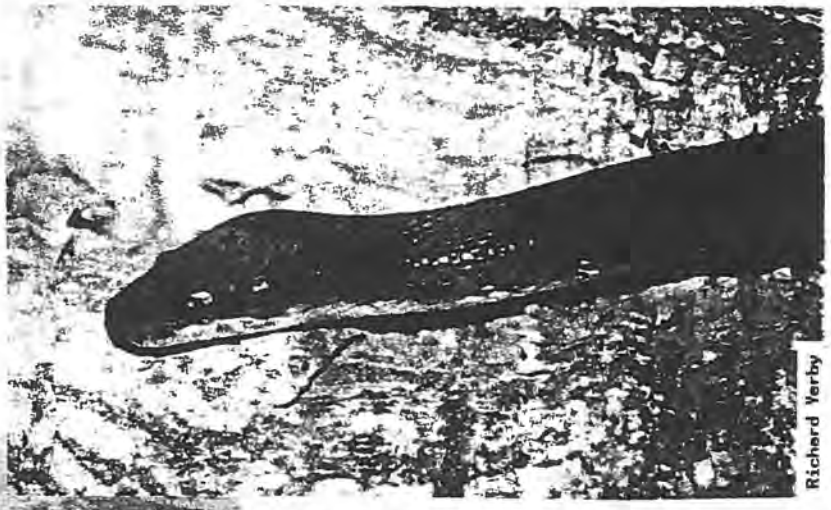
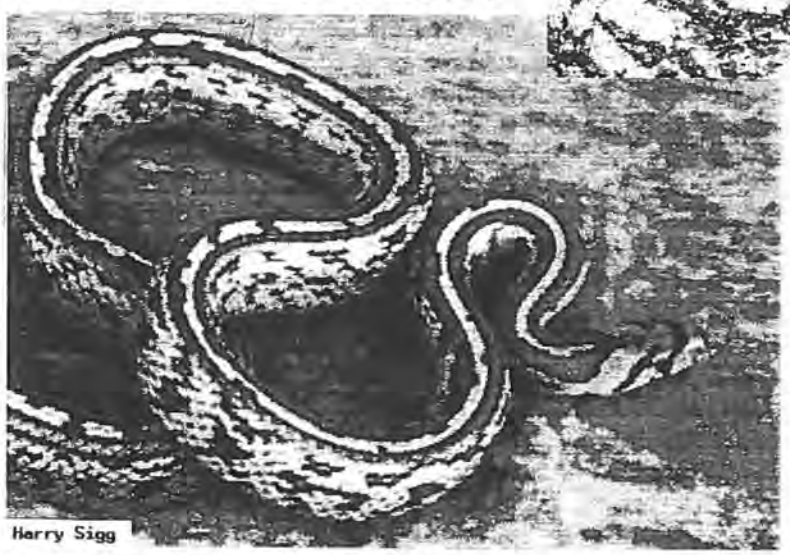
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The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts



The African House Snake, Part II by Ralf Hermann





The Care of the Leopard Snake by Kevin Hingley

Snake Breeder

The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts is published by
Snake Keeper Publishing
159 Stanley Hill
Amersham
Bucks HP7 9EY
England
Telephone (0494) 722769
International +44 494 722769
Fax (0494) 728786 (Phone first)

Editor Michael Connolley
Asst. Editor Lesley M. Close

Canadian Representative:
Scott Allen
77 Baronwood Court
Brampton, Ontario
Canada L6V 3H7

Subscription Rates:
UK & Europe 6 issues £10
12 issues £18

Rest of the World 6 issues £11
12 issues £20

Payment by cash, cheque or money order in £ sterling drawn on a UK bank.

Trade Advertising Rates:
Display 1/4 page £8
1/2 page £15
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Animal & Equipment Supplies Box £5

Inserts (A4) £5 per 100 (UK & Europe)
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Snake Breeder
May 1990 5/90

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Front cover drawing of an Anaconda, *Eunectes murinus* by Ed Dixon

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The Care of the Leopard Snake, *Elaphe situla*, and Dealing with Initial Difficulties

by Kevin J Hingley

Last year I was fortunate enough to obtain import and export licences to bring back a small collection of reptiles from Greece. Amongst these were four Leopard Snakes, *Elaphe situla*: an adult female (spotted), two adult males (striped) and an unsexed juvenile (striped). The reputation of this beautiful species of rat snake often precedes it for it is considered by many to be a difficult captive although some keepers have more success than others - but the same could be said for innumerable species of snakes.

Prior to my departure to Greece I had designed and partly-constructed (with the help of Mark Hemmings) a completely new block of vivaria, ideal, I thought, for the housing of small to medium species of snakes and their subsequent young. I did not complete the construction before going to Greece, although it was sectionally complete. All that I needed to do on my return was to dismantle my old vivaria and assemble the new ones. This being done, my current collection and the new Greek additions were rehoused in the new set-up once I had made final adjustments to the thermostats so that the temperatures were stable. I made the mistake of assuming that the Leopard Snakes would prefer relatively higher temperatures than some of my other species, basing my assumption on the temperatures I had experienced in Greece during my stay in the first two weeks of June 1989 which were around 28° C on a daily average, falling to 22° C overnight. After initially treating the snakes for mites I began to offer them food. With the exception of the smaller of the two adult males they fed on mice of a suitable size. The feeding trio continued to feed sporadically until our own summer temperatures became high enough to affect the room temperature where my vivaria are kept, sending the temperature soaring to almost 32° C daily from midday to late afternoon. This meant that I had to switch off my vivaria in an attempt to lower the temperature, although none of

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my other snakes, which are predominantly captive-bred, were affected by all this in any way.

I discovered that by only switching on the fluorescent strip lighting between 6am and 11am and then 5pm and 10.30pm the temperature in both the room and the vivaria peaked at 28° C falling overnight to 23° C. However the Leopard Snakes that had been feeding eventually stopped feeding in turn. The male that had refused to feed from the start was showing signs of weight loss and also experienced a difficult slough, so an attempt was made to assist-feed him on pink mice. He resisted this and so force-feeding was implemented. Once the procedure was complete and the snake was returned to its vivarium it would immediately regurgitate the pinky. It did this on numerous subsequent occasions. I then decided to try using a pinky pump and fortunately this worked as the male Leopard Snake would not attempt to regurgitate the 'mashed' pinky. In the short term this was a pleasing solution but I did not relish the prospect of having to continue with this somewhat stressful procedure for longer than was necessary.

However, it turned out that I needed to feed the snake in this way from early August until mid-November on a twice monthly basis.

Although there had been no significant improvement or deterioration in the condition of the troublesome male I took the decision to hibernate him along with the others. It was not an easy decision to have to make, but it was a choice between 'kill or cure' with hibernation, or perhaps causing death through trauma by continually having to resort to the pinky pump.

As it turned out hibernation proved to be the cure, for the male Leopard Snake came out of hibernation as room temperature increased naturally, sloughed and then fed voluntarily on a small mouse on the 3rd of March 1990. There has been a remarkable transformation in his general condition almost overnight and he has been displaying courting activity with the adult female. Both he and the female are currently housed together in a small aquarium placed on top of my vivaria set-up directly above a heat source provided by the strip lighting above the top row of vivaria.

Only one end of the aquarium is heated gently thus providing a thermal gradient, but temperatures are only around 26° C maximum during the day at the warmest part of the cage (22° C in the cooler part) falling to 20° C minimum at night. This seems to be working well however and it will be interesting to see if he progresses as well when the temperature begins its seasonal rise. I think it may be more a case of trying to keep temperatures down if last year was anything to go by, although the British weather can be notoriously fickle as we all know.

I had a similar experience with an adult male Aesculapian Snake, *Elaphe longissima*, in 1988. This too went off its food due to higher than normal temperatures between late July and the end of September but it was a well-fed snake and did not suffer because of this and

began feeding once more when temperatures began to fall. I shall have no hesitation in moving European species such as these to cooler quarters should high temperatures prove troublesome in the future, although such summer fast periods (aestivation) are quite natural in the wild for a number of species of reptiles, not just snakes.

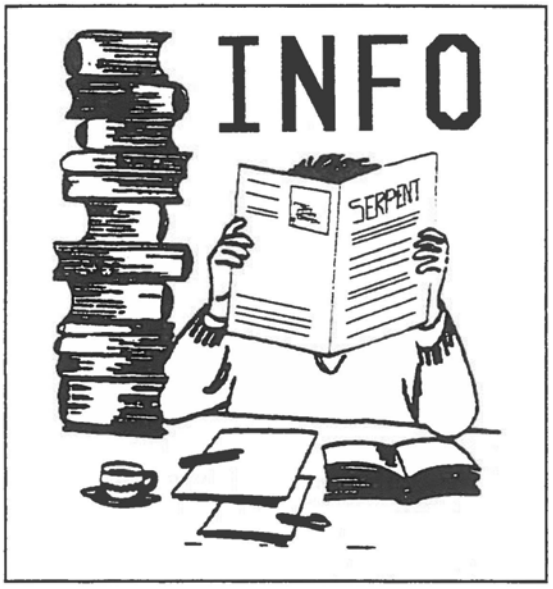
The temperature during hibernation never fell below 10° C on average being a fairly constant 13° C due to our mild winter. Numerous other snakes (7 California King Snakes *(Lampropeltis getulus californiae)*, 2 Desert King Snakes *(Lampropeltis getulus splendida)*, 4 Fox Snakes *(Elaphe vulpina vulpina)* and 3 Corn Snakes *(Elaphe guttata guttata)* were also hibernated successfully under identical conditions in my vivaria, and all have now fully warmed up and are feeding and sloughing prior to, hopefully, breeding.

To summarise, it would appear that with high temperatures the Leopard Snake, *Elaphe situla*, and possibly other European species such as the Aesculapian Snake, *Elaphe longissima*, are quite likely to fast (aestivate) during the summer months, and possibly at other times of the year if temperatures are kept artificially high.

As adults are quite content in small cages it would be possible to remove them to a cooler room should the temperature in the snake room become too high, especially if the keeper considers that this may be the case for several months in the event of a hot summer such as the one we experienced in Britain last year. As all of my Leopard Snakes were affected I suspect that continually high temperatures alone were to blame. They were transported safely from Greece, never leaving my side for a minute and subjected to a minimum of handling once installed in the vivaria. They were also housed individually and given numerous hiding places within their vivaria. Conditions in the vivaria were kept as sterile as possible, using newspaper substrate and easily cleaned furnishings, although cage servicing was reduced to once every two weeks to minimise disturbances at first as it was suspected that their nervous disposition may have been the cause of their loss of appetite. Since they have all recommenced feeding at reasonable temperatures (22 to 26° C) following hibernation, but are still nervous when approached or handled it would appear that sustained high temperature was the cause of the period of aestivation.



The Author



ANNOUNCEMENTS

The International Herpetological Society Reptile Fair 1990.

Enquiries from traders interested in exhibiting at the forthcoming IHS Reptile Fair are now being invited. The event will be held on Sunday the 16th September in the Sports Hall, Alumwell Centre, Primley Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands.

Trade tables (3' x 2') are available at a cost of £6 each. The hall will be open to stall holders from 9.15am, one hour before the event starts. The Fair finishes at 4pm. Further details and booking forms are available from The Secretary, IHS, 65 Broadstone Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 1JA.

New Chairperson for the Reptile Breeding Foundation

Louise Gervais has been appointed to the Chair of the RBF following the resignation of her husband Geoff Gaherty who remains a director.

If you would like to help the work of the Reptile Breeding Foundation your donations are always welcome. $250 will build special cages for the Blue Racers, one of the Foundations long range projects to reintroduce this snake which is virtually extinct in Ontario. $100 will adopt a Blue Racer for a year or produce a page of the studbook for Jamaican Boas, another Foundation project which records the genetic make-up of the boas held in captivity allowing zoos to assemble healthy breeding colonies. Further information from Reptile Breeding Foundation, Box 1450, Picton, Ontario, Canada KOK 2T0

SNAKES IN PRINT

ASRA Journal
Association for the Study of Reptilia and Amphibia
Volume 3 No. 4 1989 (A5)

Husbandry and Breeding of the Australian Carpet Python at the Cotswold Wildlife Park by Nigel Platt (15 pages). Nigel, as well as being Publicity Officer for ASRA is also Section Head of the Reptile Department at the Cotswold Wildlife Park. He describes the husbandry of *Morelia spilotes variegata* and the successful breeding project at the Park.

The Herptile
The International Herpetological Society
Volume 15 No. 1 March 1990 (A5)

Reptile Spotting on Thassos, Greece by Luke Yeomans. (3 pages.) The Derbyshire snake breeder and owner of Eddy, the

two-headed Honduran Milk Snake, describes a reptile spotting trip to Thassos which included views of Dahl's Whip Snake, *Coluber najadum dahli* and *Vipera ammodytes*.

Effects of Different Incubation Temperatures on the Behaviour and Physiology of Pine Snakes, *Pituophis melanoleucus* by Dave Blatchford. (2 pages.) A report by the ex-Herptile editor on the results of a two year study by Joanna Burger of Rutgers University, NJ, USA.

The Red-sided Garter Snake, *Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis* - a Snake Keeper's Experience by Peter Castle. (2 pages.) A personal account of experience with regard to the housing, feeding and behaviour of this snake.

A Case of Twins from a Single Egg in the Chinese Rat Snake *Elaphe bimaculata* by Steve Petch. (3 pages.) Steve describes how the infamous snake keeper Col G Pywell-Fox managed to get four snakes from three eggs.

Captive Breeding of the Brazilian Rainbow Boa, *Epicrates cenchria cenchria* by Jerry Cole. (3 pages.) Dorset snake breeder's description of a successful breeding which resulted in 10 young.

The Trinket Snake, *Elaphe helena* by Trevor Smith. (7 pages.) Asian *Elaphe* enthusiast describes the range and habits, care in captivity and breeding of the Trinket Snake.

Further Notes on the Incubation of the Eggs of the Royal Python, *Python regius* by Ashley Tweedale. (2 pages.) A report on the purchase of five gravid *Python regius* imported from Ghana in 1989 describing the egg laying and incubation.

Lacerta
Nederlandse Vereniging Voor Herpetologie en Terrariumkunde No. 4 Apr-May 1990 (17 x 24cm)

Verzorging en voortplanting van de ruwe boa *Candoia aspera* in het terrarium (Maintenance and Reproduction in Captivity of *Candoia aspera*) by Ton Steehouder. (6½ pages, D with E abstract.)

Milton Keynes Herpetological Society Newsletter
April 1990 (A4)

Captive Care of the Common Boa, *Boa constrictor* by B Pomfret. (2½ pages.) Barry is Captive Breeding Co-ordinator for the MKHS and offers advice on the general care of these snakes.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Reptile Appreciation Day

Members of the Wirral Herpetological Society will be appearing with their reptiles at the Visitors Centre in Arrow Park, Birkenhead on Sunday the 6th of May and Sunday the 16th of September. Further information from Eve Cavanagh on (051) 639 1197.

SRAS Open Day And Show

The Snakes, Reptiles and Amphibians Society are presenting an Open Day and Show in the Function Room at the rear of the Swan Public House, Witham on Saturday 12th May from 12 noon until 4pm. Entry fees are adults 40p and children 20p.

For further details contact the

Secretary of the SRAS on (0376) 510935.

Exhibition of Animals and Animal Products

The Amphibian Reptile Club & Rescue have arranged an exhibition to include fish, reptiles, chelonia and mammals. The event is open to everyone from the private keeper to zoos and is to be held on Sunday 15th July at the Victoria Hall, Ash Hill Road, Ash, Nr Aldershot, Hampshire. Doors open to the public at 10am and close at 5pm.

Trade space is available at £10 per table (6'). For further details contact The Secretary, ARC, 1 Springfield, Elstead, Godalming, Surrey GU8 6EG. Telephone (0252) 702714.

BATK Open Days

The British Association of Tortoise Keepers are holding open days at the Edgbaston Hotel, Birmingham on the first Sunday in every month from April to October. Further details from Diana Pursall on (021) 455 9606 between 11am and 4pm only.

MISCELLANEOUS

Careers in Wild Animal Husbandry - ABWAK Leaflet

The Association of British Wild Animal Keepers (ABWAK) have produced a leaflet offering guidance to anyone interested in animal husbandry as a career. The leaflet covers qualifications and experience, conditions and pay and methods of applying for jobs. A list of useful addresses and publications is included.

Further details from ABWAK, 12 Tackley Road, Eastville, Bristol BS5 6UQ.

Second Generation Boas

Chris and Marcia Martin 's Common Boa Constrictor gave birth to her first clutch of young on the 4th April - the second generation of Boa Constrictors born in their house.

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The African House Snake *Lamprophis fuliginosus* Part II

by Ralf Hermann

Maintenance in the Vivarium

Because they are relatively small, *Lamprophis fuliginosus* can be kept in a medium-sized vivarium. At present I keep 1.3 *L. fuliginosus* from South Africa (brown variety), 0.1 from Kenya (reddish variety), 1.2 from Morocco (black variety) and 1.2 from Ethiopia (green variety). My one male and three females (brown variety from South Africa) are kept in a vivarium measuring 65 x 60 x 60cm (lxbxh). This is illuminated by a fluorescent tube which gives adequate light. A good substitute for ground heating is to stack the vivaria on top of one another. The substrate is thus heated by the lighting equipment of the vivarium below. As substrate I use a mixture of various sands which is kept at 25° to 27° C and, at night, this drops by some 3° to 6° C. A piece of cork bark is used as a hiding place. A few climbing branches serve as decoration and these are often used by the snakes. The furnishing is completed by a water bowl.

Because they are nocturnal snakes *L. fuliginosus* are very rarely seen during the day. They generally become active only after dark. To increase the atmospheric humidity the vivarium is sprayed daily. This is especially advisable when sloughing is due since, if the vivarium is too dry, this can cause sloughing problems.

Breeding

Lamprophis fuliginosus is bred regularly and relatively frequently in captivity. For breeding purposes it does not appear necessary to separate the sexes for a short while. A hibernation period is also not necessary but to maintain a natural year cycle it is advisable. I do not however know of any negative breeding results which are attributable to non-hibernation. Although for South African animals the months of October to December are Spring, African House Snakes in captivity mate during our Spring from April to June. My male and female No. 1 from South Africa mated, for example, on the 30th March at around 2pm which I found particularly strange, these being nocturnal snakes. Although normally extremely greedy, the male refused all food. A further mating between this male and female No. 2 was seen at around 12.30pm on the 30th May. After placing female No. 1 in a separate vivarium on the 18th May she immediately burrowed into the laying container which was filled to a depth of 10cm with a mixture of peat and sawdust. The atmospheric humidity was kept higher by more frequent spraying thus making the vivarium more suitable for egg laying. The female remained buried until the 7th June. Only then was she seen to be gliding restlessly around. Between 4.35 pm and 10.50pm on the 8th of June she laid 11 oval eggs (Broadley, 1983; 6-8, maximum 16). The intervals between the individual eggs being laid varied between 25 and 50 minutes (average 34 minutes).

The actual laying time lasted 2 to 5 minutes. The intervals between each egg and the time needed to lay each egg increased continually, which was probably caused by the female becoming weaker.

A bright light was immediately shone through the eggs and proved that two were infertile. The eggs measured 30 to 50mm by 17 to 23mm. As a comparison Broadley (1983) gives dimensions of 25 to 50mm by 12 to 24mm. All eggs were then transferred to a thermostatically controlled incubator, having first been placed in small boxes containing moist bird sand. The relative humidity was kept at 90 to 95% and sank occasionally to 85% which did not have any adverse effect on the eggs which were bedded in moist sand in closed containers. The incubation temperature was between 26° and 28° C during the day and at night sank to 25° to 26° C. On the 18th of June and the 15th of July, both infertile eggs collapsed completely and were removed from the incubator. As is the case with all snake eggs, the reminder collapsed partially and turned a light beige colour one or two days before hatching. On the 67th day (Branch, 1984: 60 to 90 days) the first two young emerged and by the 14th August the remaining seven had hatched. They measured 24 to 29cm (SVL; 21 to 25cm, TL: 3 to 4cm). One of the young was deformed at the cloaca. Like all young snakes they reacted very aggressively to the slightest disturbance. After the first slough which took place between the fourth and ninth days all young immediately took nestling mice without any problems. Under optimum conditions the young grow very quickly and can reach sexual maturity in only 15 months. This relatively quick sexual maturity and high fertility rate are certainly reasons for this snake being so common. In addition, several clutches of eggs can be laid each year. Many snake keepers who have only one female have been amazed that unexpected eggs were laid. Because *L. fuliginosus* is in a position to store sperm (amphigonia retardata) gravidity can occur although no recent mating has taken place. The longest case of sperm storage which I have heard of was two and three quarter years without the female having been near a male.

Remarks on the Systematics

In all available literature there are divergent details regarding the validity of the subspecies of *Lamprophis fuliginosus*. Thus for West Africa *L. f. lineatus* (Duméril & Bibron) and for South-West Africa *L. f. mentalis* (Günther, 1888) are described (Broadley, written report). Thorpe and McCarthy (1978) however recognise *lineatus* as a species in its own right. On the basis of their investigations Roux-Estève and Guibé name the subspecies *L. f. bedrigae* (Boulenger, 1905) and *mentalis*. Fitzsimmons (1962) distinguishes between *Boaedon* (= *Lamprophis*) *f. fuliginosus* and *L. f. mentalis*. He separates the two subspecies on the basis of the two rear chin scales which are in contact with one another and the usual three upper labials which in *L. fuliginosus* touch the eye. As opposed to this, *mentalis* has separate chin scales and only two supralabials which are in contact with the lower edge of

the eye.

The problems of recognition of the various subspecies are caused mainly because of the enormous variability in colour, markings and scalation data from various localities. In any case it would appear that more exact and explanatory investigations are necessary but this will need the co-operation of everyone keeping *Lamprophis*. I hereby invite them to assist me. This study will be made more difficult because of indiscriminate collective transport and keeping specimens from various origins so that intergrading has taken place.

In addition, the export regulation at present in force in Africa prevents us from obtaining species from the various regions. It is always amazing that some herpetologists keep *Lamprophis* but do not know which species they are or from whence they originate because they were bought commercially.

Conclusion

Lamprophis fuliginosus is a snake which can be recommended to even a beginner. They make very few demands and can be kept easily and for a long time. Because of excellent breeding results it is easy nowadays to obtain captive bred stock from healthy parents in private collections.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who assisted me with data, sloughs, photographs, animals and literature and to those prepared to assist me with material to continue studying this fascinating snake in the future. Special thanks to the City Library of Salzgitter and to Mrs Sabine Kalinowski who undertook the typing of the manuscript.

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WANTED

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

Two or three female *Elaphe schrenckii schrenckii* for a breeding project as I have two males. I would prefer captive bred or long term captive (adults). Ed Dixon, 1 Birds Nest Road, St Anthonys, Newcastle on Tyne NE6 2TD.

Female **Jackson's Chameleon** wanted urgently and contact or information from anybody keeping these beautiful reptiles. Kris Wrightson, 24 Newbald Grove, Inglemire Lane, Hull, Humberside.

Female **Green Iguana**; must be long term captive, required for breeding project with large adult male who is feeling very amorous and extremely lonely! He is so desperate he even auditioned for Blind Date! If your female Iguana needs a good home or has outgrown her vivarium phone Barry Pomfret (0908) 370112.

Advertisements from private individuals are printed in this section without charge. We are normally able to accept items for inclusion up to the final day of the month subject to space. Send your advert by post, telephone or fax to Snake Breeder, 159 Stanley Hill, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9EY. Telephone (0494) 722769, Fax (0494) 728786 - Phone first.