
EGG-EATING SNAKES (*DASYPELTIS*) IN THE NOORDER
ANIMAL PARK AT EMMEN.

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PREFACE

From 1980 egg-eating snakes have been kept in the Africa-house of the Noorder Animal Park. The first specimen arrived on 7 August on its own and most probably was a *Dasypeltis inornata*. On 24 March 1981 a couple of egg-eating snakes arrived but they clearly resembled another species, most probably *Dasypeltis medici lamuensis*.

In 1985 another couple of egg-eating snakes came in our possession, they definitely were *Dasypeltis scabra*.

The first snake that had arrived, *Dasypeltis inornata*, had a green-brownish colour, with hardly any markings and has a fairly round head as far as the profile is concerned. The scales of this snake are rather smooth. The snakes that arrived on 24 March 1981 consist of an orange-red male and a pink-grey female. These snakes have markings on their heads more or less similar to *Dasypeltis scabra*, but far less noticeable. The animals we received in 1985 are clearly of the *Dasypeltis scabra* species with very clear head and dorsal markings. The general colour is light grey-brown with dark brown spots.

All three species, even just the one on its own, have produced off-spring. The identification of



Foto 1. *Dasypeltis medici lamuensis*, parent /
copulating. Foto: J.J. van Duinen.



Foto 2. Eieren van / Eggs of *Dasypeltis inornata*.
Foto: J.J. van Duinen.

Dasypeltis medici lamuensis is not positive.

DISTRIBUTION

Six species of *Dasypeltis* are found in Africa; *Dasypeltis atra*, *Dasypeltis fasciata*, *Dasypeltis inornata*, *Dasypeltis medici*, *Dasypeltis palmarum* and *Dasypeltis scabra*.

Dasypeltis atra lives in mountain forests at heights between 1000 and 2700 m in East-Zaire, Ruanda, Burundi, South-Sudan, western Uganda and western Kenya.

Dasypeltis fasciata lives in the rainforests of western Africa, from western Uganda through Zaire, Congo, Gabon, Cameroun along the coast to Senegal. In the west this species also lives in the open, outside the rainforest.

Dasypeltis inornata is found in South Africa, in south-east Transvaal, Natal and the south-eastern Cape-province.

Of *Dasypeltis medici* two subspecies are recognised. *Dasypeltis medici medici* in the eastern coastal area of South-Kenya south to Mozambique, inland to Malawi and Zimbabwe. *Dasypeltis inornata* is found in the eastern coastal area of South-Somalia south to Tanzania and on the island of Lamu.

Dasypeltis palmarum is found in the western coastal area of Angola up to Congo.

And last but not least *Dasypeltis scabra* is the most widely distributed of them all; it is found in most of Africa south of the Sahara desert and south of Morocco, Egypt and Jemen.

BREEDING *DASYPELTIS INORNATA*

At the beginning of December 1980, four months after this snake arrived, we found two clutches of

eggs neatly buried in the ground of the vivarium. One was most definitely much older than the other being more brown and more wrinkled. Both clutches were put in an incubator after which the oldest clutch rapidly died off. The second clutch however, produced two young snakes on 1 and 2 March. On 1 April 1981 this snake produced some more eggs out of which hatched another two snakes on 3 June. When hatched the young ones of this species were very small. They needed a couple of months to reach the size of juveniles of *Dasypeltis medici lamuensis*. The eggs of this snake consisted of rather small, round eggs, eight or more in number. The female of *inornata* shared a vivarium with two *Dasypeltis medici lamuensis* for several months but no matings took place between the two species. On 16 May 1981 and 17 September 1981 we found more clutches of the small, round eggs. All of these proved to be infertile

BREEDING *DASYPELTIS MEDICI LAMUENSIS*

The first eggs of *Dasypeltis medici lamuensis* were laid on 7 April 1981. The clutch consisted of five, oblong eggs that took up a lot of water especially in the first week after being laid. Because of this they grew well (something all the eggs of our snakes do). On 11 and 13 June these eggs hatched. These five eggs produced the same number of snakes.

Another mating took place one day after laying the first eggs. Thus we got a number of eggs of this species, on 25 July 1981 and 29 January 1982, both consisting of five eggs. These hatched after five months. The juveniles resembled their parents in colouration, but their markings were much clearer. As the animals grew these markings faded. The difference between males and females was very obvious; the males were orange-red and the females

grey-pink, as was the case with their parents.

BREEDING *DASYPELTIS SCABRA*

These snakes were given to the park by an amateur-herpetologist, who had bred them several times himself. Some ten or more snakes were born in the Noorder Animal Park in 1985. The sexratio was rather unfavourable though, two females, and almost ten males. These eggs hatched after two months with an incubation temperature kept at a constant 30°C.

GROWTH OF JUVENILES

The growth of the young snakes was not completely without problems. After one week they shed their skins and they should have started eating. The eggs that should be used are the size of eggs of a finch. Our experience was that some eggs were eaten but not by all snakes. After one week they stopped eating completely. When one of the eldest snake died force-feeding seemed to be the only solution. This had to be done once a week by using a mixture of egg yolk and gistocal. The force-feeding itself was done by using a valve-tubing that was fixed on a syringe. The valve-tubing was about 5 cm long. The food was inserted deep enough so it would not come up on the side of the valve-tubing. Each time half a ml was given, some time later this was increased up to 3 ml for big snakes. Snakes that were fed in this way later started eating chicken-eggs without any problems. The new born snakes were hard to force-feed because they were hardly any thicker than the valve-tubing. A lot of skill had to be used to feed them. Later on, when the snakes got used to it, it was much simpler. Although they did not open their



Foto 3. *Dasypeltis scabra*. Foto: J.J. van Duinen.



Foto 4. Nakweek / Hatchling *Dasypeltis inornata* (boven/upper), *Dasypeltis medici lamuensis*. Foto: J.J. van Duinen.

jaws themselves they did not resist being fed at all. Food inserted at the beginning of the gullet was transported by the snake to the stomach.

BEHAVIOUR

Some wild caught species of the egg-eating snake are very aggressive; they show a very fine chase-away behaviour. The snake will make loops in the form of eights with its body and will heave its head and front part of its body up. Through the movement of its body the scales are rubbed against each other making as hissing sound. The total behaviour is very impressive and looks very dangerous. When you try to touch the snake with your hand it will attack with open mouth, which shows the teeth which are no more than hard points. Apart from one of our imported snakes that keeps showing this behaviour (even after he has been in a vivarium for a long time) one of our own bred snakes keeps on showing it since it escaped and was found again after three months.

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