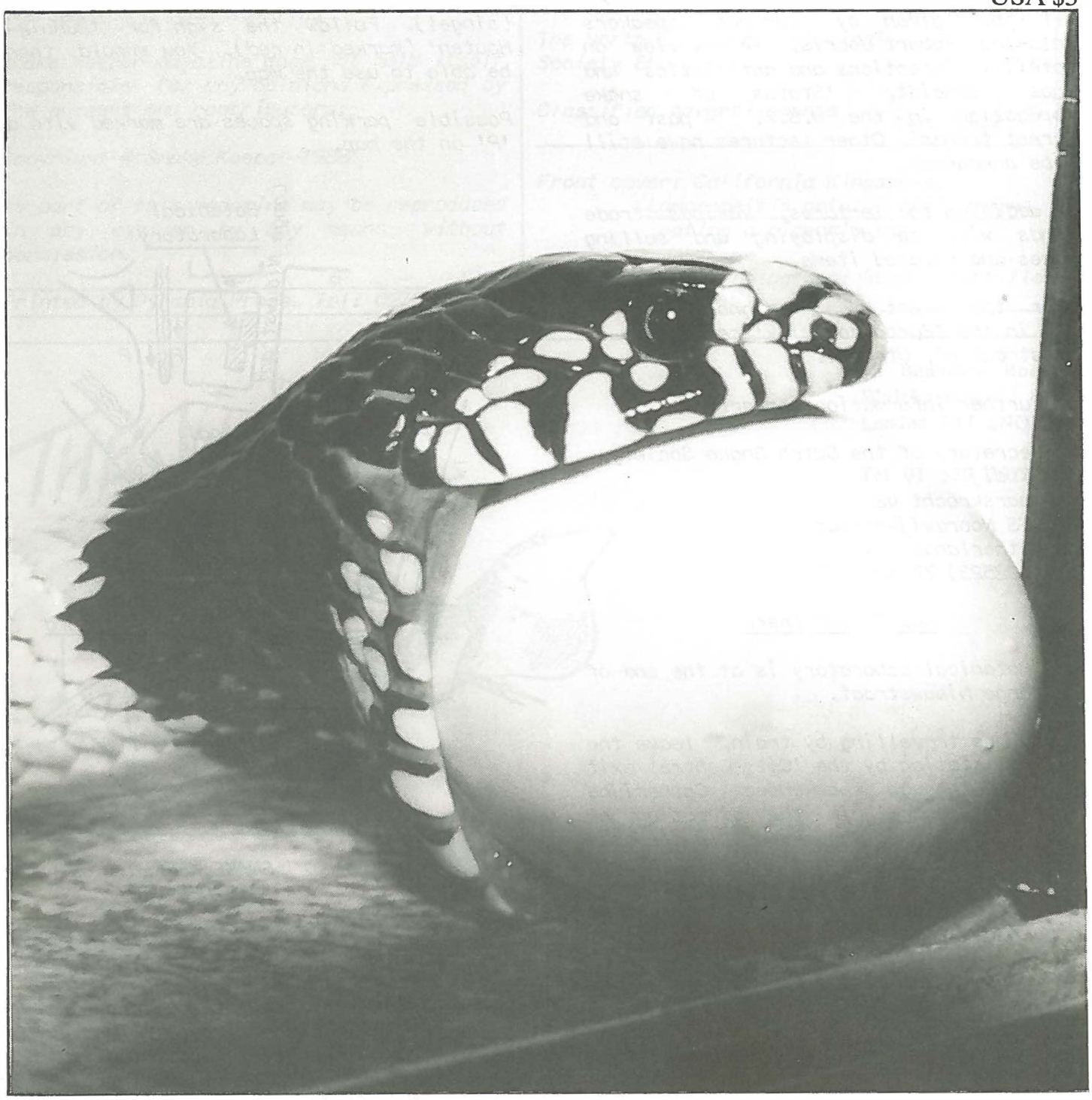
SNAKE KEEPER

Volume 2 Number 10 October 1988 £1.00p

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INFORMATION

Dutch Snake Society
Snake Day

The Dutch Snake Society are holding their annual Snake Day on the 15th October this year. The event will take place at The Botanical Laboratory on the Lange Nieuwstraat 106, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

The event will start at 10am and lectures will be given by various speakers including Robert Jooris, 'A new view on bacterial infections and antibiotics' and Vince Scheidt, 'Status of snake propogation in the U.S.A. - past and current trends'. Other lectures have still to be announced.

In addition to lectures, various trade stands will be displaying and selling snakes and related items.

After the event a joint dinner will be held in the 'Zorba de Griek' restaurant at Voorstraat 61, Utrecht.

For further information contact:

The Secretary of the Dutch Snake Society
Jaap Kooij
Spanjaarskrocht 42
2211 ES Noordwijkerhout
The Netherlands
Tel: (02523) 77253

How To Get There

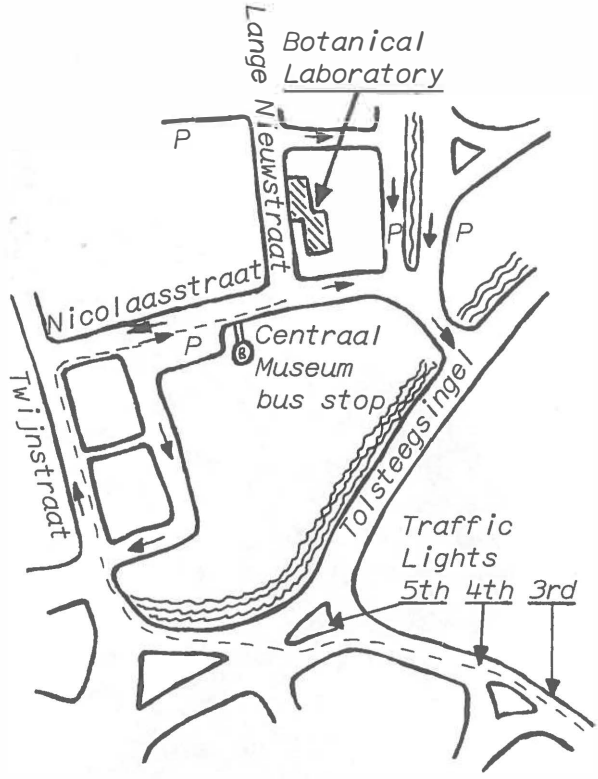
The Botanical Laboratory is at the end of the Lange Nieuwstraat.

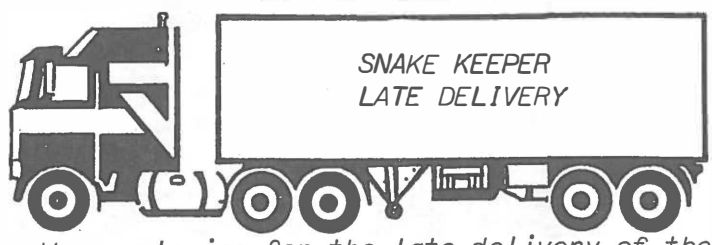
If you are travelling by train, leave the railway station by the 'City Centre' exit and go through the Hoog Catherijne shopping centre (in the direction of Vredenburg), after which you walk towards the Dom Tower (a very old and tall church tower). From the Dom plaza walk south down the Korte Nieuwstraat which becomes the Lange Nieuwstraat.

You can travel by bus from the railway station (City Centre exit) by taking bus 2 and getting out at the 'Centraal Museum' (Central Museum) bus stop. You will then be near the end of the Lange Nieuwstraat.

If travelling by car, come in from the highways and take the 'Utrecht Oost' exit proceeding in the direction of 'Utrecht Centrum'. After five sets of traffic lights you will arrive at a canal (singel). Follow the sign for 'Bunnik-Houten' (marked in red). You should then be able to use the map.

Possible parking spaces are marked with a 'P' on the map.





We apologise for the late delivery of the September and October issues. The delay was caused by the British postal dispute.

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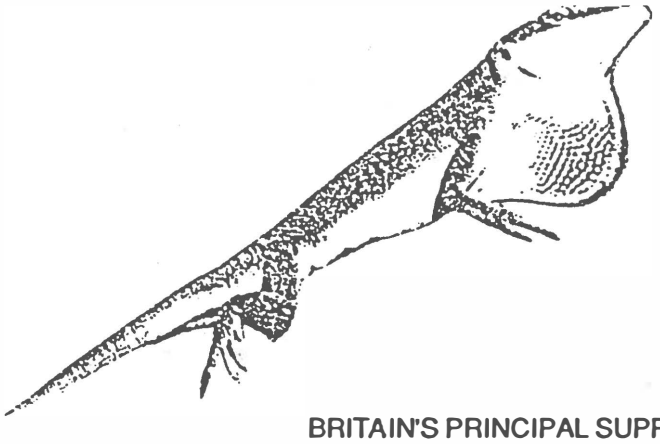
Front cover: California Kingsnake, Lampropeltis getulus californiae, eating a pigeon's egg.

Photograph: Roger Grenville

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Asian Rat Snakes of the *Elaphe* Genus
Part VIII (b) *Elaphe taeniura* (Cope,1861)

by Klaus-Dieter Schulz

This series of articles was originally published (beginning in 1985) in the magazine 'Sauria' and is reproduced here by kind permission of the author.

Translated from the original German by John Hackworth.

They were identical to their parents in colouring and at first were equally shy. After their first slough they all fed voluntarily on pink mice. After a year with good feeding they had reached a length of 70cm. In October and November 1985 I was again able to observe renewed mating activity but copulation did not take place.

Again after hibernation on the 8th of February 1986 at around 6.00pm the same pair mated in the manner described above. At this time the female was in slough. Four eggs were laid on the 24th of April (70 x 25mm) from which, on the 30th of June and the 1st of July, five hatchlings emerged. Twins emerged from one egg and these both proved to be males. As with the previous clutch all the young were perfectly healthy and soon began to feed voluntarily.

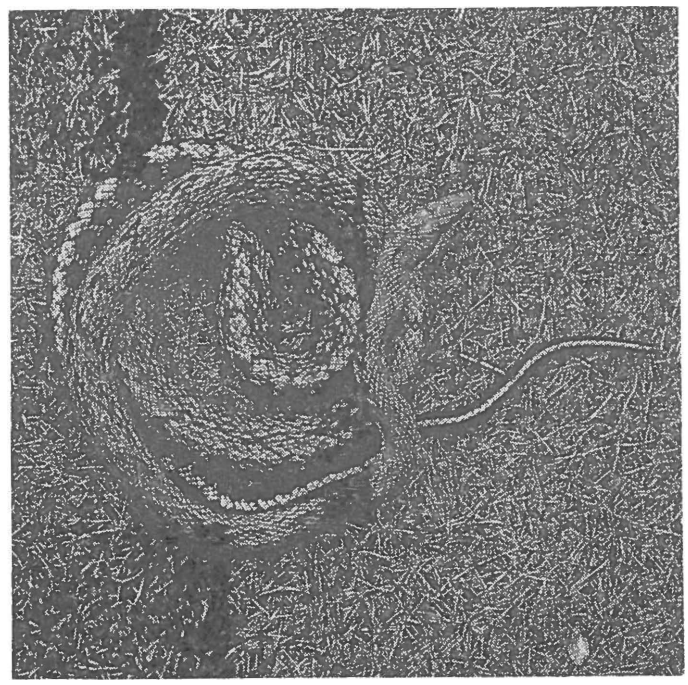
Elaphe taeniura schmackeri (Boettger 1895)

Colouring

Ground colour greenish-brown on the back and sides over the first two-thirds of the body length. In the last third of the body the colour changes to a yellowish-brown. The top of the head and the neck are unicoloured until the start of the markings which resemble those of the nominate form. In the last third of the body the markings change to two longitudinal black stripes. A broad black stripe runs from each eye to the corner of the mouth. The tip of the snout and the upper labial scales are yellowish-brown or yellow. The ventral side is yellowish with two rows of dark spots which at times run near the laterals.

Special characteristics

The head is considerably larger and flatter than in other sub-species; whereas



E. t. schmackeri Photo: M. Mori

the tip of the snout is usually four times the diameter of the eyes, in other species it is three times (Mori 1984).

Variations: Some animals have been found with a reddish-brown ground colour and much stronger markings.

Ventral scales: 250 - 260

Size: At a length of 180 - 200cm, E. taeniura schmackeri is the largest colubrid in Japan.

Distribution: Riyu-Kiyu Islands, Miyako-jima, Isigakijima, Iriomotejima (Japan). Nothing is known about their biotopes and their way of life in the wild.

Maintenance in the vivarium

According to my knowledge this rare sub-species has not been kept or bred in captivity.

Elaphe taeniura grabowskyi (Fischer 1885)

Colouring
The ground colouring in the first two thirds of the body including the top of the head is blue-grey or dark grey. The skin between the scales is irregularly

black and white which gives the impression of a reticular pattern. In the last third of the body the pattern changes into two black and one white longitudinal stripes which is typical of all taeniura sub-species. A dark stripe runs from each of the eyes to the corner of the mouth. The upper labial scales are yellowish. The underside of the head is whitish and the belly is a grey colour.

Ventral scales: 275 - 285
Length: 180 - 200 cm

Distribution

It can be said with some degree of certainty that E. taeniura grabowskyi is only native to Borneo (see Taylor 1956). Since in the past the herpetological data from one work was often taken over for another work, confusion often arose in the descriptions of E. t. grabowskyi and E. t. ridleyi. The reason for this was probably that Borneo or Sarawak (North Borneo) belong to Malaysia and both subspecies were included in the list of Malayan fauna. From this the assumption arose that two forms existed in the same area, a light form (a cave dweller) and a dark form.

Biotope

Manthey (1981) found this snake on Mount Kinabalu (North East Borneo) at the side of a path in the rain forest. Because the data on the biotopes and lifestyle of this Rat Snake have been completely mixed and confused, I am unable to give any further precise details at this point. Like the other subspecies, E. t. grabowskyi probably exists exclusively on a diet of small mammals.

Maintenance in the vivarium

I am not aware of this species having been successfully kept or bred in captivity.

Elaphe taeniura ridleyi (Butler 1899)

Colouring

The ground colouring in the first two-thirds of the body length is greenish-yellow or beige. There is also sometimes a light yellowish stripe along the back. The skin between the scales is alternately light and dark so that a pattern of reticulation appears. In the last third of the body, the colouring changes into two black and one light beige or yellow stripes. The animals from Malaysia can have a throat of a light orange tone. The top of the head is a beautiful grey blue and the tip of the snout either light brown or orange. A black line runs from the eyes to the corner of the mouth. The upper and lower labial scales are whitish. The ventral side is whitish-grey without any markings. The tongue of this subspecies is red. The colouring of the young is usually much more rich in contrasts.

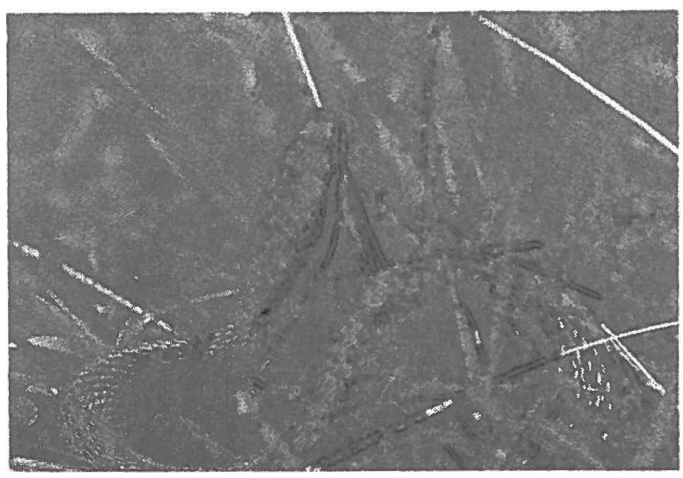
Ventral scales: 280 - 295
Length: Over 200cm; a male from Thailand which the author bought there from a local dealer in 1986 reached a length of 210cm.

Distribution

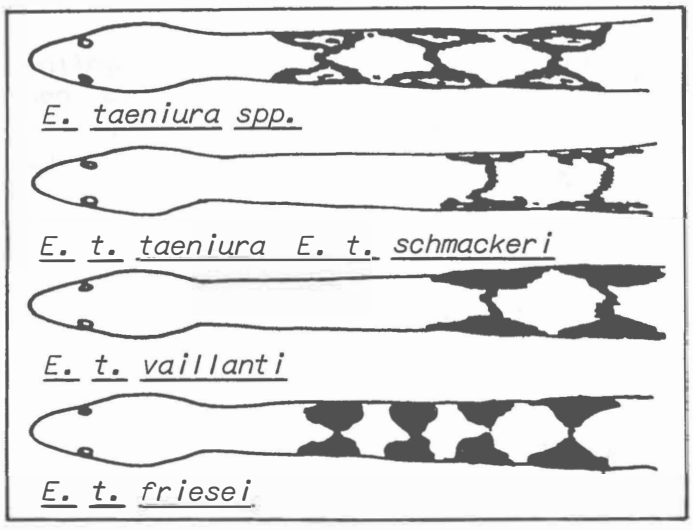
The so-called 'Black-Tailed-Racer' is known from Thailand (Yala Province, (Taylor 1965)), Batu Caves and Kedah Peak (Malayan Mainland) and also probably from many other places in these countries. Smith (1930) names two other habitats: Pajo and Korinchi in Sumatra, but does not give any other details.

Biotope and habits

According to available literature and what I have been told by local snake catchers, E. t. ridleyi is a pure cave dweller. It is supposed to be quite common on Thai and Malayan Hills and can often be seen resting on Malayan hillsides (Wirot verbal report). Because of the low light density in this environment the pigmentation of this snake is only poorly developed (Haile 1958, Wirot - verbal report). The E. t. pallidus described by Rendahl (1937) can most certainly be



E. t. grabowskyi in Borneo
Photo: U. Manthey

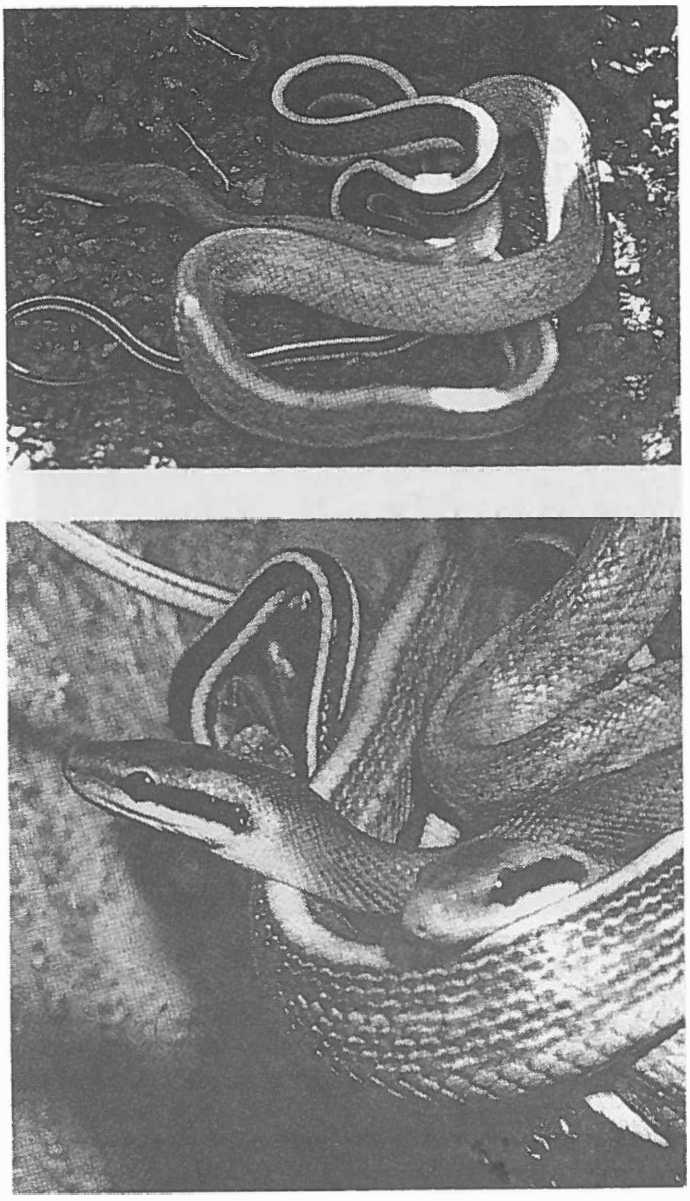


synonomised with E. t. ridleyi.

Maintenance in the vivarium

Like other subspecies of this genus, E. t. ridleyi is an ideal vivarium subject Providing, of course, that it is healthy in the first place. Because it grows very large, a vivarium of appropriate dimensions should be used to house it. The furnishings for the vivarium should be like those described for other subspecies of the genus. Taking their natural habitat into consideration the lighting should not be too intense and at times is not even necessary. Natural light such as comes through a window is often sufficient. As opposed to that, however, a temperature of 25 degrees to 30 degrees C. and a relative humidity of 90-100% appears to be important. Similar values were measured by Grossman, Schaefer, Ulber & Manthey in 1985 and 1986 in a cave in Southern Thailand where this snake lives. Bearing in mind their preference for bats in their natural habitat, in captivity E. t. ridleyi will readily and greedily accept white laboratory mice. Accordingly, small mammals must also be eaten occasionally in the wild. According to Derwanz (verbal report) E. t. ridleyi even ate sparrows. In the vivarium this snake is generally peaceful and amenable. Most of the time my two animals, a male from Thailand and a female from Malaysia, lie under a large flat stone which serves as their hiding place. If they are annoyed they coil up into the typical 'taeniura position', open the mouth and quickly strike.

E. taeniura ridleyi has not yet been bred in the vivarium although imported gravid females have laid eggs which have been successfully incubated (van Riel 1986).



Top E. t. ridleyi from Malaysia
Photo: W. Grossmann
Above Juvenile E. t. ridleyi
Photo: C. van Riel

Elaphe taeniura friesei (Werner 1928)

Colouring

Ground colour yellowish-brown to olive. The top of the head and the neck region (from 1 to 1.5 head lengths) are unicoloured. The markings on the back usually consist of two pairs of black rounded spots which are joined together. On each side of the body there are also black spots. In the last third of the body the markings change to two dark brown to black stripes and one yellowish stripe. The lateral stripes are interrupted by lighter transverse stripes, four scales wide. From each eye a dark stripe extends to the corner of the mouth. The upper labials are yellowish-white. The ventral surface is cream coloured with significant

black chequerboard markings which is a characteristic in differentiating from other sub-species. In addition this subspecies has a much wider head and a longer tail.

Length: E. taeniura friesei is not only the largest of its type but with a length of 250cm or more, is also the largest of the Rat Snakes.
Ventral scales: 240 - 258

Distribution

This subspecies is known only in Taiwan (Formosa). Its habitats there are Taihoku, Shu-Shu, Taichu, Kagi, Tainan, Koshu, Byoritsu (Maki 1931), Taipei, Chiai, Hengchun, Maoli (Moltze-Wang 1956).

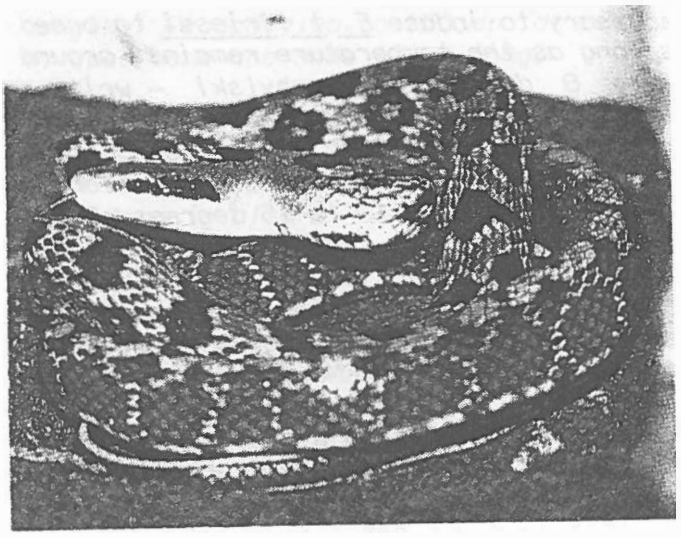
Biotope and habits

E. taeniura lives in the most varying habitats and even on cultivated land (Kunz 1963). He also states that this snake can frequently be found in bushes and trees. Mainly diurnal with a marked preference for rats, this is a very useful snake in its area of distribution. Unfortunately, however, it is frequently on the menu in Taiwanese restaurants! (Schmidt 1980).

Maintenance in the vivarium

The vivarium provided should be appropriate for the size of the snake; e.g. for four specimens a vivarium of 180 x 65 x 110cm (LxBxH) (Przbylski - written report) or 115 x 70 x 90cm (Nagele - written report) will suffice. The substrate can be of any suitable substance. For these snakes I chose a mixture of sand and gravel. The remaining furnishings should consist of several sturdy climbing branches, a solid hiding place and a large water container which helps to ensure high humidity in the vivarium. The hiding place can consist of large flat rocks stacked upon one another. Lighting in my vivarium comes from two 18W (white) fluorescent tubes which are switched on for 12 hours daily. The temperature should never exceed 30 degrees C because the animals will react to this with great discomfort (Nagele 1985). The preferential temperatures are between 22 and 26 degrees C during the day, whilst at night 18 degrees C is sufficient. Occasionally, the snakes should be sprayed with water.

My animals are fed every three weeks with



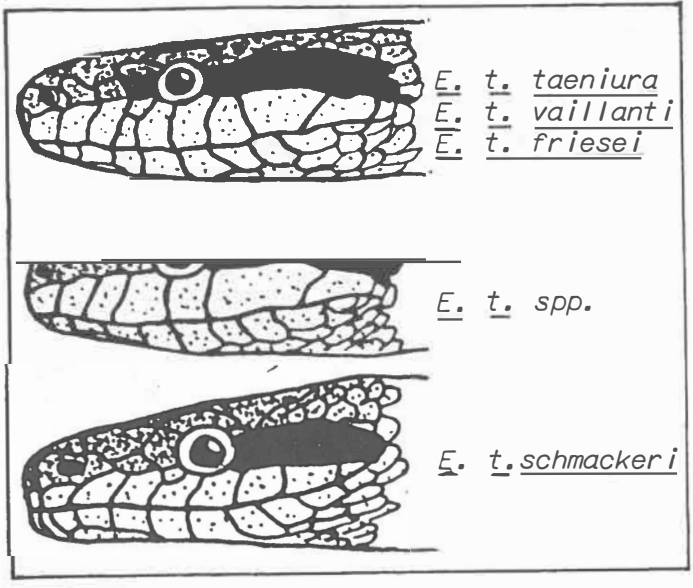
E. t. friesei from Taiwan
Photo: K-D Schulz

laboratory mice which are greedily taken both live and dead. Rats and day-old chicks are also favoured. At times the hunger of this snake appears to be insatiable; therefore care must be taken that the keeper's hand is not mistaken for a mouse. The bite of a fully-grown E. t. friesei can be extremely painful.

As opposed to the nominate form, E. t. friesei is a peaceful snake which is not very shy. Frequently the snakes lie on their climbing branches thus giving credence to their common name "Climbing Rat Snake". Sometimes they are continuously on the search for food which will be taken at any time, even when they are sloughing.

Reproduction

This beautiful and interesting Rat Snake has been bred successfully for a number of years. A period of hibernation is not



necessary to induce E. t. friesei to breed as long as the temperature remains around 6 to 8 degrees C (Przbylski - written report). My pairs are kept without light or heat at around 18 to 20 degrees C from December until March. A cooler wintering period at around 10 to 15 degrees C is better, however, so that lower demands are made on the metabolism. Mating usually results around one month after the winter resting period in the same way as with the nominate form. In May, June or even later, 8 - 15 eggs are usually laid. These have an average size of 50 x 30mm. Incubation at 27 to 32 degrees C in vermiculite at a relative humidity of 95% resulted in a 90% hatch rate after 57 - 60 days (Juschke - written report). At 25 to 27 degrees C in quartz sand and a humidity of 95 - 100%, with a temperature increase to 30 degrees C shortly before hatching, a hatching rate of 100% resulted after 65 days (Nagele - written report). The hatchlings are similar to their parents and measure some 30 - 45cm. They sloughed after 14 days and immediately took pink mice voluntarily. They grow quickly and with good feeding can attain a length of 130cm after 14 months (Juschka - written report). These snakes are capable of reproduction at around 18 months when the animals have reached a length of 140 - 150cm.

Elaphe taeniura vaillanti (Mocquard 1905)

Colouring

Ground colour yellow to olive. The top of the head and the neck over 3 to 4 head lengths are unicoloured. The markings are similar to those of E. t. friesei; the spots however are significantly longer resulting in an H-shaped pattern on the back. These are usually joined together. In the last third of the body the pattern changes to two black or dark brown stripes and one yellowish stripe. The dark stripes can occasionally be broken by light transverse stripes. The other markings are similar to those of E. t. friesei but the dark facial stripes sometimes start in front of the eyes. In the case of E. t. vaillanti the belly is only insignificantly marked with dark spots, otherwise it is unicoloured.

Length: 150 - 180cm.

Ventral scales: 256 - 259

Distribution

China (Guangxi, Guandong), North Vietnam and Hainan island. Biotope and lifestyle are similar to those of E. t. taeniura.

Maintenance in the vivarium

Unfortunately, I have only been in possession of four specimens of this subspecies for a few months and am therefore unable to give a great deal of information. They do not appear to be very shy but in fact rather aggressive but this could be as a direct result of the first few months in captivity. Their defence behaviour is however unique; at



Left A brown variant of E. t. vaillanti

Right E. taeniura ssp.

Photo: K-D Schulz

the slightest disturbance they coil their body into a double 'S' shape and their sides are inflated. The mouth is opened wide and a loud hissing noise is produced. The snake lashes its tail about and at the first opportunity will inflict a very severe bite.

Elaphe taeniura ssp.

Colouring

Ground colour yellowish brown to olive. Head and neck (1 to 1.5 head lengths) are unicoloured. On the first third of the body the markings consist of dark spots with a light centre on the back. These are joined together in the middle to form an 'H' shape. On the sides there are also black eye-shaped markings. At the middle of the body the markings slowly disappear and change into the typical three stripes. Upper and lower labial scales are yellowish or light orange. The underside is yellow or beige with insignificant markings on the side scales. A dark stripe runs from each eye to the corner of the mouth. In some specimens individual scales are reddish coloured. As opposed to E. t. taeniura, vaillanti and friesei, this new subspecies has a reddish tongue.

Length: Probably up to 150cm; at present my specimens are some 100cm long.

Distribution: North Vietnam

From the above it can be assumed that this new form is also already in the hands of other fanciers. It has already appeared in The Netherlands (Philippen - verbal report). It should be advised here that only identical animals be housed together to prevent unwanted hybridisation.

E. t. yunnanensis Anderson 1971, has not been included here (it is only supposed to have a lower ventral scale count). Its status as a subspecies still needs to be examined more closely.

I trust that from the large number of past literature sources quoted I have finally managed to assemble a more coherent picture which will at least help to simplify the sometimes difficult determination of the various subspecies of these Rat Snakes.

Asian Rat Snakes of the Elaphe Genus, Part IX, Elaphe quadrivirgata, will appear in next month's issue.

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Snakes in Social Intercourse

by Ray Hamilton

It happens to us all sooner or later, whether in a pub or party or, indeed, any social gathering. Someone appears at your elbow as if by magic and says "I hear you keep snakes." All conversation around you tails off to a whisper, some stare whilst others shuffle a couple of paces backwards. I'm sure that if this enquiring apparition had said "I hear that you hunt whales" or "I'm told you smuggle drugs with the aid of orphaned children" the reactions of others would be less hostile.

Now the handling of this single opening question really is the crux of the matter. A simple "No, not me!" and things slowly return to normal. However, just a hint of hesitation and the surrounding pack moves in. "Are they poisonous?" "My wife can't stay in the room if one comes on the telly" "I was frightened by a plastic one as a child you know." The list goes on and on. I'm sure we have all heard them. When the subject of snakes is raised in conversation - beware! People tend to talk more nonsense about snakes than any other of God's creatures. Only poor old Rattus norwegicus comes a close second. ("Columns of rats crossing the road for three hours" and "...it was as big as a Shetland pony" etc.)

Top of the snakey stories for me was once performed in a local pub. A middle-aged woman, a complete stranger, had picked up the word 'snake' in my conversation with the pub landlord. This had obviously lit the fuse and the woman, with much rolling of eyes and mock dizziness (which caused her to clutch the bar top every so often) recounted her tale to those present. Apparently, whilst walking somewhere in the darkest Cotswolds with her daughter, a snake had appeared on the scene and started to chase both persons through a meadow. The beast was "hissing like a steam train and dripping saliva as it reared up to strike." However, the unfortunate ramblers managed to scramble back to their car, jump inside and lock all the doors before speeding off only to see the beast coiled by the side of the road, waiting, should they ever return.

An amazing story but no more amazing than the reactions of the other customers in the pub. Many of them were now nodding in agreement and vying with each other to start their own scare story. For a good half hour I listened to facts and figures concerning snakes which, until then had escaped me. Most of the stories were what I call 'common snake stories' and none were recounted with the same zest as the first. There was the old favourite of the mysterious species, "I seen Grass Snakes before but this one at the quarry weren't no Grass Snake!" and the usual "The one I saw was six foot if it were an inch." Come to think of it I can't recall one snake story where the serpent has been of normal proportions.

Another thing worth watching for when people talk about the length of snakes is the vague way both arms are outstretched and thighs are pointed to as a rough estimate of girth. Why do people feel forced to tell such tall stories? Is it just ignorance of the unknown crossed with a vivid imagination?

I suppose snakes have never had a good press. Right from a 'crawl on' part in the Creation of the World through Kipling's 'Jungle Book' up to Hissing Sid. (Why are none of the Care Bears called Viper or Python?)

Children, I find, although often credited with 'active' imaginations are, thankfully, open-minded about snakes. I have given several talks at local primary schools and find the children are readily transformed from anti-snake replicas of mum and dad into individuals whose apprehension gives way to appreciation when given a hatchling Kingsnake or baby Garter Snake to handle. Also, the fantastic bragging ability of the under tens helps to spread the word to brothers and sisters that snakes are not slimy creatures to be loathed.

Finally, to return to the opening gambit "I hear you keep snakes." If, in that split second before you give your answer, you decide to stand up and be counted by replying "Yes, I keep snakes" you will quickly find that the conversation around you blossoms into something akin to a mixture of Hans Christian Anderson bedtime stories and a Monty Python Script. Still, for me, it beats comparing house prices anyday.

Phantom Pregnancy in a Burmese Python

by G & K Waddilove

On the 12th of November 1987 we put our Burmese Pythons (Python molurus bivittatus) together for the breeding season which normally runs from November to February.

The snakes' weights were recorded on the 10th November 1987. The male (Fred) weighed 36.7 kg (81 lbs) and the female (Abigale) weighed approximately 23.5 kg (52 lbs). We decided that the male's weight was sufficient to last him through the winter and mating season. The ideal female weight for breeding is 22.5 to 27 kg so Abigale was just inside this range. We gave her two 90 gram chickens to increase her weight slightly.

From the 25th of November Abigale did the classic tail weaving (advertising for a male). Fred was observed trying to mate with her about six to seven times. He would rub on her side with his spurs and arch his back over her but no actual mating was observed; pythons usually mate at night. The temperature in the vivarium at this time was 23 degrees C during the day and 17 degrees C at night. The cage lights were on for seven hours a day.

On the 7th of December 1987 Abigale refused a whole 1.8 kg (4 lb) chicken but she did eat its legs. This refusal of food is usually the first sign that mating has taken place. Fred refused food from the 19th of December and this, again, is natural during the mating season. He did not take food again until the 7th of March 1988, nearly five months. For most of this time Fred buzzed around the cage trying to get out to find other females to mate with. A randy 4.5 metre python wrecks the inside of a cage within minutes and it is worth remembering not to put rocks in a cage with a glass front.

Abigale refused a 2.2 kg (5 lb) chicken on the 11th of December 1987 but she ate five day-old chicks on the following day. On the 16th of December she ate a large rat. One day later she refused a 2.2 kg (5 lb) rabbit. We concluded that she was gravid.

We wrote to Chris and Marcia Martin of Cheltenham and they told us that they thought Abigale was gravid. Apparently their female Boa Constrictor (Boa constrictor constrictor) eats throughout her pregnancy but she only takes half-grown rats. Her normal food is 1.3 kg (3 lb) rabbits. Females usually eat small prey throughout their pregnancy as they need the food and, presumably, large prey would take up the room needed for the developing embryos.

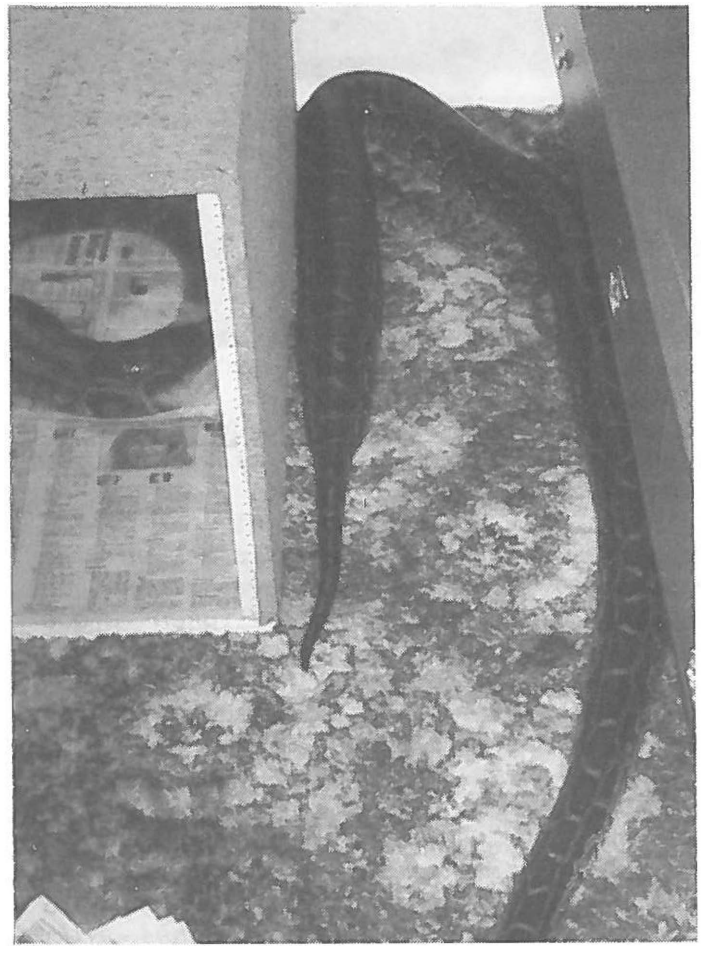


Photo 1
Abigale (captive-bred approximately seven years ago at the Cotswold Wildlife Park) showing swelling at rear end.
Photo: G & K Waddilove

From the 20th of December Abigale seemed to be gaining weight. She was looking a lot fatter and her scales were stretched. She gained 75 mm around her middle (see photo 1). She lay in a tight ball, night and day, under the heater (see photo 2) and we never saw her drink although Chris Martin said that Abigale would be drinking at night. When the temperature dropped at night Abigale would lay on her side and sometimes we found the rear end of her body upside down (photo 3). Apparently the snake does this to allow the maximum heat to reach the eggs. These were all taken as



Photo 2

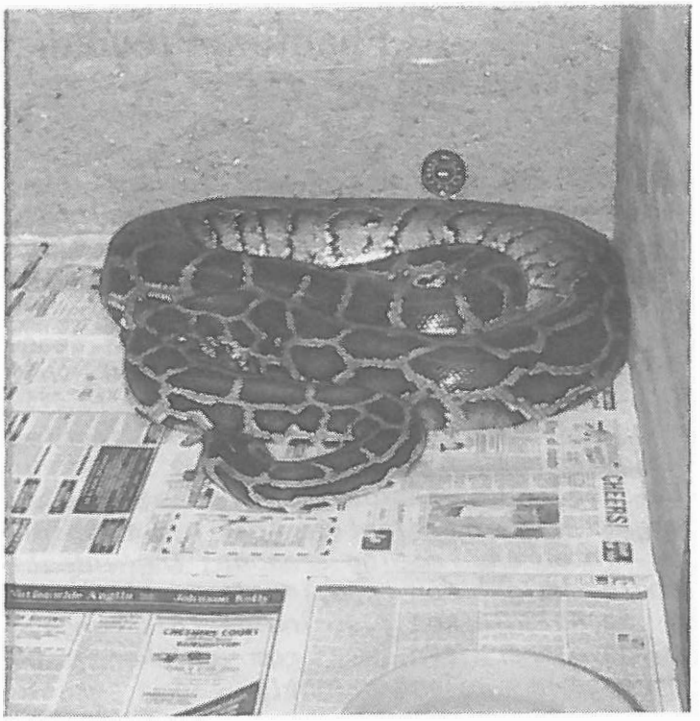


Photo 3 Photographs: G & K Waddilove

signs that Abigale was gravid; we also saw her twitch.

On a few occasions we found semen on the paper and in the water bowl. This was another sign that mating had taken place on these nights. However, we were all wrong. Abigale failed to lay any eggs. On the 11th of April 1988 she resumed normal feeding by eating 1.8 to 2.2 kg (4 - 5 lb) chickens every three weeks. She is still her normal weight.

After the mating season was over Fred was weighed and his weight had fallen from 36 kg (81 lbs) to 34.4 kg (76 lbs). His weight at the time of writing is 37.6 kg (83 lbs). The only thing we can do is prepare to try again for next year.

No one knows why snakes have phantom pregnancies, how they gain weight, why they refuse large prey or stop eating altogether. In our opinion it is because the snake has an unsuccessful mating but she believes that she has been fertilized and this state continues until she realises that she is not gravid.

Since Abigale had her phantom pregnancy we have heard of many other snake keepers who have had the same experience. The real sign that your snake is gravid is to wait and see.

We would like to express our thanks to Chris and Marcia Martin for all their help and advice and, in a way, to say thanks to our snakes for giving us the experience of a phantom pregnancy.

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Early experiences with *Elaphe rufodorsata* - a Chinese ratsnake

by Kevin J. Hingley

Like many snake keepers I have, over the last few years, become increasingly interested in keeping some of the more commonly available Asian ratsnakes of the genus Elaphe. Several opportunities have arisen to buy various species in the past but, in the back of my mind, less than favourable experiences with the Red-tail Green Racer, Gonyosoma oxycephala, sprang to mind and so I never took the chance.

Last year though I was contacted by Helen Philbin, a Snake Keeper reader from Scotland, who expressed an interest in my series of articles on the genus Elaphe which appeared in the first four issues of the magazine. Helen owned a single specimen of Elaphe rufodorsata which she wished to sell. I replied to Helen expressing my own interest in the snake and, in early March of this year. I received 'Charlie' by Red Star delivery. Helen had christened the snake with this name and, needless to say, it has stuck. Apart from being rather cold from his lengthy journey the snake was in good health and, after a two day settling in period, he fed on several pieces of Trout. I purchased some Whitebait but the snake showed no real interest in this; Trout remained on the menu until I obtained some fresh Minnows but whilst these were eaten they were not taken with the same relish as the Trout.

Shortly after Charlie joined my collection a further pair of these snakes appeared in a local dealers'. I was not too happy with their condition so I decided to wait to see if any healthier specimens became available. I didn't have to wait long as roughly a week later my local dealer had several more in stock, all quite healthy looking, so I purchased a pair. They were treated in the same manner as Charlie upon my return home, being housed in a small aquarium, separate from my other reptiles to avoid any transmission of disease etc. The following day I returned to my dealer's premises and purchased two medium sized 'Hagen' pet boxes so that the new pair could be separated for the treatment of mites. These pet boxes are excellent for the purpose of raising young snakes or small species.

To eradicate the mites the snakes were placed in their box and several inches of tepid water was added to drown the mites. As these snakes live a fairly aquatic existence they did not seem to mind their enforced immersion. After several hours the snakes were checked and only two or three mites could be seen to be drowned. Since this treatment no further mites have been seen but, should they return, the same treatment will be applied.

Both of the new snakes fed on strips of Trout just a few hours after purchase and have continued to do so since, as well as taking the odd Minnow. My local dealer seemed to think that the female was gravid and she is certainly exhibiting different behavioural patterns to both of the males, but at the moment I would not go so far as to confirm her pregnancy.

Elaphe rufodorsata, like E. dione and E. bimaculata is a highly variable species and this comes in very handy when attempting to identify individuals. The female is easily distinguished from both of the males due to her larger size and shorter tail length, although both her general colouration and markings differ from the male snakes. Charlie is a rather dark specimen which readily distinguishes him from the second male, who is best described as an intermediate of the female and Charlie. Describing these snakes is not an easy task due to the variation that exists between individuals but, for the benefit of those readers who may not have encountered this species before, here is a general description of the species. The ground colour varies from yellow to grey-brown with light and dark flecks which may be red, fawn, grey or black. Behind the eye is a dark streak which extends to the corner of the mouth and, in some specimens, there may be a red streak above this on the temple. On the top of the head there are two forward-pointing 'v'-shaped markings that extend onto the neck, forming broken or complete stripes along the back and sides of the body. The uppermost pair of stripes often consist of opposing 'c'-shaped markings superimposed on a light to dark grey stripe. On the tail the stripes are solid and usually black in colour. The underside may be whitish-yellow or whitish-grey with black checks.

Both of my males measure roughly 50cms in

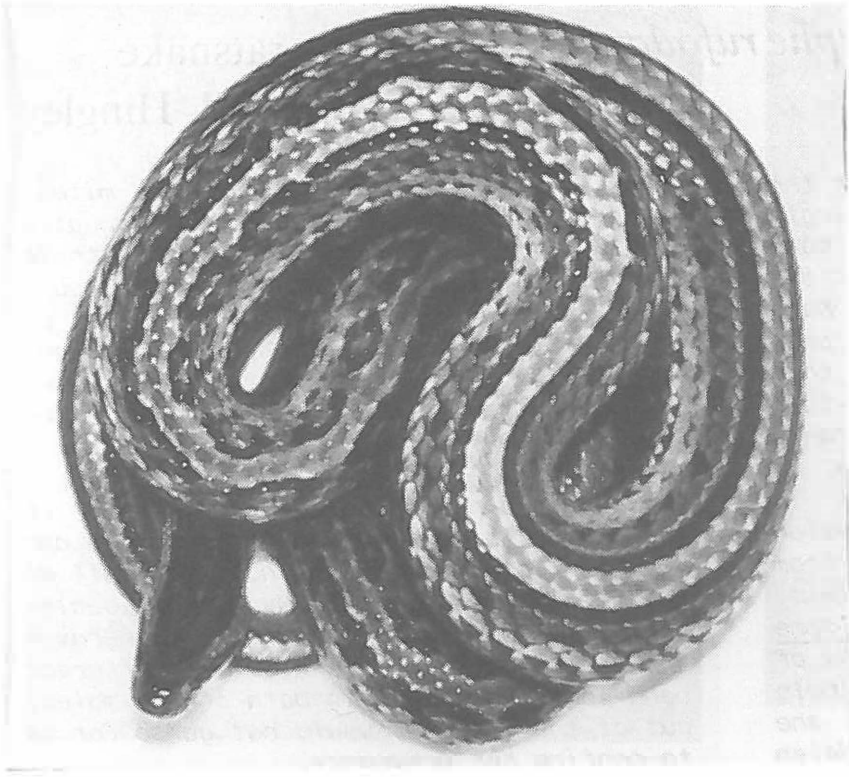


Photo 1 Gravid Elaphe rufodorsata
Photo: Kevin J. Hingley

length and are very slender compared with the female which measures approximately 80cm. Other than the initial mite infestation, I have not had any problems with them and, if anyone is interested in keeping this species, I would recommend that they treat them in the same manner as Garter Snakes, Thamnophis sp. A temperature of 23 to 26 degrees C seems to suit them and, being nervous snakes, they do require a hide box. A small water dish will provide both drinking water and a place to bathe whilst keeping the rest of the vivarium dry. The water will need to be changed regularly as these snakes tend to defaecate in it. Fish and amphibians form the main part of the diet although they are also said to feed on small rodents. They are unusual amongst the Elaphe as they give birth to live young whereas all other members of the genus lay eggs.

They are attractive snakes and most suitable for anyone with limited space who does not wish to have larger species or vivaria. Unfortunately, being fish eaters, they do require regular cage cleaning if they are not to give off an unpleasant odour. I have tried to get my specimens to take small mice by first rubbing the mouse with some fish (odour manipulation) but so far I have not succeeded. As yet none of the three specimens I own have attempted to bite when handled although

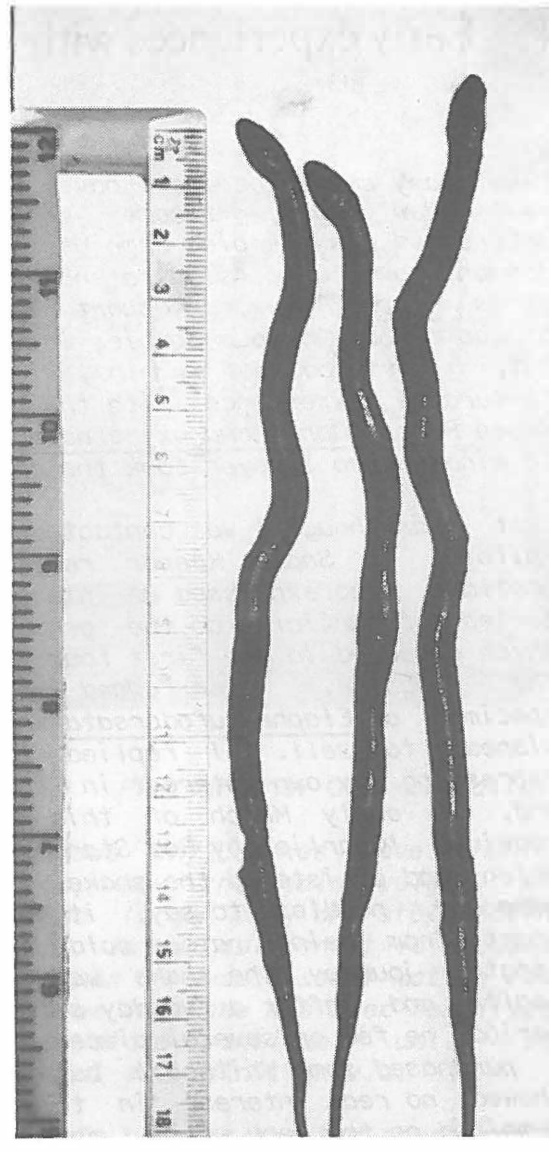


Photo 2 Stillborn Elaphe rufodorsata
Photo: Kevin J. Hingley

they are known to be capable of this. Their main line of defence is to excrete a pungent fluid from the vent when handled.

Update. Since the above article was written one of Kevin's snakes (see photo 1) gave birth to eight young on the 27th June 1988. Three of the young were still born (see photo 2) but the remaining five were healthy and sloughed the following day.

Update on Kevin's article, 'Early experiences with the Red Coin Ratsnake, Elaphe bimaculata, in the Vivarium' (Snake Keeper, Volume 2, No. 9). Of the three eggs laid by Kevin's snake, one proved infertile after 30 days but the remaining two hatched after 37 days. Both hatchlings sloughed after six days and fed on pink mice, although one required assistance.

Experiences in Keeping Cook's Garden Tree Boas - *Corallus enydris cookii*

by Norbet Schneeweiss

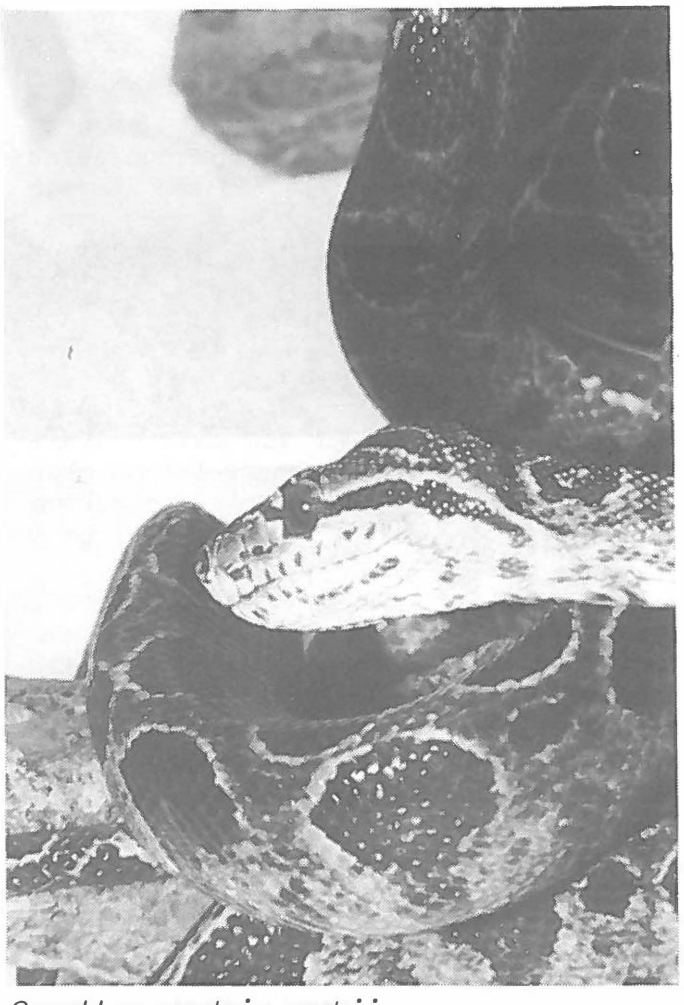
This article originally appeared in the magazine 'Aquarien-Terrarien' in the German Democratic Republic and is reprinted with kind permission of the author.

Translated from the original German by John Hackworth.

The Garden Tree Boa is a giant snake which lives in Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela and Trinidad. Compared with the Emerald Tree Boa (Corallus caninus) it is not found as frequently amongst the branches of the smaller trees in the rain forests. The colouring of this snake is extremely variable. It goes from dark silver and light grey to brown and light tones. On this grey or brown base colour there is a rhomboid-like pattern which is lighter in the centre. This very attractive pattern can, however, be completely absent. These animals, which are used to living in trees, have a body which is flattened on the sides enabling them to get a firm grasp on branches. They are less adept on the ground. A snake of this species can be regarded as fully grown at around 2 metres.

A specimen which had been born on the 11th July 1973 came into my possession in November 1984. It was born in captivity from a female Corallus enydris cookii from Grenada and a male from Tobago. This animal is dark brown with even darker shading. The pattern mentioned above can only just be seen. The underside is a uniform white, changing to light yellow. There are some individual dark spots. At the beginning considerable problems were experienced in keeping this snake. The food consisted of live laboratory mice which were frequently offered but which were refused for several months. The mouse was carefully observed and frequently bitten but always released again. The snake also frequently 'missed the target' when attacking the mice.

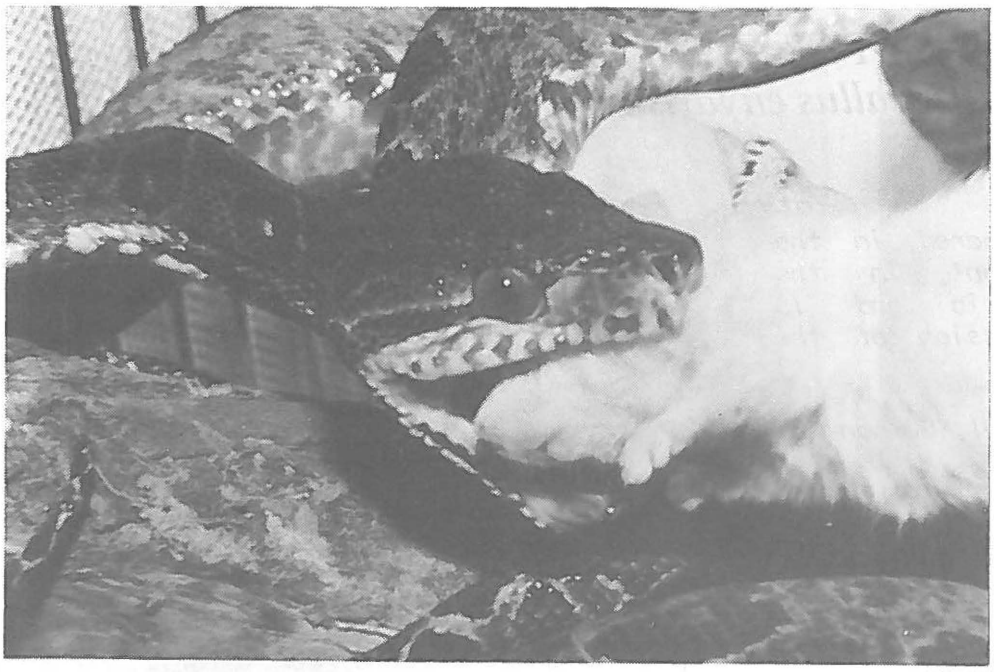
Over ten months later I received a second Cook's Garden Tree Boa. It was bred in captivity from the same parents as the first animal. It was around the same length (1.10m) but was much more sturdily built. The colour is dark grey and it has the pattern described above, which is very pronounced. The light-coloured body of this animal is interrupted by an irregular dark pattern.

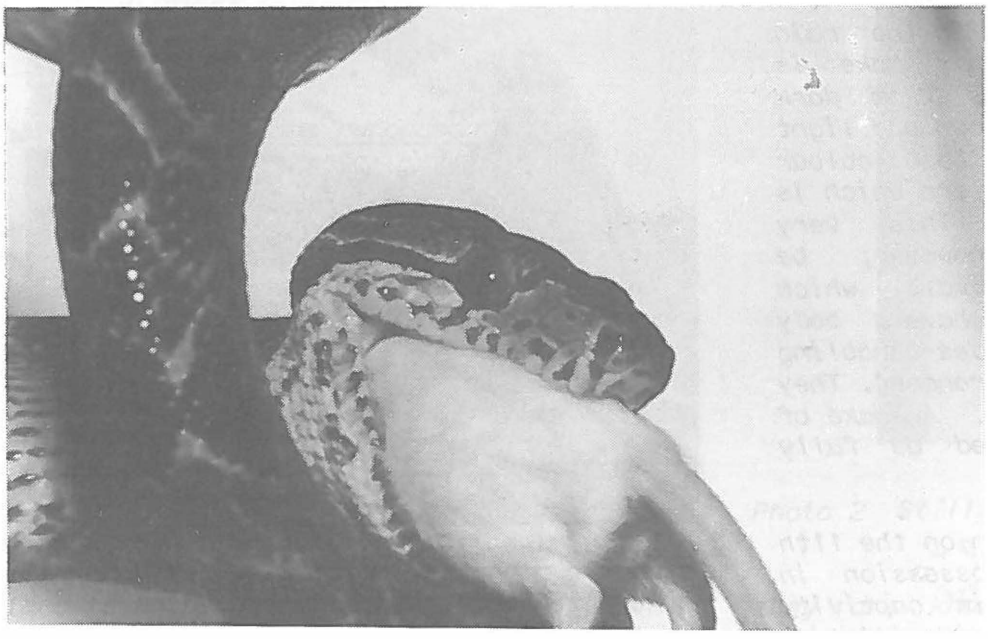


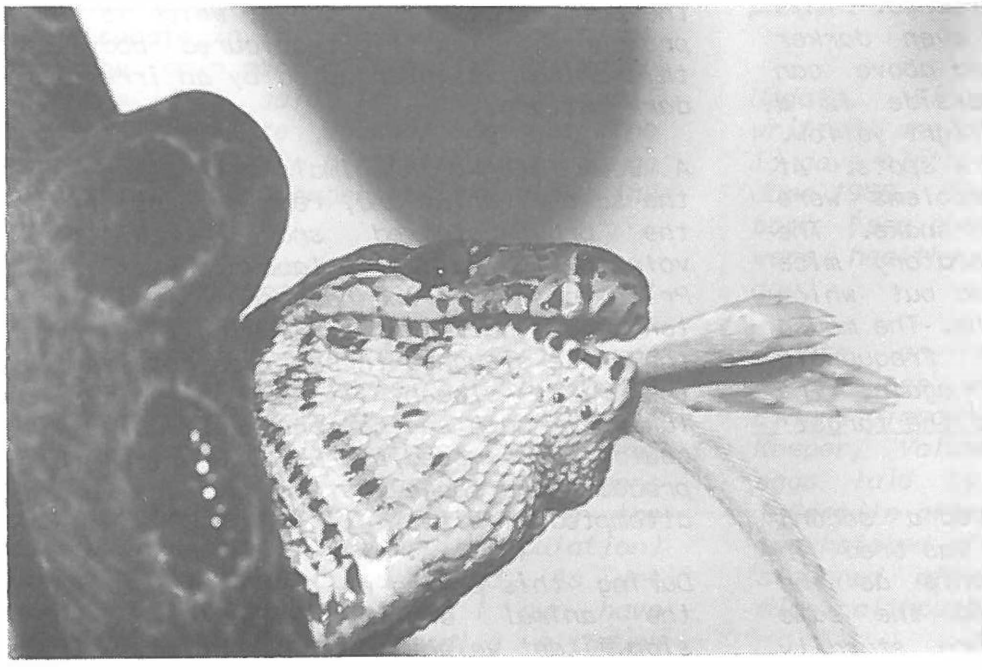
Corallus enydris cookii
Photo: Michael Connolley

A week later both animals were placed in the same vivarium and, for the first time, the brown-coloured snake took food voluntarily (a white laboratory mouse). Prior to this, food had been refused for ten and a half months. During this time the snake sloughed three times but, after the first slough, it had to be given a lukewarm bath so that the residual skin could be removed by hand. During this process the snake was very aggressive and attempted to bite.

During this period of self-imposed fast the animal drank frequently and no significant weight loss was noticed.







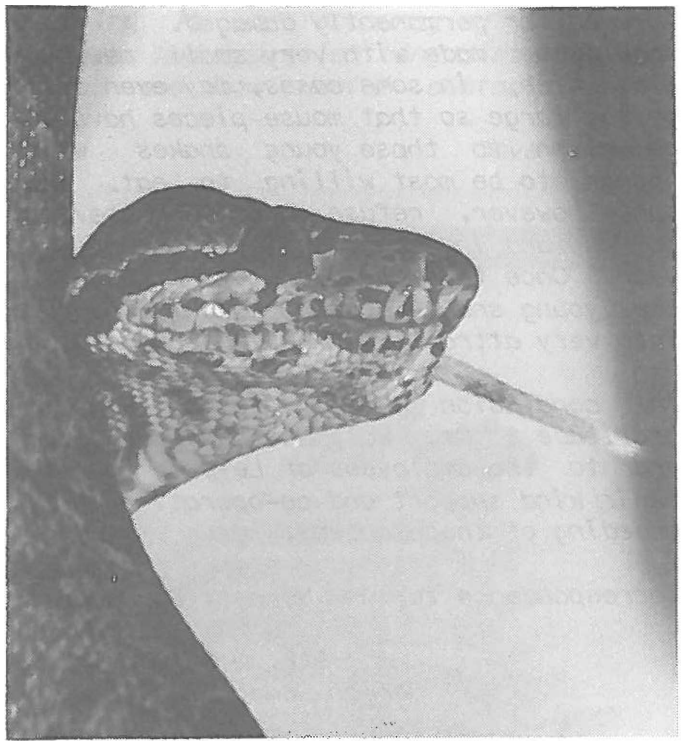
Left Captive-bred three year old Corallus enydris cookii eating a small mouse

Photos: Michael Connolley

After only ten days in the vivarium the grey-coloured snake began to eat voluntarily. From that day onwards both animals ate regularly. Whilst feeding, however, they had to be watched carefully in case they bit one another. Once the prey was recognised they attacked and caught it with great speed, a stark contrast to the initial and prolonged fast of the brown-coloured animal! Within the space of two and a half years the brown-coloured animal ate 69 laboratory mice and four (60 to 70g) rats whilst the grey-coloured animal despatched 71 mice and four rats.

Whilst the snakes are feeding some interesting observations can be made. If, for example, a movement is noticed, the animals immediately react by coiling the front part of their body into a horizontal 's'-shape ready for a split-second attack. In this way they can project over a third of their body forward thus presenting a fantastic spectacle.

When rats of 70g are given they are constricted by the snakes within one and a half minutes and in this short time the rats are killed. A few minutes later they are swallowed. At the most this process takes five to ten minutes. I have observed several times a situation where both snakes had a mouse



Corallus enydris cookii pauses before swallowing the final few centimetres of the mouse.

Photo: Michael Connolley

in their coils and, after each had killed its prey, a great competition for each mouse started; during this the snake which had a mouse in its mouth allowed it to drop and took no more notice of it. I was however able to prevent any serious fights over food and did not see any visible injuries. Once they had eaten, both snakes usually took a drink of water.

On average the snakes sloughed three to four times each year.

The snakes are kept in a vivarium of 100 x 60 x 50cm. The front, sides and top panels are of glass whilst the rear wall consists of an artificial rock face (concrete and rocks). A decisive factor for the well-being of these snakes is that a sufficiently high temperature is maintained. The initial 'hunger strike' by one of the animals was probably caused by the temperature not being high enough. Now the snakes can move around during the day from place to place within a temperature range of 25 and 30 degrees C. Frequently, usually during the afternoon, the snakes lie coiled beneath a 75 watt incandescent lamp where the temperature reaches 29 to 30 degrees C. During the morning the snakes usually lie coiled together in the opposite corner of the vivarium where the temperature reaches 25 degrees C. Sometimes the snakes spend the entire day amongst the climbing branches at a temperature of 25 to 28 degrees C. At night the 75 watt lamp is switched off so that the temperature drops a little. The vivarium is, however, constantly heated by a heating cable placed below the gravel.

The vivarium for Garden Tree Boas must have adequate climbing branches. A small water container is quite sufficient. The one I use is only 22cm in diameter and 12cm deep. It is only used by the snakes for drinking purposes.

These snakes are most active during the evening and night which is typical of all giant snakes. However, even during the day the snakes react to disturbance outside their vivarium by coiling their bodies into an 's'-shape. They can remain almost motionless in this position for a very long time.

When climbing from branch to branch they use the so-called accordion method in that they reach out the front part of the body, take a firm hold on the next branch and then draw the rear part of their body onto the branch. This proceedure is used to reach almost every part of the vivarium.

In comparison to the considerable problems experienced with Corallus caninus the Cook's Garden Tree Boa (Corallus enydris cookii) can be bred over several generations in the vivarium. The sex of the animals is easily and positively determined by examining the spurs of animals of a similar size. The snakes mentioned above are both females. In the spring of 1983 they were taken to Leipzig Zoo and placed in a vivarium with a male. This male was bred in 1981 and was much smaller than the females. Several matings were observed, one of which proved to be fruitful. The gravidity lasted around six months. The number of young can be quite small (as was the case with my animals) but can also reach more than twenty. One observation is worthy of mention and that is that several hours after the birth of her young the mother attempted to eat the almost dried-out embryonic membranes. This behaviour, which is reminiscent of more highly developed animals (mammalia), has also been observed in other reptiles (Bellairs, 1969). One week after birth the female sloughed and immediately began to feed normally again. To rear the young the keeper needs to take very special care and will rarely succeed without a few losses.

When the young are born they measure from 38 to 45cm and weigh between 5 and 16g. This is obviously a reflection on the condition of the mother as well as the number of young born. Amongst the same batch of young the colour can vary quite considerably and goes from a uniform light red through red-brown to olive green and grey contrasting tones. The first slough takes place around two to three weeks after birth. During the first six months of their lives, the ground tone of the colouring changes somewhat and the shading and patterning usually appear. Only a small proportion of the snakes begin to feed voluntarily within the first four weeks after birth. Some of our young at first accepted day-old mice but others had to be force-fed. To do this, especially during the first weeks of life, great care should be taken because the throat and digestive tract are extremely easily injured or permanently damaged. A start should be made with very small new-born mice which, in some cases, may even still be too large so that mouse pieces have to be given to those young snakes which appear to be most willing to eat. They can, however, refuse food for several months and in some cases even for over a year. Once this fast is broken, however, the young snakes develop quickly and turn into very attractive vivarium subjects.

In conclusion I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Wolf Eberhard Engelmann and to the employees of Leipzig Zoo for their kind support and co-operation in the breeding of these snakes.

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German Democratic Republic

The North East Herpetological Society Show

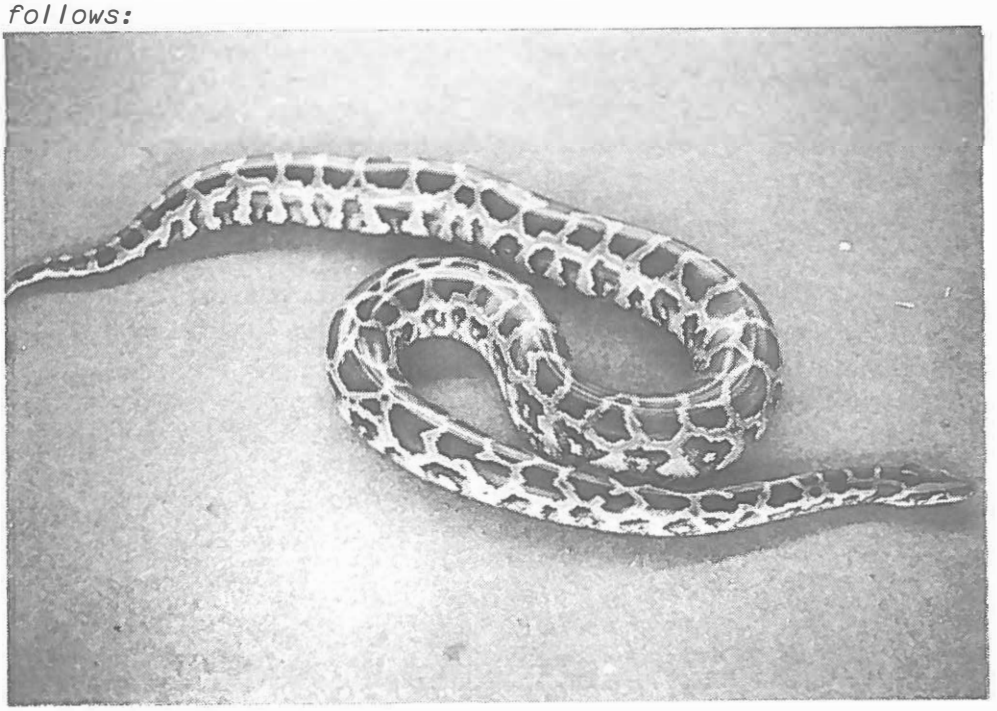
The North East Herpetological Society held an open show at Lambton Garden Centre on August Bank Holiday weekend (August 26th - 29th). The event was attended by approximately 800 people; disappointing after last year's estimated attendance of 1500 visitors. There were 35 entries in the show and all of these were of a generally high standard. The majority of the entries were reptiles with a sprinkling of amphibians and insects for general interest.

The entries were judged by Mr. Peter Beard of the Pet Barn and the winners were as follows:

Paul Chaplow	Large Snake (Indian Python)
Rob Stewart	Small Snake (Albino California Kingsnake)
Paul Gardner	Large Lizard (Green Iguana)
Dave Robson	Small Lizard (Phelsuma laticauda)
Rob Stewart	Amphibian (Argentine Horned Frog)

There was some debate as to whether an albino should have won at all, not being 'true', but as it was a fun weekend no one was upset by the decision.

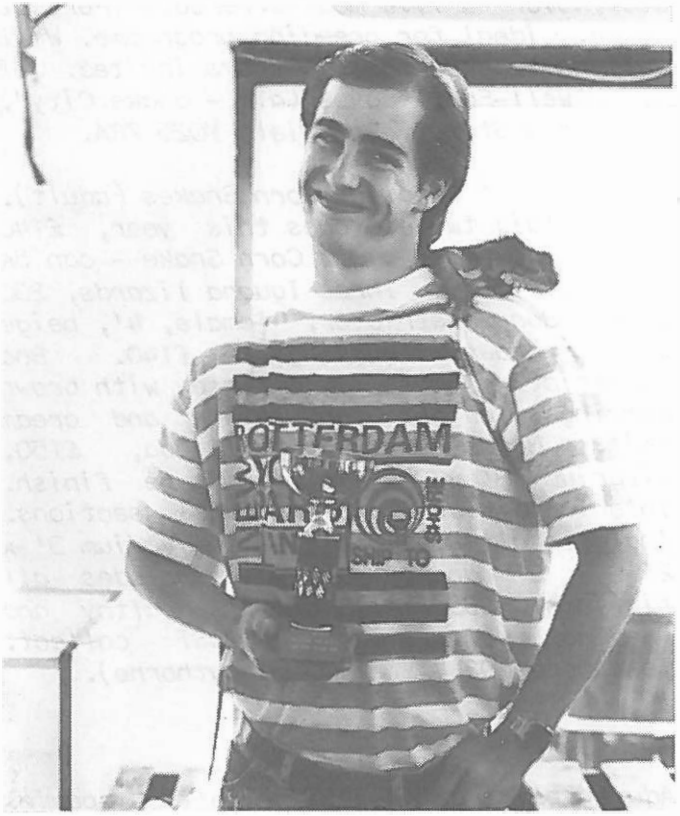
Although overall attendance was dis-

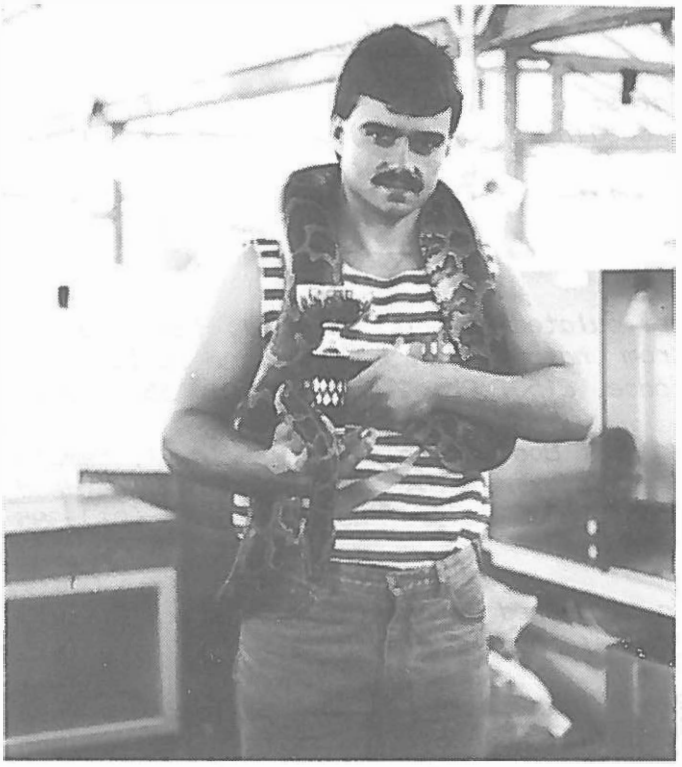


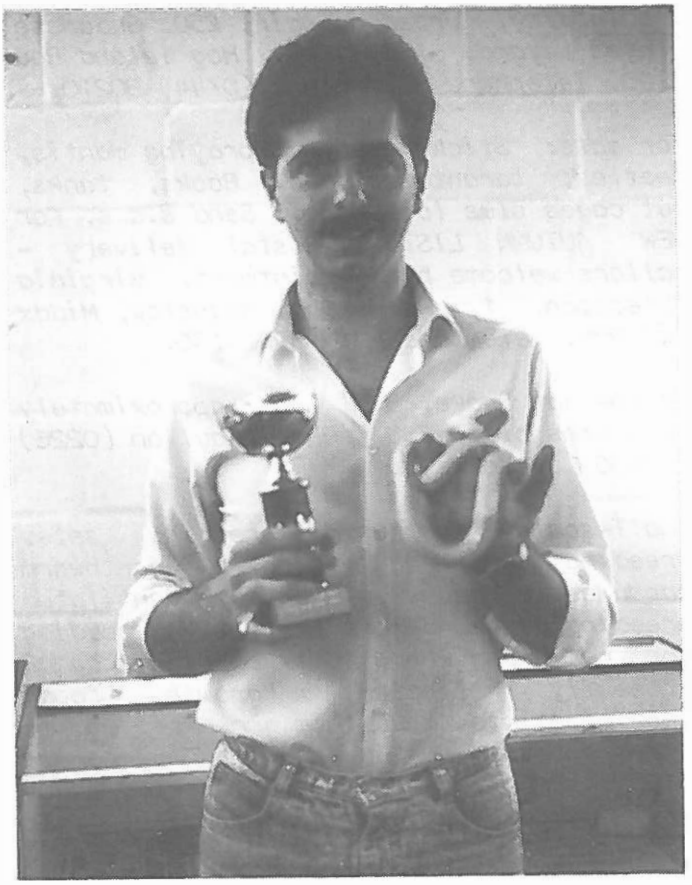


appointing it was encouraging to meet people who had travelled long distances to meet us and some useful contacts were made.

Dave Robson







Opposite page
Left Indian Python (Winner - Large Snake)
Right Albino California Kingsnake (Winner- Small Snake)

This page
Above left Paul Gardner & Green Iguana
Above top Paul Chaplow & Indian Python
Above Rob Stewart and California King-snake

All photographs: Dave Robson

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Pair of Boa Constrictors. Male 6', female 5' approximately. Tame and taking dead food. £325 pair. Phone Steve on (01) 385 0686.

Captive-bred Tarantulas. Thailand Blacks. £2. Telephone Dudley 55821, daytime only.

Green Iguana, 2', £50. Mexican Red-knee Tarantula (Brachypelma smithi) £25. Caiman Croc £50. Malayan Pit Vipers (Trimeresurus albolabris), breeding pair, £50. Sudanese Plated Lizard, 18", £40. Hog Island Boa £120. Telephone St. Helens (0744) 30210.

For sale: Stick insects, praying mantis, beetles, tarantulas etc. Books, tanks, net cages plus lots more. Send s.a.e. for NEW AUTUMN LISTS. Postal delivery - callers welcome by appointment. Virginia Cheeseman, 1, Park Lane, Hounslow, Middx TW5 9RW. Telephone (01) 897 0156.

Yellow Rat Snake, 3.5' long, approximately 12 months old. £35. Phone Paul on (0226) 245436 (S. Yorks).

Small-scale earthworm breeding sets. Breeding sets containing 50 earthworm capsules (cocoons), special ventilated breeding dish and soft protective bedding for the young worms to live in, a bag of specially selected "growth food" sufficient to make them grow for up to three months, a bag of calcium carbonate plus instructions. D. Silvester, 188 Wrens Hill Road, Wrens Nest Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3SF.

Captive bred Indian Pythons for sale. All feeding. Healthy, excellent condition. Telephone Bristol 671557.

Black, Grey, Yellow and Texas Ratsnakes. Telephone (0768) 67205.

Hatchling Elaphe guttata guttata x E. g. rosacea intergrades. Telephone Dave up to 13th October on (0289) 88277 and afterwards on (091) 251 2151 (Tyne and Wear).

Male Boa, approximately 4'+. Complete record of all meals taken in my possession (2 years). Feeding on dead rats, mice etc.(Never a live meal offered.) Perfect snake, ideal for breeding programme. Will deliver to good home. Offers invited. Col G. Pywell-Fox, "Foxes Lair - Snake City", 24 George Street, Driffield YO25 7RA.

One pair of Carolina Corn Snakes (adult). Female laid two clutches this year, £140 pair. One male adult Corn Snake - can be hand fed, £70. Three Iguana lizards, £30 each. Boa Constrictor, female, 4', beige with brown markings, £140. Boa Constrictor, male, 4'6", grey with brown markings, bright tan, black and cream tail. Bought as Red-tail Boa, £150. Vivarium 8' x 2'x 2', furniture finish. Interior divided into 5' and 3' sections. Includes all fittings £100. Vivarium 3' x 2' x 2' approximately. Includes all fittings, £35. All animals healthy and feeding well. Buyers MUST collect. Telephone (0344) 771498 (Crowthorne).

WANTED

Adult pairs of any Lampropeltis species and Elaphe guttata emoryi. Telephone Dave up to 13th Oct on (0289) 88277 and afterwards on (091) 251 2151 (Tyne and Wear).

Pair of Grey Banded Kingsnakes (Lampropeltis mexicana alterna). Sinaloan Milk Snake (Lampropeltis triangulum sinaloae). Phone Paul on (0226) 245436.

Please could any reader send unwanted sloughs to Neil Kelly, 3 Hawthorn Close, Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire WA15 6TL or ring (061) 962 7502 and I will take down your address and send an envelope for postage - Thank you.

Young male Grass Snake. Must be in good condition, feeding and not from the wild. A two to four year old female Corn Snake in good condition and feeding well (dead). Any information on the Mole Snake (Pseudaspis cana), hopefully from someone who has kept them. Col G. Pywell-Fox, "Foxes Lair - Snake City", 24 George Street, Driffield YO25 7RA.

A pair of adult Elaphe obsoleta bairdi. Jaap Kooij, Spanjaarskrocht 42, 2211 ES Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands. Tel: (02523) 77253.