snake breeder

The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts

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JERRY COLE

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1991 hatchlings of **Pacific Island Ground Boa**, *Candoia carinata*. £30 each. For experienced keepers only there are a few non-feeders at £15 each. Also a male '90 **California Kingsnake**, £35. Contact Fred on (0442) 241453 (Herts).

I am a friendly female **Burmese Python** just over 4 years old called Sam. I live in my own detached residence with all mod cons. However I need larger accomodation and so must regretfully look for a new home. Obviously I shall want to vet the new pad first. My favourite food is frozen rats and chicks. My removal expenses will be at least £100. If you have somewhere suitable to offer please call my agent, Joe, on (081) 852 0657 in the evenings.

Baby *Candoia carinata*, **Pacific Boas**. Unrelated pairs available shortly. £15 - £30 each. Sexes guaranteed. Good discount for orders of two or more pairs. Also **African House Snakes** from £15. Pair of subadult **Black Corn Snakes** (cb '89), £170 or nearest offer. Phone Kevin on (0384) 457368 (West Midlands).

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The International Newsletter
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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 or US$.

Trade Advertising Rates:
Display ¼ page £8
½ page £15
1 page £30
(based on ready-to-paste copy)
Inserts (A4) £5 per 100 (UK & Europe).

snake breeder Newsfile

This month we are pleased to announce that David and Allison McNeill of Malden, Massachusetts have kindly offered to help bring snake breeder to the attention of snake enthusiasts in the USA. David and Allison have given us much support in the past and have written several articles for snake breeder and our previous publication Snake Keeper. Naturally we wish them much success.

snake breeder
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FREE COPIES AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Readers are invited to submit articles on any aspect of snake keeping and breeding whether they be crisply laser printed or hastily scribbled on the back of a cornflakes packet. Instead of offering money (which you would only squander anyway) we will send you five free copies of the issue containing your article and extend your subscription.

NEW SUBSCRIPTIONS AND RENEWALS

Thank you to the following people who have recently subscribed or renewed their subscriptions to snake breeder.

J Beeston, D Webster, P McHardy, G Cook, K Hillier, K Jones, H Doyle, T Brough, Mr & Mrs Ager, D Legge, T Stones, G Webb, R Ruszkiewicz, C Mattison, B Gould, N McGill, D Moore, G Northey, R Trant, V Walch, D Farr, A Mawe, C Miles, A Woods, D Thurnell-Read & A Kettles.

The Maintenance and Breeding of the Chequered Garter Snake, *Thamnophis marcianus*

by Robin M Crunden

Introduction

The Chequered Garter Snake is an attractive species, olive in colour with a cream or yellow back stripe, lighter side stripes and a bold chequered pattern of black blotches on its sides. The belly is creamy white and the scales are keeled.

This species occurs in extreme southeast California, south Arizona, through east and southwest New Mexico to eastern Texas, as far north as southwest Kansas and south as far as Costa Rica. It inhabits arid and semi-arid grassland close to water and is mainly crepuscular but is active during the day in the northerly part of its range. Its diet consists mainly of frogs, fish and crayfish. Maximum length 42½ inches (108cm).

Housing

The adult snakes are housed in a vivarium constructed of Contiboard measuring 3' x 1' x 1½' with sliding glass doors. Light and heat are provided by a spotlight bulb (wattage varies but is usually 60w) at one end of the vivarium and a heating pad concealed beneath the substrate inside the vivarium for night-time heating. A temperature gradient is maintained at all times of between 72°F and 80°F with a fall of a few degrees at night.

A natural set-up is preferred allowing the snakes to exhibit normal behaviour e.g. burrowing, climbing etc. The substrate used is bark strips. A small piece of cork bark provides a hiding place and a small branch draped with plastic plants is included for climbing and aesthetic purposes. An eight inch diameter ceramic water bowl completes the set-up.

Feeding

Feeding this species is easy as a wide variety of food items are readily taken, including fish, rat pups, pinkies, mice, quail chicks and, on one occasion, raw beef. Individual specimens have preferences but generally fish is the preferred food. I have experimented with various types of fish including mackerel, sprats, trout and whitebait. Trout appears to be the favourite. All are heated in just-boiled water for five minutes from frozen to denature the enzyme thiaminase, a substance which destroys the vitamin B1. Pieces of fish no larger than 1cm in width are treated in this way and then broken into a suitable size; this varies according to the size of the snake, from small flakes for hatchlings to whole whitebait for adults. All food is presented in plastic dishes of varying sizes; occasionally rat pups and mice are fed from tongs. Adult snakes receive on average 10 feeds per month but periodically refuse food for up to three weeks and never feed during the two to three days prior to sloughing.

Vitamin supplements are added to either the fish or the drinking water every six weeks

for adults. Hatchlings are given vitamins weekly. The products used, Arkvits and BSP Vitamin Drops, are manufactured by Vetark.

Hibernation

Hibernation is not a prerequisite for breeding *Thamnophis marcianus*. All the specimens I have kept have continued feeding throughout the winter months and never exhibited typical pre-hibernation behaviour e.g. vivarium searching and refusal to feed. As a result the temperature is held at relatively constant levels throughout the year.

The snakes are subjected to a changing photoperiod as the vivariums are in a room with an outside window. However this does not appear to have any effect on mating activity.

Breeding

The specimens I keep mated at the age of 16 months but would probably have bred much earlier. Sex determination is simple; the females have a shorter tail and are much larger (largest male 26 inches in length, largest female 34 inches). In particular, females have a greater girth and broader head than males.

The snakes are kept in small groups of up to five animals, more usually three. In order to stimulate a mating response the males are separated from the females and reintroduced within two days of her sloughing. Courtship always occurs immediately. Separation of the sexes for two weeks is sufficient. The male (or males) begin by rubbing their chin repeatedly over the female's back and sides. Often she appears uninterested and moves away at speed. Usually after about 15 minutes of courtship she raises her tail exposing her cloaca. The male will then insert one of his hemipenes. Copulation may last for between a few minutes and half an hour. The males remain in the same vivarium until the female is due to give birth. Courtship and mating usually continues periodically for three to four weeks. The key to successful breeding is the separation and reintroduction of the sexes. This not only stimulates mating activity but also means that a record of the gestation period can be kept, allowing future births to be predicted with accuracy.

During pregnancy the females may consume slightly more food than normal but generally their behaviour changes very little. A considerable increase in girth is visible in the rear third of the body four to five weeks after copulation and if the underside of the female is held it feels similar to a balloon filled with water. The female's girth continues to increase and my snakes frequently bask under the spotlight during the period six weeks after copulation to birth. I have recorded a gestation period of 74 days. Seven to 10 days prior to birth the snakes become restless, presumably searching for a suitable place to give birth. At this time the female is moved to a 2' x 1' x 1½' glass aquarium with a newspaper substrate (otherwise it is impossible to locate the offspring), a small ceramic water bowl and plastic hide box. Heat and light is provided

in the usual way. Birth occurs during the night; the young are born in a transparent membrane which they usually break out of within minutes. Deformed young are unable to rupture the membrane and die. However, on one occasion, a hatchling with a deformed head managed to break the membrane but it died two days later. Infertile eggs measure three-quarters of an inch to one inch in length, are orange in colour and shaped like a rugby ball. The size of the litter varies considerably. I have recorded 12 but know of two litters of over 20 and one of over 30 young from a single female in less than two years.

The young slough within 24 hours, usually much quicker, and are then moved to 8" x 4" x 4½" plastic boxes with a kitchen roll substrate. Water is supplied (with BSP) in shallow plastic dishes and the inside of a toilet roll is used as a hide box. The boxes are placed partly on a heating pad (usually about a quarter of the way on) but this varies according to the hatchlings behaviour; e.g. do they remain at one end of the box?

The hatchlings are fed on trout (prepared as described earlier) in small plastic dishes. Fish is accepted readily as are small earthworms. At this age they are fed every other day. Growth is rapid; hatchlings can reach a length of 2' in under a year although individuals grow at different rates. Differences between the sexes can clearly be seen after five to six months.

Summary

Chequered Garter Snakes are an extremely easy species to keep and breed. They feed readily, are simple to handle, are moderate in size and captive bred offspring can be purchased for less than £10 from many herpetological society members. In short, it is an excellent choice for the beginner and experienced herpetologist alike.

References

Zwart, P. and B. van Ham. (1980). Keeping, Breeding and Raising Garter Snakes. In: **The Care and Breeding of Captive Reptiles.** British Herpetological Society, London.

Mattison, C. (1988). **Keeping and Breeding Snakes.** Blandford Press, London.

Behler, J.L. and F.W. King (1987). **The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles and hibians.** A A Knopf.

Brief Notes on *Corallus enydris*

by Stuart Bristow



I purchased a female *Corallus enydris* on the 6th of November 1990. After questioning the owner I probed the snake to make sure it was the sex stated. Three females had been previously checked and proved to be male; I wasn't taking any chances. The owner said the snake fed well and her general health was fine.

As the snake was wild-caught I arranged for a sample of her faeces to be checked for endoparasites by our local veterinary surgeon.

I placed her in a vivarium measuring 1200 x 700 x 400mm (h x w x d) with sliding glass panels. Garden mulch was used as a substrate and heat was provided by a 60w blue bulb connected to a standard room dimmer switch.

The vivarium was sprayed daily and the daytime temperature was maintained at 82°F, reducing to 74°F at night. Large, stout branches were placed in the cage and the snake used these during the day but descended to the ground at night.

One day after purchase, on the 7th of November, the snake took a Chinese painted quail confirming what the dealer had claimed about her feeding well.

On the 24th of November the animal refused food on two occasions and sat under the lamp constantly. I noted that she might possibly be gravid. I should mention that whilst under the bulb she also gained heat from the lamp in the vivarium below.

Two prominent lumps were noticed on the 30th of November. One lump was approximately 150mm from the cloaca and the other was approximately 300mm distant. The body between the lumps was of a normal girth. I assumed at this time that the snake was either gravid or the lumps were faeces. I gave her a 30°C bath for 10 minutes to help her get rid of any faecal matter but none was passed. Obviously I did not handle the snake too much but I kept her under close observation.

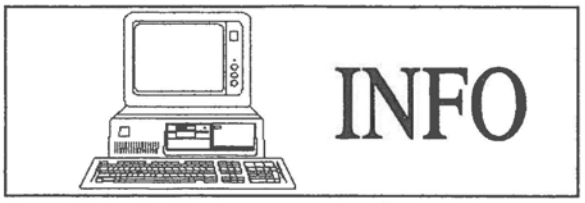
At this point in time the snake did not show any great abdominal growth and I was only assuming that she could possibly be gravid because of the habits she adopted, i.e. refusing food, basking.

On the 1st of December the snake gave birth to three young; two were burnt orange in colour and the other was chestnut brown. They were approximately 17 inches in length and aggressive. The neonates were removed from the mother's vivarium and placed in a separate cage.

The mother was very aggressive and hissed and struck whenever I opened the vivarium for routine servicing. She fed on quail on the 2nd of December and returned to her previous habits of spending the day on the branch and the night on the ground, often sitting in or behind the water bowl.

On the 15th of December the young were fed for the first time. They were force fed twice (on mouse legs) before accepting food voluntarily. They now feed on frozen pink mice, thawed prior to feeding and warmed on a radiator before being offered on forceps. The vivarium is sprayed once a day and heated to 82°F during the day and the low 70s at night.

I hope these notes are of use to other *C. enydris* keepers. Obviously I am extremely pleased with the results and I believe the female is only young due to the small number of young born. I would be pleased to hear from anyone who wishes to discuss the above events and I can be contacted on (0702) 522102.



SNAKES IN PRINT

Royal News
Volume 2 Number 4 (A5)
Lee Bowler, The Privetts, 37 Sixty Acres Road, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Bucks HP16 0PE.

▸ **From A Royal Perspective** by Frank Lundburg. (3 pages.)

Idaho Herpetological Society President suggests *Python regius* owners can learn a great deal from their animals by just watching them.

▸ **The Maintenance and Reproduction of the Royal Python in the Vivarium** by Christine and Klaus-Peter Lehmann. (5 pages.)

The Lehmann's 2.2 *Python regius* mated regularly from December to March but no eggs were laid. Things changed when they introduced a West African wet-dry cycle however.

The Herptile
Volume Fifteen Number Four
ISSN 0953 2021 (A5)
The International Herpetological Society, 65 Broadstone Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 1JA.

▸ **The Red-sided Garter Snake, *Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*. An Experience of Breeding** by Richard and Val Hallam. (2 pages.)

The authors explain how they keep, feed and breed their snakes; 42 young born in 1990.

▸ **Reminiscences of Ten Years Caring For and Breeding English Grass Snakes** by David Wright. (5 pages.)

Advice from a Grass Snake enthusiast with many years experience on how to care for *Natrix natrix helvetica*.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

13th April 1991
ABWAK Reptile and Amphibian Symposium
Twycross Zoo
Atherstone
Warwickshire

Enquiries to Nigel Platt, ABWAK Symposium, Cotswold Wildlife Park, Burford, Oxon OX8 4JW.

20th - 23rd June 1991
International Herpetological Symposium
Seattle
Washington, USA

Enquiries to Richard Ross, Institute for Herpetological Research, PO Box 2227, Stanford, CA 94305, USA. Telephone (9-5 Pacific time) (415) 941-4596.

MISCELLANEOUS

Association of British Wild Animal Keepers 16th Annual Symposium, 13th April 1991.

ABWAK are holding their symposium this year at Twycross

Zoo, Atherstone, Warwickshire. The event is organised by Nigel Platt and the speakers are John Foden, Terry Thatcher, Pat Wisniewski, Andy Highfield, Paul Edgar, Edwin Blake, Ollie Claffey from Metro Toronto Zoo (Canada) and Trooper Walsh from National Zoo, Washington (USA).

The costs are as follows: ABWAK members £8, non-members £10. A choice of lunches will be available on the day at £4.50p. Registration forms are available from Nigel Platt, ABWAK Symposium, Cotswold Wildlife Park, Burford, Oxon OX8 4JW. Closing date for registration is the 31st of March.

Snakes, A Guide to their Husbandry Before and After Purchase.

The second edition of the Milton Keynes Herpetological Society's publication, written by Jeff Protheroe is now available in the UK at £4.00 post paid (North America £7 sterling). The latest issue has been updated and features a new binding and photographs. Enquiries to Pat or Barry Pomfret on (0908) 370112.

BOOK REVIEWS

A-Z of Snake-Keeping
by Chris Mattison
ISBN: 1 85391 073 2
Published by Merehurst at £14.95p. 144 pages.

The new year for snake keepers gets off to a good start with the appearance of this new book from Britain's amiable emissary of snake keeping. Described in the cover notes as 'a useful guide for both the novice and the more experienced keeper', the A-Z of Snake-Keeping is different in style to the author's previous publications, possibly because, as keen-eyed readers will have noticed, it is produced by a different publisher.

Liberally sprinkled with superb colour photographs by the author, the contents range from A for Albinos to W for Water Snakes. Each subject is covered thoroughly and, although the book could be read from cover to cover, part of its appeal lies in the fact that it can be dipped into as queries or problems arise. In addition to a list of contents, species are indexed by common and Latin names. One interesting item under C for Cages is a series of photographs of various types of snake housing which show a walk-in cage for pythons and a bank of cages with false bottoms and drawers.

Chris Mattison has been keeping and breeding snakes for twenty years and his vast experience has resulted, once again, in a readable, concise and well-illustrated book.

Snakes of the Arabian Gulf and Oman written and published by Michael Gallagher, PO Box 668, Muscat. 16 pages.

The second paragraph of the introduction to this illustrated guide to the venomous and harmless snakes of the Arabian Gulf and Oman begins 'The danger in the region comes from all sea snakes and nine out of 21 species of land snake'. Following recent events in this area the threat of snake bite is probably the last thing on the mind of the region's

inhabitants.

Although short and fairly basic, Snakes of the Arabian Gulf and Oman is interesting and colourful. Following a description of snakes' teeth and the various types of venom, the author describes each species, categorising them as dangerous, mildly toxic/harmless or harmless, mentioning their distribution, habits, length and Arabic names. A colour picture of each species accompanies their description. An index is included and the book concludes with advice on the prevention of snake bite and first aid should the worst happen.

Available in the UK from Steven Simpson, PO Box 853, Brighton BN1 5DY (Tel: (0273) 727328) at £6.75p including postage.

Reptiles - Misunderstood, Mistreated and Mass Marketed by Clifford Warwick
ISBN 0 9516210 0 9
Published by the Trust for the Protection of Reptiles, Worcester, England.

A grim tale from Clifford Warwick of mankind's deliberate and never-ending abuse of reptiles. Forty six pages covering the atrocities inflicted on live sea turtles - 'alive, conscious and terrified these animals have their underside cut away, their flesh carved off, and the eggs and internal organs brutally torn out'; caiman - 'wild-caught caiman are commonly skinned alive in the process of supplying the luxuries market in hides'; and iguanas - '... their limbs tied behind them, fully conscious they are cut open and their eggs pulled from their bodies. They are then sewn up and released - probably to face infertility or an early death from infection.' The catalogue of persecution goes on, listing the horrific things we do to tortoises, terrapins, alligators, monitors, water dragons and rattlesnakes.

Available in the UK from Steven Simpson, PO Box 853, Brighton BN1 5DY. (Tel: (0273) 727328) at £3.75p including postage. Further information about the Trust from TPR, College Gates, 2 Deansway, Worcester WR1 2JD. Tel: (04868) 7550.

The General Care and Maintenance of Ball Pythons by Philippe de Vosjoli
Published by Advanced Vivarium Systems, PO Box 408, Lakeside, CA 92040, USA. 32 pages.

Any book that states 'Imported adult ball pythons are not a good beginner's snake' must be worth reading. The author, founder of the American Federation of Herpeto-culturists, suggests corn and king snakes are much better purchases. However, if you already have a Royal Python or feel a compulsion to buy one this book offers chapters on Selecting a Potentially Healthy Specimen, Housing and Maintenance, Feeding, Diseases and Disorders and, finally, Breeding.

Nearly all *Python regius* keepers experience feeding difficulties with their animals at some time and the author devotes seven pages to the subject.

This is another useful addition to the popular series of booklets by Phillipe de Vosjoli and more are promised.

Available in the UK from Jerry Cole, Rivendell, Piddletrenthide, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 7QX. (Tel: (03004) 738) at £3.00p including postage.

Reluctant Rigsby

by Kelvin Waltho

While visiting a local pet shop I noticed they had a new snake, a Royal Python, *Python regius*. I asked to have a look at it and apart from the fact that it was a little thin it wasn't too bad. I was told the snake was probably female so I put a small deposit down and said I would collect her in a week when I had set up a vivarium. The pet shop owner also mentioned that the snake had fed but that she needed assistance.

A week later I brought the python, now named 'Rigsby', home and put her in the vivarium. When I inspected her the next morning I suspected she might have a cold so I arranged to take her to my local veterinary surgeon the next day. The vet confirmed my suspicions and gave the python an antibiotic injection and also wormed her. After a week she showed no sign of improvement so I took her back to the surgery to be examined again and she was given another injection. I was told to return in a week if things didn't improve but in the next few days she improved tremendously.

My vet suggested that I leave the snake in her vivarium to see if she would feed. I offered a defrosted mouse but, surprise surprise, she didn't want to know. I tried moving it around in front of her but she wasn't interested. I then tried a defrosted gerbil and once again the python showed no interest. Next she was offered defrosted day-old chicks followed by defrosted rats but again she showed no interest.

While I was in the same pet shop I noticed four live mice which I managed to persuade the shop owner to sell me. I suddenly remembered an article in an old issue of *Snake Keeper* in which the author suggested sewing food items together with dissolvable stitching. My vet supplied me with the correct item I required and I sewed two defrosted mice to a freshly killed mouse. I put all three carefully into Rigsby's vivarium and stood back hopefully. The python sniffed at them for at least five minutes but then went back to her resting place. Just as I began to wonder what I could try next she struck at the freshly killed mouse and then proceeded to consume all three items; after nine weeks of frustration I had finally managed to get her to feed.

At the next feed I put a freshly killed mouse in with two more defrosted mice but she only ate the freshly killed mouse and left the other two. Once again I had to revert to my previous successful practice as it appeared this is the only way to get her to feed; we have a shortage of live mice in our area. I did manage to get her to take a rat stitched to a freshly killed mouse and she is now starting to fill out and look normal.

As soon as I am sure that the python is female I intend to try mating her with our male Royal Python. I would like to thank my veterinary surgeon Mr Scheles for his successful treatment, all at *Snake Keeper* (**snake breeder**) for the information and, lastly, my long-suffering wife.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTS

FOR SALE

African Rock Python, *Python sebae*. 5', feeds on dead food. £95 ono. Phone Phil on (0323) 38156 (East Sussex) (eves).

Incubator and stand (length 42" x width 17" x height 43". Incubator compartment (28" x 12" x 14") of welded stainless steel with three tray levels. Thermally insulated. Platinum temperature probe. Electronic temperature control with digital readout, accurate to .2°F. Heated by surface heating of s/steel tank with adjustable power output. Hours run meter and humidity indicator. £120. For information phone (0903) 872452 after 6pm (Sussex).

Male **Chain Kingsnake**. Three years old, 5' long. Includes vivarium and two books. Feeds on adult mice. £100 ovno. Telephone (0272) 891622 after 6pm (Bristol).

Superb unrelated adult pairs of the following: 1.1 **Mexican Black Kingsnakes**, 3½'. Selected for temperament and colour. £180 pair. 1.1 Amelanistic **Corn Snakes**, 2½'. Brilliant orange/white albinos. £150 pair. 1.0 Brooks-phase **Florida Kingsnake**. Huge 5' specimen. Lots of yellow, superb temperament. £120. 1.1 **Carolina Corn Snakes** (have bred previously). Not just any old Corn Snake, these are outstanding! Male is 5' monster and female is 4' with gorgeous markings. Produces large clutches of large healthy young. Will breed this year. £170 pair. 1.0 **Florida Kingsnake**. Captive bred youngster, approximately 3'. Aggressive feeder £50. Also collection of brand new aquariums with vivarium lids (also new or hardly used). 1 @ 4', £20, 2 @ 3',£15 and 4 @ 2', £10 or whole lot £50. Also available captive bred pair of **Black Pine Snakes** - details on request. Telephone Nick on (0793) 521621 Tuesday - Saturday after 9pm.

Two 8' **Boa Constrictors** (male). Excellent condition. Four vivariums, various sizes, complete with all accessories. Telephone Stephen on (0482) 502040 (Yorks).

1.1 breeding pair of **Black Racers**, *Coluber constrictor*, £40 pair. 2.0 **Black-tail Rat Snakes**, *Elaphe taeniura freisei* (cb '89), £65 each. 1.1 **Orange Rat Snakes**, *Elaphe obsoleta rossalleni*, £40 pair. One **Boa Constrictor**, *Boa constrictor*, £95. One **False Tegu**, *Callopistes maculatus*, £20. One **Soft-shell Turtle** - Free to a good home. Expected soon - **Garden Tree Boas**, *Corallus enydris enydris* (cb '91) £40 each. **Fiji Tree Boas**, *Candoia bibroni* (cbn '91), £45 each. **Solomon Island Ground Boas**, *Candoia carinata* (cb '91), £30 each. **Trinket Snakes**, *Elaphe helena* (cb '91), £35 each. **Tokay Geckos**, *Gekko gecko* (cb '91), £5 each. Telephone Jan or Tom on (0494) 815319 (Bucks).

Various hatchlings also some mature specimens including **Grey Banded Kingsnake**, £150 and **Mexican Black Kingsnake**, £95. Telephone John on (0792) 203282 (Swansea).

Burmese Python. Male, 12-13'. £125. Telephone (0245) 466503.

Female **Burmese Python**, 11-12'. Move abroad forces sale. £175. Telephone Mick or Mat on (0279) 415372.

WANTED

Female **Sinaloan Milksnake**. Preferably 1989. Telephone Paul or Jo on (0785) 850983 (Staffs)

Female **Texas Rat Snake**, *Elaphe obsoleta lindheimeri* and female **Great Plains Rat Snake**, *Elaphe guttata emoryi*. Preferably yearling or hatchling. No imports. Phone (0572) 813065.

Psammophis sibilans, male. Telephone (0702) 522102.

Adult male **Common Boa**. Must feed on dead food and be very tame and friendly. Telephone Sue Day on (0736) 740467 (Cornwall).

Female **Mexican Milk Snake**, *Lampropeltis triangulum annulata*, '89 hatchling. Possible exchange for subadult Bearded Dragon (male, 13"). Telephone (0494) 722547.

Hatchling or yearling female Sonoran Gopher Snake. Telephone K Burnett on (021) 459 6617.

Male *Drymarchon corais couperi*. Also herpetological contacts in Malta and Gozo. Telephone Mick or Mat on (0279) 415372.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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British Association of Tortoise Keepers
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Department of the Environment
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Tollgate House
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Herpetofauna News
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