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.

Erfahrungen mit Kukri-Nattern der Gattung *Oligodon* (Boie, 1827). Klaus-Dieter Schulz, 1988. Herpetofauna, Vol. 10 (52): 32-34.

In this article, Klaus-Dieter Schulz describes his experiences with kukri-snakes of the genus Oligodon. This genus includes a large number of species (more than 60), all from Asia, in a large variety of habitats. They are rather small snakes, with a length of 25 to 100 cm, depending on the species. Characteristically, the head is hardly broader than the neck and has a conspicuously broad rostral shield, which the author relates to their burrowing way of life. Most species are predominantly coloured brown or grey with darker dorsal crossbars or longitudinal stripes or blotches. A large number of these species have dark, mostly V-shaped markings on the head. One of the most beautiful species is Oligodon bellus from China, which has a magnificent red-black-white pattern. The name 'kukri-snakes' was given to the genus because of the form of the enlarged fangs in the back of the upper jaw, which remind one of long Ghurka-knives. In Thailand these snakes are very much feared, being considered poisonous. They are of a rather aggressive nature. When excited, they curve the front part of the body in an S-form, raise almost half of their body from the ground and strike repeatedly with chewing and tearing movements. This makes their bite very painful, often with extensive bleed-

ing. When caught behind the head, they are able to turn their upper jaw in such a way that they can still bite. They are also able to jump very high by whip-lashing their tails. Kukri-snakes are active during the night and hide by day. They lay three to six eggs during summer, the true tropical species probably breeding the year through. Food consists of young birds, lizards and their eggs, small rodents and insects. Hatchlings are said to feed mainly on insects.

During a journey to Thailand the author obtained three male specimens, one of Oligodon cyclurus, two of Oligodon purpurascens. At home, he placed them in a simple terrarium (60x40x50 lwh) with some stones and branches. The floor was covered with a mixture of sand and gravel. An 18 Watt fluorescent lamp provided for light and heat (22-28^{0}C during the day, about 20^{0}C at night). At first, the animals were very shy, but after some weeks they started to leave their hiding places during the day. They appeared to climb very well and were often found in the branches. The small eyes proved to be well developed: they reacted very alertly to the smallest movements at a distance of several meters from their cage.

One of the animals died after some time from an unknown cause, the others started to eat nestling mice after about a month, although one of them had to be irritated with the prey before it was taken. Live mice were simply pressed against a solid object or against the snake's own body and swallowed. Later on, they were only offered dead mice. Every one to two months they shed their skins, at first not nicely in one piece, but when the sand was replaced by peat dust and kept a little moist in one area, the animals sloughed very well. It was a disadvantage however that they remained

burrowed in the peat, with only their heads above the surface.