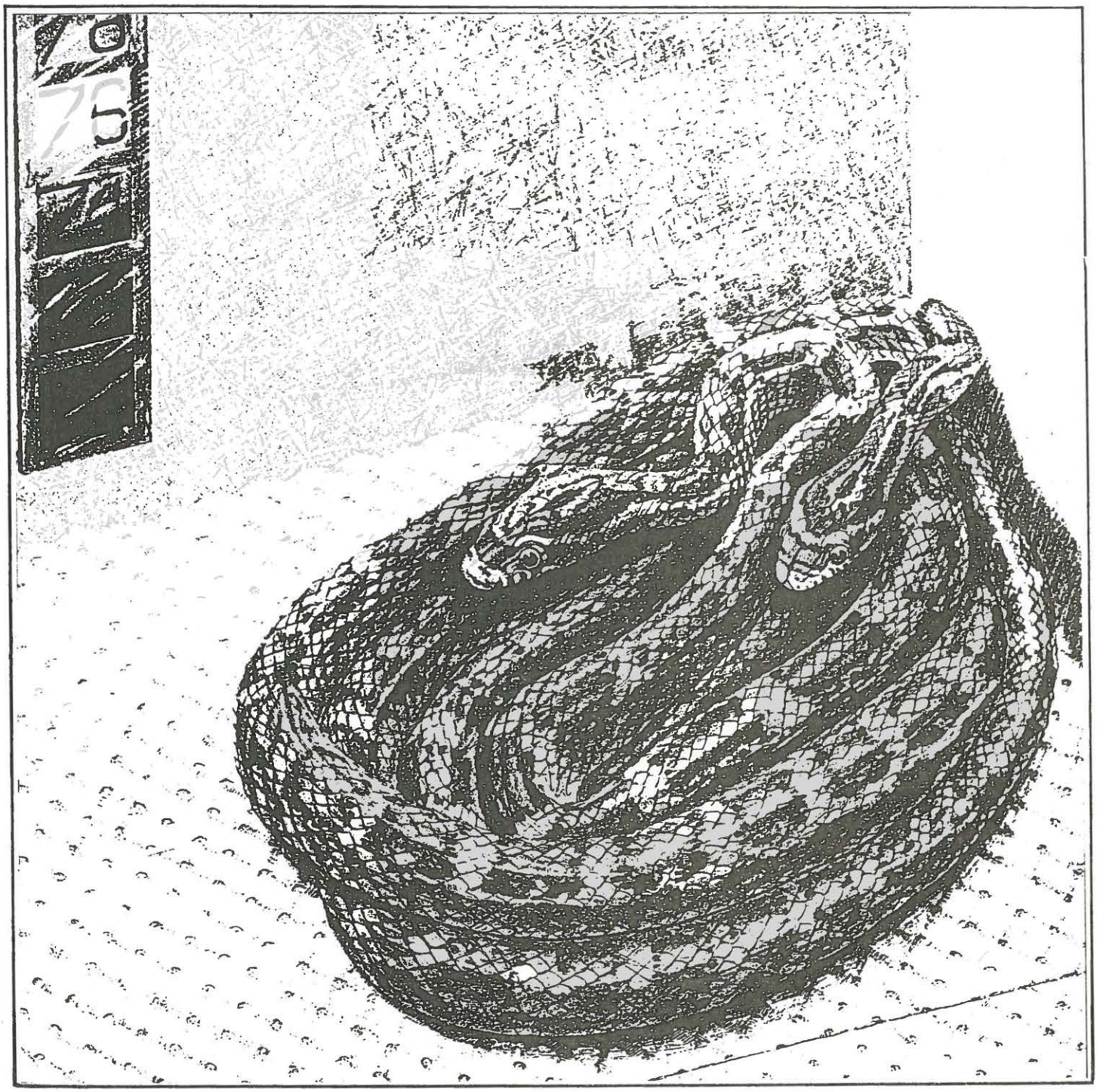
SNAKE KEEPER

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 8 AUGUST 1987 £1.00p



INFORMATION

Dutch Snake Society

Objects of the Society

- *To establish contact between snake keepers and people interested in snakes.*
- *To encourage an exchange of views on snake husbandry and breeding.*
- *To contact other societies, universities zoos, etc.*
- *To promote an interest in snakes.*

Society publications

The magazine LITTERATURA SERPENTIUM has been published bi-monthly in Dutch since 1980, and since 1983 an English edition has also been published, with an annual total of some 250 pages, including photographs in colour. Regular columns are: Health and Diseases, Breeding results, Literature and Supply and Demand advertisements from the members.

Meetings

The Society organises an International Meeting every October, the so called 'Snake Day', for all people interested in snakes. Lectures, slide shows, etc. on snakes in the wild and in the terrarium are held in English and Dutch or in English and German. Reptile dealers, herpetological book shops, plant shops, medical instrument shops, etc. have stands for direct selling. After the Meeting there is a joint dinner in a foreign restaurant. In October 1986 about 350 people from 11 countries attended the meeting.

Membership and subscription
The Dutch Snake Society welcomes members from all countries. Subscription rates for the Netherlands and Belgium are Hfl. 25.00 other countries: Hfl. 25.00 + 10.00 post.

Payment should be made to the treasurer by International Postal Money Order or by paper money in a letter (no coins). If you remit by cheque, please add Hfl. 10.00 for costs, charged to the Society by the bank for all transfers of foreign currency.

Back Volumes

These can be purchased from the Treasurer at Hfl. 25.00 per volume, including postage. Vol. 1 (1980/1981) and Vol. 2 (1982) are no longer available.

For any further information, please feel free to contact one of the following:

Secretary
Jaap Kooij
Langervelderweg 137
221 AG Noordwijkerhout
The Netherlands

Treasurer
Erwin Emondt
Copernicusstraat 118
2561 XC Den Haag
The Netherlands

Editor English Edition (New World snakes)
Adam Wright
149 Marlborough Road
Stoke
Coventry, CV2 4ES

The North East Herpetological Society in conjunction with Lambton Garden Centre are staging an Open Reptile/Amphibian Show on August 28 - 31st. Judging to take place on the 28th. All are welcome to either exhibit or just look around. The venue is Lambton Garden Centre, Chester-le-Street, Durham. Full details from Dave Robson on (091) 4173732. TV coverage is planned.

Sussex Herpetological Society
Meetings temporarily suspended until a new venue is arranged.

Salisbury and District Aquarist Society
Annual Show

Sunday 13th September 1987
Specially extended
Cichlid and Catfish Classes

including Reptile and Amphibian Classes

Admission Adults 50p Children 25p

Details from Mark Jeaves, 32 Trenchard Ave Winterbourne Gunner, Salisbury, Wilts.

SNAKE KEEPER

Vol 1 No 8 August 1987

Snake Keeper Magazine
159 Stanley Hill
Amersham
Bucks
HP7 9EY

Telephone: Amersham (02403) 22769

Editor Michael Connolley
Assistant Editor Lesley Close

Subscriptions: One year (12 issues)

U.K. £12
Europe £16 sterling
U.S.A. £18 sterling

Snake Keeper magazine does not hold itself responsible for any opinions expressed by the authors and contributors.

Printed by Pyramid Press. Tel: 0272 556539

INDEX

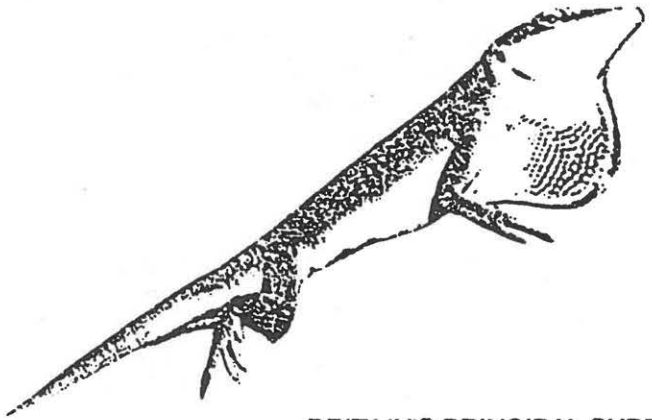
Keeping Poisonous African Snakes	4
Herpetology, Herpetologists and the Press	8
Breeding Corn Snakes - A first experience	8
The History of the Reptile House at London Zoo	10
The Demise of an Indian Python	12
The Mythological Snake	14
Oz, Dear What Can The Matter Be?	16
Conservation of Grass Snakes	18
Junior Snake Keeper	19
Truelite - A necessary expense?	20

Front Cover: Corn Snakes
Elaphe guttata
by David Durham

THE VIVARIUM

55 Boundary Road
Walthamstow
London E17 8NQ

Tel 01 520 2072



BRITAIN'S PRINCIPAL SUPPLIERS OF REPTILES AND AMPHIBIA TO THE SPECIALIST.

WE HAVE THE VERY LATEST IN HEATING & LIGHTING TECHNOLOGY FOR CAPTIVE HERPETOFAUNA, ALONG WITH A UNIQUE RANGE OF FOOD SUPPLEMENTS, TONICS AND HEALTH CARE PRODUCTS, THE USE OF WHICH WILL PROMOTE THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF YOUR STOCK AND STIMULATE NATURAL COLOURING, ACTIVITY AND BREEDING BEHAVIOUR.

Keeping poisonous African snakes

by Stephen Spawls

In Walter Rose's book "The Reptiles and Amphibians of Southern Africa" there is a chapter entitled 'Advice to the inexperienced on catching and handling poisonous snakes, together with full instructions on keeping them in captivity'. The chapter consists of a single word in the middle of the page..... 'Don't.'

I do not subscribe to this view. If we didn't start somewhere, no-one would ever keep a poisonous snake. Apart from the pleasure, a lot of herpetology can be learnt from keeping a poisonous snake. This article is intended for those who would like to start, and is based on my own experience with poisonous African snakes. It is not really about husbandry - I have mostly kept poisonous snakes at no great distance from their natural environment, so I have rarely had to heat them artificially or worry about fluctuations in the day length - but merely the practicalities of keeping and housing poisonous snakes. For those who are experienced with poisonous snakes, I apologise if my information seems simplistic.

Before you decide to obtain your poisonous snake, there are a few things worth considering.
1. If you have children, especially under the age of 10 or so, it is not a good idea to keep a poisonous snake at home. Forgetting just once to lock the cage or close the snake room door could be fatal for an inquisitive child.
2. In many countries, you will need a licence or permit to keep a poisonous snake. In the U.K., if you want to keep a poisonous snake you will have to comply with the Dangerous Wild Animals Act.
3. It might be prudent to inform your neighbours that you are keeping poisonous snakes - better in advance than after an escape! You may also be expected to inform such authorities as the police, fire brigade, gas board etc, who might have to enter your house in an emergency.
4. You should have some idea what a snakebite involves. It isn't just like a bee sting. It's easy to underestimate the damage and trauma a bite from even a small Adder can create. Have a look at some of the case history pictures in Visser and Chapman's "Snakes and Snakebite".
5. Be realistic in your choice of snake. Presuming that you have kept some harmless and rear fanged species first, then start with a small, slow-moving species. One of the smaller European adders would be ideal. Don't be tempted to start with an Elapid, or something that's very exotic and may be difficult to feed. You don't want to have to force-feed your first poisonous snake.

If you are intending to keep Cobras, Mambas or any of the larger African Vipers (Bitis sp), Saharan Sand Vipers (Cerastes) or Carpet Vipers (Echis), then you should have anti-snakebite serum on your premises (unless your local hospital stocks it - doubtful but worth checking). The two manufacturers of African anti-snakebite serum that I am acquainted with are The South African Institute for Medical Research (PO Box 1038, Johannesburg 2000, Republic of South Africa) and Behringwerke AG (Marburg, West Germany). Three sera are produced by the South African Institute. These are:
1. Polyvalent antivenom, effective against the bite of the larger true African vipers (Bitis), Mambas (Dendroapsis), Cobras (Naja) and the Rinkals (Hemachatus).

2. Echis carinatus antivenom, active against the venom of the Carpet Viper and both species of Saharan Sand Viper (Cerastes).

3. Boomslang antivenom.

The Boomslang antivenom is not for sale but is issued on request to any hospital treating a Boomslang bite. As far as I am aware, the other two sera are not available from any outlet in the U.K., but can be obtained direct from the Institute in 10cc ampoules, costing about £25 per ampoule. I usually have about four ampoules to hand, but cases are known where up to 100cc of antivenom have been used.

The Behringwerke serum is of two types, North African and Central African. The North African serum is effective against the bite of the Horned Viper (Cerastes

cerastes), the Sand Viper (Cerastes vipera), Puff Adder, Gaboon Viper , Carpet Viper, Egyptian Cobra, Forest Cobra, Spitting Cobra (Naja nigricollis) and the Blunt-nosed Viper (Vipera lebatina). The Central African serum is effective against the three cobras already mentioned, Mambas, the Puff Adder and the Gaboon and Rhinoceros-horned Vipers. Behringwerke serum can be obtained in the U.K.; I got mine from John Bell and Croydon of Wimpole Street, London, but I needed a prescription to get it. It costs about £25 per ampoule. This serum does not have as good a reputation in Africa as the South African one, but nevertheless it is a very good serum. At a hospital in northern Ghana where the Behringwerke North African serum was used to treat Carpet Viper bites (of which there were two or three a week), only one fatality occurred in two years.

Serum should be kept in the fridge (not in the freezer): the recommended storage temperature is 4 - 11 degrees C. The expiry date, which is stamped on the ampoule, is about two years from the date of manufacture; in practice, if properly stored, it will remain potent beyond the expiry date. A good rule of thumb is that if the serum remains clear, it is still potent. Your spouse, neighbour or good friend should know where the serum is kept: a notice on the snake room door stating this might be a good idea. Don't use serum yourself. If you are bitten, take the serum to the hospital with you. Serum injections should not be done by a layman.

You might find it helpful to know something about immobilisation therapy using a pressure bandage and splinting: present medical opinion is that this is the best form of first aid for snakebite. The techniques were pioneered by an Australian, Dr. S.K. Sutherland, and described in The Lancet, 1979, pages 183 - 186, as well as in a pamphlet 'First aid for snakebite in Australia', obtainable from the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, Parkville 3052, Melbourne, Australia. For more detail on medical treatment of snakebite, it is worth reading the chapter entitled 'Snakebite and its treatment' in Broadley and Cocks' "Snakes of Zimbabwe". Some of the best modern medical techniques are described here. It might be worth having a copy of the section entitled 'Why medical treatment?' and taking this to hospital with you in case of a bite, as it is possible that the doctor on duty won't be conversant with snakebite.

There are a number of poisonous African snakes for which no serum is produced, including the Garter or Coral snakes (Elapsoidea), Shield-nosed snakes (Aspidelaps), Night Adders (Causus), Mole Vipers or Stilletto snakes (Atractapsis), the smaller and mainly southern African Bitis, and the Tree Vipers (Atheris). These snakes are regarded as not being deadly, and a bite from them can be treated symptomatically.

That's the scary stuff over with. Don't be put off: if you are careful and conscientious you will not be bitten.

Everyone has their own ideas on vivarium design, and there are plenty of nice models around. I have a few tips on vivaria for poisonous snakes, which may be old hat to the experienced.

1. It should lock. In addition, if the lock is left off, it should be impossible for the snake to push the door open. A sliding door, or some sort of spring loaded catch, is useful.

2. Swinging doors should open outwards. Upward opening doors are useful, but have disadvantages such as requiring one hand to hold the door. Sliding doors should slide freely.

3. You should be able to reach all parts of the cage, with a grabstick or your hand, from the door (except in very large vivaria).

4. When you are at the door, you should be able to see if not all the cage then at least the area around the door. Glass doors, or a glass panel in the door, are useful.

5. There should not be anywhere for the snake to hide near the door.

6. If the door is very large - as in large display cages - then a small feeding hatch set in the door is useful.

7. If the door is on top or is set high on the side of the cage, then the deeper the cage the better as the snake will find it difficult to come out quickly.

For keeping large Elapids in big display cases, I have found a split door, like a stable door, to be useful, especially if the top section has a glass panel and is farly small. Don't have any branches or climbing frames too near the door.

There is a lot of debate about the best substrate for snakes. I use newspaper a lot, but it doesn't look good in a display case and has the disadvantage that it has to be changed when the snake defecates. Coarse sand looks good with the smaller

sand-dwelling vipers, and has the advantage that faeces can be scooped out without having to clean the whole cage. Non sand-dwelling snakes can have problems if they ingest the sand with their food and it is said that sand in the mouth can lead to mouth rot, although I have never personally known this to happen as a result of sand in the cages. Woodshavings make a comfortable substrate, and faecal matter deposited on them can simply be scooped out.

It is worth having a look at your snake room and perhaps trying to escape-proof it: that way you won't have to worry about an escapee turning up in your bed. Fit carpet strips or draught excluders around the door, check the skirting board and always keep the doors shut etc. Imagine trying to explain to your neighbour that one of your poisonous snakes is loose.

I'm not an expert on heating, but it is useful if you can get at the heating system from outside, in case of problems. For bulbs and strip lights, fine wire mesh will prevent the snakes getting at them.

Some tips on handling.

Don't be a daredevil. 'Necking' a big Gaboon Viper may look good, but it increases the risk of being bitten and it isn't good for the snake. Most bites sustained by herpetologists occur when they are handling a captive venomous snake.

Never free-handle, that is pick up an unrestrained venomous snake, no matter how tame it is or appears to be. Likewise, don't just pick it up if it appears to be comatose or dead. It may not be.

There are a fair number of snake handling tools on the market. In the U.K., grabsticks can be obtained from R. Taylor and Sons (Woodward Road, Pleck, Walsall) and in the United States a range of handling tools are manufactured, including the FurMont reptile handling range and the Pilstrom tongs. You should have a grabstick of some sort and a hook stick (fairly broad-bladed ones are best); a pair of 30cm surgical tongs are useful. You may have to pick up an escapee, or separate two fighting inmates, and a grab means that you won't have to reach into the cage yourself. Putting on a pair of industrial leather gauntlets while doing things in the cage is a good insurance.

Remember that suppressing a snake with a stick and holding it by the neck is traumatic for the snake and will make it angry. It will certainly try to bite and may damage its head or neck: it may be put off its food. Your aim should be to handle the snake as little as possible, and not to move it unless you have to.

A hide box with a sliding door is worth having, either permanently in the cage or for insertion when the snake has to be removed. It should be of such a design that you can flip the lid shut or slide it closed without being observed approaching, and the box should be lockable or at least firmly secured. Bear in mind that if the hide box is not a permanent fixture, you will probably have to remove available cover in the cage before the snake will enter the box voluntarily.

If you want to examine the snake closely there are certain tricks which can be used without actually handling the snake. One is to have a hide box of clear plastic, wrapped around with black paper (or something along those lines). Remove the paper once the snake is secured inside the hide box. Another trick is to remove cover from the cage and put in some lengths of clear tubing (eg hosepipe or laboratory gas tubing), diameter slightly larger than the snake. When the snake enters the tube, it can be safely picked up - if the tube is slightly less than the length of the snake, you can hold its tail and, provided the diameter of the tube is small, the snake cannot double back. This also provides a safe way of removing parasites from the snake, or deworming it orally. If the snake is in the tube and is restrained by the tail, it cannot strike or move quickly, and delicate jobs like removing unshed spectacles can be carried out. Provided the tube is small enough to prevent the snake turning around, it can be safely pulled out backwards until the required section is reached, but use both hands and make sure the head is still inside the tube! If the snake refuses to enter the tube and you have to handle it, slip a noose of some soft broad material through a piece of the tubing, noose the snake and pull it into the tube.

Remember that with the larger poisonous snakes, it is not safe to have more than two in a cage and one is better.

Many of the African vipers and small Elapids can be moved with a hook rather

than grasping with a grab stick. Provided you approach slowly, many snakes have little objection to being lifted gently and moved by hook but they should be supported centrally if using only one hook, and remember that they might drop off.

If you have to catch and handle the snake, the following tips may be useful.
1. Switch the heating off to cool the snake before handling. It will be less active.
2. Don't make sudden movements whilst approaching the snake. Watch out that the door isn't going to bang shut on you, or anything else.
3. Don't hold the snake near the head only with a single restraint. It may respond by violent shaking or gyration, and can damage its head or neck. For suppressing, a broad-bladed instrument is best, especially if it is padded.
4. When you pick the snake up, make sure it is well supported, but don't let it coil around your fingers or arm. Don't hold it by the head for too long, especially a large snake. Your hand becomes tired, and then it is difficult to judge the pressure and the snake may jerk free. Certain African snakes have spikes on the ends of their tails - two that come to mind are Gold's Tree Cobra (Pseudohaje goldii) and the Forest Cobra (Naja melanoleuca) - and you can do funny things when holding one of these snakes which decides to drive its spike into your arm!
5. Lastly, don't work with your poisonous snake alone, especially if you are going to handle or force feed the snake.

Happy Snake Keeping!

Stephen has been involved with snakes for over twenty years and is presently living in Botswana. His book, 'Sun, Sand and Snakes' was published in 1979 and is recommended reading for snake keepers, being a detailed account of his snake hunting adventures in Africa.

SNAKE KEEPER T-SHIRTS

Design shows front cover of issue six printed red and black on white. Sizes: Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large.



£5 including postage and packing

Send your name, address, size and a cheque or postal order for £5 to:
Snake Keeper T-Shirt Offer
159 Stanley Hill, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9EY
Please allow up to 28 days for delivery.

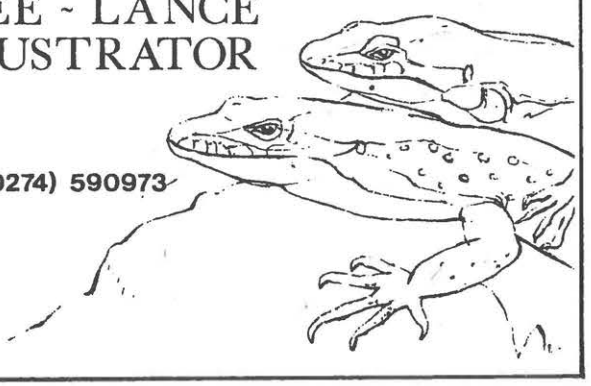
BACK NUMBERS BACK NUMBERS BACK NUMBERS
BACK NUMBERS BACK NUMBERS BACK NUMBERS

Issues 1 - 7 are available
£1 per copy including postage and packing.

Fishtique

for all types of Reptiles and Amphibians.
Large selection of books and equipment.
Vivariums made to your order.
See us at 4, Windmill Road,
Sunbury on Thames,
Middlesex.
Or phone 0932 782928
Open weekdays 10am-5.30pm.
Sundays 10am-4pm.

David R. Durham B.A. (Hon's)
FREE - LANCE
ILLUSTRATOR
Tel: (0274) 590973



Herpetology, Herpetologists.....and the Press

by Kevin J. Hingley

I expect that the reader will find this article at least provocative, if by the title only. Give any herpetologist a few years experience, throw in a few encounters with the Press (local or national) and sooner or later one becomes yet another member of the general public to be a victim of the misquote syndrome. For the newcomer, it is a new world, instant fame, public recognition, front page news! And the result of this venture? 'Monty Python moves into Acacia Avenue', 'Slippery Sid finds a new home in Surbiton', 'Fangs for the memory'. I shouldn't have to say any more, the headlines speak for themselves. If everyone were honest, they would admit that after being a willing party to a Press article, they probably cringed when they read what "that nice man from the Press" had to say about them, as well as their reptiles.

Once in a while, herpetology gets a little bit of good press. This usually appears in the form of conservation. Whilst I am not condemning the press for this style of reporting, it does little for herpetology in general. Reptiles and amphibians have always been good for a story, depending on whether or not you actually like them or the local Building Society suffered at the hands of armed robbers. When there is no news any news will do. The fact that it may be quite distorted doesn't enter into it: after all, it's what the public wants to read, isn't it?

On numerous occasions I have spoken to people following their appearance in a newspaper article and they have said 'I didn't say that!' The harrowing fact is that you probably did, but didn't intend it to sound that way. Yet another fact is that the newer you are to the 'game' and the more aware you make your neighbours of your new hobby, the more likely you are to become a 'victim of the Press'. If you make public the fact that you are keeping some form of living creature that is repulsive to the public in general, then you must be prepared to accept the consequences. There is very little point in complaining afterwards, what has been said has been said and printed in black and white. You can ask for a retraction, but don't expect too much.

By far the worst incidents that I've encountered have been when some of the more sceptical amongst us have refused to have anything to do with the Press, only to be told that unless a story was forthcoming, one would be printed in any case! Co-operation is the key word here. Let's face it, how often do you hear of someone who keeps canaries or tropical fish hitting the headlines? You won't, unless the owner is attacked by his or her pet, and when did you last read about a rabid guppy or manic canary. Scaremongering perhaps? I don't think so. Having been a victim myself, I'm speaking from experience and I'm certain there are many people out there who feel exactly the same as I do about this. The message is quite clear: if you don't want to be misquoted then don't quote. An ego trip on reptiles can easily lead to an egg on the face trip in the paper.

Breeding Corn Snakes - A first experience

by Mark Wooton

Much has been written concerning the captive breeding of corn snakes but, as it concerns my first experience of snake breeding, I hope this article may be of some help to those about to breed their snakes for the first time.

At the end of 1985 I had in my possession four adult Corn Snakes, males A and B, both approximately four feet long and females A and B approximately three feet long. All four snakes were transferred from their normal vivaria to propogators and cooled. This was achieved by placing them in the spare bedroom, which was not heated. I had intended a two month cooling period but this was extended to three months by a drawn-out house move.

On 6/4/86 all four snakes were placed in a vivarium measuring 4' x 2' x 2'. This was heated by a 120 watt tubular heater

controlled by a room thermostat set at approximately 26 degrees C. Lighting was by an 18" Grolux flourescent tube. On placing the snakes into the vivarium, the males began 'fighting'. This consisted of both males moving jerkily around the vivarium, constantly pushing against each other. I had observed this behaviour before, usually at feeding times, so it did not cause me any concern.

On 7/4/86 male A was seen in copula with female B: no courtship or evidence of disturbance in the vivarium was seen. Subsequent copulations were seen on 21/4/86 (male B, female A) and 24/4/86 (male A, female B). As before, no courtship was observed.

During the gestation period, both females spent extended periods lying on the heater enclosure and both refused food at this time. At the same time, both males also refused food and had done so in previous years, even when no females were present.

Female B's pre egg-laying slough was on 12/5/86. A container of moist vermiculite was provided for egg laying but was ignored, twelve eggs being laid under a piece of guttering 15 days later, on 27/5/86. Female A laid 14 eggs on 9/6/86, 14 days after her pre egg-laying slough. A second clutch of 8 eggs was laid by female B, which was totally unexpected. I had been busy at this time and had not noticed that she was gravid until two days before she laid the eggs. This occurred on 7/8/86, eight days after the pre egg-laying slough.

The eggs were placed in ice cream containers containing moist vermiculite (1:1 water and vermiculite by weight) and incubated in a styrofoam box, heated by a thermostatically controlled heating cable in the base. Temperatures fluctuated between 25 and 30 degrees C.

Hatching was as follows:

Clutch 1 (12 eggs) 29/7 - 1/8/86
Clutch 2 (14 eggs) 9 - 16/8/86
Clutch 3 (8 eggs) 20 - 25/10/86

All of the eggs hatched successfully producing 35 hatchlings. One egg from clutch two contained two snakes.

All of the young from clutches one and two fed voluntarily on pink mice although some required teasing or to have the food item left with them overmight. Sadly, the twins did not survive, the first dying on the day after hatching and the second two weeks later, having fed twice. Clutch three proved to be a challenge, with only one of the hatchlings feeding voluntarily. After a month of trying to tempt the remainder to take their food, force feeding was commenced. Mouse tails lubricated with egg yolk were used to start with, progressing to pink mice. I had started too late for most of the hatchlings and five died within a week of starting force feeding. The other two snakes progressed to assist feeding and finally to voluntary feeding. The cause of the deaths, I believe, was my inexperience. I did not notice that these hatchlings were smaller than the previous ones. This meant that the reserves absorbed from the egg were quickly depleted and force feeding came too late to save them.

I am hoping to breed these snakes again this year and trust that the lessons I have learnt from my first attempt will prevent any unnecessary losses.

References.

Coote, J. (1985) Breeding colubrid snakes, mainly Lampropeltis. Reptiles, breeding, behaviour and veterinary aspects. British Herpetological Society, London.

Osborne, S. (1985) The captive breeding of colubrid snakes. Litteratura Serpentium Vol. 5 No.2. Journal of the Dutch Snake Society.

JSK COMPETITION RESULTS, Issue 6

1	Corn	6	Olive
2	Blood	7	Fish
3	Egg	8	Puff
4	Chicken	9	Mango
5	Milk	10	Water

WINNER: R. Baltrock, Essex.

****

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!

****

A history of the Reptile House at London Zoo

by David Durham

No other zoo lays greater claim to establishing the fundamentals of reptile care than London Zoo. It has performed a vital role in defining the factors necessary to the successful husbandry of reptiles.

In 1849, the redundant carnivora house at Regents Park was converted into the world's first reptile house. This was a very successful pioneering attempt to display a representative collection of the world's reptiles. (Since its very early days, London Zoo had exhibited assorted reptile species, but no proper attempt had been made to understand their captive needs.)

Glass fronted wooden cases in various sizes were used to house an assortment of snakes and lizards. The whole of the interior was illuminated by natural daylight flooding through the building's glass roof. Each case had a perforated zinc top in order to facilitate ventilation. Access to the cage interiors was by way of raising the glass fronts to the smaller ones, and by the incorporation of sliding glass doors in the rear of the larger ones. In cases which housed venomous snakes, access to the interior was accomplished by lids on the top which were hinged. Furnishing of the cage interiors relied upon the use of branches and rockwork.

The cages were raised above the floor in order that they could be heated by the circulation of hot water through iron pipes situated beneath the cage bases. No supplementary forms of heating were available at that time; as a result, the temperature inside the house was not only dependent on the performance of the furnace but, to a large extent, on external fluctuations in weather and temperature. On clear days, sunlight coming through the glass roof would cause the temperature within the house to rise whilst on overcast days lower temperatures resulted.

A contemporary account of the reptile house appeared in the Observer (June 10th 1849): "Taken as a whole, this exhibition must prove most interesting to the lovers of zoology, and will no doubt be highly attractive as the only attempt which has yet been made of showing to the public this remarkable class of the great Creator's productions in anything like a natural state."

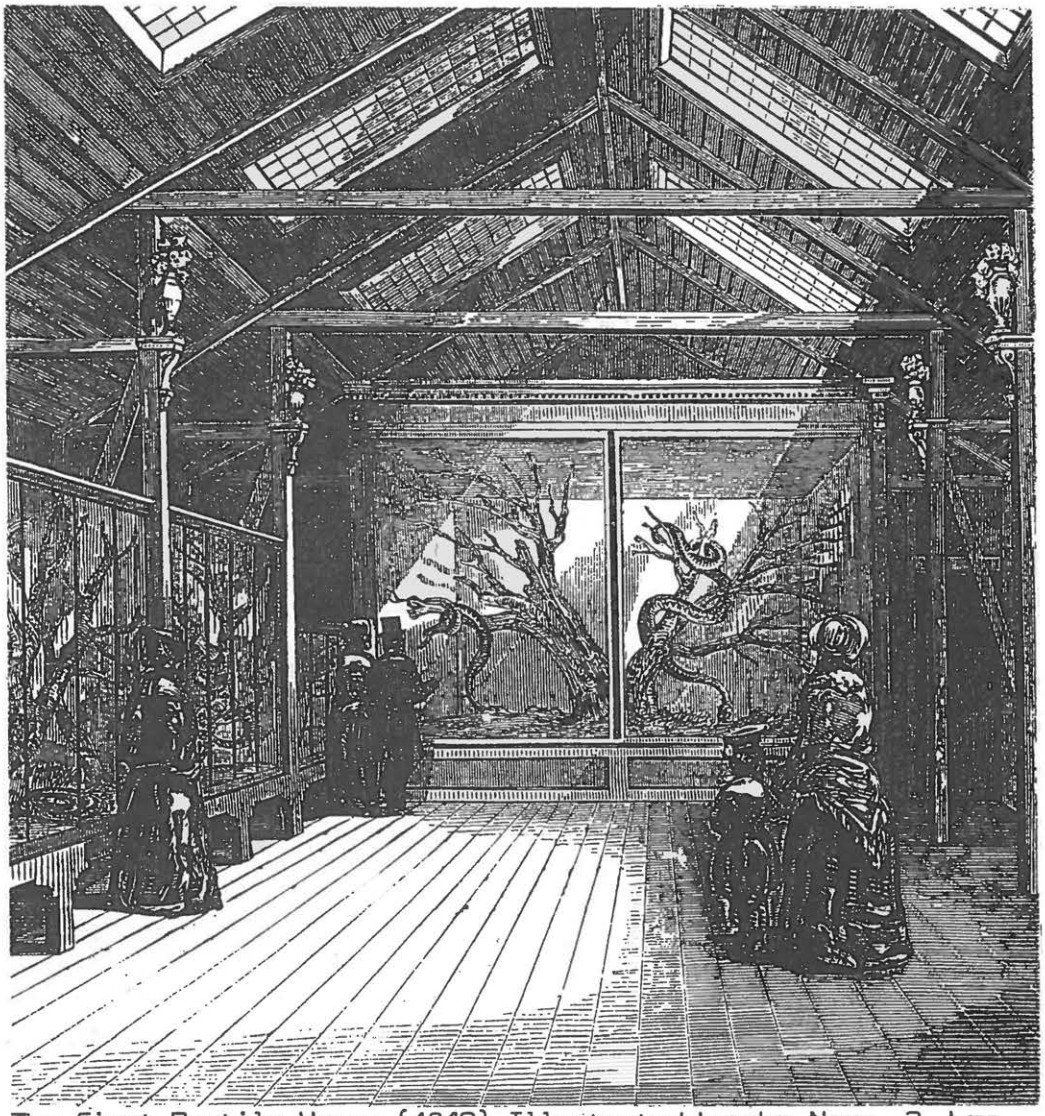
The reptile house concept did indeed prove a great public attraction and was successful for thirty four years. Reptiles had proved very popular with the Victorian public and more specimens were added to the collection, requiring the construcion of an extension to the house in 1850. Two years after this, a second house was built to house the pythons and other large snakes.

As time progressed, however, it became apparent that the captive conditions provided for the venomous snakes were, to say the least, unsafe. Wild mice, which were placed live in many of the snake cages as food, were disposed to gnawing their way out if they remained uneaten. The holes through which the rodents made their escapes also served as convenient escape routes for the exhibited snakes. Indeed, harmless snakes which had escaped in this way were discovered years after the disuse of the old reptile house in a room underneath; they had apparently subsisted on the profusion of vermin there. The reptile house was used until 1883, when it was replaced by a new building. In some respects this was similar to its predecessor: the roof had skylights on the south-facing side to admit daylight (still the only source of light) and heat was supplied to the cages by the circulation of hot water in iron pipes beneath the raised floors.

The central display area of the building was used to house various crocodilians in enclosures containing large pools. Other reptile species were housed in plate-glass fronted cages which had service passages at the rear. Although there was more space and the cages could be serviced quite easily, this house still displayed serious design faults. Temperature control was impossible: during cold weather when more heat was needed the furnaces had to be stoked up and in summer they were simply left unlit. The cages also tended to be poorly lit, especially in winter, as a result of which the successful care of

those species requiring access to sunlight was not possible. In addition, the space beneath the cages became the breeding ground of such vermin as mice, rats and cockroaches.

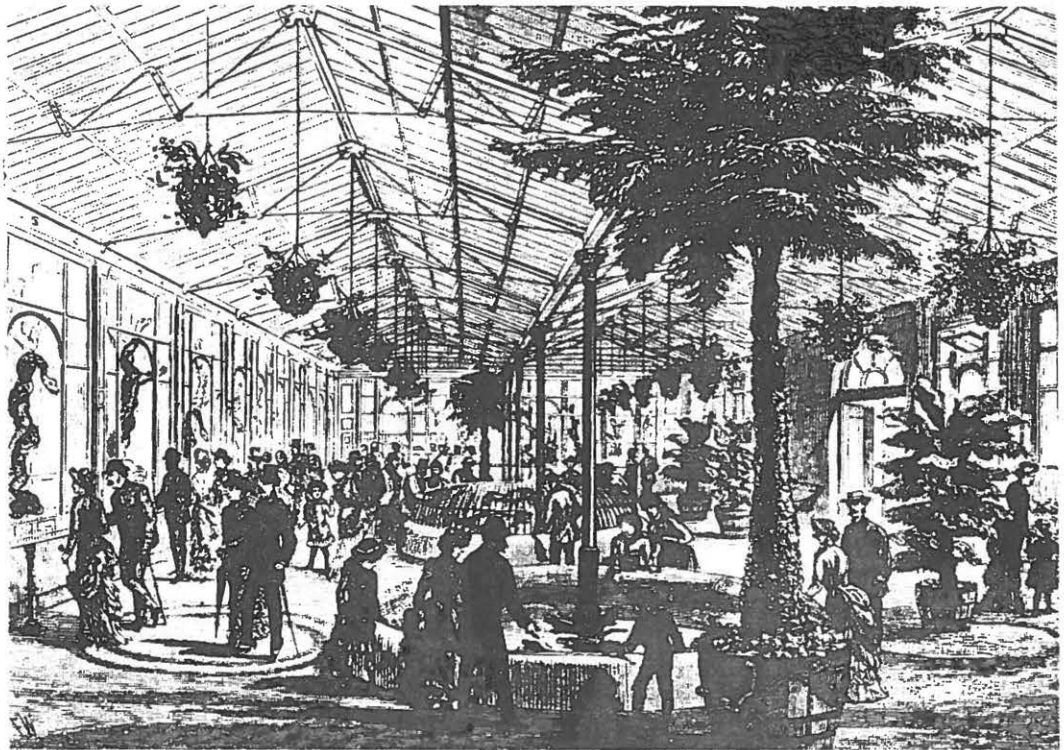
A brick-based tortoise house was opened in 1897. This had a glass roof and side windows to allow sunlight in. Heat was supplied by hot water pipes which were run from the reptile house. The temperature in the tortoise house, however, never managed to rise to that within the reptile house. In an attempt to create higher temperatures in both houses, a new furnace and boiler were introduced along with more pipes, which were boxed in beneath the cage floors in an effort to insulate against heat loss into the house.



The first Reptile House (1849) Illustrated London News, 2 June 1849

Several of the cases also had glass roof panels situated above them in order to allow more light to penetrate.

One name which stands out above all others in the pioneering work at the reptile house is that of Miss Joan Beauchamp Procter who, in 1923, became Curator of Reptiles. It was she who introduced the use of electricity to the house, with the use of electric lamps for basking and the new ultra-violet lamps which allowed the house successfully to keep tropical species

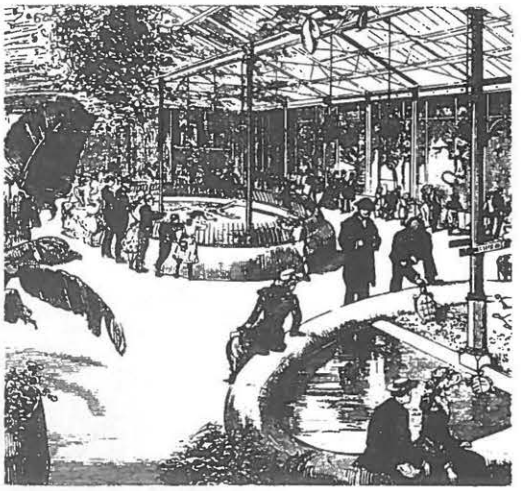


The second Reptile House (1883) Illustrated London News, 8 Sept. 1883

during the winter months.

This remarkable lady was an excellent herpetologist and her research work did much to establish the Reptile House's fine scientific reputation. She was very largely responsible for the planning and design of the present Reptile House which was completed in 1927. (The consultant architect was E.G. Dawber.) At the time, this new house was extremely innovative and was certainly the most advanced building of its kind anywhere in the world.

Heaters and lamps were specially developed and manufactured by GEC. These included thermostatically controlled heaters which were installed under the floors at the front of the cages. Heating of the air within the cages was accomplished by the use of glowing elements in reflectors; these were used in conjunction with high wattage electric lamps which provided strong illumination. All the electric fittings were screened behind wire to prevent injury to any specimens coming into contact with them. In addition to the air and floor heaters, the large boid cases and the crocodilian enclosures also



The second Reptile House 1883

Illustrated London News

incorporated pool heaters.

Where possible, natural daylight was allowed into the cages by skylights. The glass used (known as Vita-Glass) allowed as much of the ultra-violet spectrum of daylight to penetrate as possible. (Normal glass tends to screen out UV light.)

Ventilation of the cages was facilitated by pumping fresh air into the service areas at the rear of the cages. A roof mounted extractor fan removed warm air through the cage tops.

The demise of an Indian Python

by A.C. Thresh

The local pet shop provided me with my favourite snake to date, an Indian Python. It was about a year old, with one previous owner and, apart from some slight burns caused by light bulbs, looked a very healthy snake.

The Python fed well and grew in one year from about 5ft to 9ft and the weight increased from 4.5 lbs to 24 lbs.

In June of this year, I noticed that the Python was flinching as it moved around the glass-fronted vivarium. I examined the underside of the snake and noticed that the scales were red, puffy and oozing pus in some places.

The condition got worse and I took the Python to a veterinary surgeon for treatment which consisted of antibiotic injections and daily salt baths. During this time, I read other journals and discovered that Gentian Violet (a purple dye derived from aniline and used as an antiseptic) applied to the scales, after cleaning with dilute hydrogen peroxide solution, would get rid of the dead and rotten scales to avoid reinfection of the new scales and any other areas.

Also during this time the snake lost its appetite and did not go into slough at the expected time. The vet examined a sample of the snake's excrement and found that the Python was suffering from tapeworm. The vet kept the snake for a day and introduced the necessary fluid to flush out the tapeworm.

As I thought that this was the underlying problem, I expected the Python to pick up and return to health, especially as the scale rot had started to improve. Unfortunately this wasn't the case.

Towards the end of June, the snake became very bloated in the abdominal area and kept fairly still. One evening, however, the Python seemed to be abnormally active, moving rapidly in circles, up and down the walls, not really getting anywhere. I

decided to move it to a separate cage to avoid upsetting the other snakes in the vivarium.

Once in the other cage, the Python seemed to lose all its strength and lay quiet, still very bloated around the abdomen. By morning it had died.

The vet carried out a post-mortem examination at the end of June. His report included the following:

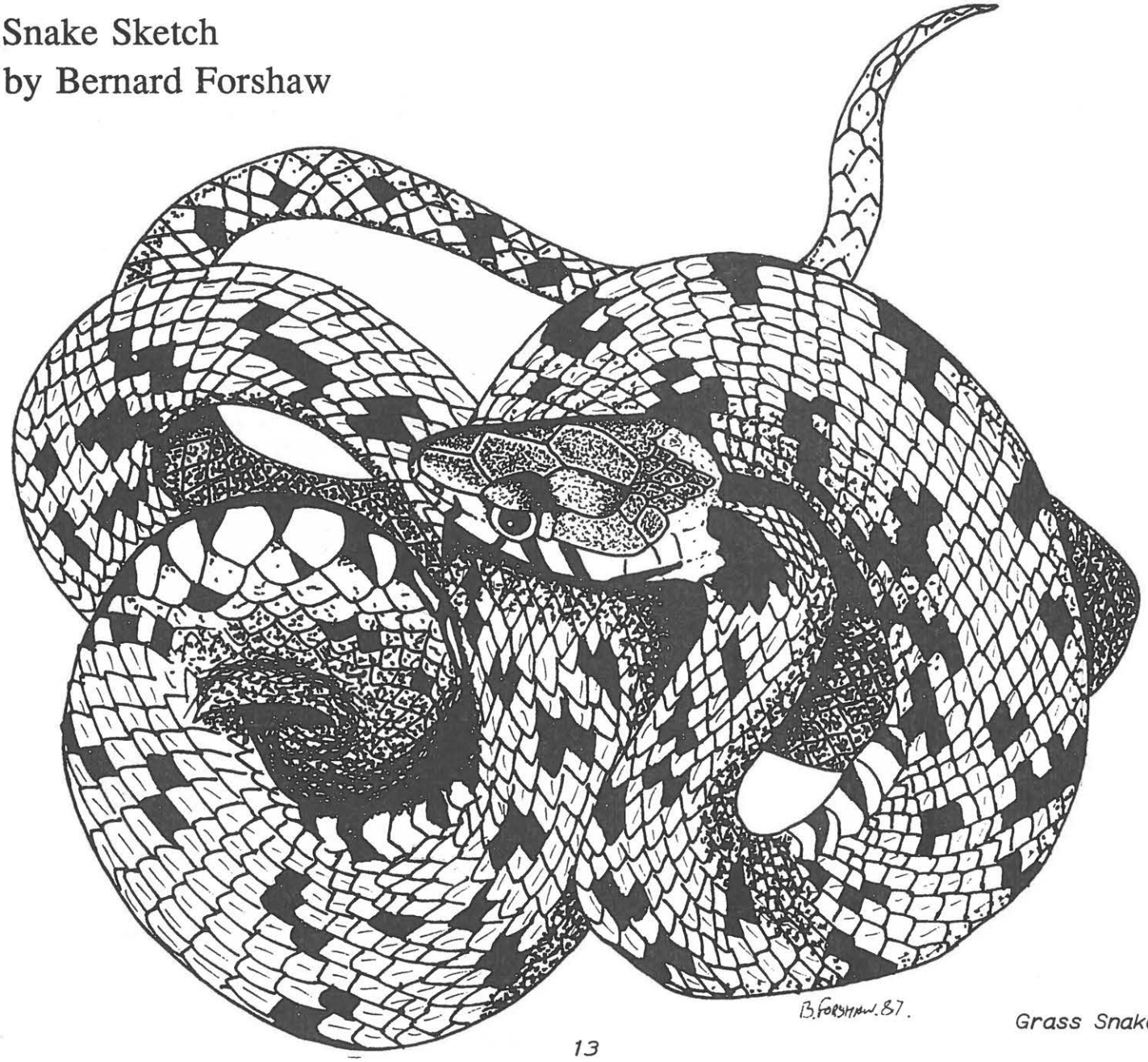
"There was extensive sloughing of the scales on its abdomen and congestion of the lungs. Heart and liver were normal but the gall bladder was enlarged. There was undigested food in the duodenum and evidence of bleeding in the pelvic area. No sign of parasites."

The suggestion was that, while climbing the higher branches of the vivarium, the back end of the Python had slipped and fallen onto something hard, such as the water bowl. This caused an internal injury which weakened the snake and made it susceptible to scale rot. A bowel disorder was the cause of death.

It doesn't appear that I could have prevented this sequence of events but I hope that this article will be helpful to other Python owners. I would be grateful if anyone else who has experienced problems of this nature would contact me to let me know how they dealt with it.

A.C. Thresh
19 Raeburn Road
Ipswich
Suffolk

Snake Sketch
by Bernard Forshaw



Grass Snake

PART ONE

The Mythological Snake

by Cassandra Oakes

Snakes or serpents have held a prominent position in many ancient religions and in some cases have reached cult status. The snake is often encountered as a symbol for a god, as a representation of a god, or as an object of evil, as in the Occult. It is seen as a mysterious and powerful creature in both ancient and modern times. This could largely account for the continuing fear of snakes.

In some of the myths and legends the snake was referred to as a serpent or, in rarer cases, a dragon or worm. The words "dragon" and "serpent" are interchangeable, especially in Biblical references to Satan, the serpent and the dragon (Revelations 12-14). The word "dragon" is derived from a Greek word meaning 'sharp-sighted one'; the Latin version of the word is "draco" which means 'giant snake'. The Old German word for dragon, "lindwurm", meant 'snake-worm' or 'snake-snake' and the Anglo-Saxon word "wurm" means 'dragon', 'serpent' or 'worm'. Some of the English North Country legends talk of worms and serpents; in these cases 'worm' can be interpreted as snake or dragon. The first recorded use of 'worm' (wyrm) (ref: Oxford English Dictionary) was in the late 8th Century poem Beowulf, and 'snake' (snacan) first appeared in the Anglo-Saxon Gospels - Luke X, 19. In the ancient Palestinian cuneiform writings the symbol for "dragon" is said to mean 'red serpent'.

There is an obvious connection between dragons, snakes and lizards. Konrad Gesner, a zoologist, and Edward Topsell, wrote a book called Historie of Serpents (1608) in which Gesner puts the legend of the dragon down to the ability and size of snakes being exaggerated. He argues that the people needed to tell a "fishermans tale" to account for a relatively small animal being so lethal, and more than one snake contributed to the legend. The dragon's "fiery breath" was probably the poison from a Spitting Cobra, and its size from a large python such as the Reticulated Python. Pliny's description of an Indian 'dragon' was actually a python.

The legends show two aspects of the snake - as a symbol of life (good) and of death (evil). The following are some of the more important snake myths and legends.

Ancient Egypt had several snake legends.

APEP was a large snake that lived in the depths of the Nile and was the eternal enemy of Ra, the sun god who journeyed round the earth in his boat, the Sun. Apep succeeded in swallowing the sun-boat during total eclipses but was always vanquished by Ra's defenders.

Around Ra's crown was coiled the URAEUS serpent - the terrible sacred asp or cobra. During the Amarna "heresy" which worshipped the Aton - the globe of the sun, the source of life - an uraeus was a symbol of royalty, worn on the front of the crown, or shown on the front of the coiffure in drawings of royal women. Sometimes this was a double uraeus bearing a disc of the sun. The famous bust of Nefertiti has, in the course of time lost most of the uraeus symbol which originally decorated the crown/head-dress.

Tutankhamun, who restored the supremacy of the God Amun, was "embraced" during his coronation by the snake-goddess, daughter of Amun, personified as a cobra, to show that he was the rightful heir. The many images of the young king show him wearing the symbols of the Two Kingdoms of Egypt - the serpent goddess, WADJET or BUTO, of the North (or Lower Egypt), which contained the Nile Delta, and Nekhabet, the vulture goddess of the South (or Upper Egypt).

These symbols were often on the Pharaoh's crown, to protect him from his enemies. BUTO is usually represented as a cobra, sometimes winged or crowned or with female features. Sometimes the two goddesses become one and the serpent's body has a vulture head-dress when they become known as Nebti - the two mistresses.

MERTSEEGER, the peak of the funerary mountain at the capital city of Thebes, was personified as a human-headed or three-headed snake-goddess. The snake as fertility symbol is RENENET, the goddess

of babies' suckling, who is represented as a snake-headed woman. Pharmuti, the eighth month in the Egyptian calendar, is the Month of Renenet. The most famous legend of an Egyptian snake is Cleopatra's Asp, which is now believed to be an Egyptian Cobra (Poisonous Snakes - T. Phelps).

Babylon, Assyria and Persia - modern Iraq and Iran - also had a number of snake myths. Apsir, the primordial ocean, and Taimat, the tumultous sea, mingled and gave birth to LAKHMU and LAKHAMU, two giant snakes that gave birth to Anshar and Kishar - the celestial and terrestrial worlds.

There is a legend that tells of an eagle and a serpent that lived together on a mountain. The eagle ate the serpent's babies, so the serpent complained to Shamash, the god of justice, who told the serpent to hide in a dead buffalo and attack the eagle when it came to feed. He did this and cut off the eagle's wings and claws and threw it in a ditch to die, as instructed by Shamash. Etana, the king of men, wanted an heir. Shamash told him to ask the dying eagle for the herb that would give him an heir. Etana gave the eagle food to make his wings grow again and then flew to Anu in the sky to look for the herb. Etana got vertigo which caused him and the eagle to crash to their deaths. The serpent was avenged.

Gilgamesh, a courageous prince wanted to be immortal. After many adventures in his search for immortality, he was finally told about a prickly plant found on the ocean floor that, when eaten, brings back youth. After finding the plant, Gilgamesh stopped to wash in a fountain and a snake, attracted by the odour, stole the plant and ate it, becoming immortal. Gilgamesh's adventures had been in vain. "I have brought no blessing on myself. I have brought blessing on all serpents of the earth."

Azidhaka, a mythical king of Babylon, was represented as a serpent with three heads, six eyes and three pairs of fangs. An incarnation of Azidhaka was Zohak, a demon and constant enemy of Persia. The spirit of evil, Ahriman, worked as a chef in Zohak's castle and taught Zohak, whose people were vegetarians, to eat meat. Ahriman kissed Zohak on each shoulder and from each spot sprang a black snake. The snakes were cut away but grew again and all spells against them failed. Disguised as a doctor, Ahriman prescribed that the snakes be fed with human brains each day. Because of this, Zohak was changed into a bad demon. He and evil reigned for one thousand years, after which he was chained under Mount Demavand by the spirit of good.

In Ancient Greece there are a variety of serpent/dragon legends, some of which have the snake as a force for good, some having the creature as evil, in which case its appearance is more fearsome or dragonlike. The god Apollo's first battle was with PYTHON, a female dragon that lived in a lair on Mount Parnassus. He killed Python with an arrow and then built the Temple of Apollo over the lair. Apollo told Python to rot where it lay and the spot became known as Pytho ("to rot"), later changed to Delphi. The temple, which had a famous oracle, was served by priestesses called the Pythia. No important decision was taken without oracular advice from the Pythia. (The priestesses are referrred to as Pythonesses in the Occult.)

ASCLEPIUS, (Aesculapius) the god of healing, was rescued from a pyre by his father, Apollo, who asked Chiron, a centaur, to bring the boy up and teach him about medicine. A serpent told Asclepius about a plant which could give life to the dead. This led to him being accused of interfering with nature and Zeus struck him dead with a thunderbolt. Asclepius was represented as a serpent or as a middle-aged man with a kind face, hence the statues on some hospitals of a man with a snake, the Aesculapian snake. Asclepius had a daughter called Hygieia. Snakes were always kept in the temples of Asclepius, particularly the Temple at Cos.

The LERNAEAN HYDRA was an enormous serpent with nine heads that lived in a marsh near Lerna. The Hydra ruined herds and crops and its breath was so poisonous that whoever felt it, died. Hercules and Iolaus found the monster and forced it out of its den with flaming arrows. Every time Hercules struck off a head, two more grew back. Iolaus set the forest alight and burned off the Hydra's heads with red-hot brands. Hercules cut off the last head and buried it; he then soaked his arrows in the blood which made them deadly poisonous.

Perseus discovered the three GORGONS - Streno, Euryale and Medusa. They had bronze hands, gold wings, wild boar tusks

instead of teeth, snakes instead of hair and the ability to turn anyone who looked directly at them to stone. MEDUSA was the only mortal sister of the three so Perseus killed her by using his polished bronze shield as a mirror and decapitating her. The winged horse Pegasus sprang from her bleeding neck and Perseus used him as his steed. He wrapped up Medusa's head and took it with him, first using it to petrify Polydectes who was harassing his mother, before giving it to the goddess Athene.

European legends, although not as exotic as others may be, are still interesting. Below the Externsteine rock carving in Germany, made by the Cistercian monks in AD 1120, lies the carving of the WORLD SERPENT. It is thought to symbolise the energies of the earth that are said to run through the site.

In Southern France, near La Serpent village, can be found the PEYROLLES SERPENT which can only be identified from the air or on a very good map. Its spine is a red rock face, its head is at Peyrolles and the tail ends near Serres. It is 2,340 feet long and is in the act of swallowing an egg. 'Le Serpent Rouge' supposedly lists the clues to the whereabouts of the Temple of Isis at Rennes and is made up of 13 verses, each corresponding to a house of the Zodiac. The extra sign is an ancient constellation called OPHIUCHUS - Keeper of the Serpent, or Serpentarius, which was originally called Aesculapius, and is found between Scorpio and Sagittarius, its line going across the Zodiac circle to Gemini and Taurus. The Red Serpent in the verses is believed to be the Peyrolles Serpent and the Temple at Rennes-le-Chateau covers an area of 40 square miles (ref: Genisis, David Wood).

The Celts had various snake gods, one of which is CERNUNNOS, a fertility god. He is represented as a man's torso with a bull's head; his legs are serpents with fish-tails. He also appears as a man holding a ram-headed serpent.

An old North Country legend tells of the LAMBTON WORM. The heir of Lambton was fishing in the river instead of being at church and caught a serpent-like creature which he flung in disgust into a well, where it grew. It escaped and grew so much that it could coil itself three times round the base of the hill and terrorised the countryside. The Lord of Lambton was advised to fill a trough with milk to try to satisfy the creature. If anyone tried to steal any milk, it would go into a rage and ravage the countryside again. Many knights tried to kill the serpent. Eventually the Lord's son went to a witch for advice on how to kill it. He was told to fight the serpent, which was able to heal itself as soon as it was cut, in water and to have very sharp blades attached to his armour. He must slay the first person he saw after killing it, otherwise nine generations of Lambton Lords would die a horrible death. The son lured the worm into the river, where it tried to wrap itself round him but the blades on his armour cut it up and the current took the pieces away. However, the Lambton family was cursed because the first person to congratulate him was his father whom the son could not bring himself to kill.

Part 2
of The Mythological Snake next month

Oz dear, what can the matter be?

by David Robinson and Katrina Hill

We obtained our two Indian Pythons, Erika and Oz, at the grand old age of one month. We never had any problems with them (apart from receiving the odd nip or two), so it came as quite a shock when, at nine months old, Oz seemingly started a hunger strike.

During one feeding session in the middle of February, Oz took the same mouse twice, but lost interest after moving around it for five or ten minutes. We didn't leave it with him as we always feed by hand rather than just dumping the food in the vivarium, and our snakes have always eaten their food right away.

At the next feeding session, Oz refused his mouse altogether, to the point of seeming to be repelled by it. After two more refusals, we decided to ring his breeder, who informed us that Oz was behaving quite normally for this time of year, it being his breeding season. He explained that Oz was deliberately giving

up food in order for Erika to be able to build up her energy resources before her theoretical pregnancy.

The problem really arose from us keeping the male and female together. His instincts probably wouldn't have been so strong if he'd been on his own. Of course, we knew that they would have to be seperated before Oz reached sexual maturity, as that would have been far sooner than Erika could safely be allowed to mate. What we didn't know was that there would be complications so early on.

We set about remedying this problem right away, and re-housed the pythons (each with a boa of the same sex).

The breeder's instructions were to ensure that Oz was drinking plenty of water, and to weigh him regularly to make sure he didn't lose too much weight, as well as to try him with a mouse at each feeding time. Oz did drink lots of water and he maintained his weight, but he still refused all food.

We started thinking about trying him with a live mouse but, since the nearest supplier is situated quite a few miles away and charges £1 per mouse, we never got round to it. Nevertheless, the thought was always there that maybe after such a long fast, he no longer recognised dead mice as food. This theory was strengthened by the fact that the young pythons had only been on dead food for about two months before the hunger strike. On the other hand, it was so easy to get them onto dead food; one session we fed them live mice, the next session we gave them dead mice, and that was that - no problems! So we just shrugged off the recognition theory.

When Oz had not eaten for a total of two months, we rang his breeder again. This time the instructions were different. We were to put some Abidec multi-vitamins on the rear end of a mouse (a regular practice anyway) and insert a Cytacon B12 tablet into the mouse's mouth. We then had to open Oz's mouth, and insert the mouse as far as his throat. The theory was that he should then take the mouse on his own, and the B12 would enrich his blood and give him back a healthy appetite. In practice, Oz just repeatedly spat out the mouse.

The breeder had mentioned that, should this fail, the next step was force-feeding. We did not look forward to this, so we decided to contact the local vet and ask him if it was possible to administer Vitamin B12 by injection. It was, and he did just that. Although at first the idea of holding Oz while someone stuck a needle in him did not appeal to us, he behaved perfectly.

We were informed that the injection would take about ten days to work. We tried Oz with food during this period, but with no luck.

Eventually, we happened to be shopping in the town that harbours the live mouse supplier, so we thought that we might as well try Oz with a live mouse as there was little else we could try.

Well, imagine our delight after this long ordeal when Oz took the mouse without a moment's hesitation. It was all over, Oz was fit and well again... until the next feeding time. Oz refused his next mouse, again seemingly repelled by it. The next time we tried Oz with a live mouse we had a dead mouse thawed out ready. Again Oz took the live mouse without hesitation, and then took the dead mouse in the same fashion. To date, he will not take a dead mouse without his live 'starter'. We find this difficult to understand after the ease of switchover to dead food in the first place.

Which brings us to the question - was Oz ever involved in complicated sexual problems, or does he just prefer to prepare his own food?

ADVERTISING RATES

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
10p per word. (Minimum 10 words.)

DISPLAY ADVERTISING
1/8 page £10 per insertion
1/4 page £15 per insertion
1/2 page £25 per insertion
1 page £40 per insertion

COPY DEADLINE
Classified advertising must be received by the 20th of the month.
Display advertising must be received by the 10th of the month

PAYMENT
Classified - Payment with copy.
Display - Invoiced. Payment within 30 days

PART ONE

Conservation of Grass Snakes

by Paul E. Hopwood

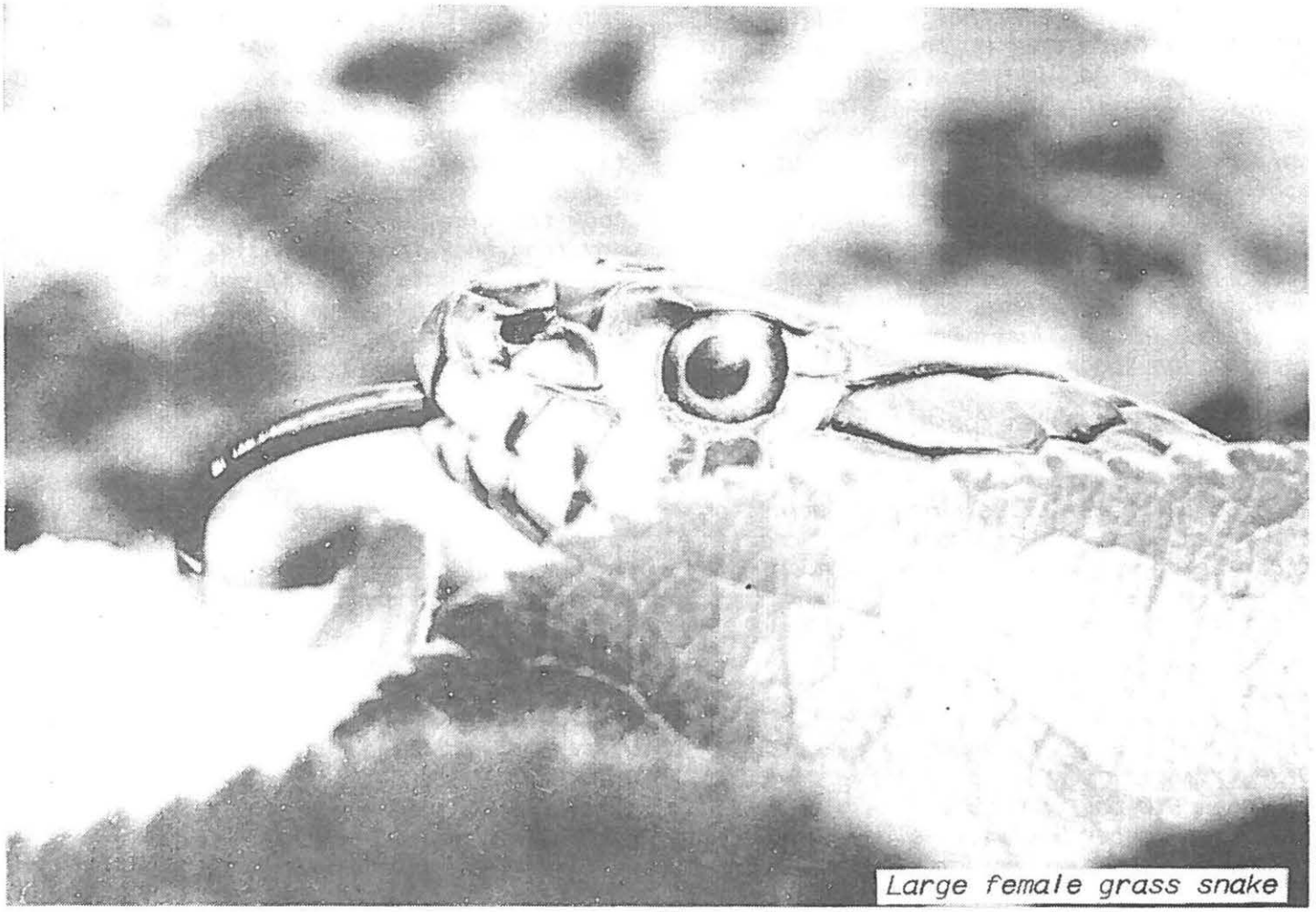
It was a grass snake which first sparked off my interest in keeping reptiles. The first one I kept as a pet I caught in some artificial brick ponds frequented by newts. I used a fishing net to catch him, took him home, and he was duly christened Isaac Newton.

Isaac was always a very healthy, hissy snake and got me interested in snakes in general and water snakes in particular. For a couple of years, I kept native grass snakes, European subspecies, viperine snakes, dice snakes, North American water snakes, garter snakes and ribbon snakes. These allowed very interesting dietary comparisons to be made.

The more highly specialised water snakes and dice snakes would eat fish in preference to anything else. For these, I used trout fry from a local fish farm where I now work. When fed in the bath, both species would swim completely submerged, actively hunting the fish. Usually, they were not very successful in this as the trout could easily out-swim them, but occasionally, in an excited frenzy, a snake would sweep sideways and catch one. In the wild, they would probably have had more success with species such as bullheads or loaches, which are either slow swimmers or are easy to locate and corner under stones etc. In captivity, these species remained unmoved when presented with mice, but would eat frogs with a certain lack of enthusiasm. Toads were rarely eaten, and were usually treated with disdain. On one occasion, a small (10") yellow eel was offered but, while alive, was too powerful for any of the snakes.

Viperine snakes showed very similar tastes to common garter snakes (sirtalis) and ribbon snakes (proximus), which are not related to the Natrix/Nerodia snakes. Viperines would eat fish in preference to earthworms, but would never refuse a worm.

continued on p. 20



Large female grass snake

JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER

Sloughing by Lee Bowler

Snakes periodically slough the outer layer of their skin. The scientific name for this is ecdysis. The snake will slough throughout its life, unlike some insects which slough or moult only a set number of times. Depending on the individual snake, sloughing occurs on average once every two months. Young snakes slough more often as they grow more rapidly.

Ecdysis is preceded by the secretion of a fluid between the old layer of skin and the new layer underneath. This causes the snake's colour to dull and the eyes to look milky or opaque. In some instances, the snake's temperament can be affected by this impairment of vision, leading to aggressive or nervous behaviour. In most cases the snake will also fast at this time.

After three or four days, the eyes become clear and then, approximately one week later, the skin is sloughed. It usually comes off in one piece, although some pythons and boas lose their skins in patches. The process of sloughing takes up to twenty four hours, and the larger snakes can take even longer.

Immediately prior to sloughing, the snake becomes very active and can be seen rubbing its snout against rough surfaces in its vivarium such as rocks or stiff branches. This rubbing loosens and stretches the skin, which starts to come off at the snout. It gradually peels down the length of the body, turning inside out as it does so. The whole skin will be slightly longer than the snake, and will show clearly its scale pattern, including the eye spectacles. The colouring pigment of a snake is mostly contained below the epidermis, but some traces of the snake's pattern may be seen in the sloughed skin.

After sloughing, the snake looks at its best, with clear and distinct markings and remarkably shiny skin. If the snake has not been feeding before sloughing, it will probably be alert and on the lookout for a potential meal. Some females show an increased interest in the male after sloughing and, if the season is right, breeding may take place around this time.

Problems can occur with sloughing. You can help the snake by spraying it with tepid water or immersing it in a container of lukewarm water. Spraying the vivarium or standing dishes of water in it will help by increasing the humidity of the air.

If, after shedding, the eye spectacles remain in place, they must be removed or the snake may eventually go blind. If you are confident, you can do this very carefully with round-ended tweezers; a vet or a more experienced snake keeper will be able to help if you find this too difficult. Luckily, most snakes slough their skins without any help from their owners; this is to be welcomed as a sign that the snake is healthy and growing well.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

FOR SALE

5' Boas £95, Baby Boas £70, 5' Indian Python £75, Baby Indians £55, Corn Snakes £58, also Rat Snakes, Garter Snakes, Retics, etc. Telephone 0626 64481 Devon.

WANTED

Pair of Corn Snakes for breeding purposes. Telephone Mark on Kenilworth (0926) 50999.

Florida/Eastern Indigo Snake. (Blue Black) Cash waiting. Will collect. Hatchling or mature snake, either sex. T. Nicholson, (0474) 351600.

Wanted mature male Gopher Snake. Telephone Northampton 61188.

EXCHANGE

Real Mink fur stole value £200 and Black and Decker Super Plus Range Router (unused with accessories) value £130. Will swop for Boa, Rock Python, Tame Retic, etc. (Tyne and Wear) Box No. 1, Snake Keeper, 159 Stanley Hill, Amersham, Bucks. HP7 9EY

CONTACT

Cumbria / South of Scotland branch of IHS. Contact sought with anyone interested in forming a branch. Katrina Hill, Flat 3, 10 Foxhouses Road, Whitehaven, Cumbria

Continued from p.18

Garter snakes go wild over earthworms, but eat fish with polite restraint. I have heard that western species of garter snakes' staple diet consists of fish.

Grass snakes always seemed in a class of their own at feeding time. Not only did they show equal enthusiasm for consuming frogs, toads, fish, mice and chicks but also, among their more distasteful meals, red-bellied newts and oriental fire-bellied toads. I have twice caught large wild specimens which have regurgitated fledgling birds. In captivity, all mice eaten have been at least half grown and, so far, these have always been eaten head first; this is probably to keep the mouse's head away from the vulnerable snake during swallowing. I have never seen a grass snake eating pinkies. Animals they would not eat were worms, insects and invertebrates. All the water snakes showed a complete indifference to other reptiles offered to them as food.

Grass snakes are much rarer in Britain now than they were in the past, but it is not too difficult to strengthen your local population. The building of garden ponds for the purpose of breeding frogs can be a positive step, and natural ponds often need a certain amount of maintenance to keep a healthy toad/frog population. I know of one large man-made pond, for instance, where all four of the common British amphibians breed, but where newts and frogs spawn in parts of the pond which dry up half way through the tadpole development. Here it is easy to move the spawn and newt tadpoles to other parts of the main pond which are permanent. With any luck, the frogs which come from this new site will spawn there themselves in two or three years time. This pond and the surrounding woodland are very infrequently visited by anyone and the site is an ideal grass snake habitat, although at present they are uncommon here. The snake population needs 'a shot in the arm' in the form of an enormous compost heap.

Part 2 of Paul's article will appear next month.

Truelite - A necessary expense?

by Chris and Marcia Martin

In our opinion, 'Truelite' is beneficial, but it must be put in the right order of importance. What we mean by this is that it's no good having Truelite installed in your vivarium if you heat the tank with light bulbs. The advantage gained by the Truelite is more than lost by the stress factor from the bulbs.

Why use Truelite? The spectrum of the light that Truelite emits contains a quantity of ultra-violet. This helps the snake to manufacture (we believe) Vitamin D and other trace elements that help to keep the snake healthy.

Warning: Don't use a pure ultra-violet light with snakes. As snakes haven't got eyelids, the UV may damage the eyes.

To sum up, we regard Truelite as the cherry on the top of the cake. Providing the cake isn't rotten, then Truelite is of value.

Chris and Marcia welcome enquiries about any aspect of snake-keeping (except veterinary problems) providing an sae is enclosed. Their address is 18, Ballinode Close, Cheltenham, Glos. GL50 4SQ.
Telephone Cheltenham 573477.

SNAKE KEEPER

1 year postal subscription (12 issues)
£12.00p post free

159 STANLEY HILL, AMERSHAM,
BUCKS, HP7 9EY.

xotic

THE U.K.'S LEADING SUPPLIER OF
REPTILES, ASSOCIATED SUNDRIES
AND LIVE FOODS.
FREE ILLUSTRATED BROCHURE
ON REQUEST.
TEL: 0773 831831 TELEX: 377974 XOTIC G

NEXT ISSUE includes

Hibernating Snakes by Dave Gales