CAPTIVE BIRTH OF SOUTHWESTERN SPECKLED RATTLESNAKES, *CROTALUS MITCHELLI PYRRHUS* (COPE)

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On the evening of 19 July, at around 8:30 p.m. we drove north out of Phoenix on Seventh Street towards the Cave Creek area. I had locality records for southwestern speckled rattlesnakes, *Crotalus mitchelli pyrrhus* from this area, and hoped to collect a pair of these rattlesnakes for future breeding.

After a couple of hours of hunting a small male was collected while crossing a small dirt road. The colouration of this specimen was a greyish pink anteriorly, and changing to a pinkish-tan posteriorly. Dorsal markings consisted of brown coloured blotches that became crossbands about midbody. The total length of this specimen was 53 cm.

On the evening of 20 July, we went back to the same area where we had collected the male *Crotalus mitchelli pyrrhus*, and at about 9:30 p.m. a female was collected as it crawled over a large pile of rocks. The ground colour of this specimen was pinkish with brown dorsal markings. The total length of this female was 68.5 cm At the time the female was collected she seemed to be rather heavy bodied for her length, and we believed her to be gravid.

	Length	Weight	Subcaudal count	Sex
83-A	25,4	14,5	27	M
83-B	24,8	14,6	24	M
83-C	24,1	14,5	20	F
83-D	24,8	14,2	28	M
83-E	25,4	14,9	19	F
83-F (dead)	22,9	12,9	26	M

Table 1: Data for newborn Southwestern Speckled Rattlesnakes, *Crotalus mitchelli pyrrhus.*

Once back in Cincinnati, the snakes were maintained separately in aquariums of about 40 litres fitted with locking lids. Newspaper was used as a substrate, and a small ceramic water dish was placed in one corner of the cage. Food was offered to the female on 13 August and 10 september. On both occasions she accepted a freshly killed adult mouse which had been left in the cage overnight.

On the evening of 13 October, at 6:30 p.m., I checked the female's cage and found one newborn young (still in its embryonic sac) laying inside the coils of the female's body.

By 11:00 p.m. the female had given birth to four more young. Upon closer examination of these young, one was found to be dead, and was not fully developed. It appeared that this specimen had probably died within the last month of gestation.

The following morning, at 5:30 a.m., I checked the cage again and found that one more young had been born. This brought the total to five live young and one dead. That evening the young were removed from the cage and were measured for total length, the range being between 24 to 25.5 cm (individual measurements are recorded in table 1). The weight of each snake was also taken and is recorded in table 1.

Following these measurements the young were each placed in a separate plastic shoebox, using newspaper as a substrate. A small plastic water dish and a plastic retreatbox were also placed in each shoebox. An inventory number (83-A, 83-B, etc.) was assigned to each snake to facilitate record keeping. In addition, pattern irregularities were recorded on each snake's inventory card to ensure proper identification in the event that they were put together in one cage.

Within one day of parturition the juveniles started going opaque, and by 29 januari of the next year all of the young had sloughed for the first time. Subcaudal counts were made from the sloughed skins to confirm the visual determination of the sex (see Table 1 for individual scale counts).

	Shedding	**Feeding (pinkies)**
83-A	29-10 06-12	03-11 15-11 28-12
83-B	26-10	28-12 09-01
83-C	26-10	03-01 09-01
83-D	27-10	20-11 04-12 14-12 28-12
83-E	27-10	04-01

Table 2: Feeding and shedding records for newborn *Crotalus mitchelli pyrrhus.*

On 2 November the first attempt at feeding these young rattlesnakes was made. A mouse pinkie was placed in each shoebox overnight. By the following morning only one of the young had eaten. Pinkies were offered to all five juveniles once every five to seven days until they had all accepted at least one meal. The last two young (83-C and 83-E) finally accepted their first meals on 3 and 4 January respectively, some two and a half months after their birth (see Table 2 for individual records).

Although this may seem like a rather long time for a newborn snake to go without eating, these two juveniles were in good health, lacking any sign of hunger folds, whatsoever. Moreover, I had newborn *Crotalus* go as long as three and a half to four

months without eating and then start feeding on their own. In some cases leaving pinkies in the cage overnight is not enough to start young *Crotalus* feeding. Occasionally the snake must be agitated enough to strike at the pinkie, as was the case with the last two young mentioned above.

At the time this article was written, all five juvenile speckled rattlesnakes were doing well and I expect that the two stubborn juveniles will begin to feed more readily in the near future. For at least the next couple of months these newborn rattlesnakes will be offered mice pinkies once a week until they are big enough to accept fuzzies. When they reach a length of about 45 cm they will be fed small mice once every week to ten days. Finally, when they reach adult size, they will be fed large mice or small rats once every two weeks.