

# **A**N EXCEPTIONAL CASE



**J.M.W. Mavromichalis**  
**Beukenlaan 85**  
**5741 DX LAARBEEK**  
**+31-492-465966**

This story is about an *Elaphe carinata*, a ratsnake originating from Southeast Asia.

This snake was for sale, in a local pet shop for a while. Every time I visited the shop, to buy prey items, I was drawn to it. It was wild caught and about 1 m long. The colour was black with some yellow on each scale. It had a beautiful yellow pattern on the head, I thought it was gorgeous.

However I did notice it being skinny. It was probably full of parasites. It's a well-known problem with Asiatic snakes after all.

After several months I asked the seller for some information about the snake. The animal had been delivered to the shop instead of an *Elaphe obsoleta*. It refused food and was very aggressive. Each time the snake was offered water it attacked the caretaker and bit him on the hand. It then also sprayed from the anal glands. This probably gave it the Dutch name, "stink snake". In the end, he offered me the snake for a bargain and I took it home with me.

At home I probed the snake and it turned out to be female. She suffered from mites. This was taken care of by a vapona strip in the cage. Her cage was a so-called sterile one. Newspapers covered the floor, there was a very well lacquered climbing branch, a little carton hiding box and a small waterbowl.



*Elaphe carinata*

## AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE



The hiding box did a fantastic job, the snake calmly stayed in it, during water changes. She kept refusing any food though. Because she was still losing weight I treated her with panacur and ronidazole. The temperature in her cage was raised to a constant 30 degrees Celsius before the night temperature was lowered to 22 degrees Celsius again after a month.

Then I decided it was time to offer her a thawed mouse overnight. The next day it was gone and from that day on, the snake became a real voracious eater. She ate up to 4 mice every 10 days and was quite different from the snake I had met in the pet shop.

Then one day she escaped. She had found the ventilation grating and had pushed and pushed until it popped out. It took me some time to find her. I noticed she must have put a great effort into escaping, for her nose was completely shaved off. I treated the wound by bathing her in warm water, finishing with a few drops of iodine. This tip I got from a vet I know and now I know it really does work. I decided to relocate the snake to another cage, measuring 120 x 60 x 140 cm. It was full of branches and was even furnished with a nesting box for birds. The original occupants were just hibernating. The snake tended to be less shy now, she moved around a lot, so I decided she could stay there for the 3th month duration, until the others came out of hibernation. Then she had to move again. I had redecorated her own place, with lots of branches and she could keep the nesting box, which she used as her hiding spot. I hoped she would remain as active as she had been for the last couple of months.

During her first inspection she immediately found the grating again and started pushing. The grating

had been fully secured, so she had no luck this time. By the next day she had damaged herself so heavily, I had to treat her once more. As soon as she was put back in the cage, she started pushing again. It was as if she knew there had to be some kind of escape route here. Despite her wounds she kept on trying until I could not bear seeing it any more and she was again relocated.

I found another enthusiast, who already had some specimens of this species and was particularly happy with this female. She was eating well now and looked very good. Her nose had already healed by now, so that was not a worry anymore.

I still find the behaviour of this snake very intriguing. She kept on trying to escape, even though she damaged herself severely. This wound must have been painful to her but she did not hesitate to try, even when I was present. It was as if she knew she could do it again, like 3 months earlier.

For me it was proof there is some kind of memory or remembrance for specific places in snakes. Reptiles are not stupid, cold animals, as ignorant people claim but their behaviour is not always scientifically explainable. There are still new enquiries to pursue, something you can do yourself at home, with your own animals. Many reptile keepers do experience interesting things and I myself keep on amazing about these beautiful creatures that have already given me years of pleasure.

*Translation: Henriëtte Bakker*

*Corrections: Mark Wootten*