

ESCAPE OF A *LAMPROPELTIS TRIANGULUM SINALOAE*

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THE BEGINNING

When I was at the 1997 snake-exchange day in Opwijk (Belgium) I bought a female *Lampropeltis triangulum sinaloae*. Once home, I put her in a terrarium, 80x90x80 cm, with various hiding places and a drinking bowl. The bottom was covered with sifted shell-sand because this was easy to keep clean.

I had asked the salesman if the snake was eating, and according to him there were no problems. After about four days I tried to feed her a naked pink mouse. She wouldn't eat it; she didn't even notice it. When I then went on vacation I asked a friend if he would like to feed her a couple of times whilst I was away (at the same time he looked after my other animals). In the next three weeks he tried to feed her several times, without success. My friend did call several people to ask for their advice. One of the tips that he got was to try a capsule of fishmeal, which Jan van Tessel had described in *Litteratura Serpenti-um*. Unfortunately Jan didn't have the capsule in stock, so he had to wait until I was back from my vacation. During the Snake Day in Houten I bought the capsules that I needed. I had tried everything to make the snake feed. I had even cut open a mouse and tried to force-feed the snake. Unfortunately having no success at all, and after several attempts with the capsule, also without result, I became very worried about the snake.

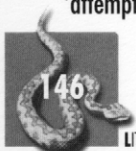
THE FIRST ESCAPE

The first time the animal escaped was just after the 'attempting to force-feed her' period. One night I

thought I should have another attempt to feed her using the capsule. I opened up her terrarium and looked in but I could not find her. After I had checked all her hiding places I still hadn't found her. Below her terrarium stands a similar terrarium for my *Elaphe obsoleta lindheimerii*. This snake was looking very stressed, which made me curious. And yes indeed, I found my missing pet visiting her neighbour *Elaphe*. It wasn't very difficult to catch her. Initially I couldn't see where she had escaped from, so I had to empty the whole terrarium. Underneath the sand and newspaper that I used as a floor covering I saw a small opening which she immediately went for when I put her back in her terrarium. I closed this opening with sealant to prevent her from escaping a second time. I was now quite sure she couldn't escape again.

THE SECOND ESCAPE

In the top of the terrarium there was a ventilation hole closed off with wire netting. The opening was at such a height that I thought that this small snake couldn't reach it. The net wiring was fixed properly on all sides. After about a week I was willing to try to feed her again. I was very surprised to find that again she had escaped. I checked all my other terrariums but with no result. I looked in my room because experience had taught me that the first few days after escape a snake would stay near their own terrarium. I couldn't find her anywhere. I double-checked the terrarium to find the opening where she had escaped. I found out that she had been pushing her head against the wire netting long enough to create a small opening through which she was able to escape. She escaped from the top terrarium. The distance from this terrarium to the ground is 180 cm. The ceiling in the room has several little holes in it,



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and I presumed that she had escaped to the space between the ceiling and the roof. After four weeks of searching I stopped looking for her. In the meantime it was December and very cold. I gave up any chance that I would find her alive. After not thinking about the snake for more than seven months suddenly a man came at my door asking me if I kept snakes. I told him that I did. He told me that he caught a snake in the neighbourhood and had asked around if anyone kept snakes. Fortunately everyone knows I keep snakes. He asked me if I had any red-black snakes and if I lost one. I told him my story of the missing snake. I also told him that it would be very unlikely that the one he had found was the one missing for more than seven months. I showed the man my male *Lampropeltis triangulum sinaloae*. He told me that the one he had caught was exactly like this one. She was very skinny and much brighter by colour compared with my male, who was due to slough, and that he had brought the snake to a nearby pet store. I could

collect it there if it was mine. I went to this store and I immediately saw that the snake was the one I lost seven months ago. She had lost a lot of weight and was very small compared with my male. They let me take her with me without a problem. When I got home I did give her two pink mice which she ate immediately.

I hope her eating problem is now over and hope that, in spite of the unpleasant experience, she will produce many offspring.

LITERATURE

Tessel, J, van, (1997) *Force-feeding*. *Litteratura Serpantium* 17,15-16.

Translation: Melanie Trip.

Corrections: Lawrence Smith.

