snake breeder

The International Newsletter for Snake Enthusiasts

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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.

M Houlden, M Haigh, M Warnock, A Rome, Mr & Mrs T Skinner, L Hurst, J Facer, J Reed, B Ellis, J Wilkins, D Atkinson, A & A Wright, S Hollingsworth, M Starkey, C Oakley, A Lewis, B Borysowich (Canada), D Buckland, C Parsons, P Humphreys, J Beanes, A Turner, R Fletcher, J Friend, Sgt Nichols, F Lundburg (USA) & TRAFFIC International.

The General Care and Maintenance of the Mangrove Snake

by Matthew Starkey

The Mangrove Snake (*Boiga dendrophila*) is probably one of the most beautiful serpents you are likely to see, being glossy jet black with vivid yellow crossbands down the entire length of the body. The body is somewhat triangular in cross-section and the head is quite clearly set off from the slender neck.

Because the Mangrove Snake now falls under the cover of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act ownership of this species can, in some cases, be almost impossible due to the narrow-mindedness of some local authorities which issue licences. The snake is a back-fanged species and a great deal of controversy exists about its venomous capabilities. I have spoken to people who think it is ridiculous that this species is on the DWA list yet a recent copy of the European Snake Society publication, *Litteratura Serpentium*, contained a brief description of envenomation from a Mangrove Snake bite. Mangrove Snakes can grow to over six feet in length and a bite from a specimen of this size should never just be ignored. At present solid information on most back-fanged snakes is scanty.

At the time of writing I have only one specimen which is maintained in a 4′ x 4′ x 2′ (lxhxd) vivarium. The vivarium is constructed from Contiplas with double sliding-glass doors arranged so that one set slides over the other. Heating is by means of an infra-red ceramic heater controlled by a VTC thermostat. The heater is positioned towards one end of the cage to enable the snake to thermo-regulate.

Lighting is provided by a Truelite tube controlled by an electronic dimmer for fluorescent lights. This creates a natural dawn and sunset. Truelite may well be too strong for this snake as it spends most of its time curled up in either one of its two hide boxes. Being a nocturnal snake low light levels are probably more preferable and so the Truelite may well be changed in the near future. The two hide boxes are positioned at either end of the vivarium allowing the snake to find security at warm and cool locations within the vivarium. Decorations consist of several rough branches, a large water bowl, two hide boxes and a substrate of sphagnum moss and peat. The substrate may not be an ideal choice for most people but was chosen for its natural look and, more importantly, its humidity giving properties. This snake has substantial heat and humidity requirements and thus is kept at 25 to 31° C during the day and around 23 to 24° C at night. The vivarium is sprayed at least once a day. Humidity should be around 70 to 80% but both temperature and humidity do vary from day to day (as they should, within reason). Although this snake likes humid conditions it is imperative that it is not kept permanently damp as this could result in skin sores or blisters. A good spraying once a day is adequate as this will probably be burnt off by the heat source within the vivarium

during a short time.

At first feeding was a problem as my snake seemed reluctant to take dead food, but within a week it took two chicks and a mouse. The mouse was anointed with the scent of the chicks which proved successful. In the wild these snakes eat lizards, frogs, birds, other snakes and mammals thus a bird seemed a logical choice for this snake. At present the captive diet is 50% bird and 50% rodent but this could include a small proportion of lizards at some time in the future. Feeding is carried out every ten days on average and usually consists of two chicks and two mice.

The snake has been wormed using Rid Worm preparation from Terrafauna Products. This was carried out by injecting the worming fluid into the snake's food with a syringe. The snake has shed successfully on several occasions and appears to be in good condition.

Probing has revealed that the snake is female My snake has so far proved to be very placid during daylight hours and does not show any aggression when handling is necessary. During the night there is a radical change in behaviour and the snake becomes much more alert and aggressive even striking at the glass if it sees anything moving. This is somewhat predictable though, being a nocturnal snake and I find it best to perform cleaning operations during the daytime.

I would like to breed these snakes and have started to construct a vivarium for my next animal. I shall probably keep them separate for most of the year and put them together only for breeding purposes. My main reason for doing so is that these snakes can be cannibalistic and I don't want to take unnecessary risks. In my opinion the Mangrove Snake is a highly attractive snake that can be kept under quite manageable conditions and is worthy of captive breeding in small numbers. Unfortunately, as with most Asian reptiles, their condition is inferior to that of other reptiles from around the world due to importation problems. I am always careful when buying wild-caught stock but particularly so with Asian reptiles. Needless to say, do check any prospective purchases before parting with your money.

School Snakes

by Caroline Hill (age 10)

In Junior 3 at St Teresa's RC Primary School, Wolverhampton we have two Great Plains Garter Snakes. We have a male and a female. The male is called Slither and the female is called Slimer. They live in the corner of the classroom and we have had them for about eight months.

In the tank we have a water bowl (with BSP Multivitamins in), a piece of bogwood and a little hidey-house for the snakes. On the bottom of the tank we put newspaper. We feed them on goldfish, trout and earthworms. We keep the tank at 75° F in the daytime and drop it to 65° F in the evening. The snakes have shed their skins about four times so far.

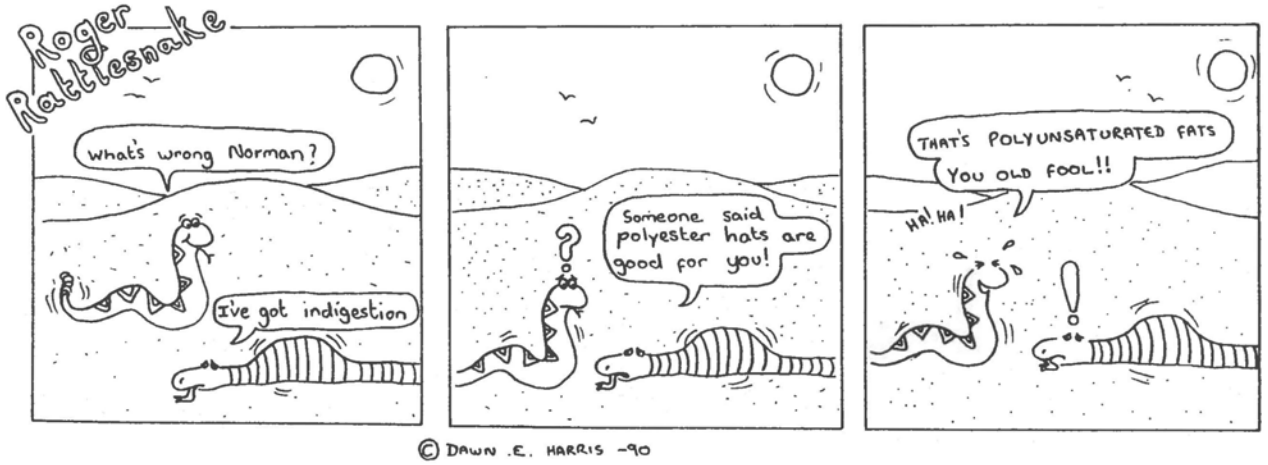
Do the children like the snakes? Most of the children like the snakes but some don't. But I like them!

The Mysterious Case of Grizelda

by Kevin J Hingley

Grizelda is a 1990 captive-bred Yellow Rat Snake, *Elaphe obsoleta quadrivittata*. She was purchased at last year's IHS Reptile Fair by Ian Morris. Weeks went by after Ian had bought Grizelda (his name for her not mine, although it has somehow stuck) but she would not feed. I agreed to have Grizelda at my house to see if I could persuade her to feed. For some strange reason I didn't have to do any persuading - she fed as soon as I offered her a pinky and continued to do so for six or seven weeks, after which Ian decided to have her back, and keeping her under identical conditions to those she had been subjected to in my collection it was hoped that she would begin to feed for Ian.

This wasn't to be although Ian followed my instructions to the letter. After a further month without food Ian phoned once more and again Grizelda found herself amongst my collection. I placed her little box on the same shelf in a large vivarium as before and without hesitation she began to feed. We gave it several weeks to a month and then Ian took Grizelda home to try again. You've probably guessed by now that I had yet another phone call a few weeks later from a very frustrated Ian - did I want to buy Grizelda? She had got the better of him and what could I say but yes. Grizelda is currently at my friend Mark Hemmings' home, still in her little box but on a heated shelf system where she is continuing to feed, slough and do all the other things she wouldn't do for Ian. I've encountered this sort of problem before, although I can't really offer an explanation for this type of fasting behaviour when the keeper is apparently replicating one's own methods. If anyone is experiencing a similar problem it might be a good idea to ask a willing friend if they will keep the snake at their home for a while to see if it will feed for them. I did nothing special to keep Grizelda, just left her in the box she came in and kept her at a temperature of 25° C, offered her a small cardboard tube hide, gave her a dish of water and left her to her own devices. Ian did exactly the same but still she wouldn't feed - is it his aftershave I ask myself? But that's another story.



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Garden Tree Boas (*Corallus enhydris enhydris*) in Captivity

by Neil Cass

In the past couple of years there have been quite a number of Garden Tree Boas imported into the United Kingdom. These reptiles are usually imported via the USA from Guyana and Surinam. I believe they are becoming more popular due to the very reasonable prices at which they are usually offered. However this obviously varies depending on whether you have bought them directly from the importer or through a pet shop supplied by the importer.

There are great variations in the colours of this species ranging from brick red to a rather dull grey with a brown mottled effect, the latter being more common. The snakes themselves are usually easy to get feeding as they are quite aggressive as captives.

Garden Tree Boas like a high humidity and do best if sprayed regularly. They also require climbing branches but don't be surprised (or think the animal is ill) if you find it sitting on the cage floor. Unlike its cousin the Emerald Tree Boa (*Corallus caninus*) which spends all of its life in the trees the Garden Tree Boa will often be found searching for food on the ground rather than in the trees which might explain their willingness to accept mice as well as birds.

You will find the snakes most active at night. I believe this is the best time to feed them; however, they will eat in the day as long as you stay out of sight as they seem to be put off and leave their meal if they sense you watching them. I don't think food should be offered too regularly.

I feed my specimens perhaps once every four to six weeks and they never refuse unless they are coming up to a slough. I keep my animals at a daytime temperature of 80° F and this falls to about 70° at night. Although I have heard of quite a few Garden Tree Boas being bred I have not yet bred this species.

If you are thinking of buying a Garden Tree Boa do remember that they can be aggressive and do not like to be handled. However they make a good exhibit and the coloured specimens are probably the most attractive regularly-available boa on the market.

I hope this information will be of some help to anyone who keeps or is thinking of keeping this species.

THAMES AND CHILTERN HERPETOLOGICAL GROUP

Annual Exhibition 1991

A Display of Reptiles and Amphibians

Saturday July 13th
11am to 5pm

West Herts College
Watford Campus
Hempstead Road
Watford, Herts

Adults £1 - Children 50p

MAILBAG

snake breeder
159 Stanley Hill
Amersham
Bucks HP7 9EY



Dear Snake Breeder,

I was extremely surprised by some of the comments made by Chris and Marcia Martin in their article It's Only Natural (**snake breeder** 5/91). In one paragraph Mr and Mrs Martin tell of the horrors of stress upon snakes in a captive situation only to state that "There are a number of set ups that can produce stress, for example, hide boxes". How on earth the Martins arrived at that conclusion I have no idea for it seems obvious that use of a hide box is an ideal way to remove stress upon captive snakes.

Moreover Chris and Marcia's suggestions for a stress-free housing environment stem no further than shouting down front-opening vivariums with sliding-glass doors in favour of vivariums which open from above because, they state, front-opening types are highly and fatally stressful. As if it is a matter of life and death whether one type or the other is used! I find it impossible to believe that snakes across the world are keeling over and dying with terror because their owners use sliding-glass door homes for their pets. Mr and Mrs Martin also feel that these vivariums are dangerous because snakes can become "trapped between the overlapping panes of glass". If this is a possibility in any vivarium then the snake inside is too small to be housed within it anyhow. As far as snakes being wounded because they try to do a runner as the doors are closed, I find it difficult to believe many owners have encountered this problem either. That would require the doors to be slammed closed and a very careless owner.

At the close of the article the Martins state their amazement that the first snake they ever bought has survived to see today as they believe they have committed so many evil acts upon him such as manually operating his Truelite tube (shock, outrage). Did it ever occur to the authors that if that snake and others survived (and presumably fed) then there was no need to radically overhaul their heating and lighting methods simply because of hunches based on a human's point of view of what is stressful and what is not.

The Martins are evidently keen on helping beginners and, as successful breeders, they are in a position of responsibility to do so. In that connection they should surely base opinions on experience and not on theorised viewpoints.

Yours sincerely,

Paul D Conroy
Surrey

*****

Dear Snake Breeder,

I have what I think is a male Honduran Boa. He is about 3 to 3½' long with a 2½ to 3" girth. I have had him for eighteen months so he could be 2 to 2½ years old. His colour is dark

brown and pinkish underneath. I also have a female and she is about 5½ to 6′ long with a girth of 8 to 10". I would like to know if the male is adult or will he grow any more as he seems to have stopped growing at the moment. He is not a good feeder; two or three mice every two or three weeks, sometimes longer. If he is a male what is the breeding procedure? Is it the same as other boas? I would be most grateful for any help with this problem.

Thankfully, D Stewart
West Sussex

PS. Keep up the good work with the newsletter, it's very helpful.

International Herpetological Society

REPTILE FAIR 1991

Sunday 15th September
10.15am to 4pm

Sports Hall, Alumwell Centre
Primley Avenue
Walsall
West Midlands
(Half a mile from junction 10 of the M6 Motorway)

Further enquiries (enclosing an sae) to
International Herpetological Society,
65 Broadstone Avenue,
Walsall, West Midlands WS3 1JA

SNAKE KEEPER
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No. 1 Demanding Beauty - Elaphe situla ✦ The Red-tailed Tree Racer ✦ Bolton Snake Keepers ✦ Fifteen Years of Reptile Keeping ✦ My Experiences with British Snakes.

No. 2 Asian Rat Snakes of the Elaphe Genus, Part I, Elaphe rufodorsata ✦ Our New Vivarium Set-up Treatment of Mouthrot in a Red-tailed Tree Racer ✦ Cuddles, the Royal Python ✦ The Rainbow Water Snake ✦ Dead or Alive ✦ The Sand Snake, Psammophis schokari, in Captivity.

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No.11 Asian Rat Snakes, Part IX, Elaphe quadrivirgata ✦ Successful Breeding of the Cuban Boa, Epicrates angulifer ✦ The Snakes of Transcaucasia, Part I, Typhlops and Eryx ✦ Snake Keeping, the Bug that Keeps on Growing ✦ African Vipers of the Genus Bitis.

No.12 Asian Rat Snakes, Part X, Elaphe flavolineata ✦ First Year Growth in a Russian Rat Snake, Elaphe schrenckii ✦ Fangs for the Ferret ✦ The Trouble with Harry ✦ The Palestine Viper, Daboia palaestinae ✦ The Snakes of Transcaucasia, Part II, Colubrids.

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SNAKES IN PRINT

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Volume 11 Number 2 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 OEF for details (don't forget to enclose an SAE).

▸ **Breeding the Grey Rat Snake** by Chiel Sterkens. (2 pages.)

The author's installation of central heating brought the cooling of his Grey Rat Snakes to an end in January 1989. The snakes mated on the 5th of January resulting in eight eggs, four of which were infertile.

▸ **Multiple Clutch Production in the Brown House Snake, *Lamprophis fuliginosus* (Boie) from a Single Mating Period** by Adam Wright. (3 pages.)

Ex-ASRA Chairman and current Editor ESS English Edition (New World Snakes) Adam Wright describes how his female African House Snake produced 32 eggs in four clutches over a 12 month period from a single mating.

▸ **The Mangrove Snake, *Boiga dendrophila*** by Richard Wishaupt. (3 pages, 1 colour plate.)

Distribution, habitat, food, venom and reproduction for Mangrove Snake enthusiasts.

▸ **Breeding *Nerodia fasciata*** by Fons Sleijpen. (5 pages, 2 colour plates.)

Informative account of the keeping, feeding and breeding of *Nerodia fasciata*. The author's 2.1 snakes were given chicken heart and stomach, earthworms, beef heart, spleen, goldfish and cod fillet. Obviously the varied diet proved worthwhile as 93 healthy young were produced in two years. However he eventually sold the adults because no-one showed any interest in buying the offspring - "Many [snake keepers] would rather pay hundreds or even thousands of guilders for an imported snake that dies after a few months ... than five guilders for a beautiful, active and virtually problem free captive-born snake."

▸ **The Effects of Food Gorging and Food Abstinence on the Growth of Juvenile Garter Snakes** by Hans van der Rijst. (3 pages, 2 colour plates.)

Report on research done by JS Meyer and AP Kowell and published in the *Journal of Herpetology* (1973). Sixteen snakes were divided into two groups (10 and 6) and maintained at 27° C. Initially the first group was offered food daily, the latter weekly. The animals were weighed regularly and charts are included showing weight and length differences between the groups.

Reptile & Amphibian Magazine
May-June 1991
Reptile & Amphibian Magazine, RD3, PO Box 3709,

Pottsville, PA 17901, USA.

► **Two Newly Discovered Snakes in Thailand** by Merel J Cox, David Drew, David Chiszar and Hobart M Smith (3 pages, 4 colour plates.)

Thai herpetologists recently discovered two species of snake not previously known in that country. The first, the Banded Green Cat Snake, *Boiga saengsomi*, was named in honour of its collector Buntot Saengmahasom. The second addition is the Pugnosed (or Ashy) Asiatic Pit Viper, *Trimeresurus puniceus*.

► **Breeding Pythons and Boa Constrictors** by John Brunner. (6 pages, 2 colour plates.)

Former curator of the Binghamton, NY Zoo has been breeding these animals since the early 1970s and offers concise advice and tips to would-be breeders.

EVENTS

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

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.

15th/16th June
Portsmouth Reptile and Amphibian Society (PRAS) Display at Eastleigh Show
Eastleigh, Hants

Enquiries to Jon on (0329) 833017.

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

Enquiries to Mrs S Hughes on (0252) 702714.

6th/7th July

PRAS Display
Co-op Educational Show
Castlefield
Southsea

Enquiries to Jon on (0329) 833017.

13th July **11am - 5pm**

Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group Annual Exhibition 1991
West Herts College
Watford Campus
Hempstead Road
Watford, Herts

Enquiries to (0734) 833532.

2nd/3rd/4th August

PRAS Display
Southsea Show
Southsea Common

Enquiries to Jon on (0329) 833017.

31st August/ Sat 10am - 7pm
1st September Sun 10am - 6pm

PRAS Annual Show
Fratton Community Centre
Trafalgar Place
off Clive Road
Fratton
Portsmouth

Enquiries to Jon on (0329) 833017

15th September 10.15am - 4pm

IHS Reptile Fair 1991
Sports Hall
Alumwell Centre
Primley Avenue
Walsall
West Midlands

Contact the IHS at 65 Broadstone Avenue, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 1JA.

19th October 1991
Dutch Snake Day

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

MISCELLANEOUS

Almost 3000 Attend First Expo

Indigo Promotions, organisers of the 1st National Reptile Expo held at Enfield last month, have reported that almost 3000 people attended the event despite predictions by many reptile keepers that the Expo would be a flop. A large range of animals and herpetological equipment was on display and some enthusiasts travelled a long way to attend.

The Expo was efficiently organised and well run. Impulse buying by the general public appeared to be minor (one person spent a great deal of time trying to persuade a garter snake to enter and stay in a plastic carrier bag).

Pleased with their success, the promoters plan another event next year, possibly at a different venue and later in the season.

TCHG Annual Exhibition

The Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group present their annual display of reptiles and amphibians at West Herts College, Watford on the 13th of July. The event opens at 11am and admission is £1 for adults and 50p for children.

IHS Reptile Fair 1991

The IHS annual Reptile Fair will be held on the Sunday the 15th of September at the Alumwell Centre, Primley Avenue, Walsall. The hall opens to the public at 10.15am and closes at 4pm. Trade tables are available and booking forms can be obtained from the IHS Secretary, 65 Broadstone Avenue, Walsall WS3 1JA. This event is always well-organised and well-attended, mainly by enthusiasts.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTS

FOR SALE

More Cheltenham-bred baby **Common Boa Constrictors** (*Boa constrictor constrictor*) £75. Chris and Marcia Martin, 18 Ballinode Close, Cheltenham, Gloucs GL50 4SQ. Telephone (0242) 573477.

Superb quality 1991 hatchlings from top American breeders available this year. Orders now being taken for numerous species. Albino **California Kingsnakes, Mexican Milksnakes, Trans-Pecos Rat Snakes, Mountain Kingsnakes** (*pyromelana*), **Pueblan Milksnakes** (*L.t. campbelli*), **Speckled Kingsnakes**. Many others available. Phone for prices or send sae for list to Mark Johnson, 41 Beech Drive, Nailsea, Avon BS19 1QA. Phone (0275) 853894.

Pair of well-grown yearling Carolina **Corn Snakes**. Beautifully marked and avid feeders. £60 pair. Telephone Allan on (0902) 784805 (Wolverhampton).

One male **Burmese Python**, 8', £120. Good feeder, excellent temperament and condition. Will consider swap with definite female. Contact Jon or Karen on (0329) 833017 after 6pm.

Garter snake hatchlings - **Chequered** (*Thamnophis marcianus*) and **Red-sided** (*Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*). Feeding on frozen fish. £15 each or two for £25. Available soon hatchling **Florida Blue Garter Snakes** (*Thamnophis sirtalis similis*). Phone Rob or Simon on (0273) 553303 anytime (Sussex).

Expected hatchlings list from our 1991 captive breeding programme. Snake and lizard species including **Baird's Rat Snakes, Albino Prairie Kingsnakes**, *Phelsuma standingi, Gekko vittatus* and others. Please send sae to DB Buckland, 148 Sidwell Street, Exeter, Devon. Telephone (0392) 79658 (Mon to Sat 9am - 5pm).

Boa constrictor constrictor young, £75. (021) 742 8626.

Captive bred **Brazilian Rainbow Boas**. Both female and immaculate. £300 each. Phone (0702) 522102.

We are breeding a wide variety of king, milk, rat, garter and other snake species. Unrelated pairs available for most species. Expected hatchling list now available. Phone Adam or April on (0203) 257182 for details.

Egyptian Spotted Sand Boas, *Eryx jaculus jaculus*; **Colombian Rainbow Boas**, *Epicrates cenchria maurus*; **Argentine Rainbow Boas**, *Epicrates cenchria alvarezi*. Home bred surplus. Contact Steve Simpson on (0273) 727328 (Brighton).

Two female **Pacific Ground Boas**. Both produced this year. Over 3'. £65 each. Will consider exchange for young Common Boas. Adult female **Water Dragon** (2½') £35. Baby **Corn Snakes** expected early June, £15 each or two for £25. Telephone Fred on (0442) 241453 (Herts).

2.1 adult **Cook's Tree Boas**, *Corallus enydris cookii*, £55 each ono. 1990 0.1 captive bred **Sinaloan Milksnake**, £70 ono. Adult 1.0 **Honduran Milksnake**, £100 ono. Telephone Paul on (0226) 245436 (South Yorks).