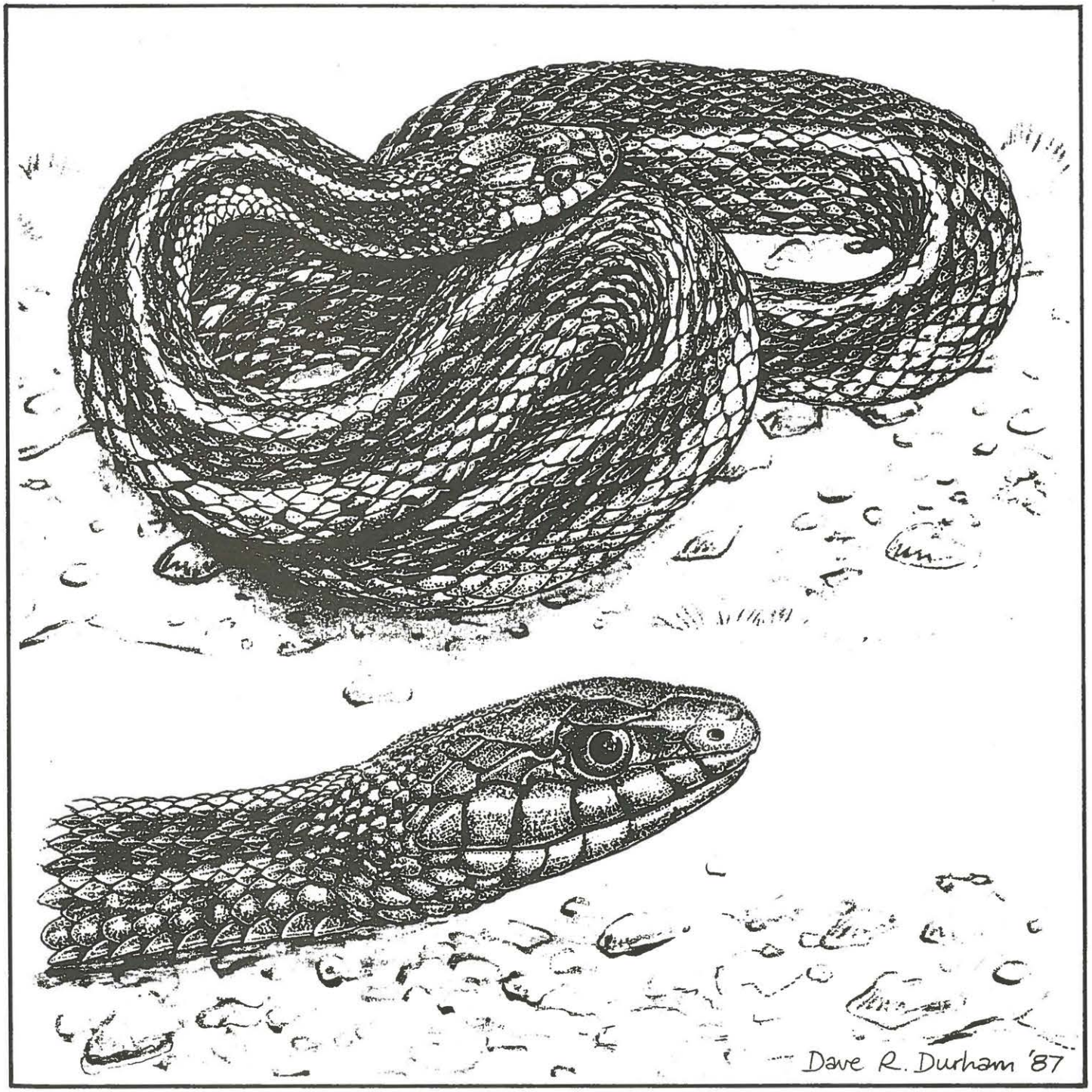
SNAKE KEEPER

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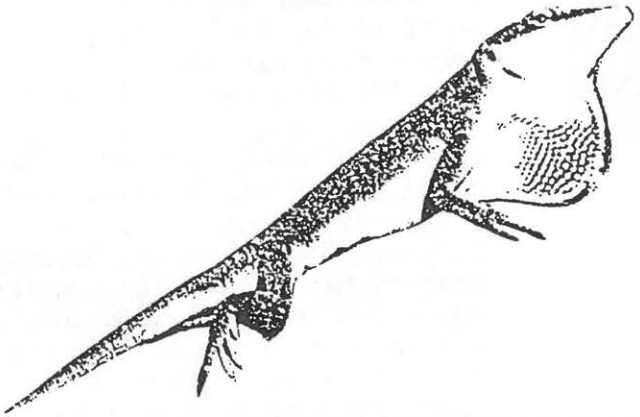
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by David Durham

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BEGINNING WITH INDIAN PYTHONS

by Paul Hobson

The Indian Python is a large constrictor which comes from South East Asia. It can attain a length of up to 6.5m (21 feet) and, in its natural environment, will feed on a variety of mammals and birds. This python occurs in two forms: Python molorus molurus, the light phase or Indian Python and Python molorus bivittatus, the dark phase or Burmese Python. The latter is the one more common in the pet trade, the former rarely being available. The two forms have been interbred in captivity but it does not appear that this occurs in the natural environment.

I obtained my first two Indian Pythons on 1st November 1985 from a London dealer; both turned out to be male (later identified by their large spurs). One was much lighter in colour than the other hence it was named "Light", the other "Dark". Both had one or two small lumps under the skin but these were not thought to be dangerous. These have since disappeared.



Light (January 1987)

I obtained my third Indian Python, a female, in December 1985. This is more yellow in colour than the others and is called "Yellow".

When purchased all three were roughly 24 inches in length.

Light and Dark were originally kept together, with Yellow on her own. All three were kept in 3' aquaria heated by red light bulbs. One bulb is on constantly and the other controlled by a thermostat. The tank temperature is 26/28 degrees C during the day and drops by a few degrees at night. During the summer the tanks are illuminated by a white bulb, controlled by an on/off clock, for 12 hours per day. In winter I rely on natural daylight for the day length. To date I have not altered the tank temperature during the seasons but will begin to do so when the snakes attain breeding size.

Each tank is furnished with a layer of newspaper on the bottom, on top of which lies Dandy Grass (synthetic green grass). A retreat is provided for the snakes (a piece of round bark) and a bowl of fresh water is present at all times. The Dandy Grass and newspaper are replaced every time the snakes defecate. The Dandy Grass is soaked in water and bleach, thoroughly washed, rinsed and dried before re-use.

When they first arrived the snakes were introduced to their tanks and left for one week before their first feed. Light took two dead mice straight away whilst Dark and Yellow took no interest. Dark and Yellow were each tried with another mouse four days later but again showed no interest. Four days later both were tried with a live mouse. Yellow took this straight away but Dark hesitated for a short while. During this time Light was taking two dead mice every 4/5 days and shed his skin two weeks later.

Dark constantly refused dead mice and never showed any interest, even when the mouse was dangled on cotton or left in the dark. Yellow would occasionally take a dead mouse dangled from cotton but was, and still is, very reluctant. The snakes are fed on a haphazard rather than a regular basis, every five to fourteen days, and were once left for 21 days when I went on holiday (though provided with fresh water at all times).

After six months I purchased one hundred dead chicks (which are far cheaper than mice). Dark immediately took two of these and showed a greater desire for chicks to the extent of ignoring mice altogether. Light also shows a preference for dead chicks but will still take the occasional

mouse. Chicks should not be used exclusively as it appears that this results in vitamin deficiencies so mice were rubbed with a dead chick to persuade Dark and Light to eat. Vitamin supplements may also be used.

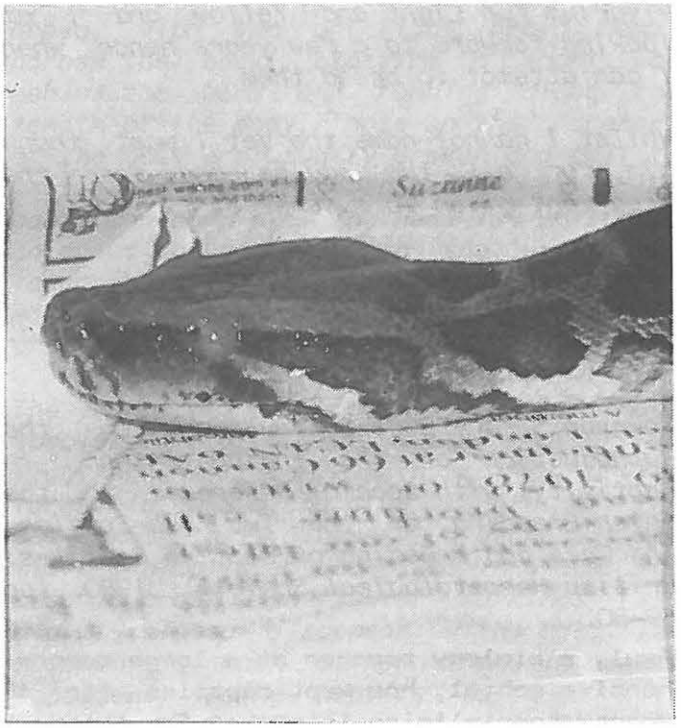
Yellow refuses all dead chicks and after eighteen months will still only eat live mice.

All three snakes usually shed their skin as a whole. This usually occurs five to eight days after the skin becomes dull and the eye spectacle milky. The spectacle then clears a day or two before the shedding occurs.

Occasionally one of Dark's eye spectacles would stick during shedding. When this occurred I placed him in a small tank of warm water and left him for a few hours. The spectacle would often free itself but sometimes had to be removed gently with a pair of blunt-ended tweezers.

Prior to the first few occasions when Yellow shed, small crusty white splodges were noticeable on her skin which disappeared after shedding. After using a routine worming mixture these have never reappeared.

The snakes are noticeably more aggressive when their eyes are cloudy. During this time I offer no food and keep away as much as possible.



Dark (Jan 1987) showing clouded spectacle before shedding.

Table 1 Frequency of shedding

	Yellow	Dark	Light
	25.12.85	27.12.85	15.12.85
	19.03.86	20.01.86	12.02.86
	22.05.86	09.04.86	02.05.86
	10.08.86	26.05.86	29.06.86
	10.12.86	29.07.86	19.08.86
	--	21.09.86	29.10.86
	--	21.10.86	27.01.87
	--	20.11.86	--
	--	05.01.87	--
Average (months)	3.0	1.7	2.3

During the sixteen months I have kept the Indian Pythons, Yellow has always been aggressive but apart from the white skin marks, has shown no signs of disease despite being in contact with Light and Dark when they were ill.

In February 1986 I noticed bubbles coming from Light's mouth and nose. I instantly removed him to a quarantine tank and raised its temperature to 30 degrees C. (This had previously worked for a Royal Python which had made a complete recovery.) After five days however there was no sign of improvement so I took him to the vet. He was given an injection of antibiotics which was repeated two days later and again after a further three days. Two days later there were still no signs of recovery so he was returned to the vet. There the process of stomach tubing was explained to me and I returned home with necessary equipment. Light was to be given 0.2 ml of Tylosin per 100g of body weight once a day for seven days. I managed this with the help of Judy who held the snake whilst I inserted the stomach tube gently into Lights's body. The Tylosin was injected using a syringe (Tylosin equal to the volume of the stomach tube or an equal amount of air must be added to ensure the correct dosage.) After seven days the cold had dried up and Light appeared greatly improved. The next day he took a mouse which caused great delight and has since remained in good health.

Dark remained healthy until the 27th October 1986 when he regurgitated three dead chicks. At the time I suspected that I had fed him too soon after I had handled him in order to remove an eye spectacle. When fed three days later he kept down the chicks and I felt no cause to worry. Three weeks later I ran out of dead chicks and

was unable to procure any for a further four weeks during which time Dark refused all offers of mice and rats both dead and alive. When I eventually managed to procure some dead chicks from a large poultry farm in Lincolnshire I immediately fed him and he took three dead chicks straight away. Two days later however all three were regurgitated partially digested. I waited two days then offered one dead chick which was immediately eaten but was again regurgitated two days later. I was now very concerned and took Dark to the vet. The vet found very early signs of necrotic stomatitis and prescribed a treatment of an injection of 0.1 ml a day of ampicillin for five days. Dark now weighed 1100 grams. At this time Dark was isolated (he was with Yellow) and the tank temperature raised to 30 degrees C. After the treatment the red haemorrahage in the mouth had disappeared and Dark was fed two days later. Regurgitation took place two and a half days later. I returned to the vet where a faeces sample was taken. This showed the presence of protozoa and the vet prescribed metronidazol (Flagyl) at 165mg per kg a day for three days via a stomach tube. Judy was press-ganged into helping again, much to her dismay as he defecated all over her. The first day I suspected that the flagyl had been regurgitated so I proceeded to treat him for a further three days.

After a further two days he was offered a chick which was eaten readily. At this time he had calmed down and was resting much easier than a few weeks previously when he had appeared very restless. The faeces at this time were very fluid and dark brown/red in colour, usually occurring a few days after eating. The last chick was regurgitated two days later, but the faeces seemed to be less fluid and the chick more digested than before. After another couple of attempts Dark kept a headless chick down and his faeces, a week after feeding, were much more solid.

For the first time I believed he was recovering and I looked forward to his being healthly again. The next chick was regurgitated two days later but the faeces were no longer fluid. It was now January 1987, the tank temperature had been maintained at 32 degrees C for four weeks and Dark now decided to shed his skin. He did not eat at this time and consequently shed his skin on 2nd February 1987. I offered him a dead chick which was taken with less relish than usual and regurgitated in a matter of hours only.

I now took Dark to the vet as I was very worried. The vet took a sample of fluid which Dark had sprayed upon being handled and sent it to the lab. The slide showed an enormous quantity of protozoa. I was informed that Dark had only a small chance of surviving, he could not hold food down, was becoming very thin and was shedding huge quantities of protozoa. He had already been given metronidazol which had not worked. I did not want Dark to linger on for a few more months and die a slow death so I asked the vet to put him down which he did with a barbiturate drug.

I am now left with two Indian Pythons, both of which appear healthy, and I am hoping that the protozoa which killed Dark has not spread to the rest of my collection. I have seen no signs so far but it is still early days. I have read that amoebic enteritis, a protozoan infection, can spread through whole reptile collections killing them all. After Dark's death the tank was therefore washed with water and bleach and the wooden top washed and repainted.

One point which I have noticed is that, like most mammals, the faeces of Indian Pythons change with their diet. Whilst it is solid and dry on a diet of mice and rats it is a lighter tan colour and softer in composition with a diet of chicks.

I have recently built a large six foot vivarium for Light and Yellow and I am looking forward to a few years hence when I can attempt to breed them.

Whilst I cannot name the vet I must thank him for all the advice and for the treatment given to my snakes.

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Paul, a biology teacher at a large comprehensive school, has kept reptiles for 15 years, specialising in snakes for the past 2 years. He stresses that he is expressing his own views, made from his observations.

SNAKES OF THE GENUS ELAPHE
THEIR CARE AND BREEDING IN CAPTIVITY
PART 4

by Kevin J. Hingley

Introduction

This is the final part of the series on Rat Snakes, and will cover some of the Asian forms that occasionally appear on dealers' price lists in the U.K. There seems to be a growing interest in the Asian rat snakes but, sadly, there is very little written information on the captive husbandry and breeding of them. For the most part it can be said that the majority of species are delicate, and are not expected to have as long a captive life-span as their more commonly imported North American cousins.

My own experience is limited to three species; E.s.schrenckii, the Russian Rat Snake, Goniosoma oxycephala, the Red-tailed Green Rat Snake, and E.prasina, the Emerald Rat Snake. I have had mixed results in keeping them, and although I haven't bred these species yet, my best results have been with E.s.schrenckii.

E.s.schrenckii

The Russian Rat Snake is a particular favourite of mine. It is not a particularly colourful subspecies, but it is a placid snake. It can grow to a length of 180 cm but it is a slender snake. Adults are dark brown to black in colour above, with tan or light brown bands across the back, starting a short way behind the head and running along the length of the body. Those on the forepart of the body are usually broken and fail to meet along the mid-dorsal. The remaining bands are complete. The head is uniformly coloured above, although the upper and lower labia are cream/yellow with black edging. The abdomen is similarly coloured cream/yellow with grey checkers.

The youngsters are blotched, as in many species of Elaphe. The ground colour is light brown or tan, with thirty or so large blotches along the length of the body and tail. These blotches are mid-brown coloured and edged in black. The head is brown with lighter markings (see Fig. 1). These disappear with age. The abdomen is much darker than in adult specimens, being heavily suffused with reddish-brown. This lightens with age. The transition from juvenile to adult marking and colouration starts just three to four months after birth.

Husbandry

This is a relatively easy snake to keep, and can be given the same treatment as other Rat Snakes. A vivarium of 100 x 60 x 60 cm is usually adequate. Newspaper for the substrate, a hide-box, water bowl and the optional branch complete the furnishings.

The day time temperature should be around 25 degrees C with a drop to 20/22 degrees C at night. They show a preference for a fairly dry environment and object to being sprayed prior to sloughing. Most of the specimens I've kept (in particular young males) have displayed a curious habit of entering a slough after each meal. This makes it difficult to ensure that what I consider to be an adequate intake of food is being administered. It is surprising just how quickly weight loss is evident unless food intake is high. Couple this with the fact that many individuals go on self-induced fasts from time to time, and it is easy to see why moderate panic can set in on the owner's part. These fasts usually last for three to four weeks, and weight loss is usually evident at the recommencement of feeding. The 'diary' of a three year old male I have on loan from Dave Gales highlights this feed/slough rota mentioned previously (see below).

14.7.86	Sloughing
19.7.86	Slough clearing
20.7.86	Sloughed. Fed 1 small mouse.
26.7.86	Fed 1 mouse.
27.7.86	Fed 1 mouse.
29.7.86	Sloughing
4.8.86	Sloughed
13.8.86	Fed 1 mouse
20.8.86	Sloughing
26.8.86	Sloughed
31.8.86	Fed 1 mouse
5.9.86	Sloughing
12.9.86	Sloughed
21.9.86	Fed 1 mouse
26.9.86	Sloughing
1.10.86	Sloughed
11.10.86	Fed 1 mouse
18.10.86	Sloughing

This pattern has continued up to the time of writing (February 1987), but is more

pronounced in males than females in my experience. My main concern is for the weight loss they often display when fasting occurs and this is far more evident in my own female. She is a wild-caught specimen whereas the male was captive bred in Holland. This may have something to do with it, although it is purely speculation for the time being.

Breeding

Mating in the natural state takes place in June or July, with the eggs being laid around eight weeks later. Peels (1982) gives 39 days as the incubation period for the eggs, at a temperature of 27 degrees C. This seems to be a rather short period compared to other members of the genus. They may breed at varying times of the year under captive conditions; Peels (1982) gives information regarding egg-laying in April followed by hatching in May. David Gales' male hatched in September 1983. My own female was purchased last September, and in late October/early November she passed roughly twenty infertile eggs. It may be necessary to hibernate both sexes in order to promote breeding. The average clutch size is twelve, and the hatchlings measure 30 cm.

G.oxycephala

It may seem odd to give mention to a species that is not of the genus Elaphe, but some authorities do class this species as Elaphe oxycephala from time to time.

The Red-tailed Green Rat Snake is one of those aptly named snakes. It is a large, arboreal species seen from time to time on dealers' lists. The overall colouration is bright green on the head and body. The chin, throat and abdomen are slightly lighter in colour, and there is a dark stripe running from the eye to the rear of the jaw. The tail is orange-red in colour. The hatchlings are said to be identical to the adults and are large, measuring 40 to 45 cm. Adults can reach lengths of 200cm.

Husbandry

A large vivarium will be necessary, with plenty of sturdy branches to facilitate climbing. One author recommends the provision of a bird nesting box fixed in a high position within the vivarium. It appears that a high level of humidity is also beneficial to this species, and this can be achieved by daily spraying (in moderation) and/or a large tray of water.

I have kept four specimens in the past, two of which died after a couple of weeks in captivity. The first pair died from a respiratory disorder within two weeks of purchase. A second pair bought a few years later did well at first. They were housed in separate cages to avoid cross-transference of any disease they may have been carrying. The male fed well on small birds, but would not accept mice. The female fed on a mouse on the day of purchase but refused to feed for a month after that. She entered a slough, and during this showed signs of what appeared to be a cold. Her mouth was swabbed with Oraldene as a precautionary measure and she went on to complete the slough. Shortly after this it became evident that the snake had mouth rot (Necrotic stomatitis). Sadly she failed to respond to a treatment of swabbing with a weak solution of hydrogen peroxide and then applying Sulphamethazine.

The male continued to do well for several months after the female's death, but I sold him as I was unable to obtain another female.

Breeding

I don't know of anyone who has bred this species in captivity in the U.K., although Bryant (1982) reports a clutch of five eggs from a female purchased in October 1981. The eggs were laid in late November and took 105+ days to hatch at an average incubation temperature of 30 degrees C. The last eggs to hatch did so after 119 days of incubation.

Notes

In addition to the scant information I have on this species, I feel the following is a necessary inclusion. It concerns the temperament of this species regarding disturbance and handling. Some specimens are of an even temper, and won't bite if handled gently. Others may bite with little or no provocation at the slightest disturbance. A trait of the species when feeling threatened is to protrude the tongue very slowly and deliberately, and then flicker it up and down above and below the head. This may be accompanied by inflation of the throat and fore-part of the body, in an attempt to intimidate the 'enemy'. The tongue is a remarkable colour, being what can only be described as metallic turquoise.

It appears to be a delicate species, being very susceptible to viruses, in particular respiratory disorders. I don't recommend it to the novice for these reasons.

E.prasina

The Emerald Rat Snake is a small species rarely seen in captivity. I was fortunate enough to have had a single specimen for several months, during which time it did quite well. The ground colour, as the name suggests, is emerald green. A black stripe runs along the centre of the back, from the neck to the tail. Along the sides of the body is a white and yellow stripe edged in black. The belly is pure white.

I kept this specimen in a propagator with newspaper as a substrate, a small water dish and a piece of cork bark for a hide. It fed on small, furred mice. It is also said to include other reptiles, amphibians and birds and their eggs in its diet, as are some of the Asian forms. I haven't been able to find any information on captive breeding or husbandry for this species so I hope the limited information above will prove useful to anyone who can obtain and wishes to keep this species.

Fig. 1

Details of head markings in young E.s.schrenckii

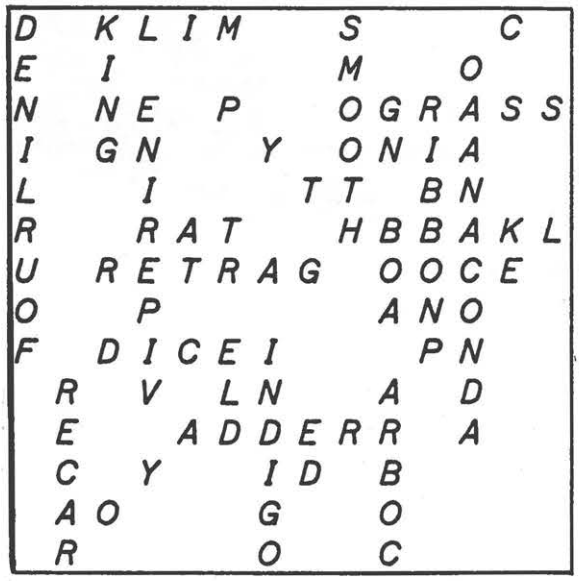




Details of labia markings

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Corn	*Indigo*	*Racer*	*Viperine*



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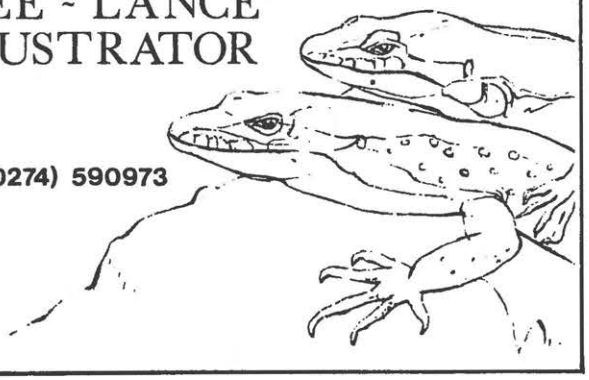
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Kevin has been keeping reptiles for over a decade, and has kept 103 lizards of 20 species, 95 snakes of 30 species and four species of chelonia in that time. He is currently Vice-Chairman of the I.H.S., and Chairman of its West Midland branch. Other hobbies include photography, foreign travel and music.

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Unexpected Garter Snakes

by J. Danecker

Last June, my son Karl brought home a pair of Garter Snakes in a small (12 x 8 x 10 inch) plastic fish tank. He had swopped them for his bike! I thought the tank was too small and managed to get a larger one from a neighbour. The dimensions of the new tank were 36 x 12 x 18 inches. As the snakes measured about 36 inches in length, I considered this was a more suitable home.

I put in newspaper as a substrate and added a large dish of water, a few stones and some tree bark. In my opinion, plastic foliage is preferable to the living variety as it is indestructable, easy to clean and the snakes don't seem to mind the difference.

Heating was supplied by a 40 watt bulb fitted to the tank lid. Everything seemed fine and the snakes were introduced to their new home.

The male settled in and fed very easily but the female refused to feed. I asked advice and read everything I could find on the subject of snakes. I thought that it might take time for the female to settle in.

After three weeks she became restless and was still refusing food. Whilst writing a letter, I noticed that she was trying to escape from her tank. I took her out and sat with her on my lap. She still wasn't happy so I put her in a pillowcase and she seemed to settle down.

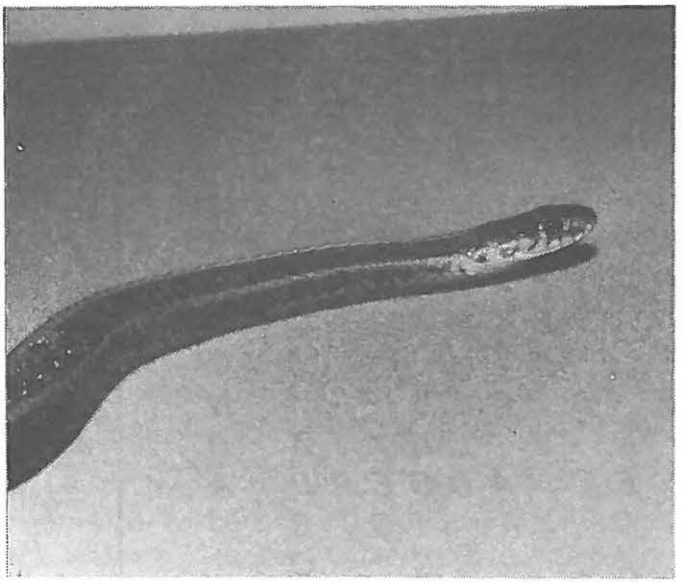
Later, my younger son looked in to see if she was alright. He told me that there was something "strange" inside the pillowcase. I had a look and saw a perfectly formed, but dead, baby. It was still coiled in a pellet so I removed it.

An hour later there was a lot of movement in the pillowcase and, upon examination, I discovered a lot of blood-stained mucus and another nine babies, all dead.

I rang a knowledgeable friend who advised me to return the female to the tank and let nature take its course. Once in the tank, the female hid and did not emerge until morning. Looking in the tank I discovered another ten dead young which I removed. I cleaned the tank in the afternoon and offered her food, which she took. After that all seemed well.

However, five days later another dead baby appeared. I thought it best to seek expert advice and took her to the local vet for an examination. Everything seemed alright.

As she was pregnant when I got her, I have no idea what caused the deaths. She is very healthy now and has settled in well. I have kept both snakes active during this winter so I don't know if they will mate this year.



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LEARNING THE HARD WAY

by Chris and Marcia Martin

The first issue of Snake Keeper highlighted a problem from which all magazines of this kind suffer. The problem, which must be very confusing for readers, is when two or more articles give different information. For example, in the first issue one author said newspaper was the best substrate whilst a second stated that almost anything could be used. Who does the reader believe?

It is with these points in mind that we will commence our article. If we don't think an idea is very good then we will try to give good valid reasons.

We have been keeping snakes for nearly eleven years. (We had our first breeding success back in June 1979 when our Corn Snake presented us with nine eggs). In March 1976 our local petshop had some baby Boa Constrictors for sale. We have always been interested in snakes so we started to build our first vivarium. When we tried to get information on how to keep our first snake we came up against a brick wall. After a lot of questions and repeated questions directed at the petshop owner we finally started to annoy him. His attitude was that "it is only a snake". It was on one of the many visits to the pet shop that we met someone who was already keeping snakes, so we turned our attention, and questions, to this new-found friend. Questions such as what is the best cage size and design and how do you heat your cages? Sometimes the answers solved the problem, sometimes they made us feel uneasy.

The first problem was heating. Our friend told us to use light bulbs connected to an aquarium thermostat but we felt that this was totally unsuitable. We could not see how any creature could stand the stress of the light bulb switching on and off, all day and night. Just imagine how you, the reader, would feel during a nights sleep if the bedroom light kept coming on. After talking to a lot of people about heating, someone suggested tubular heaters and that is what we installed in our first vivarium.

We went to the pet shop and purchased our first snake. It was a great day when our baby Boa Constrictor took charge of his new home. Soon a problem we hadn't even contemplated reared its head; we argued about who was going to handle our new pet. We soon realised that there was only one answer to the problem and another baby Boa was duly installed in the vivarium.

Over the next few months we purchased new stock and they all went into the same cage. We had purchased another baby Boa that died after ten days of agony. The snake was regurgitating so the man in the pet shop told us to give it a dog worming tablet. So we did!

We were also told by a person who kept snakes to take them out into the garden as they love it. It was then that we had our first case of pneumonia. We lost almost all our stock. A lot of the snakes we had purchased had died but we were assured by fellow snake-keepers that these deaths were usual. The only snakes to survive were the first one we had bought and a dark phase Indian Python baby.

We can hear you asking why we didn't take our sick snakes to the vet. The answer is we did! Seven times we went to different vets and seven times we were thrown out "with those slimy things". Eventually we found a vet who didn't know anything about reptiles but was prepared to try.

Over the next few years our experience grew and, with a lot of research, the heating, thermostats and cage design improved.

As we said at the beginning of this article, there are a lot of different points of view but by now we had enough confidence in ourselves to sort out what we thought was best. As an example, we had used peat as a substrate but we had had problems with the peat getting in the snake's mouths, especially after the snakes had defecated. We had joined several societies and had heard of snakes eating gravel. If this gets stuck in the snake's gut, it dies. It is for this reason that we recommend newspaper. Also, as soon as the snakes dirty the cage it can be cleaned out. Another benefit of newspaper is that it soaks up the liquid passed by the snake rather than allowing it to filter through and lie on the cage floor, thereby creating a haven for bacteria to live in.

Over the years we have learnt that the one thing that can make or break a snake is stress. Earlier in the article we stated how bad it is to heat the cage with light bulbs. The flashing bulb causes stress. Another thing that we think that is bad for snakes is a hide box. The reason for this is that the snake will hide and when you want to remove the snake to handle it or clean out the cage you have to frighten it by undoing the box. Even if you leave the snake in the box, it must seem like the whole world is going mad when you move the box. Whatever you do the experience is very stressful.

Controlling the photoperiod is a must. If you don't, the snake won't have a clue what the season is. If the snakes don't know what time of year it is, they won't breed. What is the point of laying a clutch of eggs if, in the next month, winter comes? The eggs haven't a hope of hatching.

When we had our first clutch of eggs laid, people asked if they could purchase one or more of the babies. We said yes. When we asked people where they were going to keep our baby snakes they usually replied that they would be kept in a fish tank heated with light bulbs. This horrifed us and we would explain how bad light bulbs were. Almost all the people agreed and then asked "where do we get good heating equipment from?" It was then that we decided that we should stock good quality heaters and thermostats. So, over the next few weeks, we bought a load of equipment to sell to people who purchased our babies.

Thermostats are a problem because most aquarium thermostats are not designed to operate in air. Most room 'stats aren't geared to take the wattage or aren't accurate enough. I have known some 'stats allow the temperature to fluctuate by nearly 20 degrees F. This, of course, is no use whatsoever.

It wasn't long before other people saw the equipment and asked if they could purchase some. Naturally we updated the equipment as new technology or better equipment came to light. Then people started to enquire about Truelight and recently we started to stock ultra-violet tubes as well. This is in addition to our dull heat emitters and electronic and mechanical thermostats.

As you can see, keeping a snake or other reptile alive is a very specialised vocation. We always welcome anyone who would like to visit us to talk about reptile keeping. It does not matter whether you keep them or not, anyone is most welcome.

Chris and Marcia can be contacted at 18, Ballinode Close, Cheltenham, Glos. GL50 4SQ. Tel: 0242 573477. Please enclose an sae for a reply.

The use of hydrogen peroxide to cure mouth rot

by Anthony Poole

With mouth-rot, as with all diseases, it goes without saying that prevention is better than cure. Mouth-rot often occurs after severe abrasions to the snout, usually caused by specimens trying to escape or if a cut is sustained to the mouth, such as may accidentally be caused during force-feeding.

The first signs of mouth-rot are the specimen refusing food and the appearence of a small yellow spot in the corner of the mouth. When these symptoms are seen, a check of the mouth will almost certainly reveal the presence of a thick yellow substance called canker. As soon as this is discovered, the specimen should be isolated from the rest of the collection to prevent the spread of infection.

Treatment should begin as soon as possible. Hydrogen peroxide can be purchased from any chemist and is relatively cheap. A small amount of it, about a teaspoonful, should be mixed with half a cup of tapwater. This solution can then be put into a hand spray, of the type used to spray household plants. It is preferable to spray the solution into the mouth, rather than dabbing it on with a cotton-bud, because it is quicker, thereby reducing stress and the amount of energy wasted by the specimen. It is also more accurate as one spray to the top and one spray to the bottom of the mouth will cover it completely.

Two people are needed, one to hold the reptile (its head should be tilted

slightly downwards so the excess hydrogen peroxide runs out of the mouth) and the other to spray on the solution. This should be completed as quickly as possible. When spraying, make sure that none of the solution gets into the eyes of the specimen: if it does the eye should immediately be rinsed with tapwater. Hands should be washed thoroughly, preferably using disinfectant, before anything is done to or for any other specimen.

After the hydrogen peroxide has been in the mouth for about thirty minutes it should be rinsed out using tapwater. The best way to do this is to use the spray - alter the nozzle so that a single jet of water comes out- and spray the water into the mouth. This should lift out any canker that has been loosened by the hydrogen peroxide. Again make sure that the specimen's head is tilted downwards so that the water flows out of the mouth.

Spraying should take place twice a day. If there is no improvement in the condition of the mouth after this then veterinary advice should be sought.

Using the above method I have saved several reptiles. Hydrogen peroxide, due to its speed of action and easy availabilty, is to be recommended to all enthusiasts who are unlucky enough to have a reptile contract mouth-rot.

SNAKE KEEPER NEWS

ROBBERY AT THE REPTILE-ARIUM

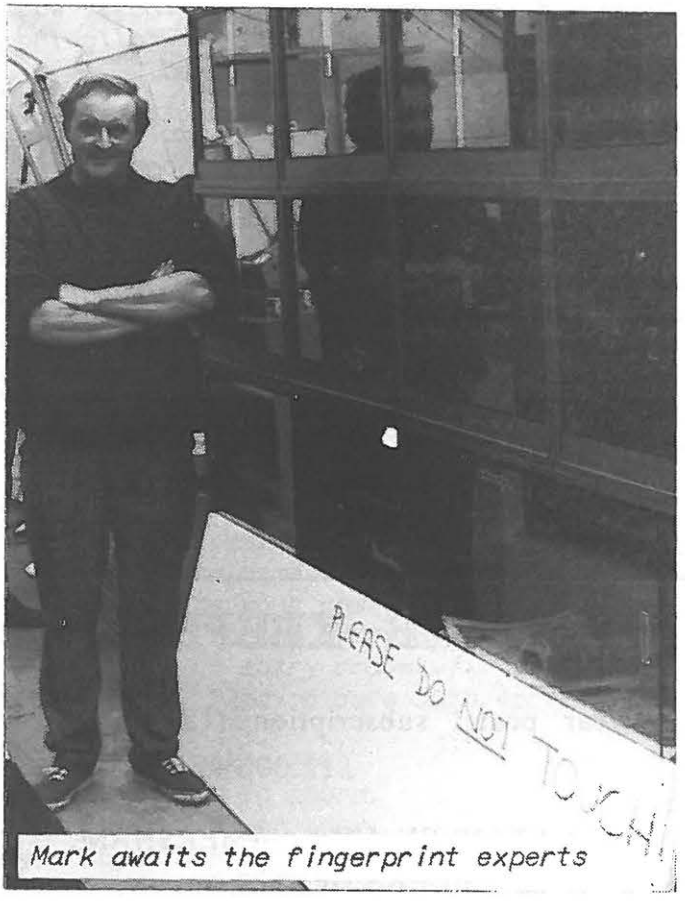
Thieves struck a cruel blow to Enfield reptile dealer Mark Hewick's plans for expansion on the night of 14-15th March when they stole 18 snakes and assorted equipment valued at £1,400. Mark discovered the theft when he arrived to open the shop on Sunday morning. Saddened by this loss he contacted Snake Keeper to ask for readers' help in catching the criminals responsible.

He is offering a reward of 10% of the value of the goods stolen to anyone who can give information which leads to a successful prosecution. The eighteen snakes stolen are listed below.

1 Red-tailed Boa, 3' 3" long. This animal has a distinctive small bump on its head.
1 pair of captive-bred Frosted Corn Snakes. These are very distinctive animals. The male is 18" long and the female, which has slight damage to two scales on her underside, is 22" long.
2 small Water Snakes, each 12" long.
1 Corn Snake, 2' long.
2 Reticulated Pythons, 4' long.
2 Indian Pythons, 3' 9" long.
1 Indian Python, 3' long.
1 Wolf Snake, 12" long.
2 Striped Rainbow Snakes, each 2' 6" long.
1 Yellow Rat Snake, 3' 6" long.
1 California King Snake, 18" long.
1 red coloured Corn Snake, 3' 6" long.

A quantity of ceramic heaters, holders and thermostats were also taken.

Mark would like to hear from anyone who has been offered any of these items in suspicious circumstances. Contact him on 01-367 1737, or write to The Reptile-arium, Jackamoors, Theobalds Park Road, Enfield, Middlesex.



Mark awaits the fingerprint experts

SNAKES, REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS CLUB

Good news for reptile keepers in and around Essex. A group of enthusiasts have formed The Snakes, Reptiles and Amphibians Club. Further details may be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Nita Tozzi, 107 Cressing Road, Witham, Essex CM8 2NW.

LETTERS

Dear Sir,

I was pleased with issue one but the magazine could do with a section on the detection and prevention of diseases.

I have a 7' Indian Python which has just recovered from mucosis. Initially I took the snake to a veterinary surgeon who charged me £48 for a series of injections after diagnosing a cold.

After four weeks the snake was getting worse. The vet told me to turn the heating up. On the sixth week of treatment there was no improvement. I was told to turn the heating up further. I asked the vet what temperature he recommended and he replied, "I don't know, as hot as it will go". I realised at that point that I had been dealing with a pirate so I took the snake to the P.D.S.A. The snake's illness was correctly diagnosed and, following treatment, the snake is now cured.

I recently looked after a male Water Dragon that was near to death. Someone had bought it as a pet for Christmas and it was suffering from mouth-rot. I took this reptile to the P.D.S.A. and, after a correct diagnosis and an injection followed up with hydrogen peroxide/water treatment, the Water Dragon is now well.

The earlier you can detect possible health problems in your reptiles the better. You can save them a lot of distress and pain.

S.W. Birmingham.

SNAKE KEEPER

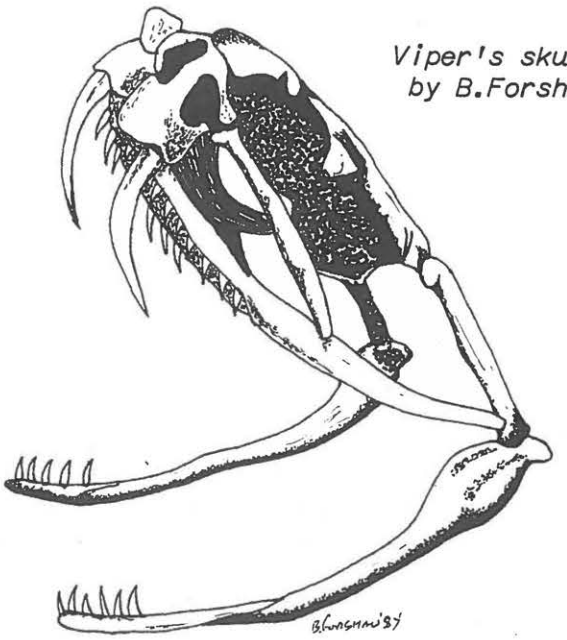
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NEXT ISSUE:

Royal Pythons..Do they have any sex drive
Caring For Racers
Ken (the Royal Python)
Force feeding and medicating-some tips
The day of the Anaconda
The care of a juvenile Reticulated Python
Incubation techniques

SNAKE KEEPER



Viper's skull
by B.Forshaw

Back numbers

Volume 1 Number 1	*Available by post*
Volume 1 Number 2	*£1 per copy inc. p&p*
Volume 1 Number 3	*Do not send coins*

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!



Red-sided Garter Snake Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis (Photographed by Lesley Close)

JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER

The Adder by Lee Bowler

The Adder, Vipera berus, is Britain's only venomous snake. It grows to a length of 24 to 30 inches and has a rather thick-set body for its size. Although venomous it is quite a placid snake, fleeing to the nearest shelter when humans, or danger, threaten.

The Adder's diet consists of mice and small voles but if nothing else is available then frogs and toads will also be taken. The snake will only feed once or twice a week and not at all in the winter months during hibernation.

Hibernation starts in September/October, rotting logs, tree stumps and dry hedgerows being the favoured places. Awakening takes place in February or March; the males usually emerge first. The Adder has a more interesting colour and more vivid markings than the other British snakes. The male has a dull grey background with a darker zig-zag line along its back and the characteristic V mark on the head. The female is much larger in build and is a dull brown colour, with less contrast between background and markings.

The mating season is at its peak between April and June, with the young being born in August or early September. The young are born fully formed and are perfect miniatures of the adult snakes. Within days of birth they shed their skin and start feeding. Diet consists of small mice, etc.

If you wish to go Adder spotting, the best time to look is in April, May or June, early in the morning. The best places to look are near open spaces such as heaths, moors, scrubland and occasionally sand dunes. Pick a quiet place and wait and listen for any movement. If you are patient, and lucky, you may see an adder.

The Adder has very few enemies apart from man and can live for nine or ten years in the wild. The bite of this small snake is very rarely fatal. Those fatalities that do occur involve small children, elderly people or people with a pre-existing heart condition. If you are unlucky enough to be bitten, keep calm and walk slowly to obtain help; medical attention should be sought as soon as possible. However, it should be borne in mind that most Adder bite victims come to no serious harm.

Further tales of Royals and radiators

On the 8th February, Cleo, my 3' long Royal Python, slid behind the living room radiator. Like Lee's snake (JSK, issue 2), she coiled up and remained like cement for 45 minutes, not moving a muscle.

I tried banging on the radiator and prodding her (gently) but nothing happened. Suddenly a possible solution came to mind. I sprinkled a couple of drops of Olbas Oil onto two tissues and then placed one above her and the other below her. Slowly she wriggled out, trying to escape the vapour. She slid into my arms and I checked her for any wounds but she was clear. I returned her to a radiator-free vivarium where she hid quickly to recover from her exciting ordeal. It wasn't so exciting for me!

Simon McDermott (aged 13), Surrey.



JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER COMPETITION NO. 4.

This month's competition is a BO-ANAGRAM. Each of the sentences below is an anagram of the common name of a member of the Boa family. Write your answers on a postcard and send it to the address on page 3. The first correct entry drawn will win a £5 book token. Closing date 30th April 1987.

1. Be a crook's toe.
2. It's corn to cobra.
3. Lead, meat or beer.
4. Say O Rob.

JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER

Articles of any length by Junior Snake Keepers are welcomed and should be clearly handwritten or typed.



Notes on the Boa Constrictor

by L.P.Jarvis

Habits

The Boa Constrictor is usually encountered in forests and along streams in the tropics. Specimens are found on the ground and in trees. It hides in mammal burrows and under tree roots. The snake feeds on rodents. Like all New World boids, Boa Constrictors bear living young, with litters of 30 to 50 quite common. The young measure up to 0.5 metres at birth.

Other subspecies: Boa constrictor amarali is much smaller, reaching slightly over one metre in length, on average. Boa constrictor occidentalis is found in arid subtropical forests and is also small, usually under 2.5 metres. It also feeds on rodents.

The vivarium

A good size cage for an adult Common Boa should measure 6' x 2' x 2' and may be constructed from chipboard, blockboard or Contiplas. Take care that you do not leave any rough edges inside the cage that may injure the snake. Glass sliding doors on the front permit easy access but make sure the edges are smooth. Ventilation is a very important consideration when cage building. Holes should be placed at the same end as the heater, in a side wall of the cage, near the floor.

Heating

The best type of heater is the German-made, Elstein dull emitter, placed at one end of the cage. This will create a temperature gradient, allowing the snake to regulate its own temperature (thermo-regulation). The heater of course must be controlled by a thermostat. A normal room or fish tank thermostat will do but it is really worth investing in an electronic 'stat. Temperature settings are 70 - 80 degrees F (21 - 27 degrees C) in winter and 75 - 90 degrees F (23 - 32 degrees C) in summer.

Lighting

The best form of lighting is produced by using a True-light tube but there are cheaper alternatives such as north light or cool white. Whichever type is used, it should be controlled by a time switch. This can be set to the correct photo-period, which is 10 hours on, 14 hours off during winter and 16 hours on and 8 hours off for summer.

Cage furnishings

The only suitable floor covering is several sheets of newspaper which can be changed easily when soiled. Gravel, wood shavings, peat and sand are unsuitable. A large heavy bowl, such as an earthenware dog bowl, will do for drinking water. A stout branch should be provided for climbing and some kind of hideaway is important for the snake's well being.

Feeding

Young Boas will readily take half-grown mice and will soon learn to eat freshly killed food. Food should be offered every seven days. Young Boas grow rapidly, about 2" a month. When the snakes reach about three feet in length they can be offered quarter- grown rats. Bigger rats can be offered as the Boa grows in size until the snake can accept medium-sized rabbits. This food should be offered at longer intervals, about every three weeks for a Boa 7 to 8 feet long.

Breeding

Boa Constrictors have been bred in captivity and luck has a big part to play. Of course there are influencing factors, such as cooling prior to pairing up sexes, and shortening the day length. Sexes should be kept apart until October then paired up until April, or until a lengthy copulation has been observed; usually 5 to 8 hours may be successful.

Immediately after birth the young should be removed from the cage and soaked in warm water. This prevents dehydration and enables the young to shed their skins and free themselves of mucous and remaining tissues. Baby Boas will only feed after first shedding their skin.

Conclusion

It is important that those who embark on the subject of herpetology try to breed from the animals in their care as more captive breeding means less strain on wild populations which is, in itself, active conservation.

References

Freiberg, Dr. M (1982) Snakes of South America.

Ross, R (1978) Python Breeding Manual. Institute of Herpetological Research, Stanford, California.