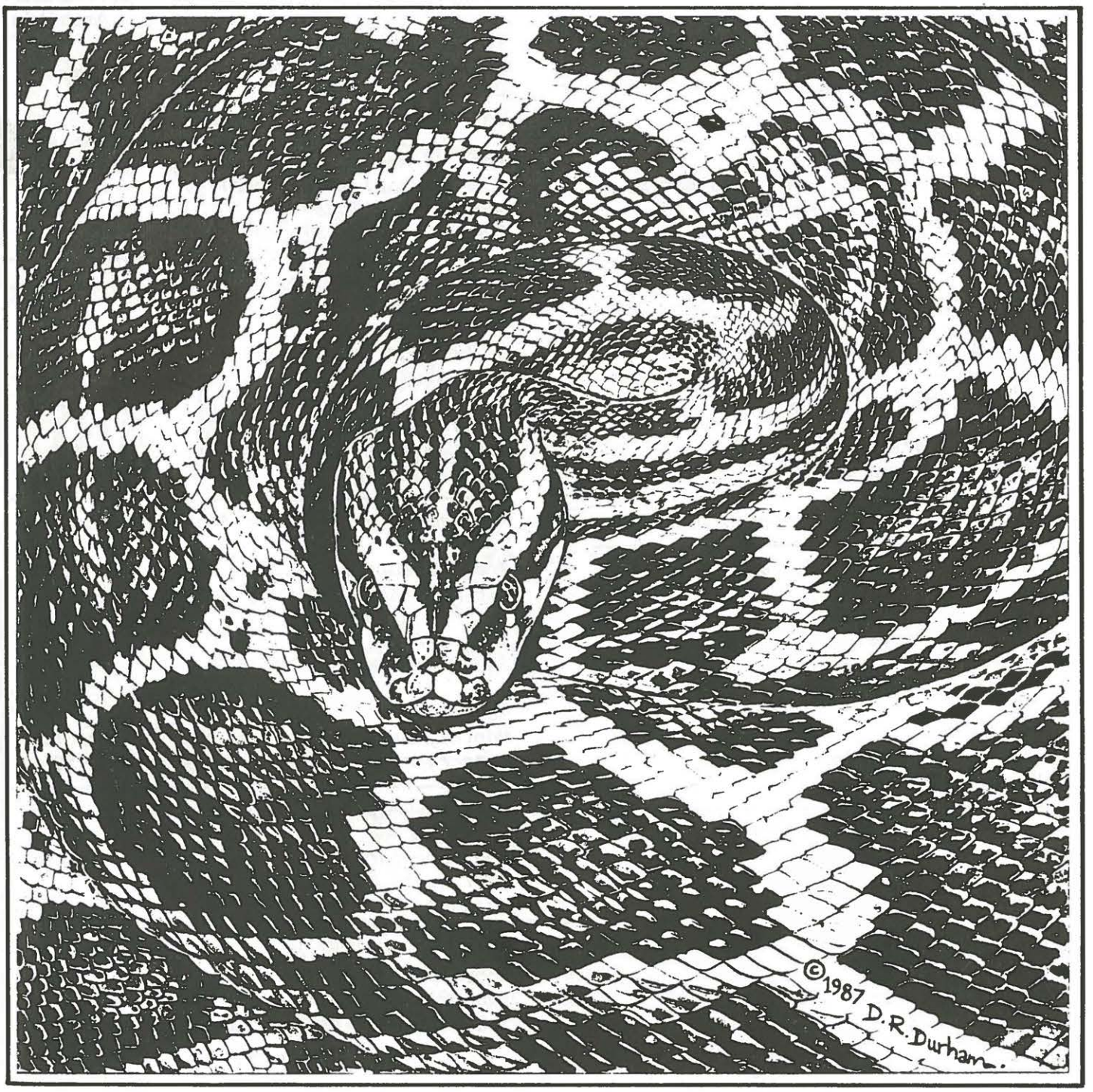
SNAKE KEEPER

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INFORMATION

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c/o The Zoological Society of London
Regent's Park
London, NW1 4RY

Bulletin published quarterly.
Journal published June & December.
Ten meetings a year.
Subscriptions: Ordinary members £15.

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West Midlands, WS3 1JA

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Branch and/or regional meetings monthly.
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Devon, TQ1 3HG

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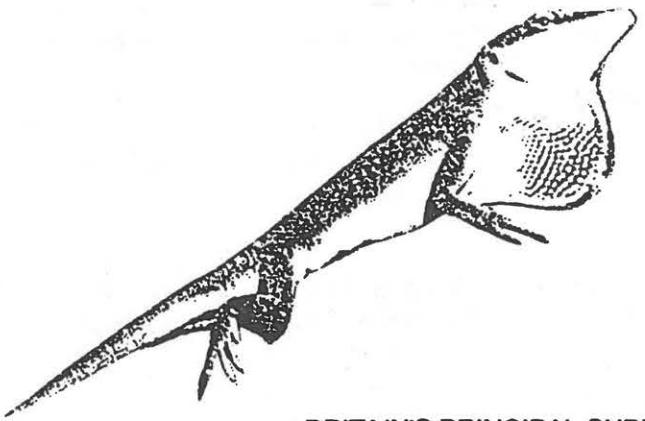
Front cover: Indian Python
Python molorus bivittatus
by David Durham

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CARING FOR RACERS
(Coluber constrictor species)
by Kevin J. Hingley

Introduction

Quite often, from early spring and onwards into the summer, several subspecies of the North American Racer begin to appear on British dealer's lists. The Black Racer, or Blacksnake (C.c.constrictor), and various other subspecies are snakes you either love or hate. I have to confess to being a lover of these snakes, and although I haven't kept any for several years now, I still have a soft spot for them.

There are eleven recognised subspecies of C.constrictor, and at least one naturally occurring intergrade, although only three or four of these subspecies are imported into this country on an annual basis. The Black Racer is the one most likely to be encountered, but from time to time the Southern Black Racer, C.c.priapus, the Everglades Racer, C.c.paludicola and the Blue Racer, C.c.foxi also appear in amongst a shipment. My own experience lies with the Black, Southern Black and Everglades Racers, although most if not all of the subspecies require the same basic husbandry in captivity.

Called Racers because of the quick turn of speed they display, they are nevertheless shy snakes and put their agility to good use in order to catch their prey or escape from a would-be enemy or predator. In the confines of the vivarium, this shyness is replaced by aggression and Racers are just one of those snakes that regularly bite the hand that feeds them. The severity of the bite depends on the size of the particular snake (adults range in size from 60 to 200 cm.) plus the fact that most individuals have the unpleasant habit of hanging on to the bitten appendage and chewing away for all they are worth, causing many small punctures and tears in the skin which usually bleed quite freely. Whilst they are not venomous snakes there may be some local swelling and the wound should be cleaned with a mild antiseptic. Bites can be avoided if the handler wears gloves as the teeth are fairly small and unable to penetrate reasonably thick suede or leather.

I have included a map which illustrates the distribution of the various subspecies throughout the U.S.A. and Canada. (Fig. 1)

Description

1. The Northern Black Racer, C.c.constrictor, is possibly the largest member of the group. All Racers are fairly long, slender snakes with narrow, pointed heads. The eyes are quite large which gives them good vision and is probably the main reason for their alertness. They are diurnal snakes and like to bask in the sun whenever possible. This subspecies exhibits a degree of variation in colour and, whilst the majority of specimens are a dull grey or black, some individuals may be brown or olive coloured. The chin and throat are usually white and the abdomen light to dark grey, gradually darkening towards and including the tail. The young are light grey in colour with blotches of either dark grey, grey-brown or bluish grey along the back. These tend to fade around mid-body becoming quite indistinct towards the tail. The sides of the body are flecked with red, brown and blue. The abdomen is whitish with dark mottling. The eye is red or orange with a black pupil.

2. The Southern Black Racer, C.c.priapus, is easily identified by its glossy black dorsum. The scales seem almost polished in comparison to the generally dull colouration of the previous form. The chin is white and the throat and abdomen dark grey or black. The eye may be reddish-orange or brown with a black pupil.

The hatchlings are similar to those of the Northern form, although generally they have a darker appearance.

3. The Everglades Racer, C.c.paludicola, is more likely to be confused with the Northern Black Racer and, until recently, was considered a direct subspecies of C.c.constrictor. It is now considered to be a subspecies of the Blue Racer, C.c.foxi.

Most specimens are either bluish-grey or bluish-green in colour and, again, the scales have a dull appearance to them. The chin is white as is the abdomen, although some specimens have pale blue or green tinged abdomens. The eye is usually red, but may be yellow/orange with a black pupil. The young are very similar to those

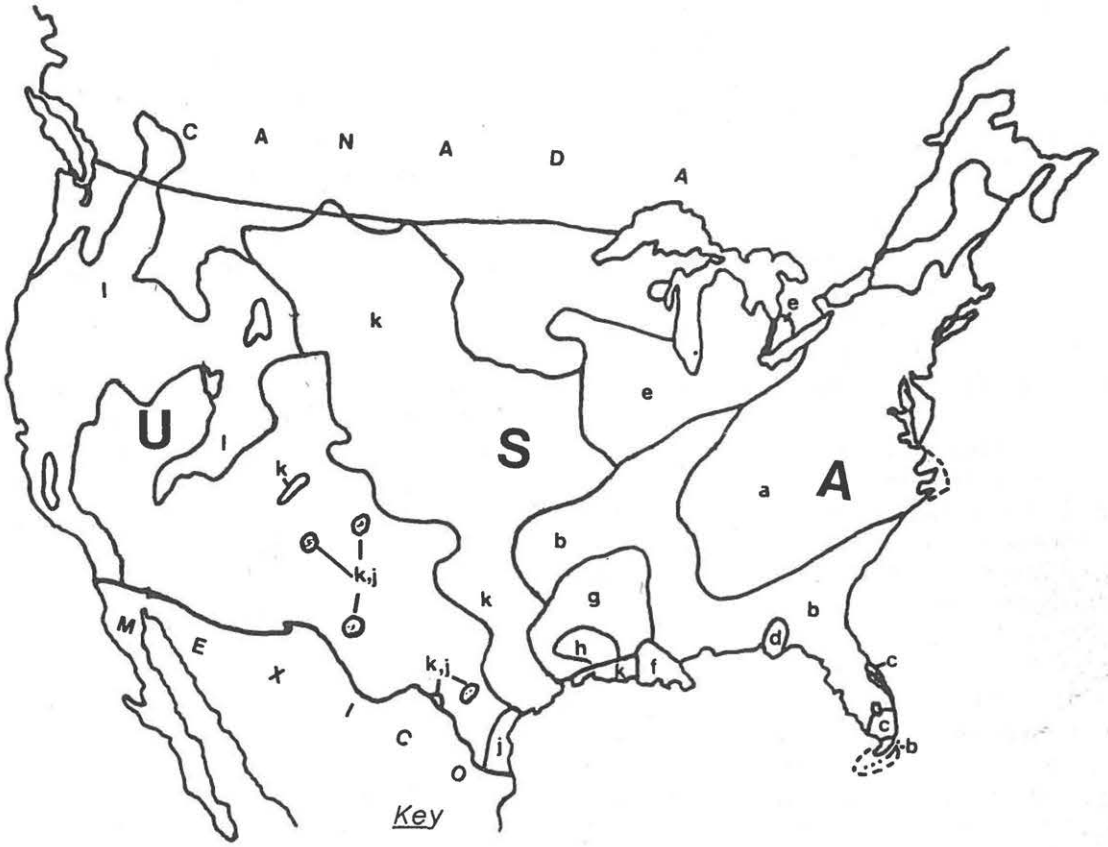


Figure 1

THE RACERS OF THE GENUS COLUBER IN THE U.S.A. AND CANADA

a	*Coluber c.constrictor*	*Northern Black Racer*
b	*C.c.priapus*	*Southern Black Racer*
c	*C.c.paludicola*	*Everglades Racer*
d	*C.c.helvigularis*	*Brown-chinned Racer*
e	*C.c.foxi*	*Blue Racer*
f	*C.c.latrunculus*	*Black-masked Racer*
g	*C.c.anthicus*	*Buttermilk Snake*
h	*C.c.etheridgei*	*Tan Racer*
j	*C.c.oaxaca*	*Mexican Racer*
k	*C.c.flaviventris*	*Eastern yellow-bellied Racer*
l	*C.c.mormon*	*Western yellow-bellied Racer*

k,j C.c.flaviventris X C.c.oaxaca Intergrade Racer

of the Northern form.

Husbandry

Whilst they may be encountered in a variety of habitats in the wild, most specimens of all three subspecies do better in a dry environment in captivity, and will quickly develop various skin ailments if kept continually damp.

Several authorities recommend large vivaria for these snakes, but I have found that they do considerably better if they are kept individually in small vivaria. Disturbance should be kept to an absolute minimum as they are easily excited, and this will lead to the following; (a) A damaged snout due to the frightened snake darting around the vivarium, (b) refusal to feed, and (c) the keeper being bitten.

Vivarium furnishings should include a hide-box, a water bowl and a small branch on which to bask. Newspaper is an ideal substrate and, for extra seclusion, this can be covered with a layer of either shredded paper or dry straw. The temperature should be around 25 - 28 degrees C during the day, with a slight overnight drop.

Diet

Both adults and young Racers have a wide range of prey including insects and other invertebrates, other reptiles, birds and their eggs as well as rodents. During the spring, frogs form a large part of the diet along with nestling birds.

I have found newly imported specimens to be 'seasonal' feeders, displaying a marked

preference for frogs in the spring and mice in the summer. Longer term captives usually accept mice during both seasons. Individuals that refuse to feed will usually do so if they are placed in a large margarine tub, 2kg+, and left undisturbed for a few days. There is no need, or room, for a water bowl at this stage, just a layer of paper or paper towels in the bottom and plenty of small holes for ventilation. After a few days place a dead mouse in the tub with the snake, and usually the snake will feed.

The youngsters feed on insects such as crickets and grasshoppers as well as earthworms and tadpoles. They are quite difficult to rear in captivity and may have to be assist-fed until they are large enough to start feeding voluntarily on pink mice.

Breeding

Because they are nervous snakes the Racers do not breed well under captive conditions. The breeding season starts in spring, followed by a clutch of eggs being laid around June or July. The clutch size is variable, and eight to twenty four eggs may be laid, although the average is twelve. They hatch after eight weeks or so of incubation and the young measure 20 cm.

Quite often it is possible to buy gravid females that have been imported during May or June.

Summary

Large Racers are certainly not snakes for the faint-hearted. The vast majority remain aggresive towards their keeper and will bite 'at the drop of a hat'. Providing they are given a dry environment and left virtually to their own devices, most specimens will eventually settle down and start to feed. They rarely become tame enough to be handled freely or to be considered a 'pet' snake.

Acknowledgements; Thanks to Mark O'Shea for supplying the map.

Royal Pythons...do they have any sex drive?

by Kevin J. Hingley

For the last two years, I have attempted to breed Royal Pythons, Python regius, but without any success. The majority of specimens are difficult enough to get to feed, let alone breed, in captivity, in particular newly imported specimens. Nevertheless, I have tried to breed this species with the help of a friend, Kevin Broome, who loaned me his female as I only have one male which has been in my collection since 1978. One would think that eight years of celibacy was enough for anyone, but this does not appear to be the case with Royal Pythons. In fact, judging by the poor breeding results of captive specimens in the U.K. alone, it seems as though these snakes prefer to live an almost monastic existence which makes one wonder why they haven't become extinct before now. It isn't as if wild specimens are prolific breeders as the average clutch size is only 2 to 6 eggs. The eggs are rather large and therefore a large clutch of eggs would be highly impractical from the female's point of view, and probably rather painful.

Most herpetologists are aware of the usual problems of poor feeding habits so I won't dwell on the point. However, it is significant that most P.regius stop feeding around the late autumn/early winter period in this country, and this corresponds with the approach of their breeding season in their native West Africa. It is also significant that it is at this time that most Royal Pythons are to be seen in large numbers at your local dealers, and probably the main reason why most newly imported specimens refuse to feed. They are also a shy species that tend to be grossly overhandled by their new owner because they are so 'tame'. This too has an adverse effect on their feeding habits.

The first attempt I made to breed this species was in mid-January 1986. My male was still accepting food at this time and had sloughed on the 12th of January. Kevin Broome's female was introduced to my male on the 28th, after both snakes had been subjected to a cooling off period. From the 28th onwards, the day time temperature fluctuated between 22 and 27 degrees C, coupled with an increase in humidity brought about by spraying the vivarium on a daily basis. At night the thermostatically controlled light was turned off completely, allowing the temperature to

fall to as low as 10 degrees C. No food was offered at this stage for obvious reasons. On the 23rd February the female entered a slough, after which I had hoped they would mate. The female had to be returned to her owner on the 25th as he needed her for lecturing purposes. She was returned to me on the 13th March and both snakes were subjected to the same combination of temperature and humidity as before, the only difference being that a large tray of water was now responsible for the humidity in the vivarium and the night temperatures were slightly higher due to our climate.

No matings were actually witnessed, but both snakes followed a pattern of entering the water during the day and leaving it at night. The temperature of the water corresponded with the ambient temperature of the vivarium. On the 17th of March, four days after re-introduction, a deposit of semen could be clearly seen on the bottom of the water tray. Great stuff, thought I, counting my python eggs before they were laid. No such luck I'm afraid; the female remained with my male until the 19th of April, but failed to produce any eggs at a much later date. Undeterred, we tried again this year following the same pattern of conditions that were imposed on both snakes last year. The female was returned to its owner on the 10th March, no matings having been observed, but with the faint hope that something went on while my back was turned. Somehow I doubt it, but she may surprise and delight us both yet. If anyone has had any success with breeding Royal Pythons, or has even managed to get them to mate frequently using a different combination of temperature/humidity, perhaps they would be good enough to have their results published in Snake Keeper so that anyone wishing to attempt to breed this species can try an alternative method to my own.

Have you any material for inclusion in

our next

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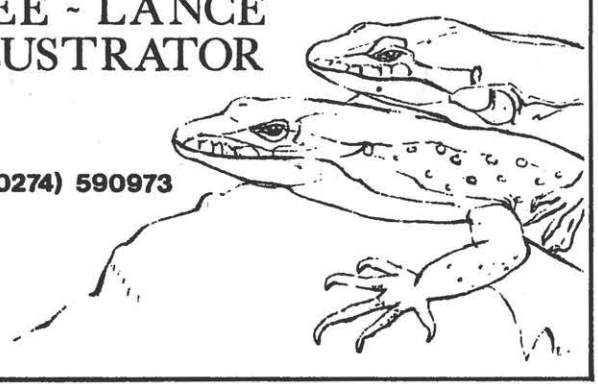
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Issue Three

a	*Indian Python*	
b	*Anaconda*	*Winner*
c	*Boomslang*	*Miss L Seymour*
d	*Blue Krait*	*Peterborough*
e	*Green Mamba*	*Cambs*
f	*King Cobra*	
g	*Gaboon Viper*	

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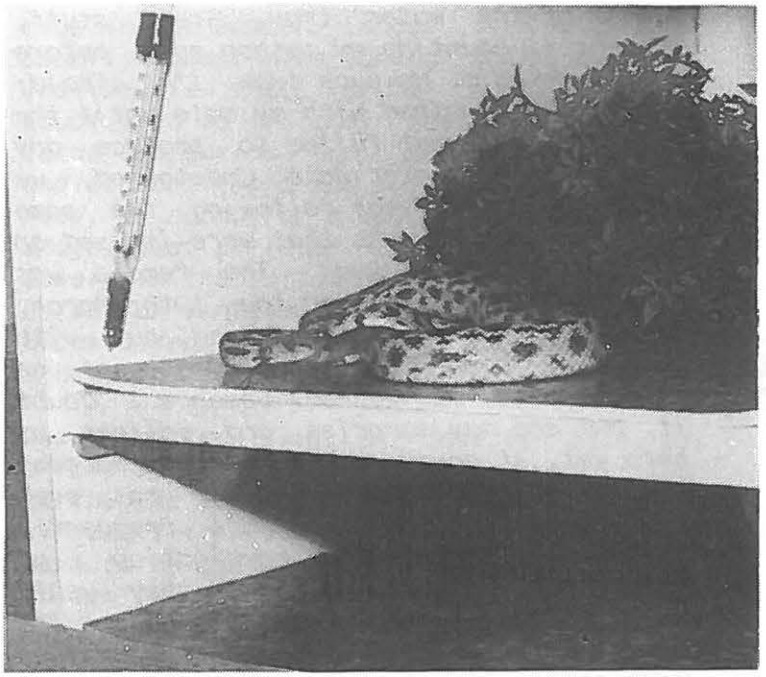


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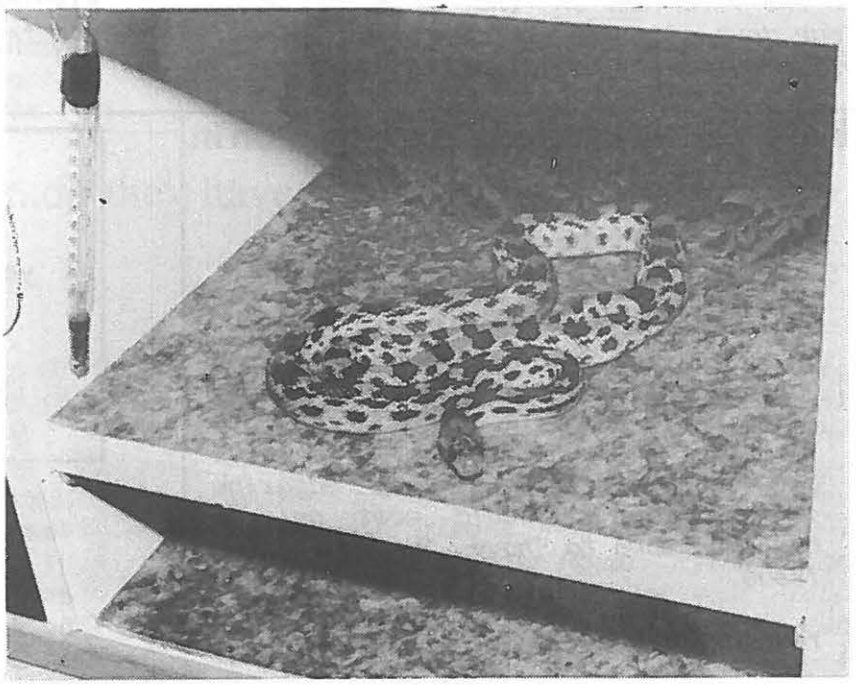
PHOTO PAGE



This month's Photo Page features some of the snakes in the collection of Roger Grenville. Roger has been interested in reptiles for 5 years and is particularly fond of King Snakes, of which he has quite a few. We hope to publish photographs of these later in the year.

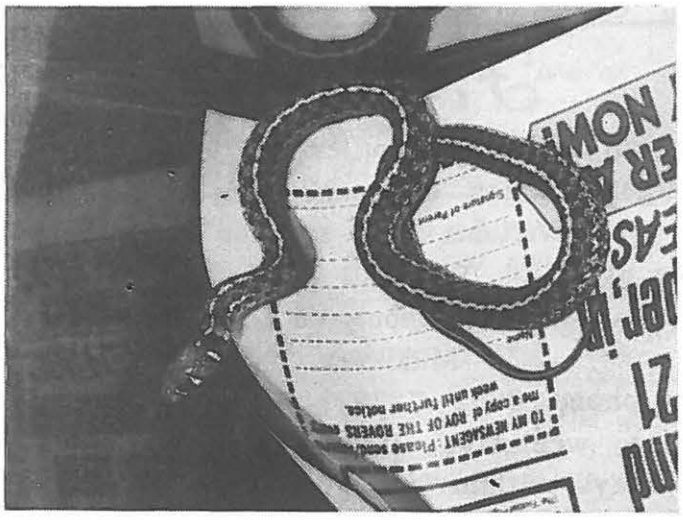
Above and right

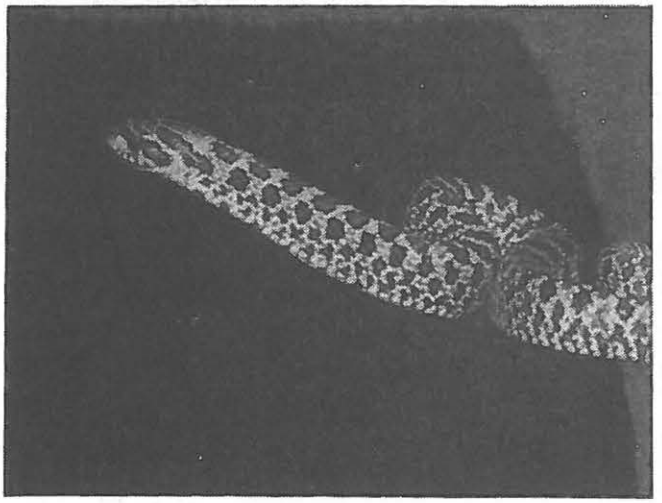
Young male Baja Pine Snake.



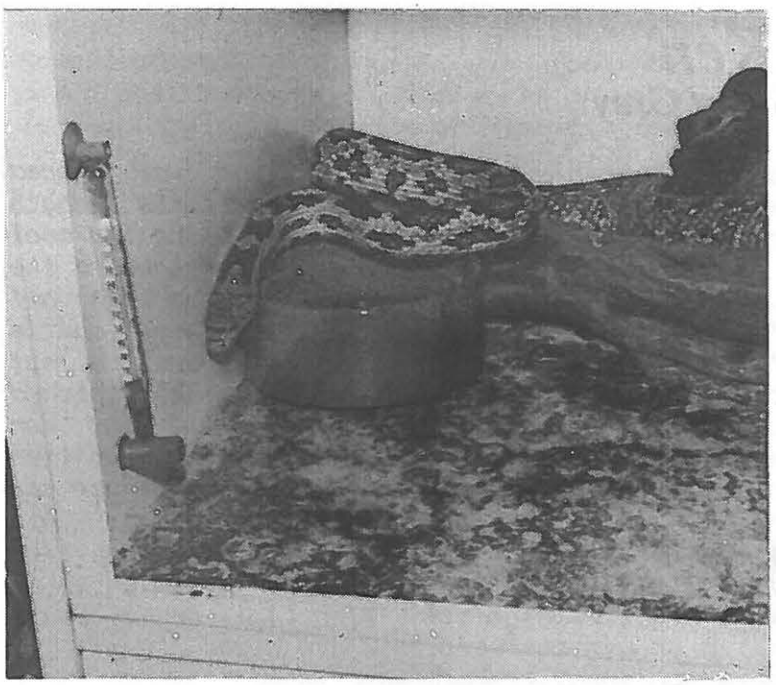
Below

Chequered Garter Snake, Thamnophis marcianus. Found in North and Central America, this snake grows to a length of 50-100 cm. Will accept fish-pieces & worms in captivity. This specimen was captive bred at Cotswold Wildlife Park, July 1986





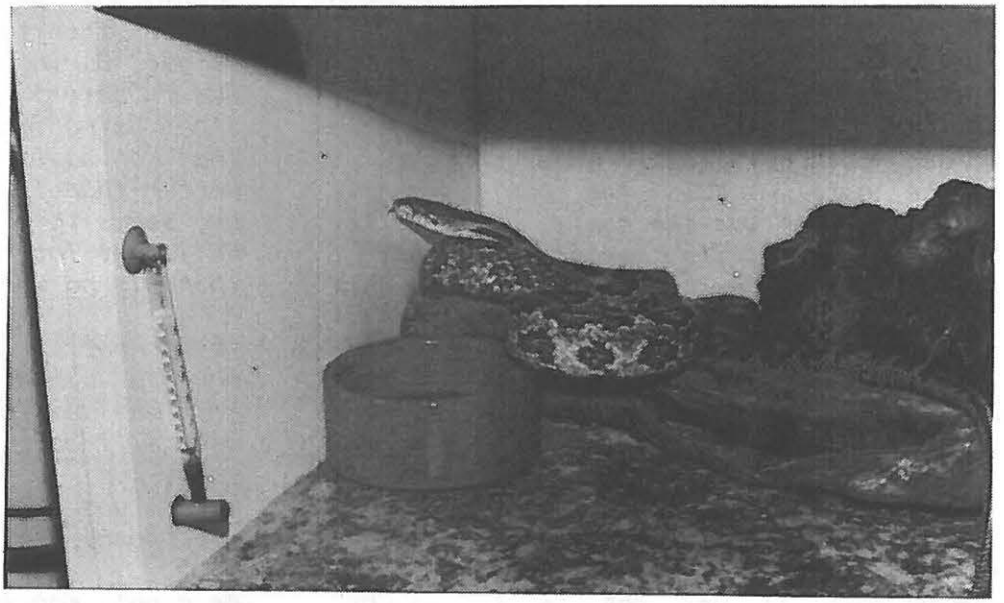
Hognose Snake, Heterodon n.nasicus. Captive bred in the U.S.A. Aug. '86.

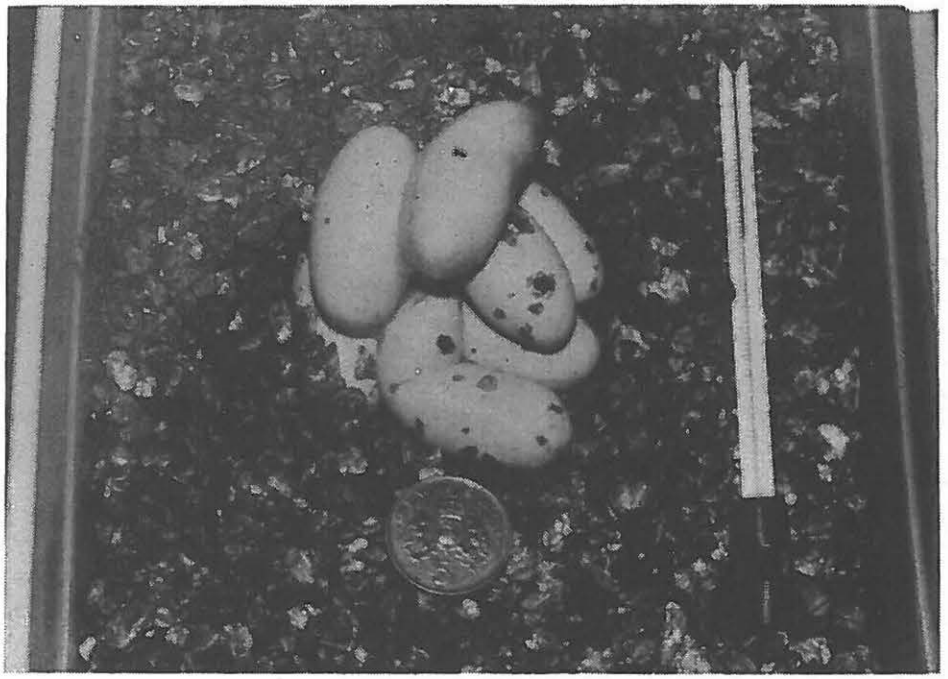


Left and below

Female Grey Rat Snake, Elaphe obsoleta spiloides. This snake was captive bred in July 1983.

In 1986 she laid two clutches of of eggs totalling 27. Of these, 25 hatched.





Seven eggs laid by a Sonoran Mountain King Snake, Lampropeltis p.pyromelana, on the 24th March 1987. The female was captive bred in July 1982. Note the egg nearest the 5p piece. It was laid against the side of the cage and has an unusual shape.

Another of Roger's snakes is featured on page 11.

Ken
by Stuart Gray

Ken is my beautiful Royal Python who has been living with me now for 16 months although I have known him for about two years.

How we came together must be the hand of destiny. It started about three and a half years ago; at that time I had no interest in snakes or zoos. I was living on a boat. As I had been to most places on the Isle of Wight, I thought I would pay Sandown Zoo a visit. A notice was displayed inviting visitors to handle a Boa. On request I was handed an 8ft Cyd. I felt a bit afraid of her big coils, but a few days later I returned. This time I stroked her side, and she must have read me - pet wanted. To my surprise she pushed her head into my chest, my fate was sealed.

I attended the zoo for many months, until one day I was out sketching and I came across Robin Hill Zoo. I made an enquiry at the gate - "Can the public handle snakes?" "Yes" was the reply. Ron Lilley the senior reptile keeper said "What snakes have you handled?" "Boas" I replied. "Could you give this little Royal some attention?" and he produced this little mite, 16 inches of rag, with seven bad burns on him; I think they were deliberately inflicted. I felt sorry for him but I could not think of him as a pet.

I had a short interlude with Berti the King Snake and thought "I'll have one of those", but it was not to be. I was handling the little mite when Julia, Ron's assistant, said "Careful, he hisses and bites." Sometime later, when the little mite had begun to recover after careful stroking, Julia said "Oh, he has taken to you." He now had a name, Ken. He was housed with a little Rock Python, about his size, and one day I found Ken trying to take a mouse out of the Rock Python's mouth, they were rolling over in struggle. It seems Ken was learning human ways - grab it!

After a time I thought I would like a Royal Python, and asked Ron whether I could take over Ken. He agreed. I obtained a glass fish tank and a cat mat to heat the bottom of the tank to 80 degrees F, his own mini-sleeping bag with his name embroidered, water bowl etc. No electric light was provided and a green cloth to cover his tank. The cat mat was placed under the tank for about half the length of the tank, the other half being the cool area. So on 7th October he came aboard the boat to live with me. By now, as with all pets, he had become my little boy, auntie Ruth, Dorothy etc. and continues to eat well and grow. In feeding I place a board with a towel cover on my lap, and Ken winds his body around my left hand, then snatches the dead rat or mouse out of my right hand. I encouraged him to come into my sleeping bag with me, where he lies full length beside me, from my thigh to my foot. It proved essential on a boat; should the ship-to-shore power fail; the only way to keep warm is next to me. As it turned out we had to endure the 1986 winter, then the most dreadful gales for a decade. During those nights I took Ken to bed to shield him from the vibrations, sleep being impossible. What I found was that Ken could stand the fury of the gales better than I can. Being in my sleeping bag seems to give him a sense of security. He is not interested in private parts so there is no worry on that account.

It was not until June the 10th that the dreadful winter gave way to a poor summer, so I decided that Ken and myself should go ashore. I bought a house, and two more tanks modified with a small hole at the bottom and a gap at the top to keep the air fresh.

As a pet, Ken is as affectionate as any other pet. He will lick my lips with his tongue, and spend hours on my lap. In general he regulates his own life, picked up when he wants and sleeping as he wants to.

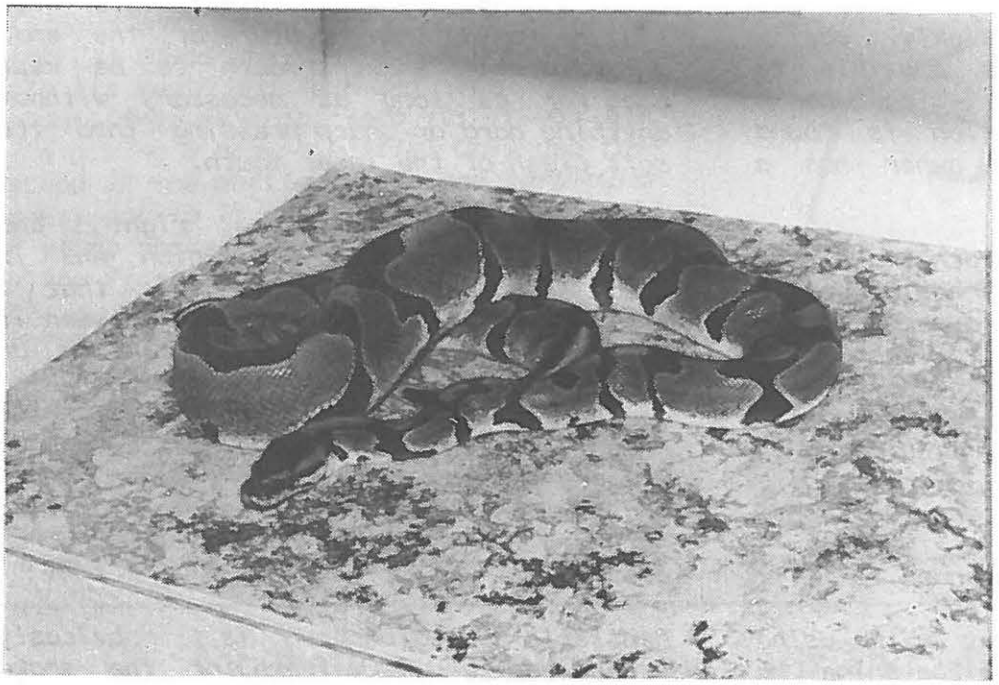
He is not a little mite any more (his last skin is forty inches). He is in excellent condition, with a life without fear of any kind. He is not available to the public, but has a few human friends who like snakes. I am now looking for a first class female for him.

During this whole time I have to thank Ron Lilley of Robin Hill Zoo for his guidance and advice.

If we could take a flight of fancy and imagine Ken could write a letter to his kind in West Africa, it would no doubt go

to the Royal Python Jungle Survival School. Here, under Professor Mel, little Royals are taught about their food and predators to beware of, the worst of which is the long limb fire ape who spit fire. Prof. Mel is one of the few Royals to see a fire ape and remain alive. The branch he was sitting on only a second before was smashed to bits when the fire ape spat orange flame. He even saw the hideous grin on its face. After reading Ken's letter he said "He's got a tame what? I don't believe it." But who knows what destiny has in store.

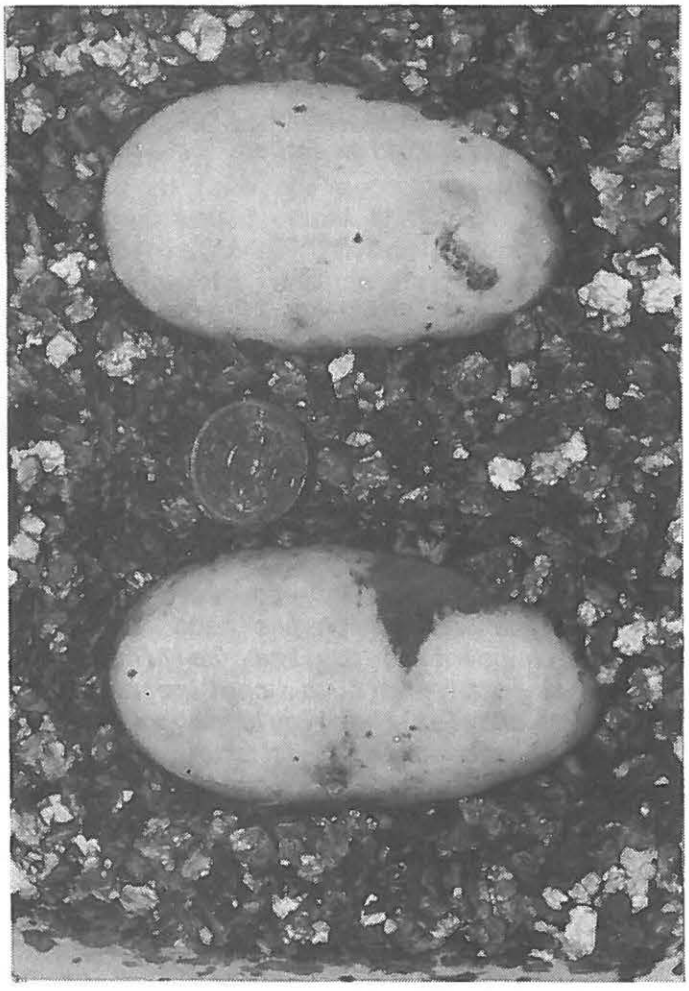
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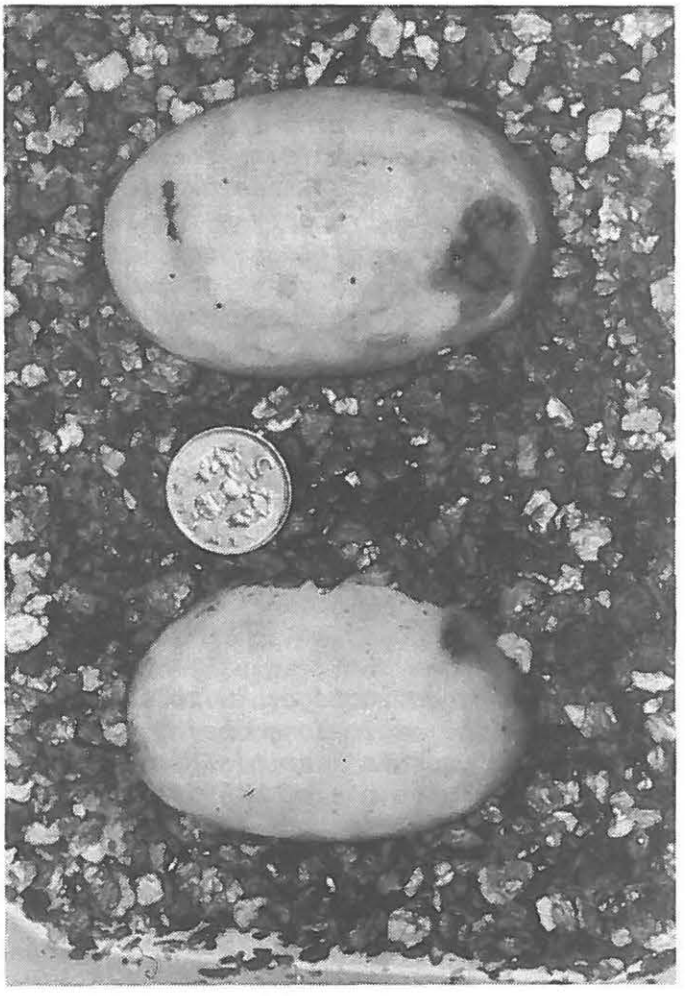


This wild-caught female Royal Python was recently bought by Roger Grenville from a London dealer. Within a few days of purchase the snake laid 4 eggs. Roger is incubating these in Vermiculite at approximately 30 degrees C. Further news and pictures on the progress of the eggs next month.

Below

The four eggs (laid on the 7th March 1987) housed in two seperate containers.





Force feeding and medicating - some tips

by Cassandra Oakes

If anyone has had to force-feed, assist-feed or give medicine orally to a snake, the simple question of what to use to get the animal's mouth open quickly, easily and with as little trauma as possible to the snake - and the owner - can be a problem. Obviously, a solution is found out of necessity and every owner has a preferred method.

After buying a 6-month old Corn Snake that was only 12" long, as slender as a pencil and not feeding on its own, a sure method had to found. I didn't want to scare the snake into not helping itself by unecessary pain or fumbling around. I tried out various devices, including a very thin paintbrush handle, a thumb-nail, both ends of a small teaspoon and both ends of surgical and eyebrow tweezers - all of which had been recommended to me.

I found the main problems with using tweezers were, firstly, that the shine or gleam coming from them was annoying and obscuring when trying to open a tiny mouth with a wriggly body attached to it. Secondly, trying to keep the tweezers open or closed whilst keeping the spare prong out of the way made holding them very hard work. Thirdly, eyebrow tweezers tend to be too small to hold properly - the ends of the prongs are a little sharp as well. Boots the Chemists do very good surgical tweezers: the prongs are excellent but made virtually useless because they're joined at one end which is too bulky to use. There are obvious drawbacks with the other objects tried, mainly size and sterilising them.

Eventually a perfect solution was found. It is a dentist's instrument called a 'flat plastic' (see diagram for description and use).

I found many advantages with this instrument, the main one being that it enables the user to keep his/her hand out of the way of the assistant with the food. I hold the snake in my left hand, the 'flat plastic' in my right, with an end pointing to the left side of the snake's jaw, and then gently 'stroke' the jaw open, being careful of the teeth. I then rest the tool in the mouth over both sides of the jaw; the ends are neither sharp nor bulky and it is thin enough to either slip between the jaws or insert into the lingual fossa. The curvature of the ends allows a small snake's mouth to be kept open for as long as necessary without anything hard or sharp pressing into the soft flesh of the inner mouth.

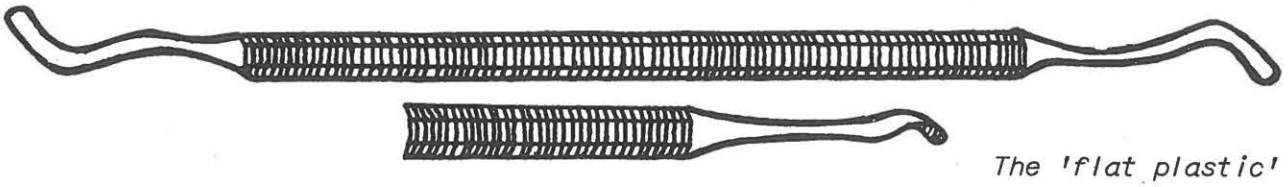
This instrument is also right and left-handed, depending on which end is used. The other main advantage is that I feel I have greater sensitivity between it and the snake - partly due to finding an instrument I feel confident with and which can be easily controlled. I have used the 'flat plastic' with equal success on wriggly Garter Snakes, a 2ft Corn Snake and Boa Constrictors. The ease of use on both small and large snakes is another good point.

Dentist's equipment is obviously expensive, but the welfare of the snake offsets this. The 'flat plastic' is relatively easy to sterilise as it is made of stainless steel, but it must be dried carefully and immediately. These instruments are available from dentist's suppliers (try Yellow Pages or ask your dentist!).

****

I have found an easy way to give a snake liquid treatments such as Stimulap or Rid Worm that come in plastic bottles and are given by the drop from the bottle. It is tempting, especially if the drops come out of the bottle quickly, to let the liquid drop into the back of the snake's throat. This is a waste of expensive medicine as it comes out of the mouth all over the feeder's fingers. A way to avoid this is to hold the snake with the head back and the mouth pointing to the ceiling. Then hold the bottle half a centimetre above the head and let the liquid drop onto the lingual fossa so that it runs down the roof of the mouth to the throat; this avoids flooding in the mouth. The bottle must not touch the snake's mouth as the contents could be contaminated.

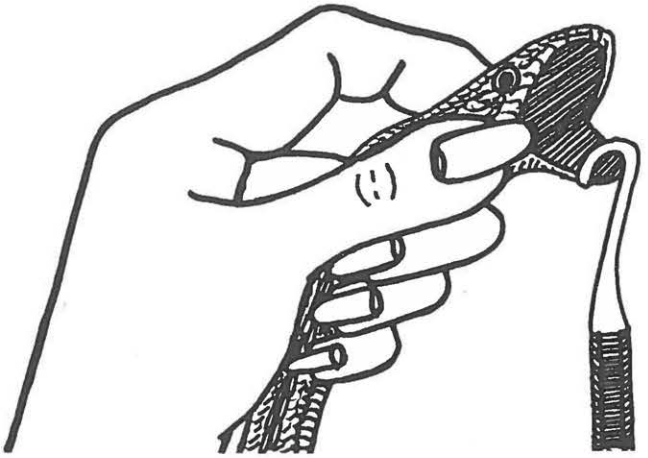
When one of my Boa Constrictors was very 'clingy' and not as co-operative as he



The 'flat plastic'

could be about taking his medicine, I held his head and, instead of opening his mouth first, I eased the nozzle of the bottle into his mouth and squeezed the required amount, drop by drop, into it: it was just like giving a baby a bottle! Only use this method if the bottle is for one particular snake; nor is it really suitable for small or young snakes, which should be treated by the first method.

Another way to administer medicine is to open the mouth in the ways I have mentioned but use a 5ml disposable syringe if a doctor or vet can be persuaded to sell or give you some. I squeeze the required amount of medicine on to a saucer then transfer it to the syringe, being careful not to let air bubbles get in. An



eyedrops dropper can also be used but the stem is made of glass which the snake could inadvertently break in its mouth.

Incubation techniques by Chris and Marcia Martin

<u>Pythons</u>

Pythons can and will incubate their own eggs. A few people take away the eggs from the female and incubate the eggs artificially. In our opinion its a very bad idea to take the eggs away because the stress you would cause the female would be incredible. All her natural yearnings will be to incubate and protect her future offspring.

Our female Burmese Python has laid for the last few years. About two weeks before she lays, we install a 3ft by 3ft by 6" box that we fill with large gravel or small stones to lay in. After she has laid, she usually takes about twelve hours to take up the classic pyramid shape. If she was in the wilds, it would be the rainy season, so the humidity of the cage must be kept high (80-90%). We do this by spraying the female three times a day. We use about three quarters of a pint of water per day.

Depending on the female, she will leave the eggs about three days before they start to hatch or she will still be curled around the eggs as they hatch; every female is different. The temperature of the vivarium should be about 85 degrees F.

Unlike some snakes, Pythons don't need to have a pre-laying slough. Hatching takes about 55-70 days depending on the temperature.

<u>Corn Snakes and other Egg Layers</u>

In the wilds, the females would lay in rotting vegetation or some other medium that supplies the correct incubation temperatures and humidity.

Corn Snakes do have a pre-egg laying slough. (We think that most egg layers do). From about the time the female sloughs to the time she lays, the female will be going mad in the tank. What she is doing is to try to find a suitable egg laying situation. Some people put in damp moss and other 'suitable' conditions for the females. Usually the females ignore them. Nature takes its course and the females will lay. Our female usually starts to lay about 8pm. We then start to prepare the incubation medium. We use the insulation chippings that you put in the roof. We use a large plastic ice cream or margarine container to hold the medium and the eggs. We soak the medium in cold water for about three and a half hours, then preheat the mixture to about 85 degrees F (to stop the eggs going into a cold

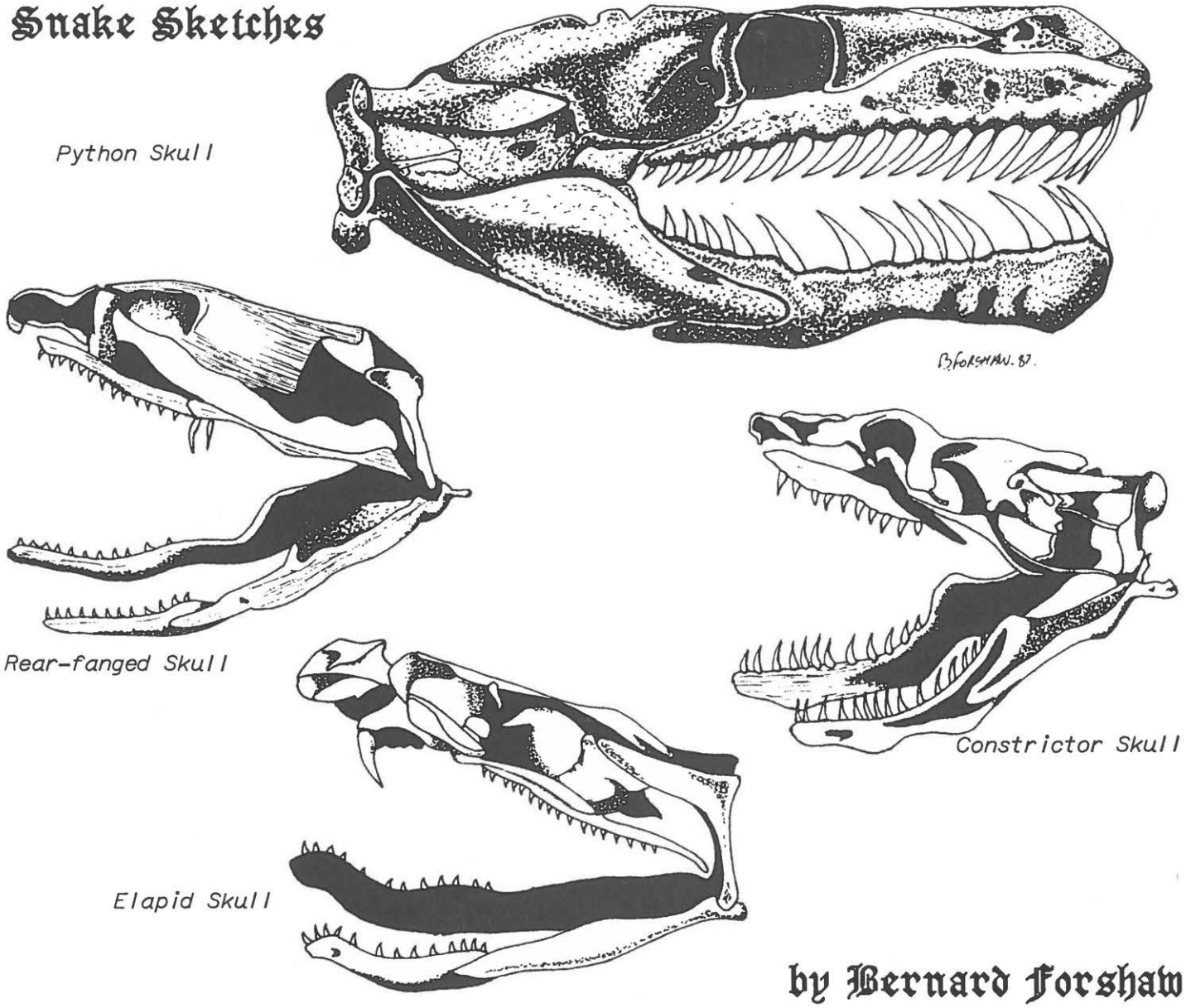
environment). Then we drain off the surplus water, half fill the container with the mixture and 'plant' the eggs that have been laid, filling the container with the rest of the medium. As more eggs are laid, these are planted with the others.

The temperature for Corn Snake eggs needs to be about 83-85 degrees F. Hatching takes about 60 days.

Heating the eggs!
We have made a wooden box that takes four plastic containers. Height is about 18" and we have a 150 watt dull heat emitter (No light, just heat) connected to a Uno Nova electronic thermostat. A Uno electronic is ideal because it has a lead connected to a temperature sensor that can be planted with the eggs. Light bulbs should not be used because of the unreliability; they do blow. Also some electronic thermostats will fail with light bulbs. Whether the Nova does we don't know, but because of the failure rate of bulbs, we won't use them. We don't find any need to dig up the eggs before the hatching date. All we do is lift the lid and, if any baby has hatched, we transfer them to a rearing tank. After about ten days from the hatching of the first snake, the remaining eggs are carefully dug up. Any infertile eggs are discarded. You can usually tell them because they are yellow in colour, hard, and if dropped they bounce. Hatched eggs are also discarded. Any other eggs can be carefully opened. Usually they contain dead babies.

Chris and Marcia are pleased to answer any queries about snake keeping (except veterinary problems). Contact them by writing to 18 Ballinode Close, Cheltenham, Glos, GL50 4SQ. Tel: Cheltenham 573477. Please enclose an sae for a reply.

Snake Sketches



by Bernard Forshaw

JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER

The care of a juvenile Reticulated Python

by D. Betmead & T.Hugh-Jones

Accomodation

The snake was housed in a container 70 x 60 x 35 cm. A climbing branch and a water container were installed. (The latter was for bathing, drinking and to raise the humidity.) Two hiding boxes (shoe boxes) were provided because other snakes were kept in the same quarters and so the Python could choose its most favourable temperature. The temperature ranged from about 26 - 29 degrees C in the day and dropped to 25 - 26 degrees C at night. In winter, the time-switch controlled photoperiod was 12 hours, provided by a 60w 'Striplite', and 14 hours in summer. Heat was provided by a 'Pearlco' CSE 100 watt, conical type ceramic heater bulb that was suspended from the roof of the cage. Two air vents were placed in one side of the cage. Heating apparatus was controlled by a Slik-Stat thermostat.

Feeding

The snake ate 1-4 mice per week and sometimes this was supplemented by a small rat or gerbil. Feeding was postponed for 2-3 weeks during the shedding process. The snake showed a great preference for small mammals, and took no notice of eggs. Chicks were not tried but presumably would have been taken. Excretion followed 5-10 days after feeding, usually 6. The faeces were a moist, dark substance that resembled cat defacation. The uric acid was excreted moist, but soon hardened to a white chalk-like deposit. I found the Python's faeces to carry an unpleasant odour. Three drops of Abidec (a multivitamin liquid) were mixed into the Python's drinking water to give the Python any extra vitamins needed. It also served as a pick-me-up to aid its feeding.

Behaviour

The snake spent much of its time huddled in its box near the entrance, and enjoyed watching what went on in its cage. Occasionally it would come out to drink, bathe or climb. The snake would usually bathe for 10-12 hours at a time before drying off on its branch near the heat source. When first purchased, the snake refused dead food even when the rats or mice were waved in front of it. This was only a temporary phase and the snake will now accept pre-killed food.

Growth

The snake showed a surprising rate of growth and the details are as shown here. The snake weighed 141.75 grams when obtained and, over the next 82 days, gained another 283.25 grams and so weighed 425 grams. The number of mice eaten during this time was 22.

The Smooth Snake by Lee Bowler

Lowland heaths in Surrey, Hampshire and Dorset are the home of the Smooth Snake, Coronella austriaca, one of Britain's rarest animals which is protected by law. Not much is known about the Smooth Snake as it is seldom seen and is a shy snake, which, instead of sunbathing, gets its body heat from lying under flat stones etc. which have been heated by the sun.

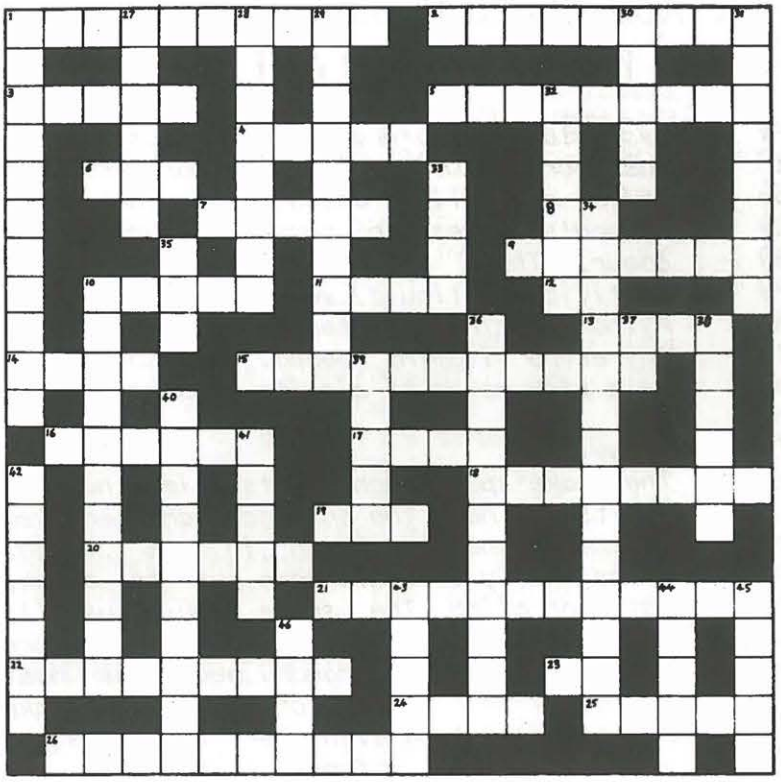
The Smooth Snake grows to a length of around 24 inches (60 cm) and has distinctive markings. The background varies from a grey-brown to a browny-red colour, with a dark stripe running through each eye and dark spots running down its back. Sometimes these spots join together to form bars.

This small reptile preys upon lizards and frogs and occasionally its own species, at least in captivity.

The mating of this snake occurs in May and the young are born fully formed in August/September, measuring approximately 6 inches (15 cm). The new-born snakes are identical to their parents except for the markings which are much darker in colour. The young fend for themselves and hunt their first prey after shedding their skin, which occurs a few days after birth. Their prey consists of spiders, woodlice and other small insects. The Smooth Snake, like the other British snakes, hibernates in the winter months, awakening in late March or early April. In the wild, this snake lives for fifteen to twenty years or more and has few enemies other than man.

SNAKE KEEPER COMPETITION

SNAKEWORD compiled by CG Pywell-Fox



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Across

1 Also known as "Old Iodine" (1,1,1,7)
2 Rattlers, Rhino's, Russells etc. (9)
3 Main diet of the Hognose Snakes (5)
4 Whose is the Tree Boa called enhydris? (5)
5 Home of the Taipan (9)
6 A Grass Snake comes in one (3)
7 This type of Adder causus me to mis-spell (5)
8 Vi__r (see 2 across) (2)
9 One of the smaller Boas comes from a rum place (7)
10 Home of the Minoan snake goddess (5)
11 Coronella austriaca is the most ____ in Great Britain (4)
12 __rodia - green Water Snake (2)
13 African Python (4)
14 Mr Phelps, author of Poisonous Snakes (4)
15 Named after the Greek god of healing (11)
16 To bite (6)
17 ____go Snake (see 27 down) (4)
18 The "punk" of Cobras (8)
19 This snake shares its name with the crossword compiler (3)
20 Half a mussarana (6)
21 King Snakes (12)
22 Home sweet Home (9)
23 Do Milk Snakes milk cows? (2)
24 Snakes do this to become warm (4)
25 Britain's native venomous snake (5)
26 Elaphe (see 15 across) (10)

Down

1 This and the Copperhead make good foot wear (11)
10 Causes death by asphyxiation (11)
27 Amongst the largest of the North American snakes (6)
28 Snakes become this during hibernation (8)
29 Cold-blooded animals (10)
30 A snake might become this if stepped on (5)
31 Cobras, Mambas etc. (8)
32 Venomous Australian snake (6)
33 Good place to look for an arboreal snake (4)
34 Often confused with Chondropython viridis (7,4,3)
35 Hydrophinae (3)
36 The Bitis known as "River Jack" (11)
37 Pyth__ (2)
38 Made from the skin of Acrochordidae (6)
39 Spilotes pullatus (5)
40 Venom injecting apparatus of 2 across (6,4)
41 Carpet viper,_____ carinatus (5)
42 To call this the "straw" snake would be "corny" (7)
43 One of Africa's most feared snakes (5)
44 Grabsticks, snakehooks and syringes are all tools of the herpetologists _____ (5)
45 A lack of eyelids makes snakes appear to do this (5)
46 What is the Adder capable of, that no other is? (4)