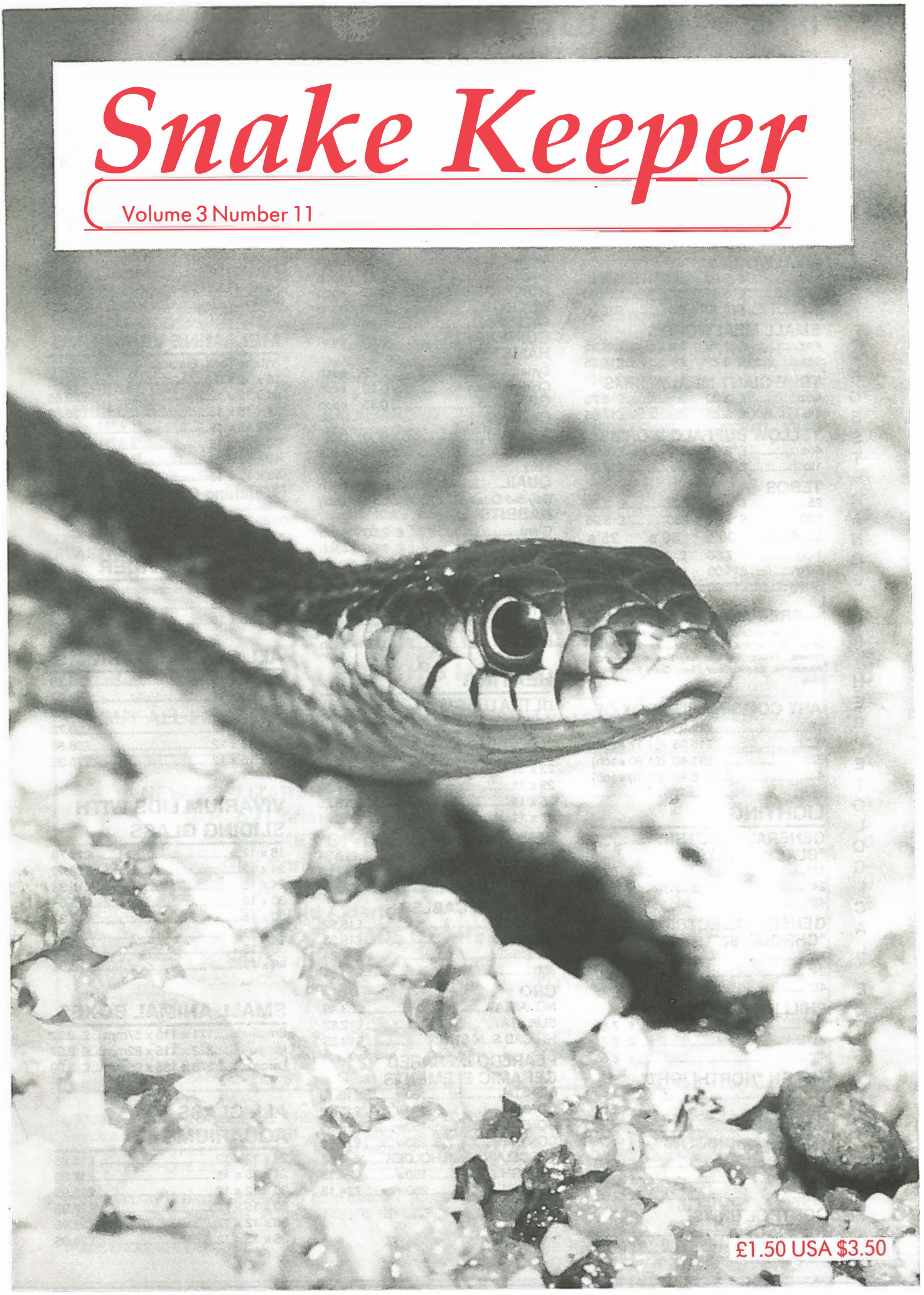
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Volume 3 Number 11



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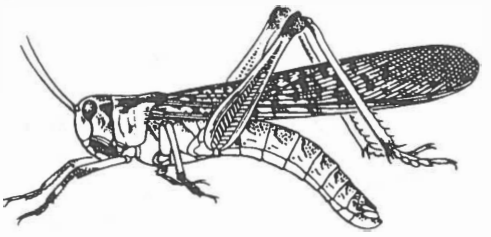
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Snake Keeper News

CUSTOMS SURPRISE

British snake keepers returning from the Dutch Snake Society 'Snake Day' in Utrecht found their belongings, and sometimes themselves, being given a thorough examination by H.M. Customs and Excise when they arrived back in the country.

The 'Snake Day' was held on the 21st October and once again proved to be a great success. Some British snake keepers were obviously tempted by the bargains on offer and couldn't resist buying animals on impulse without proper thought for the documentation required to import the snakes into Britain legally.

It would appear that Customs Officers in several ports were awaiting the return of the snake enthusiasts. An as yet unknown quantity of animals were seized and prosecutions may follow. Experts were standing by to check that any declared snakes had been correctly identified by their owners.

The reasons for this operation, which lasted for several days, are still unclear as we go to press but there are reports that it may have been brought on by someone attempting to smuggle venomous snakes into Britain from the 'Snake Day' and declaring them as "harmless", thus endangering the lives of H.M. Customs Officers. Other reports suggest that "somone in London decided this had to stop".

A report (and photographs) of the 'Snake Day' will appear in next month's issue.

*****

TWO-HEADED ROYAL PYTHON

The latest issue of 'Best' magazine contains a short report and photo on a two-headed Python regius which is supposedly on display at the Miami Metro-zoo in Florida, USA. Our investigations revealed, however, that the snake, which is at least two years old, left the Zoo some time ago and no-one knows where it went to. Does anyone know where it is now?

*****

VIVARIA DESIGN

Michael Bucknell from London is undertaking a GCSE project on the design of vivaria for Boa constrictors and similar species. Michael would be grateful for any help from readers with experience of designing vivaria for these snakes and he would especially like to hear about any problems you may have encountered. Write to him c/o Snake Keeper.

*****

ROYAL NEWS

Issue number 4 of 'Royal News', the newsletter for Python regius fans, has been published. For further details, and subscription rates, contact Lee Bowler, 'Braemar', 28 Honor Road, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Bucks HP16 ONJ. Telephone (02406) 6328.

*****

HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS

Nottingham Branch of the IHS

14th November — Wollaton Hall Natural History Museum, Wollaton Park, Nottingham.
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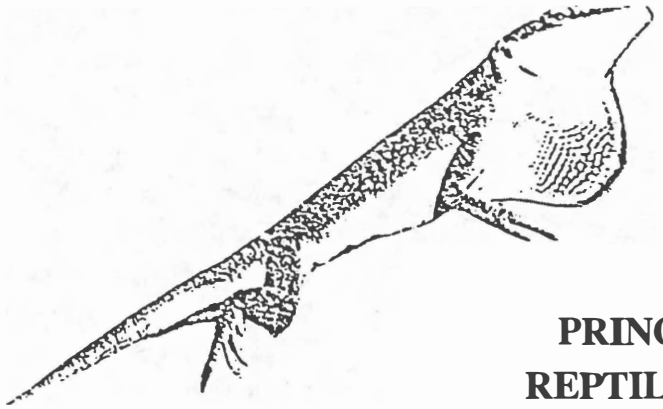
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Photo: Frank Schneidewind

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SETTING THE STANDARD FOR REPTILE-KEEPING IN THE 90's

Fascination in a Serpentine Form
The Garter Snake *Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*

by Frank Schneidewind

The combination of various vivaristic factors can seldom be brought together so harmoniously as they can with representatives of the genus Thamnophis. As an aquarist who is also interested in herpetology, I have been fascinated for many years by North American water snakes since it is quite simple to accomodate these in an aqua-vivarium. Their exquisite markings, their aquatic lifestyle and the fact that they give birth to live young finally persuaded me and awakened the desire to have some of these creatures.

Because of their especially colourful appearance I decided to try to obtain some snakes of the species Thamnophis sirtalis, subspecies parietalis. The genus Thamnophis (Fitzinger, 1843) as such contains some 22 species, some of which are partially polytypic. Of the species Thamnophis sirtalis (Linnaeus, 1766), over a dozen subspecies have already been described, the range of distribution of which reaches from Canada to Mexico.

The generic name Thamnophis (Greek) when translated means 'woods' or 'bushes'. These representatives of the genus have become commonly known as Red-sided Garter Snakes. The small size (50 to 80cm, record 124cm) of this subspecies and the fact that it is a totally harmless snake make this an extremely practical snake to keep in captivity. However, here in the German Democratic Republic I had almighty



Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis

Photo: Frank Schneidewind

problems in obtaining specimens of this snake. Because of the positive characteristics already mentioned and the fact that they are so easy to breed (maximum 80 young, average 15) this snake had already been bred numerous times. This resulted in a glut of young which totally reduced their commercial value and thus their popularity with the result that they almost totally died out in this country and were no longer as generally available as they had been in previous years. In fact one could even say that they were quite rare. However after a great deal of searching I was finally able to buy some young Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis which were three weeks old and some 18 to 20cm long. Their breeder had been feeding them on small tropical fish (Poecilliidae) and earthworms (Lumbricus terrestris). It was for me an amazing sight to behold this tangle of young, colourful beauties. I selected four of these young snakes and took them home in a transparent plastic container (with a perforated lid) containing damp moss.

At home I had already prepared an aqua-vivarium of 120cm. This contained one third absolutely dry substrate and the remaining portion was the water part. By

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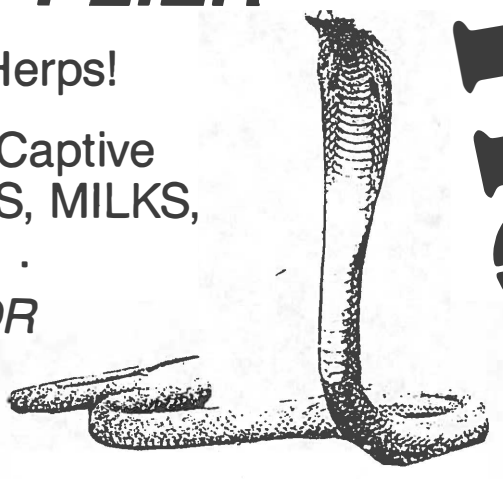
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placing pieces of petrified wood in the water part the snakes were able to enter and leave the water at will and gain access to the dry part. As decoration I used a number of green plants in hydroculture. The dry-land part consists of two layers: below a layer of peat and on top a mixture of sand and gravel. At the centre of the dry section I placed a piece of flat sandstone directly above which there was a 40W lamp. Although they are semi-aquatic, these snakes must be able to dry off completely. Below the lamp the temperature was a little over 30 degrees C. Again, using pieces of flat sandstone, the land was separated from the water section by a sort of terrace structure. A 100W aquarium heater was buried below the gravel in the water part and this kept the water at a constant 25 degrees C. The vivarium was 40cm deep and 40cm high and the water level was never above 10cm. Separated from the actual snake compartment there was also a filter chamber from the days when the tank was an aquarium. This proved to be extremely useful because using a siphon the water could be changed without disturbing the snakes. This was done twice weekly.

The vivarium was covered by metal gauze and the illumination came from two 40W fluorescent 'day-light' tubes as well as the 40W lamps. In addition an obligatory thermometer and hygrometer completed the technical installations. As a rule the following principles should be borne in mind when setting up a vivarium. Provide warm and cool places as well as moist and dry places. The inhabitants can then choose for themselves the places which best suit them. Ensure adequate ventilation without draught. Although the heat from the incandescent lamp is distributed thermodynamically the localised heat is especially effective and beneficial. This light source is housed in an earthenware flower pot giving off over 90% of the heat and this represents a sort of central heating boiler in the vivarium. Because of the water part (over 30 litres) the atmospheric humidity is almost 100% according to the amount of evaporation which takes place.



Aqua-vivarium housing Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis

Photo: Frank Schneidewind

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It is often stated in literature that instead of a water part, a photo-developing tray or something similar is adequate. Naturally that would suffice but in my opinion that does not correspond to the idea of optimum captive conditions. Anyone who practices both types of husbandry would most certainly advise that the snakes be kept in the largest possible vivarium and that a water part be provided. It is only then that one can become acquainted with these truly fantastic animals, ie. it is only then that they exhibit their natural behavioural patterns. We do, after all, want to meet the most elementary requirements of our charges and to do that we should approximate as far as possible the prevalent natural conditions rather than adopt the stupid attitude of keeping them in a 'cage' with all that that involves, ie. water bowl, branch, substrate etc. Some attention should also be given to the aesthetic appearance of the vivarium.

After transporting the animals home successfully I decided to first house them in a smaller, more easily supervised vivarium which was also easier to check daily so I made a replica mini-vivarium (40cm). Now they were constantly in view, because despite the 120cm vivarium being easily supervised they would have been out of sight for most of the time. At this point it would seem wise to give a good tip: make sure the vivarium lid fits tightly and then check again and make it even tighter because young Garter Snakes can attach themselves to the glass like rubber suckers and can thus climb upwards and subsequently out of the tank. They will find the slightest gap and one of only 3mm is enough for them to escape. If the head can be forced through... For this reason I covered up my vivarium with extremely fine gauze which was stuck down with adhesive tape.

The first food I gave to the youngsters was tropical fish which I always have



T. s. parietalis taking a Guppy *Photo: Frank Schneidewind*

available and these up to the size of an adult male Guppy (Poecilia reticulata) they fortunately ate with relish. If they do not accept fish this is a certain sign that they are ill. Ethologists have already remarked how selective a chemical prey-plan can be with Thamnophis species. For most animals, earthworms are adequate food.

Because of their Jacobson's Organ they are able to distinguish these from other potential prey. If new-born Garter Snakes are offered a number of cotton wool pads soaked in various animal extracts they will invariably go for the one soaked in earthworm extract. There is thus a chemical prey-plan which distinguishes certain preferences. Young from Wisconsin prefer fish extract whilst those from Illinois were attracted equally to fish and worm extracts. The prey-plan polymorphism which can be determined within one clutch of young is thus a sort of guarantee which prevents specialisation in only one sort of food, thus allowing the population to move on to other habitats.

My snakes would not take food from the water. On the contrary they were quite happy to be fed by hand using forceps which give an indication of the way they would catch their food in the wild. It was only when the water level became so low that the fish could barely swim that the snakes would go into the water and with a little luck catch a fish by rushing around with the mouth wide open. At first the young Garter Snakes were fed daily on fish and earthworms, usually one, or at the most two per snake per day. After a few weeks they were then fed every second day. The Garter Snake is one of those snakes which swallow their prey live. The prey is thus only killed as a result of suffocation and the digestive juices when it reaches the stomach. In the wild it will also eat frogs, toads, newts and salamanders.

My Garter Snakes underwent their first slough before I obtained them and after a week in my house they sloughed again. At first they sloughed every week and later every four weeks. In older snakes it is much easier to watch this process. Because of the penetration of lymph fluids the snake's body appears lighter. The eyes become cloudy and the snake usually refuses to eat. This situation prevails for a few days after which the snake

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attempts to split the old skin at the snout by rubbing it against a rough object which it will usually take some time to find. The skin begins to loosen about the head. Spraying can usually speed up the sloughing process. I have never had any sloughing problems because of the water and the many rough edges on the bog wood.

It is only when they are in the water that one can see what an adept swimmer the Garter Snake is. In the water and on land their locomotion is always in a serpentine fashion. Other styles of motion have not been observed. To try to reach a certain degree of tameness or at least tolerance on the part of the snakes they are handled frequently but unfortunately a personal relationship between snake and keeper cannot be established.

The Garter Snake is however perfectly suited to one thing; to prove that snakes are not slimy, aggressive and venomous. They are only ever as warm as their surroundings and their skin does not have any slime glands. I have never once been bitten by a Garter Snake. If this were ever to happen it would be at feeding time because they can detect the smell of food on the hands and this can cause them to strike. They do not know any difference. As I have already mentioned, they are programmed in this way. I have often taken my snakes to visit friends and acquaintances to try to dispel the dreadful stories about slanted eyes and forked tongues. This is not difficult to achieve using Garter Snakes as examples; in fact, it is much easier than one would think, even though they may have an inborn fear of reptiles.

After carefully observing their feeding and behavourial patterns I transferred the young snakes to the larger vivarium which

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had been prepared for them. During the first few weeks they grew several centimetres and as food the following were given: fish, fillet of fish, chopped meat which is sprinkled weekly with a multivitamin preparation and calcium powder, earthworms and nestling mice. The latter were not always taken by every snake but when they are they considerably enhance the diet of the snakes. I did not allow the young snakes to hibernate during their first winter and fed them throughout. After only six months it was easy to distinguish the sexes because of the difference in size. The females are much stouter and longer in the body. Their behaviour can also be described as more agile than the male snakes. At the age of 12 months my specimens were fully grown and continued to increase only in girth.

The females measure 90cm whilst the males are around 65cm. The females are about as thick as a man's thumb. During their second winter when they were 18 months old I again tried to feed them throughout and without hibernation. Even without this stimulus I was able to observe mating behaviour amongst the animals (3.1) at the beginning of the year. The female was followed relentlessly by the males and the reason for this was undoubtedly the pheromones given off by the female. The males (2) attempted to crawl along the back of the female and attempted to hold her down in wave-like movements so that the sexual organs became aligned. The entire mating behaviour, including copulation, lasted several hours. After several weeks it became obvious that the female was gravid. At a temperature of around 26 degrees C the gestation period lasted exactly 100 days. This depends naturally upon the ambient temperature and is analogous with the incubation time for eggs. Then one Sunday afternoon in early spring the great day arrived. For four days before parturition the female refused food of any kind. She remained on the dry part of the vivarium whilst the males remained hidden beneath a tree root. One of the nicest things about Thamnophis species is that they give birth to live young (ovoviviparity) so that the young are immediately self-sufficient the moment they free themselves from the foetal membrane. By pressing down on the tail, the cloaca is slightly raised from the ground and by rythymical pushing the young emerge into the world. The first results of the parturition process was 18 small 'packages' each containing a young snake. Four of the young were stillborn which is not unusual for a first batch of young. Several of the young were unable to free themselves from the foetal membrane so I had to step in as midwife. Using a pair of clinical forceps I was able to release the young and immediately afterwards I was able to 'stroke off' their first slough. They were then placed in the previously described 40cm vivarium. The next day they began to eat small fish. None of the young needed to be force-fed. With good feeding and husbandry a Garter Snake can live well over 10 years but for this a cool hibernation appears to be one of the main prerequisites.

At every stage the care of Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis was a unique experience. Being a placid and non-venomous creature, this live-bearing water snake is suitable for even the most novice of snake keepers. With a suitably large aquatic part in their vivarium the movements of this snake are a delight to watch, a feature which many other snakes do not exhibit. They are also living proof that snakes are not detestable, sluggish, slimy, aggressive, venomous and stupid creatures. With their fantastic markings and their red and constantly active forked tongue they are easily one of the most attractive snakes to be regularly kept in captivity.

*****

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Translated from the original German by John Hackworth.

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Breeding the Florida King Snake *Lampropeltis getulus floridana*

by Allison McNeill

The Florida King Snake (*Lampropeltis getulus floridana*) is a large robust king snake found in the wild in central and southern Florida. It is attractively marked, having a background colour of dark to light brown with the centre of each scale being lighter than the edges. There are yellow patches on the sides of the snake, with narrow yellow crossbands extending upward from them. The belly is yellow and brown checked.

The Florida King Snake is one snake I would highly recommend to anyone. They are easy to maintain apart from being rather messy. They are generally friendly, even-tempered snakes. (We had one which came out of her hide box every day when we came home from work and would beg to be handled.) These snakes are exuberant eaters and the major challenge in keeping them is tricking them to one end of the cage so you can slip the food in at the other end.

We currently have three adult and two near-adult specimens. The adult male Elvis, was acquired in 1986 as a mate for a female who died mysteriously shortly afterwards. Elvis is about 140cm (55") and is a fairly heavy-bodied snake. He is kept in a glass tank 76cm x 30cm x 33cm (30" x 12" x 13") (l x w x h), with a wire mesh lid. The breeding female, CL, was acquired in 1988 after two years of searching for an adult female. She is five years old, about 109cm (43"), and is kept in a glass tank 58cm x 30cm x 33cm (23" x 12" x 13") (l x w x h). A second adult female, 90cm (36") in length, refused to breed with the male, perhaps because the size difference was so great.

Our Florida King Snakes were put into hibernation on the 27th November 1988. Their last meal before hibernation was on the 9th October 1988. The hibernation temperature ranged between 7 and 15 degrees C (45 to 60 degrees F). During that time, water was always available. Wood shavings were used as a substrate. The snakes were removed from hibernation on the 12th March 1989 and put into their regular cages. (They were hibernated in plastic boxes.)

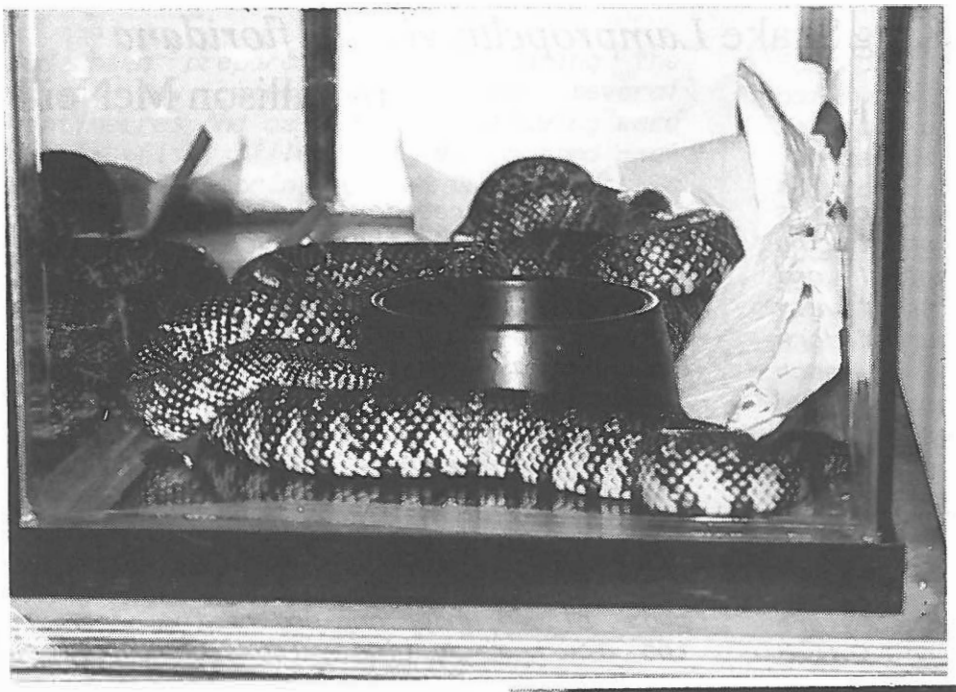
The undercage heating was not turned on for two or three days, allowing them to adjust slowly to the higher temperature. (The first thing the snakes did was to soil their cages, which I found amazing as they hadn't eaten for four months.) Feeding was resumed on the 16th March 1989.

I have already described the cages used for these snakes. Each snake has a hiding box and water dish and a stick for climbing. I use white paper towels as a substrate. The cages are heated by heating pads placed under one end of the cage on the low heat setting. The snakes are in our living room so there is no attempt to provide a natural photoperiod.

We did not attempt to introduce the snakes until the female had shed her skin which occured in late March. The female was placed in the male's cage (after removing all the cage furnishings except the substrate) on the 27th and 29th of March. On both occasions copulation was observed, lasting over four hours. The male was observed alternating hemipenes at regular intervals. He would bite the female on the neck, insert a hemipene and twitch spasmodically. After these two matings we decided that the female must be gravid if she was ever going to be.

Between the 1st of April and the 5th of May the female ate four weaning rats and one mouse, all pre-killed. About midway through April the rear two thirds of her body began to swell until she looked as though she had been inflated. We took her hide box away and gave her a nesting box made from a plastic box with a hole cut in the lid. We filled it with damp sphagnum moss and taped the lid on. She shed on the 25th of April. On the 5th of May I came home from work and found her bathing in her water dish looking thin again. We examined the nest box and found 15 eggs. (Actually we counted 14 and did not realise that there were 15 until they hatched.)

The eggs were left in the container they had been laid in and placed in an incubator. We did have to flip the nesting box over, however. Our incubator is a plywood cube with 45cm (18") sides and with a hinged plexiglass lid that opens



Left: Elvis and CL mating.

Below: Florida King Snake eggs hatching. Note the 'rotten' egg in the lower left corner.

Photographs: Allison McNeill



downwards. Heat is supplied by a lightbulb. We hadn't expected the eggs quite so soon so we hadn't tested the incubator. We found that we had to operate it with the door open about 2.5cm to prevent heat building up too high. Finally we got a proper thermostat which maintains a temperature of 27 to 28 degrees C (81 to 83 degrees F) by turning the light on and off. The eggs and moss were sprayed daily with non-chlorinated water. One egg developed a bad spot and one seemed to be crumpled but the others appeared healthy.

We attempted to breed the snakes again on the 3rd of May and 2nd of June but the female wanted none of it. On the 4th of June we noticed that she looked large again so we gave her a new nesting box. She shed again on the 11th of June. By the 22nd she was acting as though she was constipated. On the morning of the 23rd of June there were nine eggs in the nest box. These eggs were not as white as the first batch and were much narrower but we incubated them anyway. As I was putting them in the incubator I noticed that four of the first eggs had slits in them and there was a nose sticking out of one of them. We had not expected the eggs to hatch for 2 more weeks. This was our first successful breeding so it was very exciting.

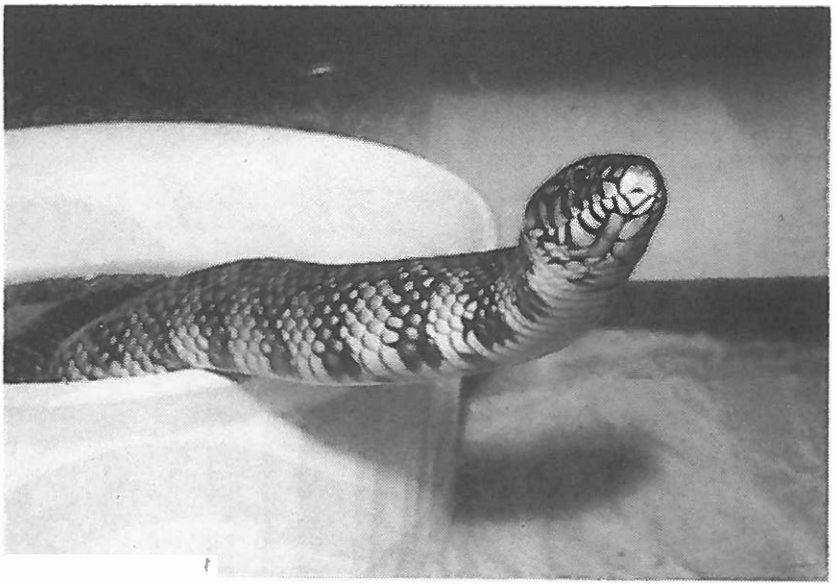
Between the 23rd and the 28th of June all the eggs hatched, even the mouldy one and the crumpled one. They hatched from one end of the nest box to the other. I had to help one of the hatchlings out of the egg because it was tangled in its yolk. It is smaller than the other hatchlings and had probably detached from the yolk sac too early. The snake that hatched out of the mouldy egg has an aberrant pattern - it is speckled in the front, striped lengthwise down the sides, with faint chain patterns on the rear of the body and strange horizontal stripes on the belly. Its head and neck are very small compared to the rear part of the body which is a bit lumpy. It ate on the 10th of July so I am hoping that it will survive. It will be quite interesting to see how its pattern

develops.

October update: The second batch of eggs proved to be duds. However, the strange hatchling, Beanie, is doing beautifully. Although she is about half the length of the other snakes she has doubled in size.

*****

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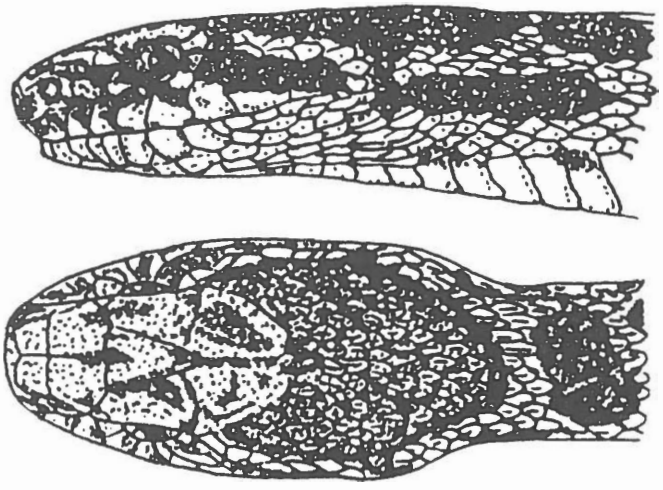
Post egg-laying shot of CL. Photo: Allison McNeill

Asian Rat Snakes of the *Elaphe* Genus
Part XV *Elaphe davidi* (Sauvage, 1884)
by Klaus-Dieter Schulz

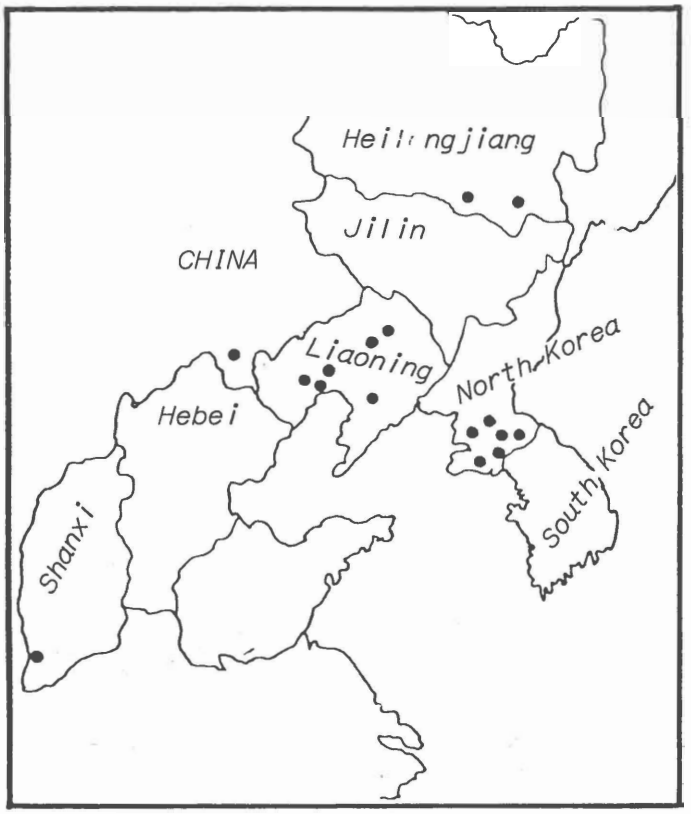
Amongst herpetologists, David's Rat Snake is an absolutely unknown species as is the case with almost all Asian Elaphe species. Even professional herpetologists have had to refer to the various literature sources in order to be able to give exact details of this species. Unfortunately this snake is only known to me from literature and from a few bad photographs.

Colour and Markings

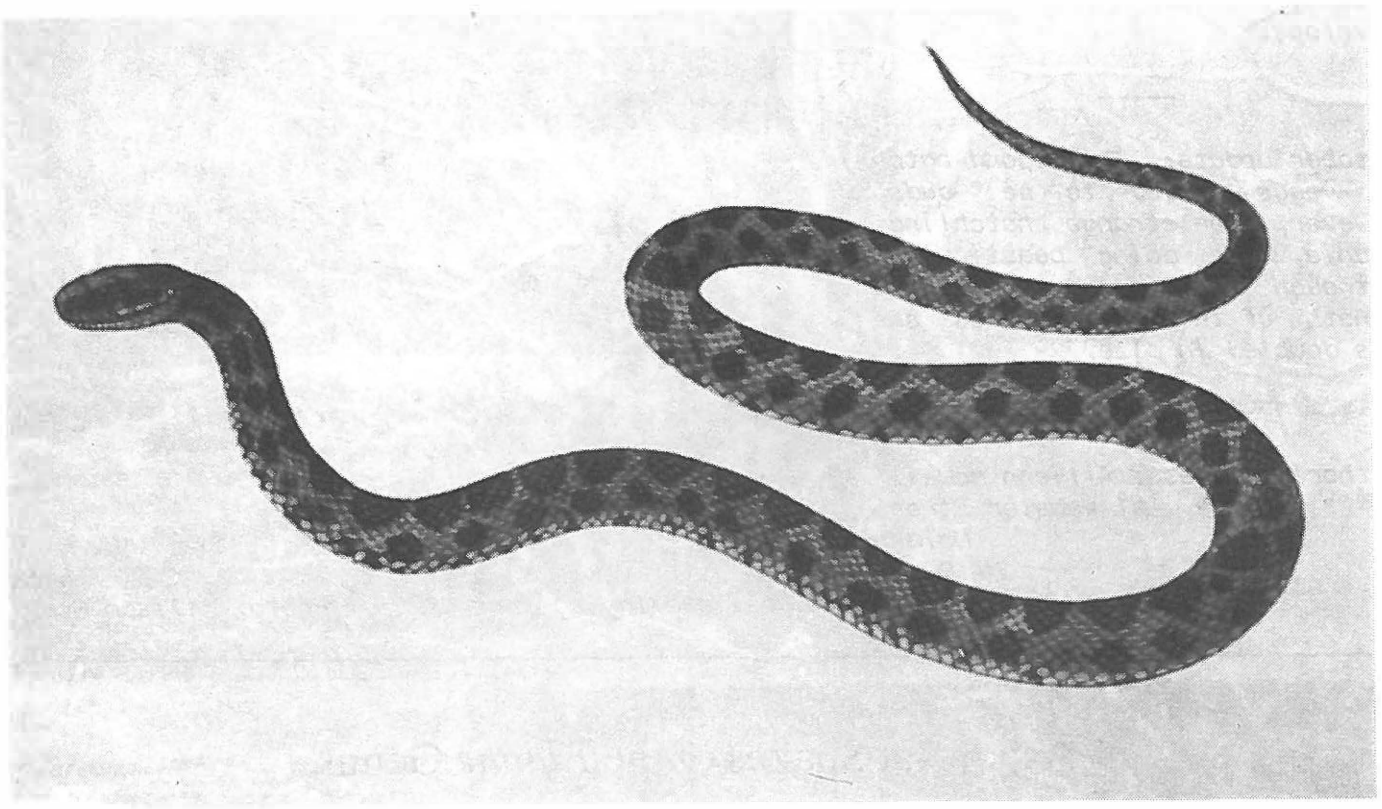
This description is based on one of Pope (1935), a drawing by Zhao (1980) and a photograph by Szyndlar (Krakow, Poland). The ground colour is usually light brown or light brown on the sides and grey brown



Elaphe davidi according to Pope (1935)
K-D Schulz



Map showing the places where Szyndlar found Elaphe davidi (1985). W. Fechner

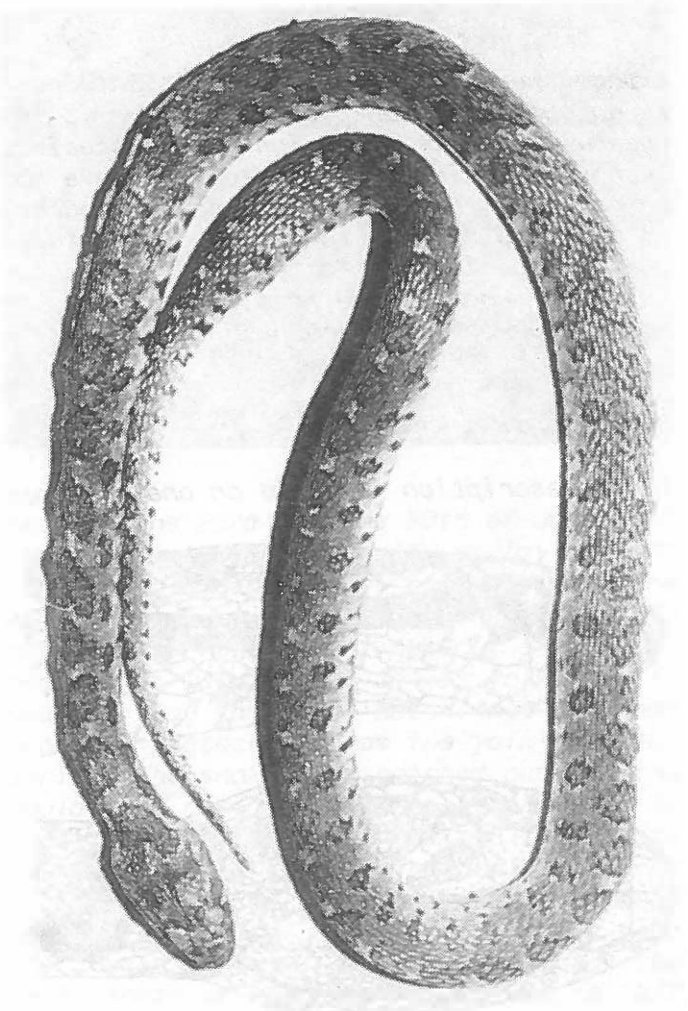


Above: Elaphe davidi from China (after Zhao, 1980) K-D Schulz

along the back. The characteristic pattern consists of two lateral rows of dark brown spots edged in black along the sides of the body with a similar row along the centre of the back. The spots along the back are usually twice as large as those along the sides of the body. Between the spots along the back there can also occasionally be small unclear lighter areas. The yellowish-white ventral surface has grey speckles. From behind each eye to the corner of the mouth there is a dark brown stripe which is edged in black. From the back of the head to the neck there is a V-shaped pattern (as in the illustrated specimen from Korea). In Pope's description (1935) of a specimen from China there is at the same place a large dark brown, black-bordered spot. The number of ventralia varies from 172 to 185 and that of the subcaudalia from 58 to 69. The species reaches a length of 90 to 100cm.

Distribution and Lifestyle

Northern China (Heilongjiang, Laioning, Hebei Janxi), Northern Korea as well as the north of South Korea (Szyndlar, 1985). There is very little known about the life style of this snake. Pope describes it as an inhabitant of river valleys with rocky surroundings or flat land at low or medium altitudes. In the stomach of one specimen



Elaphe davidi from North Korea.
Photo: Z. Szyndlar

the remains of a snake (Elaphe dione) were found but, as is the case with most species of this genus, Elaphe davidi probably feeds mostly on small mammals.

Unfortunately I have no information on the maintenance of this species in captivity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Zbigniew Szyndlar (Krakow, Poland) for his kind assistance with information about the herpetofauna of Korea and for kindly making the photograph available.

*****

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

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West Germany

This series of articles, 'Die hinterasiatischen Kletternattern der Gattung Elaphe', was originally published in the magazine 'Sauria' beginning in 1985. Part XV, featuring Elaphe davidi appeared in 'Sauria' No.1, 1989. This English translation by John Hackworth has been printed by kind permission of the author.

LETTERS

Dear Snake Keeper,

My congratulations to Glenn Cousins for his article 'A Report on Europe's Largest Snake Farm' (Snake Keeper Volume 3, Number 9). He evaluated the place correctly. I've heard lots of horror stories regarding this side-show and in fact am aware of hundreds of specimens having died there in the hands of incompetence. I recall one story where a person noticed at least four regurgitated rodents in four separate cages, plus two dead snakes. As Mr Cousins pointed out, quite a few of the animals are falsely identified. The owner 'talks' a good line but, in reality, his knowledge of these animals leaves much to be desired. He does, however, have a knack for sending many a caged beast to a premature demise. I've had the misfortune of speaking with him once, and once was enough!

No one should pay money to see a disaster and in fact places like Nordharzer Schlangenparadise should be closed down forever. Too bad the snakes can't speak, otherwise they would have serious comments on the supposed "snake paradise" which their owner, Jurgen Hergert, forces them to live in.

Yours sincerely,

Karl H. Switak
Santa Rosa
California
USA

Dear Editor,

This letter is in reference to Mark O'Shea's recent article on Hog Island Boas (Snake Keeper Volume 3, Number 8) in which he questioned the locality where the boas originated.

About 20 years ago the late Ross Allen took a group of people from the Silver Springs Reptile Institute to British Honduras (Belize). The group returned with about three dozen boa constrictors which were quite different from any seen before on the American commercial market. Compared to the snakes on the Central American mainland, these boas were smaller in size, had longer tails, more elongate snouts, and had the uncanny ability to undergo drastic changes in colour. Colour changes varied from the dark brown colouration found in boas from the mainland, to bright shades of pink or white. Occasionally their pattern was adorned with a pronounced speckling. The boas were collected on Crawl Key (off the coast of Placentia), and commercially were known as Crawl Key Boas.

In the mid-1970's a boa collected in the Cayos Cochinos (off the north coast of Honduras) was brought to Miami. This specimen, in some respects, shared some similarities with the Crawl Key animals, and is the specimen whose picture appears in the second edition of Wilson & Meyer's 'Snakes of Honduras'. A short time later a

wildlife collecting station was set up on the Cayos Cochinos. The boas exported from those islands were given the name 'Hog Island Boas' from the Spanish word 'cochino' meaning pig or hog.

For a number of years these snakes were frequently exported from Honduras to the south Florida area. In the mid-1980's, however, some different-looking boas began appearing on the commercial market, and were sold as 'Hog Island Boas'. These snakes were slightly larger in size and darker in colour, but otherwise resembled the aforementioned insular forms. Rumour in the commercial grapevine had these animals originating from the Bay Islands.

Disturbing news soon began to circulate from Honduran wildlife exporters. Word had it that boas were now being collected on other islands because the Cayos Cochinos population was almost exhausted. These rumours prompted two prominent field biologists to spend several days on the islands searching for the boas. They did not locate a single specimen.

To my knowledge the question as to the origin of the Hog Island Boas first arose in the south Florida area, when a reptile dealer began advertising the boas as 'Clouded Boas', either out of ignorance or as a marketing scheme. Further confusion came after the publication of the popular 'Living Snakes of the World' by John M. Merhtens. On page 20 there is a photograph of a 'Clouded Boa' (Boa constrictor nebulosa). The snake in the photograph actually is a Hog Island Boa.

Louis Porras

Zoo Herp Inc.
Sandy
Utah
USA

Part I

The Structural Maintenance of the Reptile Aquarium

by Alfred Fleming

My love for reptiles had its humble beginnings in a pet shop I worked at in Anchorage, Alaska. I started with one lizard and a ten gallon aquarium. The aquarium soon became my cage of choice for small and medium sized non-venomous reptiles.

Over the years my collection of reptiles has grown considerably and, of course, so has the number of aquariums needed to house my collection. It did not take long for me to realise that structure maintenance of the reptile aquarium was just as important as hygiene and other types of reptile maintenance. In the end the mastering of this maintenance skill not only proved to be a money saver but also a preventative of certain health risks to me and the reptiles that live in the aquariums. The risks posed here are from unrepaired cracks, chips and broken or structurally unsound aquariums.

The following is an outline of a step-by-step procedure that I use to repair my aquariums. Considerable practice on my part was needed however to enable me to repair and/or disassemble an aquarium without breaking the very glass I was attempting to salvage. So don't be discouraged if your first attempts at this type of maintenance fail miserably; practice makes perfect.

There are two methods of repair that I use on my aquariums: these methods I call major and minor. Minor repairs are used for partially cracked and/or chipped aquariums. Major repairs are used for aquariums that require the replacement of one or more panes of glass. The supplies you will need for both types of repair are easily obtained and are relatively inexpensive. These supplies include gloves (for safety), clear packing tape, regular aquarium sealant, several single edged razor blades and, if applicable, the proper replacement glass.

Chips are probably the most dangerous type of damage encountered. This is because sometimes you find the chip only after you have been cut. On a positive note chips and cracks are also the easiest to repair. Chips usually develop on the outside corners of your aquariums and can be repaired by first removing all the loose glass in the affected area. This is done by cutting it away with a single edged razor blade.

Then fill in the area with sealant and apply a piece of clear packing tape over



A perfect example of a ten gallon aquarium in need of major repair Photo: A. Fleming

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the chipped area. The tape serves a three-fold purpose. It holds the sealant in place both during curing and afterwards, thus making further repairs on the same chip practically unnecessary. It also allows you to shape the sealant to the form of the corner for a more appealing look. Lastly, it serves as a second layer of protection from cuts.

Cracks are easily repaired by applying clear packing tape to the entire length of the crack both inside and out. This is all that is necessary to protect you and your captive from dangerous injuries.

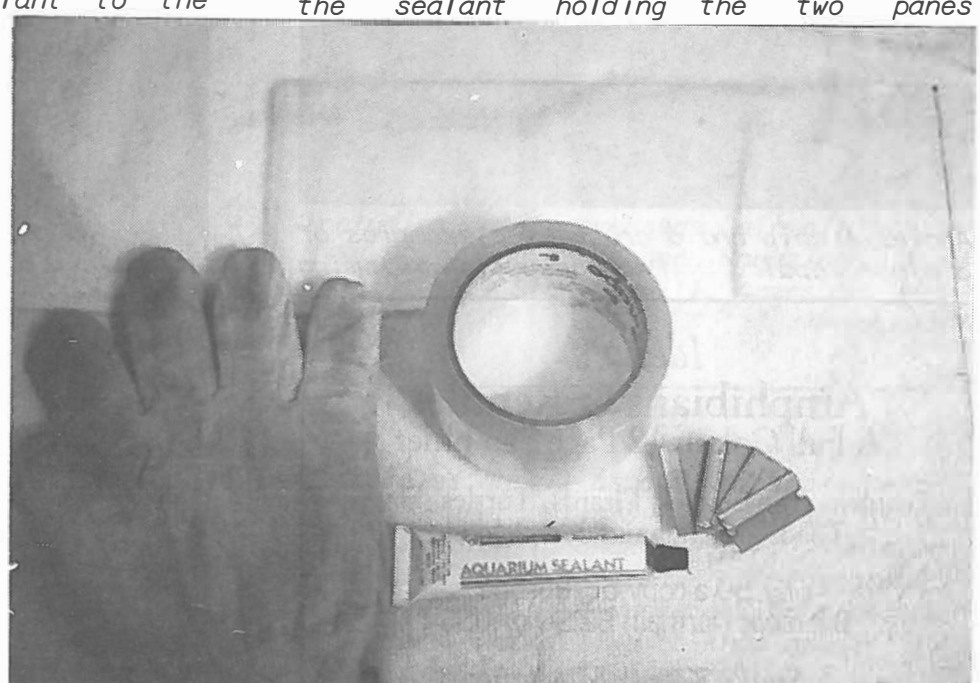
The above repairs are only feasible for single or partially cracked panels. More serious damage is probably better left to the major repairs category.

The first step in a major repair of the reptile aquarium is to remove the top and bottom framework. Our objective here is the removal of the framework in one piece without the breakage of any good glass. It is best to use only your hands to lift and remove the framework. Prying with tools or other objects will result in breakages.

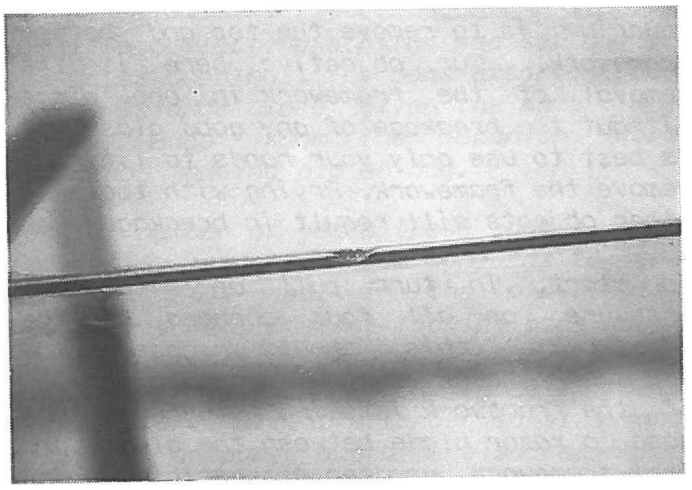
To start, in turn pull up with even pressure on all four corners of the framework; this should loosen the framework enough so it will come right up. If the framework is being stubborn then pass a razor blade between the glass and the framework as deep as possible in an attempt to sever the sealant holding the framework to the glass. Once the corners are freed, caution is also needed here because if you pull up on the framework that is not loose enough you can cause undue strain on the glass resulting in breakages.

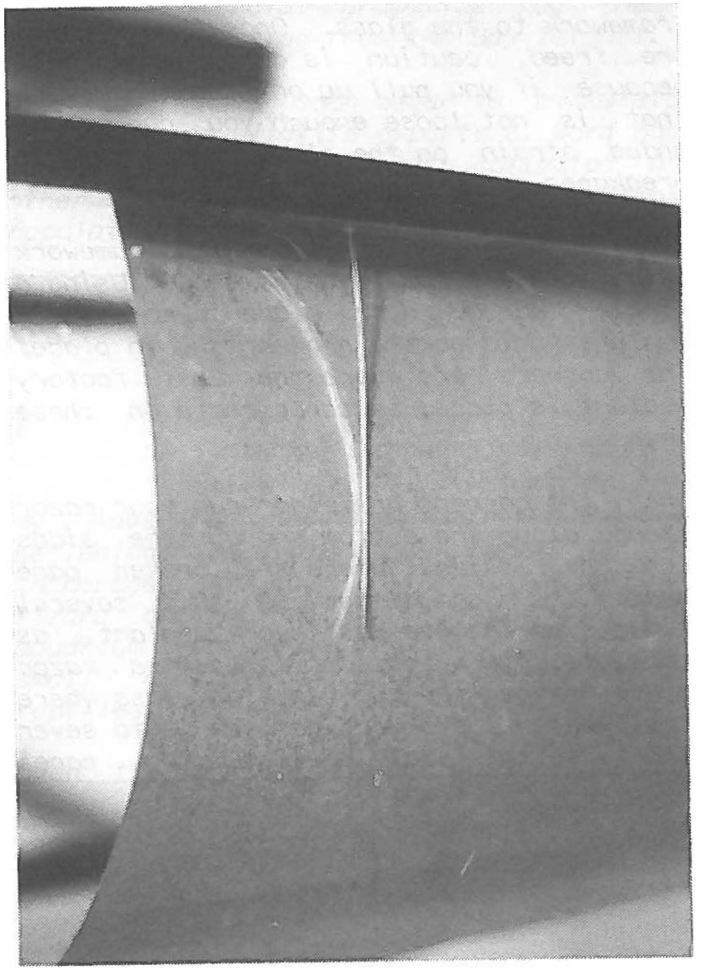
Step two begins with setting the framework aside after it has been removed. Using a single edged razor blade remove all sealant holding the broken pane in place. The corners are where the most factory sealant is placed so concentrate on these areas.

Once the corners are clear run your razor blade along the bottom and up the sides (on the inside) where the broken pane meets the good glass. Do this several times to remove as much sealant as possible. Then attempt to pass a razor blade between the two panes of glass where they meet. The objective here is to sever the sealant holding the two panes



The supplies required for the repairs are easily obtained. Photo: A. Fleming





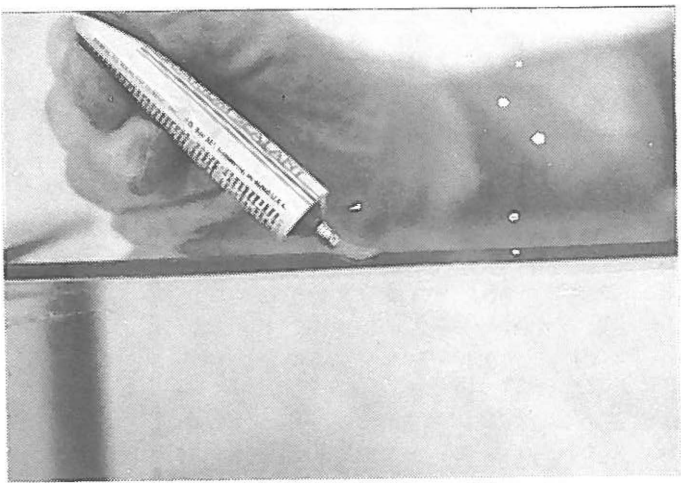
Above: A chip and a crack. Two examples of a minor repair. Photographs: A. Fleming

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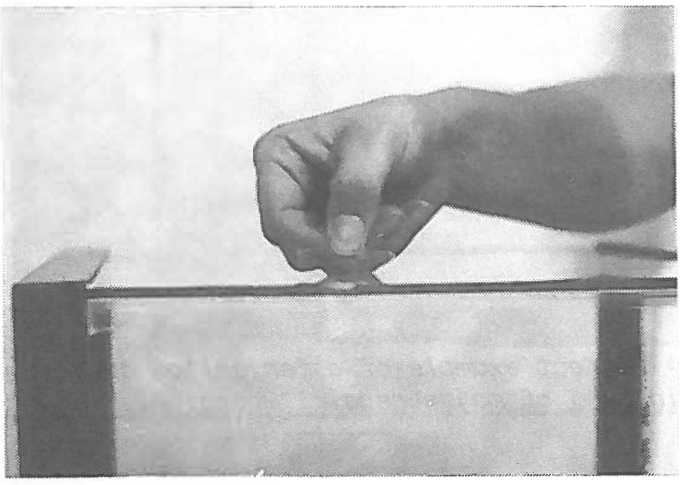
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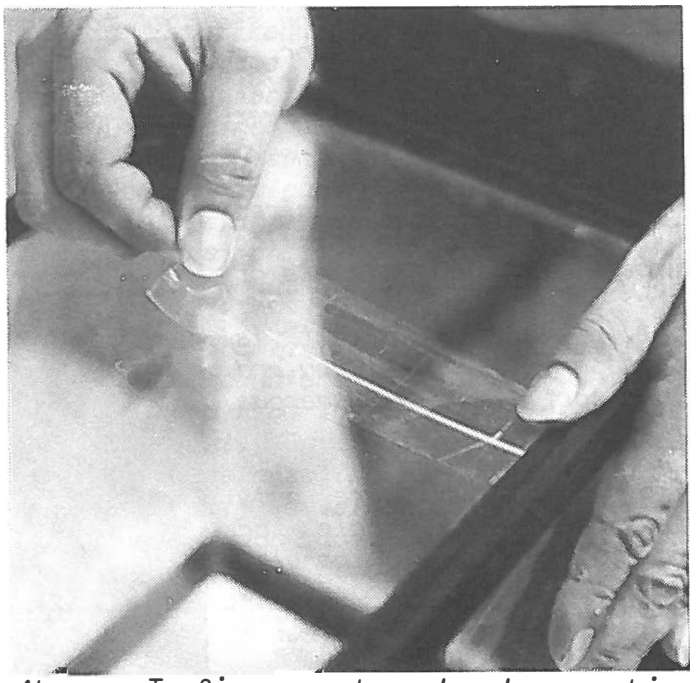
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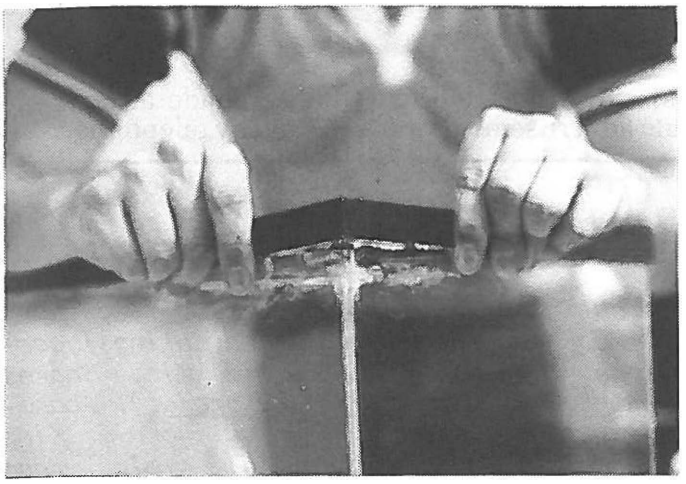
Above: To repair a chip first remove all loose glass and fill with standard aquarium sealant. Photo: A. Fleming



Above: Apply clear packing tape to the chipped area and your minor repair is finished. Photo: A. Fleming



Above: To fix a crack apply clear packing tape to the inside and outside of the aquarium. Photo: A. Fleming



Above: The first step in a major repair is the removal of the framework.
Photo: A. Fleming

together.

If this cannot be done then carefully work a broken piece of glass loose and move it back and forth cutting the sealant on both sides that hold it in place. Do this until the aquarium is disassembled to the desired point.

Part II will appear in next month's issue.

*****

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Cheyenne
Wyoming 82002
U.S.A

CLASSIFIED ADVERTS
(continued from page 24.)

WANTED

For breeding purposes only, all species of Grey Banded King Snake and Rosy Boas. Also L. m. mexicana, L. t. hondurensis, L. t. annulata, L. g. holbrooki, P. m. vertebralis, E. helena, G. conicus, E. depressa (short tailed spiny skink, coral phase). Must be captive bred or long term captives, hatchlings or adult. Will buy individuals or complete groups. Contact Anne Clegg or Kim Loader, telephone 01-555-3548 or write to Clay Hill House, Clay Hill, Enfield, Middx EN2 9JA.

I am interested in purchasing reptiles for a zoo exhibit that we are putting together. We also plan to breed many of these animals in the future. Our main interest is exotic boas and pythons and Australian monitors. Please let us know what you have. Send a price list. Eric D. Stoops, Living Treasures, Scottsdale, Arizona 85254, USA. Phone (602) 953 1911.

Wanted urgently - adult female Sunbeam Snake (Xenopeltis unicolor). Telephone Carol Hindley on (0709) 363705 (day) or (0709) 864985 (after 5pm).

Mature female Lampropeltis getulus splendida (Sonoran Kingsnake). Alexander (0702) 78346 (Essex).

BOOKS

'The Reptile World' by Clifford H. Pope, £20. 'Snakes' by W.H. Parker, £10. 'Snakes of South America' by Dr M. Freiberg, £12. 'Pythons and Boas' by P.J. Stafford, £8. Telephone (0388) 746122 (Co Durham).

Books (signed on request): 'Lizards of the World', 'Snakes of the World', 'Frogs and Toads of the World', The Care of Reptiles and Amphibians in Captivity' all £14.95; 'Keeping and Breeding Snakes' £16.95. Please include 55p towards post and packing. Chris Mattison, 138 Dalewood Road, Beauchief, Sheffield S8 0EF. Tel: (0742) 364433.

100's of books on fish, reptiles and amphibians, cats, dogs, birds, bird-watching and poultry. Free catalogue. Bures and Son, PO Box 377, Coulsdon, Surrey CR3 1YU. Telephone (0737) 556139.

POSTCARDS

Colour postcards featuring photographs by Chris Mattison. No. 1 Western Diamondback Rattlesnake. No. 2 Emerald Tree Boa. Pack of 10 (five of each card): UK & Europe £2 including p&p, overseas (airmail) £3 or US$4.80. Snake Keeper Magazine (Postcards), 159 Stanley Hill, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9EY.

WANTED

Articles on all aspects of snake keeping are always required for publication in Snake Keeper. Whatever you've seen, bred, photographed, built, lost or discovered, your fellow readers would like to know about it. Don't keep it a secret!

Classified Advertisements

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

FOR SALE

Yellow Rat Snake hatchlings, sexed and feeding, £14 each. Male Prairie King Snake (Lampropeltis calligaster calligaster), hatchling, £25. Male Grey Banded hatchling, £60. Adult female Eastern Milk Snake, offers. Phone Andy on (0757) 630038 (Yorks).

Female Burmese Python, 12' long, very tame/feeding dead only. £150. Chilean Rosy Tarantula, £10. A pair of Leopard Geckos, £30 o.n.o. Tel: Langley Mill (0773) 767017 anytime day or night and ask for Ian or Debbie.

Florida Kingsnake. Excellent feeder and condition. Very tame. Approximately 4' 8". £75 o.n.o. Royal Python, approximately 20". Very nice young snake in good condition. Excellent feeder. £50 o.n.o. Telephone (0270) 623507 (Crewe).

Indian Python ('Samson'), approximately 12', docile and very tame. Complete with vivarium and heaters. Genuine reason for sale, £120. Telephone 01-505-0418.

Captive bred hatchlings. Rare Lyre Rat Snakes. Eastern Corn subspecies. Well sought after and all feeding on pinkies. Beautiful markings, must go to good homes, £20 each. Phone Camborne 710947.

Hatchling Corn Snakes (Elaphe guttata guttata). Feeding well, £17.50. Alexander (0702) 78346 (Essex).

Hatchling Yellow Rat Snakes, £25. Grey Rat Snakes, £25. 1988 hatched Desert Kingsnake (male) £55. All from well marked strains. Also stainless steel pinky pumps, £65. Sexing probes (two probes, four sizes), £15. Carriage/postage at cost. Chris Mattison, 138 Dalewood Road, Beauchief, Sheffield S8 0EF. Tel: (0742) 364433.

200 Red worms £2.40 plus 60p 1st class postage. David Silvester, 188 Wrens Hill Road, Wrens Nest Estate, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3SF.

Amelanistic Corn Snakes (Elaphe guttata guttata), hatchlings/yearlings from £40. Anerythristic Corn Snakes (E. g. guttata), hatchlings/yearlings from £30. Snow Corn Snakes (E. g. guttata), hatchlings/yearlings from £65. California King Snakes (Lampropeltis getulus californiae), banded/striped from £35. California King Snakes (L. g. californiae), albino from £65. Brown House Snakes (Lamprophis fuliginosus), hatchlings/yearlings from £20. Orange Rat Snake (Elaphe obsoleta rossalleni), 6' male, £75. Heterozygous Gopher Snake (Pituophis melanoleucus affinis), 3'6"-4' female, £100. Tiliqua scincoides intermedia, £200. Plus a few others and accessories. Coming soon Volume 2, No. 1 of 'The Vivarium', excellent U.S. colour herpetological magazine. For more info call Jerry on (0305) 262311.

Captive-bred baby Spotted Sand Boas (Eryx jaculus jaculus). Good homes only. Telephone Steven Simpson on Brighton (0273) 727328.

One Lampropeltis triangulum elapsoides, £110.45p. One Lampropeltis mexicana mexicana, £140. One Lampropeltis alterna, £135. One yearling Python regius, £45. All the above are male. Green Iguana, 3', £65. Phone Robert on (0733) 261578 (Peterborough).

WANTED

Ruthvens Kingsnake, female. Telephone 01-231-5929.

Male Haitian Boa (Epicrates striatus striatus). Adult female Lamprophis fuliginosus. Phone Robert on (0733) 261578.

Classified adverts continue on page 23.

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