
SUCCESSFUL BREEDING OF THE BULLSNAKE (*PITUOPHIS MELANOLEUCUS SAYI*).

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INTRODUCTION

In January 1987 I came into possession of a pair of *Pituophis melanoleucus sayi*. Both animals were wild caught. The female weighed 1500 g and measured about 165 cm; the male weighed 870 g and measured about 140 cm. As both animals were adult, their age could not be determined with certainty, although the male was probably not older than a few years.

TERRARIUM

I housed the animals in separate terrariums. The male in one of 80x50x50 cm and the female in one of 120x50x75 cm (lxwxh).

I keep both animals separated the whole year, except at mating time. The air temperature during the warm season is between 24 and 32°C during the day and 18 and 25°C during the night. The terrarium is illuminated by a fluorescent lamp of 20 Watt (colour 33) and heated by a 40 Watt reflector lamp. Besides this there is a 10 Watt heating cable present, covered with slate stones of about 1 cm thick. The temperature on this is about 30°C. A part of this bottom heater is also present under the reflector lamp, so that this place is rather warmer.

BREEDING STIMULANT

The light duration in summer is 15 hours per day. There is also incoming light from outside. In October I lessen the number of hours light and drop the temperature. I also regularly spray water in this period. The animals are not offered any food. I had given the male a winter rest from 1 November till 27 December at temperatures between 14 and 18°C. The female got a winter rest from 1 November till 1 January, at the same temperatures.

COPULATIONS

On 6 March 1988 I placed the animals together just after the female had sloughed, the male having sloughed earlier. From 9 up to and including 13 March I observed pre-copulation behaviour, observing copulations on 9 March (late in the evening) and on 13 March (from early in the morning till about 3 p.m.).

PREGNANCY AND EGG LAYING

From 2 April the female refused all food offered. On 4 May she laid, between early morning and about 3 p.m., twelve large eggs. I weighed one egg: 55 g. The remaining eggs were stuck together in a cluster. The female, two weeks before she laid her eggs, weighed 1790 g and after the laying 1000 g. The weight of all eggs would have been about 790 g.



Foto 1. *Pituophis melanoleucus sayi*, vrouwtje / female. Foto: H. van der Eerden.



Foto 2. *Pituophis melanoleucus sayi*, jong op het punt van uitkomen / hatching young. Foto: H. van der Eerden.

INCUBATION

I incubated the eggs in fine sand, covered with wood chippings, at a temperature of 27 to 30°C. The already large eggs increased in size: the one weighed egg weighing about 80 g on 19 June. The incubation time was 57-59 days.

THE YOUNG

On 30 June two eggs hatched; on 1 July four and on 2 July five. The twelfth young appeared to be dead in its egg. The heaviest young weighed about 50 g. The lightest animal weighed about 30 g. The snakes were about 40 cm long. There were four males and seven females. All animals sloughed after twelve days after which they were bright yellow with a sharp dark brown pattern.

Force-feeding was not necessary: six young eating nestmice. The record was a snake that ate a hairy nestmouse one hour after it was born. The young grew rapidly.

Translation: Fons Sleijpen.