

LITERATURE

This column will give information about new literature, publications, books, etc. Tips concerning new literature are welcome, and should be sent to: Jan Cor Jacobs, Tesselschadestraat 6, 3521 XV Utrecht, The Netherlands.

BOOKREVIEW

by

ADAM WRIGHT

Les Serpents de la Guyane française; Jean-Philippe Chippaux, 1986. Editions del'Orstrom. Faune Tropicale XXVII. Institut Français de Recherche Scientifique pour le Developpement et Cooperation, Paris, Pp 165. ISBN 2-7099-0829-8.

What a delight to see a new, thorough work on a neglected area of a neglected continent. Based on studies of over 1100 specimens, the book is the first to deal with the snakes of French Guyana. As such it covers 7 families, 49 genera and 90 species. For most species head scalation diagrams of excellent quality are provided, together with distribution maps based on data gathered from many sites.

Although the main body of the text is in French, there is an additional series of keys to all known snakes of the region in English - this will get you to species level, and includes about 20 species from the Amazon basin not yet collected in French Guyana but which may reasonably be expected in due course.

Each individual species is given a thorough description, including synonyms, type locality, distribution, description (scalation, colour and size) and additional remarks.

*The publication proposes the erection of *Epicrates cenchría maurus* to specific level as *Epicrates maurus* Gray. Also, it calls for a re-assessment of several generic groups: par-*

ticularly *Liophis* - *Lygophis* - *Leimadophis* - *Rhadinaea* complex, and *Pseustes* spp are put forward. Many diagrams of maxillary bone structure and form are included in the text - the basic taxonomists guide for problem groups.

The book also includes a chapter on ecological studies, which has several extremely interesting tables. These include zoogeographical information, habitat information and biotope information by species.

Also covered are diurnal rhythms (showing activity periods over 24 hours for all 90 species) and stomach content analyses for the same number of species. Graphs showing when most juveniles are encountered (on a monthly basis) and seasonal variations in sex ratio of captures are included.

Altogether, I found this a fascinating book. I would not suggest that it had a vast sales potential for beginners (who are unlikely to encounter many snakes from French Guyana!) and one couplet in the key to *Eunectes* annoyed me, where rare species/common species was used as part of a key character (how do you know if you only see one!).

However, for anyone who is interested in herpetological literature, or those who wish to see how to approach preparing a sound scientific guide to a region, this is the ideal book to buy. It is well written, taxonomically up to date (and sound), the diagrams are excellent, the keys work and it is worth buying just for the Bibliography which contains almost 150 references to relevant articles. As a regional guide, it is almost on a par with C.R.S. Pitman's "A Guide to the Snakes of Uganda" (high praise indeed, for this is my favourite snake book!). An excellent work.

Einige Anmerkungen zur Zucht und Haltung von Eierschlangen; H. Kulmus. Herpetofauna (Ludwigsburg), 1985, Vol. 7 (36): 23-33.

The author describes the Systematics and Taxonomy of Dasypeltis inornata, Dasypeltis fasciata, Dasypeltis scabra, Dasypeltis atra, Dasypeltis palmarum, Dasypeltis medici medici, Dasypeltis medici lamuensis and Elachistodon westermanni. Literature on keeping Dasypeltinae is scarce.

The author feels that in keeping a poorly documented animal the keeper should imitate the climate of the natural habitat as well as possible. For example Dasypeltis fasciata, which lives in the rainforest requires a high relative humidity and Dasypeltis atra, which lives in mountain-forests requires a fall of temperature during the night.

The remaining part of the article is a supplement on an earlier publication by the same author.

The animals are sexually mature just before they are three years of age. Animals which had been bred by the author first mated when they were two years and nine months of age. The female (60 cm, 50 g) had just sloughed for the tenth time, the male (50 cm, 20 g) had just sloughed for the ninth time.

Some keepers, because of the difficulties of acquiring small sized eggs, rely on force-feeding their snakes. In spite of the fact that the author does not agree with this, he nevertheless gives some advice. Research has shown that although the egg scale is regurgitated, small pieces of the calciferous scale are retained in the digestive tract and are in fact digested. This means while force-feeding, calcium should be supplemented. This also means that adult snakes should not solely be fed on chicken-eggs as the egg shells are so large and tough to

crack that no pieces remain in the snake. These snakes, new born also, are able to go without food for prolonged periods. Due to circumstances the author could not feed new born snakes for over six months. The snakes seemed to have no trouble at all. When the author eventually could provide them with small eggs, only those snakes which had not eaten for $6\frac{1}{2}$ months were interested, those which had starved for 'only' five months were barely interested.

When the animals are confronted with a larger egg than they are used to, or with a large egg after prolonged fasting (over two months), a sort of 'jaw-stretching' precedes the actual eating.

The author disagrees with the often used term 'rudimentary teeth'. Rudimentary points to 'being without function'. According to the author, the teeth, though they are small, do have a function in getting a grip on the egg-shell surface.

Bemerkungen zur Verbastardierung von *Vipera ammodytes ammodytes* mit *Vipera aspis atra*; George Faoro. Herpetofauna (Ludwigsburg), 1986, Vol. 8 (43): 6-7.

A hybrid between *Vipera ammodytes ammodytes* and *Vipera aspis atra* was bred in captivity. The F₂-generation existed of one healthy animal, one strongly deformed snake and seven infertile eggs. The fact that a F₂-generation was possible, shows that *Vipera ammodytes ammodytes* and *Vipera aspis atra* are strongly related. The fact that the fertility decreased enormously, proves, however, that both snakes are of two different species.

Erfahrungen bei der Pflege und Zucht der selten

gehaltenen Bullennatter *Pituophis melanoleucus catenifer*; Dieter Hirschhorn. Herpetofauna (Ludwigsburg), 1986, Vol. 8 (43): 13-16.

The author keeps a pair of these snakes in a terrarium of 80x72x72 (lwxhxh). The floor is covered with 6 cm of soil. The terrarium gets light for 10 to 12 hours a day. Prior to hibernation, the "day length" is reduced to 4 or 5 hours a day. The snakes hibernate for 2 or 3 months at temperatures between 3 and 6⁰C.

The male was bought by the author in July 1981. The author received the female in March 1984. The female was placed in a terrarium already housing the male. Within a week the animals mated. On 25 June 1984 seven eggs were laid. These were hatched at a humidity of 94% and a temperature between 27 to 28⁰C. One egg because mouldy was removed. On 23 and 24 August six eggs hatched. After one week the young snakes sloughed and five of them ate eight to ten day old mice. The other snake had to be force fed once, two weeks after it had sloughed. From that day onwards it ate of its own accord.