snake breeder

The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts

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Resignations at the RBF

The Chairman of the Reptile Breeding Foundation in Canada, Geoffrey Gaherty, recently announced that four members of the Foundation staff - Elizabeth Dorey, Corrina Eberwein, Thomas Huff and Robert Kellough - had resigned.

In a recent circular Dr Gaherty mentions "a number of differences of opinion between Tom Huff and the board of directors, particularly around the philosophy and goals of the Foundation" as the cause of the problem. It seems that Tom and the staff presented the board with an ultimatum which it could not meet and their resignations were accepted.

Continued on page 11

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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.

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D Stratmann (Germany), Mr & Mrs Birchall,
D Goostrey, M Laurence & L Gellard.

No Hard Feelings

by Chris Roberts

I have been keeping snakes now for over 18 years and have occasionally been bitten. These have been few and far between and never more than a scratch or a few needle holes in a finger. I thought a recent experience of mine might warn fellow snake keepers against taking the keeping of 'giant' snakes a little too lightly.

The following experience concerns a large (7½ to 8') female boa called Marilyn. She was housed in a large vivarium in our bedroom (nowhere else left). She had always been placid and was one of my favourites. I prefer colubrids to boas and pythons but I have always had a soft spot for Boa Constrictors and have kept several over the years.

One particular night my wife and I were going to bed when Bernadette saw the snake had passed her last meal and refused to go to bed until the vivarium had been cleaned. I was tired and said I would deal with it in the morning but I was told it had to be done now!

My wife came up with the bright idea of cutting a hole in the substrate - corrugated cardboard - with a knife, removing the soiled portion and replacing the entire piece next morning. Without further ado I opened the door in a darkened cage with a primarily nocturnal snake watching me from a distance of two feet and began cutting out the substrate. Now I realise that some readers might now be thinking (and I agree) what a plonker! But I was very tired and not thinking clearly. No sooner had the knife touched the cardboard than the snake shot out and gave me an extremely painful bite, her jaws enveloping my left hand, just catching my little finger. Thankfully she let go straight away. Two seconds later my hand was twice its normal size and bleeding profusely. My wife insisted I go to hospital for a tetanus injection as my booster was due in a week anyway so I went to the local cottage hospital. The desk clerk didn't believe me when I told him I had been bitten by a snake and it was only when a sister who knew of my hobby came past that I was finally given treatment.

Three days after the event the snake lay coiled at one end of her cage with her head in a corner. To show there were no hard feelings I thought I would give her something to eat apart from my hand. I carefully slid back the door at the opposite end from where she lay and placed a large, dead rat on the floor of her cage. Wham... she shot across the cage and bit my right index finger. I just could not believe it! One month after that bite my finger was still yellow and the finger joint is still stiff. I didn't realise that she could turn and strike from that distance so quickly. My hand had swollen up because the teeth had punctured the blood vessels just under the skin and the internal bleeding caused the skin to swell.

So a word of warning. Never take your snakes, especially the larger varieties, for granted. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if she had bitten my face or decided not to let go.

It's only Natural

by Chris and Marcia Martin

In March 1976 our local pet shop started to sell reptiles so we decided to purchase one.

Our first task was to build a vivarium. We tried to buy a book and read about the subject of snake keeping but, alas, no book on the subject could be found. As we didn't know anyone who kept snakes we couldn't ask for help.

The only option open to us was to take a logical look at the problems of keeping snakes. The first point we considered was how do snakes spend most of their lives. Obviously most of their time was spent looking for food, water and, at certain times, a mate. However these things would not take up all the hours in a day. We looked at the items individually. Food - snakes can go for weeks if not months without food. Water - snakes only seem to need fresh water every few days. Looking for a mate - depending on the species they may only be 'on the prowl' in the spring; tropical snakes can breed all year round so the males may be a little more active. After spending many hours discussing the subject and watching television programmes we came to the conclusion that snakes spend most of their time curled up hiding from predators. In the case of tree-dwelling snakes they are usually green coloured for camouflage and try to mimic part of the tree. (Almost all of the animals in the world use some form of camouflage or are herd animals because the name of the game is survival!)

As the species we were thinking of starting with was primarily a ground-dwelling snake we started to design as natural a vivarium as we could.

After further discussion we decided that the vivarium should resemble a natural hiding place and we decided that it should resemble a small, safe cave. It would measure 54" in length, 20" in width and be 24" high.

Our next problem was the design of the vivarium. Should it open at the front or the top? At the time we opted for a top-opening for reasons we can no longer remember. However with all our experience we can now recommend top-opening vivariums and the principal reason for this is because over the years we have heard so many horror stories of snakes getting trapped between the overlapping panes of glass in front-opening units. Also if the snake is on its way out of the vivarium when the door is being closed horrific injuries can occur.

There are a number of other reasons why we don't like front-opening vivariums. We feel that a poorly designed vivarium can and does cause stress to the occupant. Stress spread over a number of years can and does kill. If you were a snake hiding from your enemies what would be your reaction if you were curled up asleep when suddenly a tremendous vibration shook the ground you were resting on (the sliding glass door is opened) and a huge hand grabbed you. You are aware by your natural instinct that 99% of your enemies will attack you from ground level. Every time the above sequence of events

happens you could be attacked and/or eaten so you have to stay alert; you are put in a stressful situation. Stress can only be dealt with if it lasts a short while but spread over a number of years it can be fatal. There are a number of set-ups that can produce stress, for example, hide boxes and bottom-drawer vivariums.

Back in March 1976 we had to decide on what is now a very controversial aspect of keeping snakes, heating. At that time the choice of equipment was very limited; it was either light bulbs or a very crude form of infra red (no light, just heat). As we were trying to create a natural environment we dismissed light bulbs in approximately half a second flat. In the wild the sun does not flash on and off twenty four hours a day. We did consider hiding the bulb to get over the problem but found there were other forms of heating that would do the same job. In the end we decided on a tubular heater unit, fixed at the back of the vivarium and boxed in with a ventilated shelf. The temperature was controlled by a thermostat. We decided not to use a dimmer switch as it is impossible to make the alterations needed during the day. The temperature does change during the day and night and only a thermostat will do that. In 1976 the quality of the equipment was very poor and that is why we used a Slik-Stat.

We decided to light the vivarium with a True-lite. We had met a couple of people who kept snakes and they told us that snakes need ultra violet light. In those days we didn't know anything about photo-periods or day/night temperature systems. The temperature stayed constant over the twenty four hour period. Our light was operated manually; when we got up we turned it on and went we went to sleep we turned it off. The more we think about it we are amazed that anything survived.

We used peat as a substrate but only for a year or so. The main argument against using peat is that it is very unhygienic. When the snake goes to the toilet the peat gets very wet and we found that it would often get in the snake's mouth. Many were the times we had to swab out the snake's mouth because it was full of peat. Our Corn Snakes seemed to suffer more than our larger snakes.

Our first snake was a baby Common Boa. Somehow that snake has survived to the present day despite the fact that we made so many mistakes. However he is now a grandfather and his grandsnakes are reaping the benefit of our experiences.

Anyone is welcome to visit us (by appointment only). Our address is 18 Ballinode Close, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 4SQ. Telephone (0242) 573477.

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An Odd Slough

by Kelvin Waltho

I bought a female Black Rat Snake from the IHS Fayre in September 1990. I installed her in a 36" x 16" x 16" vivarium heated by a 23" x 6" Ultratherm heat strip and lit by a red light bulb. I used gravel as a substrate and this was changed regularly. The set-up was completed by two hide boxes, a small branch and a water bowl.

After allowing the snake to settle down I offered a pink mouse which she ate immediately. She was then fed regularly every five days on pinkies.

After two very good sloughs I increased her ration to three to four pinkies at a time, all of which were consumed readily. The snake grew steadily and she sloughed normally three times. Then her colour became darker and she refused food as she would normally do before sloughing.

On the 11th of February she became milky and cleared on the 14th/15th of February. After a couple of days she hadn't sloughed but I decided another twenty four hours wouldn't matter before I needed to worry. On the following day I put her into a large plastic tub along with a good layer of shredded paper and a layer of cloth with lukewarm water. I left the snake to soak for six hours and quite expected to open the container to find her skin had been shed. However this wasn't the case and the snake was returned to soak on two more occasions, again without success. I thought I might have to split the skin myself and was about to do this when, on the 27th February, she began to go milky again. This completely took me by surprise as she had already milked over on the 11th of February. The snake cleared again on the 2nd of March and when I checked her on the 3rd she was just crawling out of her old skin. I offered the snake three pinkies which she ate hungrily. Twenty two days had passed since she last fed, not a long time but unusual for her.

I found this episode very strange and would like to know if any other snake keepers have had a similar experience.



©DAWN.E.HARRIS - 91.

The Hard Way

by K Burnett

After two years I finally managed to persuade my wife to let me keep a snake.

I read a basic booklet on keeping snakes and went to the local pet shop. I purchased an Eastern Garter Snake, a small glass tank, a vivarium lid, a Slik-Stat thermostat, a red light bulb, some gravel and I was given a little advice.

Whilst trying to feed the snake with a worm I realised that the gravel substrate was more trouble than it was worth so I returned to the shop and was sold some astro-turf.

My snake was now feeding well but then suddenly it just stopped. I phoned the pet shop for advice and was told not to worry. I went to the shop and was sold a 150w ceramic heater for an 18" x 12" x 12" tank. I also added some bark for the snake to hide in and it started to feed again.

I then found out about the Association for the Study of Reptilia and Amphibia (ASRA) and joined. I could not attend the meetings because I lived too far away but I did receive some information on garter snakes and I picked up some useful information from the monthly newsletter, the Rephiberary.

A friend of ours we had not seen for some time had started to keep snakes and he lent me some copies of *Snake Keeper*. After reading these I realised it was more by luck than judgement that the snake had survived for so long. I bought a bigger tank and lid, a Nova thermostat, changed to a newspaper substrate and prepared the food (fish) properly. The snake started to prosper.

For the next year everything went fine so I decided to get some more snakes. A friend gave me Chris Mattison's telephone number. I bought two male Sonoran Gopher Snakes from him and one of his books. I then made two wooden vivariums and heated the garter snake's vivarium with a ceramic heater and the gopher snakes with a heater pad and spot light (turned off at night).

I am now bitten by the snake keeping bug and read everything I can about snakes. I have now bought a second garter snake but, sadly, one of my Gopher Snakes died from a spinal tumour - confirmed by a veterinary surgeon's autopsy.

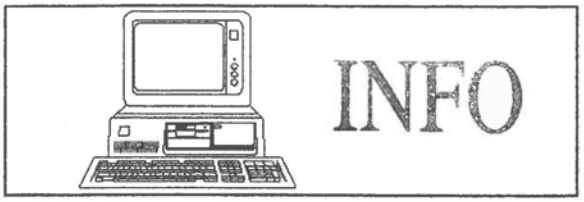
Perhaps someone else reading this article will avoid making my mistakes and read everything they can ***before*** buying their animals. Many thanks to Chris Mattison for his help during the past year and also to Les Basford from Cannon Hill Nature Centre.

Information:
ASRA, c/o Cotswold Wildlife Park, Burford, Oxon OX8 4JW

Recommended reading:

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

Protheroe J 1990, *Snakes: A Guide to Their Husbandry Before and After Purchase*. Milton Keynes Herpetological Society: Milton Keynes



SNAKES IN PRINT

World Magazine
No 49 May 1991
World Publications Ltd., Hyde Park Group, Hyde Park House, 5 Manfred Road, London SW15 2RS.

▸ **Snake Bite** by Austin J Stevens. (7 pages.)

Brief guide to venomous snakes covering the venom, the cure and the prevention, featuring full colour pictures of various biters and the finger of one of the bitten.

Litteratura Serpentium
Volume 11 Number 1 1991
Europese Slangen Vereniging/European Snake Society, Pauwenveld 18, 2727 DE Zoetermeer, The Netherlands. Subscribers in the UK can now pay their fees in sterling. Contact C Mattison, 138 Dalewood Road, Beauchief, Sheffield S8 0EF for details (don't forget to enclose an SAE).

▸ **Breeding of the Grey Rat Snake, *Elaphe obsoleta spiloides*** by Ton Steehouder. (2 pages.)

First article in the new look EES publication (now in its 11th year) describes how the author bred this species. Although the female was less than perfectly healthy five eggs were produced, two of which hatched.

▸ **A Successful Breeding of *Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*** by Henk van de Beek. (5 pages, 2 colour plates.)

A pair of snakes, obtained in the summer of 1989 were housed in a terrarium measuring 120 x 60 x 50cm. The snakes were hibernated (12-19° C) for two months in a vivarium placed in a dark cupboard. In late January 1990 mating was observed and on the 8th of June seven young were born.

▸ **Bird Predation by the Hooded Snake, *Macroprotodon cucullatus*?** by David Buttle. (2 pages.)

Short report of a snake found eating a young Wren chick in the north east of Mallorca, Balearic Islands. The author could find no other instance of this species preying on birds.

▸ ***Lampropeltis mexicana mexicana* in the Terrarium** by Hans van der Eerden. (6 pages, 3 colour plates.)

The author purchased a pair of hatchling snakes at the 1988 Dutch Snake Day. Despite a winter rest and several copulations being observed in February 1990, no young were produced. Several reasons for this are considered.

▸ **A Case of Mild Envenomation from a Mangrove Snake Bite** by AR Monk.

After being bitten by one of his three specimens of *Boiga dendrophila* the author felt increasingly unwell; fatigue, listlessness, aching joints, loss of appetite and a metallic taste in his mouth. The symptoms cleared after four days.

The Herptile
Volume 16 Number 1 March 1991
The International Herpetological Society, 65

Broadstone Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 1JA.

▸ **Hibernation for the *Lampropeltis getulus* group and other North American snakes** by Ryan Potts. (2 pages.)

The author hibernated his male *L.g. floridana* but, when placed with his female (which had not been hibernated), nothing happened. As a result of this experience he feels hibernation is probably essential for North American King, Rat and Bull Snakes.

▸ **Observations on the Captive Maintenance of *Elaphe bimaculata*** by Roger Pewtress. (5 pages.)

Report on the captive history of five specimens kept during two years and their breeding under captive conditions.

▸ **A Second Generation Captive Breeding of the Western Fox Snake, *Elaphe vulpina vulpina*** by Kevin J Hingley. (3 pages.)

Herptile Editor's account of successful breeding involving young snakes retained from the first UK captive breeding of *E. v. vulpina* by the author in 1987.

▸ **Notes on the Keeping and Breeding of the Ladder Snake, *Elaphe scalaris*** by Roger Butler. (7 pages.)

Thorough report on the husbandry, hibernation and egg-laying of captive Ladder Snakes by IHS President.

▸ **Seasonal Secondary Sexual Characteristics Observed in Eastern Indigo Snakes, *Drymarchon corais couperi*** by David Wright. (2 pages.)

After several years of keeping Indigo Snakes, Mr Wright has noted the seasonal development of faint keels along the central three rows of dorsal scales. This effect is found only in males in good condition and only during the mating season and could be of use in determining sex and condition, if correct.

▸ **Raising the Pacific Boa, *Candoia carinata*, in Captivity** by Kevin J Hingley and Mark Hemmings. (3 pages.)

Interesting article for anyone who has bought one of the many young *C. carinata* recently offered for sale in the UK.

▸ **Baird's Rat Snake, *Elaphe bairdi*** by John Weir. (7 pages.)

Comprehensive account of *E. bairdi* covering natural history, feeding, housing, mating and egg-laying.

Reptile & Amphibian Magazine
Mar-Apr 1991
Reptile & Amphibian Magazine, RD3, PO Box 3709, Pottsville, PA 17901, USA.

▸ **Bullsnakes, Pine Snakes and Gopher Snakes** by Norman Frank, DVM. (7 pages, 4 colour plates.)

Basic guide to *Pituophis* - where they come from and how to feed and care for them in captivity.

The Vivarium
Volume 2 Number 6
The American Federation of Herpetoculturists, PO Box 1131, Lakeside, CA 92040, USA. Available in the UK from Jerry Cole, telephone (03004) 738 / fax (03004) 211.

▸ **Captive Husbandry of the Eastern Milk Snake** by Al Winstel. (3 pages, 2 colour

plates.)

The author received two (1.1) wild-caught *Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum* in January 1985. He already had a female collected in October 1984. Full details of feeding, hibernation, egg-laying, incubation and care of hatchlings is given.

▸ **Snakes of the Andros Island: In the Field and in Captivity** by Brad Chambers. (4 pages, 2 colour plates.)

Situated 95 miles from the south east coast of Florida, Andros is the largest but least populated of the islands of the Bahamas. The five species of snake found on the island are discussed and mention is made that although vast tracts of the island are virtually undisturbed, logging is to commence soon.

Lacerta
No 3 Februari-Maart 1991
Nederlandse Vereniging voor Herpetologie en Terriumkunde, Zoetendaal 213, 6662 XM Elst (Gld), Nederlands.

▸ **De Amoer-rattenslang (*Elaphe schrenckii schrenckii*) in het terrarium** by René van Marle and Koert Langeveld. (7 pages, 2 colour plates. D with E abstract.)

The authors maintain their animals at a temperature of 26 to 28° C maximum during the day in summer falling to about 17° C at night. Wood shavings are used as a substrate. The animals are hibernated for a period of between three and five months. Three clutches of eggs (10, 12 and 14) were laid at the beginning of May 1991. 34 of these hatched after 43 to 52 days.

EVENTS

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

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, Stan-

ford, CA 94305, USA. Telephone (9-5 Pacific time) (415) 941-4596.

29th June 1991

ARC Fair
The Prince's Hall Conference and Exhibition Civic Centre
Barrack Road
Aldershot
Hampshire

Enquiries to Mrs S Hughes on (0252) 702714.

19th October 1991

Dutch Snake Day

Enquiries to Guido Gomes on 079-416592 (The Netherlands).

Resignations at the RBF

(Continued from front cover)

The directors have decided to continue the operation of the RBF but breeding projects will have to be pared down to a handful of the most urgent cases.

Whilst new animal staff are being hired and trained, Calvin White of the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo has offered to provide curators to care for the animals.

If you have any questions, comments, suggestions or can offer any help, telephone the Reptile Breeding Foundation on 613-476-3351 (Picton) or 416-922-3399 (Toronto).

SNAKE KEEPER
VOLUME ONE (1987) BACK ISSUES

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No. 9 Hibernating Snakes ♦ The East Cowes Mouse Muncher ♦ The African Egg-Eating Snake, Dasypeltis scabra ♦ The Mythological Snake, Part II ♦ Conservation of Grass Snakes, Part II ♦ The Sunbeam Snake ♦ The Montpellier Snake.
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No.12* The African Egg-Eating Snake, Part IV ♦ Rosie ♦ Houdini Garter Snakes ♦ The Harassment of Human Owners by Royal Pythons ♦ Success and Failure with Grass Snake Eggs ♦ Breeding Report of Burmese Pythons ♦ Keeping Red-sided Garter Snakes.

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Pair of 4', unrelated, attractively marked Surinam or Central American **Boas**. Complete with vivarium incorporating proportional temperature control (with night time temperature drop) and automatic fade up/down lighting. Package £400 - will split. Phone Dave on Guildford (0483) 67924.

Boa constrictor constrictor captive bred hatchlings and yearlings available, unrelated pairs. Well marked and feeding well. Some near adults available. Adult breeding pair of **Burmese Pythons** and captive bred hatchlings, unrelated available. **Royal Pythons**, captive hatched from gravid wild caught parents, unrelated available. The following are expected to hatch shortly: **Speckled, Florida** and **California Kingsnakes; Corn Snakes; Orange, Yellow** and **Black Rat Snakes; House Snakes; Viperine Snakes**. Phone (0482) 668002 (Humberside).

Due to hatch soon - **Arizona Mountain Kingsnakes** (***Lampropeltis pyromelana pyromelana***) and **California Mountain Kingsnakes** (***Lampropeltis zonata pulchra***). **Macklot's Python** (***Liasis mackloti***) babies available soon. Telephone Roger Grenville on (0923) 836228 day or (08444) 6867 evenings.

Private collection of boids including some rare Appendix I species, together with vivariums and heating equipment. Call Dave on (081) 661 0541, after 9pm.

Pacific Ground Boas. Assist feeders £10 each, some unrelated pairs available. Feeders £20 each. **Thai Water Dragon** £35. **Northern Pine Snake**, male, 6½', £65. Phone Fred on (0442) 241453 (Herts).

Common Boa Constrictor. Male, 5', three years old in May. Healthy, feeds easily. Handled daily. Written log for past 15 months. Complete with vivarium, £165. Telephone Ian on (03752) 5897 (Essex).

WANTED

Female **Carpet Python** (***Morelia spilotes variegata***). Preferably three to four years old. Phone (0702) 205742.

VIVARIUMS MANUFACTURED TO INDIVIDUAL SPECIFICATIONS

I will manufacture your vivarium to suit your budget and the space available to you. Internal corners can have a beautifully made vivarium from any material with sliding front glass and barrel locks.

Vivariums supplied in three forms.
Choose which suits you best

* Group One - Vivarium supplied in a flat pack with instructions, glass and fixings. Customer to assemble.

* Group Two - Vivarium supplied, again to your specification, fully assembled and with glass removed and protected for safe transport.

* Group Three (deluxe vivarium) - A fully operational vivarium with Microclimate or VTC (or other, please specify), barrel locks, ventilation and everything your animal requires.

I can build anything you wish and I can match any price quoted by shops. Please phone me on (0702) 522102 after 6pm or write to me with your ideas. Trade enquiries welcome.

S. Bristow
17 Blenheim Park Close,
Leigh on Sea, Essex SS9 4BA