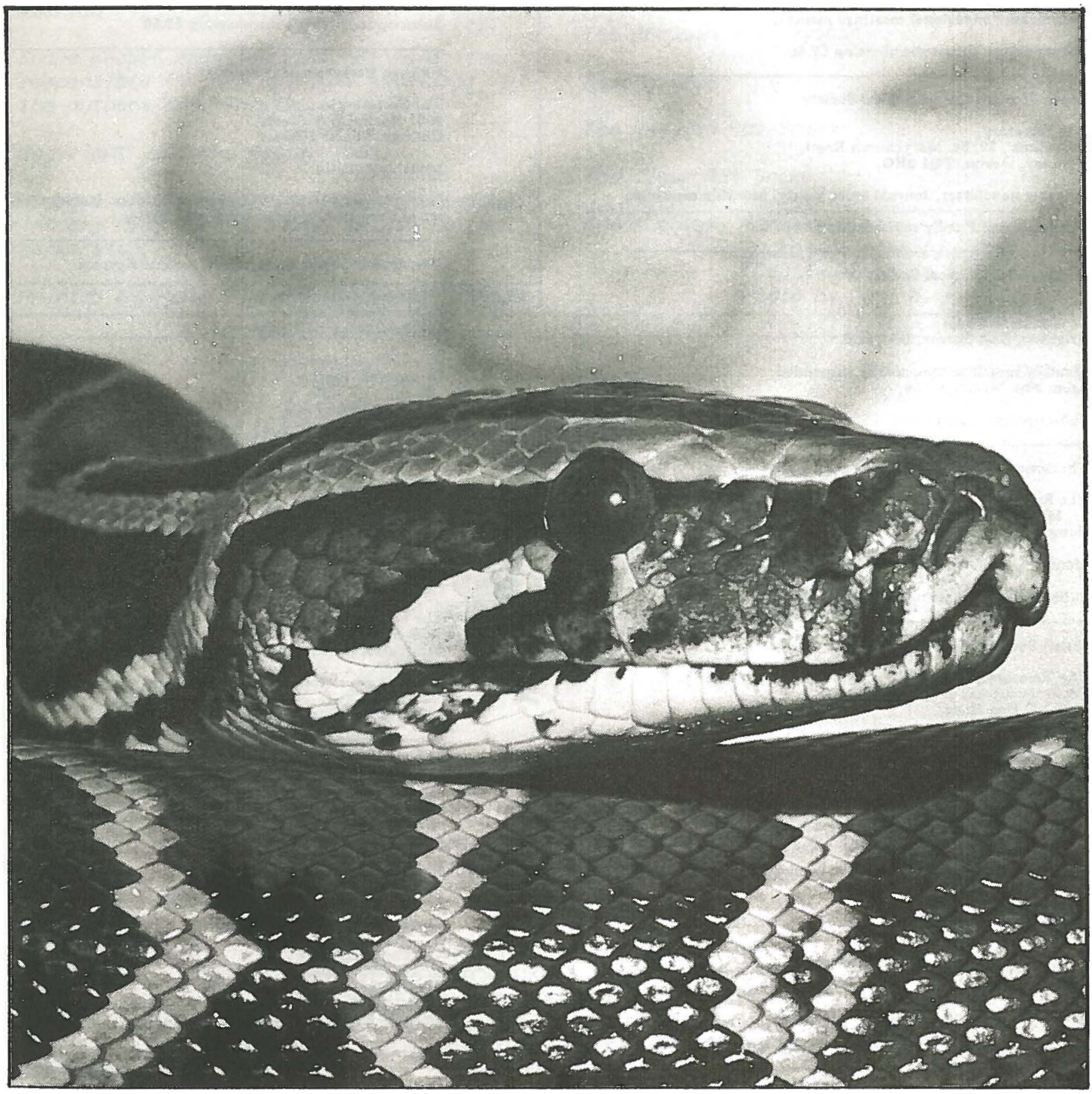
SNAKE KEEPER

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INFORMATION

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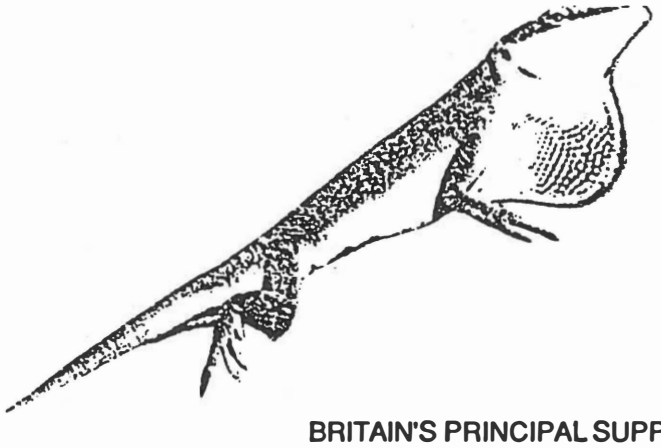
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Front cover: Burmese Python
Python molurus bivittatus
(Captive-bred in Britain)
Photo by Paul E. Hopwood.

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The Senses of Snakes

by P.W. Fensom

Since an animal's powers of perception form a vital link in determining how it reacts to the world around it, the sense organs of snakes must influence their behaviour and, perhaps, place limitations on the types of environment in which they live.

Sight

The first obvious feature of a snake's eyes is the lack of moveable eyelids. Instead, the cornea is protected by a transparent area of the general outer skin. This area is clearly visible in a sloughed skin and usually takes the form of a distinct and separate circular transparent spectacle called the 'brille'.

The structure of the eye itself is also relatively simplistic. In higher animals, and even in most lizards, focusing is achieved by means of muscles which change the shape of the lens thereby altering the focal length. In almost all snakes this ability is absent. In the one or two species that do possess the means to change the shape of the lens, such as the Tessellated Water Snake (Natrix tessellata), a different method is used. A fixed focus lens that has to be moved bodily to give visual accomodation has only a limited range, particularly when the eye itself is not enlarged to provide greater space for its movement.

Another unusual feature of a snake's eye is the abscence of the retinal fovea. This is the sensitive area at the centre of the retina which gives greater definition to the image. This results in a lack of perception of detail.

Nevertheless, by positioning the eyes on the side of the head, that is, laterally, a large peripheral vision is obtained giving enhanced perception of movement. To observe a snake at feeding time demonstrates this perception. A water snake of mine appears unable to locate a fish put into the vivarium, though obviously aware of its presence, until the fish moves, whereupon it is pounced on with great speed. Similarly the inaccuracy of many of the strikes at the food animal demonstrates the lack of highly defined vision, as does the occasional lunge at the orange duster being flicked around outside the cage during house cleaning.

It is possible that a number of large-eyed terrestrial and arboreal snakes may have binocular vision but a fovea-like area has been reported only in the Oriental Whip Snakes (family Ahaetulla) which have large and prominent eyes with slit-like horizontal pupils (as opposed to the vertical slit pupil shape of the Boidiae). This slit is generally long enough to allow light from directly in front of the snout to enter the eye and focus on the fovea-like area of the retina. Complimentary to this is a long, grooved snout.

Hearing

Snakes do not actually possess ears in the conventional sense of the word, in that they do not have external openings on the head through which sounds are perceived. They do not have an ear drum, the tympanum, or any of the bone structures normally associated with it. Nevertheless they do have an inner ear, the cochlea and associated mechanisms, such as the stapes, a stirrup shaped bone normally associated with the middle ear.

It follows, therefore, that the hearing of a snake is somewhat non-existent and experiments have shown that snakes cannot perceive most airborne sounds though they do respond to a limited range of low frequency sounds and to vibrations of the surface on which they rest. This is observed by opening the vivarium whilst the animal is asleep and seeing it jump when the noise is made.

It would appear that these vibrations are picked up through the jaw bone and transmitted to the quadrate bone and thence to the stapes. In this way snakes are able to respond to the vibrations made by approaching animals and respond appropriately.

Smell

Although the sight and hearing of snakes are less than adequate, their ability to smell or, more accurately, to taste is very highly developed. A known characteristic feature of snakes is the tongue which has a slender 'Y' shaped

terminal portion which telescopes into a basal sheath. When a snake is active the tongue is in almost constant motion, being alternately protruded, with the tips of the 'Y' shape portion flickering, and withdrawn. Similarly, when feeding, the prey animal is often extensively explored with the tongue, the snake constantly tasting different parts of it. This appears to be the principal method by which the head is found prior to swallowing.

This tasting, or smelling, is facilitated by the following mechanism: the tongue, being moist, collects minute particles from the air or from the object being investigated. When the tongue is withdrawn into the mouth the tips are placed into or against the Jacobson's organ situated in the anterior part of the pallete, or roof of the mouth. It consists of a pair of saccular structures covered in chemically sensitive nerve endings. The Jacobson's organ is connected to the brain by a special branch of the olfactory nerve. It is not yet fully understood how the particles are transferred from the tongue to the Jacobson's organ but it is probable that the tips of the tongue are inserted directly into the ducts in the organ and the particles transferred. It is also possible that the 'Y' shaping of the tongue adds a directional element to the ability to locate the source of a particular scent.

Other Senses

The facilitation of the tongue in combination with the Jacobson's organ has the effect of reducing the use of the tongue for tasting, and there are very few taste buds on it.

The remaining senses, all of which are concerned with the perception of the immediate situation, are acute. The sense of balance, for instance, is particularly good, as demonstrated by the tree climbing abilities of some snakes. It arises partly from the semicircular canals which respond to movements of the head, and partly from the manner in which the muscles are subjected to changing gravitational forces as the animal moves. I am also greatly impressed with the co-ordination with which a snake organises its movement when climbing as different parts of the body are positioned to retain the balance on a slender branch.

Although snakes appear impervious to pain, their sense of touch is surprisingly good. Diminutive tubercules on the convex parts of the head, especially the snout and chin, less commonly on the belly, and fewer still on the trunk and tail would appear to have a tactile function. This, however, is probably more to do with locomotion than with the perception of the environment.

Finally, snakes have acute sensitivity to temperature changes in the environment and to infra-red radiation. Most species have 'apical pits' on the back, flanks, tail and sometimes on the head. These are minute circular areas, barely visable to the naked eye, where the keratinous layer of the skin is much thinner than surrounding areas. The underlying epidermis in these areas is richly provided with bundles of nerve fibres and are generally accepted to be heat receptors. In addition, Pit vipers and some pythons and boas are equipped with heat receptor organs, generally situated along the snout, that enable them to locate warm-blooded prey with accuracy, even in the dark.

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Guardian Newspaper

Asian Rat Snakes of the Elaphe Genus

Part II Elaphe climacophora (Boie, 1826)

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.

Translation from the original German by John Hackworth.

Amongst Japanese snakes, Elaphe climacophora, also known as the Island Rat Snake, is one of the largest species. It can grow up to two metres but is usually fully grown at around 150-160cm. The body shape of this impressive Elaphe is slender and almost cylindrical. Typical of this Rat Snake is the long tail which takes up a quarter of the body. The long head is well set-off from the body. The scales are lightly keeled and the anal scale is divided. The eyes are brownish-yellow with a black pupil. The ground colour is greenish with brown tones. On the back and sides there are two longitudinal stripes consisting of many spots which are joined together. The underside of the body is completely grey. The head is grey-green to blue and a black line runs from the eye to the corner of the mouth.

A special variety is the albino form of E. climacophora which occurs in isolated populations in Japan. These snakes are yellowish-white and have red eyes.

Distribution and Habits

Elaphe climacophora can be found over the whole of Japan from Hokkaido to Kyusho and on the island of Shikoku. Individual occurrences have been recorded as follows; Tokyo, Yokohama, Kyoto, Kochi, Nagasaki, Yamato. The albino form occurrs at Ivakuni in the province of Yamaguchi and it was estimated in 1960 that there were still some 2000 specimens living there. In the meantime this number has been considerably reduced. Their habits in the wild are almost totally unknown. Elaphe climacophora is found in varying habitats and can often be encountered in cultivated fields. The Island Rat Snake is a ground dwelling species that sometimes climbs into trees and bushes. These snakes usually lie hidden in clumps of dry grass and, because of their colouring, are almost perfectly camouflaged and difficult to spot. They feed exclusively on small mammals. Young animals eat lizards and insects.

Maintenance in the Vivarium

Because of its size, Elaphe climacophora needs a fairly large vivarium. The furnishings can be the same as those described for Elaphe schrenki. This snake soon settles down at a temperature of 25 to 28 degrees C with adequate hiding places. They usually lie coiled together under cover and are quite peacefully behaved. The Island Rat Snake is diurnal. If they are picked up they become very nervous and can inflict several painful bites. When feeding, this Rat Snake can also exhibit individual characteristics. Sometimes they feed well and then fast for some time, or they feed very irregularly. They are usually offered laboratory mice which are promptly dealt with by constriction using one or two body coils. Rats are only very rarely taken. By and large, Elaphe climacophora is an interesting vivarium subject which can be kept without any problems. This can only lead to increasing popularity in the future. It is to be expected that Japanese snakes reach us in a much better hygienic condition with far fewer parasites.

Reproduction

Because my snakes are still too young I am unable to report any breeding results.

Since 1980 however, Vise of Monheim has managed to mate his Elaphe climacophora regularly each year.

The snakes are wintered from November to mid-March without any heating or lighting. During this time the temperature varied between 18 and 20 degrees C. After wintering, the snakes immediately began to mate. As with other snakes of this genus, the mating behaviour of the Island Rat Snake is very impulsive and can extend over days or even weeks, as for example, in a mating in 1982 from 9th - 25th February, in 1983 from 24th February - 1st April, in 1984 from 15th February - 1st

March.

Frequently a lengthy pursuit procedure is carried out during which the male tries repeatedly to copulate with the female. The male then bites the female firmly to prevent her escaping. In general the actual copulation lasts around one hour.

Because the mating of Elaphe climacophora is a protracted process with several copulations, it is difficult to calculate an exact gestation period. In 1982, ten eggs were laid on 22nd March and in 1983, eleven eggs were laid on 17th April. The elongated eggs were laid in an adhesive clump and were transferred to a plastic aquarium for incubation. The aquarium was filled with light, slightly moist foam rubber, covered with a sheet of glass and placed on a warm base. At a temperature of 27 degrees C with a nightly cooling-off, in 1982 the young snakes hatched between 17th and 20th May, and in 1983 between 18th and 24th June, i.e. between 60 and 65 days. The average length of the young animals was 27 - 35cm. The hatchlings had the same markings as the adult snakes in that the entire body was covered with numerous spots; these disappear after around two years and change into the typical striped pattern.

The rearing of the young snakes is usually quite complicated because, mostly, the young will not accept pink mice. Indeed many animals have to be force-fed. When annoyed, very young Elaphe climacophora immediately open the mouth so that a dead 'pinkie' can easily be placed in it. When the snake has been left in peace for a while it will, in most cases, begin to swallow the mouse. The young grow amazingly slowly. After two years they reach a length of 70 - 80cm and are sexually mature.

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

The Care and Captivity of the Rough Green Snake, Opheodrys aestivus

by P. Hobson

The Rough Green Snake is a beautiful delicate snake which often appears in dealers' shops in the summer. The snake is a North American species that ranges from Connecticut to Florida in the east, Ohio to Texas in the west and as far south as Mexico. It is long and thin in shape with lengths of up to 116cm being recorded, although most specimens measure less than 100cm. The major colour is a beautiful grass green on the back turning to cream underneath although some snakes are greener below. The scales are keeled and the eyes are large giving the snake good eyesight.

In the wild, the snake appears to be mainly arboreal and inhabits low growing bushes and dense vegetation, often near water. It has been reported that it is numerous on many islands in the Florida Everglades.

In its natural environment it is said to eat insects of many kinds especially crickets, spiders and grasshoppers as well as small frogs. The rest period is approximately from October/November to March/April, though this will vary depending on the part of its range from which the specimen originates.

This snake is reported to be rather fussy in captivity and often refuses to feed especially soon after importation. I have been lucky in that both of my specimens feed readily and are easy to care for.

I acquired both my specimens in June 1986 from a local dealer. I carefully selected both from a large number, looking for good clean snakes with perfect scales and eyes, tongue flicking out regularly and showing a keen interest in their surroundings.

The cage that the snakes are kept in was built by myself from some spare glass sheets. Basically the cage consists of a wooden frame which is varnished, set on a wooden varnished base with a lid of half glass and zinc gauze. It is 120cm high, 60cm wide and 60cm deep. The bottom is filled to a depth of 15cm with peat and potting compost. This is planted with Tradescantia, a Swiss Cheese plant (Monstera deliciosa) and a couple of Maranta plants. Because of the wooden base watering of the plants has to be judged carefully to stop the bottom from rotting.

The cage is heated during the day by a 60 watt light bulb for approximately 12 hours. The temperature at night falls from



The Rough Green Snake, Opheodrys aestivus Photo - Paul Hobson

26/28 degrees C to 22/24 degrees C. Because of this the plants grow to massive proportions and therefore need frequent pruning.

There isn't a water bowl at the bottom of the cage but there is one suspended from the side. Frequent spraying of water is carried out, approximately once every other day.

The snakes share the vivarium with two Florida Anoles and I have never noticed either species bother the other in any way. Both snakes spend most of their time sitting in the vegetation but they will usually go for a wander once or twice a day. They will often burrow in the compost but never stay there for long, always returning to the top of the cage to sit in the vegetation. A sprinkling of water always sets off a period of activity; if the snakes are reluctant to feed this would be a good time to try feeding. I feed both species on crickets purchased from a local dealer and both are quick to spot them and will actively hunt them.

Soon after I bought the snakes they shed their skins but after this neither shed for many months. At first this gave no cause for alarm as both were feeding well. This situation eventually carried on until the time from the last slough was ten months. At this time I purchased some Reptivite (a vitamin and mineral supplement). This was sprinkled on to the crickets before the snakes fed. In a matter of a couple of weeks both snakes shed their skins. It appears that there must be some vitamin or mineral lacking in commercially-bred crickets. Oddly enough, the anoles did not seem to suffer at all and continued to shed their skins at a normal rate during the ten months.

At one time one of the snakes acquired a black mark on its nose, the scale appearing to lift up. This did not seem to bother it and, after it shed its skin, the scale came away and left a small hole. This is dry and does not appear to hinder the snake in any way.

During winter I do not hibernate the

snakes but the temperature drops by a few degrees and the day length is gradually shortened to eight hours a day.

I believe that the secret to keeping these snakes is a well planted vivarium which is watered every few days, heated to a constant 28 degrees C during the day and allowed to drop by a few degrees at night.

My snakes have not bred but it is reported that they lay 3 to 12 eggs in July/ August and that the hatchlings measure 15 to 20 cm.

The Rough Green Snake has a close North American relative called the Smooth Green Snake and its care in captivity is probably similar.

References:

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Mattison, C. 1986, Snakes of the World, Blandford Press.

Hog Island Boas – An Identity Crisis

by Colin Clark

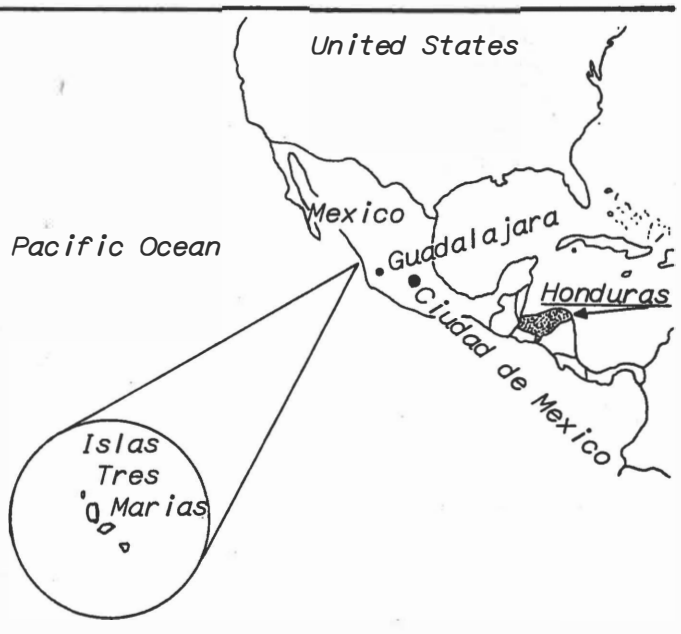
Firstly I would like to apologise to the reader who contacted the editor regarding Hog Island Boas (Snake Keeper Vol.1, No 10). Knowing that I had a pair of these snakes, Mike contacted me, and I passed on the information I had been given up to that time, namely, that the Boas came from a small island off Honduras and that the sub-species was Boa constrictor sigma.

I have spent many hours in public libraries, bookshops and at home poring over countless books and making telephone calls to various people trying to identify this particular sub-species and its reported island of origin, of which no trace can be found.

I am now convinced that the Hog Island Boas are not B.c. sigma. Firstly, B.c. sigma is found on a small island in the Tres Marias group off the west coast of Mexico (approximately 21 degrees North) and, at no stretch of the imagination, can these islands be classed as off the Honduran coast.

I have it on good authority that although the shipment originated in Honduras, the animals it contained are normally associated with the Dominican Republic area. This, and various other islands, are off the coast of Honduras even if they are some distance away.

It is possible that a shipment could have been taken to Honduras to form part of a larger consignment for a number of reasons. Of course this argument could be used for the case of B.c. sigma, but I think not.



I have also heard that the sub-species is Boa constrictor nebulosa, the Dominican Clouded Boa but I have been told that this has been dispelled by a Dutch source on the grounds of a scale count. B.c. nebulosa is also considered to be bigger built and to have an aggressive nature. (My pair are rather docile.) Although in John M. Mehrtens book 'Living Snakes of the World' there is a photograph of a snake that resembles a Hog Island Boa, it is accredited as B.c. nebulosa.

It is my personal belief, however, that the chances of Hog Island Boas being B.c. nebulosa or one of the other island sub-species is far greater than their being B.c. sigma. Of course I could be wrong; if anyone reading this knows the true identity of these snakes I, for one, would be grateful if they would share this knowledge with the rest of us. I also hope that this may encourage somebody to positively identify the sub-species.

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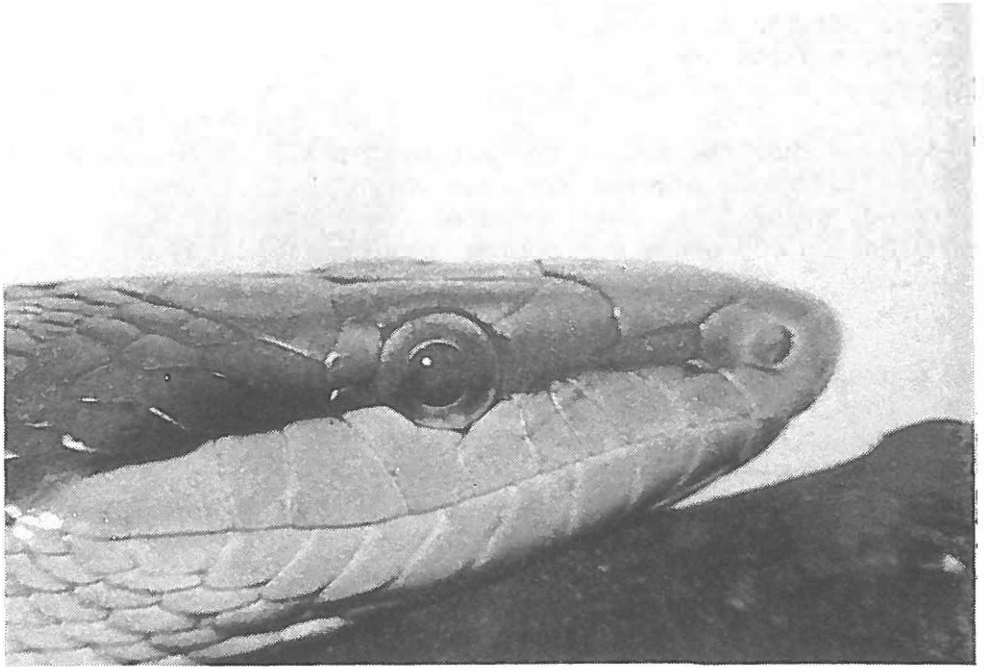
PHOTO PAGE

This month's Photo Pages feature part of the collection of Jan and Tom Burgess who live in Buckinghamshire.

Their interest in reptiles, primarily lizards, began about eight years ago.

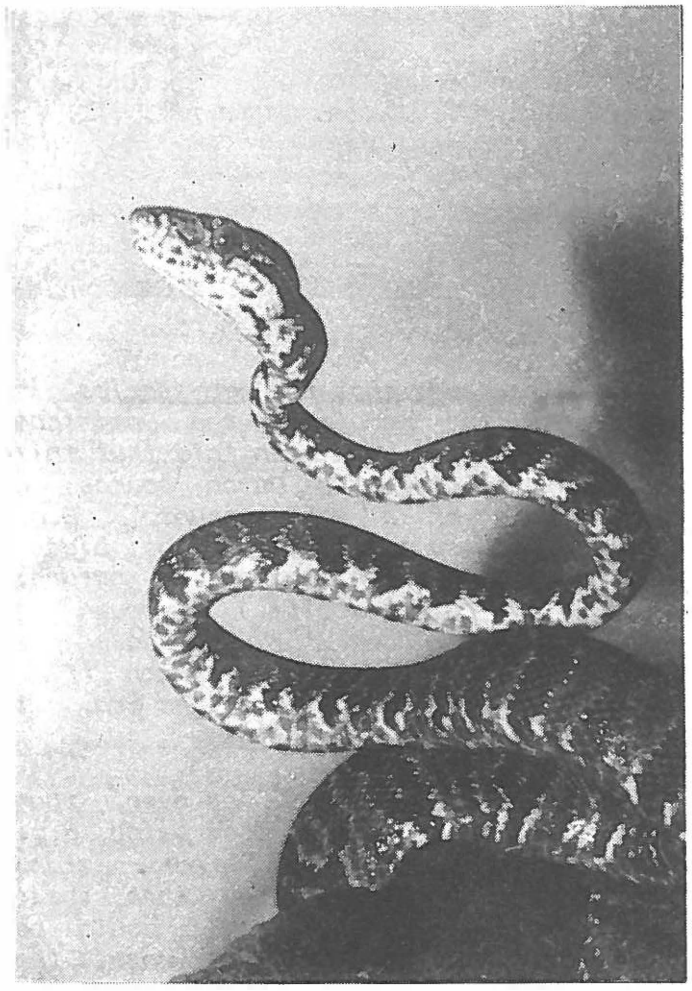
They are members of the Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group, A.S.R.A., and the International Herpetological Society.

(Photographs Lesley Close.)

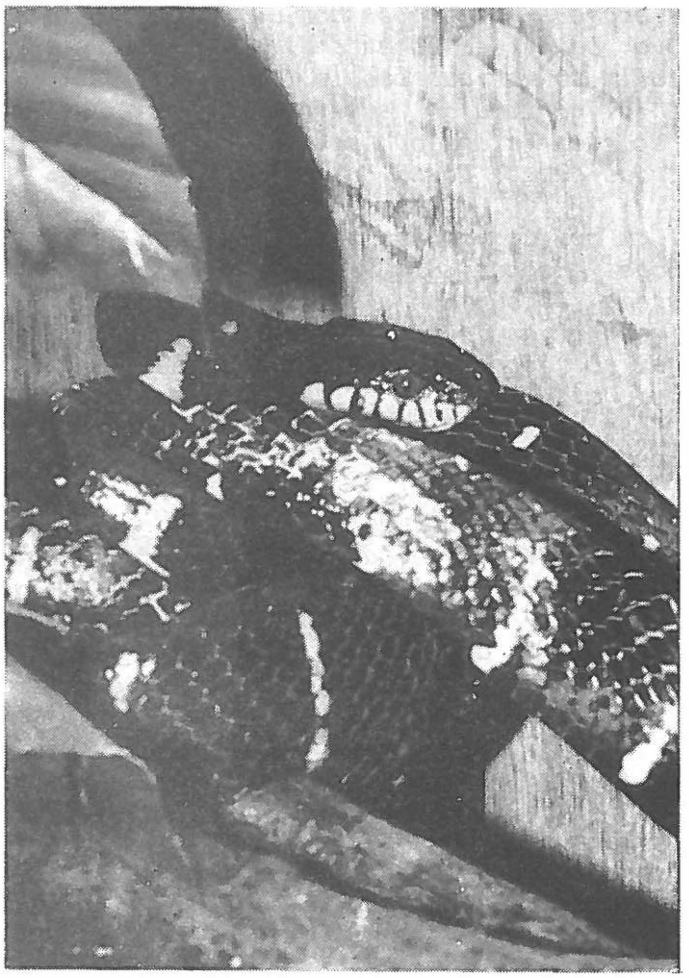


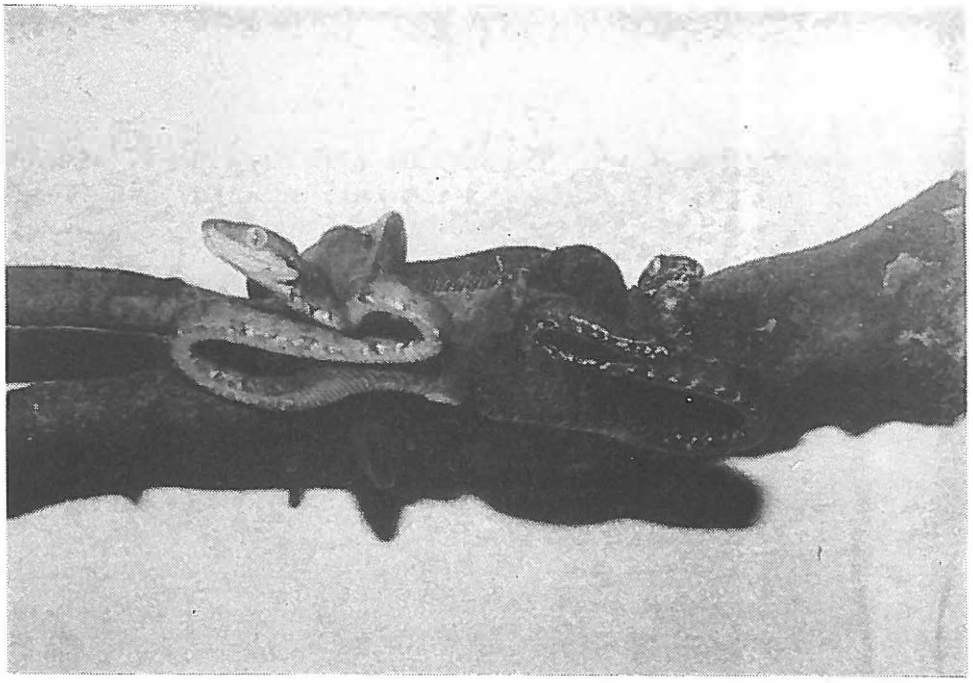
Above
Female Red-tail Tree Racer,
Gonyosoma oxycephala,
Approximately 4 years old.

Below
Male Mangrove Snake,
Boiga dendrophila,
Approximately 4 years old.

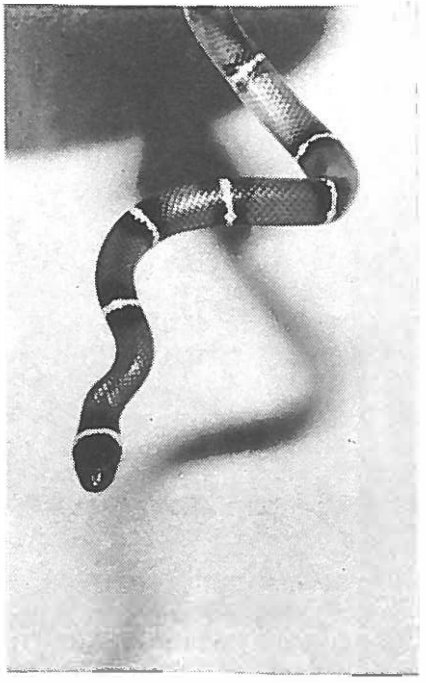


Above
Male Cook's Tree Boa,
Corallus enydris cookii,
Approximately 2 years old.

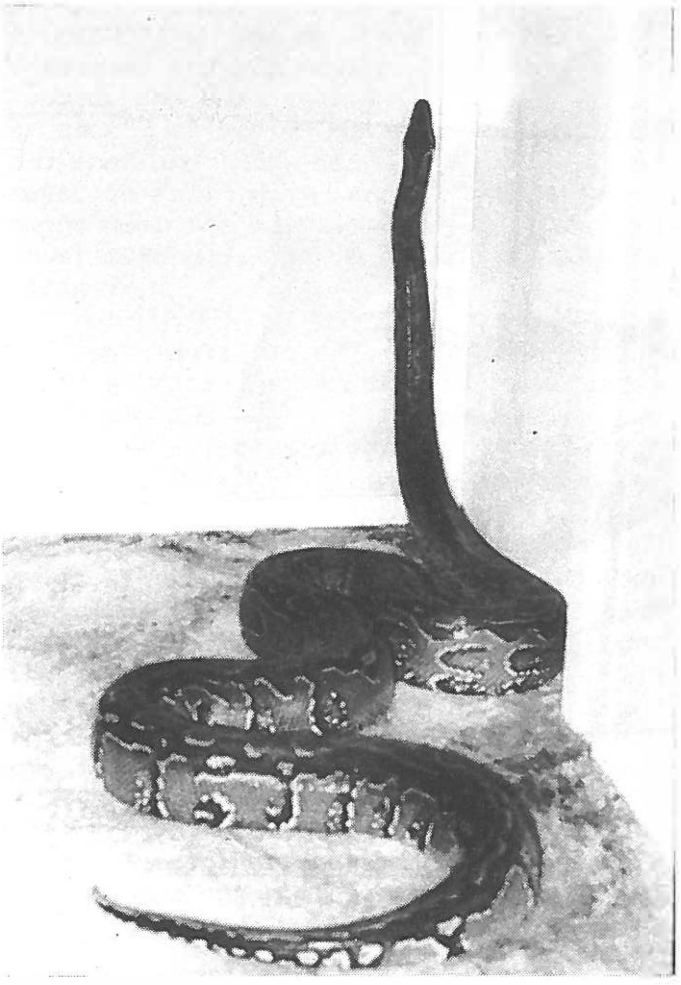


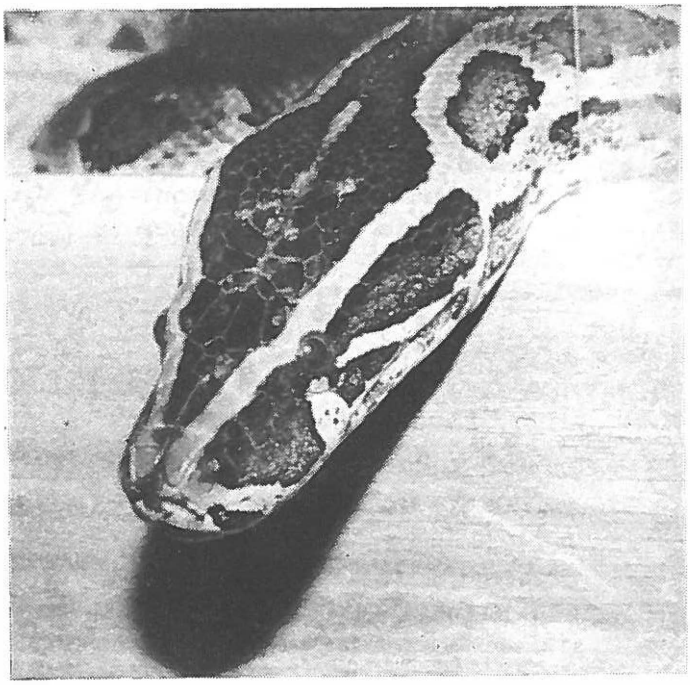


Above
Garden Tree Boas,
Corallus enydris enydris,
Female on left, male on right.
Captive bred in Holland and
approximately 9-12 months old.

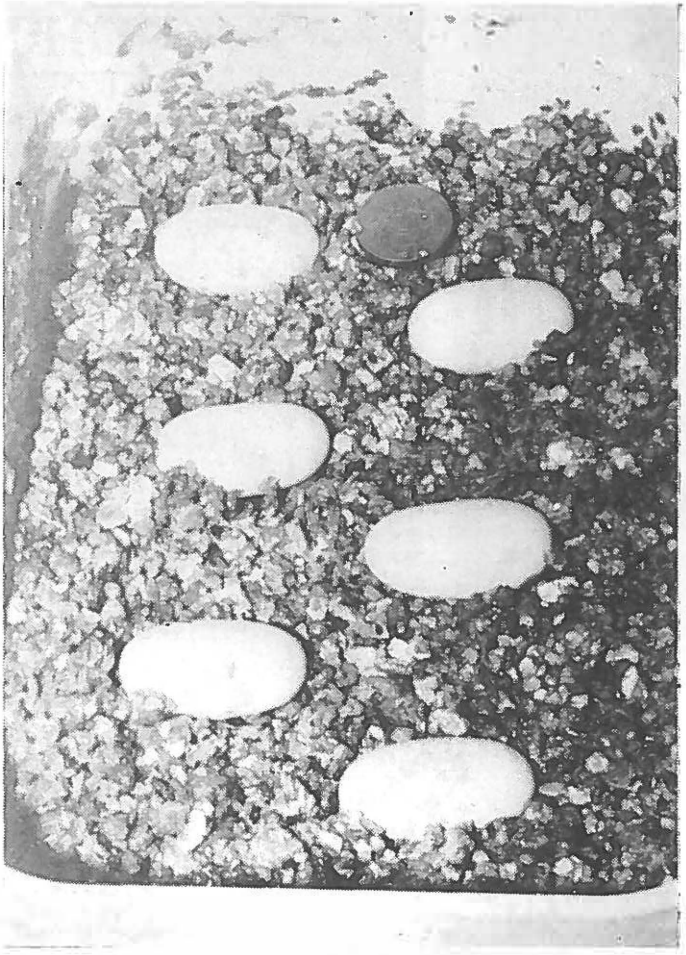


Above
Male Sinaloan Milk Snake,
Lampropeltis triangulum
sinaloae. Occurs naturally
in western Mexico but this
5 month old specimen was
captive bred in Britain.

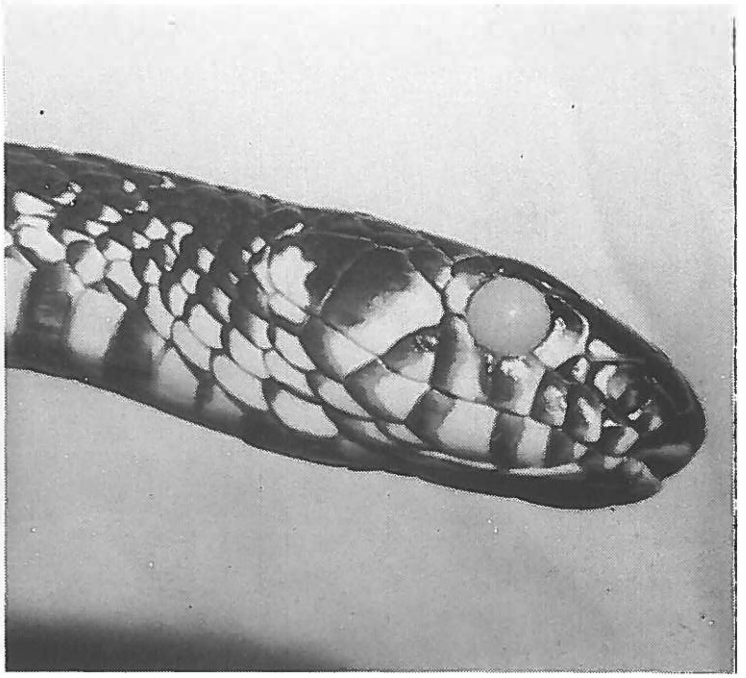




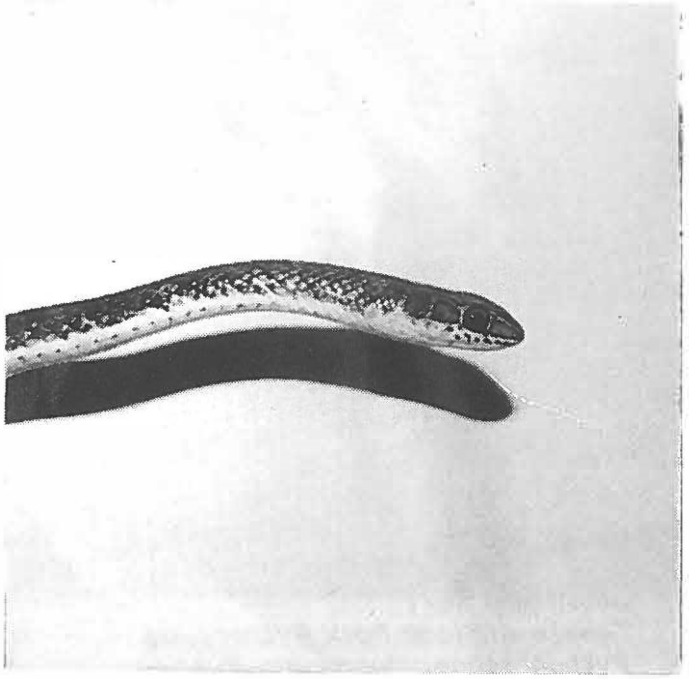
Above and left
Female African Rock Python,
Python sebae. Measuring 3.9
metres this snake is the largest
in Jan and Tom's collection. She
was bred in Holland about 6 years ago.



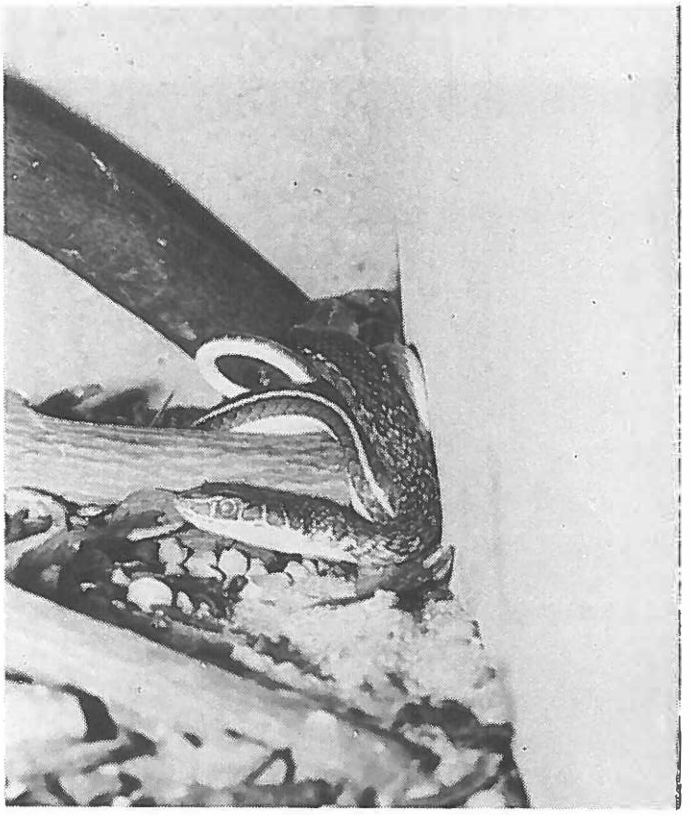
Above
Sand Snake, Psammophis subtaeniatus, eggs laid on the 13th December 1987.



Above
Tiger Rat Snake, Spilotes pullatus. Wild caught male approximately 4-5 years old. Eyes cloudy prior to sloughing.



Above
Male Sand Snake, Psammophis subtaeniatus. An extremely fast moving snake which can grow to 130cm.



Above
Female Sand Snake, Psammophis subtaeniatus. This female laid the eggs shown above.

If At First You Don't Succeed

by Cris Baldwin

My wife and I both like snakes and finally we decided that the time was right to get one. I was undecided as to which species but my wife wanted a Royal Python, Python regius, because of their beautiful markings. I told her about their suicidal leanings and that they are very nervous but she would not budge: she wanted a Royal.

So off we went and looked at a large female about 106cm long and weighing 1.7kg. The snake looked very fat and healthy. We later discovered that her first owner's daughter had dropped her and that the child had been bitten when she picked the snake up. The snake was returned to the shop in poor condition and covered in mites. She had been kept in a garden shed with some other snakes.

We found a shop which had some hatchling Royal Pythons in stock. We handled them and they looked fine so we went away to think about which one we would like and also to fit out a vivarium. Unfortunately, by the time I returned to buy one, the snakes had all been sold.

So, naturally, we returned to the shop containing the big female that had been dropped. She had developed two sores on her back just behind her head and we were told that she had not eaten for three weeks. We felt very sorry for her and bought her. She was taken home on the 2nd August 1986 and left alone for six days to settle in.

Our new snake was very active, often drinking from her pool and she often curled up, facing the television when it was on. We tried to encourage her to feed by placing freshly killed mice outside her cave but these were ignored.

On the 6th October 1986 her eyes clouded, then cleared. On the 12th October I sensed that today was the day she would slough. We had to go to a wedding and when we returned I checked the vivarium and found that she had sloughed cleanly. We offered some food but the snake refused to eat.

Weeks went by and in December we altered her photoperiod and temperature but without luck. January passed and the sores reappeared. As the sores were a form of dermatitis and we needed Gentamicin we went to our vet. He insisted on seeing 'Cuddles' in the surgery. I placed a towel on the table and put Cuddles on the towel. She lay there motionless with her tongue gently flicking. Suddenly she decided to leave the table and hung over the edge where the vet had been standing. He was now by the window and the nurse was out of the door! Cuddles was put back in her box and the ointment was handed over.

In order to minimise disturbing our snake three times a day I made 2.5cm holes in the roof of her cave. This enabled me to apply the ointment using cotton buds poked through the holes. This method worked very well; Cuddles accepted it and the sores started to heal.

Unfortunately Cuddles was still refusing to eat even though we had offered a wide range of food including rats, mice, gerbils and chicks (freshly killed and frozen). She was now visibly thinner. On the 18th February she sloughed again but this time three quarters of the old skin stayed on; either she was weak or we were doing something wrong. We put her in the bath in tepid water and I slowly peeled off the loose skin. She didn't seem to mind me doing this but she made my wife jump when she decided to get out. After the bath we dried her and put her back in the vivarium.

I decided to put the heating under her water container which I hoped would lead to increased humidity. The temperature was increased to 32 degrees C during the day and 27 degrees C at night. I used natural sunlight as well as artificial light. I replaced her stone cave with a cardboard box and removed the shingle substrate replacing it with wood shavings. At night we put a curtain in front of the glass.

Suddenly Cuddles started bathing in her pool and would spend several hours a day in the water. On the 5th May we found a pile of uric acid crystals - the first sign of anything in that line! She still refused to feed and sloughed on the 25th May 1987, again retaining most of the old skin. This time she allowed me to remove it while she lay in the pool.

On the 12th June 1987 I checked on her, as

I did every day, and noticed the sores were reappearing. Using the same ointment as before, I treated her but she seemed somehow different. On a hunch I put a freshly killed mouse in her viarium and it vanished quickly followed by a second. We tried her every two days and she took everything we gave her. We estimated that it was eleven and half months since she previously ate and she had lost nearly 225 grams in weight.

Cuddles now fed regularly, on fresh and frozen rats, mice and gerbils. Her back healed up and she became a round snake again, not triangular. Unfortunately during her eating period she became very moody, tending to strike out whenever we went near her. This behaviour lasted for three weeks and stopped as suddenly as it started. She spends most of her days in the water and has stopped eating although we are still trying her with food once a week. We offered her food on the 12th September with a dead mouse left in overnight. She totally ignored it and stayed in her box. When my wife went to remove it Cuddles quickly appeared at the opening of her box and didn't look too friendly so she could be feeling anti-social again.

Thankfully I have a young Red-tail Boa so at least I have one snake that is behaving itself and is friendly. Cuddles is causing us some concern and I am convinced that total isolation and a box that the snake can feel secure in is an essential requirement for large captive Royal Pythons.

Be warned anyone thinking of buying a Royal Python as a first snake. Some specimens can be easy to keep (as previous articles in Snake Keeper prove) but these snakes can also cause a lot of worry and concern. Remember also, that the pet shops sell Royal Pythons because they are pretty and rarely bite. This makes them easy to sell. Do, please, ask an expert for advice (not necessarily the seller). We did and were told by a well known person that we would be lucky if it lasted three months and that it wasn't worth the bother. However we ignored his advice and persevered. We learnt, just like everybody else has to, and we have succeeded - so far!

Samantha, Wife of Ken

by Stuart Gray

It was a few weeks after Ken, my Royal Python (Python regius) and myself settled down in our house that Ken exhibited some strange behaviour. He would coil around my forearm and drive the tip of his tail hard into my flesh so I said to him, "You are a big boy now! It's time you got married".

I began to search for a female Royal Python for Ken. After a number of false starts I found a breeder called Bob Smith. We arranged to meet at Gatwick airport railway station where I hoped to find a secluded place to view the snake. I got to Gatwick only to find that the station booking hall was in the middle of the airport departure lounge with no cover for us.

With hundreds of people milling about we huddled into a corner hoping that we would not be seen examining the snake. I saw at once that the female was a beautiful snake and money changed hands. Samantha was removed from her box and placed in a neck bag under my sweater, next to my stomach, and we began the journey home. What with Ken disrupting Robin Hill Zoo and Samantha threatening to disrupt a major airport if we were seen, the future seemed interesting.

Samantha settled in without any trouble and she began feeding well in a case next to Ken.

After two weeks I decided that it was time they met. At first Ken showed little interest in Samantha and then one night when I had put Samantha to bed I said to Ken, "Let's say goodnight to her". I opened the case where Samantha had hidden under the bed clothes so Ken could not see her. Ken suddenly went into a defensive ball. I phoned Ron Lilley, Senior Reptile Keeper at Robin Hill Zoo, and he told me that although Ken could not see Samantha he had smelt her but he was unable to identify the smell as a Royal Python. It seems that Royal Pythons have to learn or relearn their smells.

Later I put the two snakes in the same case, first one night together, then two and they finally fell in love. Ken taught Samantha how to harrass me by demanding

attention at the most inconvenient times but, as I had already conceded leadership to Ken there was no need to go too far. During the last two months they have been going through the mating ritual and each morning I find the water, hide box and bed clothes have been thrown about. I think I will try to find a 4 metre Indian Python to cool Ken down.

It's funny but as one gets older, one's hearing plays tricks. I was in the kitchen whilst Ken and Samantha were watching television and I could have sworn I heard Samantha say to Ken, "Where does it go to in the evenings?" "It goes to the pub to get booze", replied Ken. "What is booze?", asked Samantha. "Well... look, it's left some in this glass, try it, Samantha!", suggested Ken. " Ooh! I do feel funny", said Samantha. "Don't worry", said Ken, "come into the hide box and I'll look after you!"

The African Rock Python

by Perry Curzon

Habitat

The African Rock Python, Python sebae, is distributed throughout large parts of Africa, south of the Sahara Desert. It is seldom seen in the tropical rain forests as it prefers the open plains. It reaches lengths of up to 6 metres (20').

Captivity

In keeping with the large size of this snake a sizeable vivarium is required with a sturdy climbing limb. This is essential as Python sebae often rests in branches using its strong prehensile tail to keep its balance. A large water basin is also essential as Python sebae will often spend hours immersed with just its nostrils protruding from the water, particularly prior to sloughing.

The vivarium temperature should be 25 to 32 degrees C (77 to 90 degrees F) during the daytime dropping to 18 to 22 degrees C (65 to 72 degrees F) at night. Lighting should be on for 12 to 14 hours a day.

In its natural habitat Python sebae hibernates for 2 to 4 months. I believe that this is unnecessary in captivity.

Feeding

Python sebae presents no problems regarding feeding and usually takes dead prey. In the wild it shows hardly any food preferences, living on rodents, rabbits, birds and monkeys. Large specimens will take wild boars and small antelope.

In captivity it will eat mice, rats, hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits and chickens, all of which are despatched with equal relish.

Behaviour

Whilst Python sebae is generally considered to be calmer than Python reticulatus, many individuals bite readily until they settle down. Once settled they make good, undemanding pets.

If you are considering purchasing Python sebae it is advisable to buy a hatchling which can easily be tamed. Do not consider a larger specimen unless it is a long-term captive.

Conclusion

Python sebae can make a rewarding and long-lived addition to ones collection and, although this snake does grow to a large size, the growth rate is much slower than Python reticulatus or Python molurus, taking about 4 years to reach 2.5m (8'). However, some specimens remain aggressive throughout their life and any 3 metre python with a belligerent disposition does not make a good pet. I believe that bad-tempered specimens are the exception rather than the rule and I would stress that the opinions expressed are made from personal observations.

HERPETOLOGICAL PUBLICATIONS

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SHOP WINDOW

Every month SHOP WINDOW will offer an interesting selection of items for the snake keeper. Society publications are offered for sale only as an introduction to the respective society and will be sent with a membership form where available. We are normally unable to obtain the publications at a discounted price and have to add our postage and packing costs. You will, in most cases, be able to save money by purchasing the items directly from the society.

Prices include U.K. postage and packing.

'The Herptile'. Quarterly Journal of the International Herpetological Society. These publications contain a selection of herpetological articles although only those of direct interest to snake keepers are noted.

Volume Twelve (1987)

Number one — *The Dekay's Snake.*
An introduction to the care and breeding of small rodents

Number Two — *Hybridisation between Corn Snake and Texas Rat Snake.*
Breeding Death Adders.
'Klaygun' and its use in force feeding snakes.
Ottoman Viper in Greek Islands.

Number Three — *Breeding the Boa Constrictor.*
Natural history and captive breeding of the Californian King Snake.
The Coral Snake question.

Number Four — *Electronic temperature measurement and control.*
Captive breeding Durango and Arizona Mountain Kingsnakes.
Asiatic colubrids- Part 1.

Price: £1.45p each.

'Litteratura Serpentium'. Bi-monthly publication of the Dutch Snake Society.

Volume Seven (1987)

Number One — *Elaphe taeniura.*
The Corn Snake in the wild and in the terrarium, Pt. 1.
Terrarium building, Pt. III.
Breeding results.

Number Two — *False pregnancy in a Boa constrictor.*
The keeping and hibernating of Elaphe g. quatourlineata.
The Corn Snake in the wild and in the terrarium, Pt. 2.
Use of an autogenous vaccine for the control of recurrent mouth rot in Python molurus bivittatus. Breeding results.

Number Three — *Observations on the maintenance and reproduction of Python curtus.*
The Corn Snake in the wild and in the terrarium, Pt. 3.
Crotalus atrox in the terrarium. Breeding results.

Number Four — *The Diamond-back Rattlesnake, Crotalus adamanteus.*
Unexpected breeding of Epicrates cenchria cenchria.
Some experiences with the Spotted skaapsteker, Psammophylax rhombeatus.
The snakes of Surinam, part XVII: Family Elapidae, subfamily Micrurinae (genara Leptomicrurus and Micrurus).
Breeding results.

Supplement 1 — *List of snakes kept and bred by members of the Dutch Snake Society including addresses of the members named.*

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BOOK REVIEW

Pythons and Boas
by Peter J. Stafford
Published by T.F.H.
192 pages. 111 Colour photographs
Price £18

In this hardback book both layout and photographs are superb, making it one of the best books written on the subject.

Contents include; Natural history, Captive breeding and care of boids. The book also covers each family of pythons and boas, including subfamilies.

The text is both practical and comprehensive, including distribution maps, excellent drawings and a few black and white photographs. The 192 pages cover all aspects encountered by a snake keeper. This is the second time I have written this review. The first contained one word - Brilliant!

John Hayward

Don't forget to mention SNAKE KEEPER when replying to adverts

Regular supplies of Snake Keeper are now available in the U.K. from	*Respectable Reptiles* *17 Hampton Road* *Hampton Hill* *Middlesex*
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and in Holland from	*Interrep* *Waldorpstraat 38* *2521 CC Den Haag* *Holland*
and in the U.S.A. and Canada from	*Zoo Med Laboratories* *1420 S. Ritchey* *Unit C* *Santa Ana* *Ca 92705 U.S.A.*

Next issue includes:
Asian Rat Snakes of Elaphe Genus, Part 3, Elaphe schrenki.
Removing Skin (Leather) from Dead Snakes and Home Curing of Leather.

LETTERS

Dear Snake Keeper,

Just a short word for anybody whose snake collection is suffering from an infestation of mites and/or ticks. I have just acquired a 1m Indian Python which was in excellent condition but suffering very badly from mites.

Having consulted books and fellow herpetologists I decided that treatment with a Vapona strip was called for. Unfortunately, Maidenhead shopping centre in mid-winter is not exactly the centre of the universe and I failed to purchase the afore-mentioned Vapona.

The second-best measure seemed to be removing the mites with a pair of tweezers. Unfortunately my hands aren't too steady and my python didn't take too kindly to being poked with a pair of tweezers. At this point I had one of my infrequent brain waves. Using some of my sister's cotton wool buds dipped in water, I successfully removed the mites with a quick tap. This method was much easier on the snake as well and, combined with frequent vivarium washing and daily mite removal, I have totally wiped out the mites.

By the way, congratulations on such an excellent magazine but could it possibly be a bit longer? I have not yet managed to get the December and January editions. If the pen pal idea has gone ahead I would like to add my name to the list.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hazell (19)

JUNIOR SNAKE KEEPER

The Russian Rat Snake, Elaphe s. schrenckii

by Julia Pierce

The Russian Rat Snake, otherwise known as the Amur Rat Snake, is a quiet species that seems to enjoy being handled. It can grow to a length of 180cm but it is a slender snake. Adults are brown or black in colour on the back with grey or tan bands running along the body beginning just behind the head. The bands start to break as they reach the tail. The head is a shiny black colour, appearing polished, and the throat and abdomen are a yellow/cream colour. The stomach has grey checkers on it.

Young Russian Rat Snakes are blotched like most species of Elaphe when juvenile. The body colour is a tan or light brown with perhaps more than thirty large blotches. These blotches, which are of a mid-brown colour and are bordered with black, soon disappear as the snake gets older.

The stomach of a young snake is much darker than that of an adult being a reddish-brown colour. Three to four months after birth the change from juvenile to adult markings begins.

Husbandry

The Russian Rat Snake is quite easy to keep and should be housed in a vivarium of 100cm x 60cm x 60cm. Newspaper can be used for the substrate but, as I find this unattractive, I prefer to use gravel. A water bowl, a hide box and an optional branch are the only other furnishings needed to complete the vivarium. The temperature should be about 28 degrees C (82 degrees F) during the day and 20 degrees C (68 degrees F) at night. Russian Rat Snakes prefer a fairly dry environment and dislike being sprayed prior to sloughing. On one occasion, my snake, 'Ratso', ate a mouse seconds before he sloughed, which most snakes don't do. On another occasion he wouldn't eat which seems a common problem amongst a lot of snakes. Sometimes my snake will eat two or three mice and then go for four or five weeks without eating. This behaviour has caught me out on several occasions; I have defrosted mice and then he doesn't want them but this seems common (unfortunately for my pocket).

Breeding

Mating in the wild takes place in June or July with the eggs being laid around eight weeks after copulation. They take about 60 days to incubate at a temperature of 28 degrees C. The average number of eggs is 12 and the hatchlings measure 30cm.

I hope to breed Russian Rat Snakes in the future but at present I don't know what sex my snake is!

Correspondence to:
Julia Pierce, 95 Princes Avenue,
Walderslade, Chatham, Kent ME5 8AY.

The Tiger Rat Snake

by Dominic Betmead

Spilotes pullatus and Spilotes pullatus mexicanus are known by many names; Tiger Rat Snake, Chicken Eater, Cribo, Black and Yellow Rat Snake, Spotted Rat Snake, Tropical Chicken Snake. Whatever you wish to call them, they are often considered hard to keep in captivity. The Tiger Rat Snake hails from tropical South America, from Mexico to southern Brazil. As mentioned earlier there are two forms, Spilotes pullatus and Spilotes pullatus mexicanus; the Tiger Rat Snake and the Mexican Spotted Rat Snake. These snakes must have the largest range of common names of any snake of the colubrid family or even the whole world of snakes. Usually the background colour is ebony black, upon which lemon yellow crossbands are irregularly spaced. The head is relatively small, and the large pitch black eyes stand out prominently.

I have found this snake to be a very good captive (as snakes go) and a great show piece. When first obtained, this snake is often very aggressive but, like many other snakes, it will 'tame' once picked up. At present I am taming mine properly by picking it up every day with gloves. So far this has been very successful. The snake I have is a 2.1 metre male kept in a large vivarium containing a water basin big enough for him to submerge in, climbing branches and shelves and a large rock for the snake to hide beneath. The substrate is gravel/cat litter (which I have found is very useful for keeping the larger colubrids on).

Heating and Lighting

Heating is provided by a 100 watt ceramic heater connected to a thermostat (Slik-stat) that is fastened to the top of the cage. Lighting is provided by a 30 watt 'Strip-lite' connected to a time switch. The photoperiod is 12 hours on and 12 hours off. The ambient temperature is 26 to 30 degrees C. I made the vivarium myself with the help of my father and a friend. It consists of a blockboard box with an open front. The wood is beeswaxed (the only safe vivarium polish) and veneered. The vivarium has sliding glass doors at the front.

Feeding

Feeding these snakes is relatively easy following the usual large colubrid pattern. Mice, rats and birds are all accepted but eggs are rejected. I feed my snake once a week on two dead mice or one dead rat. This snake, when hungry, will actively search its cage, poking into every nook and cranny, looking for prey. I try to feed mine before this happens as the snake can seriously damage its nose on the mesh ventilation ports of the cage.

Many people classify this snake as a constrictor but I have not seen this happen at feeding time, even if the mice are jiggled around in front of it. However, since I have never actually fed my snake live mice, I cannot say for sure. There is one serious warning - NEVER keep any other snake of similar or smaller size with this one as they will be eaten, even if venomous. There have been records of King Snakes being eaten!

This snake will live for a long time in captivity, possibly 20 years. It grows to around 2.4 metres but will sometimes grow to 3.9 metres. An adult specimen has the same girth as a fully grown rat snake (Elaphe spp.) making this a very slender snake. When angry, this snake vertically flattens its neck and rattles its tail in a frightening display of rage. Care must be taken that the snake does not strike at the glass front. Unfortunately, captive bred specimens of this species are extremely rare and, if you can get hold of them, they will most probably have been bred in the U.S.A. and will be very expensive, possibly over £100.

Summary

To summarize, this snake is easy to keep if properly catered for. You can expect to pay anything between £50 and £90 for a Tiger Rat Snake.

References

Griehl, K. 1984, Snakes, (English edition) Barron's Educational Series.
Frank, Dr. W, 1979, Boas, (English ed.) T.F.H. Publications.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

Rates: Private advertisements (not exceeding 40 words) are printed without charge. Trade advertisements 10p a word. Deadline: 20th of the month.

FOR SALE

Two male Corn Snakes, 4 - 5', £70 each. Telephone Mark Wooten (0634) 44926 (Kent).

Second generation British-bred male Indian Python. 8 months old, approximately 3.5'. Excellent feeder. Beautiful, strong, healthy snake in immaculate condition. Phone Billy on Runcorn (092 85) 64457 with offers over £55.

Two tame, captive-bred Yellow Rat Snakes. One male 40", £35. One other male, 36" with small part of tail missing, £25. Would swap both for one medium or two small sized Bull/Pine snakes or one very young Boa or Indian Python. Other Boids considered. Contact Dominic Betmead on Cambridge (0223) 60541.

6' Boas £90, 4' Indians £60, Grey Rat Snakes £70, Redtailed Rat Snakes £50, King Snakes £70, Garter Snakes, Baby Indians, Lizards, Frogs, Tarantulas, etc, etc. Telephone (0604) 410089.

Burmese Python (P.m.b.) 8' male, healthy and feeding well. Contact Pete Jarvis on 0793 611273 (Swindon).

WANTED

British-bred Boa Constrictor. Preferably female but will consider a male. Also female Banded Water Snake (Nerodia fasciata) - temperament unimportant. Phone Angie on Runcorn (092 85) 64457.

Supplies of adult rats and pink mice in Sussex/Kent area. Telephone Marc on (0903) 882609. 24 Queen St., Arundel, Sussex BN18 9JG.

One hatchling or very young Carolina Corn Snake (E.g.g.). Preferably feeding. Phone Cassandra Oakes (0509) 215619 anytime.

Grass or Dice Snakes (any age). Pair of Corn Snakes (must be feeding well!). Adult male Black Rat Snake. Write to John Hackworth, Box No. 4, Snake Keeper Magazine.

CONTACT

Contact with anyone having information on or experience of Dromicus chamisomis, a small back-fanged colubrid from Chile. Josie and Chris, Box No. 3, Snake Keeper Magazine.

I would like to hear from or buy from a breeder or collector a Hognose (Western), male, or a black West African House Snake. Phone James Ellice on 01 464 9636.

PEN PALS

The following readers are interested in corresponding with other snake keepers.

Karen English, age 19, from Essex.
Darren Fox from Buckinghamshire.
Paul Hazell, age 19, from Berkshire.

Please address your letters c/o Snake Keeper, marking them PEN PAL in the top left hand corner.

IMPORTANT...

Modernisation of Amersham Telephone Exchange

The new exchange will be brought into service on

Saturday 5th March at 7.30 am.
and our telephone number will change to

(0494) 722769

Correction.
Carol Hindley has asked us to correct a mistake which appeared in her article 'The Rainbow Water Snake' (Snake Keeper Volume 2, Number 2, Page 13). This snake is viviparous not ovo-viviparous.



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