

# STRIKING NEST BEHAVIOUR OF HETERODON NASICUS NASICUS



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Since June 2nd 1995 I own a couple of *Heterodon nasicus nasicus*. Both animals were bred by Paul Jacobs and were born the day before I bought them. From the beginning both animals ate very well and grew prosperously. Because they were only six months old at the time I began hibernating the other snakes in my collection, I placed them both together in one terrarium and kept them warm.

Initially this went without problems, until January. At that time the male stopped eating and was only interested in mating with the female. Day and night the adolescent chased the female and mated a few times a day. Finally I decided this was getting to much for the female and separated the male on April 12th. A day later the male ate two mice. During this period the female ate normally and kept doing so. At the beginning of August her body length was 45 cm and she was as thick as a thumb.

When I entered my snake room at August 15th for inspection, I got frightened when I looked at the female. She was lying in a corner of the terrarium. The sides of her body seemed to be collapsed and her skin looked like it was oversized. Only two days before she had been in a perfect condition so I didn't understand until I noticed her hiding place. This is a hollow rock with an opening, made out of clay (provided by Eric Rosa) after a model which is for sale in a reptile store. The opening of the rock was completely filled with sand

*Heterodon nasicus.*



*Photo by Chris Mattison*

and other things that cover the bottom of the terrarium. When I removed all this and lifted the rock I found six large eggs, nice and white as they should be. When placed after each other they must have measured half the length of the female.

I placed the eggs in a incubator just as I described before (Het Terrarium 13-10) where they grew a few millimetres more. When I came back into my snake room I found the female again filling the entrance of the rock. She was lying on one side and used her jaws and nose to move the sand.

I gave her a mouse and she grabbed it with such a force as though she hasn't had food for months. While she was eating I quietly uncovered the rock but as soon as she had eaten the mouse the whole ritual started all over again. Following this I decided to clean the bottom of the terrarium and to wash the rock with hot water. However, within five minutes after replacing the rock the female had turned everything back into a blockhouse. Only after I had changed the rock for a flower pot, this strange behaviour ended.

The eggs of the one-year-old female remained in a good condition and hatched on September 28 and 29, 1996. What surprises me most is that the male was separated from the female on April 12 and the eggs were laid on August 15. This means the sperm was stored for four months, while the literature mentions an average gestation period of 45 days which is comparable to North American *Elaphes*.

*Translation from Dutch by Paul Schooneveld.*

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