SNAKE KEEPER

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INFORMATION

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SNAKE KEEPER

We have received a number of letters from readers asking for help with problems concerning snakes.

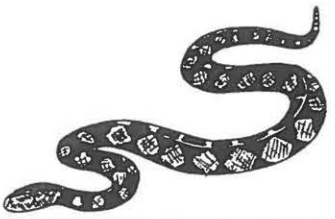
Whilst we are not in a position to offer advice, we will publish requests for help.

However, we do need <u>full</u> <u>details</u>.

If you do write, please consider the following list and enclose the appropriate details.

Species, sex, age, length.
Number of snakes in vivarium.
Type of vivarium and dimensions.
Substrate.
Heating arrangements including day and night temperatures.
Lighting equipment and photoperiod.
Food and feeding regime.
Specific nature of problem including dates

<u>PLEASE NOTE</u>
If you think that your animal may be seriously ill it should be taken to a veterinary surgeon, preferably one with experience of reptile ailments.



SNAKE KEEPER

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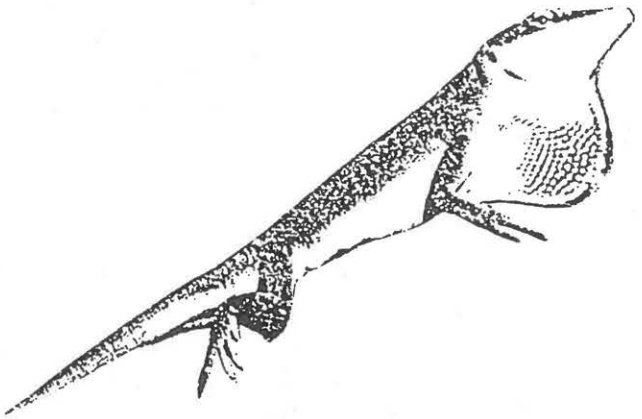
J.S.K. Competition. 15

Front cover: Royal Python, Python regius by Dr. G.M.Evans.
Rear cover: Desert King Snake, Lampropeltis getulus splendida.
Courtesy Bucks Free Press

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REARING COOK'S TREE BOAS

Cook's Tree Boa, Corallus enhydris cookii, is a nocturnal, arboreal snake from South America. It grows to a maximum of 1.5m (5ft). Food consists of birds, bats and arboreal mammals.

We purchased our first Cook's Tree Boa, (of still undetermined sex), on 22nd September 1985 from a member of the local herpetological society. The snake had been born approximately one month earlier. Our previous snake-keeping experience was limited to Red-sided Garter Snakes, Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis, and our newly acquired Large Whip Snake, Coluber jugularis. As we were boldly going where we had not ventured before we called our snake 'James T'. We grew very fond of him and bought his brother/sister within a week. The second was named 'Captain'.

The two snakes were housed in a home made cage constructed from melamine faced chipboard. Measuring 64 cm high by 56 cm wide and 38 cm in depth it has a vertical sliding Perspex front and adjustable ventilation slots, top and bottom. Using a thermostatically controlled heating pad, mounted on the inner top of the cage, the daytime temperature is approximately 30 degrees C and this falls to around 20 degrees at night.

The snakes soon settled in and our thoughts turned to feeding them. They had not eaten from birth. The snakes were absolutely tiny and had such long thin necks that it seemed unbelievable that anything would actually pass down their throats. Both snakes would strike at fingers during the first few weeks but, when offered food, their accuracy was poor and they always missed their target. We decided to try placing a dead pinky in their mouths but after the first nerve wracking attempt failed, our confidence drained away.

We were advised to try mouse tails as a prelude to more wholesome meals and each snake was persuaded to accept one per week. During this period we continued to offer pinkies but without success.

As the nutritional content of a mouse tail is probably less than zero, and being unable to do anything with even the smallest pinkies, we tried raw lamb. With a smear of margarine and a sprinkle of SA-37 vitamin supplement it was just possible to feed small pieces using a thin plastic rod to carefully open the mouth. Whilst being very unhelpful most of the time, there were nights when our snakes would co-operate, briefly. On such nights the food had only to placed in their mouths and swallowing would begin. The technique of allowing the snake's body to pass through a small gap formed by the thumb and two fingers whilst preventing the food mass from passing through, is invaluable, once mastered.

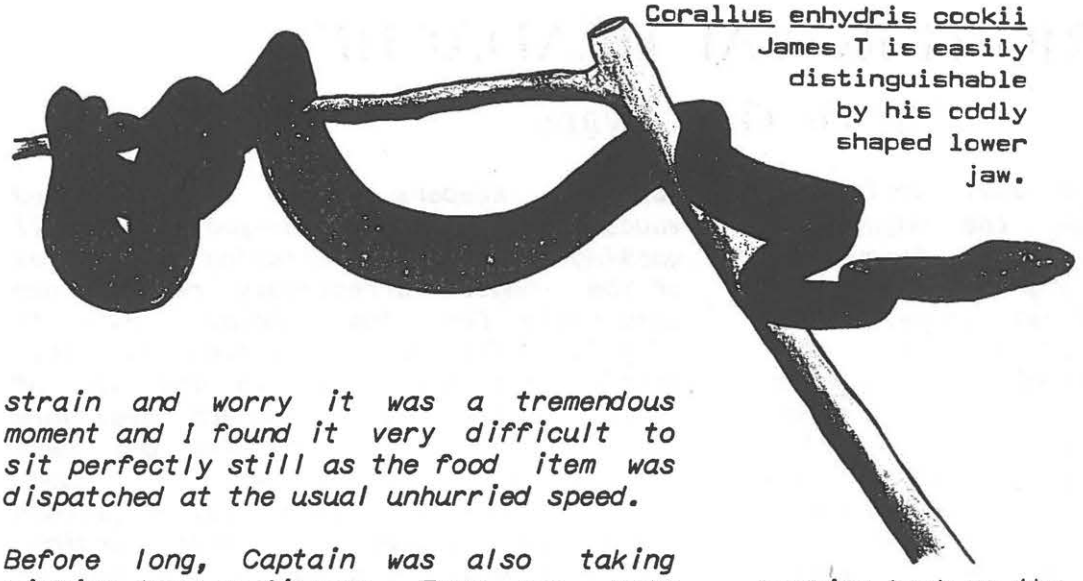
At the end of October 1985 both snakes' eyes were seen to be cloudy and we awaited our first skins. We were soon disappointed. During this and subsequent sloughs the skin came off to a point behind the eyes and then remained firmly attached. We increased the humidity in the cage, put in trays of damp peat and moss, sprayed the snakes with water, soaked them in water, coated them in Dermisol, and tweaked off the odd loose patch with tweezers. Removing a piece the size of a thumbnail was always regarded as a supreme achievment.

On the 13th December 1985 we succeeded in assisting each snake to swallow a pinky but further offerings were scorned. We changed to raw steak with vitamin supplement and this diet continued throughout January.

During this time we constantly tried to encourage self-feeding with pinkies and steak but without success. We tempted them with food laid on plastic rulers, tied to cotton, balanced on sticks. We waved it, shook it, jabbed with it, circled with it but they stubbornly refused all offerings.

On the 12th February Captain was assisted in eating two pinkies whilst James T refused all offers.

On the evening of 21st February I had helped James T to swallow one pinky. I picked up a second hoping to follow on from the first before he noticed. As I altered my grip on the food James T casually reached over and took the mouse from my fingers. After five months of



Corallus enhydris cookii James T is easily distinguishable by his oddly shaped lower jaw.

strain and worry it was a tremendous moment and I found it very difficult to sit perfectly still as the food item was dispatched at the usual unhurried speed.

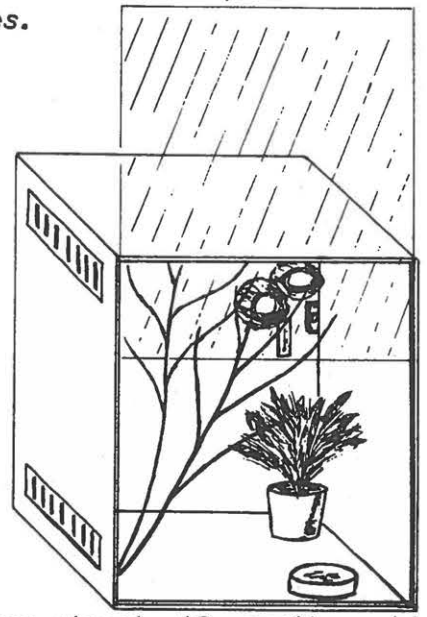
Before long, Captain was also taking pinkies from my fingers. Even now, both snakes still prefer to be fed by hand, often ignoring food that is just placed in their cage. James T has developed a large appetite, never refusing food, day or night, whereas Captain tends to be more fussy.

Although the feeding difficulties were solved, sloughing is still a major problem despite spraying their cage with water twice daily. I am sure that a fish would feel quite at home if placed in the cage. The problem has been slightly alleviated by the addition of various house plants, the most successful so far being the Boston Fern. The plants do quite well at first but finally succumb to the combination of high temperature and flooding. Our present treatment consists of soaking the snake in warm water for an hour or more and removing any loose skin with a pair of tweezers. Then a liberal coating of Dermisol is applied, after which the snake is returned to the vivarium. After two or three days the treatment is repeated and this results in most of the old skin being removed. The eyes are a particular problem area; sometimes the spectacle refuses to separate and remains in place until the following slough.

The snakes spend most of the day at the top of the cage, firmly lodged in two pieces of cork bark which are fixed to the rear wall. As night falls they venture out and travel to the lower levels. From the earliest days we have kept the vivarium furnishings to a minimum, due to the constant need to remove the occupants for 'feeding practice'. Once the snake wraps its prehensile tail around a branch it can take a considerable amount of time to unwind it.

Cook's Tree Boas have quite a reputation for unwarranted aggression and I have no doubt that ours will try to remove parts of our skin as they increase in size. At the moment we receive the occasional jab when skin removal takes longer than the patient thinks necessary. Apart from this lapse they are fairly even tempered at present.

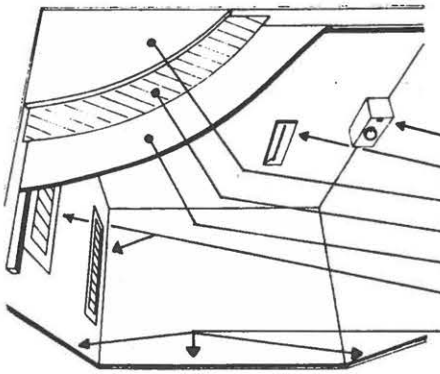
Looking back on the early days, I think that we should have tried to tempt the snakes to feed themselves for a longer period before we assisted them. This was mainly due to our lack of experience with young snakes.



Right.
The snakes home for the past 18 months is now too small and they require a much taller vivarium.

Vertical opening fronts are extremely dangerous. They cannot be recommended.

Our snakes are now almost 18 months old and have provided much enjoyment and interest during this time. They have taken up a considerable amount of time and caused a few sleepless nights. They appear to be quite healthy despite our early rearing problems. It would be a very sad day if anything happened to them.



Left.
Cut-away view of the cage showing

A RIGHT ROYAL HEADACHE

by Dr. G.M. Evans

Imported from its native West Africa in large numbers each year, the Royal (or Ball) Python, Python regius, frequently finds its way onto dealers' lists and into pet shops as an ideal first snake. While its good nature and relatively small size make it a better introduction to boid snakes than many of its kin (some of which are of enormous adult size and/or uncertain temperament), it cannot be recommended unreservedly to the beginner. Successful captive maintenance of this attractive snake requires careful attention to a number of factors, some of which it shares with other members of its family, and some of which are almost uniquely its own.

The housing requirements for this species are fairly simple. As with all but the most sedentary of reptiles, their vivarium should be as large as possible, but being the smallest of their genus, reaching little more than 1.5m (5ft) as a maximum, they clearly require much less space than the giants of their clan. As these animals are partially arboreal in inclination, a stout and well secured branch is a welcome fitting, and the vivarium should be of a sufficient height to accomodate one. They should not, however, be condemned to spending the entirety of their lives coiled up in a tree, but should be able also to stretch out on the ground. A deep dish of water, large enough for the snake to immerse itself completely, will also prove popular, as well as helping sloughing.

Their quarters should be heated to a background temperature of 22-24 degrees C (72-75 degrees F) at night, rising to a daytime 26-28 degrees C (79-82 degrees F) with localised hot-spots around 30-32 degrees C (86-90 degrees F). Many people simply use ordinary incandescent bulbs to provide the required temperature, although, while adequate, this situation is far from ideal. Prolonged illumination causes disruption to the animals' day/night biorythm, and additionally, there is some evidence to suggest that protracted constant, or near-constant, exposure to light may be detrimental to ophidian eyesight. Obviously it is preferable for the heat and light sources to be independent of each other. While some reptile keepers have experimented successfully with heater-pads and soil warming cables, the burrowing activities of the inmates effectively render them unsuitable for the Royal Python's vivarium. The ideal solution to this particular problem lies in the use of ceramic heater bulbs, which are available in different wattages, and give out heat but no light. Coupled with a good, reliable thermostat, and contained within a mesh guard to stop accidental burning, such an arrangement fixed to one end of the vivarium ceiling will provide a suitable internal thermal gradient. This ensures that the animals are not subjected to the heat of the hot-spots without the option to move to the relatively cooler areas of their container, and thus the snakes may thermo-regulate in a manner similar to their behaviour in the wild. It must, however, be remembered at all times that a ready availability of fresh air is vital for health, and the temptation to reduce air flow in order to minimise heat loss should be avoided. Such a course of action leads to a stuffy atmosphere inimicable to health. Before leaving the topic of heating and lighting, it is worth considering the use of ultra violet light. Some researchers have found evidence which seems to link the continual use of u.v. radiation with skin tumors and certain retinal problems. However, u.v. light plays an important part in vitamin assimilation, being a necessary requirement for vitamin D3 synthesis in the skin. Since this vitamin is responsible for the regulation of calcium and phosphorus stores within the body, it seems that a case exists for the careful, occasional use of "True light" or similar, though I would hesitate to advocate it on a permanent basis.

It goes almost without saying that good nutrition is absolutely critical for a healthy life. Like many of its family, the Royal Python depends very largely on mammals to provide the majority of its diet. Some specimens may be induced to eat dead day old chicks, though in the main, rodents are the preferred food, especially, in most cases, gerbils, though suitably sized rats and mice may also be taken. Ideally these should be offered dead, as live rodent teeth are quite

capable of delivering serious bites to an unwary snake. This may prove difficult at first with freshly caught individuals, but they should be weaned off live food as soon as possible. Experimentation with various methods of artificial animation may help to this end. Since snakes regularly consume the whole carcass, the potential risk of nutritional deficiencies is minimal, but the judicious use of a good mineral/vitamin preparation is of benefit.

In theory the feeding of Royals presents few problems. The practice can, however, be far from easy, as these beautiful little snakes are renowned in herpetological circles for their propensity to obstinate self starvation, with a dedication that at times borders on the apparently suicidal. Although it is possible to force-feed (with expert veterinary advice), this course of action is neither desirable, nor a long-term answer. In order for the snake to feed in as near normal a manner as possible, it is necessary to understand, and remove, the reasons for its refusal to feed in the first place.

Naturally shy and secretive, in their homeland these snakes hide during the day in undisturbed areas, emerging to hunt at night. In the vivarium, failure to take this basic need for security and seclusion into account may prove a major contributory factor in appetite depression. In addition, any feelings of exposure to dangers, whether real or imagined, that the animal experiences can also result in stresses so great that anorexia ensues. Bearing in mind the retiring nature of Royals, it is clearly imperative that conditions within their quarters allow for at least a reasonable duplication of their wild life-style. Being extremely sensitive to tactile stimulation, these pythons derive the greatest measure of security from hiding places into which they only just fit. The provision of suitable sections of cork bark or artificial caves is vital to avert the feelings of insecurity otherwise engendered.

Furthermore, factors outside of the vivarium may also give rise to stress. Movements, or the vibrations occasioned by heavy footsteps, in the vicinity of their containers can cause the snakes to be ill at ease, leading to the consequent rejection of food. The provision of a reduced glass panel, keeping the vivarium, and possibly the snake-room, in total darkness (or simply covering the viewing window) and exercising care when walking past may all help to minimise the disturbance and feelings of threat due to external events.

While considering stresses, handling is one that may often be overlooked. Particularly for a newly wild-caught specimen, the experience of being bodily removed from a relatively secure environment and placed in a new and threatening situation can prove enormously stressful. With any of these snakes that is showing reluctance to feed, handling should be kept to an absolute minimum, until it is eating normally. The temptation to touch a new acquisition can be very great indeed, but it should be resisted.

Having reached this point, it is important to emphasize that each Royal Python is an individual, and consequently each owner may have to experiment quite widely before finding the best way to induce feeding in his own recalcitrant charge. To this end some, or any combination, of the measures mentioned in this article may be of some help, though only time and perseverance will tell.

There is evidence to suggest that these pythons undergo a fasting period as a part of their natural life cycle, which indicates that an otherwise healthy snake could reasonably be expected to recommence feeding eventually. Prolonged anorexia, however, remains a worrying experience for the snake-keeper (my own first Royal took over four months to feed, and I have heard of periods up to six months). Such a time seems, if anything, far longer if you have had experience of other python species which seemingly demolish almost anything edible within a few days of arrival.

For all their disadvantages, however, the appearance, size and docile temperament of Royal Pythons make them interesting and rewarding vivarium subjects. Successfully starting them off in captivity is not without its problems but, in the long run, it can turn out to be very well worth the effort involved.

Dr. Evans, who has a special affection for the genus Python, supplied, as part of this article, the illustration used on this month's front cover.

SNAKES OF THE GENUS ELAPHE
THEIR CARE AND BREEDING IN CAPTIVITY, PART 2

by Kevin J. Hingley

Introduction

Part 1 discussed the 'obsoleta' subspecies of the genus Elaphe, commonly known as Rat or Chicken Snakes. To continue with the theme, Part 2 will discuss the remaining North American forms, such as the Corn Snake, Fox Snake, Trans-Pecos and 'Green' Rat Snakes. Their basic care is much the same as that for the subspecies of the Common Rat Snake; Elaphe obsoleta.

The Corn Snake, E.guttata.

This snake is surely the most commonly imported, kept and bred Rat Snake. Its popularity is due to its attractive colour and markings, and also its docile nature. There are three recognised subspecies, the Corn or Red Rat Snake (E.g.guttata), the Rosy Rat Snake (E.g.rosacea) and the Great Plains Rat Snake (E.g.emoryi).

E.g.guttata. Adult specimens may have a ground colour of grey, fawn, orange or red. Along the back, starting behind the head, runs a series of red blotches or saddles; these extend along the upper surface of the tail. They are usually encircled in black which makes the pattern stand out rather prominently, although some specimens have little or no black edging to the saddles and these specimens may look fairly uniformly coloured. There is also a series of smaller blotches that run along the sides of the body, although they are usually faint in comparison to the dorsal saddles and again may not be edged in black. The head is long and slender compared to other Rat Snakes and the eyes are quite large and prominent. Most specimens display those markings on the head which are usually associated with juveniles, whilst in some specimens these markings may be indistinct.

The belly, or ventral surface, may be white, grey, orange or pinkish coloured, with moderate to heavy black checkering, giving the effect of a chess board.

Hatchlings and juvenile individuals are as highly variable as the adults, although the colour and pattern are normally more prominent.

E.g.rosacea. The Rosy Rat Snake is distinguished from the Corn Snake by the almost plain coloured belly. The dorsal colour and pattern are also less striking than that of the Corn Snake, the ground colour being cream or fawn coloured. The saddles along the dorsum are reddish-pink. The blotches along the sides of the body are barely distinguishable from the ground colour. The belly may be yellow or yellowish-orange, and the black checkers are rather faded, becoming very faint or absent in the tail region.

E.g.emoryi. The Great Plains Rat Snake is the third subspecies of the Elaphe guttata group. Most specimens have a ground colour of grey or fawn-brown, with dark grey, brown or olive-brown dorsal blotches. The blotches along the sides of the body (dorso-lateral) may be of a similar colour to the dorsal saddles; they are often slightly lighter in colour. The ventral surface may be white or light grey with black blotches, these being less well defined than the checkers on the abdomen of E.g.guttata.

The young of this particular subspecies, in keeping with some other forms of Elaphe, are similar to their parents. These three subspecies can, and have been, intergraded (cross-bred). Riches (1981) intergraded E.g.guttata and E.g.emoryi; the resulting offspring resembled the young of E.g.guttata rather than E.g.emoryi, although the author does mention that some of the hatchlings could be described as intermediate to both forms. The reverse was true when Gales (1986) intergraded E.g.guttata and E.g.rosacea. Only two of the eleven snakes which hatched from a clutch of fourteen eggs could be said to resemble normal Corn Snakes hatchlings, the remaining nine had very pink abdomens as opposed to white, with reduced black markings.

Husbandry

These three subspecies can all be given the same basic care. Most adults are 120 to 150 cm long (although E.g.guttata is known to reach lengths of 180 cm) and can be housed in a cage of 100 x 60 x 60 cm. I have found the Corn Snake to be a shy snake, and would recommend the provision of a hide-box; if one is not provided most individuals will spend their time hiding underneath the newspaper substrate.

Temperature should range between 23 and 25 degrees C during the day, falling to 20 degrees C at night. A water bowl should be provided, and a branch may also be placed in the cage as they like to climb occasionally. One large individual I kept some years ago was rarely seen, it preferred to lie either beneath the newspaper or under a large piece of cork bark. It also had food and temperature preferences. It refused to eat mice, accepting either rats or small birds and confined itself to the coolest part of the vivarium where the temperature varied between 18 and 20 degrees C. I am currently looking after part of David Gales' Elaphe collection, and this includes a male E.g.guttata which displays the same temperature preference as the specimen I owned some years ago, although it will eat mice.

Breeding

This group of snakes, in particular the Corn Snake, can be bred with relative ease in captivity. A drop in temperature, or even hibernation, during the winter months should encourage mating the following spring with a clutch of eggs (average number is twelve) being laid by the female some six to eight weeks after a successful mating. The eggs should be incubated in the same manner as the eggs of E.obsoleta, as described in Part 1.

Hatching takes place after a further six to eight weeks, and the hatchlings measure between 20 and 25 cm. Unfortunately the young have a reputation for being poor feeders, and many individuals have to be force- or assist-fed for often lengthy periods before they start to feed voluntarily. This can be overcome if the hatchlings are kept individually in small, well ventilated margarine tubs (250 g), and disturbed as little as possible. Normally they won't feed for at least seven to fourteen days, during which time the first (neonate) slough will take place. A few days after the first slough is completed food can be offered in the form of a newly born mouse. Those individuals which are prepared to feed themselves may accept dead prey items, others are stimulated to feed by the movement of live 'pinkies'. Some individuals will not feed voluntarily, but should be given the opportunity to do so for a week or so before any attempt to force- or assist-feed is made.

If some of the young will not feed after this period, then the method I have used to best effect is assist-feeding with mouse tails. This method was recommended to me some years ago by the curator of the Reptile House at a zoo. All one has to do is to remove the tail from a dead adult mouse and cut it into pieces 3 to 4 cm long. By holding the baby snake in one hand, gently but firmly behind the head, the piece of mouse tail can be held in the free hand and then gently pressed against the snake's snout until the mouth opens. The tail can be placed in the mouth so that one end is just inside the throat. The snake can be replaced in its container and should consume the food. It may take several attempts, so be patient. Large hatchlings may take pinkies in this manner. It is a less stressful method than force feeding, which involves pushing the food item down the throat into the stomach. Force feeding is tricky; it is also risky and dangerous if done hurriedly or incorrectly, so stick to assist feeding if you're uncertain.

E.vulpina.

The Fox snake, as this species is commonly called, is, in my opinion, one of the most docile snakes I have encountered. Unlike other Rat Snakes they are stout-bodied, and the scales are quite thick giving them a coarse feel to the body. There are two subspecies recognised, Elaphe v.vulpina and E.v.gloydi. These two forms, the Western and Eastern Fox Snakes, are very similar in appearance, both in colour and pattern, but can be individually identified by counting the number of dorsal saddles: E.v.vulpina has 40 or more whereas E.v.gloydi only has 34 on average.

Mature specimens lose a lot of colour with age and, whilst still attractive, they are much duller than immature specimens. As youngsters, the ground colour is yellow or yellow-ochre, and the dorsal saddles are dark brown to almost black. The dorso-lateral blotches are lighter in the centre, edged with darker brown. The abdomen is a shade lighter than the ground colour of the body and is checkered with grey-brown or dark brown.

As sexual maturity is reached, around three to four years, the ground colour becomes increasingly darker, changing to dark ochre or even grey-brown. The saddles and blotches tend to lighten, particularly at the centre.

The ventral surface tends to remain

unchanged, although the dark checkers may lighten to grey. Some specimens, usually youngsters, have rust or reddish coloured heads with brown markings. Most specimens lose the head markings and the head becomes a uniform grey or brown colour as maturity is reached.

They have earned their common name of Fox Snake due to the fact that wild and newly imported specimens make use of the defensive act of exuding fluid from scent glands in the anal region when handled; this is said to smell like the scent gland of a Fox, Vulpes sp.

Husbandry

Fox Snakes require the same basic care as other Elaphe species. They adapt well to captivity and can be housed in a medium to large vivarium. They are extremely active, constantly prowling around the cage, giving the impression that they are unsettled or hungry. Three of the five snakes I am currently looking after for David Gales are Elaphe v.vulpina, and initially they gave me great concern because of their constant activity. They were provided with a hide-box and fed as often as possible, but this had no effect on their vagrant activity. As December approached and they began to refuse the odd meal, I set about reducing the temperature in their vivaria. During summer and autumn they had been kept at around 23 to 28 degrees C. A month after their last meal, the lights in their cages were turned off completely and the recorded temperatures were 18 to 20 degrees C during the day, falling to 15 degrees C at night. Even at these low temperatures they are still very active, so it would appear that complete hibernation is going to be necessary if successful breeding is to take place next spring.

Their diet consists of mice and rats, and they will eat the odd day-old chick now and again. Newspaper is the only practical substrate as they defecate quite often and the faeces are rather smelly; regular cage cleaning will therefore be required. A water bowl must be provided, although it needn't be large as they rarely bathe. They can climb but tend not to bother, so a branch is optional.

Breeding

Captive breeding of the Fox Snake in the U.K. appears to be something of a rarity, if not non-existent. They are being bred in their native U.S.A. and in Europe. Mattison (1982) reports that eggs laid in the wild number between seven and twenty nine, with the average clutch size being fifteen.

Incubation of the eggs should be the same as for other Elaphe sp. and they should hatch after six to eight weeks, providing conditions are right. The hatchlings are fairly typical of most Rat Snakes and measure 20 to 25 cm. The pattern is retained throughout life.

E.subocularis. The Trans-Pecos Rat Snake is another attractive species, easily distinguished from other members of the genus by its slender body, H-shaped markings along the dorsum and its prominent eyes, (hence the specific name 'subocularis').

In the wild this species is found in the drier regions of N.E. Mexico and S.W. Texas. Unlike other Rat Snakes, the Trans-Pecos Rat Snake is nocturnal in its habits and has a vertical slit-like pupil. The ground colour is pale yellow, although some specimens may have a greenish tinge to them. The characteristic markings begin behind the head, where two 'tram-lines' extend along the neck, either dark brown or black in colour. The H-shaped markings are rather faint on the fore part of the body, becoming more intense in colour and larger in size nearing the mid-body region, fading and diminishing towards and including the tail. These markings may be black or brown in colour, or a mixture of the two colours. There are also some faint dorso-lateral markings.

Husbandry

As this species is an inhabitant of dry, semi-desert regions it is important that similar conditions are re-created in captivity. Switak (in Morgan, 1984) reports that fungal dermatitis (Scale rot?) is evident in E.subocularis that are exposed to prolonged damp conditions, therefore Morgan (1984) recommends that water is offered at irregular intervals, yet has never witnessed them drinking. The temperature needs to be fairly high during the day, 28 to 30 degrees C, falling to 25 degrees C at night during the summer. A drop in temperature in the winter appears necessary to promote breeding, but should not be allowed to fall below 18 to 20 degrees C.

Adults measure between 80 and 170 cm. It would appear that the hatchlings are often larger than other Elaphe sp. as they

measure from 25 to 40 cm. Diet consists of rodents.

Breeding
Following the cooling off period during the winter, increasing the temperature in the spring should encourage mating activity. The gestation period lasts eight to ten weeks, after which a small (three to six) clutch of eggs is deposited. The eggs then take a further seventy to eighty days to incubate.

E.triaspis. The Green Rat Snake is another western N. American form, although it is rarely seen in captivity in the U.K. I would recommend that it be treated in the same manner as E.subocularis.

I have only had experience with a single specimen; it failed to adapt very well to captivity, and died after six months in a young friend's collection. It was a male, approximately four feet long, and seemingly in good condition at the time of purchase. It refused to feed for two months, during which time it developed a cold. I advised the owner to increase the temperature, which he did; this corrected the respiratory disorder and the snake started to feed, although at irregular intervals. After five months it stopped feeding and the cold reappeared. Upon the advice of a local vet a seven day course of antibiotics (Terramycin) was administered orally and a slight improvement in the condition was evident. Sadly, the snake developed necrotic stomatitis (mouth rot) and died, being too weak to respond to treatment.

I dare say that E.triaspis can be successfully maintained and bred quite easily, but it does appear to be a delicate species and there is very little published information available; I would not recommend it therefore to the novice herpetologist. Diet consists of rodents.

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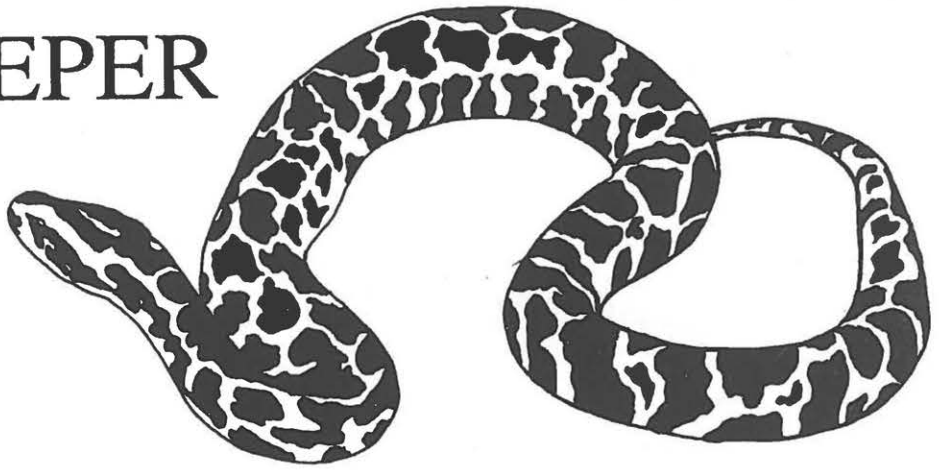
Part 3 of Kevin's article will be published next month.

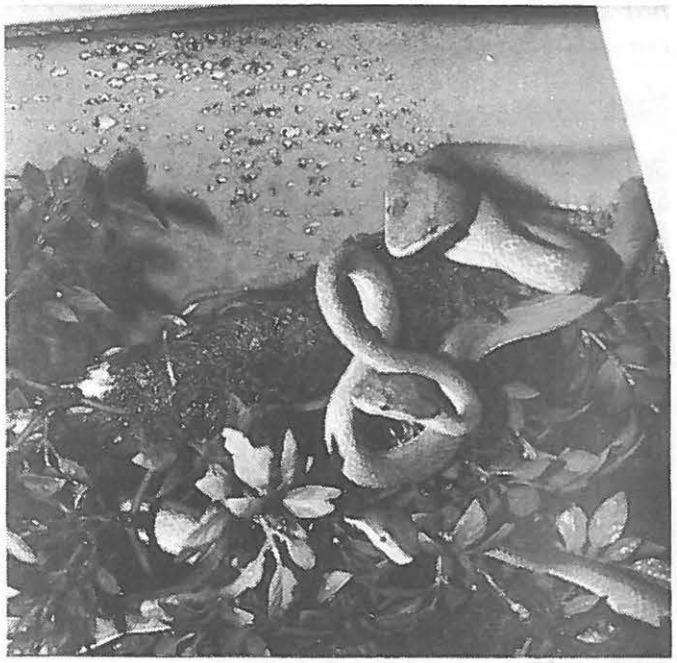
SNAKE KEEPER

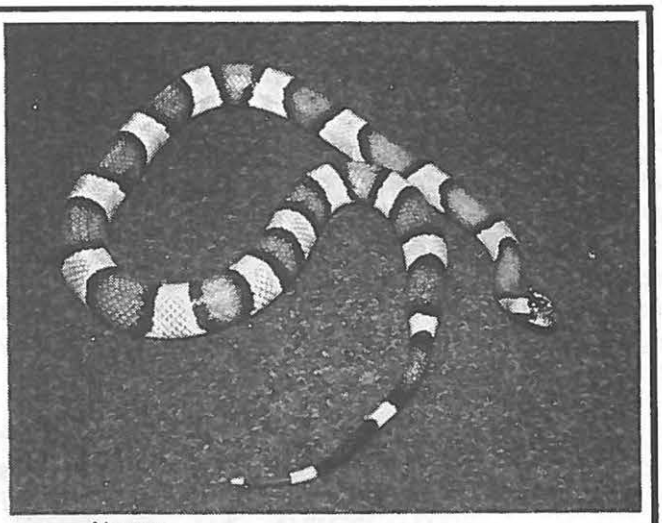
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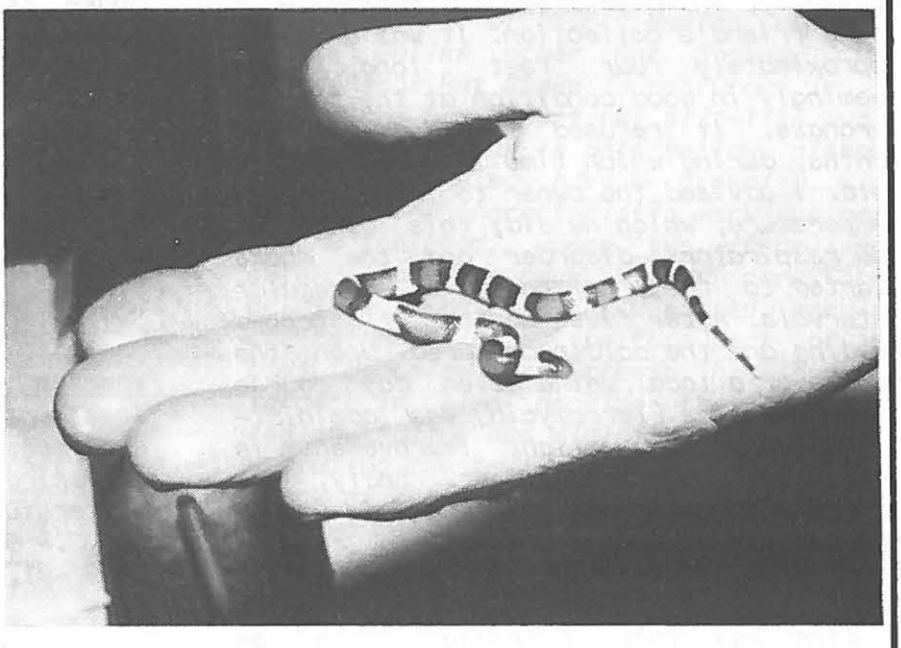


Above
Blairs King Snake,
Lampropeltis mexicana alterna,
(Blairs phase).
Male, born September 1984

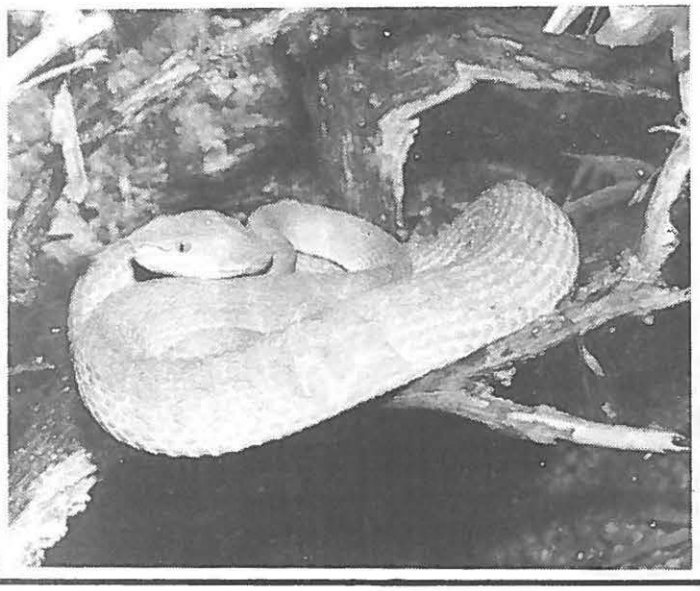
Above
White-lipped Tree Vipers,
Trimeresurus albolabris. Two
males and one female, born
May 1985 at Chester Zoo.
Distribution: North eastern
India, Bangladesh, Nepal,
South East Asia. Venomous.

Photo Page

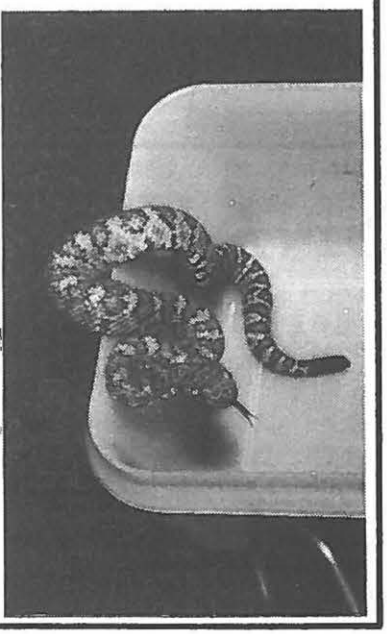
Part Two. More snakes from the collection of Frank Schofield.



Below
Pope's Tree Viper, Trimeresurus popeorum. Female sub-adult.
Distibution: North eastern India,
South East Asia. Venomous.



Above
Scarlet King Snake,
Lampropeltis triangulum elapsoides.
Bred by Frank
Schofield, June '86



Right
Speckled Rattlesnake,
Crotalus mitchellii.
Captive bred in
Germany, summer 1986.
Found in Arizona,
southern Nevada,
southern California.
Venomous.

PROBLEM PAGE

Mr T. Hayter of Cheshire has been keeping snakes for 9 months and has a problem with two of his snakes.

The first problem concerns a Garter Snake.

The snake is a female, 38 inches in length and is housed in a 24 x 12 x 12 inch glass aquarium. Furnishings in the cage include a medium sized water bowl, an old woolly jumper and a rock with newspaper as the substrate.

Heat is supplied by a 40 watt light bulb and a 4 watt heating pad giving a daytime temperature of 75 degrees F and this falls to 60 degrees F at night. No photoperiod.

The snake shows no interest in food and has only eaten a couple of worms since early December, despite being offered goldfish and pieces of cod. It spends most of its time in the water bowl which it has shared with the goldfish making no attempt to eat them. The snake stays in the water bowl at night.

The second problem concerns a Dice Snake. Eighteen inches in length and of unknown sex, the snake is housed in a glass aquarium measuring 24 x 12 x 12 inches.

Furnishings include a brick and a rock with an artificial grass substrate. A small water bowl is provided. Heating is supplied by a 40 watt light bulb and a 10 watt heating pad. Daytime temperature is 70 degrees F, falling to 60 degrees at night. No photoperiod.

This snake, it seems, will only eat live goldfish. Since early December it has caught fish from the water but after catching they are dropped and no further interest is shown in them.

The snake is very nervous. Any movement in the room causes the snake to leave the hot spot by the light bulb and it seeks cover under the brick.

Mr Hayter lives at 96 Gawsworth Road, Broken Cross, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 8UF and would welcome any advice regarding these problems.

SNAKE KEEPER NEWS

The Chairman and the Librarian of the Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group have joined forces to open 'Risborough Aquatics'.

Roger Grenville and Chris Bartlett started trading from their premises, situated in Princes Risborough, on the 6th of January. Their shop is primarily for tropical and marine fish keepers although they are hoping to develop a reptile section.

I paid a quick visit a few days after opening and found a well stocked shop. In addition to the many, many tanks of fish, there were some very nice crabs at prices from 90p to £4, Zebra tarantulas at £15, Garter Snakes at £9.50p and a California King Snake at £55.

Roger and Chris can be found at 9 Duke St., Princes Risborough, Bucks. Tel: Princes Risborough 4279.

NEXT ISSUE:

A visit to Cheltenham snake breeders, Chris and Marcia Martin PLUS Snakes of the genus, Elaphe, Part 3.

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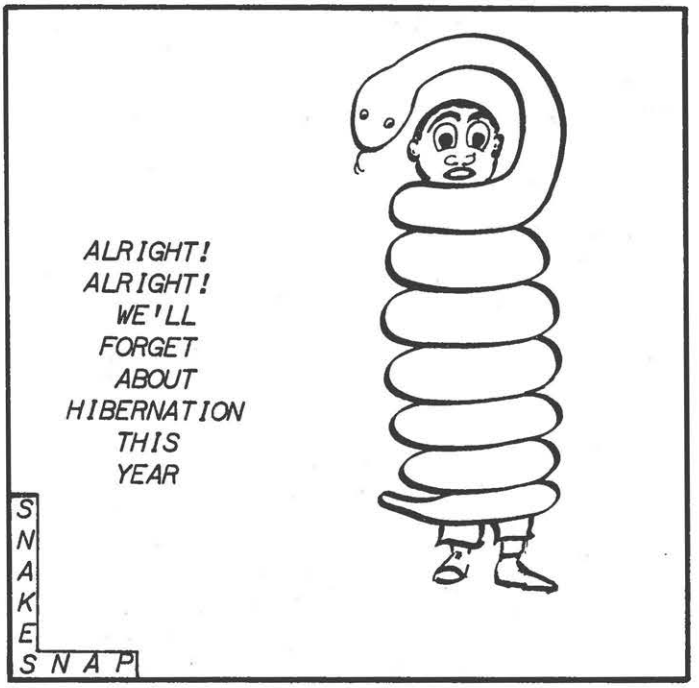
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Starting with our next issue, No. 3, we will pay a small amount for articles published. The amount paid will be between £5 and £10 and is intended to offset any expenses incurred by the author of the article.



Articles on all subjects related to snakes are welcome. These should preferably be typed but legible hand-written articles are quite acceptable.

SNAKE KEEPER is constantly searching for items of interest relating to snakes. Whatever you've written, seen, drawn, photographed (b&w), discovered, invented, constructed, bred, lost or cured... WE ARE INTERESTED!

JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER

by Lee Bowler

Last month Lee contributed an article on Royal Pythons. Following on from that article, Lee tells us of a problem involving his snake and a radiator.

It was a hot June day, mid morning, and the sun was overhead in a clear blue sky. I decided to let Guyon, my Royal Python, out for some exercise on my bedroom carpet.

My dad was at work and my mum was downstairs making a cup of tea. Guyon, mum, dad and I had been invited to go to Cotswold Wildlife Park by Don Reid. I had written to Mr Reid with some questions about Royal Pythons and he very kindly offered to examine Guyon and show us around the Reptile House.

The sun was shining in through my bedroom window so I put Guyon on the window sill to bask in the sunshine. He stretched out and appeared to have gone to sleep. I went downstairs to get a drink and was only gone for a few minutes.

As I re-entered my bedroom I saw the last four or five inches of Guyon's forty-eight inch body disappearing behind the radiator attached to the wall below the window sill. The gap between the radiator and the wall was about one and a half inches. I started to panic but then decided that my mum would not be very pleased if I told her that the snake was stuck behind the radiator. I calmed down and tried to think of a solution.

I tapped the radiator to try and scare him in the hope that he might come out. It

didn't work so I tried prodding him very gently with a pencil. Still no luck. I was quite worried by now and decided to tell my mum. Surprisingly, she wasn't angry and came to help.

We tried all sorts of ideas to make him come out but nothing worked. Mum suggested that we should defrost some food for him, using the microwave. Before long the food was defrosted and I waved it under and over the radiator, half expecting Guyon to come out but he didn't.

By now we were really worried because we couldn't see him breathing. Dad was due home from work soon and would expect us to be ready to leave for the Cotswold Wildlife Park.

There was one last resort, to ring Uncle Cyril who is a retired plumber. He is also terrifed of snakes and has trouble looking at pictures of them. As you can imagine we had to use a lot of persuasion to get him to come to our house. I made a cup of tea for him to calm his nerves when he arrived. He looked rather worried and, whilst drinking his tea, asked whether the snake would bite.

I reassured him that he would come to no harm and he plucked up enough courage to venture upstairs. After finding the key we set to work to drain the radiator using cups and small buckets. Eventually the job was done and it was time to lift the radiator from its brackets.

As we lifted the radiator Guyon slithered down onto Uncle Cyril's foot. Dropping the radiator the few remaining inches to the floor, Uncle Cyril ran for the door.

I examined Guyon for cuts or other damage. He seemed to be fine. I made my Uncle another cup of tea as he wiped the sweat from his brow and he soon went home.

Dad came home and we set off for our meeting with Mr. Reid as planned. Luckily Guyon suffered no after effects from the ordeal. I can't speak for Uncle Cyril.

Articles of any length by Junior Snake Keepers are welcomed and should be clearly written or typed. Photographs (black and white only) will help to add interest to your article but we regret they cannot be returned.

JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER COMPETITION

D	O	K	L	I	M	O	R	S	Q	A	V	C	Z
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To Reptiles And Amphibians'
by David Alderton
Published by Salamander Books

This months competition is a WORDSEARCH. Twenty snake names have been taken from the list and hidden in the box. The names could be written forwards or backwards, horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

Write the names you find on a postcard and send it to the address on page three.

The winner will be drawn from the correct entries received by the closing date of 28th February 1987. The winner will be notified by post.

