

# SERUM BANK

*A response to the article 'Difficulties with obtaining sera' by Johan Mavromichalis and Silvia Bloem, Litteratura Serpentina 16(6): 160.*

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When placing the above-mentioned article, I felt the editors should have changed the title of the column from 'Herpetologia' to 'Herpetologica', as the logic in the article - namely 'prevention' in the maintenance of venomous snakes - was a little hard to find. Is it not the case with most things we take a serious interest in, that we acquaint ourselves with the potential problems right from the start, paying particular attention to the possible consequences should something untoward happen? That is after all what the article primarily intended to address!

Although I no longer keep venomous snakes, I have maintained a small collection of snakes and other reptiles for many years. I feel I have always engaged myself adequately and responsibly in the pursuit of my hobby and have, at least, never had cause to stop and lament: 'If only I had done x, y or z'.

As a result I have had years of problem-free enjoyment and for this reason I only keep as many snakes as I can

comfortably maintain without jeopardising my well-being and theirs, despite the inevitable limitations of a captive environment.

To learn as much as possible about the consequences of keeping reptiles - and in this exceptional instance, venomous snakes - and to be made aware of possible dangers is of course why we have societies. Through these societies enthusiasts can relate their experiences, pose questions, exchange knowledge and learn. It is in this regard that I am reminded of a reading, whilst still an active member of a division of such a society, by Jan Willem Verkerk entitled: 'Preventie bij het houden van gifslangen' (Preventative measures in the maintenance of venomous snakes, *Lacerta*, 21 (5): 6-7).

Any self-respecting reptile park, institute or zoological gardens that keeps venomous snakes is also in a position to offer advice and information, and this is particularly pertinent in the case of an establishment that prioritises education and the distribution of information. In this respect one has to mention the Reptile Park Serpo, in the city of Delft, The Netherlands. The director, Walter Getreuer, is someone who, through his dedication over many years, has come to be regarded as one of the leading (venomous) snake experts in the Netherlands.

With years of research and study in the field of venomous snakes, Walter Getreuer has built up and has at

his disposal, an almost complete serum bank. If there was ever a need for a serum that he did not have in stock, he would certainly know where and how to get it in the shortest possible time. He is generous in his help and advice to both the interested individual and government institutions such as the ministries of Defence, Health, Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries. Walter Getreuer's most recent initiative is the setting up of a serum bank. Anyone who keeps venomous snakes and is prepared to play their part responsibly, can become a member. To address the concerns expressed in the article which prompted my response, I shall include the original text for the serum bank initiative.

**■ REPTILE PARK SERPO  
(DELFT, NETHERLANDS)**

***ANNOUNCING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF  
A SERUM BANK***

Each year as a result of venomous snake-bite, a number of requests for serum are made to the Reptile Park Serpo. Most cases involve accidental bites to snake keepers. Unfortunately most hobbyists keeping venomous snakes do not stock their own serum. This is often a result of unwise cost-cutting or the conceited hope one will never get bitten and if, after all, an emergency did arise, one always has Reptile Park Serpo or Artis (Amsterdam zoo) to contact for the speedy dispensing of serum. We at Reptile Park Serpo feel that venomous snake enthusiasts need to take responsibility for themselves and their surroundings.

The problems with acquiring serum are that it is rather costly and has a limited shelf-life. To buy in serum as a collective and distribute it throughout the Netherlands to keepers of venomous snakes will ensure that there is enough serum in stock to treat a bite.

Dividing the costs of acquiring serum amongst all the members of the collective would obviously mean limited costs for individuals.

For the collective buying and regulating of serum to succeed, it would need to be convenient and centrally co-ordinated. Reptile Park Serpo wishes to undertake this responsibility. The details of how it would be run in practice are as follows:

- membership will be extended for a minimum of five years at a predetermined annual subscription fee paid to the serum bank;
- the serum bank participant will receive a sealed ampoule for each type of venomous snake in his care;
- the participant is to store the serum in the correct manner;
- in the event of a venomous snake-bite in another part of the country, the participant is obliged to make the serum available as quickly as possible.

If you would like to participate, fill in the accompanying form and send this to Serpo.

For the successful establishment of an effective serum network, a minimum of 25 participants is needed. Be sensible - participate!

## NONBINDING APPLICATION FORM FOR THE SERUM BANK.

The following information is relevant to me (example) :

Snakes in my possession	Asiatic Crotalidae
Additional snakes	S-African Viperidae
Any others	S-American Elapidae
How many animals in total	More than 50
Your status	Zoo
Name	W. Getreuer
Street and number	Stationsplein 8
City	Delft, The Netherlands
Postcode	NL-2611 BV
Telephone number	+31-15-2122184
Fax	+31-15-2130334
Email	SERPO@XS4ALL.NL
Additional information	

I would like to receive additional information about the serum bank before deciding on membership. YES/NO

Please complete the above form as fully as possible. An application can also be made electronically via the Internet site: [HTTP://WWW.XS4ALL.NL/~SERPO](http://www.xs4all.nl/~serpo)

*Translation from Dutch and English corrections by Graeme Blem.*