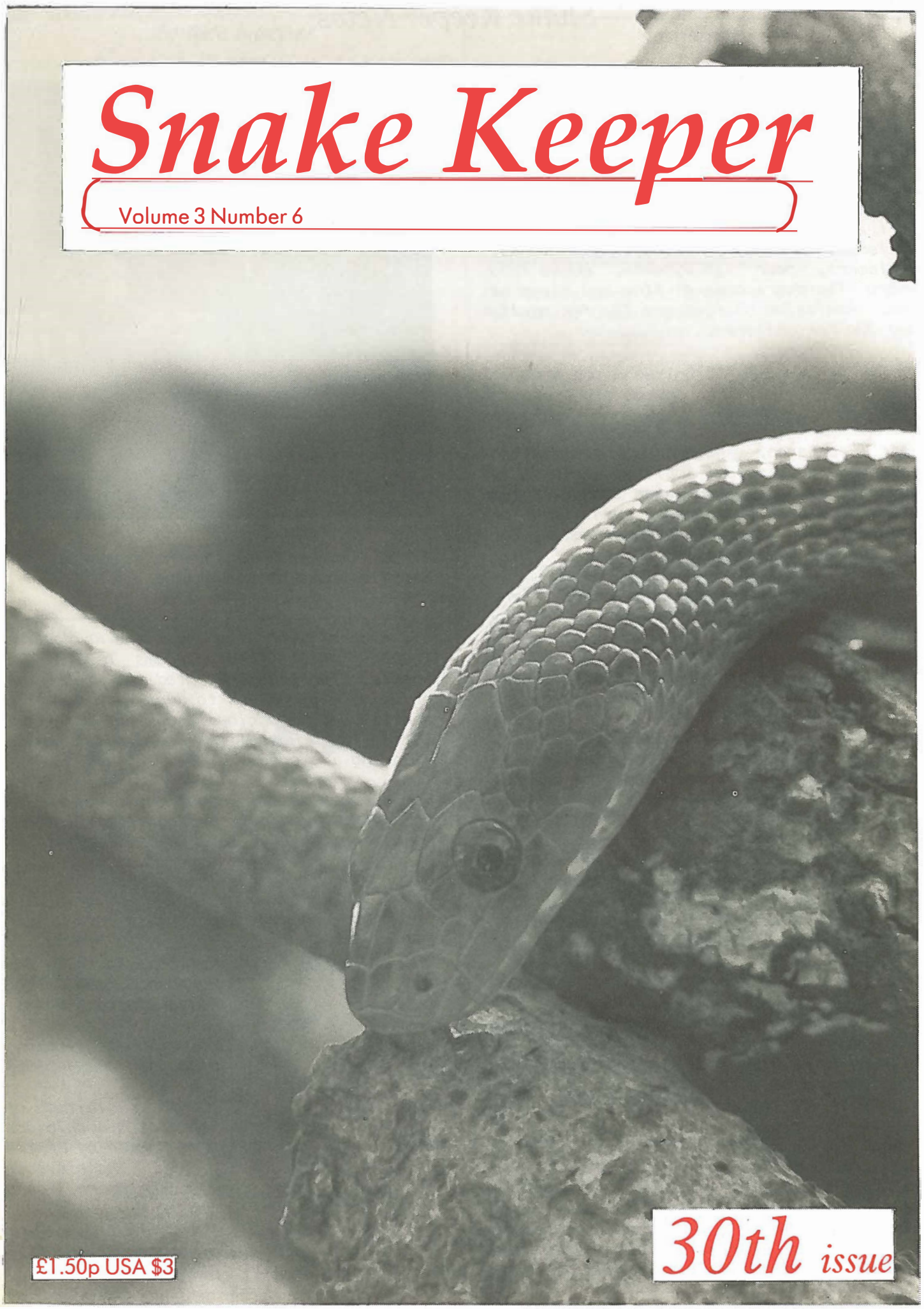
Snake Keeper

Volume 3 Number 6



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30th issue

Snake Keeper News

T. & C.H.G. EXHIBITION

The Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group are holding their annual display of reptiles and amphibians on Saturday the 29th July 1989. Due to the success of this event the Group have had to find a larger hall and the event will be held at Hazlemere Community Centre, Rose Avenue, Hazlemere, near High Wycombe, Bucks this year. The doors open at 11am and close at 5pm. Admission charges are 70p for adults and 30p for children.

*****

FEEDING SURVEY

Jeff Protheroe, Chairman of the Milton Keynes Herpetological Society, intends to conduct an experiment over the next two years to assess the correct quantities of food and time interval between feeding for the species Lampropeltis.

Jeff would like to hear from anyone who would like to take part in the survey by following feeding patterns he will provide. At the end of a two year period each animal involved will be examined for fat build-up, size, weight, etc.

If anyone has old records of feeding, post-mortems (death by overfeeding in particular) or slides of the genus Lampropeltis then Jeff would like to hear from them.

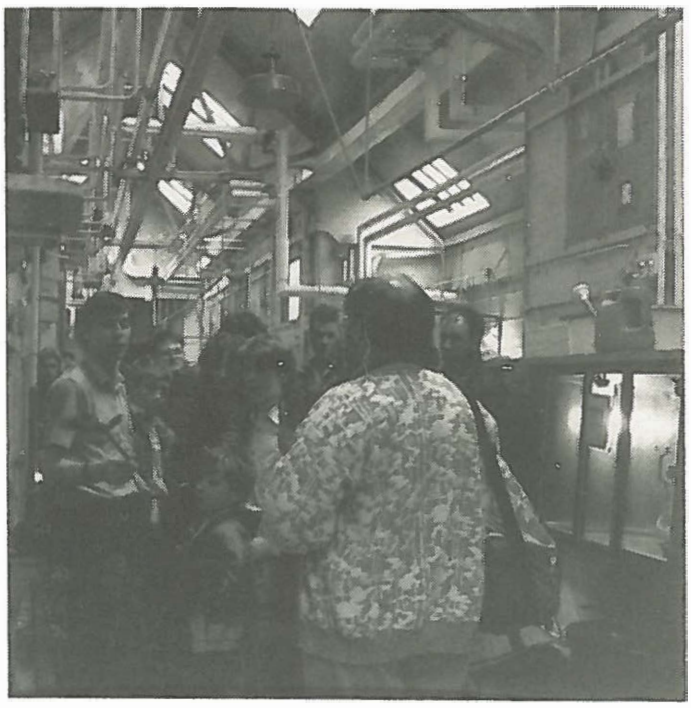
All information and items received will be returned. If you can help or would like further details then write to: Jeff Protheroe, 40 Westwood Close, Great Holme, Milton Keynes. Telephone (0908) 560657.

*****

A.R.C. TRIP TO LONDON ZOO

On the 16th April the Amphibian Reptile Club organised a trip to London Zoo. The highlight of the event was a tour of the reptile house.

The club members arrived at the Zoo at mid-day and after viewing the reptile house from the public's side they were given an escorted tour behind the scenes by their host, Terry. Various snakes were seen including Gaboon Vipers and Taipans.



A.R.C. members behind the scenes in the Reptile House at London Zoo.

The members were also shown the Rhinoceros Iguana which freely roams behind the scenes. Terry demonstrated the technique of using a grabstick to deal with venomous snakes and described how he was once bitten by a Russell's Viper whilst he was cleaning its cage.

For further details about the club, write to: A.R.C., c/o 1, Springfield, Elstead, Godalming, Surrey. Tel: (0252) 702714.

*****

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

25th July — B.A.T.K. National Tortoise Day
Hurrans Garden Centre
Kidderminster, Worcs.

Contact Sheila Richmond
Telephone (0922) 53869

29th July — T.& C.H.G. Exhibition of Reptiles & Amphibians
Hazlemere Community Centre
Rose Avenue
Hazlemere, Bucks

Contact John Owen
Telephone (02406) 4973

Continued on page 23

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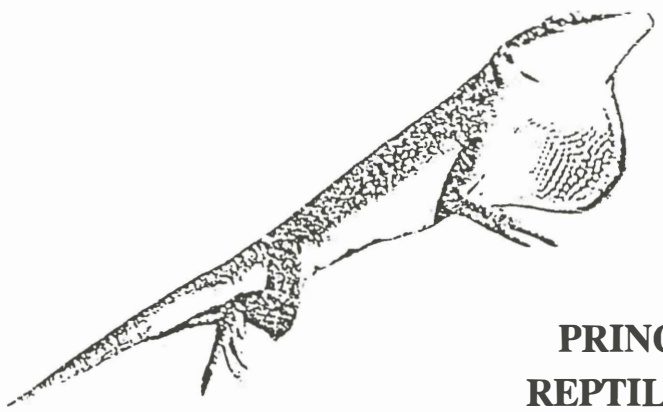
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Front cover: Everglades Rat Snake
Elaphe obsoleta rossalleni
Photo: Michael Connolley

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The Snakes of South East Bulgaria, Part III

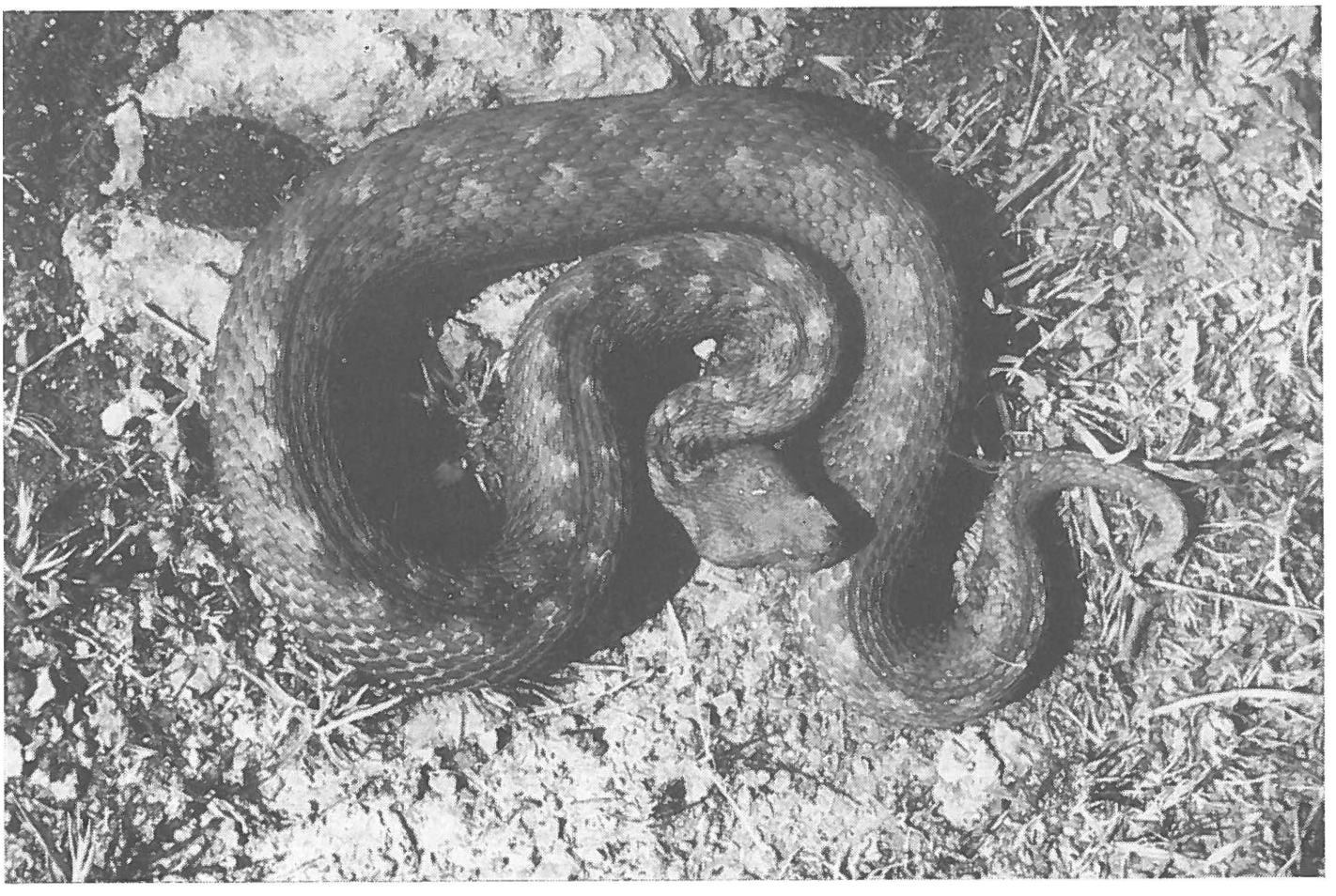
by Petr Velensky

Vipera ammodytes

This is one of the more plentiful snakes of this area. I found five examples of this species in 14 days in June 1987. After Natrix natrix, Natrix tessellata and Coluber caspius I would place this snake in fourth position regarding frequency of occurence. The snakes occuring in the area in question are probably the two subspecies Vipera ammodytes montandoni in the north and V. a. meridionalis in the south. These subspecies differ from one another mainly in the pholidosis. Sexual dimorphism is present in this snake. Females are larger and more robust. The basic colour is either brown with the typical zig-zag pattern or it can consist of a series of lozenge-shaped markings joined together to form a vertebral stripe but this is not very conspicuous. Males are whitish or greyish with a well defined stripe. One very robust female which I found on the 22nd June 1987 measured 52.2cm (body) and 6.6cm (tail). It had a very unusual dark colour and was in fact almost black.

Excellent information about the food of this species is given by Beskov (1978). According to the main composition of their food, Beskov divides specimens of Vipera ammodytes into three groups: 22.2 to 49.9cm, 50 to 65cm and 65.1 to 73.5cm. The smaller specimens eat mainly lizards and invertebrates (mainly Scolopendra cingulata). The percentage of reptiles consumed is greatest in the second group. With increasing size, the proportion of mammals (mainly Microtus arvalis) in the food increases. In the entire collection of V. ammodytes studied (65 animals) mammals represent 60.86% of the prey. Beskov also quotes cannibalism in one case. One individual may eat 40 to 50 mammals, reptiles, birds and invertebrates in one year.

Vipera ammodytes is ovoviviparous, giving birth to 4 to 20 live young (Arnold, 1978; Bannikov, 1978; Engelmann, 1985; Bruno, 1984). I observed one copulation at 5pm on the 10th May 1983. Vipera ammodytes are very regular snakes; I often found the same specimen in the same place. Their



Vipera ammodytes ssp. An uncommon dark variety

Photo Petr Velensky

favourite habitats are stony fields or overgrown places with adequate rocks.

Threats to the conservation and protection of snakes in the Sozopol–Ropotamo region.

One of the main threats to the reptiles of the Sozopol–Ropotamo region is the loss of their habitat. The main cause is the heavy planting of thick pine forests in the Sozopol area; this type of biotope is practically uninhabitable for reptiles. These areas are constantly being extended. Once the southern part of the Sozopol area was well inhabited by snakes but now a large holiday complex has been built there.

The greater part of the Ropotamo Forest is a nature reserve which is helping to protect the reptiles. Nevertheless, alongside this reserve a new highway has been built right through the area where previously I had found the very rare Coluber rubriceps.

According to Beskov (1985) there are in Bulgaria only four or five sites in which Elaphe situla can be found and in my opinion the population of E. situla are very vulnerable. On the top of the hill which these snakes use for hibernation, around ten pigs are allowed to roam freely, maybe illegally, all day long and it is obvious that these take their toll of reptiles, especially in the Spring when the snakes come out of hibernation and their density in this small area is high. Bearing in mind the possible low reproductivity of this species, this would seem to be a direct threat to Elaphe situla. The attitude of the local people to reptiles, and snakes in particular, is also very negative. I personally saw two anglers on the Agalina reserve; one of them was collecting mussels whilst the other was searching the rocks with an iron spike in an attempt to kill any Water Vipers (Natrix tessellata)

On the hills near Sozopol there are two sheep enclosures and the shepherds do not hesitate to kill any snakes they encounter. One of them told us that his dogs are even more expert at hunting snakes than he is. A number of snakes are also killed on the roads, mainly Natrix tessellata and Coluber caspius. Beskov (1978) reports that in an area of 163 sq. km. in south-west Bulgaria he estimates that people killed around 450 snakes per year. Of this number 66.33% were killed by traffic. However local people have always killed snakes randomly so I do not think that populations are any more threatened by this.

In conclusion, and to my shame, I must add to the list of dangers to snakes some snake keepers from the G.D.R., Czechoslovakia and Poland who come to Bulgaria to catch large numbers of reptiles for commercial purposes. The majority of these reptiles quickly meet their end in shops or at the hands of inexperienced herpetologists. The majority of reptiles in Bulgaria are protected by law (exceptions being Vipera ammodytes and both Natrix species). Elaphe situla, Elaphe longissima and Coluber rubriceps are contained in the Red Data Book of especially rare or endangered animals of Bulgaria. For some time Dr. Beskov of Sofia has been running a campaign to arouse national opposition to reptile poachers and to try to deter them from exporting reptiles from Bulgaria (Beskov, 1988). I wish strictly to disassociate myself from these persons. In all my travels to Bulgaria it has been my intention to observe, study and photograph the reptiles under natural conditions. I have never taken reptiles from Bulgaria to be sold in Czechoslovakia or anywhere else.

Nevertheless, I do think that keeping reptiles in captivity is a positive factor in changing the public's attitude to reptiles in the wild. It also results in new information about these animals which is impossible to obtain in the wild. It serves also to protect the animals.

I am convinced that the only way to prevent the illegal export of beautiful species of reptiles from their country of origin (eg. E. situla, E. quatuorlineata) is for snake keepers and herpetologists to ensure that the animals in their collections have been captive-bred under suitable vivarium conditions. Finally I wish to express my thanks to my friend John Hackworth for his help in preparing this article.

*****

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Snake Keeper would like to thank Kevin Hingley for assisting with the preparation of this article.

Unplanned Breeding of *Elaphe schrenckii schrenckii*

by Andrzej Kowalew

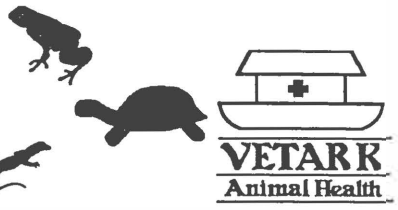
In comparison with most rat snakes, Elaphe schrenckii lays large eggs longer than 6cm and often weighing more than 20g. One can expect, therefore, that the females of this species cannot be small when they reach sexual maturity.

I have heard of breeding successes with one year old females; however, most often Amur Rat Snakes begin to reproduce when they are two or three years old. At this age they usually exceed 130cm.

I was very surprised when on the 2nd February this year I found two longish eggs in my vivarium in which I was keeping a female and two males of Elaphe schrenckii schrenckii. This was completely unexpected as the snakes were thought to be immature. The three snakes hatched on the 3rd of August last year so they were six months old. The female was 80cm long and the male snakes measured 79 and 86cm.

One of the eggs was sterile but the other seemed to be perfect. The next day three more eggs were laid but two of these were sterile. The good eggs were 64 and 72mm long weighing 19.5 and 21 g. The eggs were thinner than eggs laid by older and larger females. The eggs were incubated at a temperature of 24 to 28 degrees C (75 to 82 degrees F). The humidity was high. On the 17th of March the eggs started to

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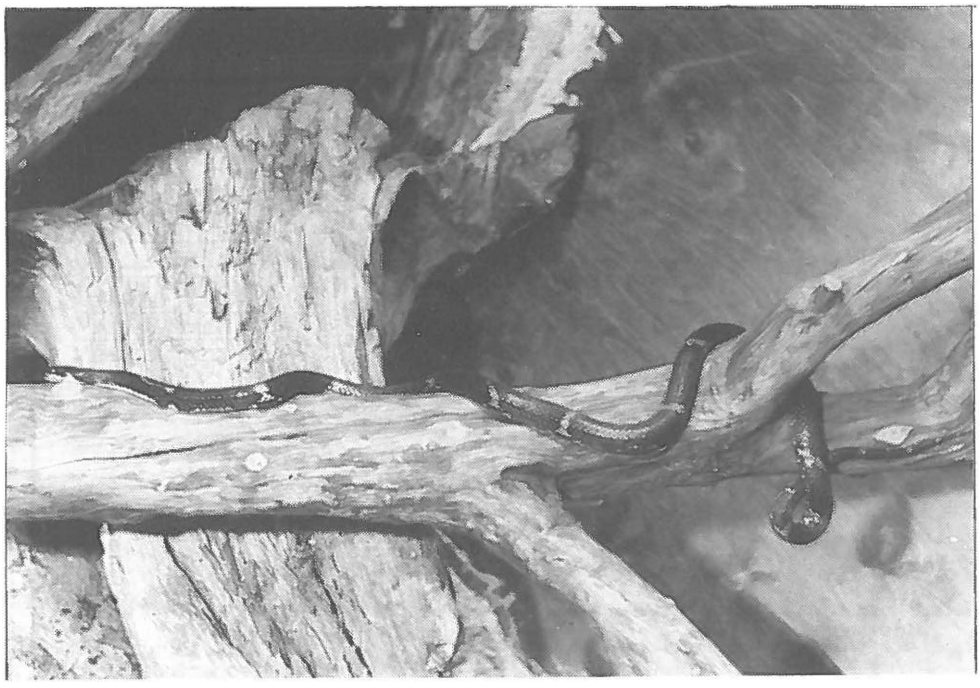
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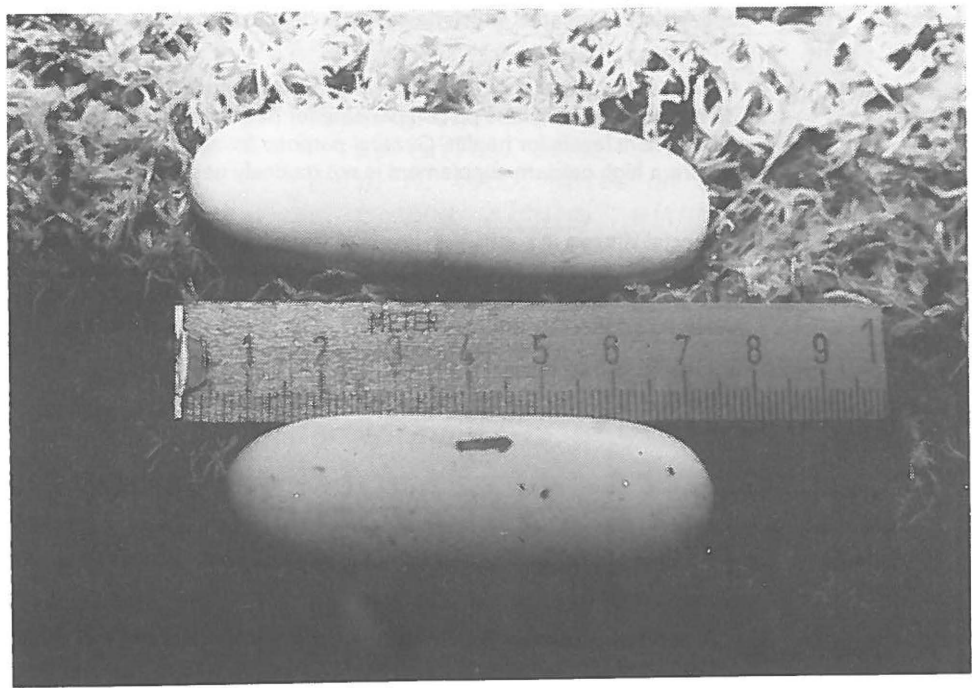
Left
Female Elaphe s. schrenckii

Below
The two fertile eggs laid by the young snake shown left

Photographs by Andrzej Kowalew

indent. On the 18th of March I found that one egg had been slit. The following day I discovered that the other egg had slit. The heads of the baby snakes were protruding from the slits.

On the 20th of March the snakes left their egg shells. The hatchlings showed no deformation and measured 31 and 33cm. When they sloughed seven days later I offered them pinkies which, much to my relief, they despatched immediately. So I hope that rearing the young will present no problem in the future.



I was concerned about the female as I thought she was too small to deposit such large eggs. However, since egg-laying the female has devoured a number of mice and seems to be very well.

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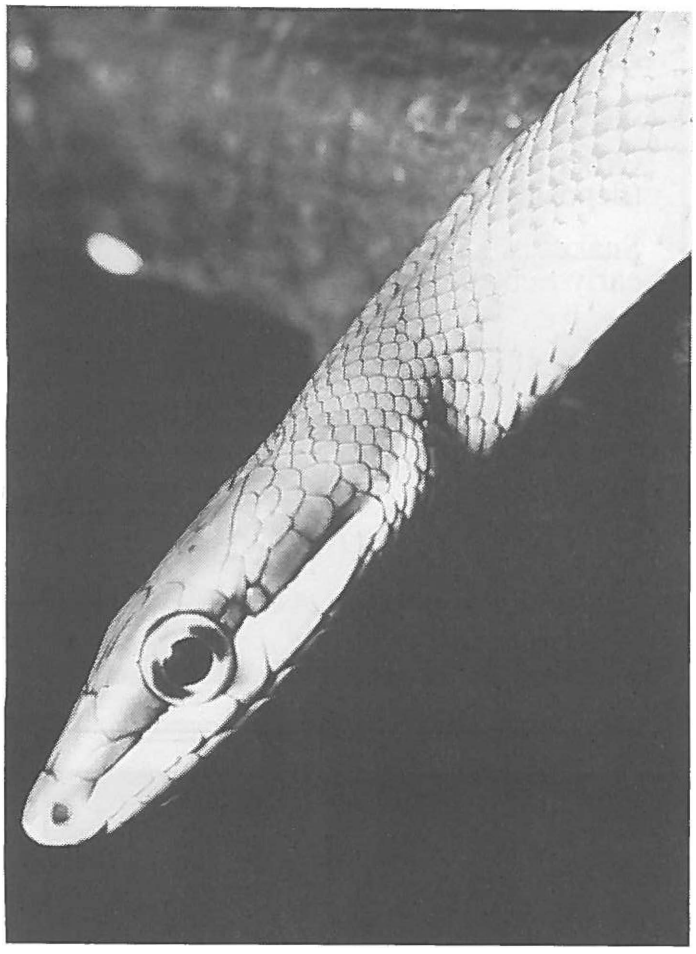
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The Maintenance and Breeding of the Red-tailed Green Racer, *Gonyosoma oxycephala*

by G.H. Heijnen



Introduction

Gonyosoma oxycephala (also known as Elaphe oxycephala) belongs to the sub-family Colubrinae (ground and tree snakes) of the family Colubridae and occurs in South-east Asia in a range which stretches from the Eastern Himalayas via Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia down to the Indonesian Archipelago (e.g. Java and Borneo) and the Phillipines. In the south of Vietnam this snake appears to be quite common, especially along the banks of the Mekong River. In this area it dwells in the bushes and trees in the vicinity of brackish water. This snake occurs most frequently in very moist tropical swamps (Trutnau, 1981).

The average length of a fully-grown Red-tailed Green Racer can be around two metres. The maximum length would appear to be around three metres, or so I was informed by the dealer from whom I bought my snakes. In their colouring and build, these snakes are perfectly adapted to their lifestyle. They have a long pointed head with a rounded snout. The eyes have round pupils (they are diurnal animals). A dark stripe runs from the nose over the head through the eye and to the throat. The scales are smooth and are a bright emerald green in colour. The belly is white, yellowish-white or even yellow. The tail is reddish-brown or yellowish-brown. According to the dealer, this colour depends upon the difference in the sexes. Sometimes the individual scales on the body have a dark border. Males should have a lighter coloured tail. Whether or not that is the case I do not know but in my case it is certainly true because the male has a lighter tail. The sexual differences in these snakes can easily be seen apart from the difference in their colouring; the base of the tail is much thicker in males than it is in females.

In this species the tongue is bright blue with grey spots. Even the manner of tongue-sensing is noteworthy; when sensing, the tongue moves in an upward direction followed by a downward direction.

From this description it will be obvious to the reader that here we are dealing with one of the most beautiful of all Colubrids.

During the past few years the Red-tailed Green Racer has been kept by an increasing number of herpetologists but most times without any great success. On arrival from the Far East the snakes are usually already in bad condition and quickly die. This article concerns my experiences with snakes of this species.

The Snakes and their Vivarium

At the beginning of April 1986 I came into possession of a pair of these snakes. On arrival the male weighed 600g and the female 850g. The male was a particularly attractive animal. The snake was (and still is) in flawless condition and is a beautiful emerald green colour. He has a

bright yellow ring between his body and his magnificent yellowish-brown tail. He is a very lively animal and is always interested in what is going on around him. When sensing the air the bright blue tongue goes straight upwards. The animal has never given any cause for concern.

The female, however, was less perfect. She had a rather damaged head and the reason for this soon became clear; she was regularly to be found burrowing in the substrate of the vivarium. The female is a similar colour to the male but without the yellow ring. She is also somewhat thinner. The tail is also not entirely complete. On her body there are a number of blueish stripes.

On arrival the snakes were first placed in a quarantine vivarium. Although I was unable to see any external parasites, I treated the snakes with Neguvon (0.2% = 2g per litre of water). This treatment was repeated after five days to remove any newly-hatched or remaining parasites.

After a few days there followed a Panacur treatment against worms (10mg per kg of body weight). This preparation is

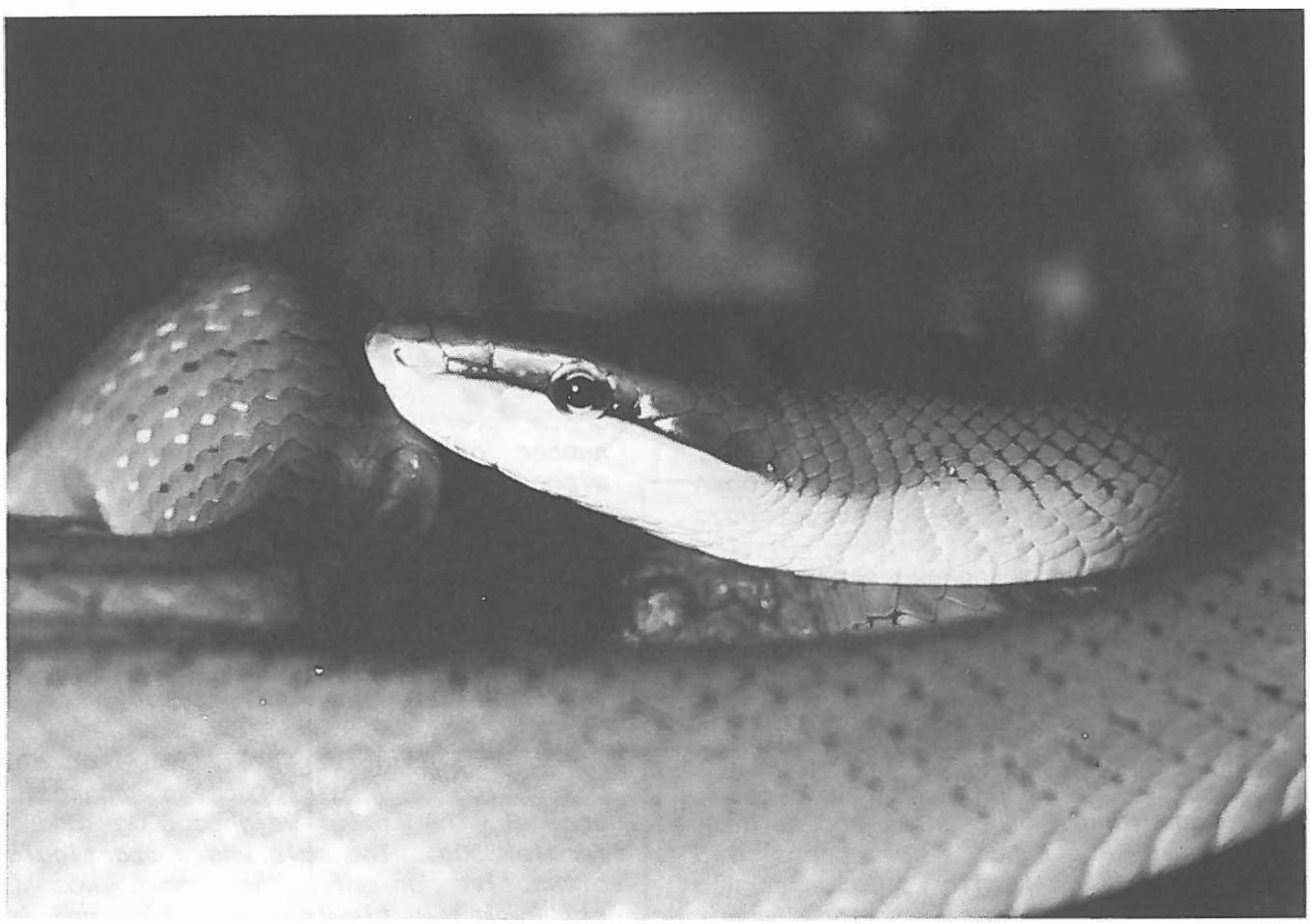
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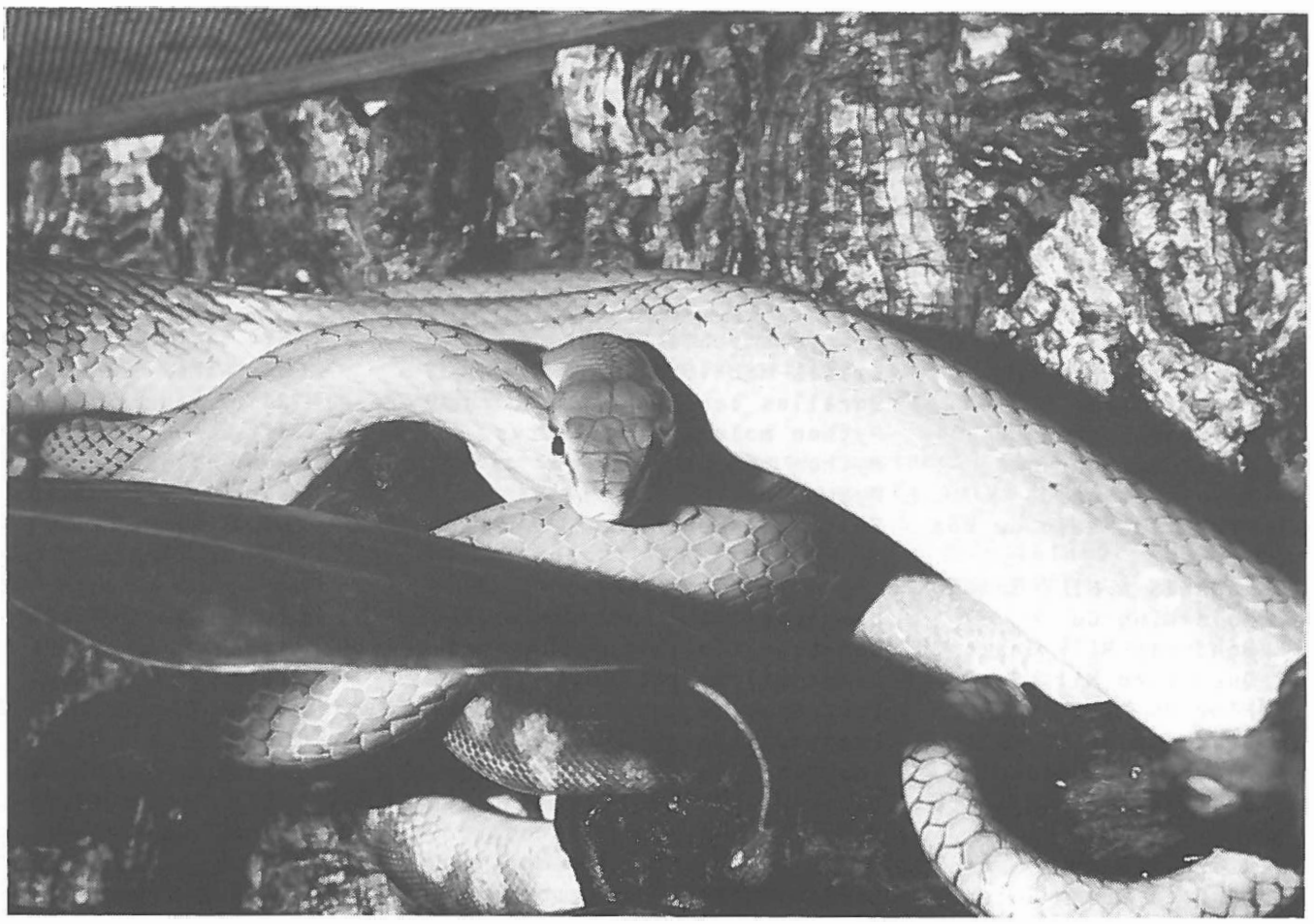
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Gonyosoma oxycephala

Photo: J.J. van Duinen



Gonyosoma oxycephala

Photo: J.J. van Duinen

effective against the ripe and unripe stages of a great number of worms, including lungworms. Wild-caught animals are only very rarely free from worms. This treatment was repeated after 14 days. Between these two treatments the snakes were also treated against unicellular intestinal parasites (flagellates and amoebas) using Ridzol-S (active ingredient Ronidazol 10%) in a dosage of 100mg/kg.

After the completion of these treatments, each of the snakes was given a mouse but neither of them showed any interest. I knew that Red-tailed Green Racers fed mainly on birds and so day-old chicks were also subsequently tried. The snakes showed no interest in these either.

Because the snakes had not fed for 14 days I decided to try the following 'trick'. Red-tailed Green Racers are known to be very aggressive snakes. The male especially tried to bite my hand every time I placed it in the tank. The female is less belligerent and allows herself to be handled quite easily. I made use of the aggression of these snakes in the following manner; I placed two fairly small mice and a dead Zebra Finch in a bowl of warm water. After the mice had been soaked for five minutes I held them in front of the snakes using forceps some 30cm long. At first I irritated the male with a mouse which he soon lunged at and then swallowed without any problem. The female then took her mouse in the same way. After a few attempts, this manner of feeding became much easier. Finally I was able to give the snakes mice which had not been in contact with a bird, and eventually the female began to take mice without first having to be irritated, whilst the male lunged at the mice spontaneously. After the completion of the quarantine period the snakes were placed in their own large vivarium. This vivarium measures 150cm long, 70cm deep and 120cm high and is furnished as a jungle vivarium. It is fitted with running water which comes from a tap and drips into a water bowl. The water bowl has an overflow which leads to a drain. The bowl is easily removed for cleaning. In addition there is a stopper so that soiled water can easily be removed after which it slowly refills from the dripping water.

Part II of this article will appear in next month's issue.

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6.6	Honduran Milk Snake Cb	Lampropeltis triangulum hondurensis	48in	95.00
1.2	Queretaro Milk Snake Cb	Lampropeltis ruthveni	10in	98.00
2.	Florida King Snake	Lampropeltis getulus floridana	48in	75.00
1.	Desert King Snake Cb	Lampropeltis getulus splendida	32in	85.00
1.1	Brooks King Snake Cb	Lampropeltis getulus brooksi	15in	85.00
1.	Prairie King Snake Cb	Lampropeltis calligaster calligaster	15in	49.95
OTHER SPECIES				
6	Striped Green Racer	Drymobius ssp	from 15in	19.95
3	Jewel Snake	Drymobius margaritiferus	from 15in	19.50
1.1	Diadem Rat Snake Cr	Sphalerosophis diadema (rarely seen)	15in	95.00
8	Balkan Whip Snake	Coluber gemonensis	from 15in	35.00
1.1	Horseshoe Whip Snake	Coluber hippocrepis	from 30in	39.95
1	Ladder Snake Cr	Elaphe scalaris	12in	68.50
2.2	Corn Snake	Elaphe guttata guttata	from 15in	28.50
1.	Carolina Corn Snake Cb	Elaphe guttata guttata	24in	58.00
1.	Albino Corn Snake Cb	Elaphe guttata guttata	18in	49.95
100	Chinese Corn Snake	Elaphe bimaculata	from 12in	18.50
100	Chinese Rat Snake	Elaphe rufodorsata	15in	16.50
6.6	Hundred Flower Snake	Elaphe moellendorffi (experts only)	40in	35.00
8.8	Mandarin Rat Snake	Elaphe mandarina (experts only)	30in	48.50
25	Russian Rat Snake	Elaphe schrenckii anata	48in	48.50
4.2	Texas Rat Snake	Elaphe obsoleta lindheimeri	from 48in	42.50
9.3	Yellow Rat Snake	Elaphe obsoleta quadrivittata	from 30in	32.50
3.2	Grey Rat Snake	Elaphe obsoleta spiloides	48in	48.50
1.1	Everglades Rat Snake Cb	Elaphe obsoleta rossalleni	30in	48.50
1.	Bull Snake Cb	Pituophis melanoleucus sayi	from 5ft	95.50
1.	Northern Pine Snake Cb	Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus	5ft	125.00
1.	Florida Pine Snake	Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus	5ft	125.00
4.3	Central Am. Indigo Cr	Drymarchon corais melanurus	from 48in	75.00
3.3	Black Racer	Coluber constrictor	from 18in	12.95
1	Striped Whip Snake	Masticophis flagellum taeniatus	40in	18.50
1	Eastern Coachwhip	Masticophis flagellum flagellum	40in	17.95
100	Red-sided Garter Snake	Thamnophis sirtalis	from 12in	12.50
25	Ribbon Snake	Thamnophis sauritus	from 12in	10.50
12	Florida Water Snake	Nerodia fasciata	from 12in	12.95
1.1	Blotched Water Snake Cr	Nerodia taxisplilota	15in	pair 35.00
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2.2	Trans-Pecos Copperhead	Agkistrodon contortrix pictigaster	24in	55.00
2.1	African Bush Viper	Atheris nitschei	15in	150.00
2.2	Western Diamondback	Crotalus atrox	36in	39.95

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2.2	Timber Rattlesnake	Crotalus horridus horridus	36in	65.00
2.2	Sidewinder	Crotalus cerastes	15in	49.95
	MILDLY VENOMOUS (Backfang or toxic saliva. No licence required.)			
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3.3	Green Vine Snake	Oxybelis fulgidus	48in	49.95
5.8	European Cat Snake	Telescopus fallax	from 18in	28.50
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5	Parrot Snake	Leptophis ahaetulla	40in	16.50
	LIZARDS			
2.3	Solomon Island Monkey Tail Skinks	Corucia zebrata (Amazing!)	24in	from 95.00
3.3	Solomon Island Skink Cb	Corucia zebrata	12in	295.00
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15	Flying Gecko	Ptychozoon lionatum	6in	9.95
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15	Marine Toads	Bufo marinus	4in	9.50
10	Southern Toad	Bufo terrestrius	2in	3.95
100	USA Green Tree Frog	Hyla cineria	2in	3.50

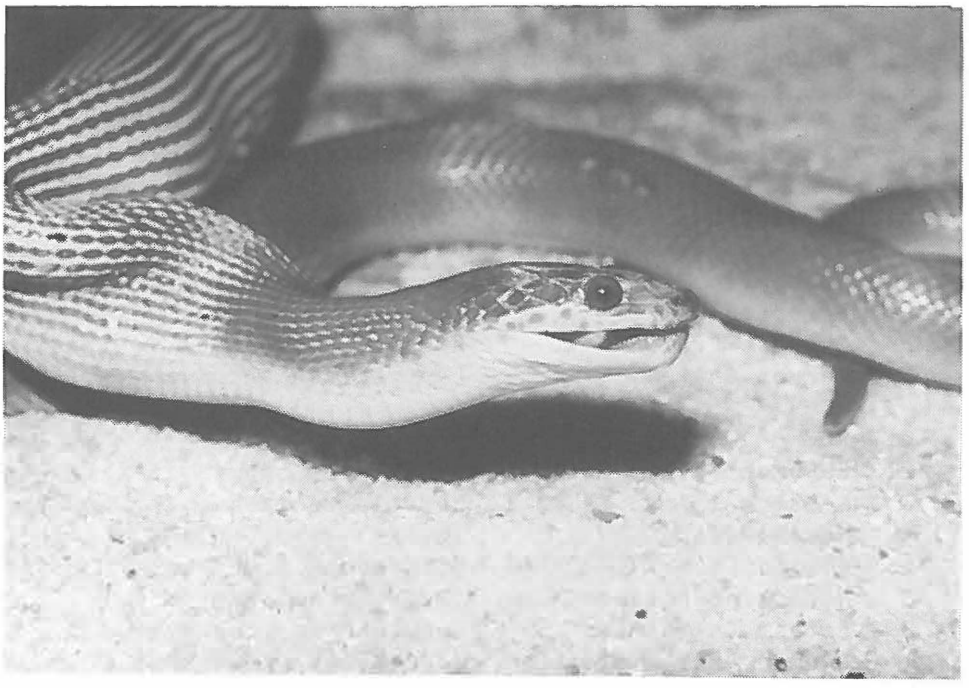
Key: 2.3 = 2 males & 3 females
25 = 25 specimens unsexed
Cb = Captive bred
Cr = Captive raised

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The Care and Breeding of the African House Snake *Lamprophis (Boaedon) fuliginosus*

by Peter Lietsch

The genus Boaedon was designated by Dumeril & Bibron in 1854 and contains eight species which, apart from Lamprophis (Boaedon) olivaceous which is aquatic, live predominantly in dry habitats from the edges of deserts to the edges of forests. They are also followers of civilisation. Their constant presence in the vicinity of human habitation has given them their common name of 'House Snakes'. The genus belongs to the family of Lycodontinae (Wolf-tooth Snakes) which is one of the largest and most populous families of the Colubrids. Lamprophis (Boaedon) lives from Arabia through East Africa southwards to the Cape. The colouring of these snakes is very variable even within one species. It can vary from golden-olive to a rich brown. Because of their small size, 50 to 100cm, they are ideal candidates for life in the vivarium and because of their relatively simple requirements they can live for quite some time in captivity.



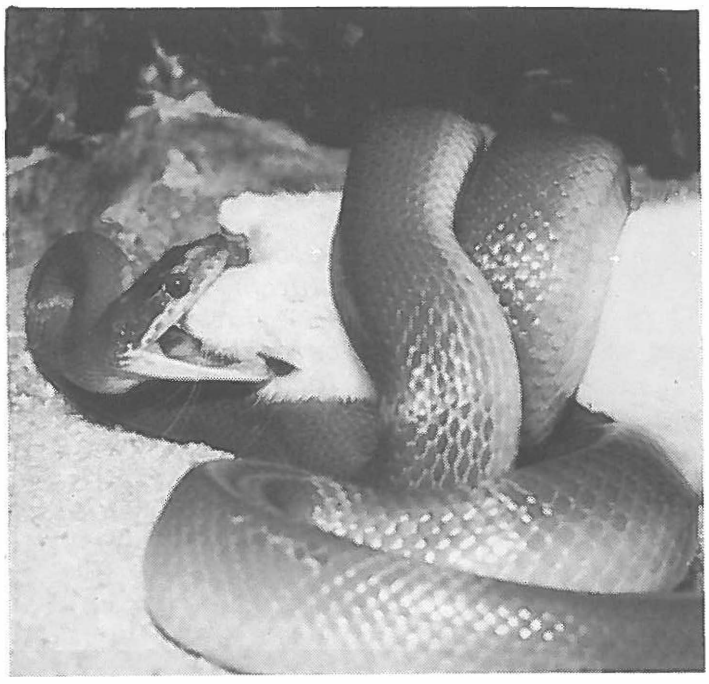
Lamprophis (Boaedon) fuliginosus
Photo: Peter Lietsch

I keep my animals as a pair in a vivarium of 70 x 30 x 45cm which is furnished as a dry vivarium. The back and side walls are covered with tree bark and as a substrate I use a 1:3 peat/sand mixture which is kept dry. The hiding place is kept moist using a little moss which is lightly sprayed twice a week. This hiding place is also covered with tree bark which gives the snakes a little 'back pressure' which gives them security in their hiding place. To meet the snakes' water requirements, a small water bowl is placed in the vivarium.

The snakes are fed on small mammals of the appropriate size. It is amazing to see the size of the prey which this relatively small snake can overpower and cope with. I prefer to feed my snakes on laboratory mice but small rats and hamsters are also avidly taken. Contrary to what I have read in available literature, my House Snakes have not eaten birds or birds' eggs.

A 15 watt incandescent lamp inside an earthenware flower pot serves as a localised heat source and this is regularly sought out by these nocturnal snakes.

In August 1986 I received a pair of Lamprophis (Boaedon) fuliginosus, the parents of which originated in Ethiopia. The young were small and very elegant animals. They measured approximately 28cm and weighed 29 and 32 grams. With intensive feeding on baby mice, the snakes grew very quickly so that in January 1987 the female had reached a length of 60cm and a weight of 60g whilst the male was 48cm and 53g. At this point the snakes were eating almost fully-grown furred mice. The well-developed snakes continued to grow in both length and weight and on the 1st of March 1987 I was able to observe the first mating attempts, which were followed by the first real copulation on the 5th March 1987. This copulation continued uninterrupted for 20 hours after which they separated and re-mated on the 23rd March 1987. This time the copulation



Lamprophis (Boaedon) fuliginosus constricting a mouse

Photo: Peter Lietsch

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lasted for 19 hours. Following the copulation food was taken normally until the end of April when the female refused a mouse which was offered. She went into the hiding place and obviously did not want to be disturbed. This for me was a certain sign that a suitable egg-laying container should be placed in the vivarium. For this I used a plastic box measuring 18 x 27 x 10cm filled with moist peat.

From the 9th of May 1987 the female slid restlessly around the vivarium seeking a suitable place to lay her eggs and finally decided upon the plastic box which had been placed there for that purpose. On the 12th of May 1987 the eggs were laid, a process which took two and half hours. Eight very large eggs were laid, seven of which were fertile. This could be clearly seen from the colour of the eggs; the infertile egg was pure white whilst the others were pale pink.

For hatching the eggs were placed in a specially prepared incubator. This incubator is very easily made and is used by many herpetologists. It consists of three plastic boxes which are easily obtained in hardware shops. In the lower box there is water which guarantees the humidity in the incubator; the central box has holes drilled in the bottom and is filled with moist peat. This box is placed on top of the box; the third box serves as a lid and must have holes drilled in the side to facilitate ventilation. The eggs are now placed on the moist peat and covered with damp moss to prevent the condensation dripping directly onto them. It is not necessary to place a heat source in the water since it is sufficient to place the incubator above the lights on top of a vivarium. This also guarantees a day/night fluctuation. At temperatures of 28 to 30 degrees C during the day and 20 to 22 degrees C at night the young hatched after 69 to 75 days (for exact details see Table 1). Approximately one week after hatching the young snakes sloughed and after a further 2 to 3 days began to feed voluntarily on newborn mice.

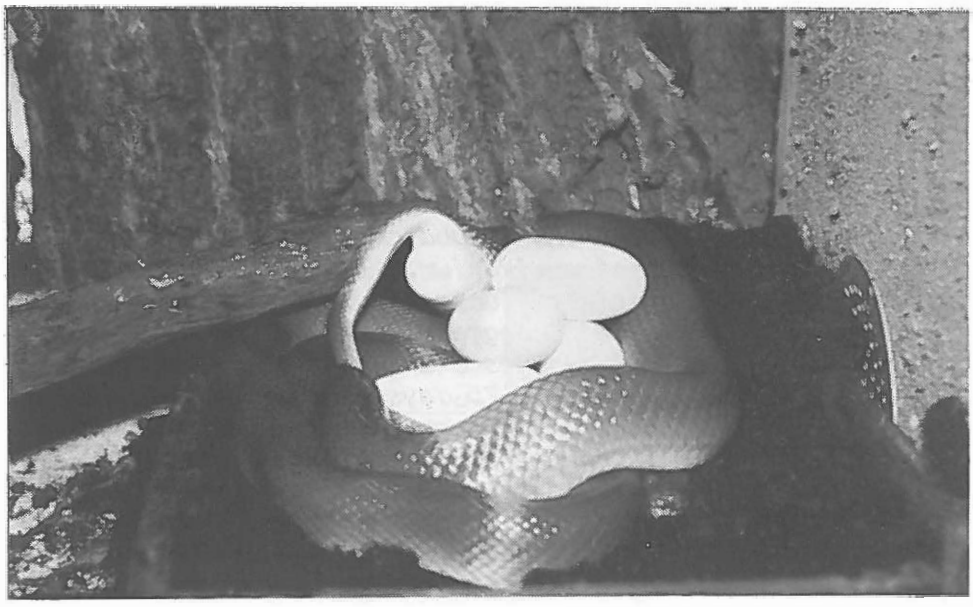
During the past few years the African House Snake has justifiably become a very popular animal in our vivaria. Their numbers have been increased through regular breeding but there is still a distinct possibility of these snakes disappearing because of herpetologists changing their interests and 'fancies' as other snakes become available. This has already been the case with several *Elaphe* and other species. It is our duty as herpetologists to maintain pairs of these snakes in our vivaria for breeding

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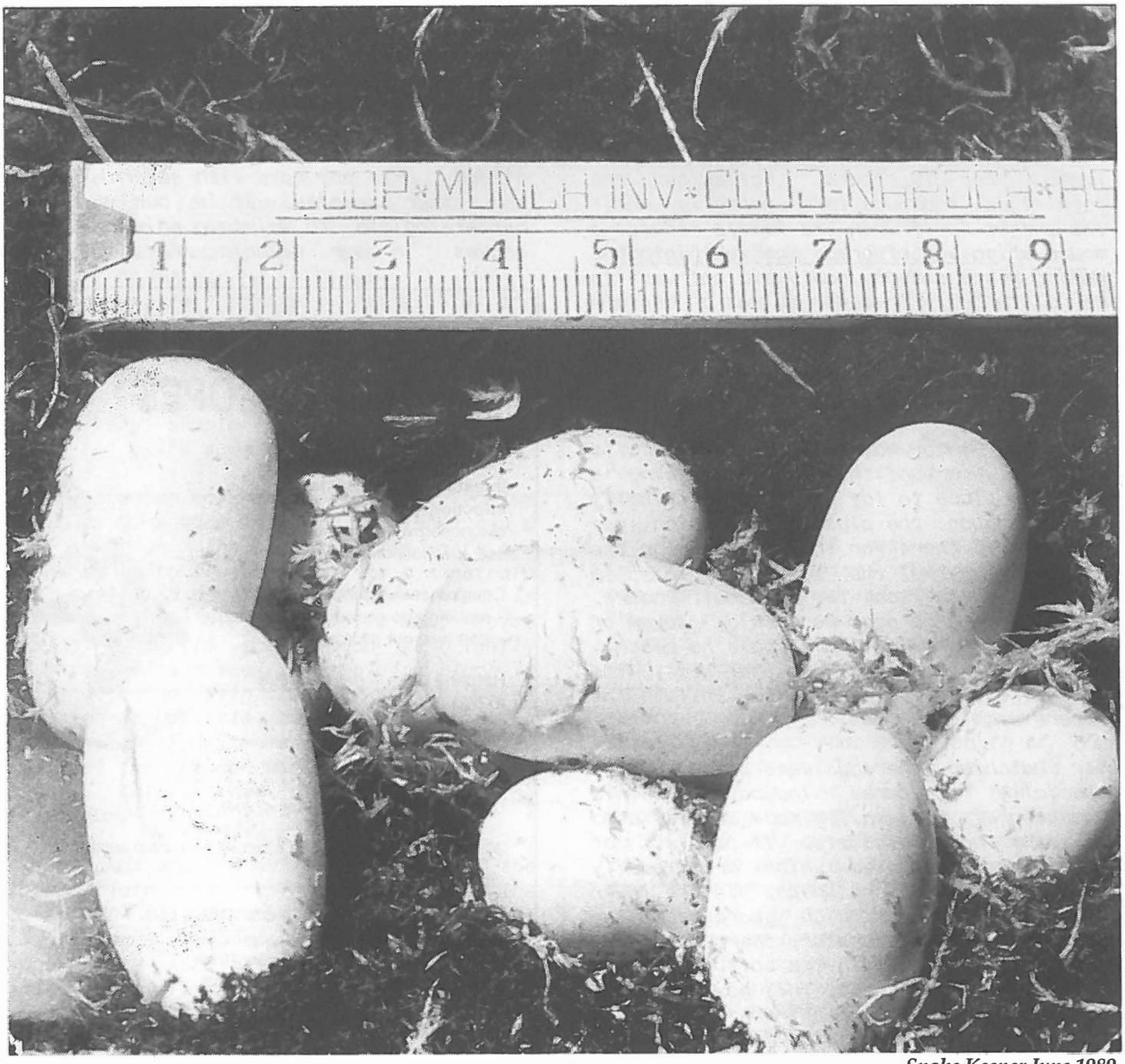
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Left
Lamprophis (Boaedon) fuliginosus laying eggs

Below
Clutch of eggs immediately after being laid. (Note the large size of the eggs.)

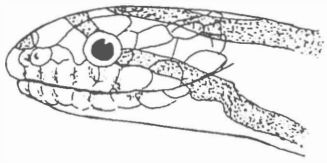
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BANDED/STRIPED/ ABERRANT/SPOTTED	*Lampropeltis getulus californiae*	£35.00
BLACK KINGS	*Lampropeltis getulus nigritus*	£45.00
FLORIDA KINGS	*Lampropeltis getulus floridana*	£30.00
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CAROLINA X FLORIDA CORNS	*Elaphe guttata guttata*	£18.00
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COMMON BOAS	*Boa constrictor constrictor*	£75.00
COLUMBIAN RAINBOW BOAS	*Epicrates cenchria maurus*	£65.00
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I can also get various other species from breeders here and abroad. If there are any particular specimens you require please contact me. For example, Fat tailed Geckos (*Hemitheconyx caudicinctus*), Namib desert Geckos (*Chondrodactylus angulifer*), New Caledonian giant Geckos (*Rhacodactylus auriculatus*), Trans-peco Rat Snake (*Elaphe subocularis*), other Elaphe and Lampropeltis species, Brazilian Rainbow Boas (*Epicrates cenchria cenchria*).

Animals are sent by British Rail Red Star. Box and carriage £15. When ordering please state your nearest BR station that accepts livestock and your full name, address and phone number. Callers are welcome but strictly by prior appointment only. Live arrival is guaranteed. All hatchlings are guaranteed healthy and feeding. Unrelated pairs are available for most species, please state when ordering if you require unrelated.

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purposes because, every day, as a result of new conservation legislation, it becomes more difficult to import wild-caught specimens.

Table 1.

Mating	Eggs laid	No.	Hatch date	Hatch time	Remarks
5.3	12.5	8	21.7	night	note 1
			22.7	1300h	
			22.7	2300h	
			23.7	1500h	
			24.7	1100h	
			25.7	2100h	note 2
25.6	16.8	7	24.10	1000h	note 1
2.7			24.10	1600h	
			24.10	2300h	
			26.10	1100h	
			26.10	1700h	
			28.10	1700h	
30.8	31.10	7	8.1	1800h	
			9.1	2300h	
			10.1	2000h	
			11.1	0900h	
			12.1	1100h	
			12.1	1600h	
			13.1	1500h	
	29.1	10			note 3

Notes 1 One egg infertile
2 With assistance
3 Mating not observed

*****

Author's address Peter Lietsch
Am Ganseanger 14, PF15/60
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German Democratic Republic

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This article originally appeared in the magazine 'Aquarien-Terrarien' 9/88 in the German Democratic Republic and is printed with the kind permission of the Author. Translated from the original German by John Hackworth.

Hog Island Boa Scale Counts by Colin Clark

I now feel that due to the limited response I have had to requests for sloughed skins or scale counts, that someone else must be doing the same study and snapping up the information. So I will take this opportunity to publish the results I do have, insignificant as they may be.

Specimen Number	Sex	Dorsal count	Ventral count	Caudal count
1	M	70	251	68
2	F	72	247	58
3	F	76	247	58
4	?	74	249	61
5	F	72	246	68
6	F	69	248	**
7	F	69	247	56
8	F	72	246	**
9	M	74	249	62
10	F	75	247	56
11	F	--	---	60
12	M	--	---	70
13	F	72	245	56
14	F	74	242	59
15	M	71	243	68

Notes Dorsal count taken at mid body
** = incomplete

I wouldn't like to hazard a guess as to the sex of specimen no. 4 although specimen no. 9 has a low caudal count and I've been assured that he is 100% male.

I hope the above information is of some use. I would like to thank those people who have taken the trouble to send me sloughed skins and information, in particular, Lesley Lawrence for the information on specimens 11 and 12 and a special thank you to Greg James of Redmond Washington, U.S.A. for taking the time and trouble to send the information given for specimens 13, 14 & 15.

I have not yet finished the survey so if any reader keeps Hog Island Boas I would appreciate any information they can give me. (Perhaps this article may produce a similar response to that in Volume 3, No. 3 from N. Morris.)

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Peruvian Red-tailed Boas	Boa constrictor ortonii	£250.00	D'Albert's Pythons
Surinam Red-tailed Boas	Boa constrictor sp.	£175.00	Liasis albertisii
Brazilian Rainbow Boas	Epicrates cenchria cenchria	£175.00	£295.00

Cornsnakes... Amelanistic, anerythristic, Snow, Blood Red, Motley, Okeetee & Striped.
Kingsnakes... Albino California, Blotched, Brook's, Baja Mt. and albino Prairie.
Ratsnakes... Everglades, Blond Trans-Pecos, leucistic Texas and albino Black.
Milksnakes... Sinaloan, Pueblan, Mexican, Nelson's, Ruthven's, Jalisco.

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* Appendix 1 species. D.O.E. Exemption required.

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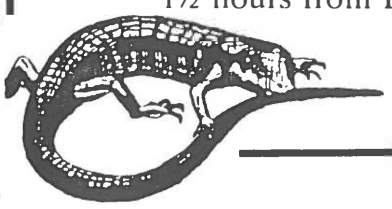
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Experiences in Snake Keeping, Part III

by Malcolm Flux

I found a pair of planting tongs I used for the fish tank and as I was grasping the mouse's tail to lift it into the air something orange and totally elastic flashed out from under the bark and took the mouse.

I don't know which was the fastest; my hand jerking back or Sid. However I was delighted. The first main hurdle had been overcome and I rushed to tell Pauline the good news.

Now the search was on for more snake information. We remembered that Poole in Dorset had a Serpentarium on the quayside. At the next possible opportunity we combined a visit to the shops in Poole with a visit to the Serpentarium. This was a place of wonder; fish of all types (even a Lemon Shark), spiders, lizards and, above all, snakes. Having spent hours just looking we came to a display showing the recent breeding successes and just visible under a piece of bark was the brilliant red, yellow and black colours of a hatchling Scarlet Kingsnake (Lampropeltis triangulum elapsoides). This, to me, was the most spectacular colouration I had ever seen (except on a snakes and ladders board) and, as I was enthusing about it, a member of staff came over. I was able to ask all the usual novice-type questions about the snake.

During the conversation I asked if I could purchase this, or any like it, locally. I was told that a snake keeper in Portsmouth (seventy miles away) had a pair for sale. I was given his telephone number and, as soon as we arrived home, I was on the phone immediately. Bob, the seller, gave me the instructions needed to find his house which we did the following night.

On arrival we were taken to his reptile room and shown the pair of Scarlet Kingsnakes. I questioned Bob about the adult size of these small snakes and was amazed to find that they were nearly fully grown. I had foolishly thought that these snakes would grow to 1.8 or 2m at maturity and I was disappointed to discover the truth.

Upon looking around I was delighted to see lots of other big snakes including Black Ratsnakes (Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta), Pine Snakes (Pituophis sp.), Rainbow Boas (Epicrates cenchria) and Common Boas (Boa constrictor). Bob very patiently showed us all of them in turn even though he knew that I was no longer interested in the Scarlet Kingsnakes. I asked him where I could gain more information about the husbandry of reptiles and he mentioned that he was the Chairman of the Portsmouth Reptile and Amphibian Society which met every third Monday at 7pm in the main Portsmouth library. This information was manna from heaven. At last I could talk to people who did not think you were a trifle strange in liking reptiles and who had an enthusiasm to talk to and help the less well-informed.

The round trip to Portsmouth library was seventy miles and on the next third Monday I was there fifteen minutes early and ready to listen. Slowly various people began to arrive and gradually the hall filled up. I couldn't believe it; over fifty people in one place talking about nothing but reptiles - fantastic!

Bob soon arrived and I asked him what happened at normal club meetings. He said that for the first half hour it was a general chat and then a talk on a herpetological subject. On that particular night it was a talk on the 'Care and Captive Breeding of the Indigo Snake' by the now-deceased Richard Ashton. This was one of the snakes featured in the one and only book I had and it looked quite spectacular in black and white so what would it be like in the flesh?

Richard put the suitcase he had brought with him on the table and opened the lid. At first nothing happened then a magnificent jet black head of a snake appeared over the top of the case with its tongue flicking in and out. A sharp intake of breath followed by a gasp emanated from everyone in the room and not a single pair of eyes were anywhere but on this incredible reptile. A tingle ran down my spine as Richard lifted the remaining 2m of this beautiful creature out of its container. I was immediately hooked.

This was the size I wanted my second snake to be, I thought. Richard certainly knew his

subject and covered every detail with great confidence. He had brought a pair of Indigo Snakes with him and while he talked about the female he offered the large male to the audience to handle. Luckily, due to my enthusiasm, I was seated in the front row so I did not have long to wait before being given the privilege of holding the amazing animal.

After the talk had finished, I approached Richard and discussed with him the possible source of any hatchlings for sale. He said that he knew of only one at that moment in time and this particular snake was in Dorset. He gave me the telephone number of the person to contact and I left the meeting keener than ever.

The next evening I telephoned Geoff, who had two hatchling Indigo Snakes (one of which he was keeping for himself). The other one was for sale but was not available yet as Geoff was not satisfied with its feeding habits. This suited me perfectly as it would give me time to sort out some living quarters for the snake. I made arrangements to visit Geoff and did so the following Sunday. Mike, a friend of mine, had taken a great interest in Sid the Corn Snake and one evening his wife June telephoned me. Now June has one major dislike in life and that is snakes so I was very surprised when she asked me if I could obtain a hatchling Corn Snake and all the necessary equipment to house it. This was to be a surprise Christmas present for Mike. I knew Geoff had some hatchling Corn Snakes for sale and as I had a male (Sid) I arranged to collect a female (with possible future breeding in mind) when I went to see the Indidgo Snake.

Geoff's collection was fascinating; tanks and cages everywhere full of frogs, lizards, toads and snakes. He showed us the hatchling Indigo Snake which seemed a very tiny snake when compared to Richard's animals. However I was assured that it would grow. I decided to buy it and arrangements were made for Geoff to telephone me when he was happy with the snake's feeding pattern.

The next week saw me trying out all sorts of combinations of places in which to keep the soon-to-be-acquired snake. In the end I decided to move the fish from a 1.2m tank into a bigger tank leaving the smaller tank available for Sid (who was now about 60cm in length. Ken, from the pet shop, kindly made me a suitable top for this tank and Sid was installed in his spacious new home. I had decided that kitchen roll was not very decorative in the quantity needed to cover Sid's new home so I sterilised the gravel substrate that was originally in the fish tank. With the plant backdrop that was enjoyed by the previous residents, a few rocks and a spotlight, I felt it was an attractive set up.

I made several phone calls to Geoff during the next few weeks and it appeared that the Indigo Snake was still not feeding voluntarily. In the meantime Poole Serpentarium had successfully incubated a clutch of Florida Kingsnake (Lampropeltis getulus floridana) eggs and had offered them to the members of our society. The fact that I had an empty tank was too much to resist and consequently 'Florrie' arrived.

Two weeks before Christmas, I had a phone call from Geoff and it was the worst news I could possibly imagine. He told me that the Indigo Snake was still not feeding properly. My heart sank to my feet; it felt even lower. However, Geoff offered to sell me the hatchling he was keeping for himself. I was overwhelmed. (Sadly, I found out later that the difficult feeder had died.)

We collected the tiny animal and installed him in the third tank, put it back in pride of place on the television and stood back to admire it. I put a small cardboard box in the tank as a retreat for the snake which it soon discovered and disappeared inside. I decided not to feed him for two days so that he could settle down in his new surroundings but after only one day had passed I could not resist the temptation to try feeding him with a small defrosted fluffy mouse. I put the mouse right in front of the hole in the box and waited. Eventually the snake came over to the entrance and flicked his tongue in and out over the mouse then disappeared back into his retreat.

During the next week I tried the snake on a freshly defrosted mouse every evening but it showed not the slightest interest. I then tried putting the mouse in the box and leaving it in all night. When I looked the next morning the snake was lying as far away from the mouse as possible.

The next club meeting was due soon so I

was hoping for a good suggestion and miraculous cure from one of the experienced members. I pestered everyone at the meeting and received various suggestions including trying rat pups, live mice (heaven forbid), pink mice and a mouse with lizards egg smeared on it. I tried all of these suggestions, having scrounged a Gecko egg from Bob and some rat pups and pinkies from Ken, but all to no avail.

A call to Geoff brought some new suggestions and he assured me that the snake was eating 'fluffs' whilst in his possession. I was getting more despondent by the day and after nine weeks had still not had any success.

I was desperate and willing to try anything; even force feeding. I had some sprats in the freezer (the main food for the Piranha) and remembered reading somewhere that Indigo Snakes ate amphibians in the wild. In desperation I thawed out a sprat and rubbed it over a fluffy mouse. This was the nearest thing I had to an amphibian but anything was worth a try. I put the prepared mouse in the tank (now moved to a spare bedroom to create a more peaceful environment). The hatchling flicked his tongue over the mouse and struck!

I shouted out in loud excitent and flew down the stairs to tell anyone who would listen. I cannot explain the relief I felt. After nine weeks the hatchling was now feeding. Over the next eight weeks I scented all his food with a sprat and he took it every time. I gradually reduced the amount of scent until he took his first unscented mouse six months after I acquired him.

I now had seven tanks dotted around the lounge, three containing fish, three containing snakes and one holding a Tarantula. Something would have to be done as I had been told that Bob's Pine Snake had laid a clutch of eggs and there was nowhere to balance another tank. Besides, the Indigo Snake (christened ET, after the character in Spielberg's film) and Florrie would require larger accomodation very soon.

Hours were spent designing and drawing a unit to fit on one side of our fireplace. It had to be 1.8m without a doubt and the most it could protrude into the room was 53cm. I decided the two 1.2m fish tanks would have to go. I gave my collection of cold water fish to a friend with a large pond. Sid was transferred to a temporary 60cm tank that I had kept in the loft.

I set to work designing the vivarium unit. The layout gave nine separate compartments each one fitted with a spotlight, 40W in each of the top three levels and 25W in the bottom section. Each light had its own control switch via a 500 watt dimmer switch. Each section also had a substrate heating cable again with its own control switch but this time via a 200 watt dimmer switch. The cabinet material was a wood-effect laminated chipboard with the back made of hardboard and sealed with polyurethane varnish. Access to the front is through sliding glass doors; 4mm glass for the top two levels and 6mm glass for the lower sections. Ventilation is taken care of by two caravan vents per compartment; one mounted two inches from the top of the compartment and the other two inches from the bottom. Each compartment has its own thermometer and hygrometer and independent time switches operate the lighting and substrate heating. The whole cabinet is assembled using fixing blocks so it would dismantle easily. All of the butted joints were sealed with silicon sealant to protect the chipboard from moisture.

I visited the local d.i.y. store and purchased 20 ventilators, 9 greenhouse thermometers, 19m of 53cm laminated chipboard, 2 sheets of 1.8 x 1.2m hardboard, 15m of lighting flex, 1 box of flex clips, 2 tubes of silicon sealant, 50 fixing blocks, 5 x 25 watt flexible wine bottle heaters, 4 demijohn heating pads and 2 dimmer switches. In addition, I purchased 9 spotlights and 2 sets of nine-gang switches from other sources. I already possessed half of the glass I needed which I had saved from a double glazing unit. Due to the size of the finished unit it had to be constructed in situ. So I began to hammer, drill, screw and seal. I had to work mostly in the evenings and finish any noisy work by 8pm as, by then, the children were attempting to get to sleep in the room above.

I was going to use a new type of cat litter as the substrate.This was not the old grey dusty stuff but a new type consisting of sawdust mixed with a water soluble adhesive and extruded into a pellet approximately 2cm long by 4mm in diameter. This is sold under the name

'Tact'. This new cat litter has proved highly successful with all sizes of snakes and allows a reasonable amount of decorative furnishings to be included without a major disturbance being needed for cleaning. The substrate heaters were sandwiched between the base and slate roof tiles and the Tact was just poured over them.

I joined the International Herpetological Society and took out a subscription to Snake Keeper. Both of the publications, apart from having very interesting and up to date articles, also had a 'For Sale' section which contain mainly captive bred animals. The 'Exchange and Mart' reptile section seems to consist mainly of adverts from dealers selling imported animals.

My monolith was eventually finished and with lots of plastic ferns and ivy, bark, rocks and pebbles added it was time to install the snakes. One of the nicest things that a reptile enthusiast can have is empty cages. This is very helpful when an unexpected opportunity to purchase another snake arises. Close on the heels of the Indigo and Corn Snakes and the Florida Kingsnake came a Pine Snake from Bob's hatchlings. Then came a Sinaloan Kingsnake resulting from a Society trip to London Zoo. This was followed by a pair of Californian Kingsnakes obtained from other members of our society, a Pine Snake from Dennis Lee (to make an unrelated pair), a pair of Everglade Ratsnakes (obtained at the London Symposium), a Brazilian Rainbow Boa from the late Richard Ashton's collection and a Common Boa from an Essex snake breeder.

I attempted to hibernate the Californian Kingsnakes in 1978/88 but the winter was so mild that I had great difficulty in keeping them cold enough and unfortunately lost one. I think it may have had an internal parasite as it appeared to collapse inwardly. Its mate. which was the same size, survived quite well.

The Portsmouth Reptile and Amphibian Society encourages its members to exhibit their animals at the Portsmouth Show for three days in August and at our own two-day show in September. We raise money for the society's funds from these shows by selling sloughed skins and photographing snake handling. In the case of our own show we charge a small admission. In 1988 we were able to donate £400 to the British Herpetological Society Land Fund which enables them to lease heathland in Dorset and thus protect it from development.

Some of the other benefits from belonging to a herpetological society are the opportunities to see 'behind the scenes' in such places as the Reptile House in London Zoo, Poole Aquarium, The Cotswold Wildlife Park and other members' private collections. The endless discussions and advice from others who share the same interests is highly enjoyable and you also have the opportunity to obtain the names and addresses of snake breeders which is very useful if you trying to obtain a certain species or gender.

I have recently gained a secondhand fridge/freezer which just fits into the garage and I have stocked the freezer section with snake food. I am hibernating a pair of Pine Snakes in the fridge section and I hope they will breed during the spring.

My next ambition is to go on an organised 'herpetological holiday', if such things exist. I hope that the ramblings of a keen novice were not too boring and I would like to thank all the people I have met during the three short years of my interest for all the help and advice so freely given.

*****

Forthcoming events (continued from p. 2)

2nd September — Zoologica
South of England Showground
Ardingly, Sussex

Contact C H Keeling
Telephone (0483) 37547

10th September — Salisbury and District
Aquatic Society Show
(inc. Reptile/Amphibian section)
College of Technology, Southampton Road
Salisbury, Wilts

Contact Mr R F Adams
26 Empire Road
Salisbury, Wilts SP2 9DF

7th October — Amateur Entomologists' Society
Annual Exhibition
Kempton Park Racecourse
Staines Road
Sunbury, Surrey

Contact Roy McCormick
125 Brocks Drive
North Cheam, Sutton, Surrey

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

Boa Constrictor, 6', male, £150. Indian Python, 3', £65. Both good feeders and very tame. Telephone Mr Poole on (0482) 502040 (Humberside).

Captive-bred Rainbow Boas (Epicrates cenchria maurus). Beautifully marked. £110. Contact Andrew Ginn on (061) 798 9395.

Orders being taken now for Brown House Snakes (Boaedon fuliginosus) and amelanistic and anerythristic Corn Snakes (Elaphe guttata guttata). Also 7W heatpads £6, feeding tongs £6. For 1989 hatchling prices send s.a.e. to J. Cole, 6 Salisbury Terrace, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JT. Phone (0305) 62311 early evenings or weekends.

Boa Constrictor. 4-5', healthy, feeding, slightly aggresive, £150. Telephone (01) 868 2096 (Harrow).

Indian Python (Monty). About 7'6" long, sex unknown. Docile, friendly, has been a good pet from hatchling. Will accept £75 for a good home. Telephone Sunbury on Thames 785600 (ext.222) during business hours or Guildford 222776 after hours.

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

Captive-bred snakes/lizards for sale. Also black bush crickets £1.90 per 100 and General Electric ultra violet black lights. Ring (01) 524 2522 after 6pm.

Green Iguana, 4 years old, 3' long, £75 o.n.o. Corn Snake, 4', 5 years old, vivarium, £65 o.n.o. Telephone (02407) 2525.

Hatchling Dusty Hognose Snakes, £35. Californian Kingsnakes, £30. Desert Kingsnakes, £40. Available now or soon. Telephone Chris Mattison on (0742) 364433 (Yorks).

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

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, Orebro, Sweden.

Female Californian Mountain King Snake (Lampropeltis zonata). Also any information on breeding Ceratophrys ornata. Contact Andrew Ginn on (061) 798 9395.

Young Royal Python or similar Boa (between 3-12' when adult) up to £50 paid. Telephone Richard Lee on (0532) 820678 (Leeds).

Indian Python owner would like to contact anyone keeping snakes in S.E. London area with a view to meeting, exchanging ideas etc. Telephone Joe on (01) 852 0657 evenings.

Any information on Chrysopelea ornata, the Golden Tree Snake. I would be very grateful if anyone could send me details on keeping and breeding them in captivity. Mr L. Buncher, 57 Warwick Street, Leicester LE3 5SE.

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

EXCHANGE

Exchange pair of 2-3' Iguanas, feeding well on vegetables for pair of Rainbow Amievas. Also wanted Pink-tongue Skink, 8-10" and Eyed Lizard. Telephone (0733) 332445.

Snake Keeper Magazine

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