

***LIASIS OLIVACEUS PAPUANUS*, A VERY RARE PYTHON FROM NEW GUINEA**

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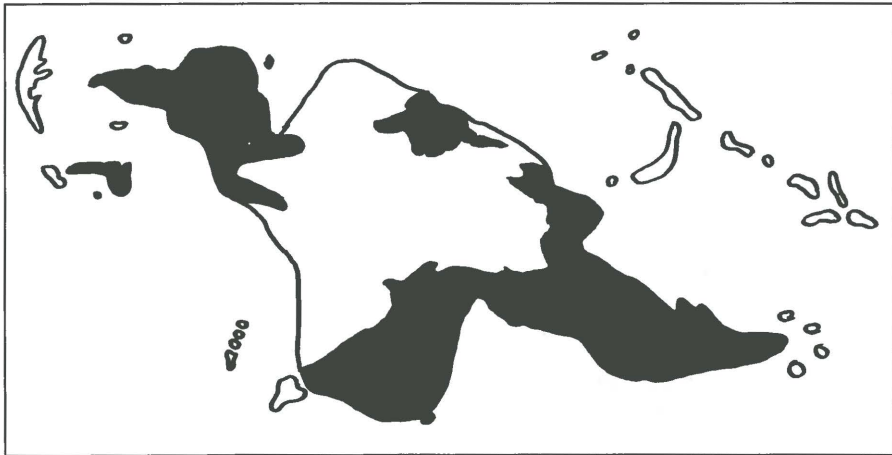
Translation by Jan-Cor Jacobs; English corrections by Mark Wootten.

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DESCRIPTION

Liasis olivaceus papuanus or olive python is a rather unknown (certainly in the literature) python species from New-Guinea. She is a subspecies of *Liasis olivaceus* and the main difference between both subspecies is that the head of *Liasis olivaceus papuanus* is short and thick-set and changes gradually into the neck while the head of *Liasis olivaceus olivaceus* is clearly separated from the neck.



Distribution area of *Liasis olivaceus papuanus*.

The snakes are olive green to gold brown with a remarkable shining iridescence. This splendour of colours is one of the reasons why we keep this snake in captivity. Characteristic are the light to dark grey tones of the under parts of head and neck. The average length of this snake is 2,5 meters, but larger animals have been found often in New Guinea. Some herpetologists give a maximum length of 4 meters. And according to McDowell this *Liasis* species might even outmatch *Liasis amethystinus* - which is commonly considered to be the largest *Liasis* of New Guinea - both in length as in width. *Liasis amethystinus* is much more slender.

Another important characteristic of this python, as we have observed, is its cannibalism, so it is wise to pay attention when feeding the snakes.

Liasis olivaceus papuanus are known for their wide range of prey items. Wild caught individuals were found which had just eaten a wallaby (in one case the weight of the prey was 22,7 kilogramms). Another individual was found which had devoured a *Liasis amethystinus*. On the other hand: expeditions in New Guinea noticed that the local population prepares *Liasis olivaceus papuanus* for meals. Of course, we don't like this aspect very much!

IDENTIFICATION TABLE

Colour: olive green to gold brown; under parts of head and ventrals light grey; underskin black. **Rostrals:** broader than long, seen from the top, with a shallow groove at each site. **Internasals:** length about one and a half times the width. **Prefrontals:** large and ranged in pairs. **Postoculars:** 2 to 3. **Supraoculars:** 10 to 11. **Dorsals:** 65 to 71. **Ventrals:** 358 to 390. **Subcaudals:** 82 to 88. **Distribution:** see map.

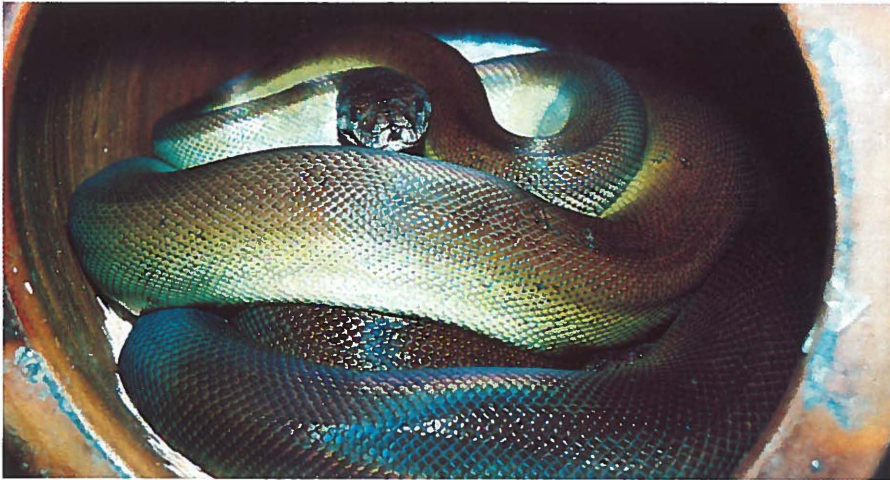


Foto 1: *Liasis olivaceus papuanus*.

Foto: Marcel van der Voort.

SNAKES IN VIVIARIUM

We own three *Liasis olivaceus papuanus*, two females and one male. They are housed together in a vivarium of 120 cm (length), 60 cm (depth) and 80 cm (height). During the day the temperature is between 28 and 32°C. At night the temperature drops till 20-24°C.

The largest female, which we call female 1, was bought in a pet shop two years ago. The snake was imported. It is a very tranquil animal and very easy to handle. Even during treatment with injection against worms there was not a single sign of aggression. Feeding has never been a problem: she always took willingly adult rats. At purchase she measured about 3 meters and weighed 4,3 kilogrammes.

The other pair were obtained from another snake keeper. These animals had been imported shortly before. They were already treated against worms and flagellates, but had not yet eaten. Female 2 measured 2,7 meters and weighed 3,5 kilogrammes. The male measured 2,6 meters and weighed 3 kilogrammes.

In the beginning this pair refused to eat the offered rats, mice and dead baby chicken. Because we had experienced before that snakes which refuse to eat can be persuaded with quails and zebra finches, we tried to trick this pair in this way too. The effect was remarkable. As soon the quails were put into the vivarium, the passive snakes turned into active hunters. A battle for food was started and the snakes did not shrink back from attacking each other. It was clear: these animals are ophiophagous, a character which has also been mentioned by Trutnau (Trutnau, 1988, pag. 71). An indication for this ophiophagy is its characteristic way of grabbing a prey directly behind its head before strangling. Therefore it is wisely to feed *Liasis olivaceus papuanus* seperately.

Since they have eaten quails, they also accept dead rats. By coincidence we noticed that they also eat very large prey. As we fed our Indian Pythons with large rabbits, we put one rabbit which weighed over 5 kilogrammes in the cage of female 2. She grabbed it immediately and after four hours she had swallowed it. There were no problems with digestion, so from that time on we feed her besides rats a rabbit now and then.

The other two snakes also accept large quantities of prey. After a substantial meal they often lay in a water tank for some days. At other times they also prefer to stay in the water for long periods and during their slough they do not leave the water at all.

All three animals are not aggressive and easy to handle. A few times, if we accidentally frighten them, they will attack with closed mouth. Until now they have never bitten. Obviously they do recognize the difference between prey and snake keeper. That is why they are ideal snakes to keep. There is only one negative aspect: *Liasis olivaceus papuanus* is found in Asia and it is well known that snakes from this region often have worms and flagellates. Our animals were also infected with worms (cestodes), which could be noticed by the small bubbles underneath the skin. We also noticed that the snakes, though they had eaten well during half a year, had not gained any weight. Female 1 had even lost weight. Another snake keeper gave the animals levacol injections.

CONCLUSION

Five months after being treated with levacol female 1 has gained 500 grammes in weight, female 2 has even gained 750 grammes, which is partly caused by eating rabbits. The male has only gained 360 grammes, which might be due to a cooler period of two months. During this period it was not fed.

At this moment we do not expect any matings, but nevertheless the male was kept at cooler temperatures for a while in order to keep its normal hormone cycle intact. Next season however we will try to breed this attractive python.

REQUEST

Until now we have not found many articles on *Liasis olivaceus papuanus*. We would appreciate it very much if some one can help us to find some more literature. Copies of articles can be send to our home address. Overhead expenses will be restored.

TABLE

	♀1	♀2	♂
Date of purchase march 1993	4300	3500	3000
Treatment with levacol 25-10-1993	4100	3500	3000
Weight at 28 maart 1994	4800	4250	3360

LITERATURE

- McDowell, S.B., 1975. A Catalogue of the Snakes of New Guinea and the Solomons, with special reference to those in the Bernice. P. Boishop Museum, Part 11, Anilioidae and Pythoninae. J. Herp. 9(1), 1-79.
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- Riel, C. van, Zwart, P. and Winter, E., 1984. Pentasomen en andere parasieten en hun behandeling bij *Liasis papuanus*. Litt. Serp. Vol. 4 (1), 22-25.
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