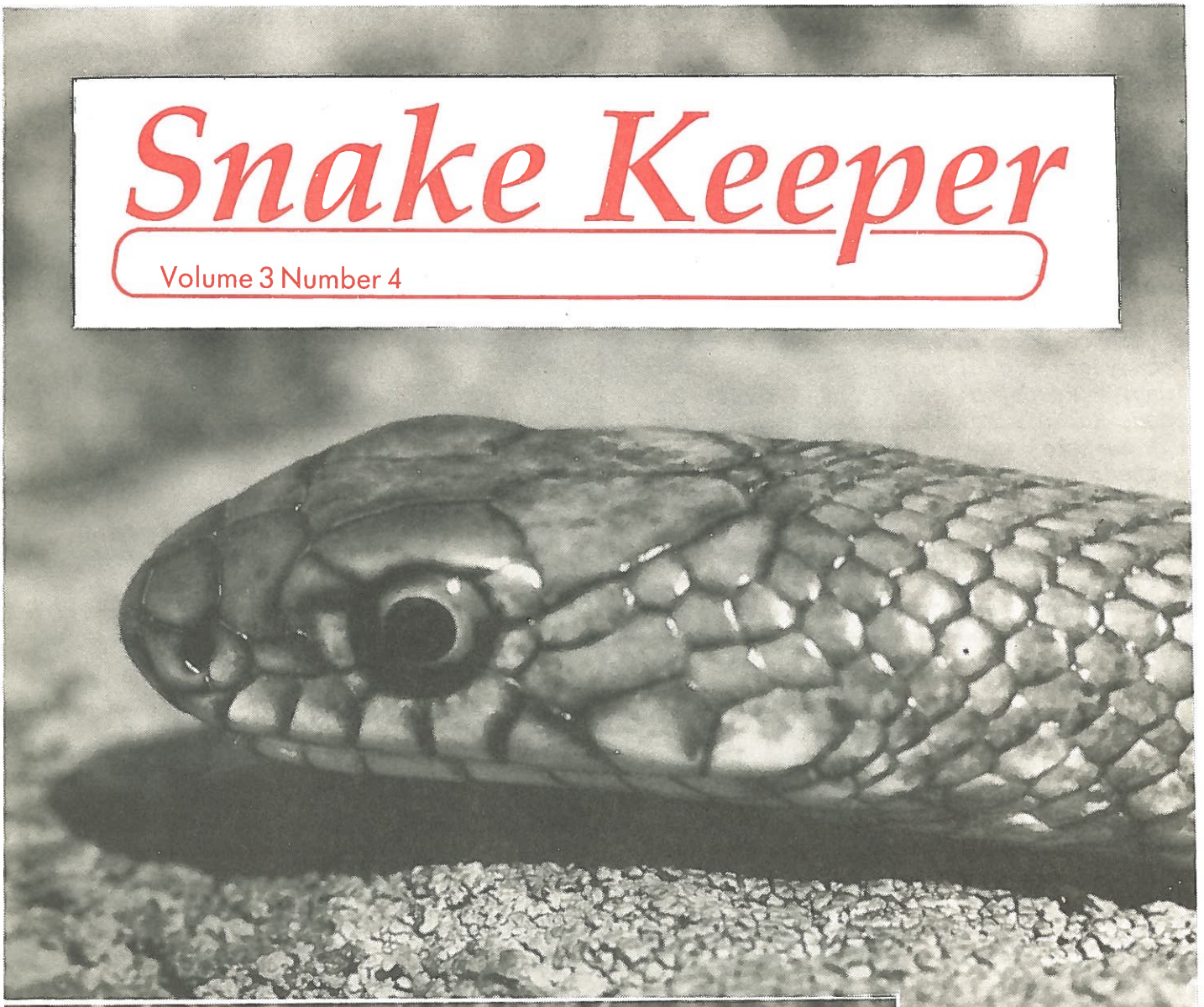
Snake Keeper

Volume 3 Number 4





The Snakes of South East Bulgaria

by P. Velensky

£1.50p USA $3

SNAKES MAKE NEWS

Snake keeping featured prominently on the front page of 'The Sport' during one slow news day in early March. The paper in question, which has done for journalism what the UK Environment Secretary, Nicholas Ridley, has done for the British countryside, featured a front page headline declaring "Snake Boy Lives With 30ft Killer". Readers eagerly turning to the centre page spread could learn how a three year old Indonesian boy, Karin Belang, keeps a pet 9.1m Reticulated Python. Karin's father is quoted as saying "We do not worry when they go out together; wild animals are very wary of a full-grown python." According to the article, the python is very protective towards the boy and acts as his minder apart from one hour each day when the snake forgets her maternal instincts and slips back into the jungle to hunt. It is obviously hungry work acting as mother to a three year old.

*****

NEW JOURNAL FOR CHELONIA FANS

A new publication for chelonia enthusiasts, 'The Journal of Chelonian Herpetology' has been established to provide an international forum for the publication of specialist papers and feature articles relating to chelonia. The Journal will be published quarterly and subscription rates are: UK and Eire £10, Europe £12.50 and Overseas (Airmail) £15.00. Further details are available from the Journal of Chelonian Herpetology, c/o The Tortoise Trust, BM Tortoise, London WC1N 3XX, England. Telex: 265871 Monref G (Ref: 72:MAG32237).

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ZOOLOGICA '89

The annual 'Zoologica' event takes place this year on September 2nd at the South of England Showground, Ardingley, Sussex. Described as the only event of its kind in the world, last year Zoologica '88 offered visitors exhibits ranging from a Butterfly farm to a Chimpanzee and from a bird of prey flying display to rare domestic cats. Most of the exhibits are housed in the huge Abergavenny building - one of the largest 'rooms' in the south of England - so bad weather poses no problems. Further details of the event are available from Mr C.H. Keeling on Guildford (0483) 37547.

*****

SYMPOSIUM ON PYTHONS AND BOAS

The Boa Group, part of the Swedish Herpetological Society, are holding their Third Symposium at the Institute of Genetics, Uppsala University, Sweden on the 20th May. A list of speakers includes:

Irene Ahl - The anatomy of Pythons and Boas.
Burtus van Heyden - Captive breeding of Chondropython viridis, Liasis albertisi and Liasis childreni
Henrik Bringsoe - Captive breeding of Corallus enhydris enhydris.
Even Street - Captive breeding of Python molurus molurus and Python sebae.
Quentin Bloxham - Breeding endangered species at the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust.
David Blody - Breeding Snakes at the Fort Worth Zoological Park including Corallus annulatus.

The Group are interested in contacting people who breed pythons and boas and who would like to give a talk at the Symposium. They offer to help with travelling expenses and to make your stay in Sweden as pleasant as possible. Further information from:

Anders Wahlström
Ventilvägen 57
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Sweden.

*****

I.H.S. West Midlands Branch 1st Herpetological Fayre

Only a few spaces remain for private and commercial dealers of livestock, books and equipment at the one day Fayre to be held on the 20th May.

Anyone interested in reserving space should immediately contact:

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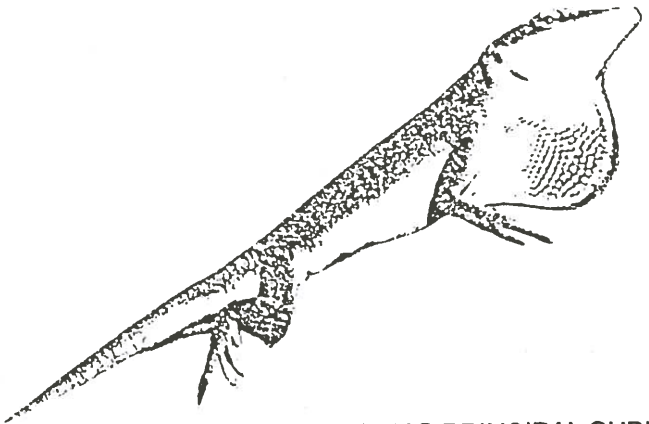
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Front cover: Female Coluber caspius (top)
Coluber rubriceps thracius (bottom)
Photographs by Petr Velensky

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The Snakes of South East Bulgaria, Part I

by Petr Velensky

Introduction

During the years 1973 to 1987 I visited Bulgaria nine times. My main interest was soon concentrated on two places on the Black Sea coast. These were the areas around Sozopol and the estuary of the Ropotamo River. In these areas I spent a total of 65 days during the months of April, May, June and September. The majority of my observations were, however, made in June.

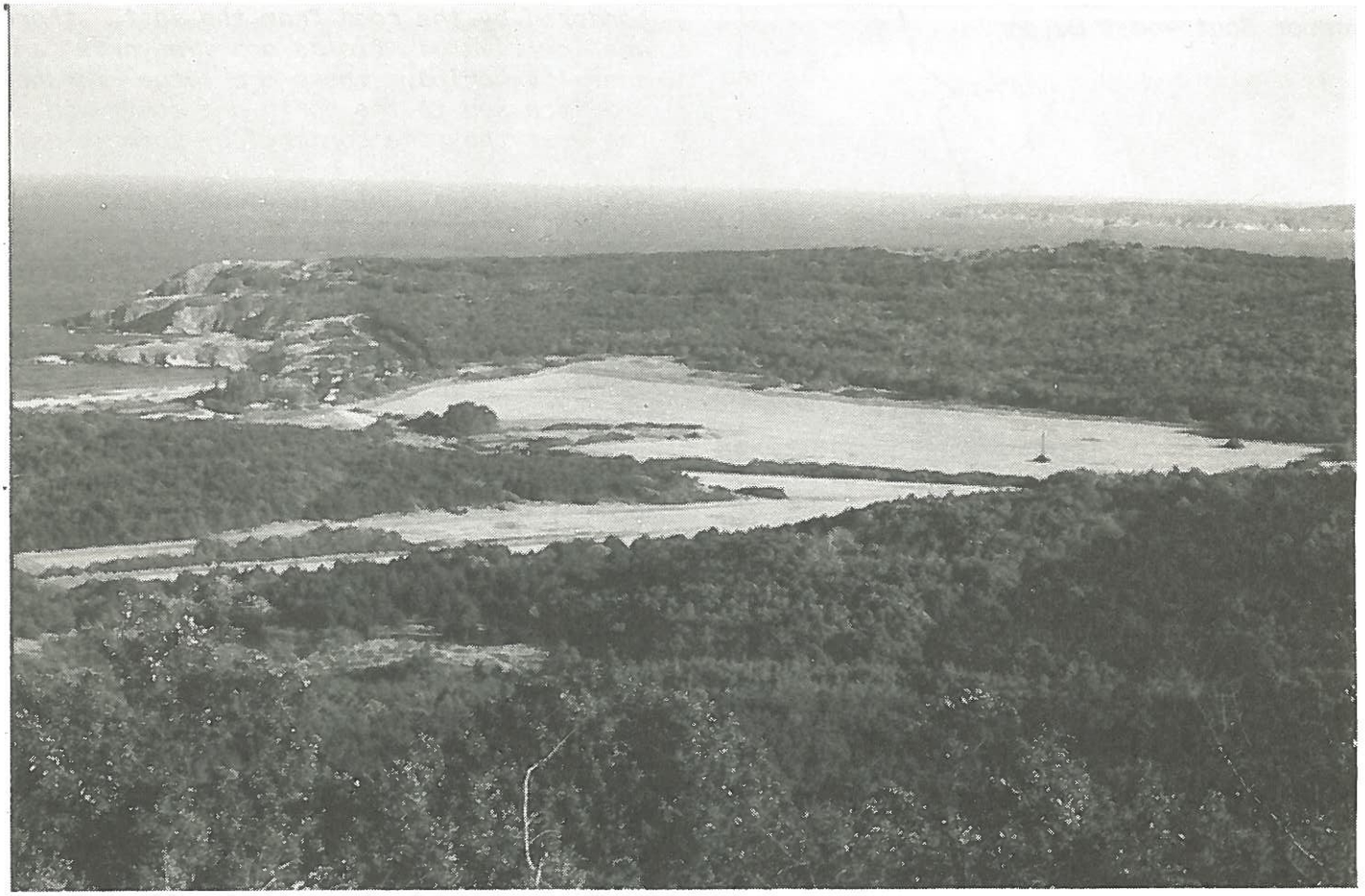
The natural conditions, vegetation and fauna vary greatly from site to site. In the vicinity of Ropotamo the main vegetation is broad-leaved primeval forest which is very damp, becoming marshy in the lower parts, and very dry on the slopes of the low hills. The second biotope on the Ropotamo Estuary consists of large sand dunes which, in some places, could even be called sand hills. These are stabilised by grasses and small stands of broad-leaved trees.

Around the environs of Sozopol there are five low hills (up to 100m above sea level) on which the natural growth was formerly dry oak/hornbeam forest (mainly Quercus cerris, Q. frainetto and Carpinus orientalis). The remains of this forest can now only be found on the north-east slope of one hill. The other areas on the north-facing slopes are covered with thick pine plantations (Pinus pinaster and P. nigra). On their south-west slopes the hills have vegetation which provides much more suitable conditions for reptiles. There are terrace-like fields with dry, overgrown stony walls as well as bushy vegetation and small gnarled trees of the genus Quercus and Carpinus.

The area around the five hills of Sozopol is relatively strongly delimited. They are



General view (north) from the highest hill near Sozopol *Photo: Petr Velensky*

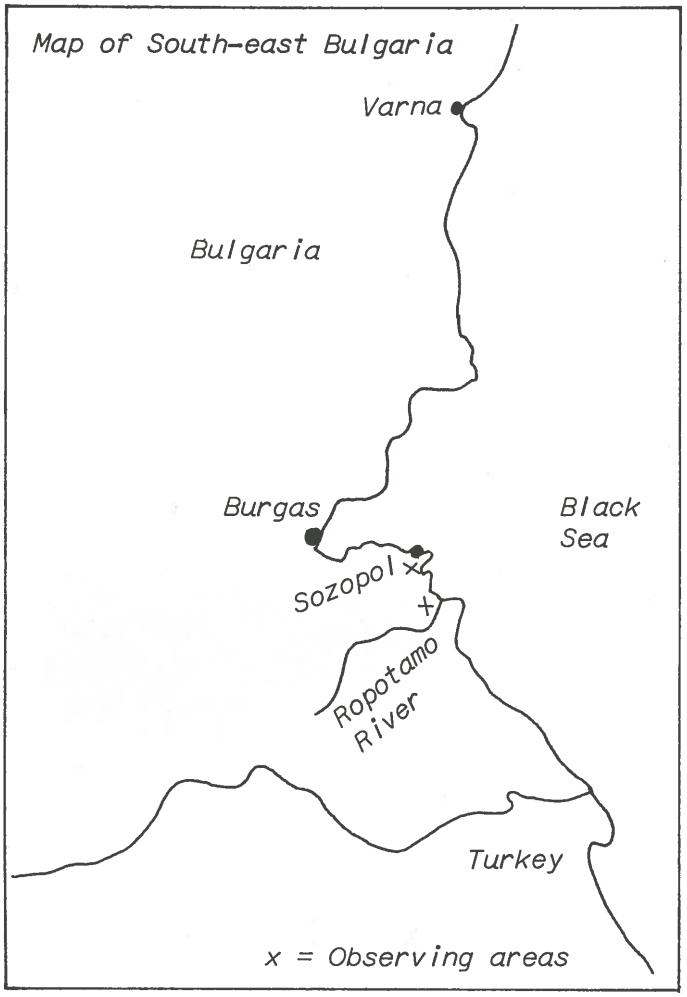


Above General view from the same hill as shown on page 4 but this time looking east.

Below Typical biotope of the Sozopol area; pastures with stands of trees and bushes.

Photographs Petr Velensky





bordered by the road from the east, there are cultivated fields and vineyards and the city behind, there are large marshes and the sea to the north and south and on the west they are bordered by cornfields.

Although this article deals with the snakes of the area, I shall give a list of the other reptiles which I found there; Testudo hermanni hermanni, Testudo graeca ibera, Emys orbicularis, Anguis fragilis colchicus, Ophisaurus apodus thracius, Ablepharus kitaibelli stepaneki, Cyrtodactylus kotschyi danilewski, Podarcis taurica taurica, Podarcis muralis muralis, Lacerta viridis meridionalis and Lacerta trilineata dobrogica.

Should anyone be interested in learning more details of the lifestyles of these species or require colour slides of them I would be pleased if they would write to me.

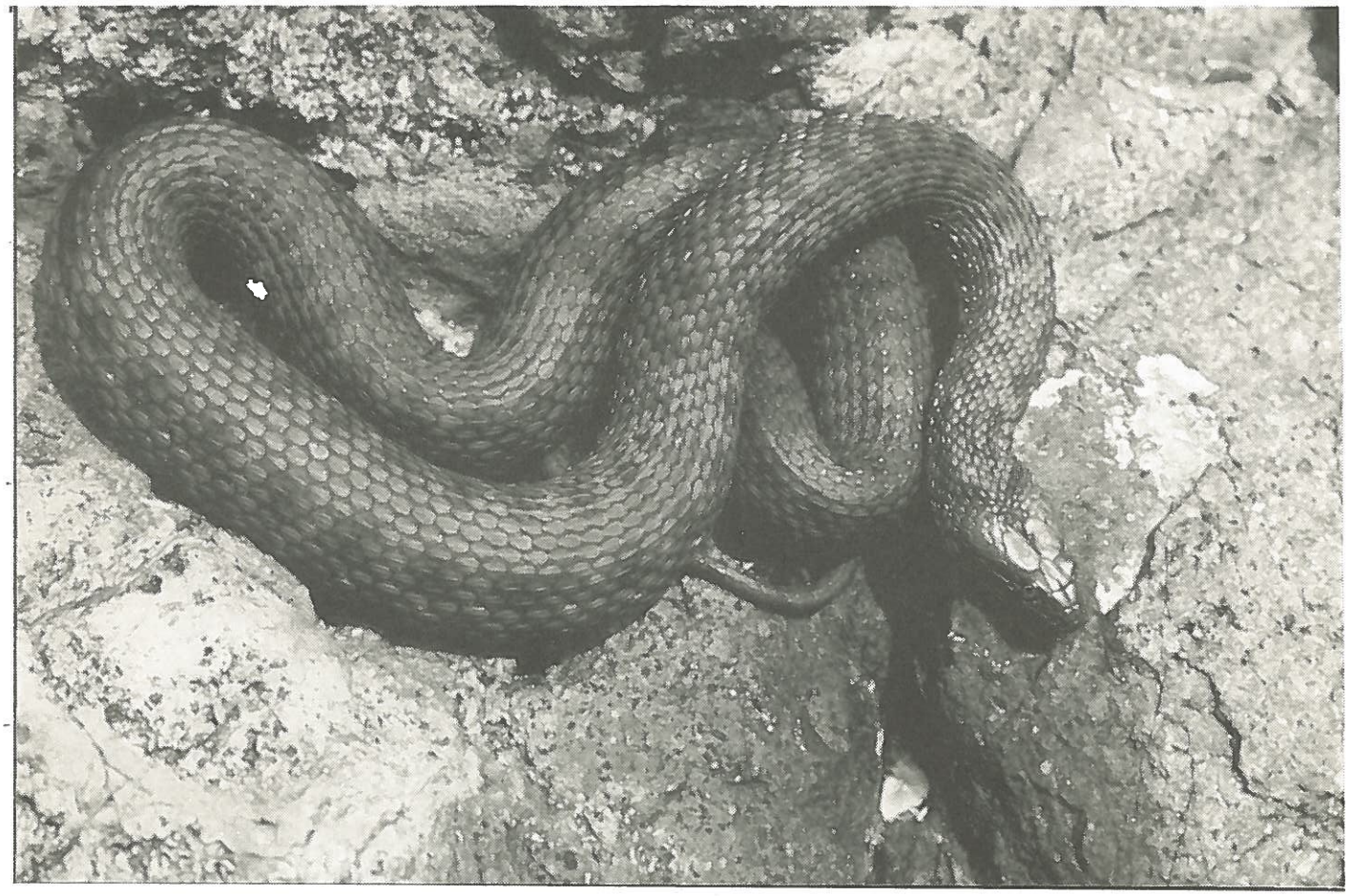
Natrix natrix

This snake is common in the marshes and in the broad-leaved forest. A smaller number live in other, relatively dry, places in the observation areas. Both colour varieties, Natrix n. natrix which



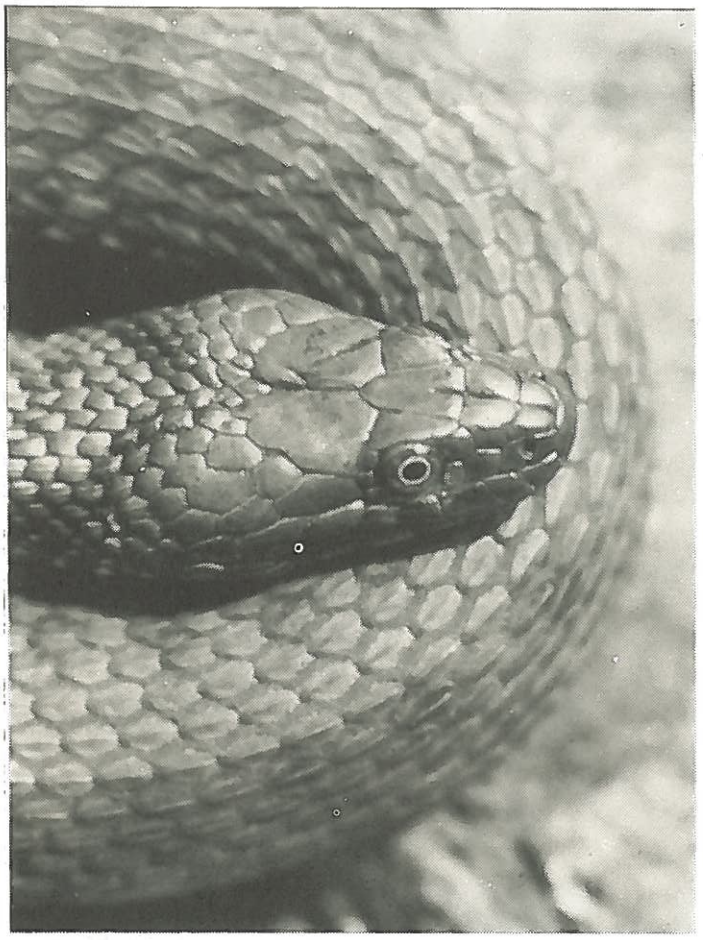
Sand dunes near the Ropotamo estuary.

Photo: Petr Velensky



Above *Natrix tessellata tessellata* *Photographs Petr Velensky*

Below *Natrix t. tessellata* - *head detail*



are brown or grey without any pattern on their back and *Natrix n. persa* *which has two longitudinal stripes, are present in equal numbers. As described by Dr. Beskov (1978) the main food of these snakes in Bulgaria is frogs (*Rana sp.*) whilst the young eat tadpoles.*

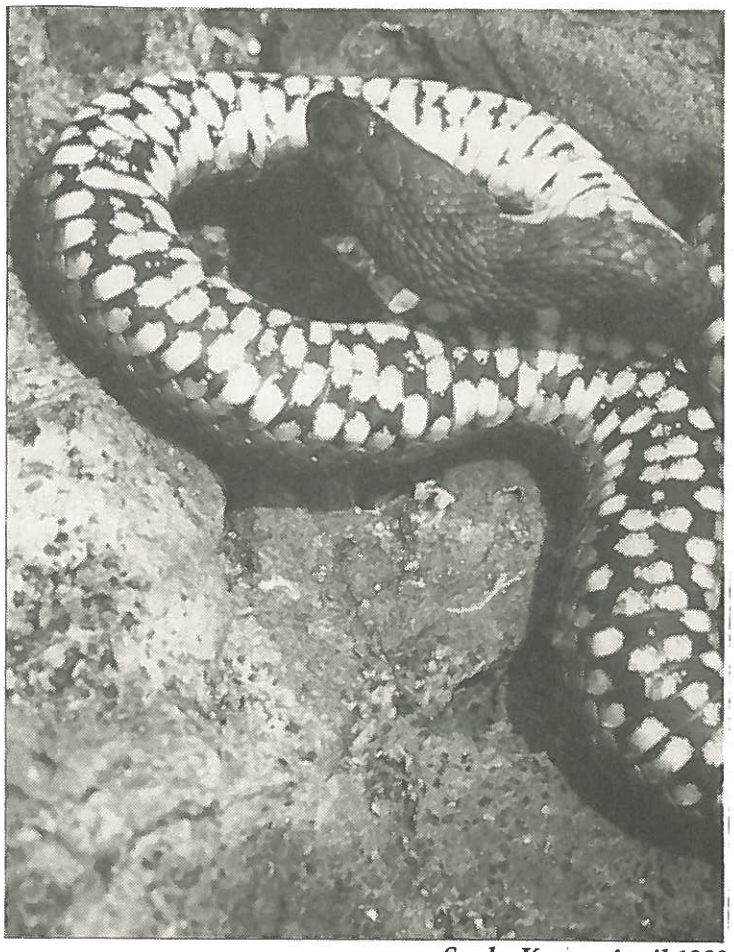
Natrix tessellata

The second species of snake which is strongly dependant on water for its food does not occur in the same places as *Natrix natrix*. *Natrix tessellata lives in large numbers directly on the banks of the Ropotamo River. I frequently saw many dozens of these snakes basking on the branches of trees, dropping into the water and amongst the rocks and rushes along the river banks. A second biotope for* *Natrix tessellata* *is the rocky shore along the Black Sea coast (eg. the nature reserve on the Agalina Fjords). These snakes can be seen swimming in the sea and catching fish. On one day in May 1983 I saw numerous* *Natrix tessellata* *swimming in the sea and hunting together. The most frequent prey of these snakes are fish of the* *Blennius* *genus which are common in the*



Above Natrix tessellata *feigning death.* *Photographs Petr Velensky*

Below Natrix tessellata *coming back to life.*

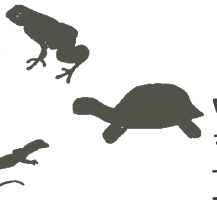


shallow water. The snakes in this biotope use stones covered by high grass at some distance from the water's edge as their hiding and basking places. When handled, one specimen went into the condition of thanatosis (playing dead). In this species sexual dimorphism is obvious from the body structure. The males are smaller and more slender than the robust females. In colour they are mostly uniform grey or greenish-grey and some specimens have the characteristic flame-like blotches along the sides of the body.

Coluber caspius

Previously this snake was classified with the black phase and named Coluber jugularis *as was the red phase* Coluber schmidti. *In Turkey all three species occur in the same areas without interbreeding. The differences in them are so great that the Turkish herpetologist Dr. Baran (1976) divided them into three species. After the members of the genus* Natrix, Coluber caspius *is the most frequently encountered snake in the area. It lives in all types of biotopes except the pine forests and directly in the water. It also lives in close proximity to*

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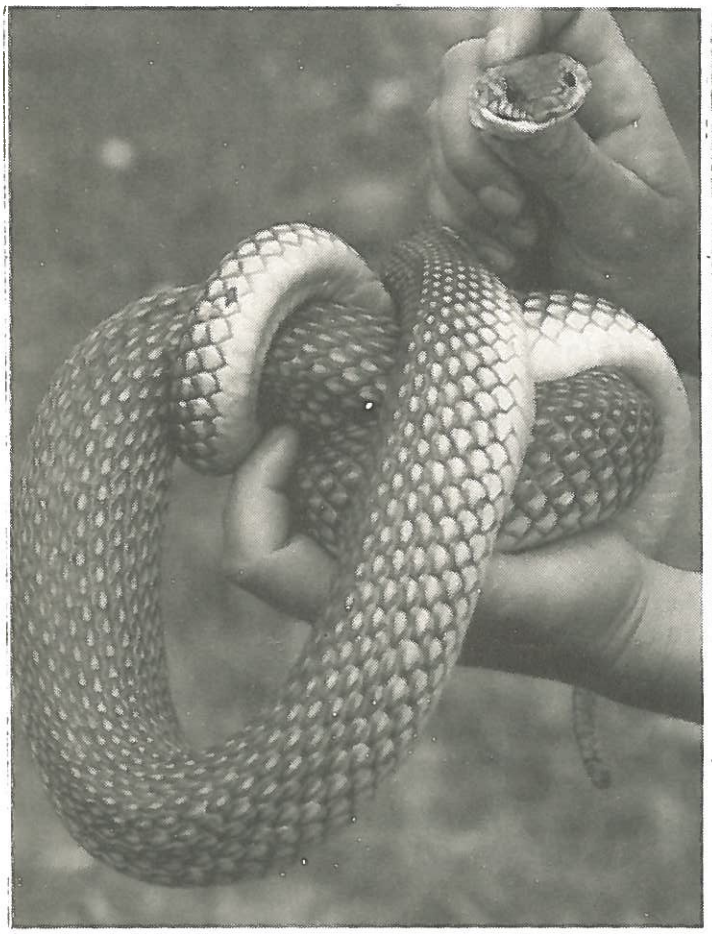
human dwellings, in gardens, on beaches, in vineyards, on rubbish dumps, in ditches and near roads etc. On average I was able to find this snake within one or two days of searching. This snake is mainly diurnal and, in June, its main period of activity is from 10am until 5pm. It prefers a temperature of 30 to 35 degrees Centigrade. Coluber caspius is a very fast snake which is difficult to catch. If caught it bites wildly and ferociously. This is a beautifully coloured snake which, along its back, can be grey, blue-grey or even blue (especially in young males). On the centre of each scale there is a small yellow fleck. The head is brown or a copperish-red and the belly is yellow. The hatchlings are either uniformly grey or brown in colour with narrow transverse black lines. This pattern fades when the animal reaches a length of around 100cm.

The average snake measures around 120 to 130cm but one male which I caught in June 1986 measured 175cm and that was with about 15 to 20cm of its tail missing! This supports the data in various sources (Arnold, 1978; Engelmann, 1985) that the total length may reach 250cm. According to Beskov's (1978) research into the stomach contents of these snakes their food appears to be mainly mammals (57%), reptiles (33%, Lacerta sp. and Anguis fragilis), birds (15%) and insects (9%). Food is sought during the day either on the ground surface or in underground burrows. A 102.5cm male which I found had eaten an adult female Lacerta viridis meridionalis; this was regurgitated when I gently massaged the stomach. A 175cm long specimen regurgitated a semi-digested 90-100cm Ophisaurus apodus whilst I was manipulating it for photographing.

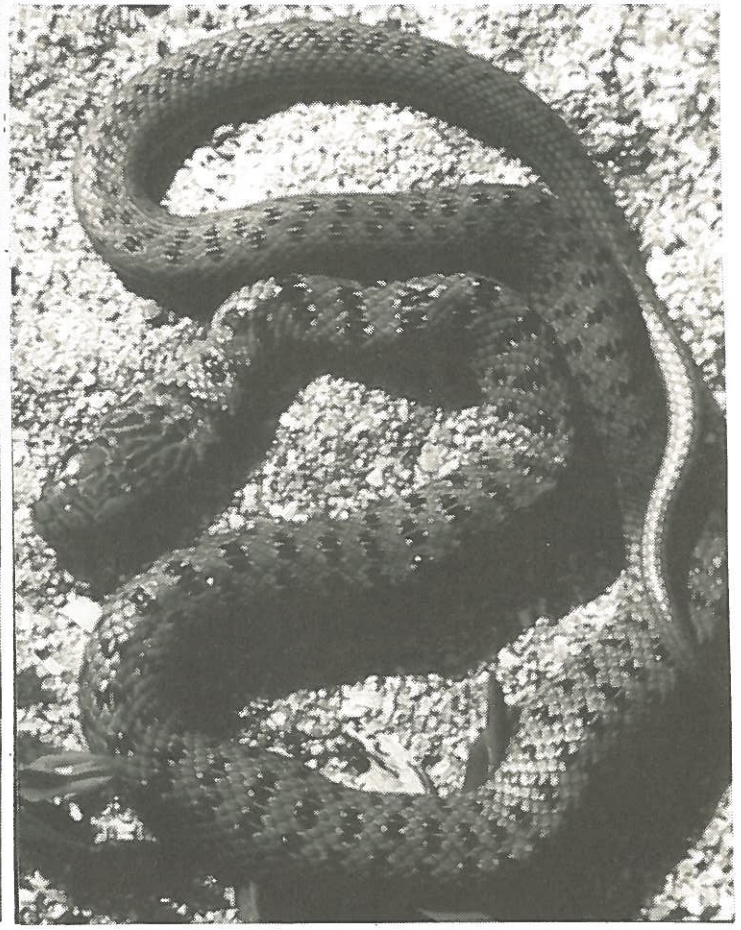
The eggs are usually laid around the middle of July. A friend brought 12 eggs to me which had been laid by a female on the 15th July 1985 in a hole in the sand on the beach near Sozopol. Their average measurements were 39.5 x 19.5mm and they hatched after 62 days on the 15th of September. During incubation the temperature fluctuated between 20 and 30 degrees C but was usually around 25 degrees C. Two other females which I caught in other places in Bulgaria laid 14 and 21 eggs on the 13th July 1975. According to available literature the number of eggs is 6 to 18 (Arnold, 1978; Bannikov, 1978; Engelmann, 1985). Because of their beautiful colouring and lively



A large (175cm) male Coluber caspius regurgitating an Ophisaurus apodus.
Photo: Petr Velensky



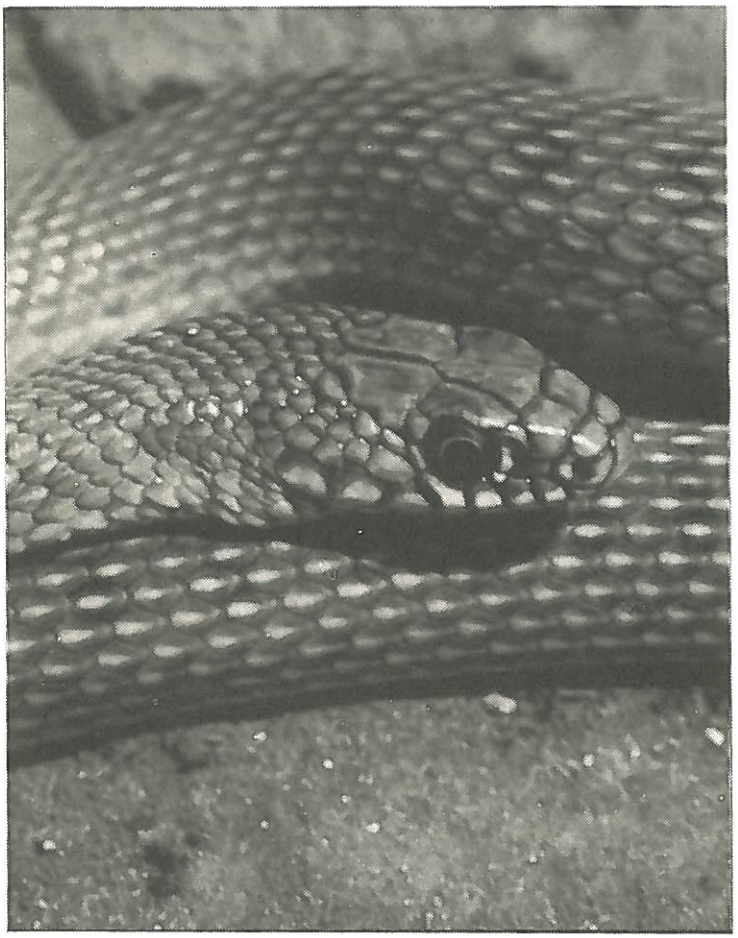
Above Large (175cm) male Coluber caspius.



Above Juvenile Coluber caspius

Below left Coluber caspius - head detail

Photographs by Petr Velensky



agile nature, I enjoy watching these snakes in the wild. I have tried to keep these snakes in the vivarium for a number of years but have come to the conclusion that this snake is not suitable for a life in captivity. They remain extremely nervous and are constantly trying to escape from the vivarium often resulting in injuries to the snout. In 1981 I brought home four young snakes 34.5 to 63cm long, thinking that they would adapt more readily to captivity than the adults. Initially all appeared well. The snakes were quite calm and feeding well on new-born mice. However, later in the year they began to act in a similar manner to the adults so the following Spring I released them in the place they had been caught in Bulgaria. During their year in captivity they had grown by 3.25 to 5cm.

*****

Part II of The Snakes of South-east Bulgaria will appear in next month's issue.

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100	USA Green Tree Frog	Hyla cineria	2in	3.50
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50	Xenopus	Xenopus laevis	2in	2.75
25	Giant Indonesian T. F.	Litoria infrafranta	3in	18.95
25	Paradox Frog	Rana paradoxa	3in	7.95
25	Bronze Frog	Rana clamitans clamitans	3in	2.95

Key: 2.3 = 2 males & 3 females
25 = 25 specimens unsexed
Cb = Captive bred
Cr = Captive raised

Opening hours
Mon-Sat 9.30am to 5.30pm
Friday to 7.30pm
Alt. Fridays (Snake Night) to 9.30pm

Asian Rat Snakes of the *Elaphe* Genus
Part XIV *Elaphe subradiata* (Schlegel 1837) and *Elaphe erythrura* (Dumeril & Bibron 1854)

by Klaus-Dieter Schulz

Elaphe subradiata (Schlegel, 1837)

According to the information presently available to me, live specimens of the Timor Rat Snake have not yet reached Europe, although according to Mertens (1930) this is not a rare snake. For this reason it has not been possible for me to obtain photographs of living snakes.

Mertens (1930) distinguishes two subspecies, Elaphe subradiata subradiata and Elaphe subradiata enganensis (Vinciguerra, 1894) but these can only be distinguished with great difficulty.

Description
Because there is very little information available to me, I must quote from Merten's description:

Ground colour almost constant brown to reddish-brown or olive-grey. The markings usually consist of four narrow, black longitudinal stripes which begin at the neck and fade around the middle of the body. In adults and some semi-adults the stripes are formed of spots and also form more or less significant transverse bands. The ventral side is a uniform grey or yellowish-white, whilst the rear half, including the tail, is a somewhat darker colour. Behind each eye there is a black stripe which is absent in only a very few specimens.

The young are very similar in colour to the adults. A young animal from Endeh did however have prominent black spots on the lateral edge of the ventral scales.

According to Brongersma (1934) the distinction of the two subspecies can be carried out as follows:

2 upper labials touching the eye = E. s. subradiata
3 upper labials touching the eye = E. s. enganensis

However there is great variety within the two subspecies which, as mentioned by Mertens, makes it extremely difficult to distinguish them from one another.

For the subspecies enganensis, Brongersma gives 107 to 109 subcaudalia, whilst for the nominate form Mertens gives 80 to 102.

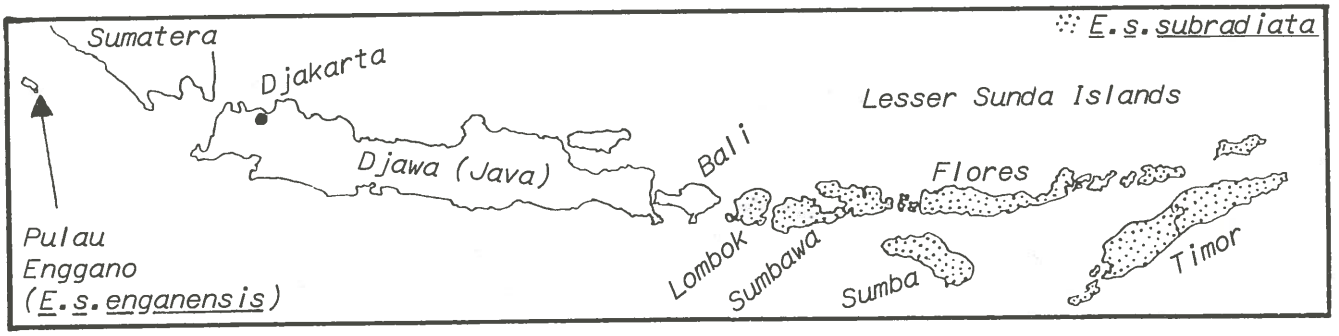
This snake can reach a length of 150 to 180cm.

Distribution
Elaphe s. subradiata: Lesser Sunda Islands (Lombok, Sumbawa, Komodo, Flores, Endeh, Alor, Wetar) Sumba, Rotti, Samao and Timor (= terra typica).

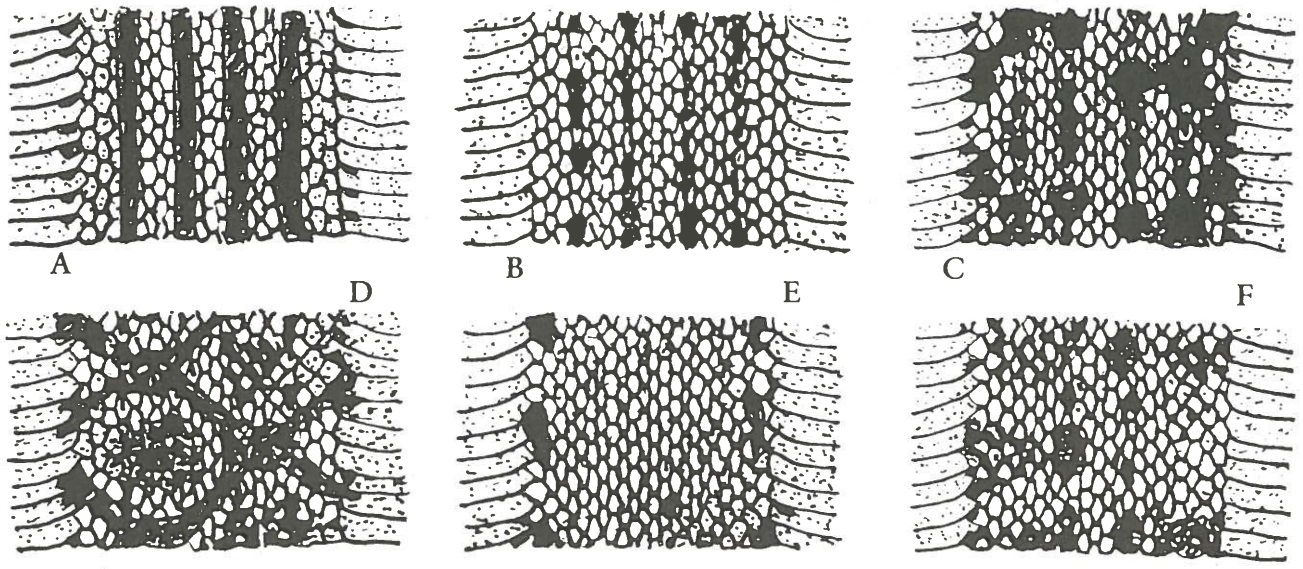
Elaphe s. enganensis: Island of Enggano (south-east of Sumatra).

Lifestyle
Elaphe subradiata is a eurytopic snake which can be found in habitats such as palm plantations (near the coast) in steppe-like areas and into the tropical mountainous rain forests (Mertens).

Its lifestyle can be compared with that of Elaphe radiata (see Snake Keeper Vol. 2, No. 8). Mertens describes this as a very



Distribution of E. s. subradiata & E. s. enganensis by K-D Schulz

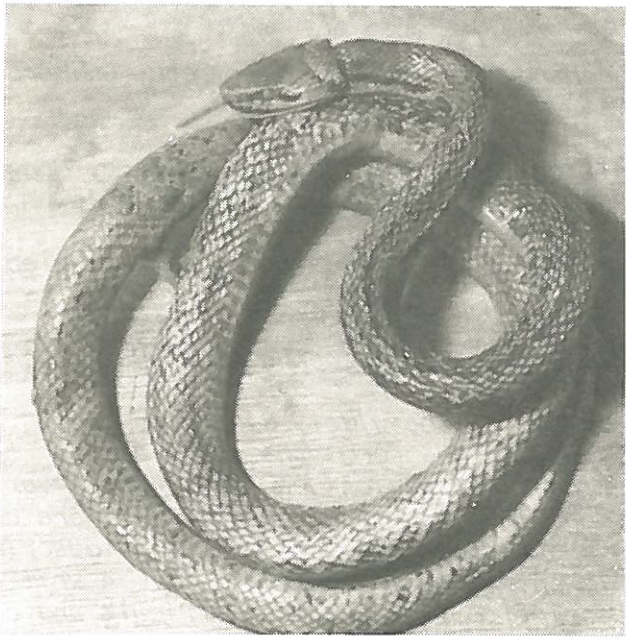


E. s. subradiata from Komodo. Variations (A-F) in markings according to Aufenberg, 1980.

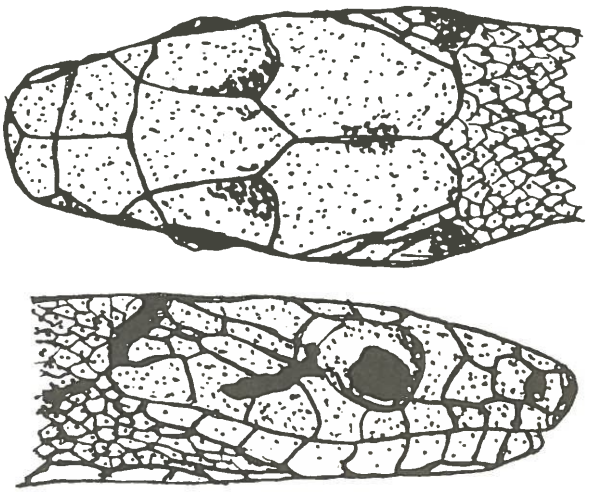
shy and timid snake which, despite its abundance, is only very rarely seen. Its threat posture can also be compared with that of Elaphe radiata. Its food consists of small mammals and birds. In the stomach of one specimen Mertens found a half-digested rat. Aufenberg (1980) also found rats, bird feathers and a Gekko gecko in dead snakes from Komodo. Young snakes contained mainly small geckos (Hemidactylus sp.).

Elaphe erythrura (Dumeril & Bibron, 1854)

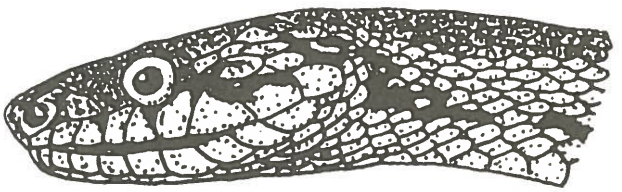
Like the previous species, the Phillipines Rat Snake can also be described as relatively unknown. Although it too is not exactly a rare species, I have not yet seen a live specimen.



E. s. subradiata (preserved in alcohol).

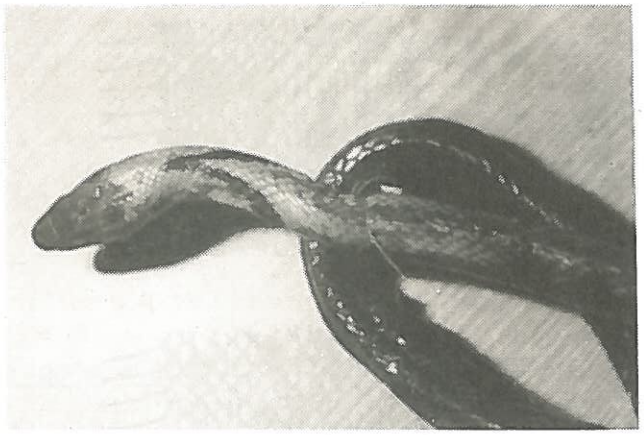


E. s. subradiata from Komodo (according to Aufenberg, 1980).

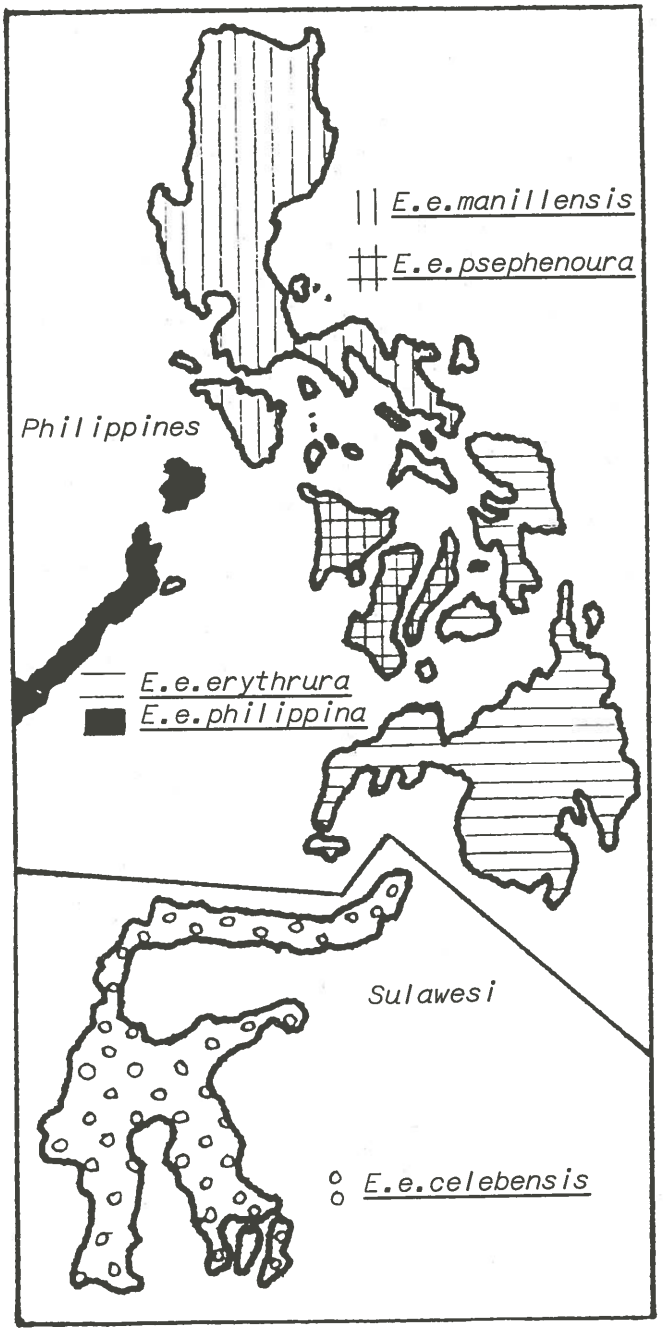


E. s. enganensis (according to Brongersma, 1934).

Leviton (1977) divides this species into five subspecies; Elaphe erythrura erythrura, E. e. manillensis (Jan, 1867), E. e. psephenoura (Leviton, 1977), E. e. philippina (Griffin, 1911) and E. e. celebensis (Jan, 1863). The description of each of these subspecies is given in the following table.



E. e. celebensis (preserved in alcohol).



Distribution range of Elaphe erythrura by K-D Schulz

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Distribution (according to Leviton, 1977)

erythrura - *Philippines: Bohol, Comotes Group (Pacijan, Ponson, Poro) Camiguan, Leyte, Mindanao, Samar, Sulu Group (Jolo).*

manillensis - *Philippines: Luzon, Mindoro, Polillo (?).*

psephenoura - *Philippines: Cebu, Guimaras, Negros, Panay.*

philippina - *Philippines: Balabac, Bongao Busuanga, Culion, Palawan.*

celebensis - *Indonesia: Buton, Celebes (Sulawesi).*

This species can reach a length of 160cm.

Because of the widely dispersed group of islands which form the Philippines the various subspecies can have great variations in colour. Unfortunately there are no photographs available to help describe this rat snake in great detail. A written description is therefore difficult and can cause complications because of the varying powers of the imagination.

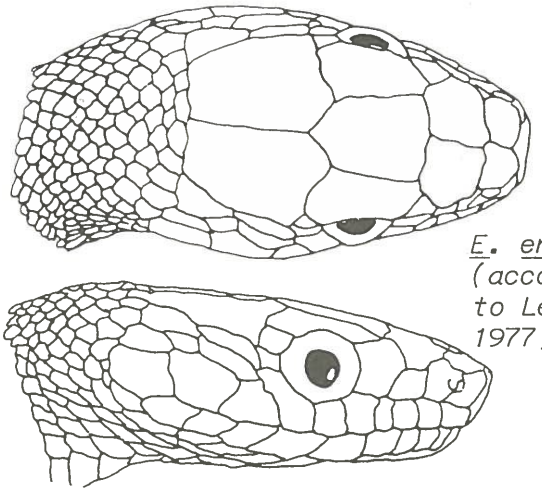
Lifestyle

Very little is known about the lifestyle of Elaphe erythrura. Leviton describes it as a snake which occurs from the lowlands up to an altitude of 850m. Foekema (1977) found E. e. celebensis in the rain forests of Sulawesi in the immediate vicinity of a river.

In danger, the subspecies celebensis is especially supposed to rear up like a cobra whilst flattening its throat to reveal the dark V-shaped marking (De Ruiter, 1959).

Because of its tropical distribution it would appear that Elaphe erythrura breed throughout the year. The young hatch after about 90 days (Leviton). Their food usually includes small mammals and birds.

I have no information on the captive husbandry of Elaphe subradiata or Elaphe erythrura.



E. erythrura (according to Leviton, 1977).

This series of articles, 'Die hinterasiatischen Kletternattern der Gattung Elaphe', was originally published in the magazine 'Sauria' beginning in 1985. Part XIV, featuring Elaphe subradiata and Elaphe erythrura appeared in 'Sauria' 3, September 1988. This English translation by John Hackworth has been printed by kind permission of the author

Subspecies, colouring and markings	*Ventralia*	*Subcaudalia*
erythrura: Brownish, towards tail dark brown to black. Tail reddish-brown to red somtimes with dark spots. Rear half of ventral surface with reddish-brown to black spots: a few dark spots on the front flanks of the body.	*211-227*	*90-107*
manillensis: Uniform brown to reddish-brown. No significant markings on body.	*211-217*	*94-105*
psephenoura: Similar to erythrura: brownish becoming darker towards the tail; tail black or reddish-brown, no significant markings. Below the eye an insignificant dark stripe to the corner of the mouth. Lower half of the head lighter than the upper half. In some specimens from Negros the rear third of the body and the tail are blue-black in colour.	*214-230*	*90-105*
philippina: Brown with significant black stripes on each side of the neck. Short, vertical black-bordered yellowish-white rhombic spots at the front of the body. Three black stripes on each side of the head, one of which is below the eye, a second behind the eye to the labial scales and one from the temporal scale to the neck. Upper side of the head brown, labial scales yellowish. Ventrals yellowish, ventral keelings are grey in colour. Over the entire body young have yellowish-white crossbands which are bordered in black.	*223-238*	*102-114*
celebensis: Brown with significant V-shaped marking on neck. Rear half of body and tail uniform dark brown to black. Head mainly uniform reddish-brown to brown. In young and some adults vertical rhombic spots can also occur along the sides of the body.	*216-232*	*90-98*

These descriptions are based on Taylor (1922) and Leviton (1977) as well as on specimens preserved in alcohol in the Alexander Koenig Museum in Bonn.

A Report on the Breeding of the Common Boa Constrictor

by Chris and Marcia Martin

The female Boa constrictor lives in a vivarium 142cm long by 55cm wide by 60cm high which is heated by a 250 watt infra-red dull-heat emitter. The vivarium is subjected to a day/night temperature difference; the daytime temperature is approximately 32 degrees C falling to 26 degrees C at night. The vivarium is equipped with a True-lite tube which is on a fixed photoperiod of 14 hours on and 10 hours off. Access to the vivarium is through the top. Newspaper is used as a substrate and there is a water bowl on the floor. There are no other decorations in the vivarium.

This report covers the female's sixth clutch. She laid her first clutch in 1983. (The snake's name is Abigail.) She is about 2.6m long and weighs about 8kg. We have three male snakes ranging from 5 years of age and 1.5m in length to the first snake we ever bought which is now 1.9m long and weighs 2.7kg.

Mid-November is the time Abigail usually mates. We place a male in her cage and then we wait. Sometimes courting will start within minutes. If nothing happens after a couple of days we usually introduce another male and sometimes the new male will start courting Abigail. Should this proceedure not work we remove one of the males and put the third male in with her. If nothing happens we leave both males with her for a couple of weeks and, if at the end of this period mating still hasn't taken place, both males are removed for one week and then put back in the cage. Mating will usually start at this time.

Courting and mating usually continues for eight to twelve weeks. Sometimes the male (or males) have a few days rest during this period. (Sometimes one of the males will mate with Abigail, sometimes both of them will do so.)

Abigail will continue to eat when she is gravid but she eats less as time passes. Her normal food is 2.2kg rabbits. However, from about 110 days (half time) she will only eat half-grown rats. We believe that these snacks during her gravidity help to keep her energy levels up. Obviously, her babies will be bigger and stronger if she can keep herself in good condition.

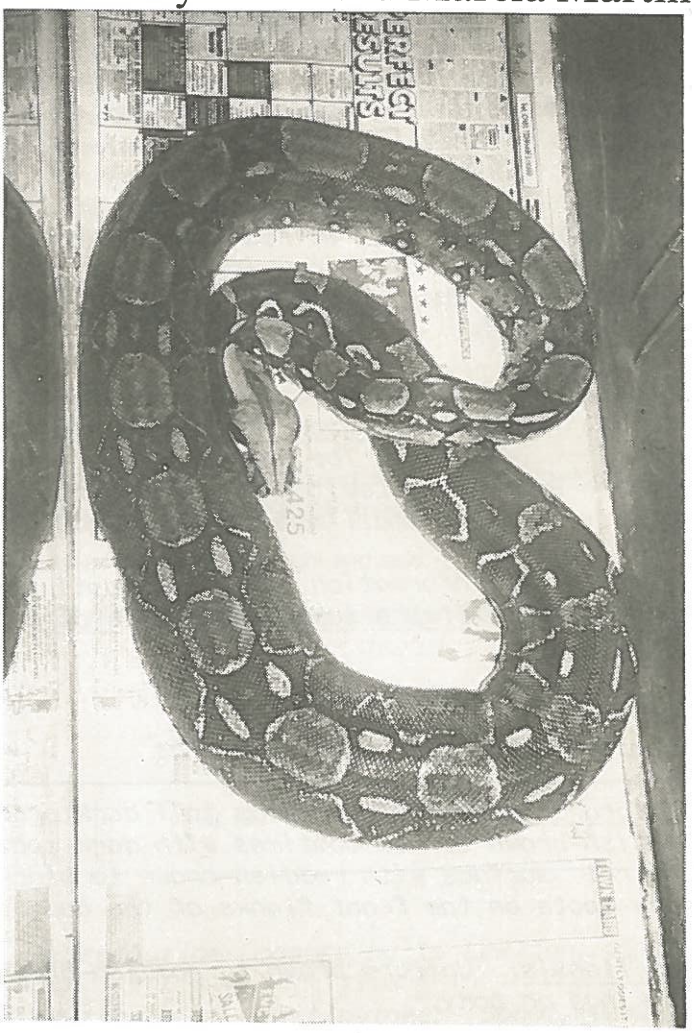


Photo 1

Photo 1 shows Abigail about an hour before she gave birth; we suspected that she was about to give birth soon because she was very restless for about three days. On the day she gave birth (May 7th) she was very restless and kept going to the toilet every hour or so. She was only passing a small amount of faecal matter.

Photo 2 shows her in the process of giving birth. She started at 2.50pm. The large solid objects in amongst the babies are infertile eggs. When Abigail finally gave birth she produced 24 live babies and 10 infertile eggs. The babies are sometimes born in a sac. After a few seconds they struggle and break the membrane. Sometimes the sac breaks before birth and then when the baby snake emerges from the mother it crawls away immediately. Abigail gave birth to 23 live young and the infertile eggs within 20 minutes but the last live

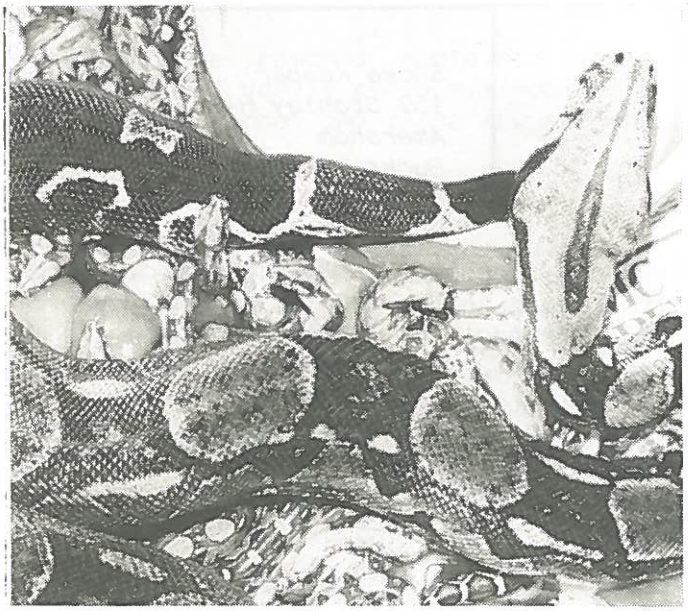


Photo 2

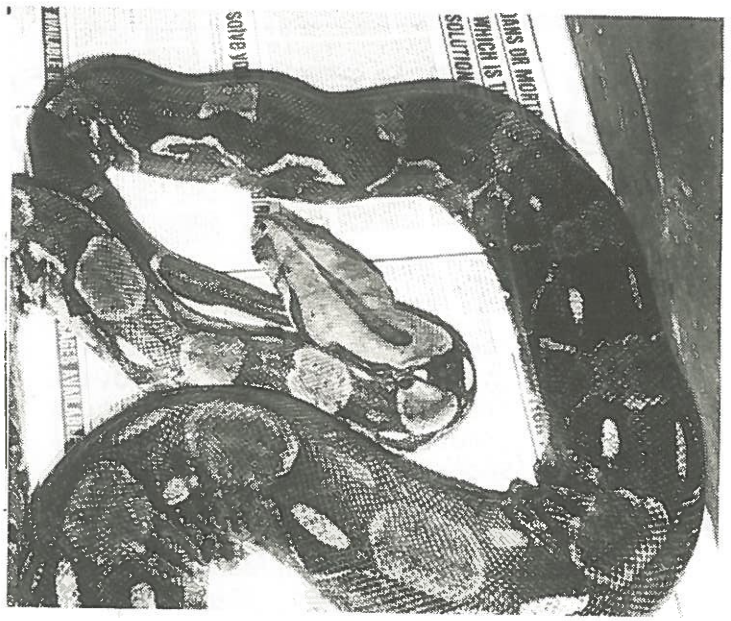


Photo 3

young snake took almost 45 minutes to emerge. The trouble appeared to be caused by the sac breaking inside the mother and she had nothing to push against; the baby was poking its head out and whenever Abigail tried to push, the baby snake returned inside her. After about 45 minutes of trying, Abigail relaxed completely. A few minutes later about half the baby's total length emerged. Abigail then carefully and slowly raised the rear third of her body about an inch from the ground and cracked it like a whip, expelling the baby across the cage. I am sure I saw a contented smile cross the mother's face.

Photo 3 shows Abigail just after she had given birth. At the time of writing, Abigail has been mating since Novemeber so hopefully her seventh clutch will soon be on the way. (Photographs by Chris Martin)

*****

If we can be of any help with herpetological problems (excluding veterinary advice) please write (enclosing an s.a.e.) or telephone. You are also welcome to visit us by appointment only.

Authors' address Chris & Marcia Martin
18 Ballinode Close
Wymans Brook
Cheltenham
Glos GL50 4SQ
Telephone (0242) 573477

Book Review

Dictionary of Reptiles and Amphibians in Five Languages by V.E. Sokolov.
Published by Russky Yazyk Publishers, Moscow, 1988.

For anyone who has contact with foreign herpetological societies in either a professional or amateur capacity, this book will prove to be truly invaluable. It contains the names of over 12,000 species in Latin, English, Russian, German and French in a format which makes it simple to cross-reference any species to which one needs to refer. As well as being divided into easily-found language sections, the main Latin section is further divided into the various subsections of caudata, anura, lacertilia, testudines, amphisbaenia etc. and a huge subsection on serpentes. With an increasing number of foreign herpetological publications becoming available in this country, this book will be a very useful addition to the bookshelf of any herpetologist, and can be ordered through your local bookseller or by post (£10.95p plus 95p p&p) from Bures and Son, P.O. Box 377, Coulsdon Surrey CR3 1YU. Telephone (0737) 557149.

Reviewed by J.R.H.

LETTERS

Snake Keeper
159 Stanley Hill
Amersham
Bucks HP7 9EY

Dear Snake Keeper,

My first intention was to write and congratulate the Editor on the improved layout and content of the magazine, but when I saw the photograph of the cobra and the mongoose (Snake Keeper Vol. 3 No. 2) that went by the board.

The picture in the February issue I found disgustingly appalling and the caption even more offensive for a magazine which purports to promote a caring attitude towards snakes and animals in general. To portray the animals which had been so unceremoniously slaughtered to create a tacky tourist ornament made me absolutely livid. Such monstrosities are sold in Thailand for a mere £4 or £5.

It is bad enough to buy such ornaments and thus encourage the death of other such animals but to show them in a magazine which pretends to 'love' snakes I find truly sickening. At first I thought the picture with its even more appalling caption 'tribute to taxidermy' was some kind of sick joke and if that were the case it should have been followed up with an expose story on these exploitative traders. I would appeal to the Editors to refrain from publishing such offensive material in the future as I know it to be true that I was not the only person deeply offended and almost physically sick on seeing this photograph.

Yours sincerely, John Hackworth
North Tyneside

*****

Dear Snake Keeper,

I would just like to say that I agree with Col G Pywell-Fox about the recent photograph you recently published showing a mongoose in the coils of a cobra. Although I did not find the photograph itself appalling, I think that you should not have called the photograph 'A magnificent tribute to the art of the taxidermist'. A magazine such as Snake Keeper should persecute taxidermy, not promote it.

I would also like to say that I find Snake Keeper a thoroughly enjoyable magazine but with regard to your reply to Col G Pywell-Fox's letter I do think that there is a clear line between snake exploiters and herpetologists. Herpetologists cannot be blamed for conditions suffered by snakes before exportation whereas snake exploiters are directly concerned with mistreating these marvellous creatures.

Yours, Paul Conroy (13)
Surrey

*****

Dear Snake Keeper,

Regarding the recent debate on heating and lighting techniques in the past three issues, it is not the snakes that are "turning cartwheels in the corner" but the poor novice snake keepers like myself.

Come on snake breeders, publish your results, tell us of your successes and failures and how you heat your vivariums. Let the results speak for themselves and see if there are really any noticeable differences with the various methods used.

Yours sincerely, P. Kite
Dyfed

PS. If you use light bulbs as a source of heat in the vivarium, one way of controlling this is to connect the bulb to a dimmer switch and not a thermostat. You can adjust the dimmer for day, night and season and it eliminates the flashing on and off of the bulb.

*****

Dear Sir,

I was somewhat bemused by some of the comments made by C & M Martin in their article 'A Guide to Vivarium Heating Techniques' (Snake Keeper Vol.3 No. 1). This article was, in my view, unfairly dismissive of most heating methods other than Infra-red Dull Heat Emitters (this of course has nothing to do with the fact that Mr Martin appears to be selling that particular item), and it worries me that

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many of the remarks contained in the article could easily prove misleading for the inexperienced and those new to snake keeping.

In general, I feel that the article rather skipped over the options available to herpetologists, both in terms of the range of equipment now available to them and the circumstances in which it might be used, but I was especially concerned about the quality of reasoning, or rather lack of it, used by the authors in reaching their conclusions. C & M Martin make several curious assumptions about snakes and their behaviour based largely upon anthropomorphic thinking, and it is quite wrong to draw such comparisons.

While I accept that light bulbs may not be appropriate or desirable in some setups, I myself maintain a fairly large number of vivariums using low wattage (15, 25 or 40 watt maximum) bulbs, and in their five years of use I cannot recall a single incident of injury to a snake through burning, bulb breakage or electrocution, even involving quite strong and active specimens such as Pine Snakes and Indigo Snakes.

Light bulbs that are left on all day can be regulated with a Variable Temperature Control, rather than an on/off thermostat (I turn the lights off completely at night and use an electric oil-filled domestic heater to maintain the ambient room temperature, allowing a slight overnight fall).

With regard to the effect of light bulbs on breeding, I would agree with K. Hingley's observations in his letter to Snake Keeper (Vol.3 No.2) on the same subject, that photo-periods do not appear to play a crucial role. As visual aids or photo-receptors, snakes' eyes cannot be compared to the human sight. Snakes tend to rely more on other highly developed senses, such as the detection of vibration and the body heat of prey. And since many snakes are particularly sensitive to infra-red, I would question whether an Infra-red Dull Heat Emitter is any less of a distraction to a snake than a light bulb.

Temperature, however, is a different matter, and the point made by the authors in this respect, about snakes being too cold in winter in particular, needs to be qualified. The temperature requirement for a snake throughout the year will vary according to the geographical location of its original habitat.

Some snakes, for example, Kingsnakes and Milksnakes may be found in high mountain ranges and other locations throughout North America which annually experience cold winters. These snakes are used to hibernating through the winter in the wild, and if they are not allowed to do so in captivity, their breeding potential will be reduced and possibly their life expectancy.

As for hide boxes, I provide some form of shelter for all my snakes as a matter of course, and certain types of vivariums actually incorporate false bottoms as a place of shelter in their designs because it is considered an essential part of the environment. Most snakes in the wild spend a substantial part of their lives in, under or around some form of cover. This is quite natural for them and not something they presumably find 'unpleasant'

The imagined problem of not knowing if your snake is unwell until it is dead should not arise, as a healthy snake will usually become active at the favoured time of day and put in an appearance. Any un-

certainty can usually be avoided through the simple expedient of lifting up the shelter to have a look at it every now and again.

As for any undue stress placed on the snakes kept in the above conditions, I have seen no evidence of this in my own collection, and their breeding potential does not appear to be diminished.

The other type of snake husbandry system I now extensively employ, and one by the way which is also favoured by many of the captive breeders, both in this country and abroad (but frowned upon by the authors), is partial underfloor heating. Some use Heating Tape, as I do, others use Heating Pads, depending on the set-up but both have a proven track record, and there is no evidence to link this method of heating with specific problems regarding digestion or sloughing.

Neither have I observed any difficulty on the part of the snake in being able to regulate its body temperature by moving around. Far from being a 'chancy' method, I would suggest that it is a perfectly natural function for reptiles, and far more desirable for the captive specimen to be provided with a moderate range of choice in its living conditions. Maintaining specimens at a constant, overall temperature is much more likely to interfere with their natural functions, and consequently increase the possibility of stress.

There are advantages, disadvantages and pitfalls with all types of equipment, depending on the circumstances in which it is used. Part of the skill of the 'serious' herpetologist lies in providing the best possible environment for the captive reptile, according to its needs, through the appropriate selection of available resources. This should be a considered and objective process, and I hope that C & M Martin will bear this in mind when handing out their advice.

Yours faithfully,

K.M. Loader
London

Amanda, Wife of Tarquin

by Stuart Gray

For some people it seems that love will never come but one should not give up hope. Such was the case for Tarquin, one of my Royal Pythons. I had been searching without luck for some months for a mate for him then one day, whilst I was visiting Newport Pets and Aquaria, I found her. Rosemary, the shop owner, allowed me to handle the snake. I must point out that Rosemary will only sell snakes to, or allow snakes to be handled by, people with experience. It was love at first sight for both of us. The snake coiled around my arm and looked me straight in the eye. I had only blind instinct and guesswork to know that she was a female. She clung to me and would not let go.

A week later I took my precious snake home. In his 22nd year, Tarquin now had a wife, Amanda!

I am sure that in her life Amanda had been someone's pet as she enjoyed being handled and was not at all nervous. Perhaps the previous owner died - I cannot see why else she was given up. Rosemary only had the snake for three weeks but I think Amanda must have been lonely for a year. So, coming to my house with my three other Royal Pythons must have been like coming from solitary confinement to a disco. Within a week she started her first slough; in places she had three layers of unshed skin. An interesting point is that Tarquin who until then had sloughed in a rather tatty manner now had a perfect slough. It wasn't long before Tarquin and Amanda started to mate, taking their cue from Ken and Samantha, the snakes in the next tank. As all my four Royal Pythons have perfect skins it seems that sex is the best stimulant.

So Amanda has settled down to be a good wife for Tarquin and enjoying what all my Royal Pythons do, mating, climbing over the furniture and myself, being stroked and watching television, although what they see in television I don't know!

I think the most important thing to realise with Royal Pythons is that are very sensuous and affectionate and, as such, should be treated to as much handling and freedom as possible. That way you form a bond with them and they lose what fear they may have of man. They must not be used as toys or objects in a glass case. One final word, as they are very sexy keep two of them - a male and a female. If you keep one it will get lonely for a mate.

Experiences in Snake Keeping, Part I

by Malcolm Flux

I have held a dread of reptiles, especially snakes, from a very early age. This fear was due mainly to misinformation about the 'forked stinger' and how Adders attack and kill on sight. It was hardly surprising that 'them' and 'me' kept a great distance apart. I was, however, fascinated by them, especially if a 10mm sheet of reinforced bullet-proof glass was betweeen me and certain death.

I was able to maintain this remoteness for 42 years. During this time I married, had children and started to accumulate various pets including two cats, four dogs (Lhasa Apso's and Shih Tzu's) four large tanks of tropical fish (one of which contained three piranhas), a Mexican Red-leg Tarantula plus the usual hamsters, rats, guinea pigs and a Giant African Land Snail. The requirement for specialist food started a happy relationship with the local pet shop owners, Ken and Margo.

I was in the shop one day in June buying a pack of crickets when Ken grabbed my arm and told me they were going to stock reptiles but because of a clause in the lease they were not able to keep them in the shop. The shop owner lived upstairs and did not take kindly to the thought of 'things' escaping and roaming at will. Ken invited me and my family to his house on the following Sunday to see the new stock.

We arrived on the agreed day with me bringing up the rear of the party armed with a camera fitted with a 200mm telescopic lens. The first animal we saw was an adult Chain Kingsnake. It seemed about 2.5m long but was probably only 1.5m or less. The children were impressed - I was not! Ken, who had just fed ten Indian Python hatchlings with chick legs, suddenly noticed that two of the snakes had both grabbed opposite ends of the same leg. He held out one of the writhing beasts and told me to hold on to it. He said that if he didn't separate them one would eat the other and that would be £60 down the drain.

Sweat ran down my back and I involuntarily held out my hands to receive the snake. The children were amazed at the sight of me holding a snake. I told myself that I must not show any emotion as I did not want the children to grow up with unreasonable prejudices.

After what seemed to be an age, but was probably only three minutes, I realised that the snake had not gone for my throat or stung me with its 'stinger' or even attempted to coil around my neck with the intention of choking me to death. Even more unbelievable was the fact that it was not slimy. Suddenly 42 years of fear and terror left me and a fascinating and new interesting era had dawned.

We then wanted to see everything in the room and went through the ritual of having a 19kg Reticulated Python (*Python reticulatus*) draped around the neck of each member of the family in turn. (I don't think I would do this so readily now having discovered what their temperament is like.) Having taken lots of photographs to prove to all our friends our (my) lack of fear, we went home.

To be continued.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS
(Continued from page 24)

WANTED

Skinks and Geckoes (especially Tokays) any species, size or age. John Hackworth, 84 Mitford Gardens, High Howdon, Wallsend, North Tyneside NE28 0QR.

Contact wanted with anyone who keeps snakes in the Holloway/Islington areas. Telephone Sue on (01) 609 7218.

Supply of live mice or rats in the Cardiff area. Telephone Mark on 482971.

Adult female Black Rat Snake and female Yellow Rat Snake. Required for breeding. Must be handleable. Tel: (0452) 307845 evenings or weekends (Gloucester).

Pair of Emerald Tree Boas. Two individuals of opposite sex will do. Must be subadult or youngsters. Healthy and feeding snakes only considered. Buyer collects, C.O.D. Box No. A/10, Snake Keeper Magazine, 159 Stanley Hill, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9EY.

Contact wanted with keepers/breeders of *Eryx johnii johnii* (Indian Sand Boa). Telephone Roger Grenville on (08444) 6867.

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

Frozen mice. 10 for £2, 25 for £4.75p, 50 for £9, 100 for £17. Ophidia Herpetological Supplies. Telephone Oxford 790832 or Hemel Hempstead 41453.

Captive bred Boa Constrictors (*Boa constrictor constrictor*), 3' long, good feeders and in perfect condition. £100 each. Contact Pete on (0793) 611273 evenings (Wilts).

D'Albert's Pythons. Amelanistic Sonoran Gopher Snakes. Albino Sonoran Gopher Snake (father). Blood Pythons. Telephone (0245) 466503 after 6pm (Essex).

Clear-seal vivarium. Glass with black metal top (glass access panel), sliding glass doors, ventilation. Provision for light fitting. Dimensions 24" x 12" x 15". Second-hand, cost £30, will accept £15 if buyer collects or would consider swop for mainly wooden vivarium (any size). Telephone (0428) 52076 (Surrey).

Male Corn Snake, 2', three years old. Captive bred. £50. Male Black Rat Snake, 4', four years in captivity, £50. Two male Banded Water Snakes, three years in captivity £15 each. One baby water snake £7. All snakes feeding, healthy and tame. Telephone Runcorn 564457.

Reptile Book Specialist. Large selection of new and secondhand books. J.G. Animals, 17/19 Streatham Vale, London SW16. Telephone (01) 764 4669. Callers welcome or s.a.e. for book list.

Pair of Red-tail Boas, 6'. Perfect examples, possible breeding. £300. Black-bellied Boa, 3', male. £80. Indian Python, 5', male. £80. All good eaters and in excellent condition. Vivarium 3' x 3' x 1'6". Fully equipped £50. Vivarium 3' x 1'3" x 1'3". Fully equipped £25. Open to offers. Telephone (0962) 51066.

Rainbow Boas (2m & 3f). Two years old, all around 4'. Sensible offers please to John Hackworth, 84 Mitford Gardens, High Howdon, Wallsend, North Tyneside NE28 0QR.

Docile, loveable, homeless, desperate snake seeks a new owner. Female, 6'6" Indian Python. £110 o.n.o. Call Chaz Law on Slough (0753) 28077 after 6.30pm.

For sale to experienced keepers only. Indigo Snake. Male, 6' long. Price negotiable. Royal Python. Male 3'6" long. £50. Large vivarium. 5' x 3' x 18" approximately. Plywood with sliding glass doors. £40 o.n.o. Telephone Winslow 2792.

Central Plains (tri-coloured) Milk Snake, *Lampropeltis triangulum gentilis*. Adult male approximately 30". Feeding on pinkies and furries, £65. Phone Allan Goode on Wolverhampton (0902) 784805.

Female Burmese Python. 8'6" long. Good condition and good eater but will only eat live food. £80 or will swop for male same size or bigger. Tel: (0484) 547207.

Arizona Mountain Kingsnake hatchlings, *Lampropeltis pyromelana pyromelana*. Due beginning of May. Tel: Roger Grenville on (08444) 6867.

Albino California Kingsnake. 1'6" - 2' in length. Excellent condition and good feeder. Good temperament. £110. Telephone (0270) 623507 (Crewe).

WANTED

Female Indian Python, about 6'. Healthy specimen. Tel: (0706) 57519 (Rochdale).

Juvenile Emerald Tree Boa. Captive bred. Telephone (01) 556 3912.

Classified adverts continue on page 23.

Snake Keeper Magazine

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