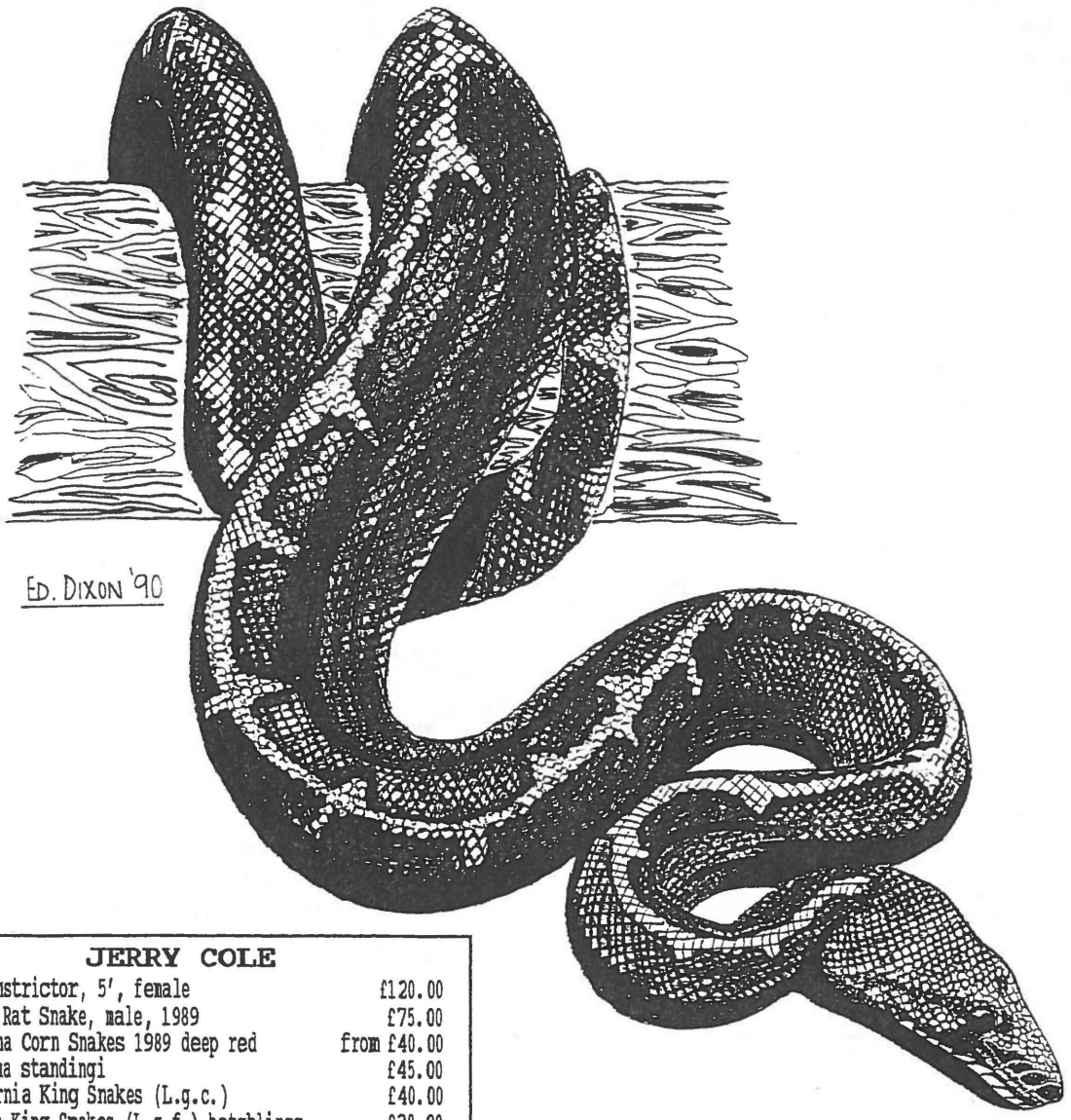
snake breeder

The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts



JERRY COLE

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False Pregnancy in a Corn Snake
When Will I Ever Learn?
Burrowing Bully
I'm No Expert But...

Plus Book Review, Info & Forthcoming Events

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. Don't forget, if you don't write it - we can't print it! Obviously you would be offended if we offered you money for your contribution and we respect you for that so, instead, 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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Emerald Tree Boa,
Corallus caninus
by Ed Dixon

NEW SUBSCRIBERS

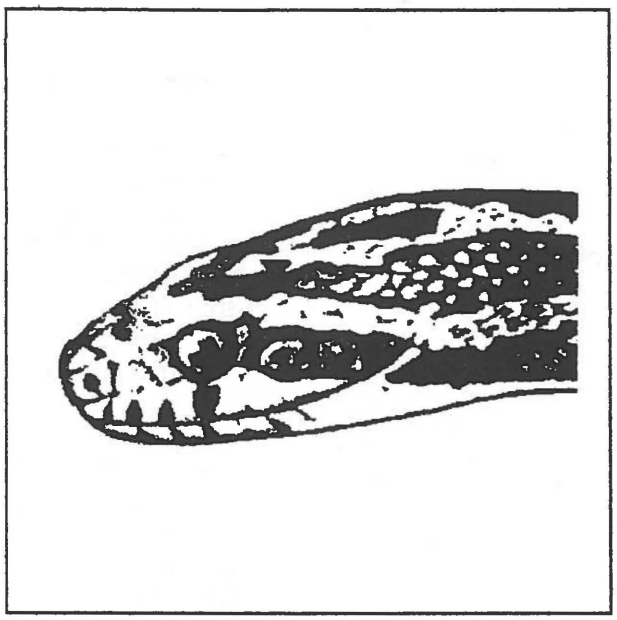
Welcome to the following new subscribers to Snake Breeder:

C Parsons, P & O Miles, S Crunden, P Graham, C Hindley, L Burnett (Canada), M Edser, J Hollingsworth, The Westcoast Herpetological Breeding and Research Foundation (Canada), C Roberts, K Burnett, F Schofield, D Frayne, S Buncher, B Wright, C Mattison, R Webb and B Borysowich (Canada).

A Case of False Pregnancy in a Corn Snake

by Allison McNeill (USA)

In 1989 we bred our Corn Snakes for the first time. The female is a normal Corn Snake acquired from a pet store in 1987. Her age is unknown. The male is amelanistic, hatched in 1987 and raised by me. The snakes went into hibernation on November the 27th 1988 and came out on March the 12th 1989. Both the male and the female snakes ate several meals before being introduced to each other. They were introduced twice without success before the female shed.



On April the 20th the female shed and she was reintroduced to the male. Copulation occurred four times, on the 20th, 21st, 26th and 29th of April. During this time the female ate four jumper mice and the male ate one jumper mouse. Copulation was of short duration, only about 10 or 15 minutes. This was sort of a surprise because our Florida King Snakes copulated for four or five hours at a time. Following these four instances of copulation the female refused food and appeared to swell up. She was kept in a cage made of two plastic sweater boxes. The bottom one was painted black to block out light and she spent most of her time in that one which we lined with damp sphagnum moss. The upper sweater box stacks on the first and has a hole cut in it so the snake can travel between levels. The water dish was kept in the upper level, which was lined with paper towel.

We were sure the female was gravid because of her refusal to eat and because she seemed swollen. We watched anxiously for eggs but, after six weeks the female suddenly started eating again and no eggs were produced. She remained healthy and it appears she was not egg-bound. She must have reabsorbed the eggs for some reason. We hibernated the pair again this winter and are breeding them again. This year I noticed that the female swelled up even before breeding. Our female Florida King Snake did this as well and a friend has noticed the same phenomenon in his female snakes. This year the male has been off his food since coming out of hibernation, accepting only two mice between March 4th and April 16th, while the female has eaten 11 mice in that period. Copulation has occurred four times, although it is still of short duration. Perhaps the male was not quite old enough last year. I will be very interested to see if we get eggs this time.

When Will I Ever Learn?

by Paul Crook

I have been an avid lizard keeper for many years and so I thought I would try my hand at snake keeping. I went to the IHS Reptile Fair in 1989 and bought two Corn Snakes, one male and one female, both 15" in length.

When I got home I put them in a box until their cage, a 24" x 12" x 12" glass fish tank with a glass sliding lid, was ready. The cage was heated by a ceramic heater controlled by a VTC. I also provided a water dish and a hide box for the snakes to sleep in.

With the snakes placed in their new accommodation I realised I had a small problem - FOOD! There is nowhere locally to buy pinkies so I quickly dashed up the motorway to a reptile shop (name of shop deleted as they still owe us money, Ed.) for 17 pinkies. However, by the time I arrived home all the mice had defrosted. (What was I going to do with 17 defrosted pinkies?) I put them in the fridge and after three days decided to get some fresh ones. By the way, the snakes loved them and ate two each.

I then acquired some live pinkies from The Vivarium in London. I froze them straight away in an old ice cream container, much to the horror of my mum who found them whilst looking for the ice cream.

Two days later I put two pinkies into the tank and went to bed. Next morning the pinkies were still there. The same thing happened the next night. What on earth was I going to do with all those pinkies? I eventually discovered that if I put the snakes in a box and left them alone with the food for one hour, they fed. From then on they fed this way without any problems.

If I had read about Corn Snakes I would have realised that they are quite active at night and I wanted snakes I could see during the day. I was not amused. Frozen pinkies, sleeping snakes - when will I ever learn?

MAILBOX

Dear Snake Breeder,

I recently had a Red-sided Garter Snake called 'Whisper' that died. I had her for four years and became very attached to her. I fed her on goldfish, strips of filleted fish and earthworms sprinkled with Vionate, a vitamin supplement.

Lumps began to grow in Whisper's tail about four months before she died. The lumps spread to her spine and then the pupils of her eyes began to go white. She appeared to be going blind and was like this for three weeks before she went off her food. We took the snake to a local veterinary surgeon but he could not suggest any reasons for her symptoms.

Near to her death, the snake's tail was almost as wide as her head. She could hardly move and became very aggressive. Have other readers experienced the same symptoms in their snakes?

Yours sincerely, Ms V Johnson
Herts

Burrowing Bully
Pituophis melanoleucus sayi

by Robin M Crunden

On the 29th of September last year I purchased a captive bred male hatchling Bullsnake from The Serpentarium measuring approximately 22 inches. It was in perfect condition and had previously fed on the 6th and 18th of the same month. I recommend that anyone who wants to see how a reptile dealer should exhibit and maintain their stock should visit The Serpentarium. I have visited many dealers and few match his high standards. (If you're reading this Dave I'll expect a cheque in the post!)

The Bullsnake was initially housed in a 3' x 1' x 1½' aquarium with metal vivarium lid. Heat was supplied by an ordinary light bulb and Ultratherm heating pad. A temperature gradient of between 75° and 85° F with a fall of a few degrees at night was maintained at all times. Cork bark was provided as shelter and bark chippings as a substrate. A small ceramic water bowl completed the set-up.

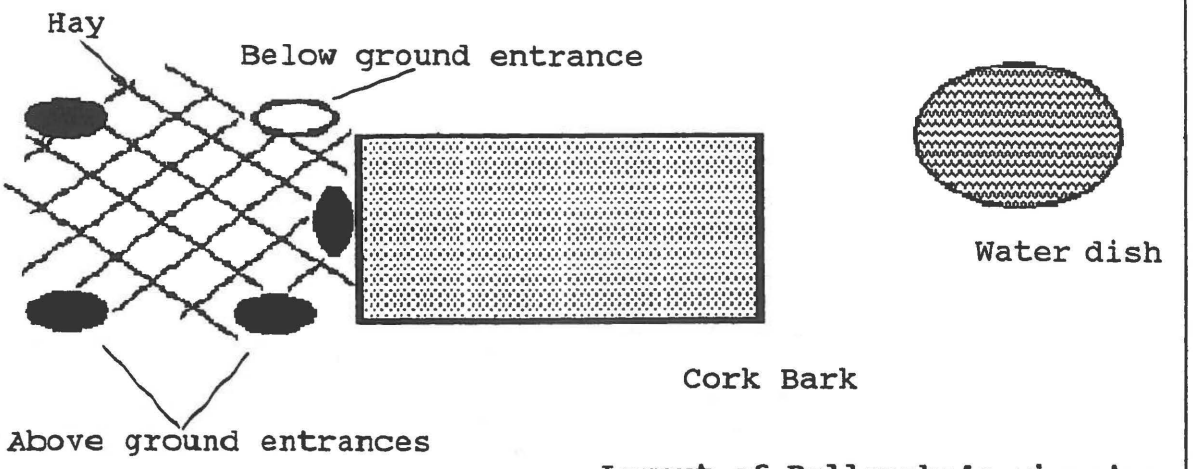
When any snake is new to a collection the temptation to view and handle the specimen is enormous. I made this mistake. On one occasion, a few days after I had purchased the Bullsnake, I disturbed it when it was concealed beneath the bark chippings. The snake assumed the typical *Pituophis* defence position - coiled on the substrate, head held high, hissing continuously for ten minutes. I had read that these snakes hiss incredibly loudly but this is a gross understatement; he could be heard three houses away!

Initially live mice were the only food accepted. It took 15 attempts at feeding over a six week period before any food was taken but in March this year the snake was persuaded to take a dead mouse scented with chick and now feeds regularly (about once every ten days), taking either one large dead mouse or a couple of small dead ones, but always scented with chick. He has grown considerably and now measures around 40 inches.

During his 'fast', I knew I was doing something wrong. I had a perfectly healthy, captive-bred specimen of a relatively easy-to-maintain species that would not feed. I strongly believe that force feeding should only be undertaken if absolutely necessary. If a healthy snake will not feed either the right food is not being presented or the vivarium conditions are wrong. Whichever it is, it is not the snake's fault!

Over a period of several weeks I tried a variety of foods including pinkies, mice of varying sizes, rat pups, (furred and unfurred) and chicks. These were presented in various ways without success. I came to the conclusion that the vivarium set-up was wrong.

I re-read everything I could find on *Pituophis*, which wasn't a lot! In the wild this species is ground-dwelling, likes to burrow and inhabits the burrows of small mammals. It was not practical for me to create a system of burrows in the vivarium but I could provide a substrate that was easy to burrow into. I chose to use



Layout of Bullsnake's vivarium

medium grade wood flakes (the type sold in blocks for small mammal bedding). A tunnel was made using a half piece of cork bark and a pile of hay was placed in one corner of the vivarium. (See diagram.)

The Bullsnake was placed in a newly constructed melamine-covered chipboard vivarium (3' x 1' x 1½') and left completely undisturbed. He immediately entered the hay and was not seen for several days. Two weeks later he fed for the first time. I believe this was due to two factors; firstly, he was not disturbed in any way and secondly the conditions were much more suitable, providing the security he needed.

Over the following months the snake was observed more and more frequently, usually in the early morning and evening and he now basks regularly in the open and is unconcerned with routine vivarium maintenance. The only sign of aggression is the occasional hiss if he doesn't want to be disturbed.

What I have found unusual is the intricate network of tunnels which the snake has 'created' in the substrate and hay. A 'nest' consisting of a large central chamber with five separate entrances, four above ground and one below, has been built in the hay. All of the tunnels are permanent and are regularly used. Initially I thought these were the result of the Bullsnake's wanderings around the vivarium but, five months later, the network of tunnels and the 'nest' are still in place.

I have not needed to clean the vivarium completely as the snake always defecates in the same place, i.e. the furthest point from the hay nest. The wood flakes make cleaning easy as they adhere to the faeces and can then be easily removed. They are also inexpensive.

I am sure I do not own the only nest building snake and would be interested to know if any other readers have observed similar behaviour in *Pituophis* or other species. I have tried similar vivarium set-ups with other species but I have never witnessed tunnel or nest 'construction'.

Robin M Crunden (0273) 553303.

Book Review

Snakes, A Guide to Their Husbandry Before and After Purchase
by Jeff Protheroe
Published by the Milton Keynes Herpetological Society, 17 Torre Close, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK3 6NG.
UK £4, Europe £5 & USA $10 including postage.

Snakes, A Guide to Their Husbandry Before and After Purchase is a valuable addition to any snake keeper's library and, indeed, an essential publication for beginner and experienced care provider alike. Because captive snakes are totally dependent on their keepers for everything - their environment, food, water, cleanliness - not only must their basic needs be met but, also, even small mistakes in care can pose great danger to the animals. This publication covers both the essentials and details through the theme of 'think of the snake's requirement first'. Few manuals on the care of snakes cover the basics as accurately, clearly and comprehensively as does this booklet. When I first began keeping snakes I found each book I examined seemed to answer every question except the one I had at that particular moment. One of the challenges in caring for snakes is that, just when you think you understand their behaviour and needs, they do something different from anything you have encountered. This booklet gives enough information so that if it is followed, you can be fairly certain that your snakes will have adequate care. It provides general information on care and enough specific information to answer those new questions which arise as you continually become familiar with your snakes' behaviour.

The booklet is divided into fifteen short chapters: An introduction describes the format of the information. Chapter 2 reviews the evolution of snakes in a style which can be understood by the young keeper and enjoyed by the experienced. It's hard to believe snakes could go from above ground to underground and back above ground again (about 200 million years) in two pages but this booklet highlights the evolutionary successes of snakes well in that short space.

The next chapters discuss characteristics of snakes including scales, shedding, temperature requirements, Jacobson's Organ, sight, hearing, locomotion, size and hibernation. One short section on 'Psychology' covers a subject vital to your snakes' well-being, and yet often overlooked. That subject is the necessity for snakes to have hiding places for privacy. All creatures (including man) need individual space and privacy. Snakes, because by nature they are shy animals, need it very much. Including this need in both the section on characteristics and in the one on care is again an asset to this unique publication.

One exceptional feature of this booklet is that the basic needs of snakes are discussed early on and then repeated throughout the succeeding chapters. By the time the reader finishes, he cannot help but remember heat, light, food, water, privacy, security and care in handling,

the things all who care about snakes must know. The reader will always remember to 'think of the snake's requirement first'.

As the booklet shifts focus to describing the care which must be provided to meet the needs of snakes, emphasis is placed on vivarium structure, types of food items, frequency of feeding and all the other items related directly to the snakes' welfare. An example of this is the recommendation of newspaper as a substrate. The only disadvantage is how it appears to the keeper. In convenience and cleanliness, it ranks far above anything else. As the author states, 'think of the snake's requirements first'. This subject is particularly vital, for the beginner tends to think of a good environment for the vivarium as one which simply looks like the desert, savannah, jungle or whatever is the snake's native habitat. Duplicating appearance is mistaken for duplicating conditions. What needs to be duplicated is not the cosmetic appearance of the native habitat but, rather, the physical conditions. My Gopher Snakes (*Pituophis melanoleucus deserticola*) do not care whether there is a cactus or sagebrush in their vivaria. In fact those things get in their way. They do, however, need clean climbing branches and adequate heat, light, privacy, humidity, food and water. In short, they and I alike need 'Cleanliness, Convenience and Security'. Many first-time visitors upon viewing my snakes say, 'but those newspapers are ugly'. My reply is, 'but my snakes are very healthy'. Perhaps the greatest reward in caring for snakes is to have healthy animals. The condition of a captive snake reflects the compassion, integrity and professional competence of its keeper.

Subsequent chapters in the booklet cover sexing, breeding, raising hatchlings and general common sense advice. A final 'Do's and Don'ts' summary should be in the hands of everyone concerned with snakes. All of us, not just beginners, should memorize this list. If only pet stores and dealers would follow this simple advice, which, again, is summarized in the statement 'think of the snake's requirement first'.

Snakes, A Guide to Their Husbandry Before and After Purchase is valuable because it is comprehensive, without being overly technical, easy to understand and accurate. Your reward in owning this booklet and following its advice will be the satisfaction of having healthy, thriving animals. Your snakes' good care, aided by the information contained in the booklet will help you, individually, to meet some of the needs for preservation of species and conservation of our world's resources.

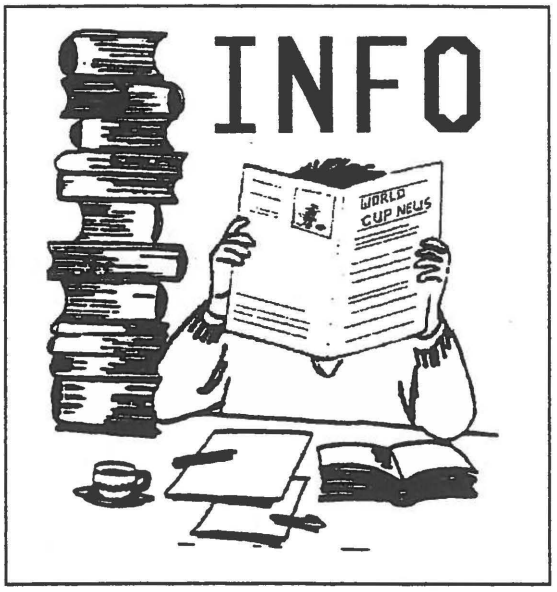
Reviewer: Frank Lundberg, Idaho Herpetological Society, Boise, Idaho, USA.

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SNAKES IN PRINT

Lacerta
Nederlandse Vereniging Voor Herpetologie en Terrariumkunde
No. 5 Jun-Jul 1990 (17 x 24cm)
ISSN 0023 7051

Breeding *Thamnophis sirtalis similis* in captivity by VJ van Wanrooy. (4 pages, D with E abstract.) Description of distribution, habitat and behaviour. A one year old female gave birth to a clutch of 8 young after mating was induced by an artificial seasonal cycle.

Reptile Keeper International
Northern Herpetological Society
Number 2 (A4)

The Maintenance and Reproduction of the Royal Python, *Python regius*, in captivity by Christine and Klaus-Peter Lehmann. (2 pages.) Intelligent and informative article describing successful breeding of *Python regius*. Two pairs of Royal Pythons were housed in a wooden vivarium and mated regularly from December to March without any eggs being laid. Success came with the adoption of a West African wet-dry cycle resulting in ten fertile eggs, the first of which hatched after 58 days.

Successful breeding of the Yellow Anaconda, *Eunectes notaeus*, by Gerd Horlbeck. (1 page.) The author maintains five snakes and very briefly covers their housing and mating, which resulted in the birth of 34 young.

The Vivarium
American Federation of Herpeto-culturists
Volume 2 No. 3 (8½ x 11")

AFH Interview with Richard Ross. (4 pages.) Part 2 of former pediatrician's excellent interview covering his new book 'The Reproductive Husbandry of Pythons and Boas' due in October, egg reabsorption, cutting eggs to free hatch-lings, choosing between artificial or maternal incubation, thermal gradients, the future of captive breeding and more.

To Scent or Not to Scent (Techniques for feeding baby snakes) by Tony Mills. (4 pages.) Advice for troubled keepers with lizard-loving snakes. Lots of tricks and tips to help you cope with difficult feeders.

The Herptile
The International Society
Volume 15 Number 2 (A5)
ISSN 0953 2021

An Appraisal of the Status of *Coluber jugularis* and *Elaphe quatuorlineata* in Greece, Part I by Richard Clark. (14 pages.) In depth Greek distribution of

C. jugularis and *E. quatuorlineata* including mention of habitat, habits and diet. Not bedtime reading - best with a cup of coffee about 10am.

An Appraisal of the Status of *Coluber jugularis* and *Elaphe quatuorlineata* in Greece. Part II - Cycladean populations of *E. quatuorlineata by Richard Clark*. (9 pages.) Summary of the controversy surrounding the taxonomy of Cycladean populations of the Four-lined Snake.

Feeding Snakes - Getting off to a good start by P Johnson. (5 pages.) Sound, common-sense advice on feeding, 'tipping', scenting and force feeding.

Bulletin
The British Herpetological Society
No 31 Spring 1990 (A5)
ISSN 0260 5805

A Report on the Reptile life of South Central France by Richard Clark. (6 pages in total.) Crossing frontiers and publications Richard Clark presents herpetological notes made during a trip to France in the summer of 1989. Includes sightings of *Coluber viridiflavus* and *Vipera aspis*.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Items for inclusion in this column are welcome and should include time, date, venue and a contact telephone number.

7th & 8th July

PRAS Display, Co-op Educational Show, Southsea Common, Southsea. Contact PRAS on (0329) 833017.

14th July 11am - 5.30pm

TCHG Exhibition '90. Hazlemere Community Centre, Hazlemere, Bucks. Contact Jan Burgess on (0494) 815319.

15th July 10am - 5pm

ARC Exhibition of Animals, Victoria Hall, Ash Hill Road, Ash, Nr Aldershot, Hants. Contact ARC on (0252) 702714.

15th July 10am - 5pm

NHS Exhibition of Reptiles, Amphibians and Arachnids, Scouts Hall, Manor Road, Tynemouth.

3rd, 4th & 5th August

PRAS Display at Southsea Show, Southsea Common, Southsea. Contact PRAS on (0329) 833017.

15th & 16th September

PRAS Annual Show, Co-op Hall, Fratton, Portsmouth. Contact PRAS on (0329) 833017

16th September 10.15am - 4pm

IHS Reptile Fair 1990. Sports Hall, Alumwell Centre, Primley Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands.

16th September

WHS Reptile Appreciation Day, Visitors Centre, Arrow Park, Birkenhead. Contact Eve Cavanagh on (051) 639 1197.

I'm No Expert But...

by Kelvin Waltho

Stoke on Trent, where I live, isn't exactly brimming over with snakes, shops that sell them or people who keep them. I was, however, talking to a young couple recently who told me they had a Yellow-bellied Rock Python! I couldn't work out what the snake was from their description but it sounded like a Reticulated Python (*Python reticulatus*). Two shops had told them it was a Yellow-bellied Rock Python and one had said it was an Anaconda.

I visited their home and immediately recognised the snake as a Reticulated Python. I explained to them just how big it would grow, how it should be housed (it measured three metres and was living in a fish tank of 90 x 45 x 45cm). They were told when they bought it that it wouldn't reach 2.5m.

The owners had very little idea of how to care for the snake so I explained the snake's good and bad points as clearly as I could. I examined the python for mites, ticks and sores (as its tank was wet) and suggested that they sell the snake to someone who knew what they were doing and taking on. I also suggested that if they were still keen to keep snakes it would be a good idea if they purchased a smaller, more suitable species of snake.

Happily, a month later they sold the snake and obtained a pair of Corn Snakes (*Elaphe guttata*) which they now keep properly fed in a better, heated vivarium.

Finding good information, equipment and food is always a problem for snake keepers. (Because of a lack of suppliers in my area I buy all my snakes' food by mail order from a High Wycombe company called Locusta.) If the couple had received better information they could have bought a suitable snake in the first place and saved themselves a lot of hassle.

Once you've become known as a keeper of snakes people will always come to you for advice and we should always be willing to give it. Since I first started keeping snakes I've lost a couple of friends who can't bear them but I have received a great deal of pleasure from taking my animals to local schools and trying my best to dispel peoples' fears about the creatures. I'm no expert but just a happy amateur who loves snakes.

Temperature Control Equipment

A Cornwall based company, Eco Electronics, have been manufacturing temperature control equipment for seven years, specialising in animal welfare and photographic applications. Their range of products include the Ecotronic (for the control of photographic chemicals), the Eco Stat (for use in animal welfare or incubation equipment) and the Eco 2 (a plug in, fully proportional, air temperature controller). Eco Electronics also produce a range of flexible heating elements (loops) in 25, 50, 75 and 100 watt ratings.

Further details from Eco Electronics on (0209) 612264.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTS

FOR SALE

Brazilian Rainbow Boa hatchlings, c/b 1990 *(Epicrates cenchria cenchria)*. Feeding well, superb specimens. £220 each. Phone (0703) 847117 after 6pm.

Burmese Pythons. Female, 9½ to 10', £195. Male, 8 to 8½', £150. Both good feeders (frozen) and very tame. Telephone Mike on (081) 361 8336 or (081) 886 9962.

Two Boa Constrictors. Male and female, 3'. £250 inc. tank. Telephone Adrian on (05394) 33973 (Ambleside) after 6pm.

Tiger Rat Snake, 7' in length, beautiful markings. Feeds well, generally calm but not tame. Not vicious but defensive. To go to someone who is confident they can handle her as we cannot. **Indian Python** hatchling approximately 20" in length. Hatched first week in June. Feeding well and active. Offers in the region of £70-75. Glass vivarium 24" x 12" x 18" also available, £10. (0428) 52076.

WANTED

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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.

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