

EGG BINDING IN **LICHANURA TRIVIRGATA TRIVIRGATA**

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INTRODUCTION

In May 1994 we bought a pair of 1 year old *Lichanura trivirgata trivirgata*. In the beginning we fed them once a week, a one-day-old rat. We then thought the young we had bought had already grown reasonably (we had never seen new borns.) The animals grew very fast and ate always and all sizes. We soon fed them full grown mice, as much as they wanted.

The first year we did not hibernate the snakes. They were kept at 26-30 degrees Celsius all day and sprayed every two weeks. Literature stated that they should be kept dry and mating would normally occur, after hibernation, in April-May. We did not believe in full dryness. In October 1995 we stopped feeding to commence hibernation.

In November heating and light were turned off abruptly and the animals were separated (we normally keep them together, by species). Temperature ranged between 18 and 22 degrees Celsius till the first of February 1996. Then light and heating were turned on again and temperature ranged between 26 and 30 degrees Celsius again.

Due to the literature, we first attempted to mate in April. We never saw copulation but in May the female stopped eating and her abdomen began to swell. We were very excited about our first pregnant boa, as we believed her to be. Great was the disappointment when after a couple of weeks she started eating again and her body returned to normal.

THE PREGNANCY

The next year, February 1997, we trusted our instincts and rejoined the animals directly after hibernation. A few days later we caught them copulating and we then saw them mating regularly, until the end of March. In April the female only accepted small prey and by the beginning of May she had completely stopped eating. Her abdomen had swollen again and we started to feel hope. In the second week of July she shed her skin. By then she was checked twice daily and as time passed by, I even woke up during the night and checked on her.

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I looked in her cage and saw several young moving. Yes, yes, yes, she/we had done it! 5 live young, 1 dead, probably its mother had laid on it, and 1 unfertilized egg. The young looked very big, about the size the parents were when we bought them. It was hard to imagine them fitting into the belly of their mum. The female still did not look completely worn out and she soon returned to normal, on a diet of 5 mice (full grown) a week. The young all accepted live newborn rats, within two weeks.

THE SECOND YEAR

In October we decided to feed the female for two more weeks (and thus hibernate her for 2,5 month), so she would really be in optimum condition for the next season. Again mating took place in February and March but now we started to feed her small prey, as soon as we expected her to be gravid. (This was in the beginning of March.) She





then ate till halfway through June. At the end of July, she shed her skin and on the 17th of August 1998 she again delivered 4 big young.

THE LAST YEAR

Due to the short recovery period she required and her eating during pregnancy, we decided to try mating again in 1999. All went fine and she shed her skin at the end of July. She was very big and we expected more young than the year before. Weeks went by. By the end of August, there were still no young. The female looked very restless and was constantly moving in and out her hiding box. She was still definitely gravid and examination, revealed there were at least 5 young. In agreement with the vet, we decided to wait for 2 more weeks and then try oxytocine. (0.2 ml Calcium sandos or Calcitad and 2 I.E./kg oxytocine in the abdomen to initiate contractions of the egg-tube. Calcium sandos enhances the effect of oxytocine.) But after the oxytocine there were still no young. The female began to look exhausted. She irregularly accepted small prey but this did not seem to help her. Around the second half of September we called a herpetological veterinarian, Marja Kik, and made an operation appointment for 5 days later. The female was never operated on.

She died 2 days before the operation and section revealed 8 young. 4 were fully grown, 2 were almost fully grown but had a cheesy egg-yolk surrounding them, 1 died halfway through its development and 1 looked very tiny but complete.

One of the egg-yolk young was in front of the end of the uterine tube and had inflamed this, probably by dying before its time. Due to this young and the inflammation, the other young could not get out and died also. This further inflamed the tube

and the female consequently died. Another thing that was noticed during section, was a slight disfiguration of all the young. Some were visible, some could only be felt when sliding your fingers down the spine but all had it slightly. For information, the female still had enough reserves to last for several months, all her other organs were intact and healthy. Her gall bladder looked enlarged and contained a clear light blue solution but this turned out to be normal, for an animal that has not eaten for a long time.

Maybe we were wrong by trying to use the female for 3 consecutive years but she must have been in excellent condition in spring, or otherwise there would not have been 8 young.

Maybe we were wrong for waiting so long, to let her to do it herself. As soon as we saw her deterioration, we tried to do something about it. We had no idea she had such a huge inflammation, she could not tell us.

Maybe it was just bad luck.

*Translated by Henriëtte Bakker
Corrections by Mark Wootten*