

HERPETOLOGIA

A column for short herpetological contributions

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THE 'MULTI-MAMMATE MOUSE' AS AN IDEAL PREY FOR *LAMPROPELTIS PYROMELANA*

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English translation by Fons Sleypen.

Young snakes of the genera *Elaphe* and *Lampropeltis* are mainly fed with nestmice. Most of the time there are no problems, sometimes however, they obstinately refuse to eat these. Especially famous for this are juveniles of *Lampropeltis mexicana*, *Lampropeltis zonata*, *Lampropeltis alterna* and *Lampropeltis pyromelana* (Mattison, 1991).

In 1992 I bought a couple of the latter species (subspecies *Lampropeltis pyromelana pyromelana*). They were a couple of weeks old and the female was said to eat independently, the male 'with somewhat more difficulty'. And indeed, the animals did eat, however, very irregular and often only one mouse at the time. I changed the circumstances under which the animals were kept: different light conditions and temperatures, hiding places, drier or more humid. None of these changes brought any convincing improvement. Also the suggestions of Mattison (1991) were tried; locking up the snake with dead or living prey, damaging the nose/head of the mouse (scent of blood and brains) and rubbing a dead lizard against a nestmouse.

In all cases the result was the same; sometimes they ate, but most of the times they didn't. Because they did eat independently I was reluctant to start force-feeding them. This in view of the stress it can cause. The female grew reasonably well, the male a lot less.

The snakes were over a year old when by accident I acquired some multi-mammate mice (*Mastomys nataliensis*) with young. The adult mice were fed to a *Boa constrictor* and the young were offered to the *Lampropeltis pyromelana*. They were eaten immediately. From that moment on the male completely refused to accept ordinary mice. I tried to offer other species (*Acomys* spec.), but these were also refused. A dead, thawed out harvest-mouse (*Micromys minutus*) was however eaten.

I set up a breeding group of multi-mammate mice and when the young of these were offered they were almost immediately eaten again. Now the snakes eagerly eat this type of mouse, even when they have reached the size of 'jumper'. The male exclusively eats this species. The female also accepts ordinary mice, but only when they are small. At this moment the snakes grow well. It is evident that multi-mammate mice are ideal food for

my *Lampropeltis pyromelana*. I have comparable, but less convincing results with juvenile *Lampropeltis mexicana greeri*.

In addition to the suggestions of Mattison (1991), Osborne (1985) also suggest offering a 'wild mouse' to snakes that are reluctant to eat. He means the white footed mouse (*Peromyscus spec.*); a species from Northern America. It is rarely kept or bred in the Netherlands. The multi-mammate mouse therefore appears to be a good alternative. Bulian (1994) mentions that a *Liasis albertisii* refused to eat ordinary mice, but immediately accepted multi-mammate mice.

The multi-mammate mouse is named after the large number of nipples, up to 20 (Van der Gulden, 1972). Adults are larger than a mouse and smaller than a rat. They are kept and bred in the same way the usual rodents are. It is said that this species gives large nests and for this reason has so many nipples. There is however no difference with ordinary mice; the litter exists of 6 - 10 young. My impression is that the wild-colour variety breeds better than the blond; in any case the latter has fewer young per litter (usually only 3 or 4).

LITERATURE

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