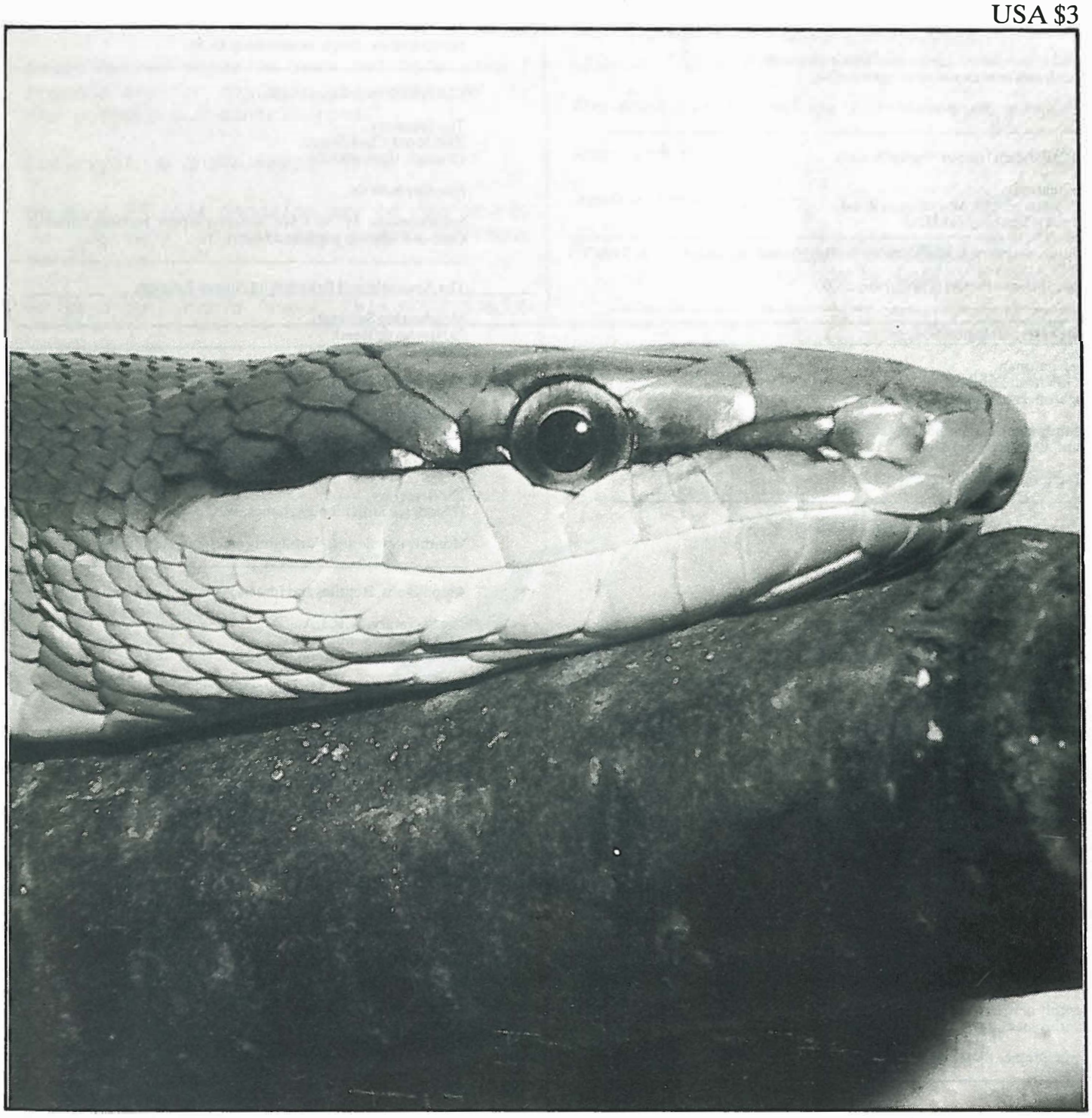
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INFORMATION

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Subscriptions: Ordinary members £15.00.

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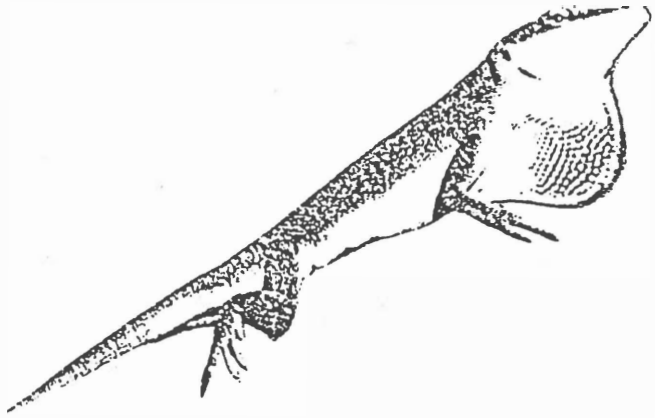
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Front cover: Gonyosoma oxycephala
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Asian Rat Snakes of the Elaphe Genus

Part IV Elaphe dione (Pallas, 1773)

by Klaus-Dieter Schulz

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Translation from the original German by John Hackworth.

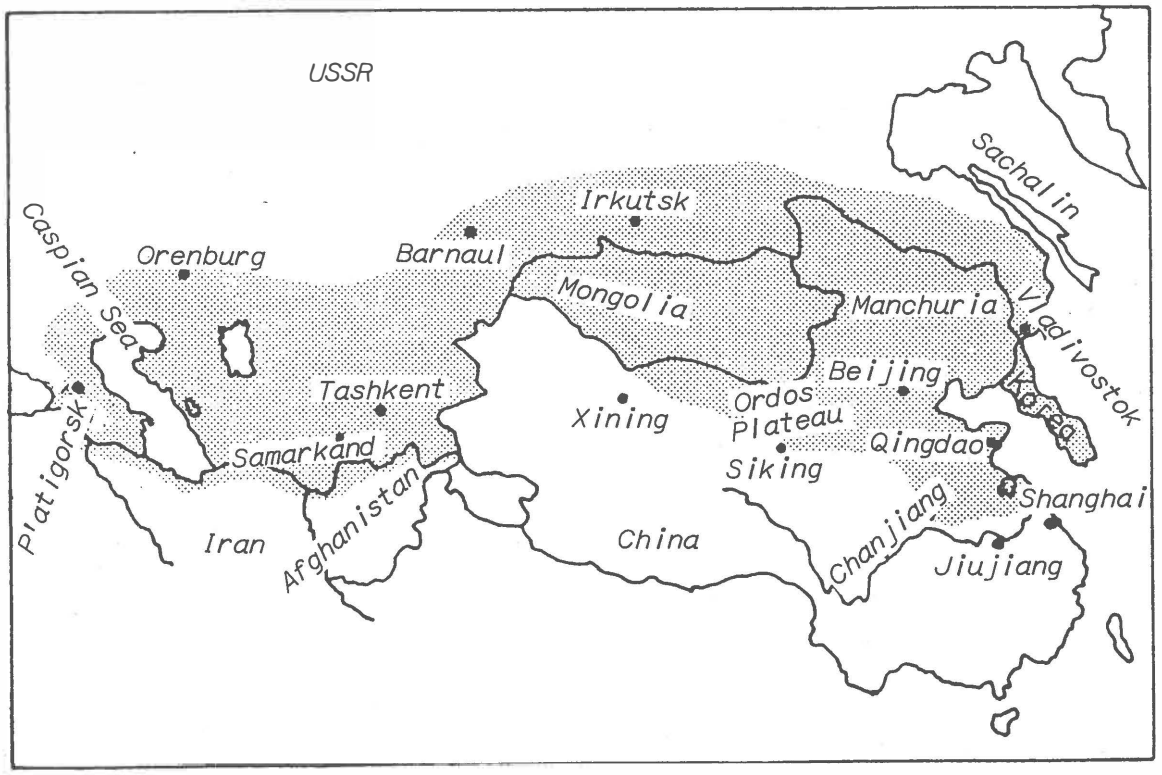
To give an exact colour description of the Dione Rat Snake one would almost have to write a complete book. In their enormous distribution range this small Rat Snake occurs in so many variations that it is amazing that no sub-species has been described. These days most animals which get into our vivaria come from the Soviet Union. Their colouring is basically grey to grey-brown covered with irregular dark brown spots. These spots can sometimes be edged in black or can even be totally black. In addition, uniformly coloured snakes in dark grey, brown and black can also be found, but, however these are quite rare. The top of the head has very variable markings. It consists of a dark brown horseshoe, open at the neck, with a light centre (see sketch in part 1). A dark stripe extends from the corner of the eye to the corner of the mouth. The underside is grey or yellowish-white with scattered dark spots. The length of female snakes is usually around 90cm.

According to my knowledge, the colouring of Dione Rat Snakes varies depending upon how far East they are found. In this way even the Chinese and Korean specimens can show significant differences. Here the grey tones disappear to be replaced by brown, red-brown or even yellow tones.

As opposed to the Western forms, which in general can be described as small snakes, Chinese specimens can be considerably larger and more robust: total length of females up to 105cm (Schulz 1983), 110.4cm (Mell 1929). The males remain smaller and thinner.

Distribution

The large range of distribution of the Dione Rat Snake extends from Northern Turkey and the South West of the USSR (the Caucasus) across the Southern Ukraine, along the Caspian Sea, over Northern Iran, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Korea and China. The Yangtse-Kiang River in Central China appears to be the south-east limit of their occurence. Some animals have also been found in the extreme south of China but the same can be said of these as of other Chinese species that they have simply been transported there. Pope (1935) lists the following Chinese provinces for the distribution of Elaphe dione: Kiang-su, Shantung, Shansei, Kansu and Shanghai. It is interesting that in Eastern China, Elaphe dione has only extended its range southwards. The explanation of this seemingly abnormal distri-



bution is not apparent. Perhaps in the near future specimens will be found in Western China proving that the Dione Rat Snake also exists there. Elaphe dione appears to occur universally since it can be found in all biotopes. In the Caucasus and Central Asia it can be found at altitudes up to the forest limits (Nicolsky 1916). Quite often this snake has been found in semi-scrubland (Ordos Plateau - China) and the Steppe regions. However, damp regions are also the habitat of the Dione Rat Snake. This was observed by G. Kirichenko on the Caspian Sea at Palysh where they quite capably caught fish from the sea (Soverby 1914). Like many members of its genus this snake has also become a follower of civilisation in that it is frequently found in gardens and old houses. Taracuk (1959) reports that Elaphe dione can often be found under harvested corn and in barns. Obst (1962) found specimens near Bajanchongor, a sulphur spa in the Shanhai Mountains in the immediate vicinity of the treatment centres.

The range of food which they eat is extremely extensive. As well as small mammals, birds and their eggs, they also eat other reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects. In Emelianov's case (1929) young Dione Rat Snakes even ate cockroaches.

Elaphe dione is a very peaceful snake which only very rarely bites, even when handled. It moves very slowly and sometimes even laboriously. When extremely angry it vibrates its tail, a phenomenon which often occurs with other colubrids.

Maintenance in the Vivarium and Reproduction

Because this snake shows great variability in habitat it makes no great demands regarding the furnishings of the vivarium. They can therefore be kept equally well in a forest or desert vivarium. Some herpetologists advise a deep substrate because these snakes like to burrow. However, I have never been able to observe this behaviour. The substrate in my vivarium consists of a 5-6cm layer of a sand/peat mixture. Because the Dione Rat Snake remains quite small the dimensions of the vivaria can also be small, e.g. for two males and two females a vivarium of 70 x 50 x 50cm (lxbxh) is quite adequate. It is however particularly important to keep Russian specimens very dry because on a damp substrate fungal diseases can occur. A water bowl, however, must always be available. My snakes use this not only for drinking, but frequently also for defecation. The water bowl is almost never used for bathing. With Chinese specimens, however, I have often observed that they like lying in water, especially before sloughing. During the day the temperature in my vivarium is between 25 and 27 degrees C and at night around 20 degrees C. In my experience, Elaphe dione is a very active snake but one which climbs only very occasionally.

The snakes are fed on half-grown laboratory mice. Mongolian gerbils are also eagerly eaten by snakes which are extremely hungry (Buseke). The mice are quickly constricted by a few body coils. Small and defenceless animals are swallowed live or pressed to the ground until dead. I have also observed that some snakes press their snouts into the mouse, in all probability to accelerate the suffocation process.

After being intensively 'tongued' even pieces of meat are sometimes taken. However, meat, even that which has had vitamin and mineral preparations added, should never be relied upon as a complete food source since it never has the same nutritional value as a mouse from well-fed stock.

With appropriate hibernation, Elaphe dione can be bred relatively easily. However, it is recommended that during hibernation and before the mating season, the sexes be housed seperately. Mating usually takes place in March or April but can occur later (eggs laid in December, Tiser). I have even had reports of snakes mating in Autumn and only laying their eggs the following year (verbal report (Schneider 1985) to Vohenstrauss). It is interesting that in the reproductive biology of the Dione Rat Snake, the females are able to retain the eggs or sperm until environmental conditions are able to guarantee successful incubation. In Sosnovsky's case a female laid fertile eggs after having been kept alone for nine months. The very short incubation time of 13 or 14 days (Olexa 1975) is most unusual in colubrids. Sowerby (1914) gives a maximum incubation time of three weeks and in Emelianov's case (1929) the eggs hatched after 28 days at temperatures of 18-25 degrees C. I am of the opinion that the duration of the incubation depends solely upon how high the incubation

temperature is. In Tiser's case (1980) temperatures of 28-32 degrees C during the day and 23-25 degrees C at night resulted in the hatching process beginning after only 14 days. At lower temperatures, e.g. at 25-27 degrees C and a nightly cooling to 20 degrees C, the snakes hatched after 25-30 days. The longer incubation at lower temperatures does, however, have the advantage that the hatchlings are much stronger and much more capable of survival. The theory of Trutnau (1979) that animals from higher altitudes are almost viviparous is therefore almost true. The number of eggs can vary considerably. Normally 5-10 elongated eggs are laid. The largest clutch of E. dione eggs consisted of 16 eggs (Schmidt, 1981). At hatching, young E. dione are 15-20cm and, in general, readily take pink mice after the first slough. I find it peculiar that in my case the females take food much more readily than the males. I have had the same experience with other Elaphe species (Elaphe helena, Elaphe bimaculata). With exceptionally good feeding, the snakes can be sexually mature in one and a half years.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that because of easy management and their pleasing colouring, especially in the case of Chinese and Korean animals, these snakes can be highly recommended to even the most amateur herpetologist. With continued breeding this species could become even more popular in the vivarium without having to rely on imports from their country of origin. This is now a task for us, the herpetologists!

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

The Dice Snake

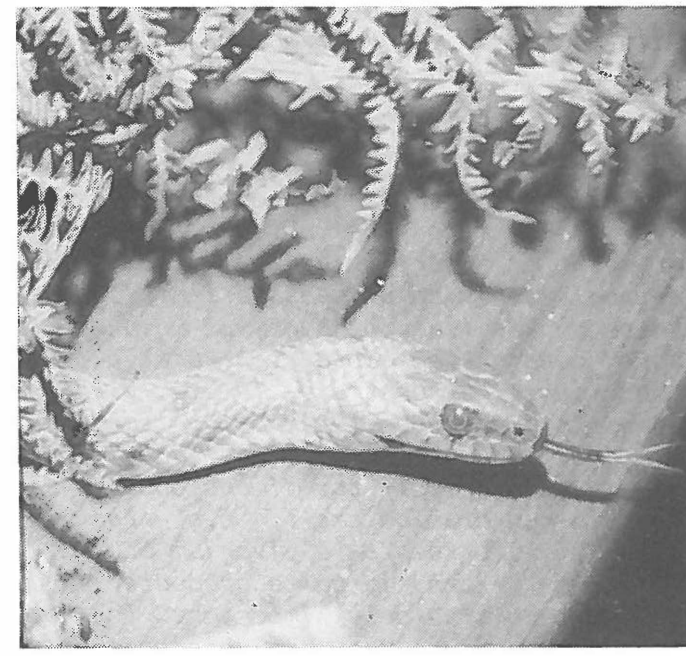
by Carol Hindley

The Dice Snake (Natrix tessellata) comes from Central and Southern Europe and Asia. It grows up to 150cm in length. Dice Snakes are usually a shade of green but they can also be greyish or brown with black markings. The ventral scales can be either white, yellow or red with black. There is a sub-species of Dice Snake that is all black. Dice Snakes eat fish and, occasionally, amphibians so they always live near water.

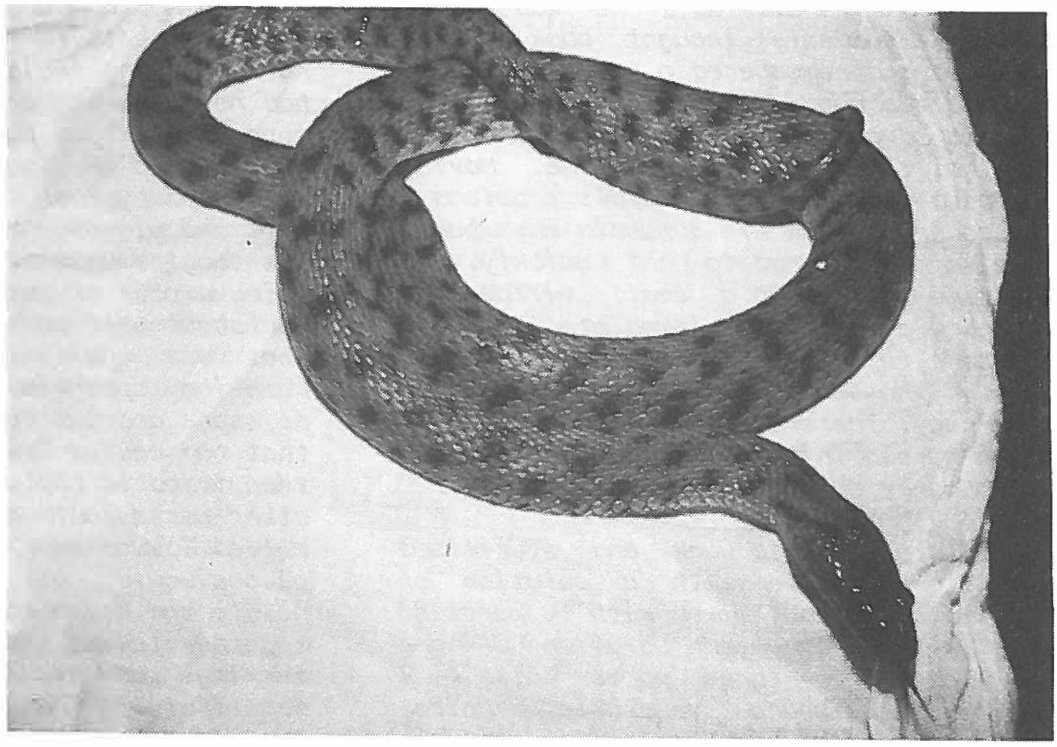
I have two female Dice Snakes. I have had one for two years and it now measures 75cm and is light green in colour with very faint black spots. This snake will eat any kind of fish and is very greedy. It was kept with four Garter Snakes but every feeding time it stole the other snakes' food from out of their mouths so now it is kept in a vivarium on its own. The other Dice Snake was acquired on the 3rd of June last year (1987). She is about a metre in length and is yellowish-brown with big black spots. and a black V-shaped mark on her neck. She will eat anything from fish to mice. I noticed she was putting on a lot of weight but, bearing in mind the amount of food she eats, I thought nothing of it.

At the beginning of July she suddenly stopped eating and got very restless. She wandered around the vivarium all day and night as though she was looking for something. Then on the 11th of July at 7a.m. I found out that she had laid one egg in her hide box. The egg was about 4cm long and pure white. By 8.30a.m. she had laid another two eggs. One of the eggs was very small and had clear blotches all over it. She had laid another two normal sized eggs by 9.20a.m.

The five eggs were placed in a clear plastic container half-filled with damp peat. I then put the container in my Royal Python's vivarium because I had nowhere



Natrix tessallata Photo - Carol Hindley



The female Natrix tessallata which laid five eggs.

Photo - Carol Hindley

else to incubate them at the correct temperature. The container was screwed to the vivarium so that the python couldn't knock it over. The temperature in the vivarium is kept between 27 and 30 degrees C. Two weeks later the Dice Snake hadn't eaten anything and she was very thin so I took her to the vet. The vet gave her a vitamin and antibiotic injection and the next day the snake ate four small goldfish. She is now eating properly again.

I checked the eggs every day and noticed after a week that the small egg was turning yellow. It gradually changed to green and went mouldy so I threw it away. The four remaining eggs still looked alright. On the 22nd August I looked at the eggs and saw a tiny head emerge. The snake came out of the egg completely around midnight. The hatchling was about 20cm long and exactly like its mother. The remaining three eggs hatched the following day. One hatchling looked like its mother but the other two were dark green with black bars. The hatchlings were housed together in a 60 x 30 x 30cm glass tank. This was heated by a 40 watt bulb to 24 degrees C. The heating was turned off at night. The hatchlings sloughed on the 28th and 29th of August and began to eat immediately afterwards on small tropical fish and pieces of chicken and plaice sprinkled with SA-37 vitamin powder. At the time of writing the hatchlings are approximately 30cm long and eat goldfish.

Snake Surgery

by Geoff Gopher

I have been keeping snakes for almost five years now and have successfully managed to breed Boas and Corn Snakes. For the last three years I have kept a wide range of snakes including Indian and Reticulated Pythons, Garter Snakes and Rat Snakes. Hopefully by sharing what knowledge and experience I have gained I might be able to help other snake keepers.

On the 4th April 1984 I acquired a five year old Cuban Boa (Epicrates angulfier) which measured 2.1 metres. The snake fed very well from the moment I got him home. I named him Edward and I was amazed by his timid and pleasant nature as I had been told that the Cuban Boas are known to be more aggressive than the common variety. For six months everything was fine and Edward fed excellently and sloughed his skin every seven weeks (almost to the day).

One morning I came downstairs and switched on Edward's vivarium light as usual only to find him writhing frantically on the floor of the vivarium. I immediately knew that this was not normal writhing and that there must be something very wrong. I tried to pick him up but he was moving too

fast and rolling over as if he was about to die. I suddenly thought back to my childhood and remembered a time when I had appendicitis and I realised that the symptoms Edward was displaying were almost identical to mine at the time. Having diagnosed the cause of Edward's problems I was concerned that his appendix may burst at any moment. I had to act quickly. At that time I lived in a small village in Yorkshire and had no immediate form of transport to take Edward to the veterinary surgeon whose practice was about nine miles away. Therefore I knew that I had to act on my own initiative and had no choice but to carry out the operation myself.

I immediately set to work and sterilised the kitchen table with a solution of Dettol disinfectant mixed with 14 parts of water. With a stronger solution of one part Dettol to three parts water I sterilised a sharp vegetable knife, scissors, needles and a pair of tweezeers. One of the major problems to tackle was how I was going to anaesthetize Edward without having a proper anaesthetic in the house. I suddenly remembered a cocktail that I had once had at a hotel in Greece. The drink had knocked me out cold for two days after only one glass. I had been so impressed that I had asked the barman for the recipe. After a few minutes hunting I found the recipe and proceded to mix the drink which was known by a Greek name that I could not pronounce. I have since renamed it 'Snakesleeper' and it can be made as follows;

1 measure cognac
1 measure vodka
2 measures vermouth
slice of lemon
rainwater
poured over ice

I wasted no time in mixing the cocktail and, using a straw, I managed to give it to Edward by sucking the drink up the straw, placing the other end in his mouth and blowing the liquid down his throat, taking great care not to swallow any myself. After three full straws Edward was unconscious. I uncoiled him and laid him out on the kitchen table. I donned a pair of rubber gloves. At the time this equipment was all that I had but I do strongly recommend that anyone attempting snake surgery should invest in the proper surgical gloves and instruments.

I took a deep breath and using the sharp vegetable knife I made the first incision stretching from the upper body down to the base of the tail. In retrospect this was rather a long incision but at the time I had no idea where to find the snake's appendix. I then pulled Edward's internal organs onto the table but I was totally mystified by the complexity of all the bits and pieces and I could only make out the tangled mass of Edward's intestines. Using a pair of tweezers I fished around for about half an hour until I came across what was unmistakably a swollen and rumbling appendix. I took a pair of scissors and cut out the redundant organ that had caused Edward so much pain. I then tried to replace the intestines and other parts that had fallen out and I rolled Edward back into his original shape as one would roll dough. I threaded a needle and began to sew the incision back together taking great care to follow the markings on his skin (which are very beautiful). I changed the thread colour from time to time to make it blend in with his skin. After an hour of sewing I had finished and my stitches could not be detected against his marvellous markings. I cleaned Edward and put him back in his vivarium.

After two days Edward regained consciousness and was perfectly fit and well. I took him to the vet just to make sure that all was well. I told the vet how I had operated on my snake and described the procedure I had used. The vet did not believe me and, having nothing to prove, I felt it pointless to pursue the issue. However the vet did say that Edward was in perfect health and could look forward to a long and bright future.

The great success of the operation had been a tremendous inspiration and for me it was only the beginning. Since then I have carried out a snake kidney transplant and a lung transplant. However, my greatest accomplishment to date was a recent operation in which I put the brain of a Reticulated Python into a Garter Snake. I watched the snake grow to 5.5 metres and take large rats without any trouble at all but... that's another story. I hope that in sharing my knowledge with you I have opened your eyes to a whole new field of snake keeping.

This article was written for our edition published on April 1st but did not appear due to lack of space. Geoff is obviously no fool; his skill with the scalpel is matched only by his prowess with the pen.

Gonyosoma oxycephala

by Josie Annandale and Chris Fletcher

On the 20th March 1987 we acquired our first specimen of Gonyosoma oycephala. This particular snake had been in the 'care' of a dealer friend for at least six months prior to this date. During this time it had neither eaten nor successfully sloughed (although it had lost none of its aggressiveness).

After many attempts, we convinced our friend that if the snake was left unattended it would die so he might as well give it to us.

The snake was about 1.7m long and in a very poor condition. The ventral scales were concave, indicating advanced malnutrition and the body was hung with pieces of loose skin from unsuccessful sloughs. There was also a build-up of skin around the eyes where the brille had remained attached.

On arriving home we placed the snake in a bucket of warm water containing a few drops of 'Shed-aid'. Immediately on entering the water the snake began to drink. He was removed from the bucket and placed in some fresh water which he drank for a period of about five minutes. At this point we began to wonder what had kept the poor thing alive for so long!

We replaced the snake in the Shed-aid solution and soaked him for around two hours. Most of the loose skin on the body could then be removed gently although the brilles remained firmly in place.

Passive hand feeding was then attempted with a rat pinky. We tried for three hours to encourage the snake to swallow the food but, when the rat was half-way into its mouth, the snake would spit it out. Eventually the rat was swallowed.

On the 21st March we bathed the snake's eyes in dilute Shed-aid and proceded to offer food again. We gave up after an hour and a half because we did not want the snake to regurgitate its previous meal.

On the 22nd March we bathed the snake's eyes again and tried to feed it a dead day-old chick. After only 45 minutes of placing it in the snake's mouth the chick was taken.

Hand feeding was attempted again on the 28th March but it became obvious after several hours that the snake was not interested.

We would like to point out that at this moment in time we did not know the identity of the snake but, thanks to Snake Keeper and Kevin Hingley's article on G. oxycephala, we soon identified it. At this time I started to spray the snake's tank with water.

The snake ate a rat pinky on the 6th April without assistance but a second rat was tried and refused.

On the 11th April, after daily bathing, one of the brilles finally came off. We noticed that the snake was beginning to show the classic symptoms of a respiratory disorder.

On the 13th April we took the snake to a veterinary surgeon in Grimsby who prescribed an oral medicine to be given twice daily for a week. He also suggested the use of Complan (a dietary supplement) with the medicine. We followed his advice and fed Complan by tube for one week. Two weeks later the snake was offered a rat pinky which it took immediately.

Feeding was then an on/off affair until the 2nd July when the snake ate five pink rats. I stopped spraying the tank when the respiratory disorder was first noticed.

On the 20th July the snake sloughed perfectly with both brilles coming off and we were rewarded with a fit and healthy snake with no more feeding problems.

On the 19th November we were offered two more G. oxycephala which we purchased from Terry and Jackie of Brittania Pets in Doncaster. They kindly allowed us to have them sexed by Luke Yeomans of the Nottingham Branch of the I.H.S. We found that we had two males and one female. At the time of writing, all the snakes are feeding well and they all seem to be healthy.

In the final part of this article we would like to mention the day to day husbandry of this species. Many readers may find

Gonyosoma oxycephala
Photo - Lesley Close



On the question of feeding, all three specimens are taking rodents although they have differing preferences. Male no. 1 eats only live pink rats, male no. 2 eats dead mice and the female eats nearly half grown rats. This has turned out to be an advantage as it means we can feed the males without having to keep separating them.

this controversial and we would welcome a response from other keepers.

The snakes are kept in two separate vivaria at a temperature of 28 degrees C (82 degrees F) with no night time reduction. The vivaria have no provision for internal lighting with light being provided by a bulb in the snake room. This is left on to give a 14 hour day and 10 hour night. The bulb is positioned high above the vivaria leading to the light being reduced - as it would in the forest canopy.

When we acquired the first male he was kept in temporary accomodation which was heated by a bulb. When he was eventually moved into his permanent home, heat was supplied by a Pearlco 100 watt ceramic infra-red conical element. It was about this time that feeding problems ceased.

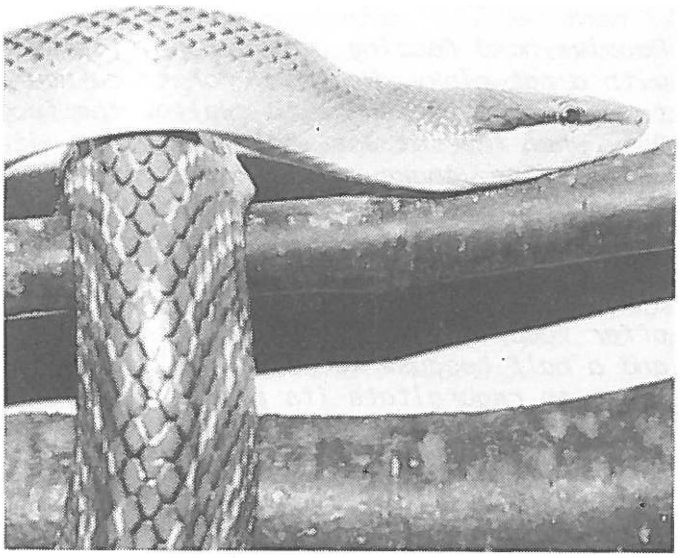
In previous articles (Snake Keeper Volume 1, No. 4 - K.J. Hingley and Volume 2, No. 1 - J. Bennett) reference has been made to the high level of humidity necessary to the well being of the species. The articles then mention the susceptibility of the snakes to colds and respiratory disorders. After the first instance of breathing trouble in the male snake (April 1987) the humidity was reduced by not spraying. Humidity is provided by a large water dish directly under the heater. This maintains a 60% humidity and we have had no recurrence of the problem. It has been suggested, however, that mating is likely to take place following the rainy season so we will raise the humidity prior to pairing the snakes.

Although these methods of keeping G. oxycephala seem to stray outside the norm, they seem to have been successful so far.

References:

Hingley, K.J. 1987. Snakes of the genus Elaphe, their care and breeding in captivity, part 4. Snake Keeper Volume 1, No. 4, p8.
Bennett, J. 1988. Red-tailed Tree Racer (Gonyosoma oxycephala). Snake Keeper Volume 2, No. 1, pp 12-13.

Special thanks to the above authors, the editor of Snake Keeper, Luke Yeomans of Derby for sexing the snakes and finally to Terry and Jackie for their help.



Gonyosoma oxycephala *Photo - Lesley Close*

An Outline of the Law Concerning the Display of Snakes for Commercial Gain

by David Neville

On 3rd March 1973, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species was signed in Washington. Intended to protect endangered species of wild fauna and flora by regulating international trade in such species, this agreement is commonly known as the CITES convention. It was presented to the U.K. Parliament in November 1973 and came into force in the U.K. on 31st October 1976. The 'teeth' of this international legislation providing the penalty in the U.K. is in fact The Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976.

Most of us realise that such controls exist to police the import or export of endangered species but how many of us realise that it is also an offence to display to the public certain birds, animals or reptiles for commercial gain? Yes folks, before you lecture with live exhibits and are paid a fee for doing so, take care; you may be committing an offence which carries a maximum fine of £2000 or imprisonment for a term of two years.

It is absolutely a waste of time to say, "I'm sorry, but I didn't know that law existed". It may be mitigation but it is certainly no defence. So when did this apparently draconian regulation spring upon us and from where?

The Council of the European Communities, in its wisdom, prepared COUNCIL REGULATION (EEC) No 3626/82 on 3rd December 1982 and, as with the CITES convention, it needed legislation in this country to provide a penalty. This is to be found in the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1985.

That's all very well but it won't be used in this country... wrong! Early in March a wildlife lecturer was fined a total of £400 for displaying two birds of prey and certain owls to the public for commercial gain.

The British Parliament had absolutely no choice at all; it was mandatory that legislation be drawn up following the EEC Regulation and so the animal keeper has yet another law to observe and observe we must. It is now not sufficient to be professional in our care of our animals, we must also be professional in our knowledge of the legislation governing not only the welfare of them but also that which governs the sale, movement, and now the showing of them if it is for commercial gain.

It is an offence for any person to display to the public for commercial purposes any specimen referred to in certain articles of the EEC Regulation 3626/82. As far as snakes are concerned, those so listed are all fairly rare but to ensure that all readers of Snake Keeper are kept properly informed of the law I have listed them below.

Madagascar Boas	*Acrantophis* spp.
Round Island Boas	*Boleyria* spp.
Keel scaled Boas	*Casarea* spp.
Puerto Rican Boa	*Epicrates inornatus*
Jamaican Boa	*Epicrates subflavus*
Indian (Rock) Python	*Python molurus molurus*
Madagascar Tree Boa	*Sanzinia madagascariensis*

These are the only snakes listed in Appendix 1 which is said by the Regulation to include all species threatened with extinction which are, or may be, affected by trade. Trade in specimens of these species must, according to the Regulations, be subject to particularly strict regulation in order not to endanger further their survival and must only be authorised in 'exceptional circumstances'.

There are, of course, certain exemptions to the display or sale regulations such as if the specimen was bred in captivity, it is intended for research, teaching or breeding purposes and, of course, zoos are exempt. However, at the court case in which the wildlife lecturer was fined for displaying the birds, although he was able to prove that they were bred in captivity, the Magistrates still found him guilty as he did not have an exemption certificate or licence granted by the Department of the Environment.

If you are in doubt at all consult the DOE at Tollgate House, Houlton Street, Bristol, BS2 9DJ (telephone 0272 218811). They will advise you and are only too pleased to so.

*Editor's note - see page 20.

H.E.I.N.Z. (Herpetological Information Zenter)

H.E.I.N.Z. is an electronic data bank which will eventually contain all herpetological works from the various journals, yearbooks etc which are not recorded by 'Zoological Record' or 'Biosis' because of their very strict demands regarding content and quality.

It is planned that the documentation of all recent magazines, even those which are no longer published, and which touch on the subject of herpetology will be recorded.

The material will be recorded in the following way:

01 Author
02 Year of publication
03 Title
04 Periodical
05 Abbreviation of the periodical
06 Year, Volume or Edition
07 Issue
08 No. of pages
09 Illustrations, Tables, Diagrams etc
10 Keywords
11 Summary

If, for example, someone requests literature concerning 'Far Eastern Elaphes', I can key into H.E.I.N.Z. the keywords 'Elaphe' and 'Far East' and it will seek and print out all articles and works on this subject known to me. Because I do not record the text of each individual article but rather have a copy of each of the published magazines in my library I am able to make photocopies of the requested works available.

Finally I can also key into the above mentioned data banks, 'Zoological Record' and 'Biosis', via on-line research.

I have not yet given any consideration to the cost or the capacity of the system. It is more important at the moment to determine whether there is a demand for such a service and to ensure that I receive all relevant periodicals for evaluation.

In addition, I am planning either a quarterly or half-yearly issue of 'Herpetological Record' which will give information about all works which have actually appeared.

The support which I have received to date from the various herpetological societies has been most encouraging but there are still some who need to be convinced of the value of this service.

All enquiries to:

Hans-Dieter Philippen
H.E.I.N.Z.
Kelsterbachstr. 24
D-5138 Heinsberg - Grebben
West Germany
Tel: 02452 63506

The Case for the Classification of Royal Pythons as Domestic Animals

by Stuart Gray

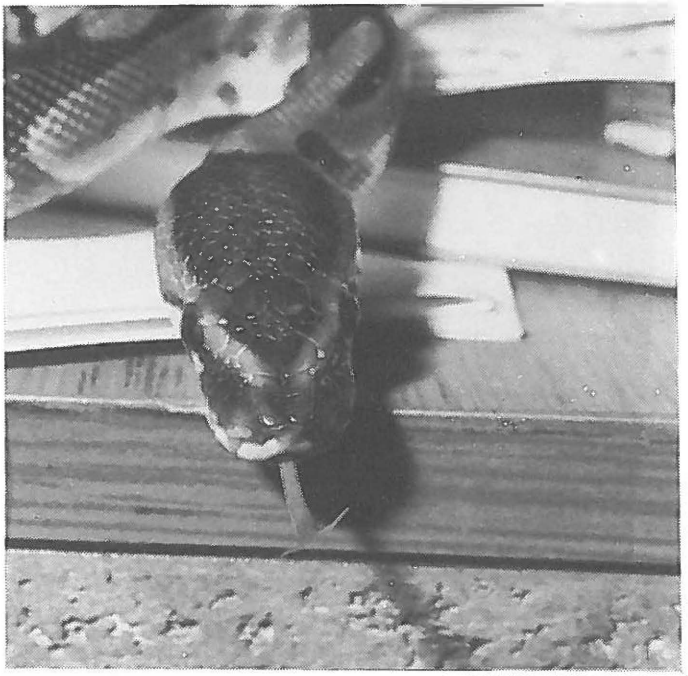
I must state at once that the only reason a person should keep a Royal Python (Python regius) is that you love them and that you are an animal loving type. You will keep them on their terms - not yours! Once they accept you all the feeding and breeding problems disappear providing you have a healthy animal.

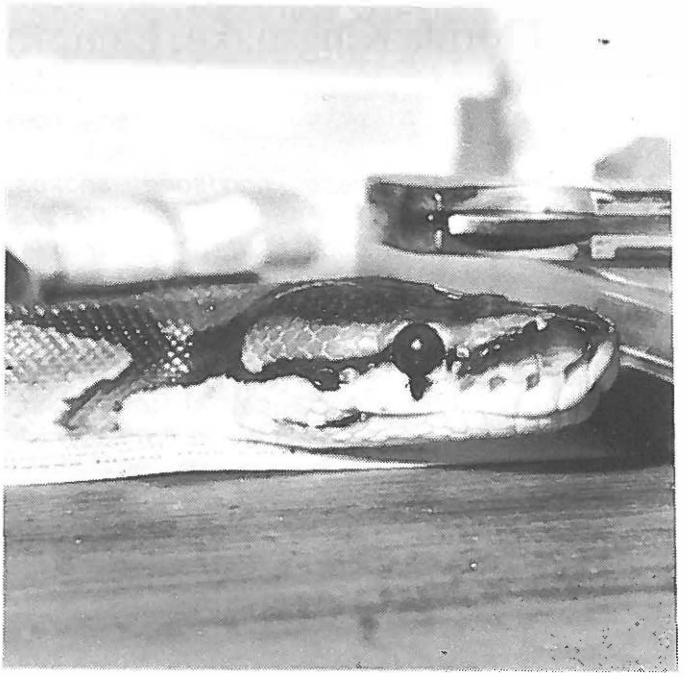
Contrary to popular belief, Royal Pythons are very affectionate. To give you some idea of their 'pet power', Ron Lilley, Robin Hill's Senior Reptile Keeper, came to my house for a short visit. He said that he must leave by 6.30pm. Ron is used to having his own way with snakes but not this time. It was 7.30pm before he could depart. Samantha, one of my Royal Pythons, had worked her charms on him.

As many people will confirm, having established the snakes as pets, we now need to give them more protection in law. If we call them domestic animals in law we will silence the strange voices in the wilderness who say to Whitehall "better off in the wild - cruel to keep them!" Are the protesters always showing concern for the animals or are they just exercising a little power?

Now for the pet trade. Many Royal Pythons are brought into this country in a disgraceful condition having been caught and transported without care although, having said that, there are many reptile dealers who do care and would welcome legislation regarding the welfare of Royal Pythons and other reptiles. If Royal Pythons are still to be imported, perhaps we could have a certified six-month period of quarantine and a certificate of health signed by a qualified veterinary surgeon before the snakes are sold.

We must now look at snake abuse. A very tiny minority of snake keepers are exhibitionists, even to the point of being cruel and neglectful and sometimes denying the snakes any form of heating. Some snake keepers use snakes to frighten other people; this in fact is a criminal offence

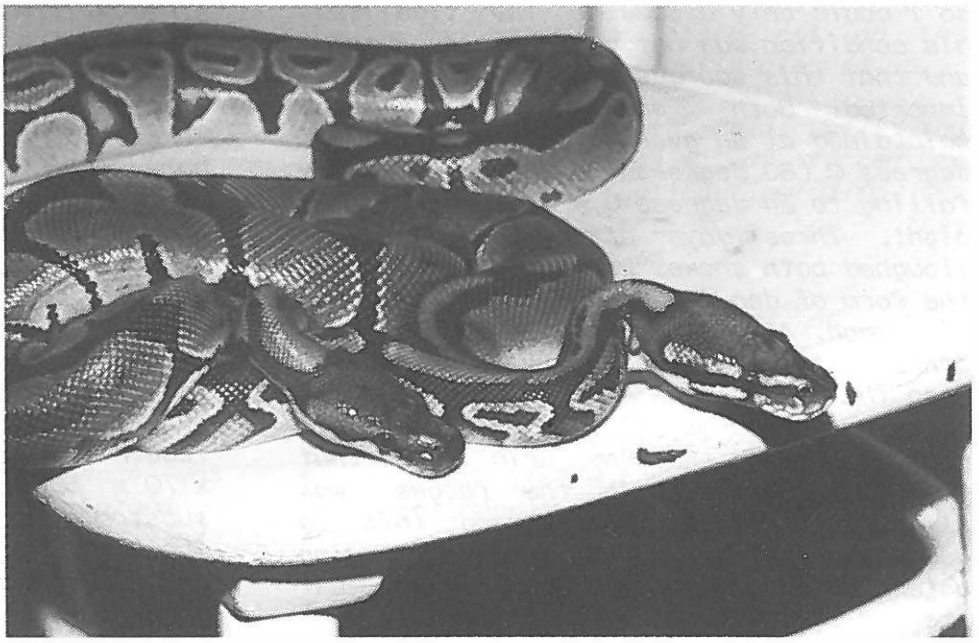




in as much as you menace the person and disturb the peace. It is also cruel to cause distress to the animal. Such practices bring snake keeping into disrepute so, through our Societies, we must press for the heaviest penalty the law provides.

If we fail to do so the strange voices will say "told you so - ban them" and we will all suffer because of the tiny majority.

I will leave you with a thought. In the sixty-five million years that pythons have been around they have evolved many species and adapted to many different conditions. Could it be that they are now trying the most dangerous but possibly the most successful experiment to survive - to live with man?



Top right
Stuart's female
Python regius,
Samantha.

Above
Samantha
examines the
photographer.

Right
Ken (right)
and Samantha.

Photographs - Stuart Gray

The Florida Kingsnake, Lampropeltis getulus floridana, in Captivity

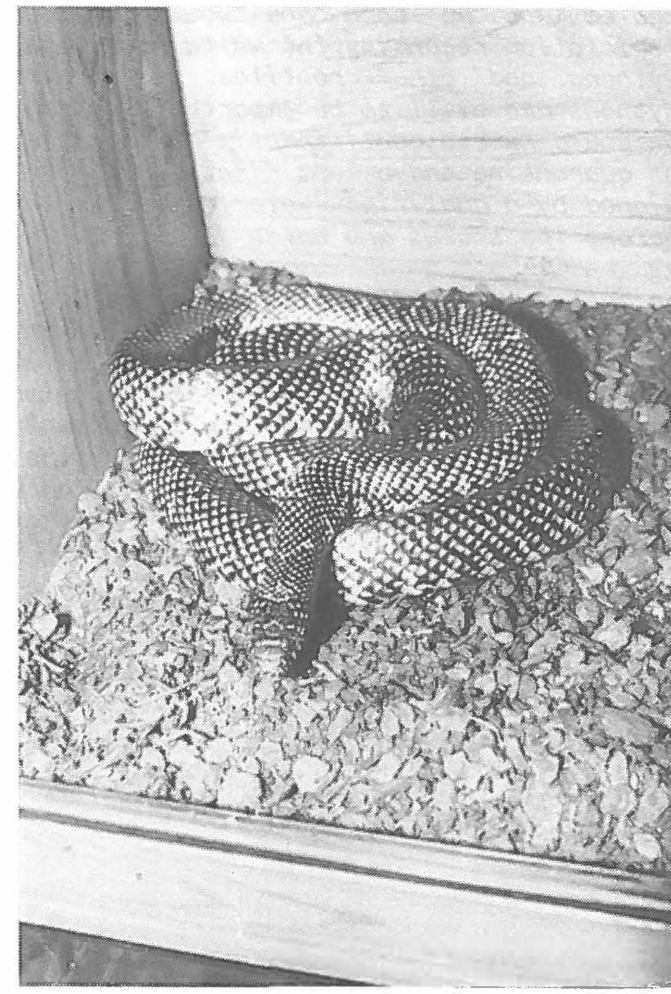
by Kevin J. Hingley

I kept a pair of these handsome snakes several years ago (in September 1982). Both snakes were in good health generally although the female did have a small patch of scale rot on her ventral surface. This did not cncern me too much as I had previously treated this infection successfully using a dilute solution of hydrogen peroxide followed by a 'dressing' of gentian violet.

Both snakes went into a slough a week after purchase so I withheld treatment of the scale rot on the female's abdomen until she had completed the slough. Being aware of the Kingsnakes' ophiophagus habits, the snakes were initially housed separately, although they had been housed with a number of other L.g. floridana at the dealer's from which they were purchased.

The female sloughed first, requiring no assistance to do so and she accepted a dead mouse a few hours later. It is always encouraging when a newly imported snake begins to feed shortly after it has been acquired. The following day she appeared to be hungry again so I offered her some more mice and she accepted three in the space of five or six minutes. The male was still undergoing a slough at this stage.

Five days later the male finally completed his slough but required assistance to do so. The humidity in his vivarium was of a similar level to that in the female's cage so I could only assume at the time that his condition was not quite up to scratch and that this was due to being recently imported. Both snakes were being maintained at an average temperature of 27 degrees C (80 degrees F) during the day falling to 24 degrees C (75 degrees F) at night. Three days after the male had sloughed both snakes were offered food in the form of dead mice and both ate two mice each. After a further three days both snakes defecated, the female more heavily than the male as she had been fed on three occasions compared to the male's single meal. I noticed that the uric acid that the male passed with the faeces was slightly green in colour and this is usually associated with a snake not having eaten for some time such as having just emerged from hibernation. As the male was feeding and not regurgitating his meals I

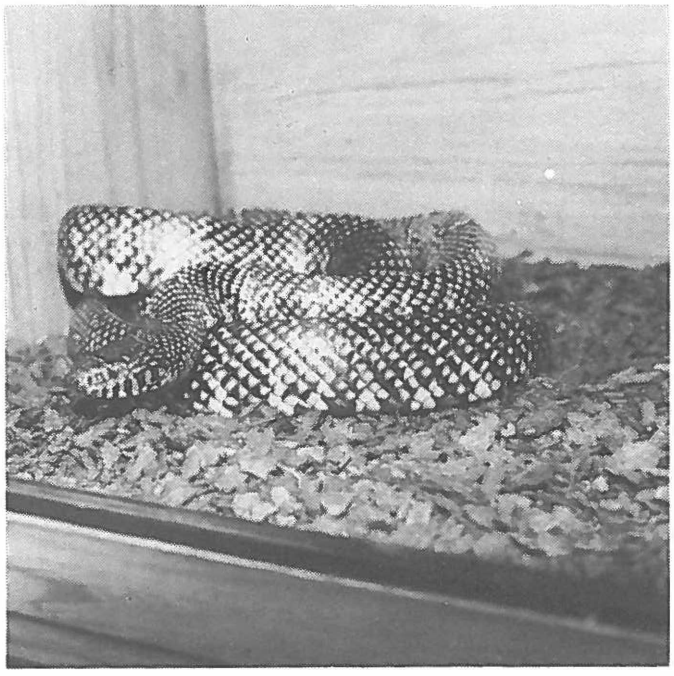


Lampropeltis getulus floridana
Photograph - Lesley Close

assumed that he had not fed for some time prior to being imported to the United Kingdom. I was not worried by the fact that the female took a couple of weeks before she passed any faeces. I had noted on a number of occasions with a wide variety of species that snakes which had not been fed for lengthy periods, in particular Python regius, would not pass faeces for quite some time but, when faeces were eventually passed, they appeared to be quite normal.

By the beginning of October both snakes seemed suitably settled and, as they were of a similar size, I decided to house them together in a large vivarium measuring 90 x 70 x 60cm. Newspaper was used as a substrate and the cage furnishings included a large bowl of water for drinking and bathing, a large section of cork bark for shelter and a sturdy, upright, forked branch which both snakes

liked to climb and rest on. They settled into their new vivarium quickly and continued to accept dead food, this time in the form of dead day-old chicks. A week or so later both snakes entered a slough which was completed after seven days. Neither snake required any assistance to slough although, at the time, I was more pleased with the male's progress as he had taken a shorter time to slough than previously. The following day both snakes fed; the male ate two chicks. The female refused to eat the chicks but eagerly accepted two mice. Three to four days later both snakes passed faeces from this meal so all seemed well and, more to the point, both snakes appeared to be improving in general condition.



Lampropeltis getulus floridana
Photo - Lesley Close

By mid-October the male was exhibiting slight signs of a cold in the form of excess mucous in the mouth. I thoroughly examined him to ascertain the severity of the cold but, apart, from the mucous, there were no other symptoms such as wheezing, mucous exuding from the nostrils or mucous in the throat. There were no signs of mouth rot either but, on the recommendation of a local vet, the male was given a small dose of Neobiotic powder. I did not keep my records as thoroughly in those days as I do now so I cannot recall what the exact dosage was and neither am I prepared to hazard a guess. The Neobiotic powder was made into a solution and applied to the stomach of a dead gerbil. The male accepted the gerbil without hesitation and, by doing so, received the full dose of medicine without having to endure the stress of an injection or having to be given the medicine orally using a syringe and catheter.

Both snakes continued to feed; the female accepted mice and the male took chicks. The mucous problem persisted and although the condition was not getting any worse it was not improving either. I contacted the vet again and this time a course of Flagyl, in tablet form, was prescribed. Again my records let me down so I cannot give the exact dosage other than mentioning that half a tablet was placed in the mouth of a dead chick with an interval of five days between feeds. This did the trick and the mucous cleared up. To avoid any possible confusion to the reader, I should point out that the mucous was present at all times and not just at feeding times as was the case with the female or with the male before he contracted the cold, It could not be confused with the saliva produced in order to make the swallowing of prey easier. The male was only 'dosed' twice with Flagyl before the symptoms cleared up.

By the end of October it was the female's turn to play up. I debated whether or not to hibernate her as she started to refuse to feed. I weighed up the pros and cons of the matter and, for several reasons, decided not to hibernate her. The main factors were her recent importation and the fact that I was not completely satisfied with the male's condition. The female recommenced feeding in early November and both snakes entered another slough a short while later. Upon completion of this slough I noticed that the small patch of scale rot on the female's abdomen had finally cleared up.

Both snakes continued to feed until the end of November but, as I was forced to sell most of my collection including the Kingsnakes, I do not know how they progressed from then on.

Kingsnake supplied courtesy of 'The Reptile-arium, Theobalds Park Rd. Enfield.

****
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* subscribers in 13 countries. *
* *
* Distribution now exceeds 600 *
* copies a month. *
****

The ASRA Exhibition

On 26th March, ASRA, the Association for Study of Reptilia and Amphibia, held a one day show of reptiles and amphibians at St. Aldhelms Hall, Regent Street, Swindon, Berkshire.

The aim of the show was to make people aware of ASRA's existence and to show them what keeping reptiles is all about.

The doors were open from 10a.m. until 5p.m. and approximately 500 people passed through them to examine the exhibits.

The snakes on display included,

Lampropeltis getulus floridana
L.g. californiae
Elaphe guttata
E.g. emoryi
E. obsoleta obsoleta
E.o. spiloides
Thamnophis marcianus
T. sirtalis parietalis
Lamprophis fuliginosus
Boa constrictor
Python sebae
Python molurus bivittatus
Masticophis flagellum
Pituophis melanoleucus sayii.

The rest of the reptile and amphibian world was also well represented and a range of ASRA merchandise including books, badges, window stickers and t-shirts was available for purchase.



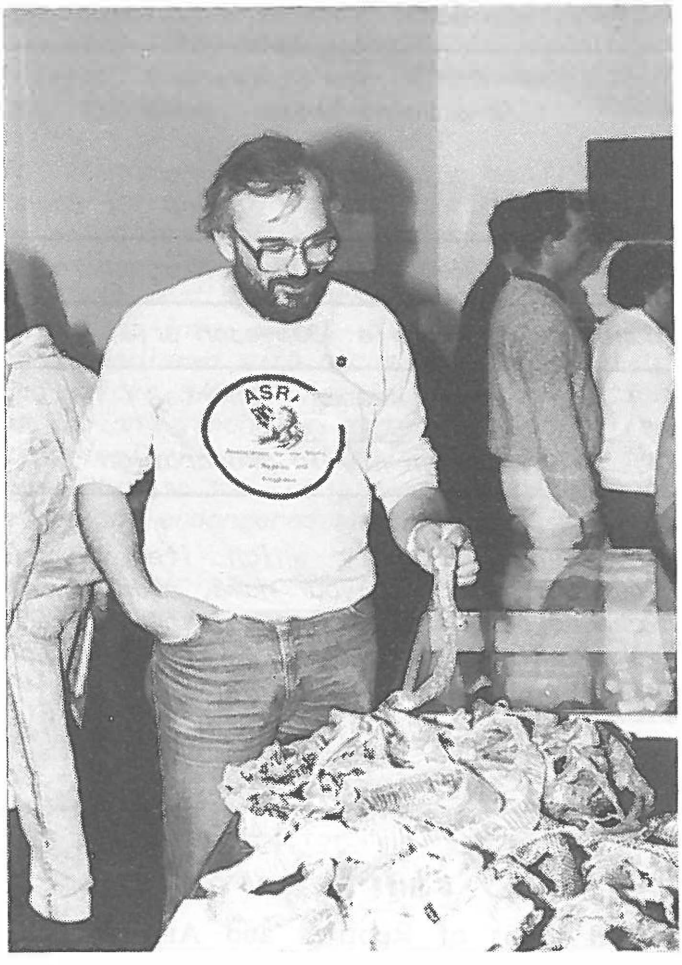


Above
Jenny Swainston, Editor of the ASRA newsletter, The Rephiberary, takes care of the Chelonia exhibit.









Below left
ASRA Chairman, Adam Wright, with some of the snake skins on sale.

I purchased a Royal Python in August 1987. It was in reasonable condition but a bit scabby and untidy. I was assured that the snake was feeding regularly on dead chicks but, surprise, surprise, I could not get it to take these. However, it was very keen to accept mice, gerbils and small rats. It has never fasted nor have I had any other problems with it.

About one month ago, whilst handling 'Mombassa', I noticed the same pinkish hue as described by Simon. I thought that I was in for a lot of trouble. The next time I fed Mombassa, I dampened the rear end of a gerbil and powdered it with a vitamin supplement. The meal was devoured instantly. Mombassa sloughed over the past three weeks, with the help of a bath or two and is now the most attractive and healthy looking Royal Python that I have seen. Unlike other Royal Pythons I have known, I have never seen him in either of the two pools in his vivarium.

I am no wiser as to the cause of the pinkness and whether the vitamin supplement or bath helped cure this problem and, unless it reappears, I am not likely to be.

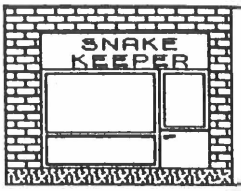
Yours sincerely,

Col G Pywell-Fox

LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS

Dear Snake Keeper,

Upon reading Simon McDermott's letter (Snake Keeper, Volume 2 No.4) re a <u>Python regius</u> with pinkish tinges on its ventral scales, I decided to write about a similar experience.



SHOP WINDOW

Every month SHOP WINDOW offers a 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. Overseas (airmail) please add £1 per item.

'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 Ten (1985)

Number Three Husbandry and breeding of the Honduran Milk Snake, Lampropeltis triangulum hondurensis.
The Jailisco Milk Snake, L.t. arcifera
Comparisons between the natural and captive environments of the Sinaloan Milk Snake, L.t. sinaloae.
The role of pelvic spurs.
Genetic composition of Death Adders (Acanthophis antarticus) in the West Head Area.

Number Four Letter from Botswana.
Thunder and Lightning - snake catching in Honduras.
Venom collection in the Gaboon Viper.

Volume Eleven (1986)

Number One Letter from Botswana.
Natural History of Prairie Rattlesnakes (Crotalus viridis viridis) in Wyoming.
The dentition of venomous snakes.
The Night Adders of Southern Africa.
Reminiscences of venomous snakes.
Experiences with King Cobras in captivity.
Captive breeding of the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake.

Number Three Captive breeding of the Mozambique Spitting Cobra at the Poole Serpentarium.
Breeding Corn Snakes.

Volume Twelve (1987) Numbers 1,2,3 & 4.

Price £1.45p each

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

Volume Seven (1987) Number 5.

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The way to a man's heart is through his stomach

by Lee Bowler

Fortunately for the snake, the saying "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach" is not that of snake lovers but some people do eat snakes. One of the best examples is provided by the Chinese who eat snakes with the same enthusiasm that they show towards poultry. With the spread of Chinese culture and population, snake meat is also eaten across most of south east Asia.

One of the snakes most likely to be slaughtered for food is the Indian Python (Python molurus) which is not wild caught and brought home for the pot but reared from young in captivity until almost adult and then slaughtered. The skin provides a by-product that is worth much more than the meat. The meat itself is sold for between four or five times more than poultry.

In common with most meat in tropical countries the boid snakes are taken to the market place live in order to prevent deterioration in the hot temperatures. Like all meat in Chinese cookery the snake is cut up into small bite-sized pieces, then garnished with herbs and eaten with chopsticks. Unfortunately the population of Indian Pythons in the wild has fallen drastically, especially in China and the Indo-Chinese sub continent where it is among the endangered species of boid.

The Aboriginies of Australia hunt most snakes from the wholly aquatic Wart Snakes (Acrochordus javanicus) to many large venomous snakes such as Death Adders (Acanthophis antarcticus), the bites of which are fatal in at least 50% of cases. When the heads are removed from these 'delicacies' they seem to be eaten with relish.

In New Guinea the climax of every Papuan wedding feast is traditionally a pair or more of Green Tree Pythons (Chondropython viridis), one of the most beautiful, expensive and hard-to-obtain snakes there is, served to the guests.

A few years ago in America the canned food industry discovered snake meat and created their own speciality, 'Rattlesnakes in their own juices'. The meat was mainly supplied by species of large North and Central American Rattlesnakes e.g. Crotalus adamanteus and C. atrox. They were supplied by snake farms where the snakes spent most of their lives producing venom for the production of antisera. At the end of their useful working lives they were sent off to the cooking pot or, to be more exact, a tin can.

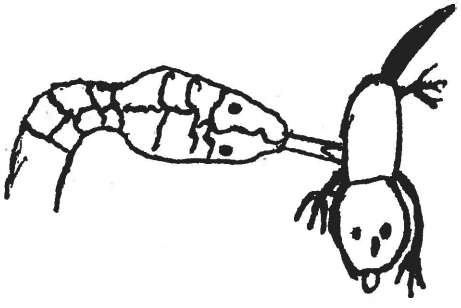
It can be seen from the above examples that not everyone views snakes in the same way as snake keepers do or, indeed, as the majority of the general public do.

Gerbils and Snakes

by Danielle Oakes (Age 7)

Snakes eat gerbils, mice and rats.

Snakes bite and some constrict like a Boa Constrictor.





A gerbil in a nest

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WANTED

If you keep monitor lizards, or have kept them in the past, please contact me and provide badly needed British input into a book about Varanids that I have nearly finished. Daniel Bennett, 118 Sheffield Road, Glossop, Derbyshire SK13 8QU. Telephone (04574) 61069.

Youngish female Corn Snake. Juvenile female Black Rat Snake, preferably under 3'. Female Boa between 2' & 5'. Must be in good health and feeding well. Col G Pywell-Fox, 24 George Street, Driffield YO25 7RA.

++
+ Next issue: +
+ Unusual Behaviour in the Indian Python. +
+ Creating an Attractive Vivarium. +
+ Snake Spotting in Europe. +
+ Breeding the Rainbow Boa (Epicrates +
+ cenchria crassus) in a home vivarium. +
+ Adders in Captivity. +
+ Plus pictures +
+ of a stowaway snake from Florida +
+ and Eddy, the two-headed Honduran +
+ Milk Snake bred by Luke Yeomans. +
++

David Neville, author of the article 'An Outline Of The Law Concerning The Display Of Snakes For Commercial Gain' has made a study of animal law. He is the legal adviser to NAPAK, the National Association of Private Animal Keepers. David would be pleased to answer any queries readers may have concerning the article. Please send your questions and an s.a.e. to David via Snake Keeper.

Snake Keeper is constantly searching for items of interest relating to snakes. Whatever you've written, seen, drawn, photographed, discovered, invented, bred, constructed, lost or cured... WE ARE INTERESTED!

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