snake breeder

The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts

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Vipera lebetina Photo: J.N. Brian Barden

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  featuring
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  Events & Miscellaneous.

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Classified adverts continue on page 12.

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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

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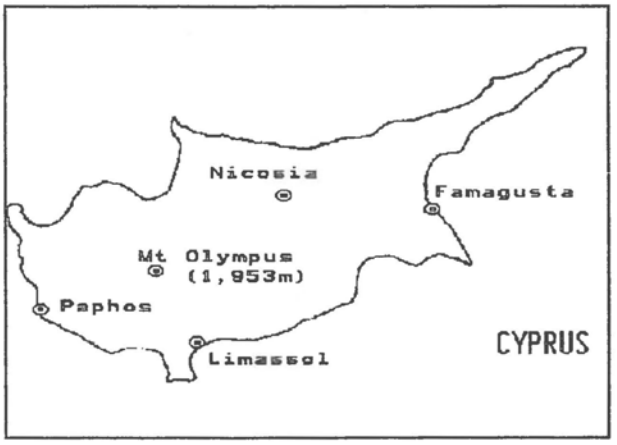
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Snakes of Cyprus

by J.N. Brian Barden

Introduction

My father was a member of HM Forces for some 28 years and I enjoyed the advantages of being brought up in various parts of the world - Malta, Germany, Malaya, Singapore and Cyprus. This early exposure to different peoples, cultures and countries laid the early seeds for many of my hobbies. Additionally these experiences gave rise to the *wanderlust* with which I have been afflicted ever since - I am now in my thirtieth abode! (I am forty four years of age, have lived in my present location for over three years and I am well aware of the fact that it is time to move!)



Most of the places I have lived in the past have been revisited on several occasions with the singular exception of Cyprus. I originally lived there, near Nicosia, during 1959 when my father was serving with the Royal Artillery.

Last summer I decided to put matters to rights and take three weeks holiday in Cyprus. I was accompanied by my girlfriend, some years younger than myself, who also lived in Cyprus ten years ago whilst her father was serving in the Royal Air Force. Little did she realise that she would soon be handling a variety of snakes, including venomous specimens!

I decided to combine the holiday with a little indulgence in some of my hobbies which include Astronomy, Railways (steam - yes, there were some in Cyprus), Circus (my father was Ringmaster with Billy Smarts), Music, Languages (ancient scripts), Aircraft, and of course, Herpetology.

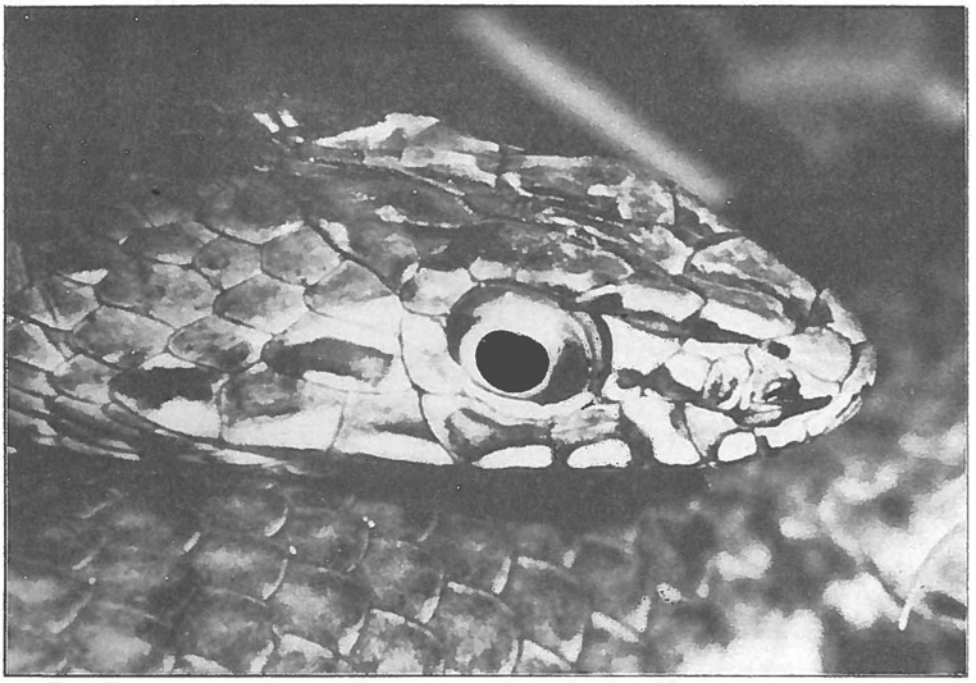
I was disappointed to find that very little published information on snakes in Cyprus was available and those which did exist were contradictory in nature. I hope that this article will put the record straight regarding snakes *currently* found on the island.

Arriving in Cyprus I had resigned myself to hiring a car and, armed with notebooks, field guides, and cameras, to simply start exploring in search of snakes and hoping that I would come across some local enthusiasts to help me in my endeavours.

The Herpetological Society of Cyprus

You can imagine my delight and surprise when, on the second day of the holiday, during a 100 mile tour of the west coast and having visited Aphrodite's Baths to placate my girlfriend,

I came across a rather tatty poster affixed to a lamp post in the town of Polis advertising an exhibition being staged by the Herpetological Society of Cyprus!



Malpolon monspessulanus Photo: J.N. Brian Barden

This exhibition was being held on land adjacent to the Monastery of Ayios Neophytos near Tala, in the mountains not far north of Paphos. As we were staying in Paphos this location could hardly have been better and, following hurried negotiations with my girlfriend, dusk found us approaching the site along the winding, mountain road.

On arrival we were greeted by Wiedal Hans Jorg, the Managing Director of the Herpetological Society. Originally from Innsbruck in Austria (a place I know extremely well) Hans has been in Cyprus for some years and eventually succeeded in setting up the Herpetological Society. I am most grateful to him for the information he was able to provide, the time he spent with me, and the copies of his field notes and photographs which he gave me during my final visit prior to returning to England. He is most anxious to promote the cause of his Society and to raise funds to expand its activities.

All reptiles and amphibians in Cyprus are now endangered, mainly because of the destruction of their natural habitat through expansion of building and agriculture. Moreover the people are superstitious about snakes, believing folklore stories which originated hundreds of years ago, and consider that the only good snake is a dead snake.

No one has carried out an intensive study of the herpetofauna of Cyprus. In 1985 a herpetologist (Beat Schätti of Switzerland) discovered a new endemic species (*Coluber cypriensis*), thus illustrating how important it is for further study to continue.

There are currently six known species of snake found in Cyprus; four other species have not been seen since the early 1960s. Hans Jorg had an example of each on display within his exhibition - in the case of *Coluber cypriensis* this was the

only example known to exist at present.

The exhibition was outdoors with the various vivaria being neatly placed around a large flat area of land nestling on the slopes of the mountain above the monastery.

Hans very kindly removed each snake (with one exception) so that I could handle and examine them at close quarters. My girlfriend was then nominated to hold each one in turn to enable me to take a series of photographs. Although she had handled my ten foot Burmese Python back at home this was her first exposure to smaller species and the look on her face, when informed by Hans that three of the snakes she was holding at one point were venomous, was a perfect study in horror and disbelief!

The Six Snakes of Cyprus

Whip Snake
Coluber cypriensis Schätti, 1985

This is the only reptile uniquely found in Cyprus. Discovered in 1985 it is very rare and the example in the exhibition was the only one known to exist at that time. It has not been found in the coastal regions and appears to prefer the biotopes in the hills and the mountains.

The base colour of the upper side is olive brown, the front of the body has a fine clear cross-band, and the scales of the back are smooth. The body shape and form indicates that this snake should be a good climber but very little else is known. It is completely harmless.

Persian Large Whip Snake
Coluber jugularis (Linnaeus, 1758)

A large slim snake with a small head clearly distinguishable from the neck, big eyes with round pupils, smooth scales and a long tail ending in a fine tip The colouring of the back and sides is variable - dark brown, olive brown or black. This snake can attain a length of ten feet (three metres) and is normally found in dry, very sunny areas in the hills and mountains.

This snake is active during the day, basking during the early morning and feeds on small mammals, lizards and other snakes. The specimen I handled was some five feet in length, black in colour and fairly active. It is completely harmless.

Coin Snake
Coluber nummifer (Reuss, 1834)

A strong snake with a relatively large head, round pupils and lightly keeled scales covering the body down to the start of the very long tail. The upper head colouring is variable and the body and the tail are covered with dark brown patches, roughly diamond-shaped. The average length of this species is five feet (150cm).

Coluber nummifer is active during the day, loves the sun and is remarkably agile. It is to be found close to populated areas looking for small mammals, lizards and birds in old stone walls. According to Hans, prey is encircled following a fast strike and strangled to death. This snake is harmless and can be handled easily.

Montpellier Snake
Malpolon monspessulanus (Hermann, 1804)

A very strong snake with a central indentation in the head and large eyes with round pupils. The head can be dark or light in colour with dark patches and lines. The body is mostly grey or greyish brown with a cream or yellow abdomen.

Found in Southern Europe, North Africa and South-west Asia the Montpellier Snake prefers dry landscapes on the plains and in the hills but is also found higher up in more mountainous areas.

Remarkably fast and agile, it can be aggressive, though it is normally shy and flees at the slightest sign of danger uttering a very strong hiss. It feeds on lizards, birds and other snakes.

The poison fangs, sitting far behind in the jaw, are effective only when prey is held well within the jaw. Though venomous this snake is not normally dangerous to handle - only if it succeeds in gripping a finger deeply within its jaw can the venom penetrate. The specimen in the collection was perfectly safe to handle, although my girl-friend took some convincing.

Cat Snake
Telescopus fallax (Fleischmann, 1831)

Another venomous snake which can quite safely be handled because of the relatively small head and mouth. The two specimens I handled were young and would have experienced great difficulty bringing the fangs into play.

Found throughout the Balkans, Aegean and South-west Asia this species is found on sunny, stony, bushy slopes. It is active at dusk and during the night and is consequently observed rather rarely.

It feeds on lizards, and sometimes mice, killed or paralysed by a weak venom. Growing up to just over three feet (one metre) in length it has vertical slit pupils and a body covered with smooth scales. The ground colour is grey or brownish with dark irregular patches. The cream coloured abdomen is normally dark freckled.

Blunt-nosed Viper (cover photo)
Vipera lebetina lebetina (Linnaeus, 1758)

This was the one specimen which was not handled during my visits to the exhibition! A very venomous species with solenoglyphic teeth (hollow fangs that swing forward and function like a hypodermic needle).

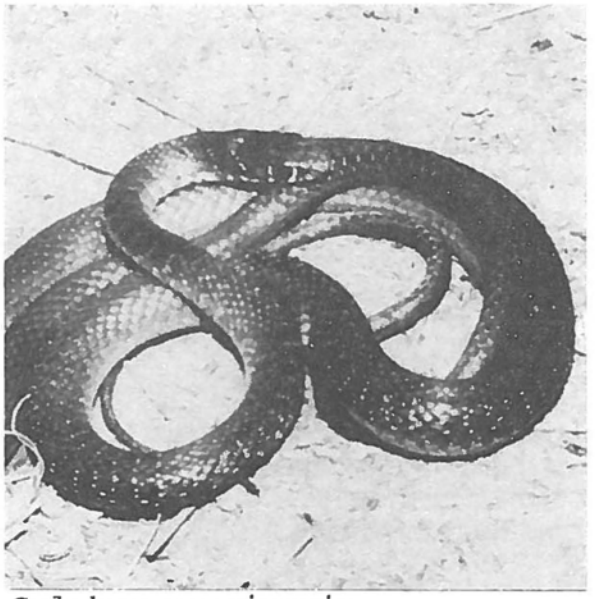
Vipera lebetina is a large strong viper with a sturdy head and relatively small eyes with vertical slit pupils. The background colour of its keeled scales varies from white-grey to yellow-rust brown, with two rows of ochre-coloured staggered transverse patches along the back.

This snake is found on sunny, scantily planted slopes but appears to prefer dry river beds with small pools where it waits for prey (birds and mammals).

Conclusion

The brief notes given above are

of the six species of snake currently to be found in Cyprus. More research needs to be carried out and much more needs to be done if these remaining species are to be removed from the endangered list. Anybody wishing to contribute towards, take part in or help in any way in achieving this end should make contact with the Herpetological Society of Cyprus. Hans Jorg is the Managing Director and Dr Andreas Jacovides is the President. They can both be contacted at the following address, Herpetological Society of Cyprus, PO Box 2133, Paphos, Cyprus.

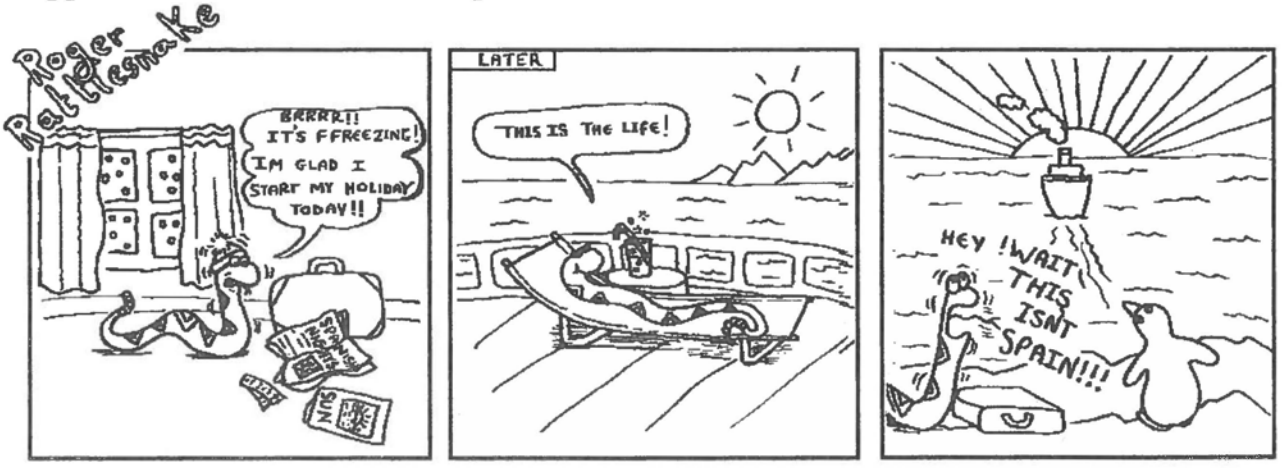


Coluber cypriensis
Photo: J.N. Brian Barden

The Society is desperately in need of help (financial and otherwise), and I would urge any individuals or societies who feel they can contribute in any way whatsoever to make contact. Hans Jorg is fluent in English, as well as Greek and his mother tongue.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to Hans Jorg for his time, information and assistance in preparing my notes on the snakes of Cyprus. For those interested he is also an authority on the lizards of Cyprus and these formed part of his exhibition. I would also like to thank my girlfriend (who still speaks to me) for allowing me to take up so much of our holiday playing with railway engines, looking at stars, studying ancient inscriptions and for being willing to have various snakes draped around her shoulders and arms! My suggestion to visit China this coming summer has thus far been met with total silence! Thank you Sue - next time we'll go swimming (avoiding sea snakes, of course).





SNAKES IN PRINT

Litteratura Serpentium (A5)
Volume 10 Number 6 Dec 1990
European Snake Society, Pauwenveld 18, 2727 DE Zoetermeer, The Netherlands.

▸ **Hibernation: A Problem?** by Hans van der Rijst and Ton Steehouder. (9 pages.)

The mysteries of hibernation explained.

▸ **Differences in Size and Behaviour due to Sex Differences in Snakes** by Hans van der Rijst. (9 pages.)

Based on an article by Richard Shine in which Shine tested the supposition that ritual battles within snakes lead to larger males.

▸ **How High is the Body Temperature of *Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis* During the Copulation Period?** by Hans van der Rijst (3 pages.)

Based on an article by Tom Vincent which researched body temperatures at a den site in Manitoba.

MKHS Newsletter
April '91 (A4)
Milton Keynes Herpetological Society, 15 Esk Way, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK3 7PW.

▸ **Rattlesnake Round-up** by Clifford Warwick. (6 pages.)

The Chairman of the Trust for the Protection of Reptiles tells of the torture and butchery of rattlesnakes in Texas and Oklahoma. (The TPR is co-ordinating a campaign to bring about a total ban on such round-ups. Further details from them at 2 Deansway, Worcester WR1 2JD. In the USA the Reptile Defense Fund, 5025 Tulane Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70808 can supply information on their own campaign.)

IHS Newsletter (A4)
Volume 1 Number 3 Oct 1990
Irish Herpetological Society, 2 Vernon Court, Seafield Road, Clontarf, Dublin 3, Ireland.

▸ **Herptile Hunting Abroad** by Kevin J Hingley. (2 pages.)

Reminiscences of animals found on holidays in Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece.

▸ **Feeding Problem Snakes** by Joe McElheron. (2 pages.)

The causes and cures for non-feeding snakes.

▸ **Some Notes and Reminiscenses on the Royal Python, *Python regius*, in Ghana and Elsewhere** by Stephen Spawls. (1½ pages.)

First part of famous Botswana-based authors account of his experiences with Royal Pythons.

▸ **Royal Python Hatchlings** by Ray Cimino. (1 page.)

Ray describes how he purchased and cared for ten newly-hatched *Python regius*.

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.

25th May 1991
Milton Keynes Herpetological Society Exhibition
Lord Grey School
Rickley Lane
Bletchley
Milton Keynes

Enquiries to Jeff Protheroe on (0908) 560657.

27th May 1991
1st National Reptile Expo 1991
The Great Hall
Lea Valley Leisure Centre
Pickets Lock
Enfield, Middlesex

Enquiries to Indigo Promotions on (071) 485 5163.

12th June
One-Day Course on the Biology of Reptiles and Amphibians
University of Kent

Enquiries to Dr R Griffiths, DICE, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NX.

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.

29th June 1991
ARC Fair

Enquiries to Mrs S Hughes on (0252) 702714.

MISCELLANEOUS

First National Reptile Exposition 1991

Indigo Promotions are holding their first event on Bank Holiday Monday (27th May) at the Great Hall Lea Valley Leisure Centre, Pickets Lock, Enfield, Middlesex. The Expo will contain many trade and private breeder stands offering captive bred animals. Various herpetological societies will also be represented. Entrance fees will be £3 for adults and £2 for children under 14. The event starts at 10am and continues until 6pm. Private breeders can hire tables (6' x 2½') at a cost of £10 each to display their surplus stock. Trade stands are available at £15 per sq yard; each stand is two yards deep. Call Andrew White, Keith Welch or Barry Hales on (071) 485 5163 to book space or request further details.

Sociéte Herpétologique de France, Twentieth Anniversary Congress.

The SHA have announced an appeal for papers to be presented at their forthcoming congress to be held on the 19th to 21st of June. The principal theme is the biological

development and reproduction of reptiles and amphibians. Enquiries to Prof. Jacques HOURDRY, Laboratoire de Biologie du Développment des Vertébrés inférieurs (Bât. 441), Centre scientifique d'Orsay, Université de Paris-Sud, F-91405 ORSAY CEDEX, France. Telephone (1) 69 41 75 72.

An Exhibition of Wildlife Sculpture in Herts

A chance to see the work of Simone Lyon between the 20th March and the 10th of April at the Zoological Museum, Tring, Herts HP23 6AP. Telephone (0442) 824181 for details.

ARC Annual Fair 1991

The ARC Fair will be held on the 29th of June this year at the Prince's Hall Conference and Exhibition Centre, Barrack Road, Aldershot, Hants. The public will be admitted from 11am. Private and commercial dealers of livestock, books, equipment and clubs and charities are invited to apply for details from Mrs S Hughes, 1 Springfield, Elstead, Godalming, Surrey, telephone (0252) 702714. All profits from the event go to Amphibian and Reptile Club and Rescue.

Herpetological Course on the Biological Study of Reptiles and Amphibians

Organised by the Sociéte Herpétologique de France this two-level course (beginners and advanced) runs from the 1st to the 5th of July and will be held at the Station biologique, Forêt de PAIMPONT (35), France. The cost, including course, board and food, is 1000F for SHF members and students and 1200F for non-members. Further details from Bernard LE GARFF, Laboratoire d'Entemologie Fondamentale et Appliquée, Universite de Rennes 1 - Campus de Beaulieu, F-35042 RENNES CEDEX, France. Telephone 99 28 61 23 or 99 28 61 60.

Light Dimmer

Dave Atkinson, an electronics engineer from Surrey, has discovered a 'very useful little device' that can be used for dimming vivarium lights slowly over a period of 15 minutes. The basis for the device is a MK14 voltage controlled AC power controller marketed by TK Electronics. Using additional components Dave has adapted this device, which comes in kit form, for vivarium use and can supply it ready-built. For more details contact him on (0483) 67924.

A Warning to Beginners

by Allan Kettles

About two years ago I went into the local pet shop looking for something different for my tropical fish aquarium as I was getting a bit bored with the creatures, having bred most of the easier species anyway. I went browsing around the tanks and then, in the corner of the shop, I spotted some tanks without water. At first I assumed that they must have been cleaning them but then I noticed the bark chippings in the bottom of the tank and the odd branch here and there. Suddenly I noticed the tank's occupant; about three feet

long, slim (too slim I later found out) and a lovely, or so I thought, dull, red colour with brown blotches. I just stood for about ten minutes watching its pinky-red tongue flicking in and out. Completely entranced, ideas began to establish themselves: out with the water, in with bark chippings and branches. I asked the shop keeper how much the snake was and when he told me £85 it soon brought me back down to earth. He also said it was a Corn Snake, he didn't know which sex. I soon accepted that this was the price for a Corn Snake as he also had a small Indian Python (covered in black beasties) for £160.

I asked for a bit of information about the Corn Snake such as housing needs and general care. The shop keeper assured me that this was, "no problem at all. A light bulb, water bowl, shoe box and three bags of these" [mite infested] "bark chippings at £1.95 a bag and you're set." No mention about sterilizing the chips, putting air vents in the tank, bulb wattage, temperature, worming etc. I asked about literature on the subject and he said he didn't think there were any by UK authors, most of what was available was published in the USA and that it would probably cost an arm and a leg to get it. However, he was <u>sure</u> there would be "no problems" and asked if I wanted to put down a deposit as two or three people were interested. Eagerly I paid my £20 deposit and said I would pick the snake up the following weekend.

The next weekend came slowly and I took my fish into the shop, for which I accepted £25 even though I knew they were worth double that (mug!) but the excitement of having the snake was too much. I <u>had</u> to have that beautiful reptile! I paid the remaining £40 plus £2 for my two frozen mice which, surprise, surprise, he actually did advise me to defrost. He nervously put the snake in a bank bag and gave it to me saying, "have fun". I was on my own.

I put the snake in the car (not keeping it particularly warm) and set off for home. Once I got there I took the snake up to my bedroom and lay it on the bed where it stayed for about another half an hour. I took the water and accessories out of my aquarium and replaced them with mite infested bark chips, a bowl of water, a shoe box and a branch. I also fixed a 100 watt bulb to the roof of the tank to keep it nice and warm - practically tropical in fact. Then I emptied the snake, just as I had done my fish, into my new vivarium.

Feeling very chuffed with my new pet I took it out a dozen or so times that day, playing with it and showing my family. The poor animal was then put in his shoe box for the night - leaving the lid open in case he needed to get a drink (idiot).

By morning the snake was very active and I thought to myself that perhaps he was too warm. Clever me - when I opened the lid it must have been about a hundred degrees in there. I went back to the shop which was, luckily, open on a Sunday. I asked about temperature and got the reply "put a lower wattage bulb in mate and here's a thermometer for only £2.99. Keep the temperature on the green bit, about 68° to 80°." Now he tells me.

The next problem was those little black beasties. His advice there was to spray some Vapona on the bark chips and that should kill the little so-and-so's (or words to that effect). Obviously this wouldn't affect the snake's enjoyment of his new home and so I sprayed away. Somehow the animal survived all this and having let it settle in for a week I attempted to feed it. I defrosted a mouse and put the cold rodent in front of the snake but, guess what, it didn't take it. I tried again next day but without success. It had probably never seen a dead mouse in its life.

After more useless advice from the shopkeeper I decided in desperation to go to the library where I discovered *The TFH Book of Snakes* by Thomas Leetz. Much to my amazement (after all I wouldn't be able to get worthwhile snake literature in the UK) this contained some useful and interesting facts. Unfortunately, however it was too late. The snake died! He had probably had enough of varying temperatures and Vapona fumes. I later found out from my veterinary surgeon that he was also riddled with worms and parasites. I'd only had him for three weeks. I was mortified, nay heartbroken. I had really begun to feel for the defenceless creature.

After I got a full report from the vet and obtained a bit more knowledge from an experienced reptile keeper I returned to the shopkeeper to complain and to get my money back. Needless to say he wasn't particularly forthcoming so I threatened to write to the local paper and expose him in the customer complaints column. Funnily enough I got a full refund.

Now totally hooked I started from scratch with all the necessary equipment I bought *Keeping and Breeding Snakes* by Chris Mattison, built my own vivarium and bought another Corn Snake from a long-established reptile shop. I've now got three 4' x 2' x 2' vivariums containing the Corn Snake, a Northern Pine Snake, a 4' Indian Python and a 3' Red-tailed Boa. All, thankfully, feed on frozen food.

So a warning to all beginners, be patient. When buying a snake make sure you go to a specialist shop or experienced keeper and you'll embark on a very enjoyable and rewarding hobby. Here ends today's lesson.

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FOR SALE

Two beautiful male **Corn Snakes**. Captive bred 1989. Feeding on dead semi-adult mice. Great temperament. £50 each. Phone Carl on (0777) 700204.

Adult male banded **California Kingsnake** (*Lampropeltis getulus californiae*). Cooled down over winter period and now ready for breeding. £60. Tel: Allan on (0902) 784805 (Wolverhampton).

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. 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).