snake breeder

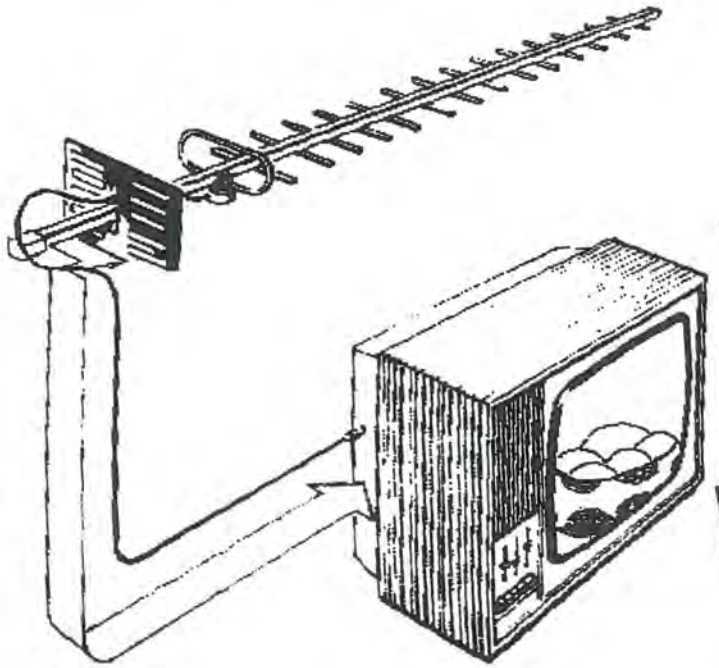
The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts

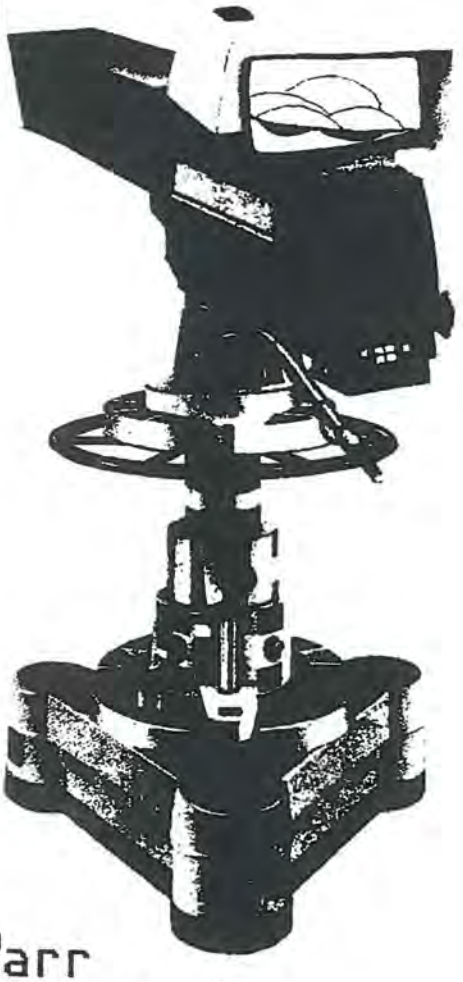
JERRY COLE

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It's Always Alright On the Night -

Chris and Marcia Martin describe events when the BBC arrive to film their pythons!

Royal Pythons by Dave Warr

Choosing the Right Disinfectant by Gretchen Davison

Plus Mailbox, Info and Classified Ads.

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 spelling 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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NEW SUBSCRIBERS

Welcome to the following new subscribers to Snake Breeder:

A Crossley, S Sharp, P Clark, J Burgess, S Wilkinson, C Pywell-Fox, S Baker, S Nichols, T Spooner, P Sizer (United Arab Emirates), C Chivers, N Epps, M Chapman. N Blackler, R Smith.

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.

It's Always Alright on the Night

by Chris and Marcia Martin

Just picture the situation, thousands if not millions of viewers are sitting in front of their televisions waiting to be amazed and, perhaps, thrilled by the marvels of nature in the wonderful world that we live in. (Let's hope we leave a few living creatures for future generations, not just film and video recordings of them!) Whether the program in question is a one-off or a series such as the BBC's 'Supersense' have you ever been amazed by one particular shot or sequence and wondered just how it was filmed.

Many times in recent years I have heard people ask how the camera crew managed to be there at the time of a particular event to capture it on film. As members of several herpetological societies we have been present at meetings when programme makers have given talks. A few illusions have been shattered by their revelations but usually the way the camera operator has achieved the desired effect is interesting and fascinating.

This article describes the time we were asked to help on a programme called 'The Serpent's Embrace' which was transmitted on BBC2 in the 'Natural World' series.

It all started back in March 1989 with a telephone call from Dave Morritt, a researcher for producer Nigel Marvin. Dave asked if we had any boas that were gravid. Unfortunately at the time of his call we hadn't but during the conversation we mentioned that we had two gravid Burmese Pythons. Dave said he would have a chat with Nigel about the possibility of doing a python breeding sequence.

A week later Dave phoned again and said they were interested. During the period between calls we had thought about some of the problems that filming would cause. You may be wondering what problems we would have filming in the wilds of Cheltenham. The last few words should give you a clue to problem - it is supposed to be filmed in the wild! Some people complain about being conned when they find out that a particular sequence was not filmed in the wild. We think that the best way to explain why it's perfectly reasonable to film supposed wild scenes in captivity is to imagine the amount of time and money it would take if the camera crew had to spend weeks, if not months, in a country trying to capture what may only be a few seconds of screen time. Surely it is better to get the shots under controlled conditions. The shot probably involves an animal just doing what comes naturally but under supervision. This leaves more money in the budget for shots that must be filmed on location.

One problem was converting a 4' x 4' x 3' vivarium into a natural location. The first thing we decided was that the snake came first. We all agreed that, whatever happened, the snake wasn't to be upset or frightened in any way. We made sure that any plants or leaves

introduced into the vivarium were free from germs or bacteria. After a great deal of discussion we decided we couldn't use any live plants. It was agreed that the only material we would use would be dead leaves and material that had been autoclaved. The snakes usually have a large pebble 'nest' to lay on but it didn't matter if that came in shot. The main problem was the wooden sides of the vivarium. We decided to wait until the snake laid her eggs then we would try to put the material around her to obscure the background. With all our plans made we then had to wait for one of the snakes to lay. I was given a phone number to call, day or night, when something happened.

The evening of the 15th May came and Marcia went to inspect Rama (our biggest female Burmese Python) only to find that she was laying. A quick phone call to Dave let him know that it was all happening. As I was working I arranged for Dave and Gavin Thurston (the cameraman) to arrive about 11pm. When I got home Dave and Gavin had already arrived and were unpacking their equipment.

As already mentioned, the size of the vivarium Rama occupied was 4' x 4' x 3' and, luckily, she had decided to lay at the front of the vivarium so all the shots could be taken through the front glass panel. The sequence required was Rama laying eggs and she would lay an egg every 10 to 20 minutes.

By midnight everything was ready for filming to start - all we needed now was an egg. Fifteen minutes passed, an egg was about to be laid, and so Gavin started to film. It was at that point that Rama decided she wasn't going to make things easy so she turned her tail away from the camera. We were ready for take two about 12 minutes later after Gavin had repositioned his camera. Just as the egg was about to be laid she put her tail back into the original position. Luckily, Gavin's experience enabled him to quickly reposition the camera. However, Rama now played one of her many trump cards; she put her tail down between her coils so we couldn't see the egg being laid.

By 3am Dave and Gavin decided that they had enough film in the can to use if they couldn't get any better when Kimberley, Rama's daughter, laid her eggs.

The following morning at 9am we looked in on Kimberley to find her curled up around a clutch of eggs - Rama's film would have to be used!

As you probably know things never go to plan. Problem number one was that for the first time in her life Rama had laid a clutch of infertile eggs which she left after a week. Problem number two was that Kimberley had laid her eggs in the rear right hand side of her vivarium which meant that for technical reasons she couldn't be filmed through the front glass or through the top opening of the vivarium. The main problem was that wildlife filming has to be done at the level of the animal. If you film it from above it looks unnatural and the shot doesn't blend in with the rest of sequence. In addition the shot would be too wide, showing the sides of the vivarium. Dave and Gavin decided that the only way to get the required shot of a python incubating her eggs was

to use a periscope. This device is similar to those fitted in submarines but it works in reverse; the camera is fixed to the top lens. The device is about three feet in length and great care had to be taken not to frighten Kimberley when the unit was lowered into the vivarium. The lens had to be kept very close to the snake (between three and five inches) otherwise the shot might include unwanted items. In the beginning Kimberley was a little perturbed by the periscope but after two or three hours she ceased flicking her tongue at it. Over the next four weeks Gavin and Dave came to get various shots.

The most important shots to knit the whole sequence together were of Kimberley curled around the eggs while they were hatching.

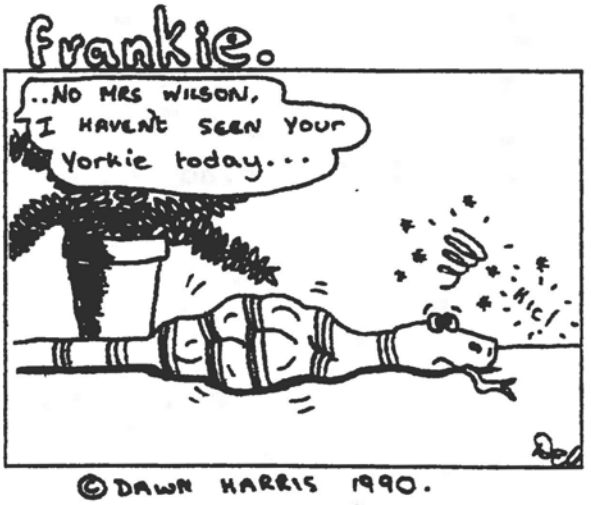
One major problem was that most pythons leave their eggs as soon as they start to hatch or just before. As this was Kimberley's first clutch we didn't know what she would do.

The day eventually came when we noticed that one of the eggs had a small split in it and I phoned Dave to let him know. He decided to wait until the young snake's head protruded from the egg. Two days later at 7.30am I peered into Kimberley's vivarium to find three little heads emerging from their eggs. I hurriedly phoned Dave but he wasn't in so I phoned Gavin who was also out. I left a message and Gavin returned my call five minutes later. Upon hearing the news he said they would be with us within the hour.

Kimberley was still curled around her eggs when Dave and Gavin duly arrived an hour later. Gavin set up the lighting and camera in record time. The first priority was to get some shots of Kimberley and her young before she left them. Over the next hour Gavin got the shots he wanted. While the crew paused for a cup of tea we noticed that one of the eggs was moving which meant it was about to hatch. During the next twenty minutes Gavin filmed the egg every time it moved. Just as we began to wonder if the egg was going to hatch it gave a shudder and out popped a head. Gavin decided he had all the film he needed and dismantled his equipment, packed it in the car and left. We waved goodbye and went upstairs to find Kimberley had left her eggs.

Gavin and Dave returned a few days later to film Kimberley with some of her young. This proved to be a difficult job as neither the mother nor her young would go where we wanted them to.

Next time you watch a nature programme on television we hope you will give some thought to the difficulties the crew faced in making the programme.



Royal Pythons

by Dave Warr

At the beginning of the year I decided that, due to its ever increasing size and uncertain temperament, it was time to say goodbye to my beloved Reticulated Python (*Python reticulatus*). An advertisement was duly placed and on February 6th the snake departed with his new keeper. Whilst awaiting a response to the advertisement I decided that his replacement would be a Royal Python (*Python regius*). Prior to searching for a specimen I set about preparing a suitable vivarium, a three-quarter inch plywood cabinet with glass sliding doors at the front. Light and heat were provided by a 60W striplight and thermostatically regulated ceramic trough element. These enabled me to maintain a constant daytime temperature of 30-32° C which was lowered at night to 27-28° C. The vivarium was lit for 15 hours a day. Climbing branches, a water container and a hide box were also provided and to complete the set-up a substrate of bark chippings was added.

On January 28th I purchased (from a London dealer) a healthy-looking adult female Royal Python. Although she had been recently imported I was assured that she was a regular feeder. After approximately seven days, during which time she was left completely undisturbed, a dead mouse was offered and shortly consumed. The snake continued to feed regularly until the 22nd February. From this date the snake showed no interest in food although it was continuously offered. After a month of abstinence I began to grow slightly anxious. However on March 23rd I was given a totally unexpected explanation for the snake's behaviour - my new arrival produced a clutch of four eggs overnight!

The fact that she might be gravid hadn't even occurred to me. Taken by complete surprise I was thrown into instant confusion as to what to do for the best but I finally decided that it was best not to interfere but to let nature take its course.

I adjusted the temperature to a constant 31° C and misted the vivarium twice each day. Any intrusion into the vivarium was greeted with loud hissing and defensive behaviour as the python settled down for incubation tightly coiled around the clutch. Occasionally she loosed a coil or two in order to drink which gave me the opportunity to inspect the eggs. By mid-April it became obvious that the uppermost egg was not likely to hatch. A fortnight later it had begun to deteriorate noticeably; the surface had collapsed and become discoloured. I crossed my fingers and continued to wait patiently, hoping the other three eggs would not suffer the same fate. I had calculated that the eggs should hatch by the 20th May.

The 20th came and went without event and there was still no evidence of life by June 1st. I became increasingly convinced that nature had taken the wrong course and that nothing was now likely to happen.

However my girlfriend, Sue, remained optimistic and managed

to convince me to have a little extra patience. Her optimism was rewarded a few days later on the 6th of June when the first hatchling's head came poking through the shell closely followed by the emergence of heads from the other two eggs. After a couple of days all three snakes had emerged completely from their shells.

I noticed that they were all swollen with absorbed yolk and although they all appeared to be in good health one snake was smaller and in different proportions to the other two. Upon inspecting the discarded egg shells I discovered that one shell had a noticeable residue of yolk remaining within.

The baby pythons were removed from the mother and rehoused in a plastic seed propagator. This was installed in a corner of the vivarium so as to benefit from the same heat and light sources.

By the 20th of June two of the hatchlings had shed their first skin, the third smaller snake taking a week longer. I began to offer pinkies hoping they would begin feeding but at the time of writing this article (June 30th) no food has been accepted; presumably the absorbed egg-yolk provided adequate sustenance.

Shortly after completing the incubation period the mother shed her skin and began to feed voraciously. From June the 9th to date, twelve adult mice and nine pinkies have been devoured. It is noticeable that her former health is returning and her skin has begun to regain its wonderful iridescent sheen.

In retrospect, over a period of some six months I have been able to observe and acquire quite an amount of unexpected experience and knowledge about *Python regius* after starting out completely in the dark.

I have decided that I will keep the three hatchlings and hopefully watch them grow into healthy adult specimens.

As a relative newcomer to herpetology I would like to converse with anyone who shares my interest. I can be contacted at home on (081) 802 0077 - ask for Dave.

MAILBOX

Dear Snake Breeder,

I have six adult Honduran Boas. I have been told they are *occidentalis* but I cannot be sure as I have yet to find any decent photographs or literature on this subspecies - I would be very grateful for any help other readers may be able to offer on identifying and sexing them.

My snakes are all about six feet in length. Their backs are predominantly black with muddy-brown oval markings. Between each oval there are two white stripes each about half an inch long. Their flanks are silver-steel grey with diamond or oval shapes, mainly black with a central white dot. Their tails are black with large white bands. Their heads are grey with a black and white band from the eye through the jaw. A black line runs down the centre of the head. A faint black line crosses the head between the eyes and there are a few black marks above the eyes (like eyebrows). The undersides of the snake are cream with black

spots. Two of my snakes are more red-brown than grey and their heads and tails tend to be more red-brown but the markings are identical to the others.

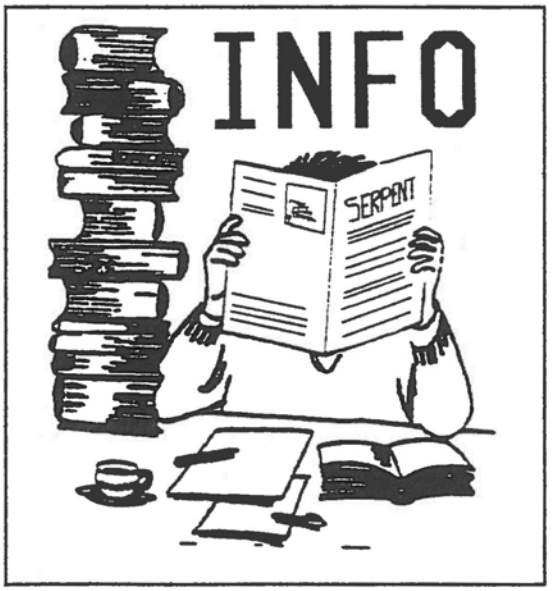
The first snake was bought as a grey-black female. Number two (grey-black female) and number three (red-brown male) were bought as an unrelated pair. Number four was bought as a grey-black female. Number five (grey-black male) and number six (red-brown female) were bought as an unrelated pair. The scale counts taken from complete sloughs are as follows:

No.	Vent.	Subcaud.	Tail/Body Ratio
1	230	55	7
2	246	51	8
3	251	56	7
4	248	57	7
5	250	66	4½
6	254	61	5¼

I think number two is female and number five male. Number six could be male and one, three and four could be female. Again, I would appreciate any information/help from other readers.

Yours sincerely,

P Kite Tel: (0570) 423311



SNAKES IN PRINT

SWHS Journal
Volume 1 Number 3 1989 (A5)
ISSN 0953-0363
South Western Herpetological Society
59 St Marychurch Road, Torquay, Devon, TQ1 3HG.

Boas of the Genus Eryx, Part II by Jon H Flynn. (5 pages.) Captive husbandry of the sand boas, mainly *Eryx jaculus turcicus*, by the SWHS Journal Editor.

The Systematics, Maintenance and Reproduction of Kingsnakes by Dr. sc. Dieter Schmidt. (6 pages.) English translation of an article covering the introduction, captive care and breeding of *Lampropeltis getulus* by the editor of 'elaphe', the GDR quarterly magazine.

Reptile Keeper International
Number 3 (A4)
Northern Herpetological Society
8 Bromley Gardens, Battle Hill, Wallsend, North Tyneside, NE28 9BS.

Garter Snakes - *Thamnophis* by Dr. sc. Dieter Schmidt. (2 pages.) Doctor Schmidt again, this time on the description and care of Garter Snakes. Continuation in next month's issue of RKI.

The Vivarium
Volume 2 Number 4 (8½" x 11")
American Federation of Herpetoculturists
PO Box 1131, Lakeside, CA 92040, USA.
Available in the UK from Jerry Cole (03004) 738.

Small Rattlesnakes by Vince Scheidt. (4 pages.) Short account describing the range, size and habitat of *Crotalus polystictus, Crotalus enyo furvus, Sistrurus miliarus streckeri, Crotalus pricei miquihuanus, Crotalus tigris, Crotalus willardi amabilis, Crotalus transversus, Sistrurus ravus exiguus, Sistrurus miliarus miliarus, Crotalus lepidus morulus, Crotalus cerastes laterorepens* and *Crotalus triseriatus triseriatus*. Includes colour picture of each snake by John H Tashjian.

The Hardy and Prolific Sand Boa, *Eryx jaculus jaculus* by Steven Simpson and Angela Ellis. (5 pages.) Well-known herpetological book seller's comprehensive guide to this snake including a description, history of captive maintenance, care and successful breeding.

Herpetozoa
Volume 2 Number 3/4 June 1990
ISSN 1013-4425 (A5)
Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Herpetologie
Linke Bahngasse 11, A1030 Wien, Österreich.

On Habitat Selection and Phenology in Six Species of Snakes in Canale Monterano (Tolfa Mountains, Latium, Italy) including data on reproduction and feeding in *Vipera aspis francisciredi* by Luca M Luiselli and Lorenzo Rugiero. (9 pages.) E with G abstract. From nine species of snake found in Central Italy, six (*Coluber viridiflavus, Coronella austriaca, Elaphe longissima, Elaphe quatuorlineata, Natrix natrix* and *Vipera aspis*) are living practically sympatric in the territory of Canale Monterano, one of the richest places in central Italy as far as reptiles are concerned. Data on reproduction, annual activity, prey and habitat selection of the snakes observed are given.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

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.

Choosing the Right Disinfectant

By Gretchen Davison

The use of disinfectants as part of the regular routine in herptile management is one of the best steps we can take to prevent infection in our animals.

With so many types and brands on the market, though, which is the best one to use? There are several factors we need to take into consideration before making our choice. A highly toxic solution would do more harm than good whereas one that was too weak would give no protection at all. Some have better anti-bacterial activity than others and this could be important as a variety of gram-negative bacteria cause infections in reptiles, *Pseudomonas* being a possible example. Hard water can affect the efficiency of some disinfectants and most are neutralised by organic material. There are some solutions that leave a stain on plastic material whilst others are corrosive to metal. All these factors and more need to be taken into account before the final choice is made.

Disinfectants can be divided into five groups depending on their chemical properties. The relevant groups are **halogens, quaternary ammonium compounds (QAC's), ampholytes, alcohols and pine fluids.** Ideally the disinfectant we are looking for would be

- effective against all forms of bacteria and virus
- non-toxic
- non-irritant to snake and user
- non-corrosive
- non-staining
- capable of having lasting activity
- inexpensive
- easily available
- active in all types of water
- suitable for all materials.

Unfortunately, there is no disinfectant which meets all these criteria. So, how good are those which are available to us?

Halogens can be sub-divided into three further groups; hypochlorites, iodine compounds and chloroxylenols.

Hypochlorites include Domestos and Milton. They are highly effective against bacteria and their spores. Their toxicity level is low and they are only slightly inactivated by dilution with hard water. Disinfectants in this group are cheap but they are corrosive.

Iodine compounds include disinfectants such as Betadine. These cost a little more but are no more effective against bacteria than the above - in fact they have only a limited effect against their spores. They are also slightly affected by hard water and although they are not corrosive they do stain.

Chloroxylenols are much more toxic. Dettol belongs to this group. They are limited in their activity against gram-negative bacteria, are seriously inactivated by hard water

and are expensive.

Quaternary ammonium compounds have a pleasing detergent and deodorising action and are non-toxic. However, they have a limited activity on gram-negative bacteria and are seriously affected by dilution with hard water. They are also expensive.

Ampholytes have a similar bacterial activity but disinfectants in this group leave a residue making them effective after use. Their activity is seriously impeded by hard water and they are expensive.

Alcohols are highly effective against all bacteria but are quite expensive. They are only slightly affected by hard water and are the only group mentioned that are not seriously affected by organic matter.

Pine fluids such as Jeypine are cheap but have little effect on bacteria of any kind especially when diluted with hard water.

In summary, hypochlorites such as Domestos are the most effective of all halogens and, indeed, of all disinfectants. They tend to give off unpleasant fumes and items such as plastic boxes need to be rinsed well but their only real disadvantage is that they are corrosive and would not therefore be suitable for metal objects. QAC's are not as effective but they are non-toxic and this makes them useful for items such as water bowls. Their deodorising properties make them pleasant to use as they leave a clean smell. Ampholytes have a similar effectiveness but leave a residue and so go on being effective. Pine fluids which are frequently seen on the supermarket shelf are best left there. Alcohols are effective against bacteria (but not their spores) and are non-corrosive and therefore suitable for such items as probes and feeding tongs. They can be used as a hand wash to prevent cross-infection and the more expensive ones are recommended as an internal wash for the handler only.

At the end of the day, the only solution seems to be to keep a stock of more than one type; for example, a halogen for general disinfection of plastic cages etc., a QAC for water bowls and an alcohol for instruments. It is worth emphasising that all disinfectants, with the possible exception of alcohols, are inactivated in the presence of organic materia; therefore all your items must be thoroughly washed beforehand - so get your sleeves rolled up...

CLASSIFIED ADVERTS
(Continued from page 12)

FOR SALE

Two large, all-glass fish tanks on stand. Top 36" x 24" x 24", bottom 36" x 18" x 24", with all accessories. £175 or exchange for Burmese Pythons, either potential, friendly breeding pair or trio hatchling with cash difference either way. Ring Sue on (0638) 668690 (Newmarket) after 7pm.

Boa Constrictor, male, 3'. Captive bred, excellent condition, slightly defensive. Must go to experienced keeper. £100. Phone (0842) 753820 after 5pm.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTS

FOR SALE

Reticulated Python. Very tame, 9½'. Feeding on rats. Possible male. £150. Ring Alex on (0494) 725869 (Bucks).

Hatchling **Corn Snakes**, *Elaphe guttata guttata*. Born beginning of July. Feeding well. £18.50 each. Contact Jason on (0639) 642227.

Northern Pine Snakes, *Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus*. This year's hatchlings. £35 each. Telephone Mark on (0634) 844926 (evenings and weekends) or (0634) 724841 (day) (Kent).

Second-generation Cheltenham-bred **Common Boa Constrictor**, *Boa constrictor constrictor*, £70 each. Telephone Chris and Marcia Martin on (0242) 573477 or write to 18 Ballinode Close, Cheltenham, Gloucs GL50 4SQ.

Corn Snake. Possibly male. Grey phase. 3½', 4+ years old. Tank 4½' long x 2½' high. £70 ono. Tel: Mrs Davies on (02406) 3070

Captive hatched **Royal Pythons**, £40, captive bred **Common Boas**, £75, **Leopard Geckos**, £10. Also available wide range of frozen foods, rats, mice, chicks, turkey poults, rabbits etc. Telephone (081) 524 2522.

200 Red Worms £2.40p + 60p 1st class postage. 200 Brandlings £2.40p + 60p 1st class postage. David Silvester, 188 Wrens Hill Road, Wrens Nest Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3SF.

1990 captive bred **Brazilian Rainbow Boa** hatchlings, *Epicrates cenchria cenchria*. Feeding well on dead fluffs. Superb specimens £220 each. 1990 captive bred **Pine Snake**, *Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus* hatchlings from a very large male. £45 each. Telephone Malcolm Flux on (0703) 847117 after 6pm.

Captive bred **Burmese Pythons**, 22" to 28" in length. Hatched early July. Parents can be seen. £50 to £60 each. Phone Mark on (08323) 492 (Cambs.).

Two **Boa Constrictors**. Male and female, 3'. £200 inc. tank. Telephone Adrian on (05394) 33973 (Ambleside) after 6pm.

Female **Indian Python** 6' to 7', £150. Feeding on dead chicks and rats. **Royal Pythons**, all good feeders, £50 each ono. Phone Bryan on (0375) 382682 (day) or (03752) 3233 (eves.).

Indian Pythons, male 11', female 9'. Both good feeders (frozen) and tame. Breeding pair £350 or will sell separately. **Indian Python** hatchlings from above pair, good feeders, very good temperament, £100 each. Phone Mark on (0375) 382682 (day) or (0268) 511307 (evening).

WANTED

Female **Russian Rat Snake**, *Elaphe schrenckii schrenckii*. Ring Brian on (0305) 812877.

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.

Yearling or hatchling female **Sonoran Gopher Snake**. Buy or exchange for yearling male. K. Burnett (021) 459 6617.

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