

THAMNOPHIS, PART III: *THAMNOPHIS SAURITUS PROXIMUS*.

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DISTRIBUTION

The entire centre of the U.S.A. and the north of the eastern Sierra Madre (see map 1).

DESCRIPTION

The dark ribbons between the light stripes look black, but are in fact dark brown. The dorsal stripe is clay coloured or honey-yellow. For a short distance along the neck this stripe and the lateral stripes are a whitish yellow. The lateral stripes run over the third and fourth scale rows. The labial and ventral scales are unmarked. The upper surface of the head is dark brown and has two white spots. The throat and the belly are white and becoming yellowish posteriorly. The length varies from 45.7 cm to 101.6 cm. The *Thamnophis sauritis proximus* is a slender, streamlined snake. It has a long tail, which forms about one third of the complete length of the snake. There are 19 scale rows. The anal scale is undivided.

THE TERRARIUM

My snakes were housed in a terrarium of 110x40x40 cm (lxwxh). Two lamps of 15 Watt provide both light and heat. The temperature in the terrarium was about 35⁰C during the summer and about 20⁰C



Map 1. Distribution area of *Thamnophis sauritus proximus*.

during the winter.

THE FURNISHING

The watertank in the terrarium had a diameter of about 30 cm. Initially I used saw dust as substrate, later peat dust. I provided hiding places, as well as climbing branches. The terrarium also contained plastic plants.

THE FOOD

The given food consisted mainly of smelts with a vitamin preparation, Carnicon or Gistocal, sprinkled over it. Besides this they were sometimes fed some whiting, because not all *Thamnophis* species eat smelt.

THE REPRODUCTION

The male crawls on the back of the female and clenches his tail around that of the female. In this way he tries to push his cloaca against hers to bring in his hemipenis. Copulation in the wild takes place from March to May, but in a terrarium this can also take place at other times. There are three to twenty-six young born that are between 18 and 23 cm long. The *Thamnophis sauritus proximus* is mature in two to three years.

THE REARING OF THE YOUNG

As soon as the young leave their egg membrane they hide themselves wherever possible. It is advisable to take the young away from their parents and put them in another terrarium, because it is possible that the adults look upon them as food

and may eat them (as far as I know this has never happened with my snakes).

After a few days they start to eat. In the beginning I feed them with smelt that is cut in little pieces with Gistocal or Carnicon dusted over it. Later I start to give them whole, small smelt, also with one of the preparations sprinkled over it. Force-feeding the young was necessary with my snakes.

CONCLUSION

When it gets frightened, the *Thamnophis sauritus proximus* usually goes into the water. In general I thought they were shy and jumpy, in spite of the fact that it were adult captive-bred specimens. The animals can also be greenish coloured, which occurs when 'proximus' is cross-bred with 'sauritus'.

In the next article I will treat the *Thamnophis radix haydeni*.