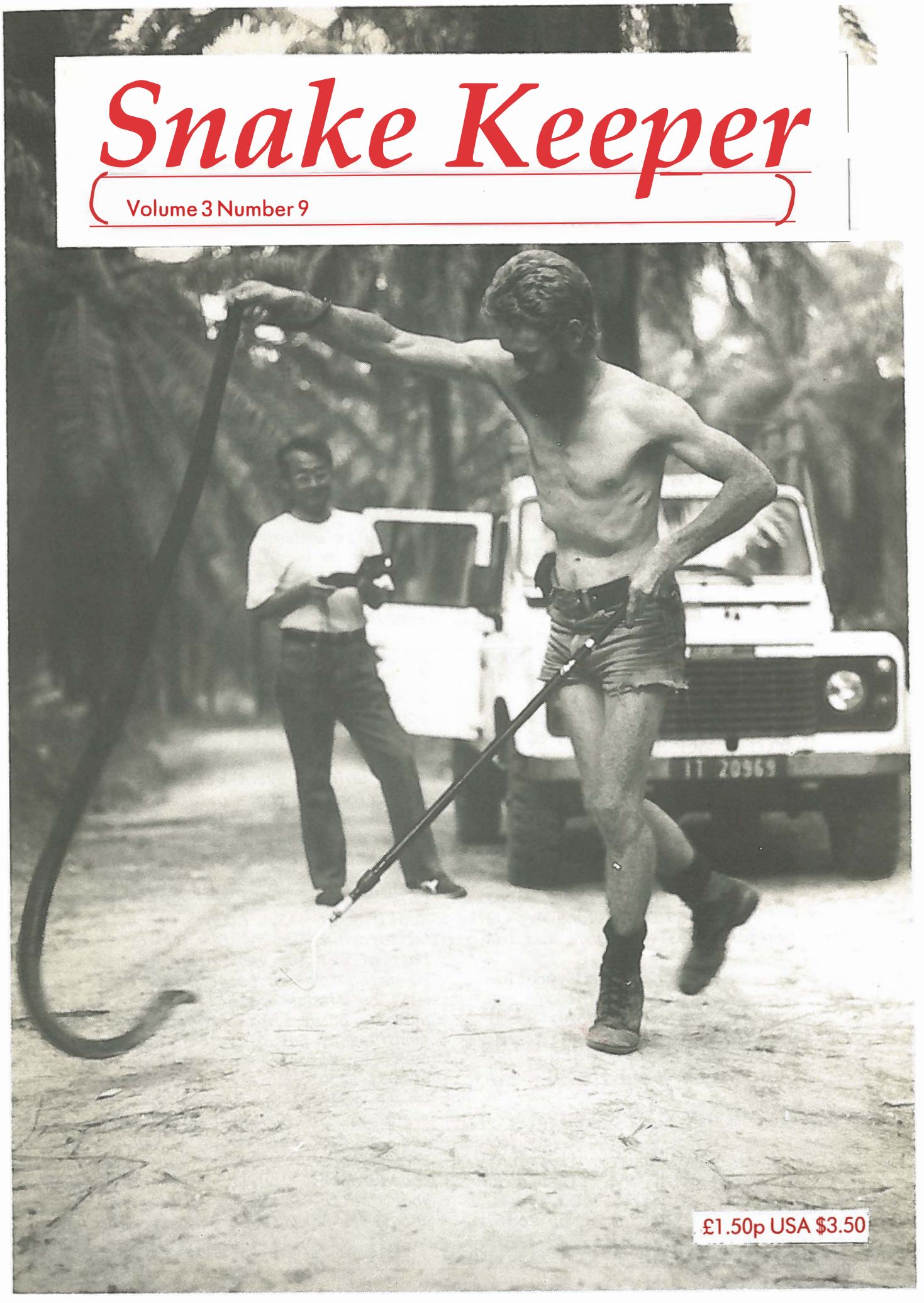
Snake Keeper

Volume 3 Number 9



£1.50p USA $3.50

Snake Keeper News

DUTCH SNAKE SOCIETY SNAKE DAY '89

The Dutch Snake Society have confirmed that their Snake Day on the 21st October will definitely take place at the University of Utrecht. Four lectures will be given during the day. Subjects to be covered include: The snakes of Columbia, Quarantining of snakes, the genus Pituophis and the genus Lampropeltis. Vince Scheidt will be travelling from the U.S.A. to give two lectures and will also have a wide selection of captive-bred snakes for sale at the event.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

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

16th/17th September — Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society Annual Show
Co-op Hall, Fratton Road, Portsmouth

Contact J Hollingsworth
Telephone (0329) 833017

17th September — I.H.S. Open & Sales Day
Memorial Hall
Great Barr
Nr Birmingham
(Jnct 7/M6)

Contact A J Mobbs
65 Broadstone Avenue
Walsall, West Midlands WS3 1JA

23rd September — Whipsnade Symposium
Whipsnade Zoo
Dunstable, Beds.

Contact C H Keeling
Telephone (0483) 37547

21st October — Dutch Snake Society
Snake Day '89
University of Utrecht
Utrecht, The Netherlands

Contact Jaap Kooij
Telephone Netherlands 02523-77253
(From UK dial 010 31 2523 77253)

WHIPSNADE SYMPOSIUM

Zoologist Mr C H Keeling has announced details of the Whipsnade Symposium. Described as "the first event of its kind - ever." Mr Keeling states " Many people have approached the powers that be - the thou shalt not brigade, who are opposed to the keeping by private individuals of non-domestic species - such as the RSPCA, the RSPB, the NCC, the DOE, the Environment Investigation Agency. As specialist groups, people keeping birds of prey or reptiles plead their case. This symposium is different. It's the only event where people of all persuasions when it comes to animal keeping - mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, amphibians and invertebrates - are going to give slide talks about their particular activities and enthusiasms to an audience which will include representatives of these organisations. It is perfectly obvious that many of the latter are quite unaware that there are some very serious private animal keepers about but that they are not necessarily pet keepers: they have some serious raison d'etre for keeping the species they do. I think that the anti-brigade are unaware of this. If we could, in effect, say to them 'you've heard what we have got to say, seen our slides of what we do with our stock, you've noted our attitude to animals - so now will you please leave us alone!'"

This unique event will be held at the Education Centre, Whipsnade Zoological Park, near Dunstable in Bedfordshire on Saturday the 23rd September 1989. Proceedings begin at 10am and end at 5.30pm and admission is strictly by ticket only. These are available from Mr C H Keeling at 13, Pound Place, Shalford, Guildford, Surrey GU4 8HH at £5 each to help offset the very high overheads. Only 90 delegates can be accomodated so tickets will be dispatched on a first come, first served basis and applications must be received by Saturday 16th September. For further details telephone Mr Keeling on (0483) 37547.

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



Snake Keeper

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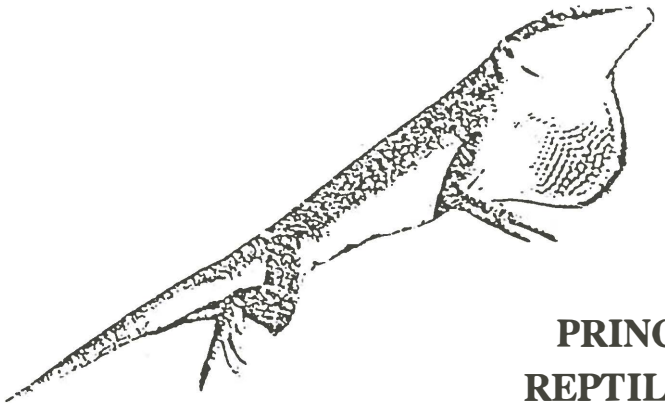
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Mark O'Shea holding a 2.5 metre, male forest cobra, Naja melanoleuca.
Photo: Mark O'Shea

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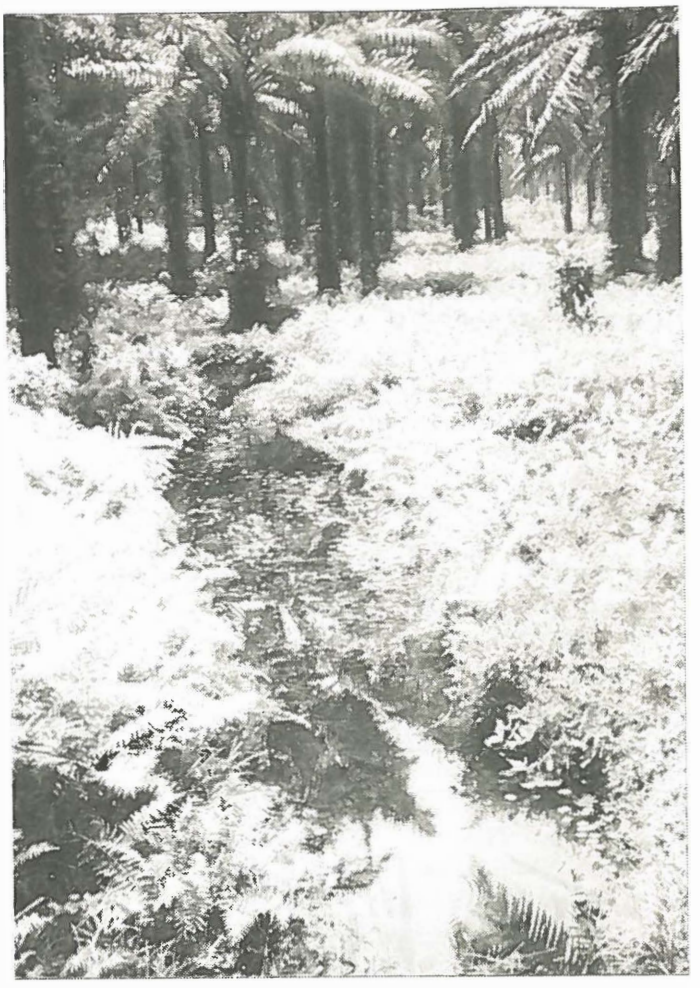
SETTING THE STANDARD FOR REPTILE-KEEPING IN THE 90's

Cameroon Cobra Catchers '89

by Mark O'Shea

It is quite usual, when a sizeable collection of live snakes has been built up, for the owner to receive a steady stream of visitors wishing to be thrilled, horrified or educated by being in close proximity to these much maligned and, to us, intrinsically beautiful creatures. I am sure this is a situation with which most private keepers can empathise but let me assure you that the lure of caged snakes is no different in tropical countries than at home. Indeed the draw these reptiles can achieve in a tropical country can prove to be greater than merely the odd acquaintance from work arriving unannounced on the doorstep with the cliched, "Well, I was just passing... and I just thought and er... you said one day you would..." In Honduras and Papua New Guinea whole communities came to call; entire villages trying to force themselves into my tiny bush science laboratory pointing, prodding and picking things up - not the snakes themselves I hasten to add, as actual physical contact with them was avoided by the front members of the crowd with a skill generally only witnessed in limbo-dancing demonstrations.

There is initially a display of total disbelief by the locals that you have come all the way from England to catch snakes, followed by the type of gasping admiration one can only achieve among such people when one deftly and, in the crowd's eyes magically, handles some poor, small inoffensive serpent whilst reciting its English and local names, preferred habitat and diet. This sort of admiration is coveted by the moth collector, who has just been shoved off his stool and out of the back of the tent by the surging mass of people who weren't even aware that the science tent was home to anyone else other than the 'snakeman'. Oh don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining about being visited by hordes of locals keen to see snakes. After all it gives me the opportunity to educate a few into recognising and not killing harmless species and it also guarantees that any snakes subsequently sighted near the village will be observed until the snakeman arrives and 'magically' captures it. It's just that as soon as one party of people has departed, three more persons



A creek in the oil palm plantation - prime cobra habitat. *Photo: Mark O'Shea*

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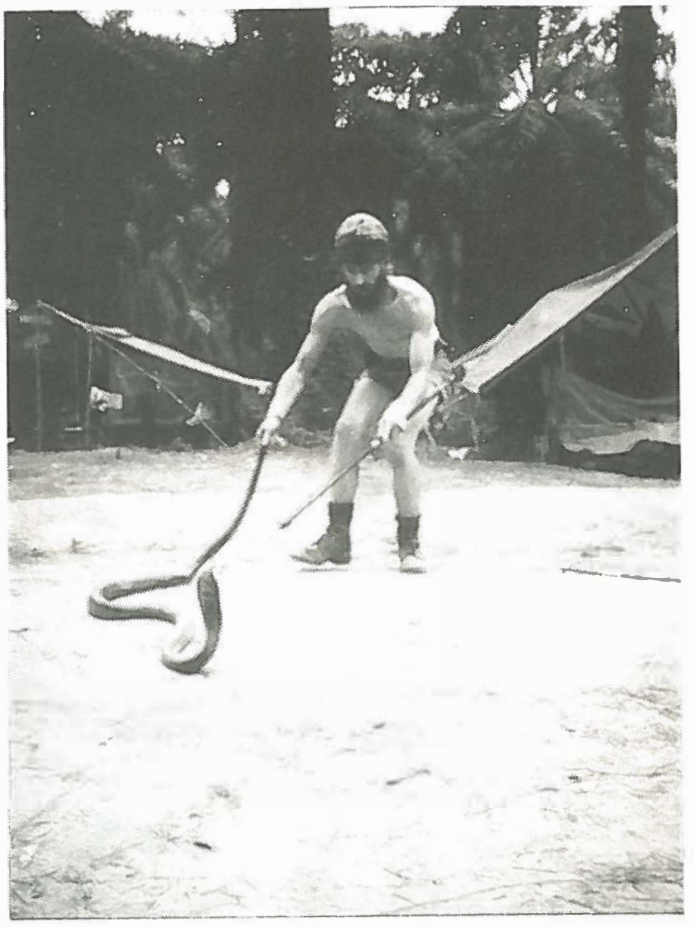
will arrive and demand a re-run of the snake show. Eventually much of the morning is given over to visitors rather than the methodical identification of difficult specimens, recording of data, checking of drift fences, scale counting, measuring, sexing, drawing and photographing of specimens already identified, all those tasks which simply must be performed in order to keep up to date and be able to release some of the specimens.

It was the arrival of the old man and the four words, "Want to see snake", which made me sigh. In the last two days I had been visited by a high school sixth form, a group of WWF staff and workers, the Commanding Officer of the nearest Gendarmerie barracks with his latest camouflage-bedecked, red-bereted contingent of para-military policemen and three

groups of Pamol workers from the oil palm plantation settlement down the road. I was standing there facing the old man trying to figure out how I was going to tell him there would be no more shows today, that I had to get on with some work and he should come back tomorrow morning, when two fellow expedition members, who had been talking to a young man, shouted over that he didn't want to see my snakes but rather did I want to see his snake, one that he had just seen in the plantation. "Yes", said the old man patiently "big snake, black - you want to see it?"

Usually in my book a snake sighting always means 'stop whatever you are doing and go for it' but this time I decided to put on my sturdy jungle boots before I went charging into the plantation undergrowth. The other two expedition members, Ian, a large Royal Engineer in an ill-fitting red t-shirt and Rab, a professional stuntman from Glasgow were already suitably shod having just come in from the bridge site. Operation Raleigh Cameroons were busy constructing a 120m suspension bridge over the Ndian River into the Korup National Park to allow wet season access for WWF personel and park workers. Calling over my shoulder that they go ahead with the old man and try to locate the the snake but under no circumstances try to catch it in case it was a cobra, I ran to pull on my boots and half lace them up before I set off in pursuit of my colleagues and the old man who was surprisingly quick on his feet. Running up the dirt road behind them I suddenly saw both Ian and Rab turn abruptly right into the vegetation. Almost immediately I heard Rab shout "It's a cobra" and I was just in time to meet Ian rushing back to the safety of the dirt track. Apparently the cobra had come down one of the oil palms and was heading into a pile of dead vegetation when Ian prodded it with a snakegrab. The snake turned and hooded, just once, and that was enough to convince them both of its identity.

Taking the grabstick from Ian I went into the vegetation to the pile of dead palm fronds where he said it had taken refuge. Sure enough something was moving around inside so I rapped the snakegrab on the dead foliage. Out came the cobra, a quick hood then back into the mass of tangled vegetation. Another rap with the grabstick and out it shot again, this time to my left, straight for a large mammal hole which I hadn't noticed. I had to move fast. As the snake poured itself into the



Keeping the forest cobra at arms length.
Photo:Mark O'Shea

Herpetological Postcards For Sale

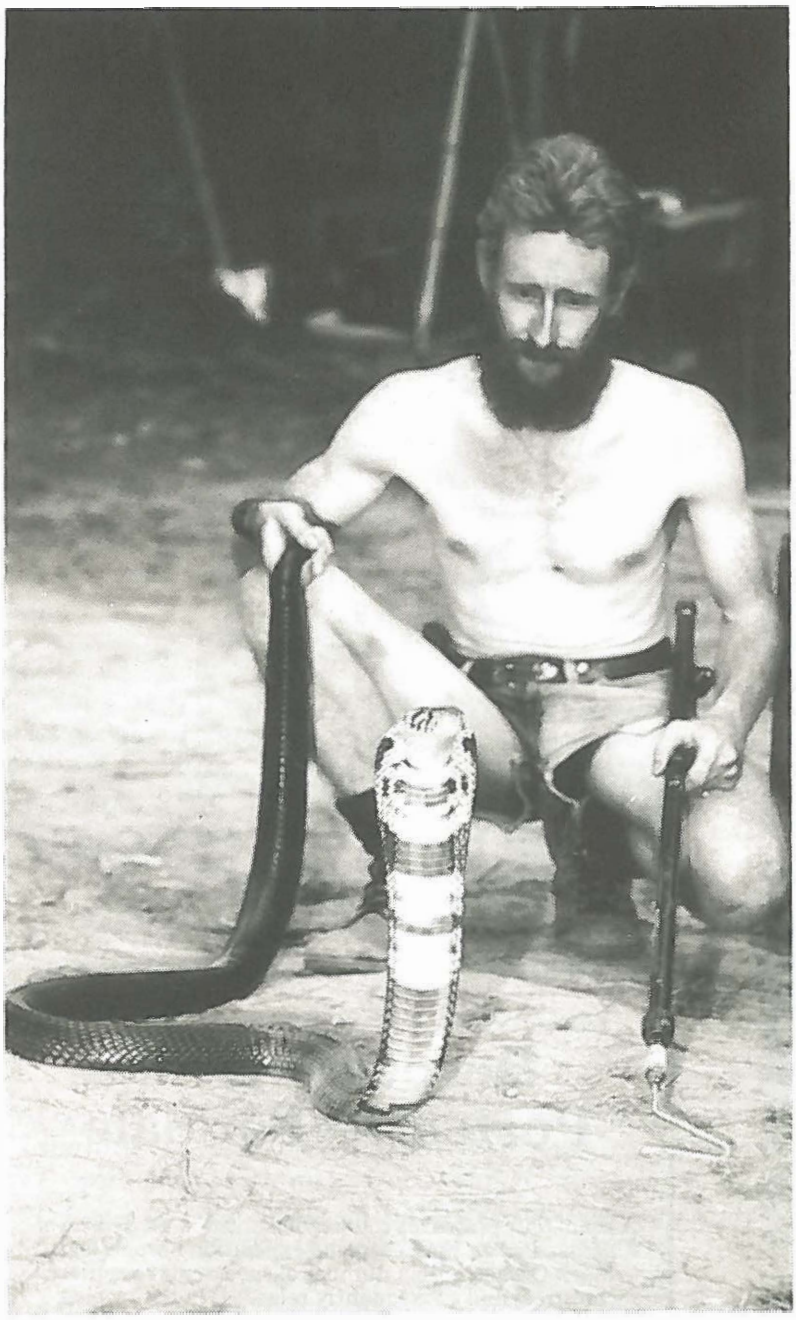
A set of four postcards collectively entitled '*In Search of Curious Beasts*' and featuring expedition herpetologist Mark O'Shea with a number of spectacular reptiles captured, and subsequently released, in the tropics. Species featured are; Honduran green iguana, *Iguana iguana rhinolopha*; Brazilian cribo, *Drymarchon corais corais*; a pair of Brazilian cascavel rattlesnakes, *Crotalus durissus ruruima* and a West African forest cobra, *Naja melanoleuca melanoleuca*.

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Mark O'Shea, 46 Buckingham Road,
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The author persuades the newly-captured forest cobra to pose for a photograph back in camp. Photo: Mark O'Shea

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hole I grabbed the tail with my left hand and thrust the grabstick after it with my right. Operating the trigger grip of the grab I closed the jaws on its body, I hoped near to its head, and still holding the tail in my left hand I pulled it back out of the hole.

Unfortunately I had missed the neck and the cobra, a 2.5 metre male forest cobra (Naja melanoleuca), had at least 60cm of free neck and body with which to strike if I came within range. Before I attempted to make my way back through the tangled vegetation to the path I needed to secure the body nearer to the head. I regretted not having brought a second snakegrab from camp but there was no time to send for one now so I looked about for a suitable area to readjust the position of the grabstick. There was a small clearing, an old campfire, to my right. Lowering the snake to the ground I quickly released the grab and rolled the cobra off balance by twisting my left hand over before resecuring the grab again about 10cm from the head. It was now safe enough to carry up to the roadway.

Once on the roadway I had another problem. It was only a short walk back to camp but I couldn't carry the cobra all the way back with a grab clamped on its neck as it could result in serious injury to the animal. In the absence of a large enough snakebag, another serious oversight, the only option available was to pin the cobra down and carry it back by hand.

Still maintaining the grabstick's position I placed the snake on the floor again and kneeling gently on the lower body, to prevent it thrashing about and injuring the neck when the tail was released, I moved my left hand forward and took a firm hold of the neck just behind the jaws of the grab. When I felt that I was in control of the head I released the grab and moved my right hand down to pick up and support the rest of the snake's body. The cobra now being safely secured we all started back to camp. I walked carefully watching for potholes in the road and concentrating on not dropping the cobra. Ian and Rab were recounting the capture to each other as if one of them had been absent and the old African, who had started the entire sequence of events, happily danced along in front. Younger men chatted away and fingered the snakegrab in awe before operating its mechanism on the ankles of the person in front, then falling about with mirth when the poor fellow squealed out imagining that I had dropped the snake and it had chosen to sink its fangs into his ankle. Small boys, who had appeared as if from out of the vegetation, ran ahead competing with one another to be the first to tell the news to the campsite with the result that when we arrived the entrance to the camp was thronged with other expeditioners all eager and jostling to get the best position for a photograph like

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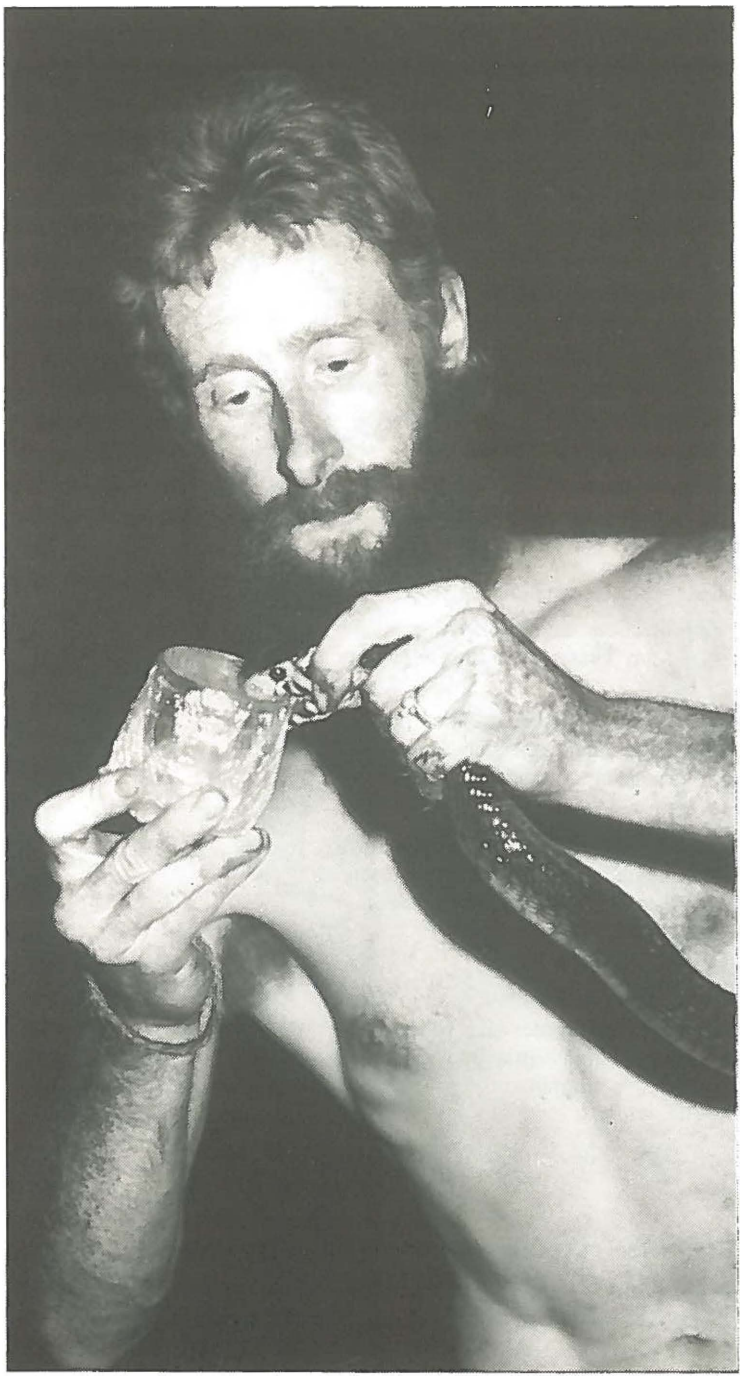
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Above The author milking the forest cobra
Overleaf Forest cobra, Naja melanoleuca

Photographs by Mark O'Shea

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'paparattzi' at a society wedding.

Of course now that I had a large cobra in a secure cage in camp my visitors increased and I was called upon to give several demonstrations where the cobra was enticed to hood for Cameroon television cameras, a Birmingham University team making a deforestation awareness video, the Editor and photographer from the Swiss magazine DAS Magazin not too mention all the other expedition members, from sixteen nationalities, who had not been present when the cobra was first brought into camp. The Gendarmerie CO returned with his men and then, the next day, with the local Army General and his staff. In addition, the Expedition Director, Roger Chapman, and the Expedition Leader, Nick Horne arrived with the British Ambassador and his wife, various Cameroonian ministers and dignitaries and the WWF Korup people who were present for the official bridge opening ceremony. Our forest cobra must have become one of the most photographed cobras in Africa.

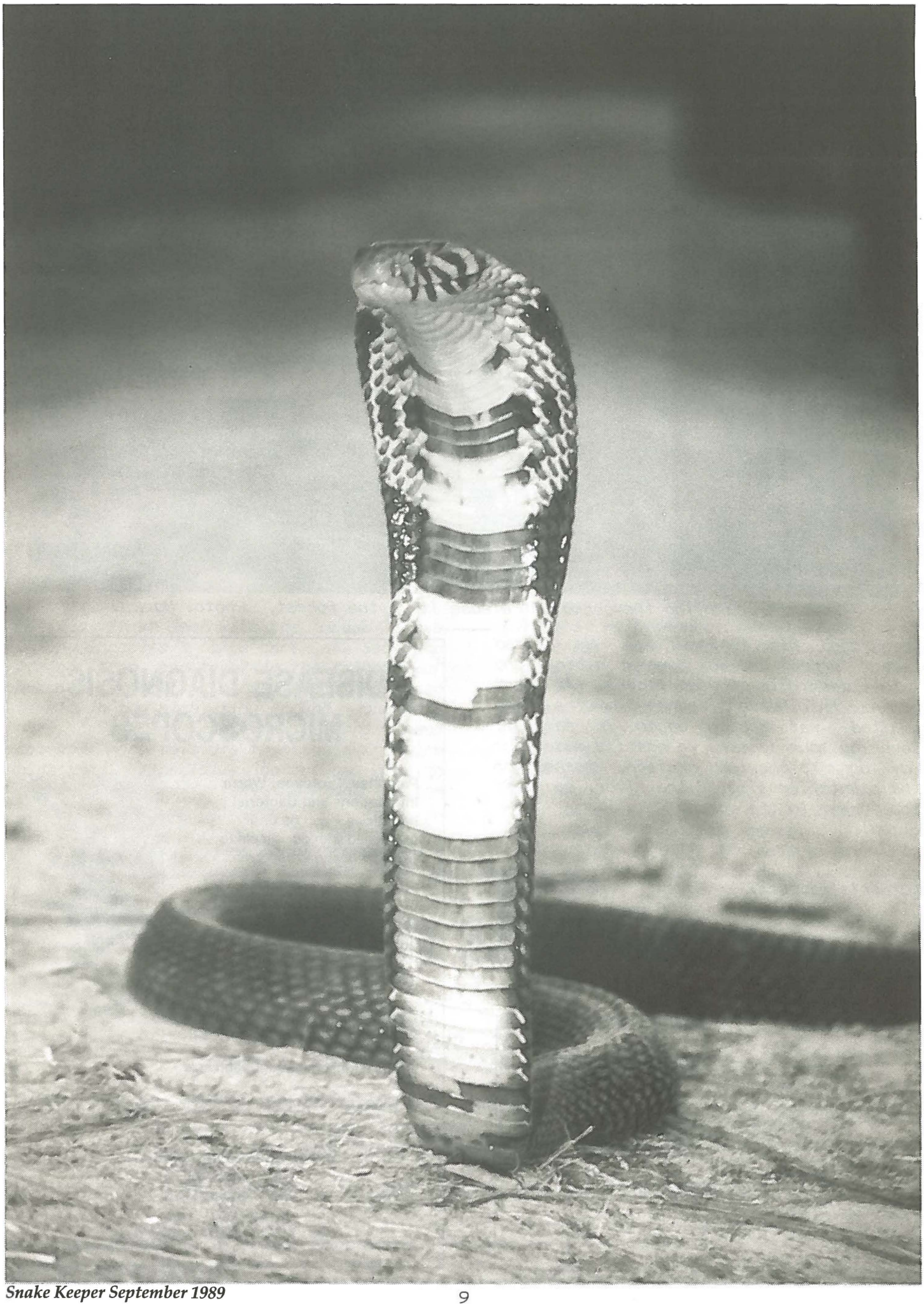
One thing in particular sticks in my mind regarding the Cameroonian attitude to cobras. They all, fairly naturally I suppose, wanted me to kill it, but not just because it was highly dangerous but also because they wanted to eat it.

"Kill it and give it to me, I want to eat it", said Maurice, one of the Cameroonian Venturers, almost every morning.

"Okay Maurice", I said after several days of his persistance "you catch it the way I did and you can eat it".

"Nooooo- it will kill me", said Maurice losing his appetite.

Eventually after we had kept the cobra captive for about nine days I decided it was time to release him. In view of the strong belief in magic in the region I decided that I couldn't just let him go back into the plantation. If any person had a close encounter with a big black cobra over the next couple of years it would be said to be my cobra and if a bite or, worse, death occurred my magic would almost certainly be blamed. The cobra would therefore have to be released in the Korup National Park on the other side of the river. I bagged him up and my team and I set off to cross the river at the bridge site. Once in the forest and away from the trail I opened up the sack and





The author carrying the cobra to release it in the forest. Photo: Mark O'Shea

encouraged him to crawl out. He hooded once, turned and was gone up a bank and into a deep pile of dead leaves. At that moment the heavens opened and the long awaited wet season began in earnest. Covering our cameras we hastily made our way back to the land cruiser, parked on the plantation side of the river, and left the forest to the cobra.

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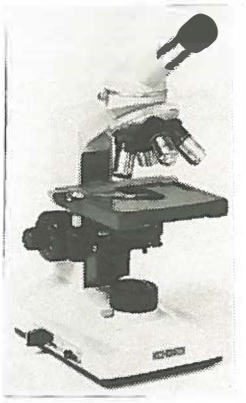
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House Snakes and Egg-Eaters - Typical Snakes from South Africa

by Karl H. Switak

Amongst the many African snakes which reach us through the pet trade there are two outstanding species which are particularly interesting and relatively easy to keep and breed. One of these is the Brown House Snake (Lamprophis fuliginosus) and the other the Egg-eating Snake (Dasypeltis scabra) called the Egg-eater by the Africans. Both genera contain several species which inhabit the most divergent areas and regions over the greater part of Southern Africa. When setting up a vivarium for these animals one must bear in mind that their requirements can be quite different depending upon their origins. If the origin of the snakes is not known then care should be taken that in the vivarium there are places which are warm and some which are cooler as well as some which are moist whilst others are dry. With a little experience and common sense one can soon recognise the requirements of the snakes by their behaviour.

Let us first deal with the House Snake which inhabits a large part of Southern Africa from sea-level in the forests of Dukudus in Natal to around 1500m above sea level in the high veld around Johannesburg. Snakes from the lowlands need somewhat more moisture than those from the highlands, especially before and during sloughing. This is very important for the welfare of the animals.

In general these snakes rarely reach more than one metre in length but some examples from Natal can reach 1.5 metres. As their common name suggests they can frequently be found near human habitation where they catch rats and mice. These are very quickly constricted and devoured. As well as rats and mice, which form the main part of their diet, House Snakes will also eat small birds, lizards and frogs - the young will even eat insects. They are so-called 'opportunists' and will eat whatever crosses their path. Their main period of activity is after dusk.

House Snakes become accustomed to captivity quite quickly but their greed is such that this can be dangerous for the keeper if he does not pay particular attention to the snake's behaviour. In time, the slightest movement means only one thing to these snakes; "Aha! Feeding time again!". It will immediately attack and makes no distinction between its food and the keeper's hand. Maintenance and breeding are especially easy. With suitable maintenance these snakes will live for many years and will breed regularly. Normally one clutch of 8-10 eggs per year is laid but I know one snake keeper who hatched all the young from three clutches of eggs laid in one year. The largest clutch contained 16 eggs. As hatchlings the young measure 21-25cm and are much more intensely coloured than their parents. The attractive head markings make a special contrast. A cool hibernation or rest for several months at

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10	Tokay Gecko	Gekko gecko		8in	9.95
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17	African Fat Tail Gecko	Hemitheconyx caudicinctus		8in	36.95
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55	Giant Legless Lizard	Ophisaurus apodus 30in £28.50		pr.26.50	2p 24.50
35	Giant Day Gecko	Phelsuma madagascariensis		8in	29.95
50	Lined Day Gecko	Phelsuma lineata		4in	14.95
25	Oscillated Day Gecko	Phelsuma oscillatus		4in	14.95

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

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a lower temperature is also advisable; this corresponds to the conditions prevalent in the wild. It is not difficult to set up a suitable vivarium for House Snakes. The substrate should be a mixture of sand and peat upon which several flat rocks or pieces of hollow bark are placed as hiding places. In one corner a clump of grass, together with its root ball, may be planted and a potted Aloe can also be added. By watering/spraying these plants there is always one corner which is moist whilst the remainder of the vivarium stays dry. One part of the vivarium should be covered with dry oak leaves. A branch or root stock or both will cater for the House Snake's infrequent climbing excursions. The daytime temperature should be around 30 degrees C. A reduction to around 15-20 degrees C during the night will correspond to the conditions in its habitat.

Turning to the Egg-eating Snake its distribution range reaches from the Cape region of South Africa to Southern Sudan and Arabia as well as from East Africa to West Africa. At present the genus is divided into six species which reach a total length of 50-96cm. This article will deal only with the best-known species, Dasypeltis scabra, which barely reaches a length of 65cm. Like the House Snake, the Egg-eater lives in the most divergent habitats. It is most frequently found in semi-desert with thorn bushes and open grassland in which the many termite mounds are an obvious feature. Like many other animals the Egg-eater utilises termite mounds as a hiding place during the day and also as a winter hibernation site. In summer the constant internal temperature protects the snakes from the fierce heat and in winter from the frosts. In the area around Witwatersrand, Transvaal, South Africa I found Dasypeltis scabra at an altitude of around 1500m.

As far as its eating habits are concerned the Egg-eater must surely be one of the most interesting of snakes. There are indeed other snakes which occasionally eat eggs but none does it as exclusively as the Egg-eater. This snake will not however eat just any egg. It is able to distinguish fresh eggs from those which have started to develop. According to some reports this snake does not only eat birds' eggs but will also eat the eggs of lizards and snakes, those of its own species included.

One is always astounded by the size of the eggs which the Egg-eater can swallow. An adult snake of around 79cm is quite able to engulf a hen's egg but that is sufficient food for two or three weeks. It is much more difficult to feed smaller snakes which have to be given the eggs of pigeons, finches or bantams. It is wise for someone keeping Egg-eaters to strike up a friendship with an aviculturist who will occasionally have some infertile eggs or some which are not needed for his breeding programme. Snakes which refuse to feed can be force-fed quite easily using beaten egg. This is drawn into a hypodermic syringe and gently forced down the snake's throat into the stomach. Fresh eggs of the appropriate size will normally be accepted immediately.

Egg-eaters like to climb amongst bushes, presumably searching for bird's nests. Their vivarium should therefore have a number of climbing branches. I particularly remember an experience I had whilst camping on the banks of Crocodile River near Komatipoort which leaves no doubt whether or not Egg-eaters climb. We had just taken a juicy steak from the grill and placed it on a plate when an Egg-eater dropped from the tree under which we had been grilling our meal. It landed directly on the steak. It was a case of who was more confused, the cook or the snake. It was a really huge tree and when we looked more closely we could see several birds' nests. Normally however Egg-eaters are only active during the night.

Eggs are normally laid during the months of December and January but they can be laid in April or May. The reproductive cycle of the Egg-eater is strongly dependent upon the availability of an adequate supply of fresh eggs as indeed is its entire lifestyle.

Newly hatched young measure around 20-23cm

and require correspondingly small birds' eggs which can cause quite a problem when it comes to feeding the snakes. Initially it is best to start off with adult snakes. Before attempting to breed, arrangements must be made to guarantee that a regular supply of suitably-sized eggs will be available.

*****

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Reasons to be Cheerful?, Part II

by Kevin J Hingley

In Volume 3 Number 7 of Snake Keeper I think I made it quite clear that today's hobbyists are a lot better off in terms of available information, captive bred stock and contact with other herpetologists than a lot of us were a decade or more ago. In 'Reasons to be Cheerful?' I also stated that I think it is a matter of individual choice as to what forms of heating and lighting we opt for and if it works for that person stick to it. Why change and find out then (with possibly dire and costly consequences) that someone else's methods don't work for you?

The IHS West Midlands Branch held their monthly meeting at Drayton Manor Park recently (in the Reptile House, courtesy of John Foden). The Branch has held a number of their meetings in the Reptile House there with Mr Foden usually giving a guided tour and relating his experiences with various reptiles he has been involved with over the years. The last meeting was, however, different. Due to the recent debate in Snake Keeper Mr Foden decided to talk about the heating and lighting used in the new reptile section. He then went on to promote a discussion about various forms of heating/lighting/egg incubation techniques and how the various methods can and do work for different people. In the end though the only conclusion that could be formed was 'If it works for you then stick to it'. It was a friendly sensible debate and I hope those who attended and hoped to learn something went home enlightened by it all and didn't dash off to radically change their current methods.

The readership is well aware of the fact that I use light bulbs to heat my cages and I hasten to add that I am not the only one. It might interest readers to know that I have just built a new vivaria block to replace my old set-up, not because of the recent debate but because my old cages were becoming a bit rickety after many years of wear and tear and because some of my 'home-bred' youngsters were growing up and in need of more space. (Many thanks to Mark Hemings for all his help with the construction.) I have still used light bulbs coupled to thermostats to heat certain cages and fluorescent strip lights to both illuminate and heat the remainder. There is little or no heat from the light tube itself but there is quite a lot generated from the choke/starter unit of the strip light fitting and as these are

fixed to the underside of the floor of the vivaria above they warm the floor. The light bulbs serve a similar purpose, the difference being that they provide heat from above in one cage and heat from below in the cage above the light/heat source.

The space between each row of cages, four rows in all totalling 24 separate vivaria, allows room for the heating and lighting system I now use. The cages have been left open topped by the use of 1/4 inch gauze which allows the passage of heat and ventilation circulation. However, because I built a new set-up I now have to experiment in order to achieve the desired temperature ranges for the particular species of snakes that I keep. It may take a week to sort out, it may take a month or even more but eventually I'll get it right. In the meantime it hasn't had too much effect on my snakes with the exception of some newly imported Leopard Snakes, Elaphe situla, which have yet to become accustomed to their new environment. The three Royal Pythons, Python regius, I have are all feeding and these are often considered difficult or 'easily stressed' snakes but they do not appear to be at all troubled by their recent rehousing.

Some advice I will reiterate is the following; Go for the type of vivarium or vivaria that suit you, the snakes you intend keeping and of course your budget. Keep the cages clean and simply furnished, providing a hide box for nervous species or individuals. Finally use whatever form or combination of lighting/heating you prefer or can afford. If your snakes are feeding, sloughing, defaecating and ultimately breeding then you must be doing something right so stick to whatever it is you are doing because you have got reasons to be cheerful!

*****

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A Case of Pneumonia caused by *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*

by Andrzej Kowalew

Introduction

In December 1986 a number of Varanus bengalensis, Varanus salvator, Boiga cyanea, Trimeresurus albolabris and Trimeresurus popeorum were imported from Thailand to Warsaw. Almost all of the animals were suffering from a respiratory disorder. An examination showed that the infection was caused by Pseudomonas aeruginosa [Footnote 1].

Thirty per cent of the reptiles recovered after they had been treated with Gentymycine. However only one animal (Varanus bengalensis) has survived until now. The other animals died within a few months of their initial recovery. Upon examining sections of the dead animals visceral gout [2] was discovered in almost all cases. Most probably the kidneys had been destroyed during the course of treatment with Gentamycine.

There are several antibiotics, among them Gentamycine, to which Pseudomonas aeruginosa is sensitive. Still it is difficult to find an antibiotic which will kill the bacterium and at the same time will not be toxic to the kidneys.

In 1988, two Belgian herpetologists, Robert Jooris and Eric Tubex released an article entitled 'About a progressive passing infection in a reptile collection and the successful treatment of a serious pneumonia caused by Pseudomonas aeruginosa' (Litteratura Serpentium Volume 8, Number 3). The antibiotic discussed in the article was Piperacilline [3]. I am greatly indebted to the authors as most probably their article saved the life of two of my snakes.

Pseudomonas aeruginosa in Yellow Rat Snakes and the Treatment

On the 18th September 1988 I bought three four-month-old Yellow Rat Snakes (Elaphe

obsoleta quadrivittata). I examined them thoroughly and they appeared to be quite well. The same day the snakes were placed in a container heated to 27 degrees C (81 degrees F).

On the next day I noticed that one of the snakes was breathing heavily with its mouth open. The mouth was full of mucus. Therefore I separated the snakes, transferring them to three sterilized vivaria. I placed an infra-red lamp above the vivarium of the affected snake so that at one end the temperature was 32 degrees C (90 degrees F) and at the other end 28 degrees C (82 degrees F).

Every six hours I disinfected the vivarium with hard ultra-violet radiation for ten minutes. Twice a day I changed the drinking water adding to it a little vitamin B complex. I cleaned the mouth of the snake every time I disinfected the vivarium. This all gave no improvement and the following day the snake died.

I took it immediately to the Microbiological Laboratory of Warsaw University. There they diagnosed pneumonia caused by Pseudomonas aeruginosa.

On the 21st September I found to my horror that the other two snakes showed signs of serious respiratory problems. Their mouths and throats were full of mucus. I was lucky to get hold of some Piperacilline quickly. The dose of Piperacilline is 100mg/kg of bodyweight per day in human medicine. I recalled that the first snake had died only thirty hours after the first illness symptoms. I decided to increase the dose to 200mg/kg. Another reason to increase the dose was that the snake's metabolism is slower than that of mammals. I have to stress however that the dosage I used was more a guess than a result of reasonable calculations. Fortunately it worked!

To the drinking water I added 1 n HCl (6ml per litre of water). I wanted to avoid dehydration of the snakes. That is why before the first injections I gave each snake 3ml of the prepared drinking water with a feeding tube.

Infra-red lamps were placed above the vivaria. In addition the vivaria were disinfected with ultra violet radiation every six hours. Twice a day I cleaned the mouths of the snakes. On the next day I did not notice any improvement, however, the following day the mucus in the mouths of the snakes was not produced so intensely as previously. Nevertheless the snakes still looked very weak. On the fourth day of the treatment there was a remarkable improvement in the condition of the snakes. First the mucus seemed to disappear, secondly the snakes apparently lost their apathy - one of them bit me while I was giving it an injection.

The snakes received Piperacilline for a further six days although the dosage was decreased to 100mg/kg. Seven days after the recovery the snakes ate new-born mice. Since that time I have not had any problems with them. Now they measure 105cm and 95cm and look very well.

Footnotes

1) Pseudomonas aeruginosa is a gram negative bacteria measuring 1.5µm. It needs a wet environment to develop. The bacteria can be killed by high temperatures (above 55 degrees C/131 degrees F). It is resistant however to disinfectants.

2) Normally, urates are eliminated from the body through the kidneys. When the kidneys do not function properly the urates are deposited throughout the tissues of the body destroying internal organs. Such a condition is called visceral gout.

3) Piperacilline is a wide spectrum penicillin. An extensive range of gram positive and gram negative bacterium is sensitive to this antibiotic. It does not mean, however, that all infections of the respiratory tract can be treated with Piperacilline.

*****

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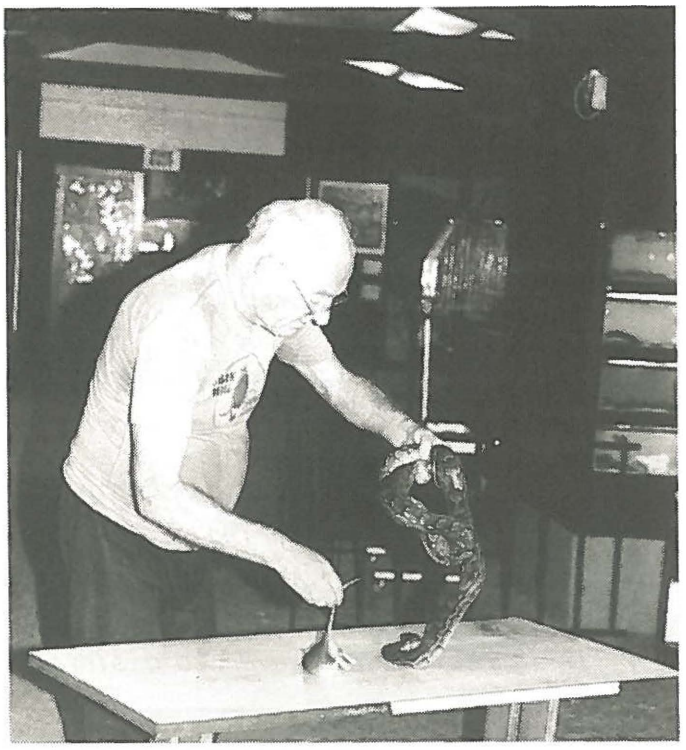
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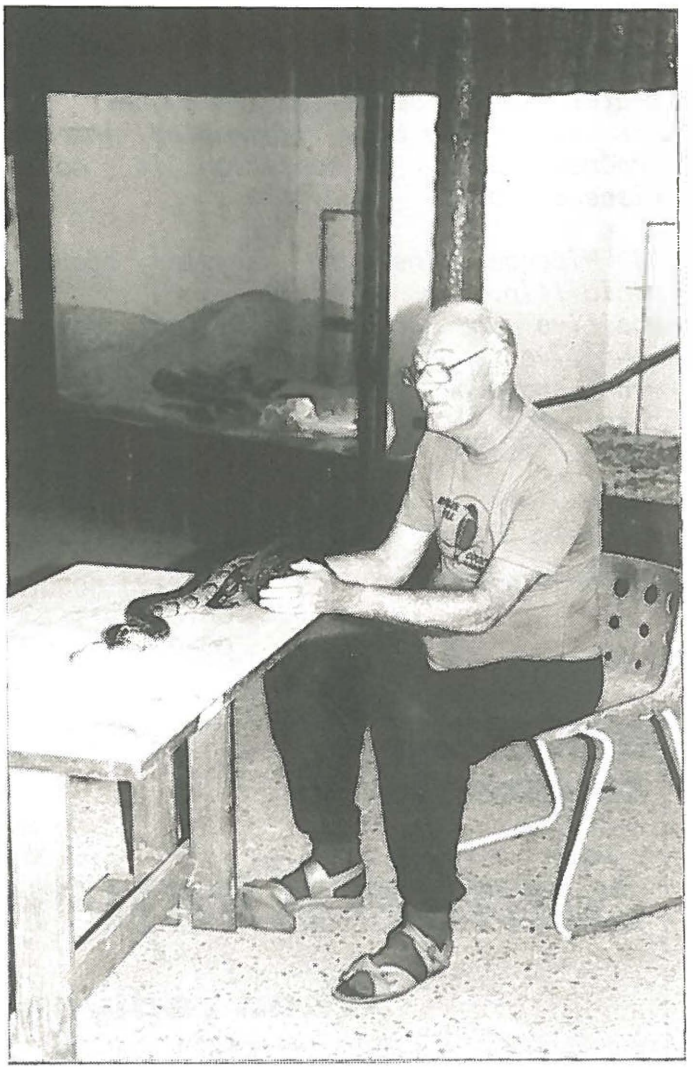
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Notes on the African Rock Python, *Python sebae*

by Stuart Gray



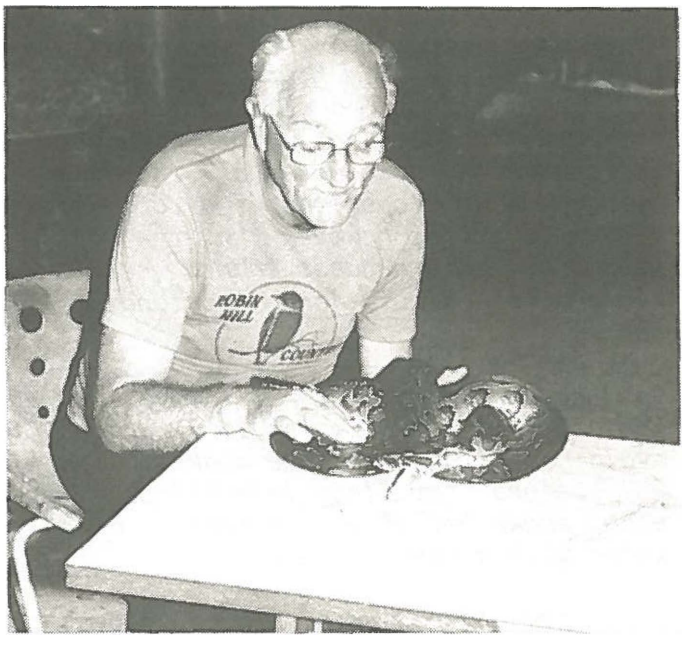


Some people say Python sebae is unpredictable, moody and snappy. Well, in my opinion, it is simply not true. However, they do need a little more understanding than some snakes. The fact that they hiss more than the other pythons should not put you off – they hiss for nothing. Some people over react to this and, in turn, the snake is startled and this could lead to snapping.

When you touch your python the hiss could be an automatic alarm. Having turned to see you the python will stop hissing and think "Oh! it's you". At other times they hiss if you fail to take notice of them or put them down when they don't want you to leave. None of this will lead to biting. At Robin Hill Country Park (Isle of Wight) we seldom get much of a hiss now and the snakes are brought out for the public to see.

With a little understanding, they become warm and affectionate pets as do Indian and Royal Pythons. Of course they must not be used as toys or objects in a case.

I have often wondered why they are called African Rock Pythons. Has anyone seen them sitting on rocks? At Robin Hill they could be called African Lap Pythons.



Photographs show Stuart Gray giving a Python sebae feeding demonstration at Robin Hill Country Park, Downend, Arreton, Isle of Wight.



A REPORT ON EUROPE'S LARGEST SNAKEFARM

BY GLENN COUSINS

On a recent holiday to West Germany to visit friends and tour around the city of Braunschweig and the Harz Mountains the last thing I expected to find was a snake farm.

My German friends who, I hasten to add, are not of the snake-keeping persuasion told me of the existence of the farm in the small town of Schladen, some 30 kilometres south of Braunschweig. A visit to the tourist office in the nearby historic town of Goslar (itself well worth a visit for the wealth of very well preserved old houses and buildings) produced a leaflet giving details.

Claimed by its owner Jürgen Hergert to be the largest 'Schlangenfarm' in Europe with over 1000 snakes it is situated beside the B4 motorway between Braunschweig and Bad Harzburg. It is open daily from 9am until 6pm. Herr Hergert held world records for sitting in a tank with venomous snakes for over 90 days in 1983 and 100 days in 1986.

I visited the farm with eager anticipation arriving at 9.30am on a Sunday morning with some two hours available before I had to move on. Not as large inside as one gets the impression from the outside, the public area consists of pathways on the outside of which are varying sized vivaria housing a varied collection with a large 'natural habitat' pit containing five species of European snakes, the whole being open to the elements. The sun was just warming things up and the pit provided an interesting diversion with the snakes starting to move around.

I was somewhat disappointed not to see some unusual species. For example there were no Australian specimens on show. The condition of some of the snakes also left something to be desired in my opinion. Having said that a pair of Green Tree Pythons were superb as was the largest Royal Python I have personally ever seen. Another large vivarium contained a pair of Burmese Pythons which, according to the label on the glass, were eight metres in length! Since they were both coiled up in a large water pool I could not verify this.

Next to the Burmese Pythons was another large vivarium containing six Reticulated Pythons. No label this time but, judging by their body girth, I would estimate that they were over 6 metres in length. A Gaboon Viper, whilst of reasonable size did not have the bright patterning one usually expects to see and a Common Boa Constrictor, half sloughed, with pieces of old skin hanging from it did not look too good. One of a pair of Cobras should definitely not have been on show as it had a large lump (obviously some sort of growth) to the left of its spine behind

the neck. This snake continuously moved around the vivarium and was obviously agitated.

I speak virtually no German but listened nevertheless to an attendant talking to a visitor in front of a vivarium containing a pair of Eastern Diamond-back Rattlesnakes. Much to my surprise (and to the consternation of my wife) the attendent did no more than unlock the door and pull one of the snakes out with members of the public standing around - admittedly out of striking range!

At 12.30 each day the owner demonstrates the milking of venomous snakes in a purpose built arena within the farm. Unfortunately I was not able to stay long enough to witness this event or to try and talk to him.

If you find yourself in this area then this is an obvious place to visit. I must say that I doubt the claim of 'over 1000 snakes' but there again I did not stay long enough to count all of the snakes in the pit. Perhaps you will if you go there.

*****

Glenn is Events Secretary for the Snakes, Reptiles and Amphibians Society (SRAS) and would be pleased to supply further details of the Schlangenfarm to anyone considering a visit. Please write c/o Snake Keeper.

An Effective Way to Mark Snakes

by Dr. Peter Hentschel

Marking snakes, particularly young snakes, as a means of identifying each individual has great significance for every herpetologist. Field and professional herpetologists mark wild snakes by cutting into the scales on the underside of the tail according to a certain key, but obviously this can only be done on larger specimens.

In the vivarium, marking enables individual snakes to be more readily identified. To determine certain biological data such as body weight, body length, food intake etc. it is important to be able to distinguish individual animals with certainty. For this reason young snakes are frequently kept in individual plastic boxes which involves a great deal of expense in both time and money.

With spotted or blotched snakes it is less difficult to identify individually marked specimens. Individually patterned variants such as Elaphe guttata allow certain identification to be made if one prepares a drawing of the top of the head and the neck region, or if a photograph is taken. The head and neck of a slough can also be cut off and affixed to a card so that the individual markings can easily be recognised. In species with special markings such as Elaphe schrenckii or Boiga dendrophila, the pattern on the upper labial scales serves to identify each individual animal. Unicoloured snakes however are not so readily identified by colour-tone, size and special characteristics.

For the herpetologist there are always problems when many young hatch simultaneously and when their food intake, their development etc. has to be checked and recorded to ensure that as many as possible are reared. In some species it is especially difficult to distinguish between the individual young. This is certainly the case with Thamnophis, Nerodia, many Elaphe and Vipera species as well as Dasypeltis scabra etc.

For the purposes of distinguishing individual snakes, especially young snakes, the herpetologist can use the same method as that used by apiarists to distinguish queen bees.

Materials

1. 'Opalith' discs (supplied by Fa. M. Kempe, Zschopau/Sa., German Democratic Republic) and usually available at apiculturists' suppliers in the colours yellow, red, green, white and blue, each colour numbered 1 - 99.
2. Clear nail varnish as fixative.
3. A piece of wooden dowelling (100mm long, 4mm diameter) with a steel pin protruding from each end.

Marking

The Opalith disc is affixed to the frontal scale of the snake using clear nail varnish as fixative in the following manner. Using one of the pins protruding from the dowelling, a drop of nail varnish is placed on the frontal scale. The pin at the other end is lightly moistened on the tip of the tongue and used to pick up the Opalith disc. The disc is placed on the nail varnish and held lightly in position. For the few minutes needed for the nail varnish to dry, the snake can be held in the hand or placed in a small plastic container.

Previous experiences

To date around 40 snakes of the following species have been marked in this manner: Thamnophis sirtalis, Elaphe guttata guttata, Elaphe obsoleta quadrivittata, Coluber jugularis caspius, Dasypeltis scabra and Vipera ammodytes montandoni.

Clear nail varnish has been proven to be an effective fixative. Manufactured to protect finger nails it also adheres well to the upper surface of the frontal scales of snakes. In each of the young snakes thus marked I was not able to see any detrimental effects caused by the solvent. When the snake sloughs the Opalith disc is also shed so that for continued distinction a new disc has to be attached to the snake. As a rule the disc stays firmly in place for several weeks until the next slough. In some individual cases the discs were detached from Thamnophis as a result of their constant burrowing in the moist substrate. This appears to facilitate the removal of the discs, but if the substrate is kept dry they are not so easy to remove.

For groups of up to five identical young snakes it is sufficient to have supplies of the discs in each of the five available colours. For larger groups of snakes the numbered discs should be used and, in this way, in theory, up to 500 snakes can be marked.

*****

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This article originally appeared in the magazine 'Aquarien-Terrarien' in the German Democratic Republic and is reproduced here by kind permission of the author. Translation by John Hackworth.

LETTERS

Dear Snake Keeper,

Reading about the spinal lumps on a Corn Snake in last month's Snake Keeper reminded me of an experience I had with my male Burmese Python (Python molurus bivittatus). The snake, which was 2.75 metres long at the time, was in the living room while I cleaned out his cage. As the snake moved around I noticed two lumps on his body, one on either side, about 30cm from his cloaca. They were very obvious, soft and moveable and felt like small semi-hard blisters.

I contacted my veterinary surgeon who told me not to worry. He said that as the lumps appeared so quickly they shouldn't be that serious. After he had shed I again checked the lumps and saw that they were still there but no bigger.

Whilst on a visit to Chester Zoo I told Mr Keith Brown, Head of the Reptile Department, about the lumps and his advice was identical to that given by my vet - do not worry. He said that I could arrange to see their vet if necessary. Apparently they had roughly the same problem with a female python. She had a large lump under her jaw that actually pushed her jaw out. An exploratory operation found nothing and the lump disappeared.

My vet thoroughly examined my snake and afterwards he told me there was nothing to worry about. Fourteen days later the lumps appeared smaller and were still soft and moveable. After a further fourteen days the snake shed his skin and after cleaning his cage out I noticed that the lumps had disappeared completely. My vet said this confirmed his first thoughts that the lumps were not serious but he could not say what the lumps were or what caused them. My snake is now in full health and there is no sign of the lumps reappearing.

Yours sincerely, *Kelvin Waltho*

The Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group
Reptile and Amphibian Display 1989

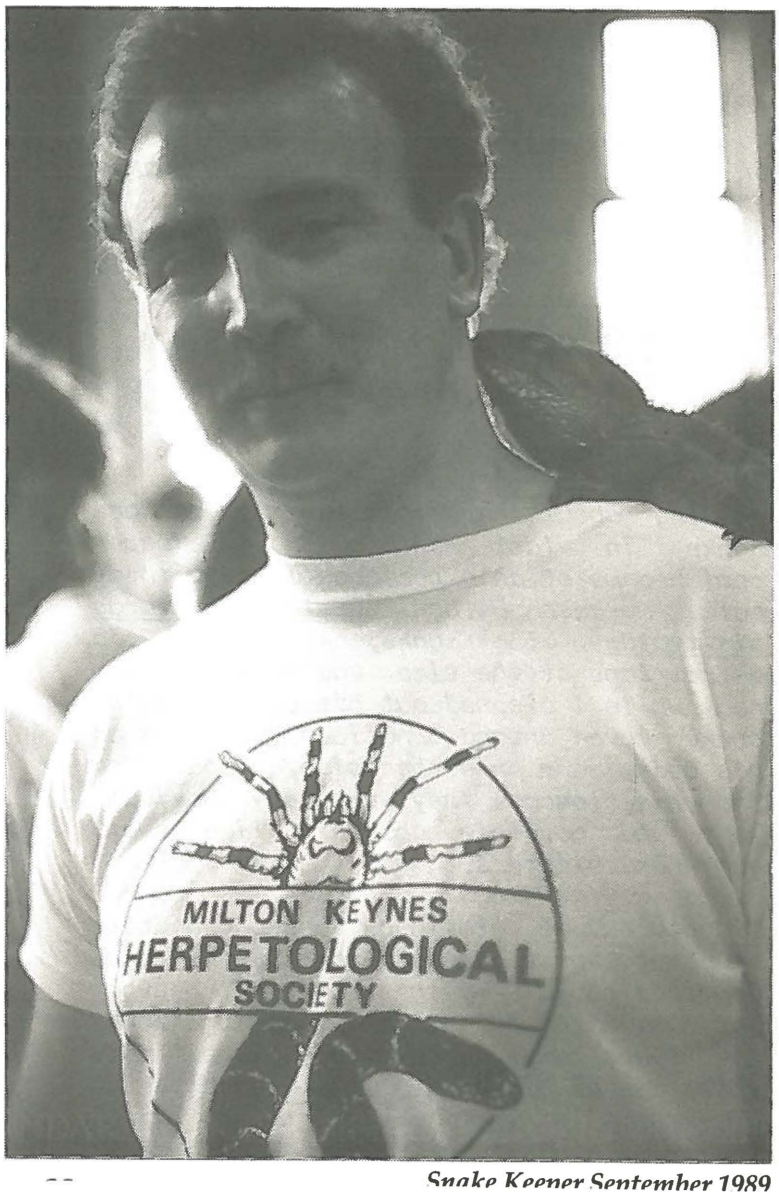


On the 29th July the T&CHG held their annual display at Hazlemere Community Centre, near High Wycombe.

Below: Geoff Fielding awaits the first visitors. (Note the large cash box on the floor.)

Right: T&CHG member Jeff Protheroe blatantly advertising the newly-formed MKHS (of which he is Chairman) and obviously managing to attract one new member during the day.





Approximately 800 people attended the event.

All profits from the display go towards T&CHG funds







Left: Group Secretary Frank Schofield (on stage in white shirt) brought along a selection of venomous snakes which were displayed in a special area.

Below: Northamptonshire member Val Rowland and her husband attracted a lot of interest with their display of spiders.

Photographs by Lesley Close

FROZEN FOODS

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Gerbils	35p
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Please mention Snake Keeper when replying to adverts. Thank you.

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WANTED

Male Cook's Tree Boa and Female Speckled Racer. Must be good specimens. Contact Col G Pywell-Fox, 24 George Street, Driffield YO25 7RA.

Adult female Black Mexican Kingsnake (Lampropeltis getulus nigritus). Phone Gary or Sarah on (0384) 410513.

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

POSTCARDS

Colour postcards featuring photographs by Chris Mattison. No. 1 Western Diamondback Rattlesnake. No. 2 Emerald Tree Boa. Pack of 10 (five of each card). UK & Europe £2 including p&p. Overseas (airmail) £3.00 or US$4.80. Snake Keeper Magazine (Postcards), 159 Stanley Hill, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9EY.

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