

ERYX



COLUBRINUS

(Stull, 1932)

J. van het Meer,
Chopinpad 34, 1323 RZ Almere, The
Netherlands.

■ INTRODUCTION

In August 1995 I was offered an *Eryx colubrinus*, more or less out of the blue. Because I didn't know anything about this species at first, I was well into the subject 'in no time'. Fortunately, I was able to find something in a book about dwarf boas, which I had purchased some time earlier for my *Lichanuras*, and some articles in *Litteratura Serpentina*. When I had read one or two things I finally had some idea about the best possible way to keep these animals.

After acquiring this information I decided to purchase the animal; I knew somebody who was also interested in this species, and should I decide not to keep the animal, it would be in good hands.

When I had purchased the snake, which had been sold to me as being a female, I went looking for a male. A mate was located and we arranged to meet each other on the Snake Day. On the day the seller told me he had sold the animals already. I was really annoyed, but I determinedly went looking for another specimen. Fortunately, there was someone else who had some captive-bred specimens. Although I was really looking for one male, I decided to buy myself two males and one female. In that way I would have two males and

two females, I thought.

After I had been asking around for a bit with other *Eryx*-lovers, and after I had checked all four animals at home, the first female turned out to be a male. So, I had three males and one female. Because I wanted to have two males and two females to start a breeding group, I went looking for a female. Just like before, this turned out to be difficult. I was almost desperate, when, quite unexpectedly, the phone rang. I was being offered a one year old pair, a single female was not negotiable. I also purchased this couple. Right now, I have six animals, four males and two females.

■ DESCRIPTION

Eryx colubrinus is divided into two subspecies, i.e. *Eryx colubrinus colubrinus* and *Eryx colubrinus loveridgei*. The differences between these two subspecies are not great. Below I will describe the differences as far as I know them.

In general

- there are 12 to 15 scales around the eyes
- there are 10 to 12 scale rows between the eyes
- they have 5 to 6 scales between the eye and the nostril
- head merges into the body (no visible neck)
- muscular body (sausage shaped)
- the abdomen is grey to yellow-grey

Eryx colubrinus colubrinus

- 47-49 dorsals
- 168-182 ventrals (mean 173.2)
- there is a pattern on the abdomen

Eryx colubrinus loveridgei

- 53-59 dorsals
- 175-192 ventrals (mean 184.8)
- there is no pattern on the abdomen (there is doubt about a pattern on the abdomen - Parker, 1949)
- more yellow on the back, it sometimes looks as if there is an orange sheen on it.
- the yellow pattern on the back is linked, in a chain like pattern.

Because in my opinion the differences between these animals are very small, I can't help asking whether one can distinguish between the two subspecies. Fortunately, I do not have to decide on this.

The sex can be determined reasonably well in the case of adult animals. This is because the males have a relatively longer tail than the females. The spurs are also visible in quite a number of males. The males are much smaller in adulthood than the females. The length varies between 60 and 80 cm. Unfortunately, it is much harder to determine the sex in young animals.

■ DISTRIBUTION

The distribution area lies in north and east Africa and even in Saudi Arabia. They can be found on the plains and other arid regions. During the daytime they lie hidden in the sand, underneath rocks and in holes which have been dug out by mammals.

■ FOOD

Their food consists of half-grown mice. It is preferable to offer them prey which is not too large because they

have difficulty with larger prey. It seems, from an article in *Litteratura Serpentina* by A. van Woerkom, that some animals are problem feeders. The solution offered to this problem was to put the animals into a small linen bag, one animal per bag, together with two pinky mice. The animals will quickly eat the prey, after which they can be put back into the terrarium again. This also has the advantage of knowing exactly how much an animal has eaten.

My animals pose no problems with eating, so I didn't have to fall back on the method mentioned above. The females eat better and more than the males, but that is not unusual with snakes.

With regard to drinking: I have a waterbowl in the terrarium all the time. This in contrast to some *Eryx*-lovers who offer water once or twice a week. A reason for this is that the animals may want to drink too much after they have eaten and consequently could throw up their prey. I have not experienced that phenomenon, but nothing is impossible.

■ HOUSING

I keep the animals together in a terrarium measuring 70x60x35 cm (lxwxh). The substrate consists of sand, a layer of about 6 cm. Furthermore, I furnished the ter-

Eryx colubrinus loveridgei.



Photo by J. van der Pols.

rarium with some branches, stumps and artificial plants. I also provided several hiding places made of cork, which the animals can retire underneath. This is important, as they lead a secluded life in the wild. There is a heating pad, A-4 size, in the terrarium, which is turned on for 24 hours, so there is a constant temperature of 22°C on the pad. A Halogen spotlight is also on during the daytime, which provides light as well as warmth in the terrarium. The temperature in the terrarium can rise well up to 35°C. There is a radiator in the room where the animals are housed which doesn't let the temperature get below 20°C.

■ REPRODUCTION

The reproduction of these animals takes place during the summer months, i.e. the months of June and July. After about four months the young are born (boas are ovoviviparous). Several *Eryx*-lovers keep the animals separated during the whole year and they are placed together only for the duration of the mating season. I intend to keep the animals together for the whole year. Advice is given to place more males, two or three, with the females. This enhances the rivalry, resulting in more successful matings. A litter contains between ten and thirteen young. In the wild, females have a litter every two years, but in captivity they may produce offspring every year.

The young are born in the fall; they are about 20 cm long. The young are fed with newborn mice.

■ CONCLUSION

In my opinion *Eryx colubrinus* are nice and attractive animals to look at. They are not aggressive and can be handled well. Unfortunately, they lead a secluded life, as a result of which the animals cannot be seen very often.

But I would add that these animals are mostly active at

night and can then be seen above the sand regularly.

■ LITERATURE

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