



# **B**REEDING REPORT: MORELIA SPILOTA IMBRICATA 1998

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*Morelia spilota imbricata* is a sub species of the carpet python that occurs in the South-western part of Australia. For this reason *Morelia spilota imbricata* is also referred to as the Southwestern Carpet Python. Together with *Morelia spilota mcdowelli* (Coastal Carpet Python) it is one of the largest sub species of carpet pythons. Animals with a length of over three meters are no exception.

If you see an *imbricata* for the first time you can't help but notice its head, which is relatively large and broad in comparison to other sub species. The only exception is maybe the *Macrobola* form from Irian Jaya which has a similar characteristic head.

Because of its large head this snake may appear somewhat aggressive. Its looks are however by no means characteristic for its behaviour. In my experience these animals never bite when not approached with food. When you take them out of the terrarium, for instance during cleaning, they crawl over your arms very gently and are not aggressive at all. Still one needs to be careful since it are rather stout animals and there is always a first time!

## **BREEDING**

Outside the breeding season I keep both sexes separated. During the daytime they can choose a temperature between 25 and 35 degrees Celsius. During the night the temperature drops to approximately 22 degrees Celsius. The temperature gradient during the daytime (in a terrarium of 120 x 60 x 60cm) is created in sever-

al different ways: The room in which I keep my snakes is heated to a 'basic temperature' of approximately 25 degrees Celsius by means of a small electric heater.

- Every terrarium is equipped with a small heating pad of 30 Watts. This creates a maximum local temperature of 35 degrees Celsius.
- By means of a staircase made from bamboo the animals can choose the height they want with the rule that the higher the more warmer it gets.

Around November I start with cooling the animals down. As a rule this is done by gradually lowering the daytime temperature 4 to 5 degrees Celsius. This can be done in several ways:

- When you heat your terrarium through heating lamps you can use an automatically or manually operated dimmer and thus lower the temperature.
- You can also exchange the heating bulbs by bulbs with lower capacity. Yet another possibility is lowering the overall temperature of the room.

I myself installed a manual dimmer for the heating mats and can easily lower the temperature in the terraria. I choose to regulate the floor heating and not the lighting for two reasons:

- The heating mat generates most heat in the terrarium and this is therefore easiest to control.
- When the heating mat is turned "low" the substrate (peat dust) remains moist. This raises the relative humidity in the terrarium, which has a positive effect on mating.



*Morelia spilota imbricata*. Photo by Lucien Rooyendijk

At the end of December after about 50 days of cooling I placed the male with the female which resulted in a first mating that same day. After this first mating I separated the animals again. A few days later I again placed the male with the female. Within one hour they mated again. When a couple of days later I again placed the male with the female she refused any attempt of the male to approach her. From this I concluded and hoped that the previous two matings had been successful.

## EGGS

From the middle of February on the female became more restless. For me this was a sign that it would not be long before I could expect the eggs. On February 26 I entered the snake room and I noticed the female curled nicely around a large clutch of eggs. I immediately took some pictures,

which did not interest the female at all so that was no reason not to take the pictures. After that I removed the eggs from under the female in what seems to me a very simple way. I placed a large towel over the female and I lifted her in here 'breeding posture' and place her besides the eggs. This is the most difficult part since it has to be done 'blind' under the towel. After that the eggs could be placed in the incubator without any trouble. After about 15 minutes the female had positioned herself on top of the towel and had started sitting on her 'eggs'. After about two days she finally realised that she was sitting on some rather strange eggs and she finally left the towel for what it was. Fourteen days later she ate her first rat again and a second one again a few days later. Now, in the beginning of June here physical condition is back to what it was before she was gravid. This is one of the main reasons why I prefer to incubate the eggs arti-





*Morelia spilota imbricata*. Photo by Lucien Rooyendijk

ficially. A second reason is that during natural incubation by the python herself, always a few eggs are lost and the hatching percentage is lower.

To incubate the eggs I use a 'standard incubator' This means a glass aquarium with a layer of water that is heated by a normal aquarium heater controlled by a thermostat. The incubation temperature is on average 30 degrees Centigrade. During the daytime the temperature is somewhat higher to a maximum of 32 degrees, at night it is somewhat lower to minimum of 28 degrees. For substrate I use clean wood shavings which are slightly moist. A total of 20 eggs were incubated.

## HATCHING OF THE YOUNG

On April 20 1998 (after an incubation time of 53 days), the first eggs hatched and some young stuck their heads out of the eggs. On April 28 also the last eggs had hatched. All but one egg hatched so the result was 19 young carpet pythons out of 20 eggs. All were 30–35 cm's long and already after 10 days the first young accepted a baby rat.

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