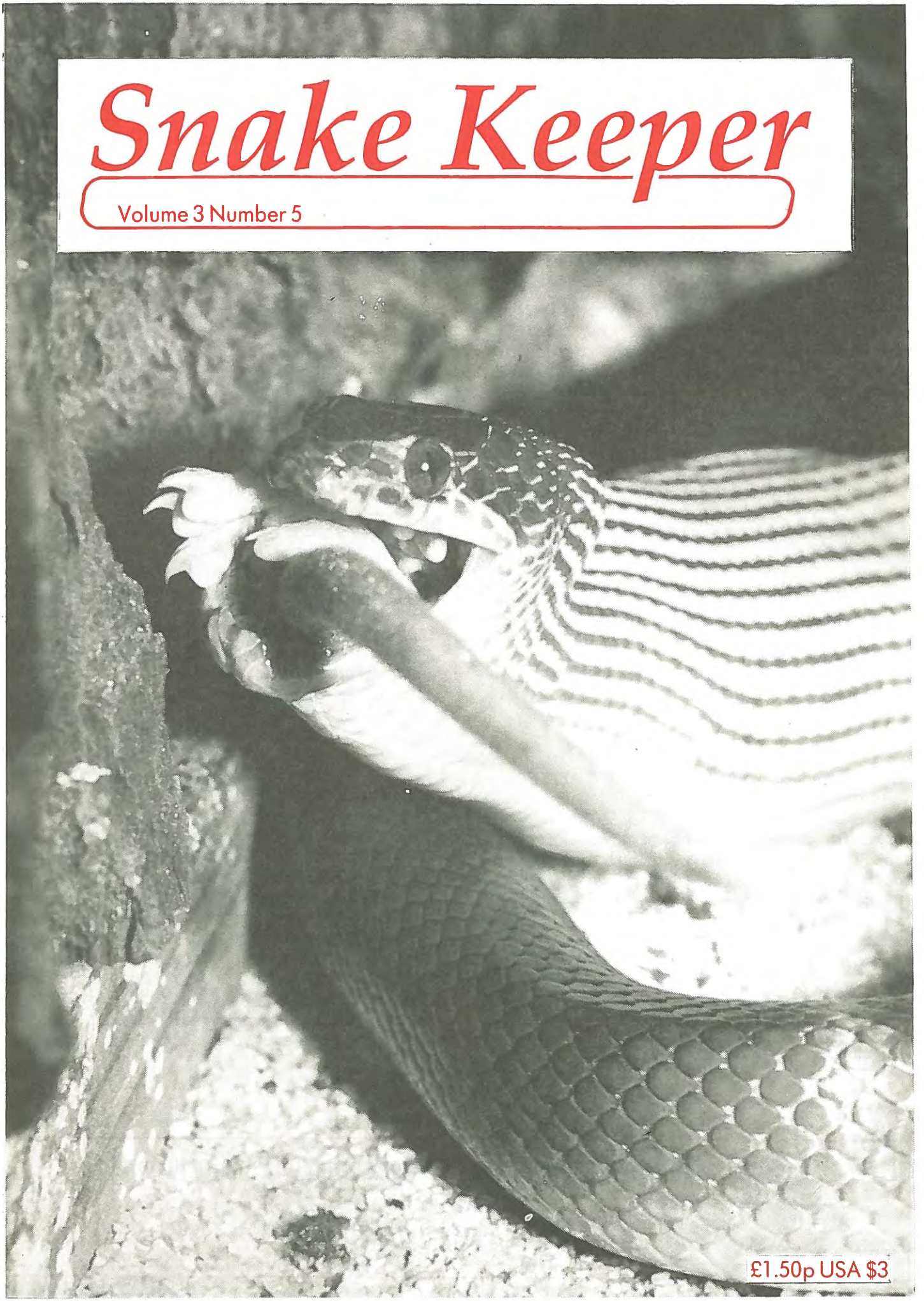
Snake Keeper

Volume 3 Number 5



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Snake Keeper News

EAST SUSSEX HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The East Sussex Herpetological Society has recently been reformed after an absence of four years and is now seeking new members. For further details contact Phil on Eastbourne (0323) 38156.

*****

MILTON KEYNES HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Herpetologists in the city of Milton Keynes are now forming their own society. New members can look forward to monthly meetings, monthly newsletter, a help-line, and facts-files. Subscription rates are as follows; Family £10, single £7.50p and junior £1.50p. Contact Pat Pomfret on (0908) 70112 for further details.

*****

NORTH EAST REPTILE AND AMPHIBIAN GROUP

Richard Toward has written to tell us of the formation of the above named group which will be based in Newcastle upon Tyne. Anyone requiring further information can write to him at 5 Tweedy Terrace, Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 3AS or telephone (091) 265 3641.

*****

BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF TORTOISE KEEPERS

The BATK require Tortoise, Turtle and Terrapin owners to promote the welfare, breeding and conservation of their chelonians by joining their Association. If you are interested in chelonia contact the BATK Membership Secretary, Sheila Richmond on (0922) 53869. The Association are holding a National Tortoise Day on the 25th July 1989 at Hurrans Garden Centre, Kidderminster, Worcestershire to which all are welcome.

ONE DAY EVENT - NATIONAL PET WEEK

Berkshire College of Agriculture are holding a one day event to promote National Pet Week on Saturday the 6th of May. The aim is to encourage responsible pet ownership, make people aware of the benefits conferred by pets and working animals and to increase public awareness of professionals involved with pet animals. Owners of Mediterranean tortoises can have their animal weighed, measured and Jackson ratio calculated and given a health check between 1 and 2pm. Advice will be offered on diet, hibernation and housing. Indoor stands include RSPCA, Cats Protection League, Small Pet Mammal Society and specialist societies for cage and aviary birds, fish, tarantulas, and reptiles and amphibians. The event starts at 11am. Telephone (062 882) 4444 for further information.

*****

FISH (AND REPTILE/AMPHIBIAN) SHOW

Salisbury and District Aquarist Society are holding their annual show on the 10th September at the College of Technology, Southampton Road, Salisbury. The format is the same as last year and includes classes for (1) Reptiles, (2) Amphibians and (3) Arthropods. A trophy will be presented for each class winner. Further details will be available shortly.

*****

I.H.S. WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH
1st HERPETOLOGICAL FAYRE

The event will be held at the Cotwall End Nature Centre, Catholic Lane, Sedgley, near Dudley, West Midlands on Saturday the 20th May commencing at 10am. Items for sale will include captive-bred and wild livestock, books and copies of Snake Keeper. Doors will close at 5.30pm. No admission charge will be made and refreshments will be available. All the trade tables are now fully booked and the Branch thank everyone for their enquiries.

*****

Snake Keeper News continues on page 23.



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Snake Keeper

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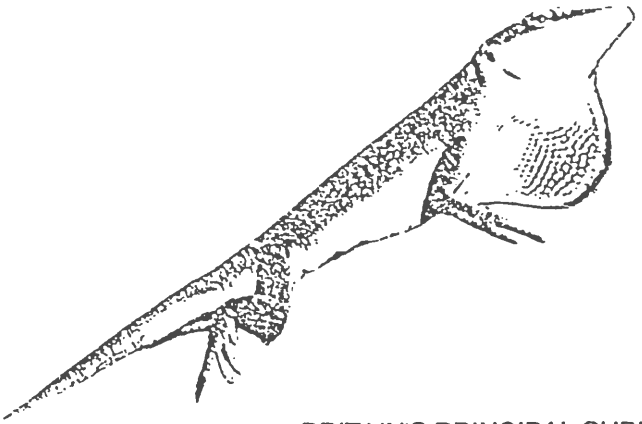
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Front cover: African House Snake, Boaedon fuliginosus, devouring a rat Photo: Peter Lietsch (The June issue of Snake Keeper will include an article by Peter on the care and breeding of the African House Snake)

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The Snakes of South East Bulgaria, Part II

by Petr Velensky

Coluber rubriceps

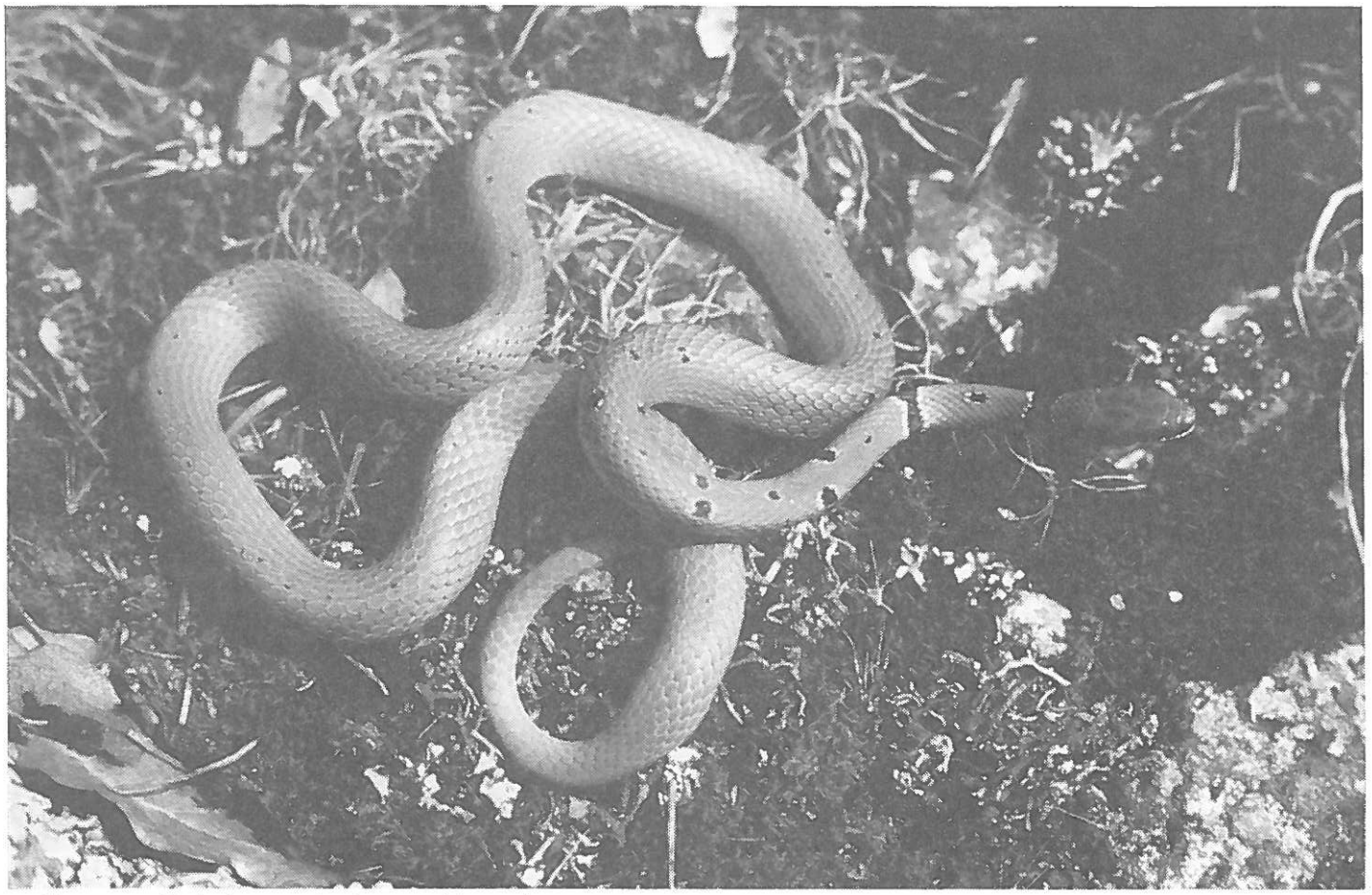
As Coluber caspius was subdivided from Coluber jugularis, so Coluber rubriceps was subdivided from Coluber najadum by Dr. Baran (1976). The first occurrence of this snake in Bulgaria was described by Bartosik and Beskov (1979). In 1985 the Czech herpetologist Dr. Ivan Rehak described a new species Coluber rubriceps thracius from specimens collected by my friend David Kral from near the Ropotamo River. The subspecies C. r. thracius differs from the nominate form mainly by a lower number of ventral and subcaudal scales as well as by a relatively shorter tail (Rehak, 1985).

Coluber rubriceps is a beautiful little snake and quite a midget compared with the other snakes which I found in these areas. In length they never exceed 65cm and of those caught the majority only measured around 50cm. They were no thicker than a pencil. The body colour is brown whilst the forepart of the body and the head have a greenish tinge. Behind the head there is a transverse black or blue stripe bordered by one row of whitish scales. The round spots and little dots on the lateral sides of the front part of the body are the same colours. The ventral surface is white with a nacreous sheen. I found a number of snakes of this species in dry, open places on the slopes of the Ropotamo Forest area. The main place in which they were found was a small, south-west facing area some 30 x 30 metres covered with flat rocks and a small number of bushes. They were also found on forest paths and clearings round electricity pylons. Four times during each of my visits to this place, I found one to two of these snakes under the same rocks. I do not know if they were the same specimens because I was not able to mark them in any way. However, judging by the number of sloughed skins below the rocks there was a very high population density of these snakes in this area.



Biotope of Coluber rubriceps

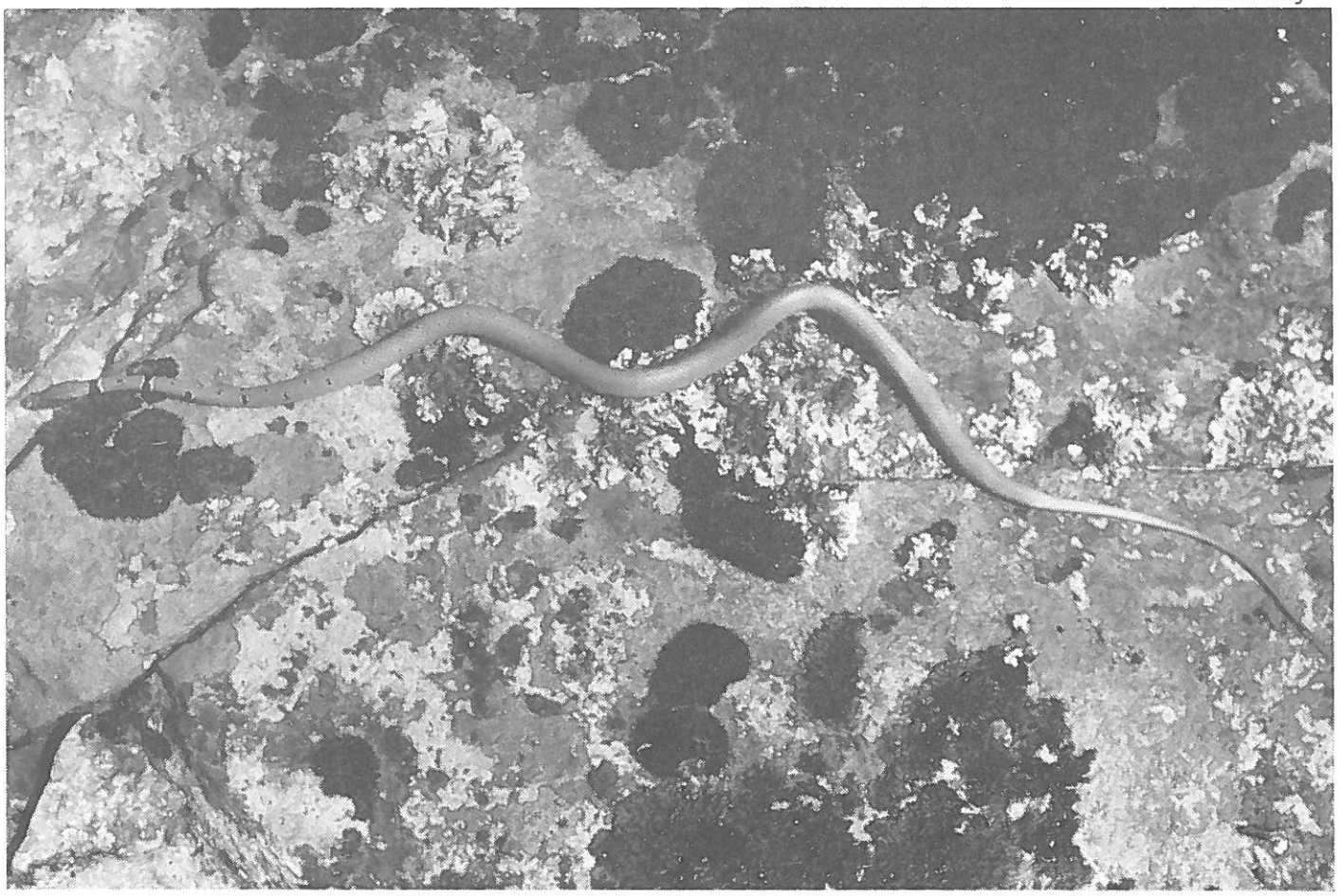
Photo: Petr Velensky



Above *Coluber rubriceps thracius*

Below *Coluber rubriceps* blends into its natural surroundings

Photo: Petr Velensky



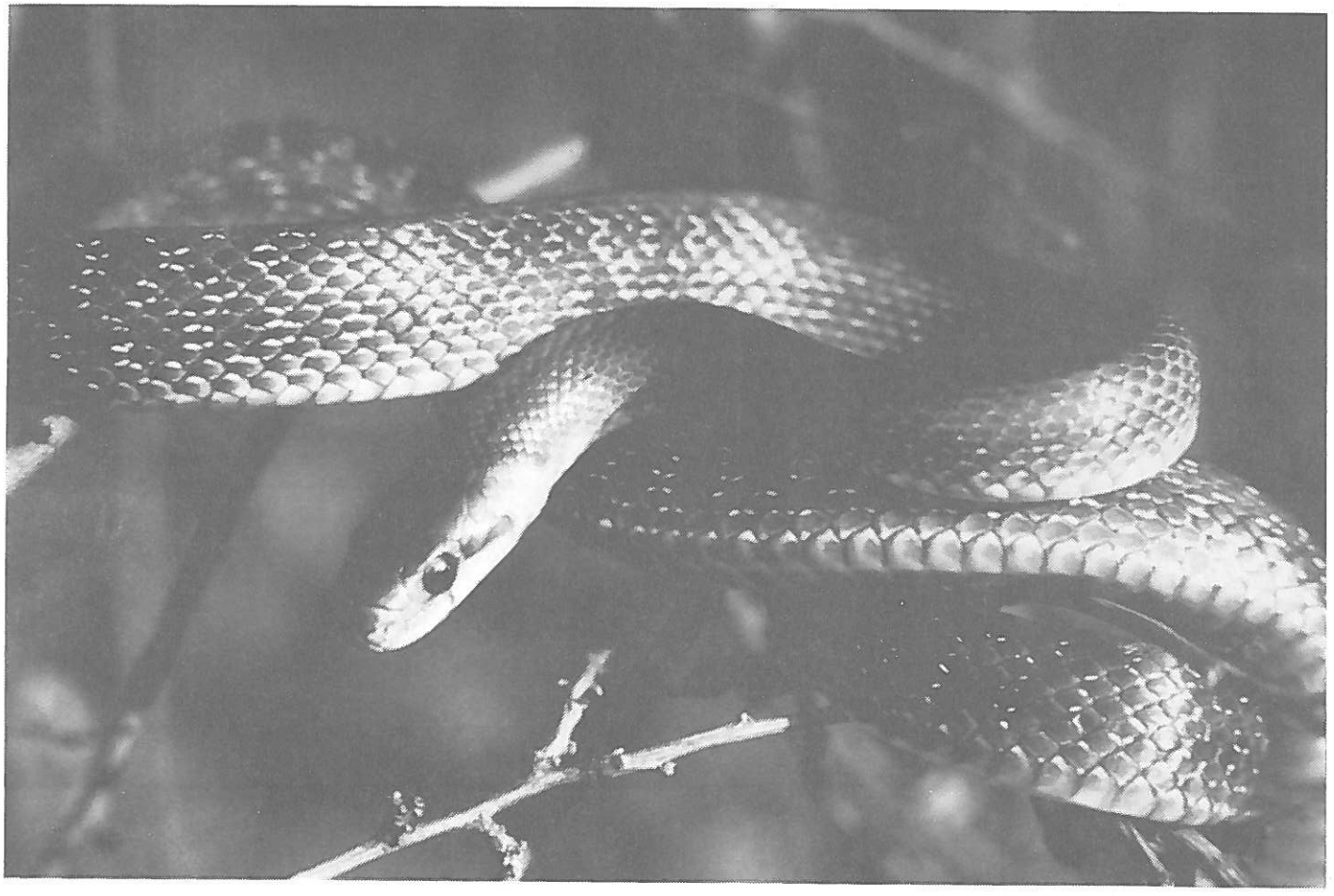
The main food of this lovely little snake is small lizards (Ablepharus kitaibelli, young Podarcis taurica and baby Lacerta viridis). I did not attempt to keep these snakes in captivity but released them immediately after measuring and photographing them. Consequently I can only relate the experiences of my friend Dr. David Kral in this respect. His specimens only ate new-born mice occasionally and they gradually wasted away and died after a year. Engelmann (1985) quotes the number of cylindrical eggs as 3 to 5.

Elaphe longissima

Of the two observation areas in question, this snake only occurs in the Ropotamo Forest. Here two colour varieties are present, brown and black. Because Elaphe longissima is a well-known and widely distributed species I shall not give a detailed description of the colouring and lifestyle. The species from southwest Bulgaria eat 67% mammals (mainly rodents), 29% birds and 2.5% insects (Beskov, 1978). Adult animals eat around 60 to 70 prey items in a year. Once, in 1973, we found a black specimen some 2.5m high in a tree and heading towards the nest of a small bird. I made one very interesting observation in June 1986. I saw one specimen which had been climbing in branches drift on the water to the pillar of a bridge in the middle of the Ropotamo River. After ten minutes it then dropped into the water and swam to the nearest bank which was overgrown with rushes. After a further five minutes it slid out of the rushes and swam across the river (some 30 metres) to the opposite bank which was covered by forest. I took photographs of this event from the bridge.

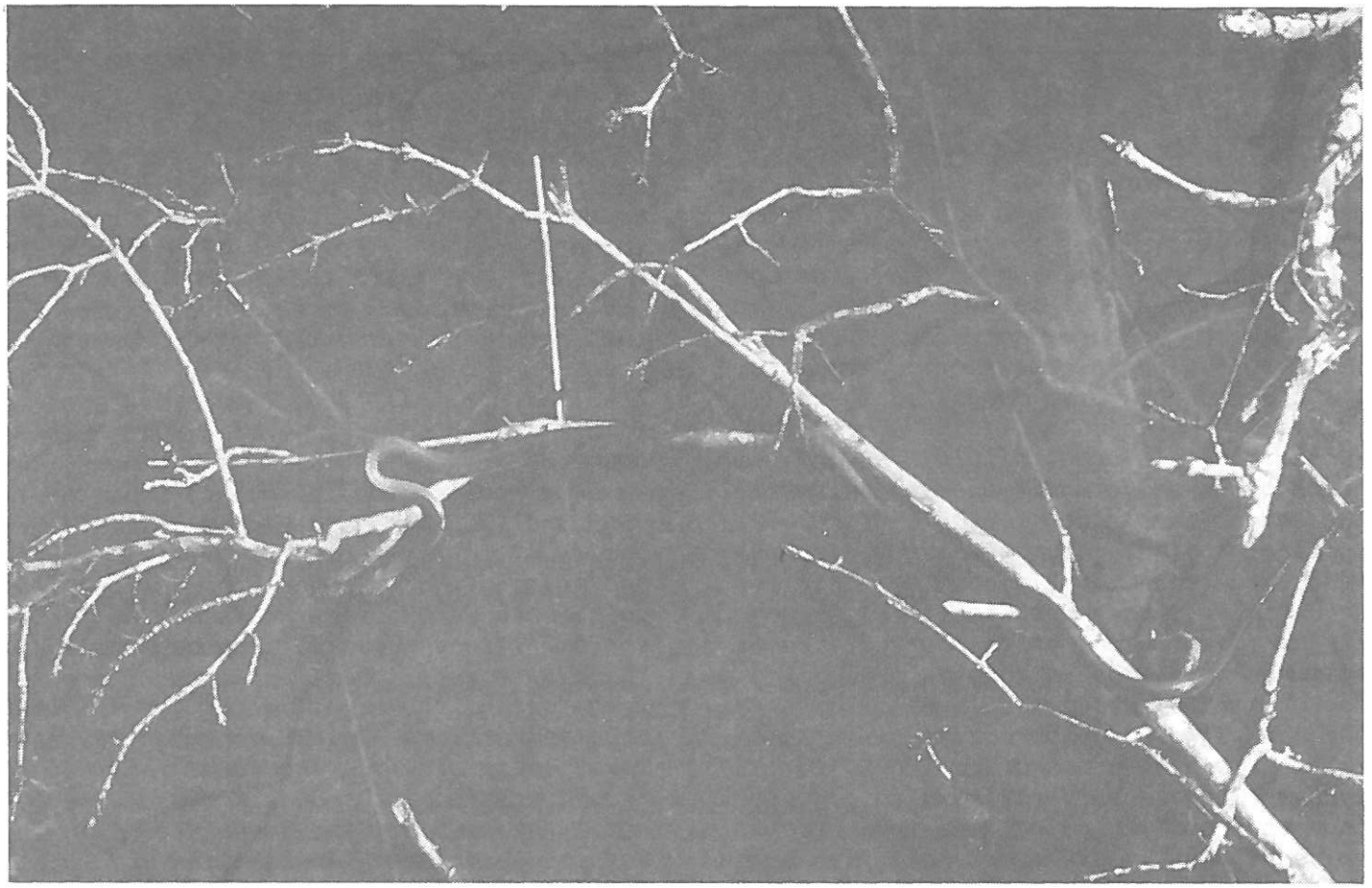
Elaphe quatuorlineata sauromates

This large (150 and exceptionally 200cm) black and yellow snake is the subject of a separate article which is at present in preparation. In the Sozopol-Ropotamo region it lives in many places, from dry biotopes to the marshes (Thieme, 1983). It is one of the rarest local snakes. In ten days of searching I saw only one, but this can probably be explained by its secretive lifestyle and the fact that it is basically a 'hider', much more so than the Coluber or Natrix species. The main food of E. q. sauromates consists of rodents and birds and their eggs. Six to eighteen eggs are laid during the first half of



Elaphe longissima

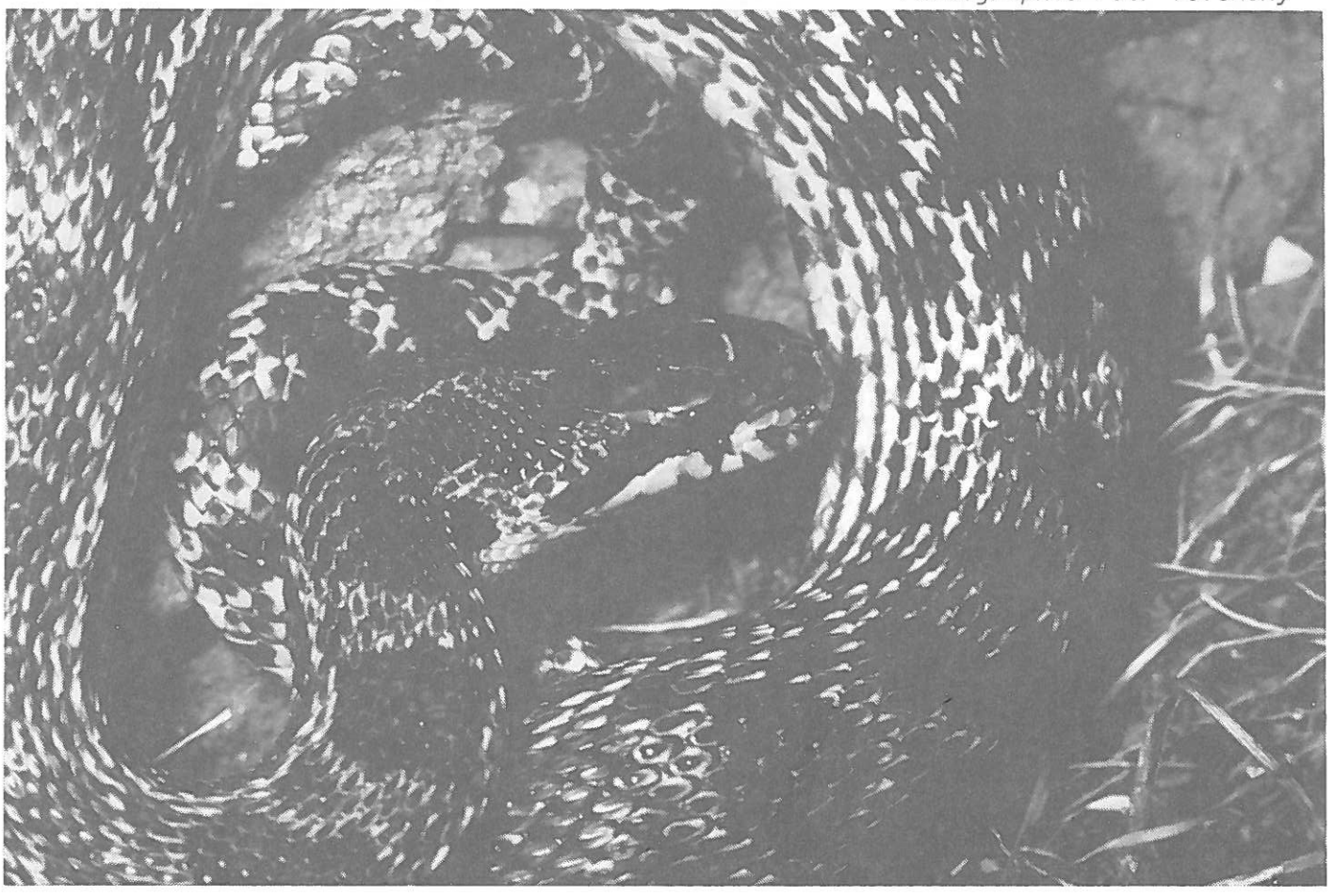
Photo: Petr Velensky



Above *Elaphe longissima* climbing on branches above the Ropotamo River

Below *Elaphe quatuorlineata sauromates*

Photographs: Petr Velensky

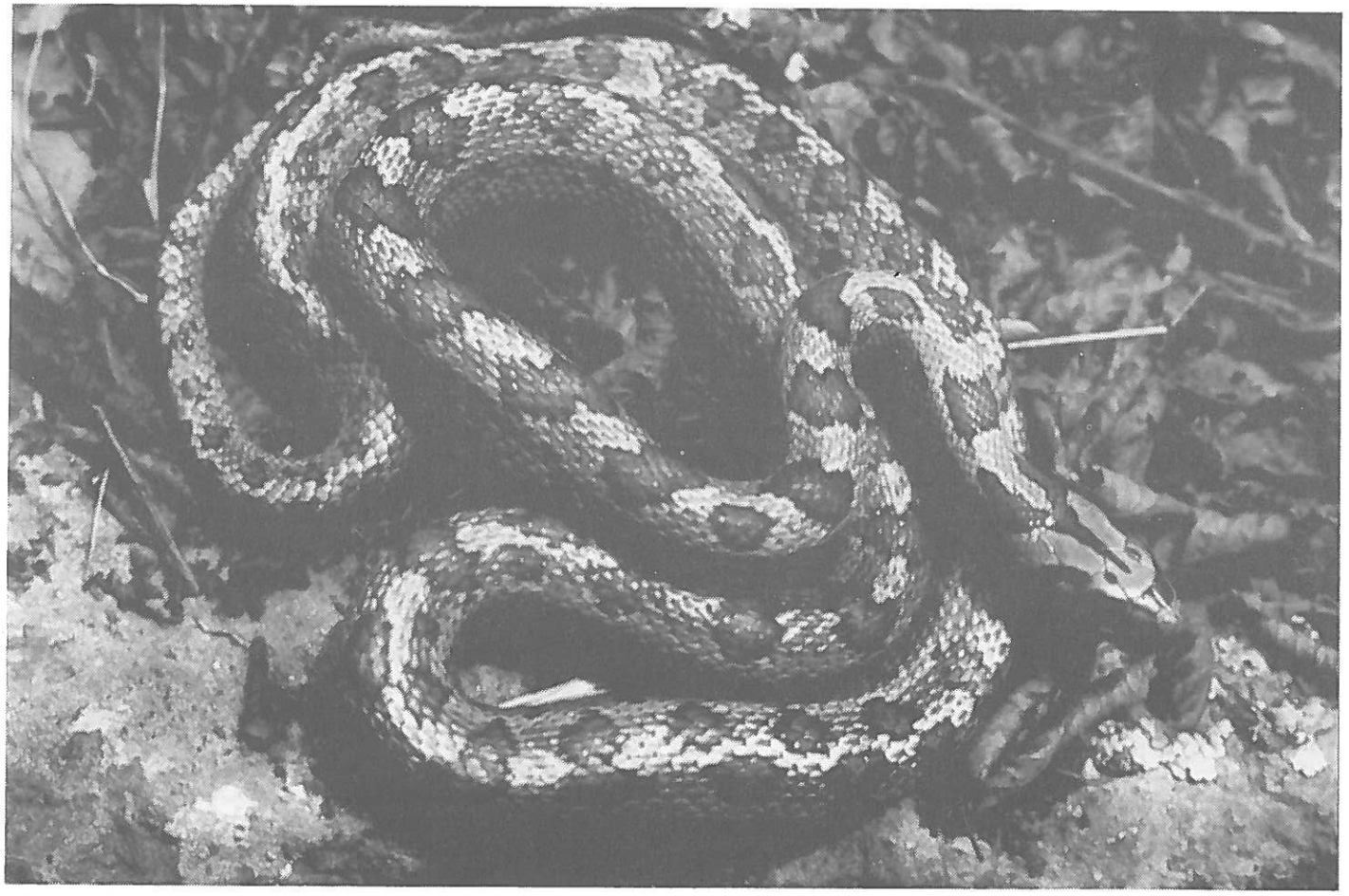


July and these hatch around the middle of September.

Elaphe situla

This is one of the most beautiful and mysterious snakes of Europe. In the areas in question it lives in the remnants of the original oak/hornbeam on the limestone hills. The limestone hills are pitted like an Emmental cheese and thus provide adequate hiding places for E. situla; eggs are probably also deposited there. In addition the holes are also useful for hibernation. Elaphe situla is not a thermophile snake and temperatures above 28 degrees are not suitable for it. Exposure to temperatures above 28 degrees C for any length of time can be critical for this species. Despite this, Elaphe situla lives in one of the hottest parts of Europe (see map in Arnold, 1978) and only up to 600m above sea level. This is only an illusory contradiction. Elaphe situla prefers temperatures of 20 to 25 degrees C and does not like to diverge from this optimum range. In this area it can seek out these temperatures both during the day and at night. The limestone hills around Sozopol enable it to seek out suitable temperatures amongst the rocks. It is for this reason that this snake leads a very secretive lifestyle for most of the year. It is almost impossible to find Elaphe situla during the hottest part of the year and, in most instances, the snake is found only by pure chance. During my three fortnight-stays in July and one in October I only found E. situla once, on the 22nd June 1987. Prior to that date it had rained for three days and the temperature had dropped to 20 degrees C. When the rain stopped at 1pm I hurried to the 'situla hill' and there I found a female which had newly fed, gliding slowly over the ground. A male was found at 7pm under a rock in the oak/hornbeam copse. In 1982 and 1983 we found Elaphe situla quite easily at the end of April and the beginning of May. Young from the previous year were found below rocks at the top of the hill; they measured around 33 to 35cm. The adults were found over a much greater area around the same time of year; when the temperature was 20 degrees C. they moved very slowly. The total lengths of two of the longest snakes (males) were 102 and 107cm. Of all the snakes found in the Sozopol area 64.9% were males and 35.1% females.

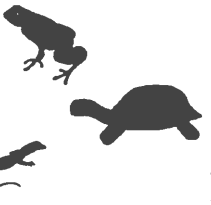
Elaphe situla has two basic colour



Elaphe situla - blotched variety

Photo: Petr Velensky

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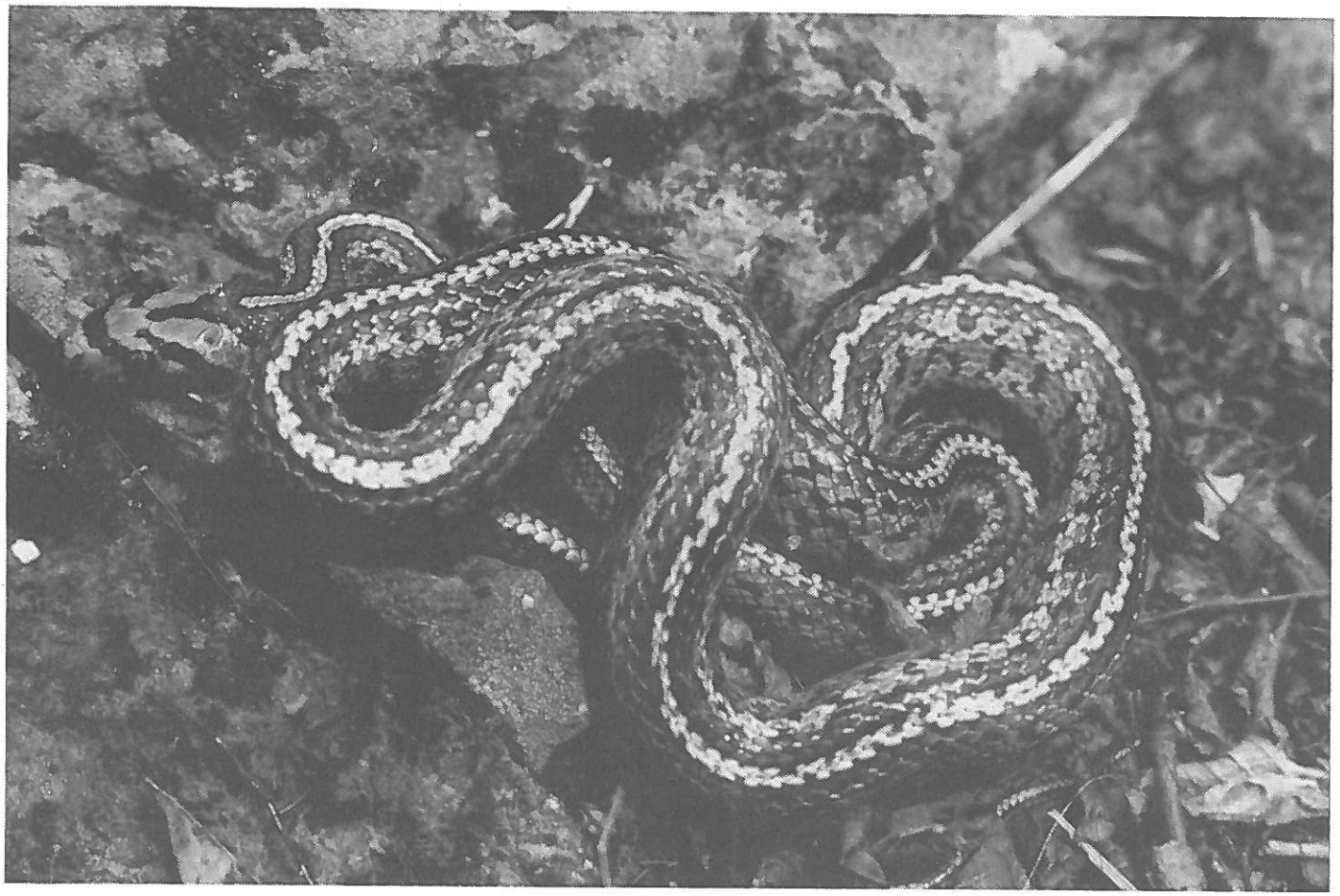
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Elaphe situla - striped variety *Photo: Petr Velensky*

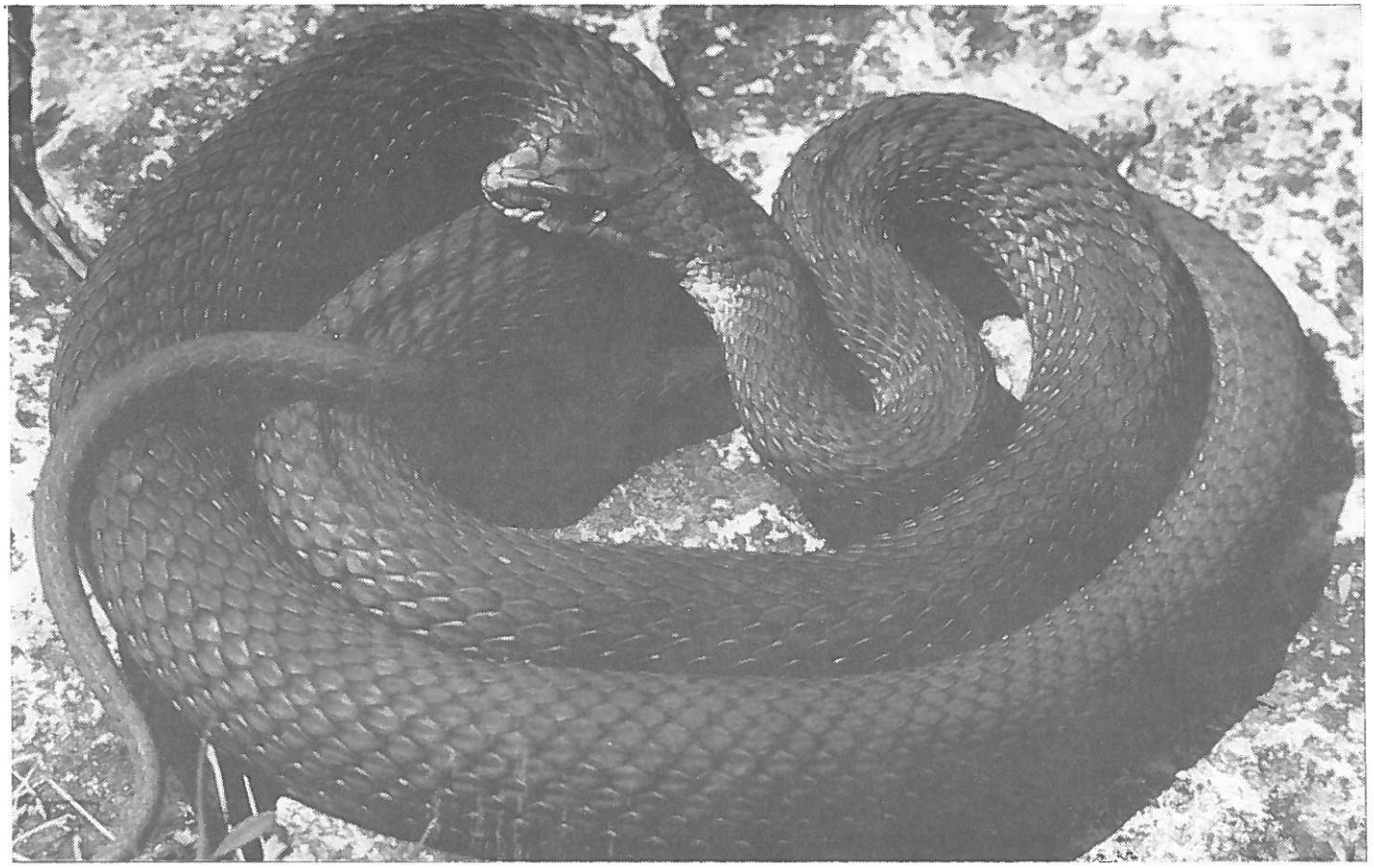
varieties which occur together over the whole of their distribution range. The most frequently found are those with red or brown dorsal spots on a grey or beige background. This variety is designated Elaphe situla leopardina but there is no doubt that it is not taxonomically independent. The second variety has two longitudinal stripes which are red behind the head and brown further down the body. In the areas under observation we found 79% of spotted and 21% of striped specimens.

The reproductive capacity of Elaphe situla is low as a result of its secretive lifestyle. According to available literature the number of eggs laid is given as 2 to 5, 3 to 5 or 2 to 7 (Arnold, 1978; Bannikov, 1978; Bruno, 1984; Beskov, 1985; Engelmann, 1985 and others. Sigg (1988) hypothesises that these snakes may have a biennial reproductive cycle. This I would support but only because I found one female (that mentioned above) with a total length of 72cm, found on June 22nd, but which showed no signs of gravidity. Their food consists mainly of small mammals. In the stomachs of 10 animals in south-west Bulgaria, Dr. Beskov found only mammals, rodents and insects. From the 62% of baby mammals found in the stomachs of these snakes it can be assumed that these snakes hunt in mammal burrows underground. Beskov (1978) also states that this snake often hunts at night.

Malpolon monspessulanus insignatus

In the Ropotamo area this snake lives in the high overgrown sand dunes and in clearings which have been made in the dry forests for electricity lines. In the Sozopol area it lives in dry stone areas and in bushy divisions between the terraced fields.

Young animals are light brown with a pattern of white and black dots. Adults are uniformly grey or bluish- grey. The change in colouring occurs at a length of about one metre. One female which I had caught on the 10th May 1985 measured 103cm and had residual juvenile markings. It did not lay any eggs in that year. Another female caught on the 10th May 1985 measured 97cm and had adult colouring. This female laid 10 eggs on the 8th June 1985. She had sloughed nine days prior to the eggs being laid. The weight of the clutch of eggs was 100 grammes. The average size of the eggs was 35 x 20.55mm.



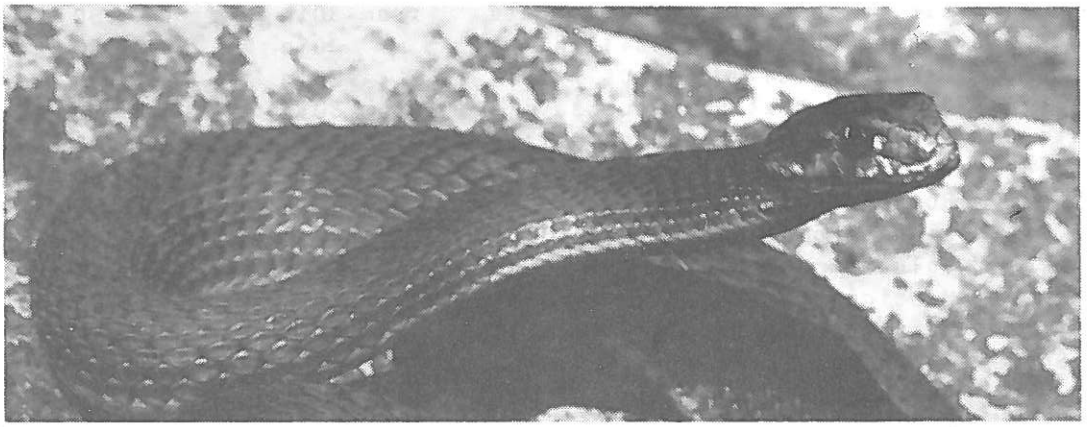
At 29 to 30 degrees C the eggs hatched after 57 to 60 days. The young measured 28cm (body) and 6cm (tail).

The chance of finding these snakes in the areas I was investigating is low. On average I was only able to see this snake once every ten days. Malpolon monspessulanus is an active diurnal snake which moves very quickly. When handled or disturbed it hisses loudly and bites. Its food consists mainly of other reptiles (Lacerta sp. and Coronella austriaca, according to Beskov's research) but occasionally small mammals and birds are also eaten (Beskov, 1978).

By gently massaging the stomach of a newly-fed adult of this species, an adult specimen of Lacerta trilineata was regurgitated. This male measured 144.5cm (113cm body and 31.5cm tail). This individual, as well as all others caught, was released after being measured and photographed. In the vivarium, adults of this species eat mice, whilst the young only eat lizards. The prey is held in the coils and then bitten by the venom fangs which are situated at the back of the upper jaw. The venom acts very quickly. When this snake bites defensively, the venom fangs are only very rarely brought into play. In 1977 in Yugoslavia I was bitten very badly but with no venom being injected.

*****

The final part of The Snakes of South-east Bulgaria, featuring Vipera ammodytes, will appear in next month's issue.



Above and left

Malpolon monspessulanus insignitus
(Photo on left shows snake in typical watching pose.

Photographs:
Petr Velensky

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2.3	Giant Euromastix	Euromastix ejiptus	24in	95.00
100	Bahaman Anolis	Anolis segrei	5in	3.50
100	Green Anolis	Anolis carolinensis	5in	3.50
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20	Asian Leaf Frog	Megophrys nasuta	3in	22.50
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Key: 2.3 = 2 males & 3 females
25 = 25 specimens unsexed
Cb = Captive bred
Cr = Captive raised

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The Care and Breeding of the Viperine Snake, *Natrix maura* (Linnaeus,1758) Part II

by Steven Bol

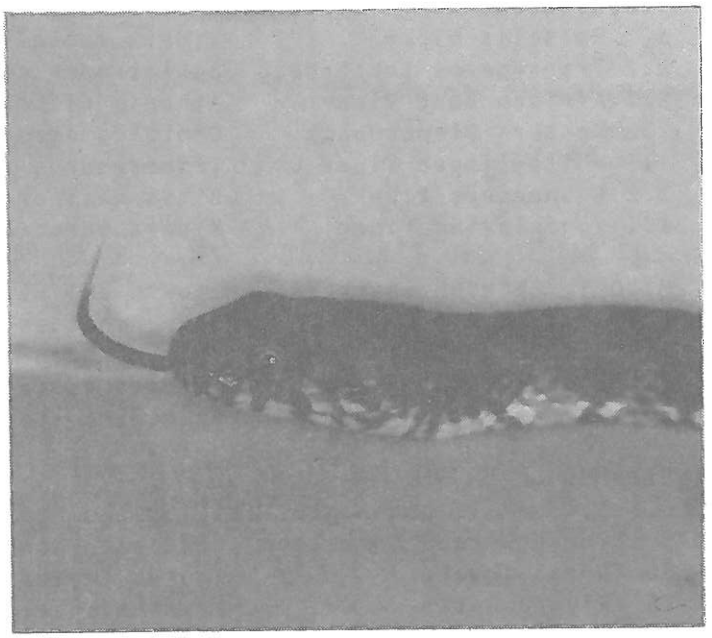
The first part of this article appeared in Snake Keeper, Volume 2, Number 6.

Reproduction

Immediately after hibernation the males began to come into breeding condition. It could be seen the previous year in the vivarium how the male specimens frequently and obviously excitedly attempted to crawl over one anothers' backs. As soon as they saw another snake they attempted to mate with it. If a male encounters a female one can see how he glides over her in the direction of her head. During this process he pushes his head along the female's back in jerky, zig-zag movements. He subsequently turns around and glides (again over the female's back) in the direction from which he started and, finally, turns again heading in the direction of the head. The male then remains lying alongside the female with his cloaca lying near to that of the female. Sometimes he even assumes this position immediately. He then starts to make jerky head-movements which continue in undulating wave-like movements along his body. At the same time he moves his tail below that of the female so that both cloacae are lying next to one another.

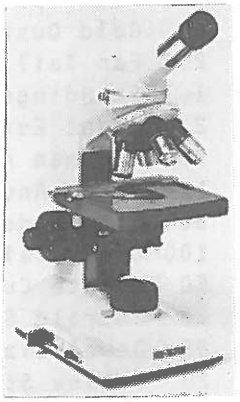
Nietzke (1984) reports that in males of Natrix maura (and Natrix tessallata) the keeling of the last row of scales above the male's cloaca are thickened which would help him to coil around the female. As soon as he has found the female's cloaca he can insert one of his hemipenes. Coitus then takes place.

With my animals I have observed several times that at the time of coitus the female promptly turned on her back whereby the male was thrown off. It is possible that the female was not in breeding condition and in this way attempted to deter the male. It also sometimes happens that a male tries to coil around another male whilst he is lying with his head on the back of a female. I can only presume that he 'thought' that he had a female in his coils. The males are exceptionally eager to mate in the early part of the year, immediately after hibernation, but



Natrix maura bred by Steven Bol
Photo: Michael Connolley

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are also sometimes in breeding condition well into the Autumn. Even well after the females have been mated, and up to shortly before the females are ready to lay their eggs, the males remain ready to mate. In the wild, Natrix maura lays 7-20 eggs in June-July (Steward, 1971).

In the vivarium the date when the animals are removed from hibernation determines when the eggs will be laid. The earlier the hibernation ends, the earlier the eggs will be laid.

That the laying of the eggs is imminent (about 4-5 weeks after mating) is first signalled by the female in that she stops eating. Secondly she becomes very restless and burrows in the substrate. A third sign that the eggs are due is that the female increases visibly in girth so that the skin between the scales can clearly be seen. A small plastic container filled with moist peat is then placed in the vivarium. A small hole is cut in the top so that the female may enter to lay her eggs. My breeding results were listed in 'Reptilia' Volume 1, No 2. Altogether in 1986 the four females laid a total of 54 eggs (five clutches) from which 51 snakes hatched. In 1987 these females produced 72 eggs (six clutches) from which 66 young resulted.

In the wild (as far as I am aware) these animals only lay one clutch of eggs each year. In my case the snakes laid one or two clutches of eggs per year. Willsch (1984) mentions Spanish Natrix maura which even lay three or four clutches per year, producing sometimes around 18 eggs per clutch. Obviously in the case of Natrix maura there are variations in the number of clutches laid per year, whereby specimens from the more southerly parts of their range (North Africa, Spain) can produce a greater number of eggs.

Eggs

As soon as the eggs are laid they are transferred to an incubator. By holding the eggs against a bright light one is able to determine whether they are fertile (one can see red veins running to a red spot - the embryo). The incubator (after an idea by Budde, 1980) measures 50 x 50 x 50cm. The top and sides are covered with foam rubber which, on the one hand acts as insulation and, on the other serves to prevent drops of condensed water falling on the eggs. The incubator is filled with water to a depth of around 15cm and in this an aquarium heater/thermostat is placed. This heats the water to around 29 to 32 degrees C. In the incubator there is a relative humidity of 90 to 100%. Plastic containers filled with sphagnum moss are placed in the incubator. These stand on a wire-mesh framework so that they cannot fall into the water. The eggs are placed on the moist sphagnum moss.

Using a felt-tip pen the top of each egg is marked with a number and during the entire incubation period this number is kept uppermost. If the eggs are not kept in the same position throughout the incubation period there is a considerable chance that the embryos will suffocate. I probably lost my first clutch of eggs in 1985 for this reason. At temperatures of 29 to 31 degrees C the eggs hatched after 35 to 42 days. At lower temperatures the incubation can take much longer (up to 65 days).

Juveniles

After hatching, the juveniles are transferred to a pre-heated vivarium. At this time they are still very pale in colour and free of markings. During the first few months the colouring develops dramatically; in most cases the animals go darker in colour and the markings become more vivid. The young snakes slough for the first time after 9 to 10 days and immediately begin to eat. Before sloughing they live on the yolk-sac which they absorbed whilst still in the egg.

In November/December 1986 most of the juveniles were well nourished (a few, however, were not) thus it was decided to also give these tiny creatures a short hibernation. They (even those which had lost weight) were well able to withstand a

short hibernation of two months after which all specimens began to eat well again. There is no doubt that without this hibernation the young would have starved to death.

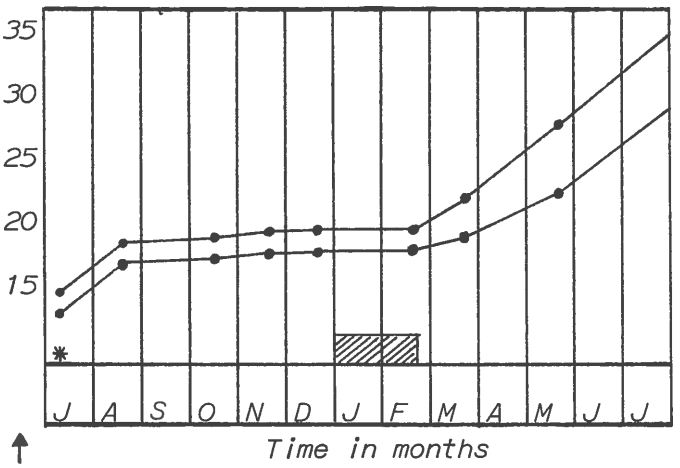
Growth

In other literature it has been mentioned that females can achieve a length of 130cm (Bruno, 1977). For males the maximum length of 80cm is given. From the many specimens (over 100) which I was able to observe in the South of France not one female measured more than 80cm; the largest male measured 54cm. It is possible however that in Spain and North Africa, Natrix maura can attain greater lengths. Meerman (1979) reported a Viperine Snake of 95cm from Tunisia.

My adult snakes slough on average two to four times a year; the juveniles more frequently (every one to two months). An average growth chart for the animals hatched in 1986 can be seen in Fig. 2. Because some examples had a small part of their tail missing, snout to cloaca lengths are used. From the chart it can be seen that the females grow quicker than the males. At the end of August 1986 however the growth rate began to slow down. The temperature in the tank was influenced each day by the ambient temperature in the room in which the tank was situated and this in turn was influenced by the outside temperature. In this way the young slowly stopped eating (they went into hibernating condition) and became extremely restless. At the end of October 1986 the 60 watt lamp was replaced by one of 100 watts, the aim being to get the snakes to feed better and become less restless. From the graph it can be seen that between October and November the growth rate was only very slow. This 'revival' was however short-lived because in November most of the animals stopped eating and the growth rate was nil. After hibernation all young began to eat well again; the growth rate increased and remained constant during the period February to August.

In August 1987 the largest female measured 50cm (total length); the largest male measured 41cm. At the beginning of September the first signs of mating behaviour were also observed so that this year the F2 generation can be expected. In Willsch's case (1984) a female laid eggs at the age of only one year.

Figure 2.
Growth rate chart of ten captive-bred examples of Natrix maura born around the 5th July 1986.



Key
Upper line indicates average length of six females
Lower line indicates average length of four males
* Date of birth
▨ Hibernation

Hunting Behaviour

Patterson and Davies (1982) describe two types of hunting behaviour. In one case the snake hunts by swimming and striking out when it sees a fish. Another type of hunting behaviour is that the snake lies still in the water with its body coiled like an accordion. When a fish comes into sight the snake strikes out. In the vivarium I have observed many times how a Viperine Snake lies with its head just above the water surface with the front part of its body coiled like an accordion, whilst the remainder of its body lies on the dry land part of the vivarium. As soon as a fish in the water comes within range the snake strikes. If it misses the target then the head is withdrawn from the water and the snake takes up its previous position. Natrix maura is most often described as a diurnal snake but it is also active at night when it frequently goes in search of food. To do this it swims around the tank (mostly with open mouth) making large loops with its body. If any part of the body is touched by a fish it turns its head in the direction of the point of contact and seizes the fish. Steward also reports that Natrix maura

(and other members of the genus Natrix) make use of their body when hunting for food.

Diseases

As I have already reported, my first Viperine Snakes died after about six months, probably from hunger. In 1983 I obtained new trio of this species. At first these were doing extremely well until I placed a Dice Snake (Natrix tessallata) in the same vivarium. This was a mistake because the Dice Snake did not look too well and was probably quite ill. Within two months all the snakes (including the Natrix tessallata) were dead. They probably died from an intestinal infection. This only serves to emphasize the necessity of a quarantine period. Things went much better with the specimens which I caught in 1984 and 1985, but there were one or two problems. A female which was in the latter stage of sloughing shortly before hibernation was placed in the refrigerator. After hibernation she attempted (without success) to remove the old skin and also ate badly. After two months I was forced to assist the female to remove the old slough but during this process her right eye was badly damaged. She began to eat again but it soon became obvious that she was blind in the right eye.

The snakes were also infected with mites, but these were easily treated with 'Neguvon'.

After a faecal examination in 1987 a number of worms and their eggs were discovered and pieces of tapeworm were being passed with the faeces. I was informed that it was a case of (the larvae of) Nematodes (threadworms) and (the eggs of) Cestodes (tapeworms). The Nematodes were treated with 'Ripercol' (dosage: 20mg/kg body weight) injections. The Cestodes were treated with oral doses of 'Dronocit' (dosage: 5mg/kg body weight). Both medications were repeated after 14 days.

Conclusion

Natrix maura is an easily managed snake which is very suitable for the beginner to the hobby. This article is intended mainly as a guide to their maintenance and breeding. In the same way other European Natrix species and North American Nerodia and Thamnophis species can also be easily kept. As is the case in their natural habitat the latter two species must be hibernated at 12 to 15 degrees C if breeding is to be attempted.

*****

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Correction to Part I

The original article contained an error which we repeated in our translation. The last sentence of Part I should read "The females are also much bigger and more robustly built".

This article, 'Verzorging En Kweek Van De Adderringslang Natrix maura' originally appeared in the Dutch magazine 'Reptilia' Volume 2, Nos 1 & 2 and is reprinted here by kind permission of the Author. Translated from the original Dutch by John Hackworth.

A Total Albino Grass Snake, *Natrix natrix* in Berlin

by Norbert Schneeweiss

In September 1985 a total albino Grass Snake was found south of Berlin. The snake was only a few days old and measured 16cm. The dorsal and ventral scales were basically whitish in colour with a slight pink overtone. The eyes were vermillion red and there was no distinction between the pupil and the iris. The collar was still the typical yellow and the tongue was a light red colour. Along the dorsal surface there were one to two rows of small pinkish-coloured spots some 1.5mm in diameter. In a normally coloured Grass Snake these spots are often found but they are always black. After a few days in the vivarium the young snake began to take food (Guppies) without any problems.

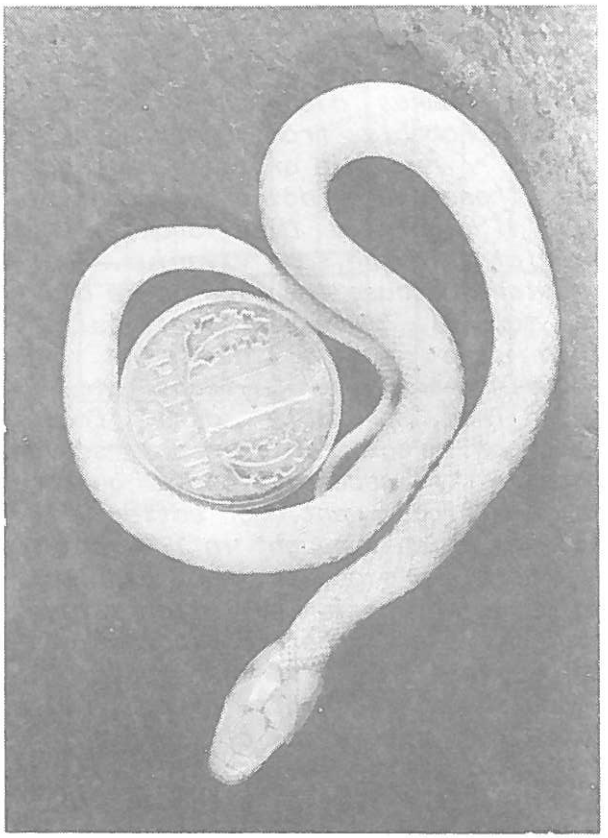
After three years in captivity the following details can be given about the development of the animal. Apart from a barely discernable yellowish tone on the dorsal surface, the original colouring has not changed. The snake is a female and to date has been kept singly. On the 1st June 1988 the snake laid seven very small and infertile eggs. The length of the eggs varied between 15 and 25mm. The last time the snake was measured on the 13th February 1988 (after hibernation) it measured 59.5cm and weighed 41g. Evidence of albinotic reptiles in the wild is very rare and is usually limited to young specimens. The rapid selection of an albino occuring in any population is determined by its conspicuousness. Constitutionally the albinos are not born in any set ratio to the normally coloured animals. On the basis of experimental crossings it has been proven for many snake species that the tendency to albinism is a factor which is inherited monofactorily and recessively.

Finally I would like to express my thanks to Mr. Heinz Nazbrowsky in Berlin for the data which I have quoted above.

*****

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Translated from the original German by John Hackworth.



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Dear Snake Keeper,

Concerning the debate about light bulbs versus ceramic heaters I first used light bulbs to heat my snakes as I was not able to purchase ceramic heaters in my area. Whilst using light bulbs my snakes continually hid under the newspaper substrate until disturbed. I eventually found a shop in Walsall which sold ceramic heaters and I have used them ever since. With ceramic heaters my snakes don't hide at all as I am now able to provide a day and a night period without a bulb turning on and off. My animals are much happier with the new heaters and have never hidden during the time I have been using them. When I used light bulbs my snakes suffered colds but with ceramic heaters they are superior in health. I know people who use light bulbs and their snakes are irritable and stressed - you only have to look at them to see this!

Yours sincerely, K. Waltho
Staffs

*****

Dear Snake Keeper,

This letter is a follow up to our article in Snake Keeper, Volume 3, No. 1 about the methods of heating a vivarium. Over the last few months several letters have been published concerning our article and we wish to reply to them. The letters in question appeared in Snake Keeper, Volume 3, Nos. 2 & 3.

We would like to deal with Mr Hingley's letter first. In the second paragraph Mr Hingley implies that, as far more people use light bulbs, this method must be better than infra red heaters. Hundreds of years ago sailors believed that they might fall off the edge of the world and so they wouldn't sail out of sight of land. Christopher Columbus was called mad because he would not go along with his fellow sailors' views.

Later in his letter Mr Hingley makes statements like "As for providing a photoperiod, I can prove that this is not always essential." We thought that this magazine was published to help all snake keepers. How does a novice know which snake needs a photoperiod and which snake doesn't. We think that all snakes need a photoperiod. Mr Hingley may not realise it but he does give his snakes a photoperiod providing he doesn't keep them in a windowless room. Daylight passes through a window and that will illuminate a vivarium.

Has Mr Hingley ever heard of heater guards? The idea of these devices is to protect snakes from being burnt. This would prevent the fears he has about snakes being burnt.

Marcia and I still have the view that using light bulbs without a hide box is barbaric. Imagine yourself asleep in your bedroom and a light is switched on and off every few minutes. You would be a psychological wreck within a week or so. If you supply a hide box you will get over some of the problems (as we mentioned in our original article) but will you ever see your snake? How will you know if it is ill? Wouldn't it be better to use a system that permits you to see your pet?

We know of someone whose snake died whilst in a hide box. The first idea he had that something was wrong was the smell. Someone else found six rotting eggs in their hide box. "I didn't know she was gravid", he tearfully told us.

Now on to Chris Mattison's letter, the first section of which agrees with us about light bulbs. He then recommends heater pads or cables. Returning to our original article we stated that partial underfloor heating in conjunction with a dull heat emitter is the best system you can buy. We totally agree with Chris

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Mattison that if you use a dull heat emitter you must use a very good reliable thermostat. We feel that most of his worry about the dull heat emitters was the problem of the thermostat.

We would like to take issue with one small point in his letter. He said that we were wrong to choose an even temperature throughout the cage because we do not know what temperature the snake likes. Then he advises giving it a variable temperature throughout its cage - let the snake choose because the snake knows best but it's still the snake's owner who chooses what temperature range the snake will have its choice of.

Let us tell you how we choose our temperatures. We go along to our library (after finding out where the reptile comes from) and consult HMSO temperature records for the area where our reptile comes from. Amongst other information we can find out the average daily temperature, the average night time temperature, the maximum and minimum night and day temperatures, humidity, hours of sunshine, etc. This is how we determine what our reptiles need. We realise that there may be local conditions that may change the temperature. Surely doing it this way is far better than leaving it to pot luck that you have selected the temperature the reptile needs within your limits.

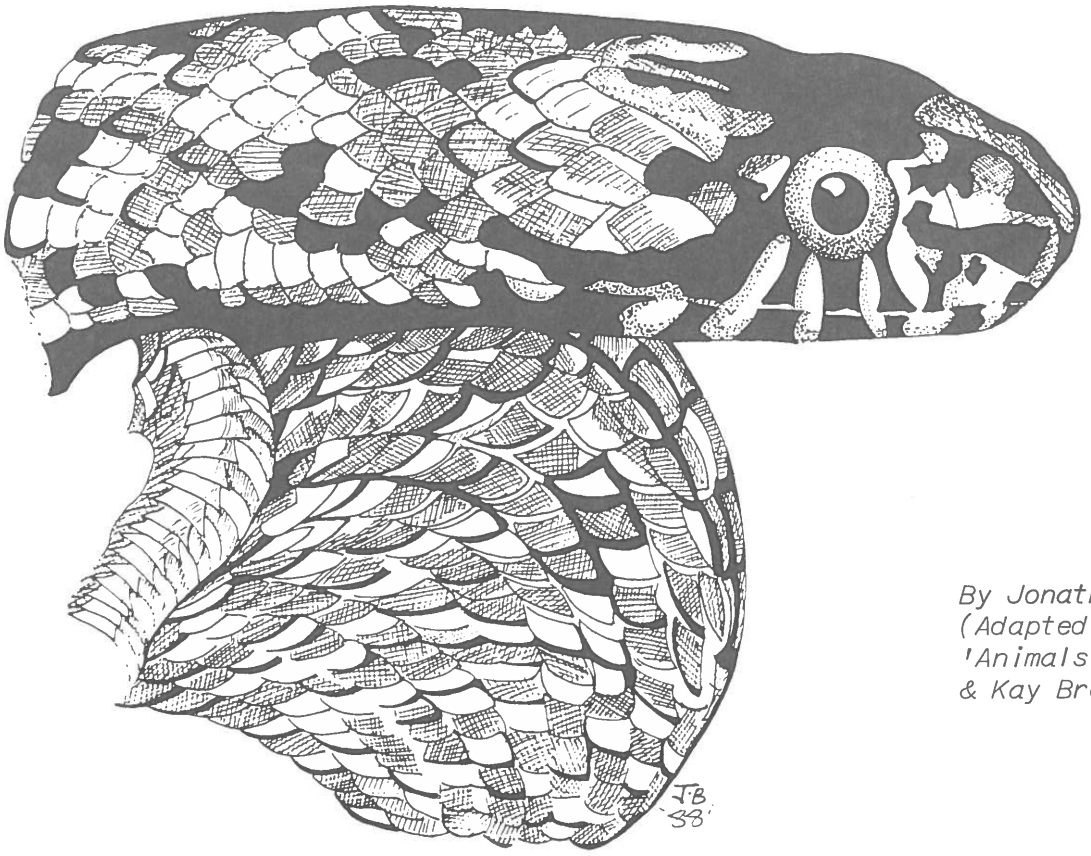
We would like to throw another spanner in the works by saying that we don't believe that a snake will necessarily choose the best temperature for itself. We think that a snake will choose the safest place, irrespective of temperature. We think that a snake would rather be safe and cold rather than warm and in danger. Remember that snakes are wild animals and they have many enemies in the wild. We believe that the number one priority is getting through the day alive. What is the point of being nice and warm but dead!

Yours sincerely, Chris and Marcia Martin
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Snake Art

By Jonathan Brownlee
(Adapted from a photograph in 'Animals of Australia' by Stan & Kay Breeden)

Experiences in Snake Keeping, Part II

by Malcolm Flux

That evening I asked my wife where I would find information about keeping snakes. "Are you serious?" she replied. "Well I would be interested to read about the subject but I don't suppose I will ever keep one," I said.

The next day I scanned the bookshelves in our local pet shop. I found a TFH book called 'Beginning with Snakes' which was full of photographs, advice and lists of species suitable for captivity with descriptions of correct temperatures, humidity and lighting required.

Then I came to a section entitled 'Common Problems' which frightened me to death. This section contained close-up photographs of worms, mouth rot, mites, ticks and respiratory diseases. One of the pictures showed a King Cobra being force fed. (Can you really keep this type of snake in the lounge, I thought?) Well it was nice to read about snake keeping but I couldn't see myself doing this sort of thing - I mean where on Earth do you buy dead mice or rats or even things called 'pinkies' that go into pumps?

My wife, Pauline, asked what the book was like and I replied that it was not bad but that snake keeping was not for me. I said I was keen until I read the book but that it had put me off for good.

Two weeks later we were in the pet shop buying the weekly rations for the animals when Ken asked me to go upstairs and see what he had in the stock room. Yes, you've guessed correctly: it was a snake. Ken told me that it was his own snake which had escaped last year. Whilst decorating the lounge he had to remove some skirting boards and had found the snake behind one of them. He told me that the snake had been behind the boards for at least five months over the winter. I asked what sort of snake it was and Ken explained that it was a Corn Snake from North America. I thought that it had very beautiful markings and seemed a very placid snake. My wife asked if I would like the snake for my birthday and I stammered, "No... yes... no... I mean I don't know". She turned to Ken and told him I wanted it and asked how much it would cost. Where am I going to keep it? What am I going to keep it in and what do I need to keep it? These were the questions that sprang into my buzzing head. (I was not at all prepared for all this decision making off-the-cuff. I needed time to think.) Ken said that I only needed a small fish tank and a light bulb to start off with. He told me to come back next Saturday and all would be ready for me and with these words ringing in my ears we set off for home.

I grabbed the snake book from the bookshelf and read and re-read and read it again. I might just have missed something the first half dozen times.

Saturday came and I insisted that I went on my own to get 'Sid' as the snake had been christened. I arrived at the shop and was given a glass tank (45 x 22 x 22cm) complete with a lid (which had two vents cut into the top), a 30 watt tungsten strip lamp, three dead mice and Sid. I had taken an old sheet with me and covered the package so that it would not be seen on the way to the car. I arrived home and was greeted by the whole household, including the dogs, who followed me into the lounge.

My first problem was where to put the tank. The solution seemed to be to put it on top of the television set where it would be in constant view and bottom heat would be provided for most of the day. Over the next few hours Sid's every move was observed by at least eight pairs of eyes as he explored his new home. I discovered that folded standard kitchen roll was a perfect substrate (apart from the red flower border - I made a mental note to remember to buy sand-coloured rolls next time). A piece of forest bark and water dish completed Sid's new home.

Next morning I dared not look in the lounge. I imagined that Sid had died in the night from fright or had escaped and gone up the gas-fire flue. But no, thank goodness, he was still in the tank, resting under a piece of bark. That evening I decided to try and feed him. After everyone had retired for the night I cautiously lifted the lid and dropped one of the dead mice into the tank. Nothing happened! After ten minutes or so I thought that the best thing to do would be to waggle the mouse to attract the snake's attention.

To be continued.

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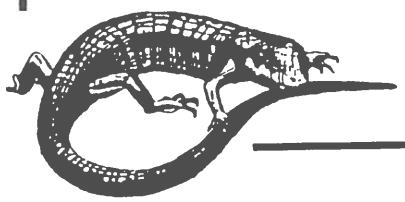
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Proprietor: S. P. Norris

SNAKE KEEPER NEWS
(Continued from page 2)

MAINLY ABOUT ANIMALS

The first issue of the new quarterly magazine 'Mainly About Animals' has been published. Edited by zoologist C. H. Keeling, it includes articles about Belize Zoo, Seals, Cryptozoology, Private Animal Keeping, Tortoise Keeping, Suburban Safaris, Life with Invertebrates, book reviews and news from zoological gardens. A one year subscription costs £4.80 for four issues. For further details contact Mainly About Animals, 121, Layhams Road, West Wickham, Kent BR4 9HE.

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ROYAL NEWS, No. 2

The second issue of 'Royal News', the newsletter for Python regius owners has been published. This issue includes An Introduction to Python regius in Captivity, Part II, Ball Python Survey, Sensory Deprivation in Royal Pythons and a problem page. Further information is available from Lee Bowler, Braemar, 28 Honor Road, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Bucks HP16 ONJ. Telephone (02406) 6328.

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REPTILE BREEDING FOUNDATION

The Foundation, based in Picton, Ontario, has made arrangements to acquire three Eastern Indigo Snakes to form a breeding colony with the two which they already own. These snakes originally occurred from South Carolina to Florida and west to southern Lousiana. However there have been no recent sightings except in Florida and Georgia where the Indigo Snake is listed as a "threatened species".

Despite a recent $25,000 grant from Imperial Oil which will help to upgrade the Exotarium facilities, the Foundation still needs financial help. For the sum of $25+ you can become an Annual Member and receive the newsletter 'Scales and Tales' and an individual pass to the Exotarium. As an Annual Contributor ($75+) you will receive 'Scales and Tales', a family pass to the Exotarium and a colour poster. Further information from P.O. Box 1450, Picton, Ontario KOK 2TO.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTS
(Continued from page 24)

WANTED

Contact wanted with people seriously interested in the genus Thamnophis. This very diverse group deserves more attention! Also interested in good quality colour slides of Thamnophis sp. and ssp. Please write; Jan Malmgren, Hjortstorpsv. 22, S-703 66, Örebro, Sweden.

Male Iguana, must be tame. Phone (0742) 645332.

Poison Arrow Frogs, any species. Contact David Manning, 55 Grove Park Road, London W4 3RU.

Rear-fanged or unusual snakes. Contact Pete Blake on (0752) 263659 (Devon).

Good healthy female Boa for breeding. Must be 5-7' long and four years old plus. Must have attractive saddle markings. Tel: Mike (0962) 60918 day or (0962) 51707 evenings.

Vine Snakes (Oxybelis fulgidus) or any other Vine Snake. Phone Kevin on (0733) 240475 after 6pm.

Adult female Grey Rat Snake (Elaphe obsoleta spiloides). Also wanted to buy or on breeding loan - adult female Great Plains Rat Snake (Elaphe guttata emoryi) and adult female Rosy Rat Snake (Elaphe guttata rosacea). Contact Dave Gales, 1 Sanderson Road, Monkseaton, Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear NE26 3PF. Tel: (091) 251 2151.

Garter Snakes, Captive bred or captive raised. Also hatchling Corn Snakes. Tel: (0639) 642227 day or (0639) 646677 evenings.

Information on Emerald Tree Boas (Corallus caninus) and Green Tree Pythons (Chondropython viridis) regarding husbandry, feeding, breeding and their availability in the UK. Andy & Bev Cutts, 31 Austen Drive, Bramley, Rottherham, S. Yorks S66 OUF. Tel: (0709) 549384.

EXCHANGE

African Rock Python, 5'. Immaculate condition, excellent feeder on dead rats, mice or chicks. Handleable but nervous. Challenge for experienced keeper. Swap for Common or Red-tailed Boa, 3'+. Collection/delivery by arrangement. Tel: (0224) 493704 (Aberdeen).

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

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

4 Puff Adders, 8", males, £55 each. 1 Burmese Python, 9', male, £100. 1 Banded Egyptian Cobra, 5', male?, £40 (imperfect). 1 Western Diamondback, male, £50 (imperfect - no rattle). 1 Western Diamondback, male, perfect, £70. 1 Long-nosed Viper, 6", female, £70. 1 Mozambique Spitting Cobra, 2'6", male, £90. 1 Ceram Island Death Adder, only one in the country, £400. 4 Yellow Banded Krait, 1 female, 3 males, £50 each. 1 Eastern Diamondback, male, £70. 1 Great Basin Rattlesnake, £120, male? (only one in the country). 1 Boa Constrictor, 4-5', male, (red-tailed), £150. 1 Burmese Python, 6', male, £80. Timber Rattlesnakes, large, £80 each. Prairie Rattlesnakes, adult, £50 each. Western Massasauga, £80. Block of vivariums, 12 @ 2'6" long, underfloor heating + bulbs. 5'10" tall. £350. Telephone Pete Giles on (0621) 869686 evenings (Essex).

Pair of Curly-tailed Lizards, £15 pair. Butterfly Agama, £10. Also female Leopard Lizard, £10. Phone (0742) 645332.

Royal Python. 3' long plus vivarium (4' x 1' x 1'6") with ceramic heating. Whole package £90. Telephone (0753) 885297 (Bucks).

Locusts for sale. 100 small £6.95p. 50 med/large £6.95p. 100 med/large £12.00p. 20 adult £5.00p. All include 1st class post/packing. David Manning, 55 Grove Park Road, London W4 3RU.

Black Rat Snake, male, 4', four years captive, £45. 2 male Banded Water Snakes, three years captive, £10 each. 1 baby water snake, £5. 1 Red-rumped Tarantula + tank, £12. Also various tanks and equipment. All animals healthy. Phone Runcorn 564457 after 13th May.

Sale or exchange. 2 Sunbeam Snakes, *Xenopeltis unicolor*. Both feeding well, 2'6" and 3'. £60 both. 2 Red-tailed Tree Racers, *Gonyosoma oxycephala*. Both feeding well and healthy, £70 both. All snakes have been in captivity for seven months and have been wormed. These snakes were brought back from Thailand by myself. Any of the above snakes swapped for female adult Corn Snake, female Yellow Rat Snake or female subadult Everglades Rat Snake. Any other rat snake or kingsnake considered. Phone (0742) 680000 after 4pm.

FOR SALE

3' Ball Python with 3' vivarium, ceramic heater and Nova thermostat. £110. Tel: (0706) 350876 (Rochdale).

Pair of Northern Pine Snakes (*Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus*). Captive-bred, 18 months old, 5-6' long, unrelated pair. Feeding well, perfect condition, tame. £160 pair. Contact Pete on (0793) 611273 (Wilts).

Male Green Iguana, 3' long, good feeder, nice markings. Feeds on vegetables and also dead mice. £50 o.n.o. Phone (0742) 666725.

Pair of captive-bred Carolina Corn Snakes, *Elaphe guttata guttata*. Male approximately 2'6" and female 3'. Very tame and feeding well on dead mice. Absolutely stunning colours, £100. Also includes insulated wooden vivarium with glass sliding doors, ceramic heater and thermostat. Telephone (0274) 722227 (Bradford).

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

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

Indian Python, 9' female. 3 Reticulated Pythons 1 @ 9' and 2 @ 4'. Cabinet vivarium 6'10" x 2' wide x 3' high. Fully equipped. £450. Price negotiable. Tel: (061) 682 4207 after 5pm.

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Please mention Snake Keeper when replying to adverts. Thank you.

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More adverts on page 23.