

# DUMERILI-BOA'S (ACRANTOPHIS (BOA) DUMERILI)

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## INTRODUCTION

For more than a year now, I have owned a pair of Dumerili boas, which I obtained from C.A.P. van Riel. The animals are from two unrelated breeding pairs. I had owned another dumerili, of a few years old, but in the meantime I have sold that particular animal. The reason why I wrote this article is that I could find very little literature about this animal.

## CHARACTERISTICS

The dumerili boa is a beautiful coloured and marked animal. Its background colour can be grey, brown, pink

or even dark red. The flower shaped markings are dark brown and often show a slightly lighter coloured edge. Like the *Boa constrictor* this species also show dark stripes on the side of the head that runs through the eyes.

In build this animal strongly resembles the *Boa constrictor*. This is remarkable given the fact that these two species occur in totally different parts of the world (Madagascar and South America). This could indicate parallel evolution. However both genetically as well as internally *Boa constrictor* differs so much from *Acrantophis* that the latter undoubtedly forms a separate genus within the family of Boidae. *Acrantophis dumerili* and *Acrantophis madagascariensis* are not hard to distinguish. The easiest characteristic is the presence of two large loreal scales. Also the number of scales



*Acrantophis dumerili*, eating. Photo: Harold van der Ploeg

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Head of *Acrantophis dumerili*. Photo: Harold van der Ploeg

around the eyes differs. *Acrantophis dumerili* has 11 to 16 ocular scales while *Acrantophis madagascariensis* only has 6 to 10. Of course there are many other differences but I will not go into these here. As far as I know no hybrids are known.

Generally the animals do not grow to over two meters in length although specimen of over three meters have been reported. The tail comprises 7 to 8% of the total length. Juveniles generally are around 45 centimetres. I could not find information on the average age expectancy of the animals but I assume it will be between 20 and 30 years.

### HABITAT

The dumerili boa can be found in the southern, south-western and north central parts of Madagascar. It

prefers the somewhat dryer savannahs and open forest regions. Here the animals live in what remains of a once large rainforest. It is estimated that only 10% of the original rain forest is still intact. This is one of the reasons why this animal, together with *Boa madagascariensis*, in 1977 was placed on the list of animals that were threatened to become extinct. Yet there are still locals who have this snake on their menu and who use the skin to make handbags etc. The snake is a true ground dweller that can be found even in the vicinity of human habitation. In contrast to adults, juveniles are regularly found in bushes and trees.

### KEEPING DUMERILIS IN THE TERRARIUM

Given the fact that these animals are still threatened with extinction, I strongly favour its breeding. The fact

that this breeding has been quite successful over the last years, can be seen at the large number of captive-bred animals that are being offered. This has led to a sharp decrease in price and has allowed many to obtain pairs. To keep this animal one has to have the proper licences. I obtained my animals with Euro certificates of CITES. Within a year, the animals have to be fitted with a micro chip. Together with the CITES certificate I send the number of the chip to the CITES bureau. Within a few weeks I received the permit for keeping these animals through the mail. This permit is valid for three years. The permit costs 20 Dutch Guilders and once a year I have to report the number of dumerili boas I own. This means that I have to keep a register of my animals.

I "chipped" my animals within the first year but later I came to the conclusion that I should have waited somewhat longer. In my opinion the animals were still quite small to be "chipped," which caused the chips to appear as small bulges under their skin. When one asks the CITES bureau for more time, I don't think they will object.

There are different opinions on what is the "ideal" position for the micro chip. Some people think that snakes can best be chipped right behind their heads. This will not pose any problems in adult animals but in juveniles I think this is a rather risky position. I heard from an English breeder, that he inserts the chips vertically in the middle of the snake. The danger in this method is that one can harm vital organs between the ribs. I personally prefer to position the micro-chip parallel to the spine at a distance of about one centimetre. In this way no organs can be damaged because

these are protected by the ribs. I chipped my animals just before their tails. I recommend to have the hole closed by a vet. If this is not done there is a danger that the chip is massaged out of the body by the movements of the animal. This happened with one of my animals.

I have housed my animals in a terrarium of 100 x 50 x 50 cm. This will be sufficient for the first two to three years but for specimen of two metres I think that one square metre per animal is the minimum. During the daytime the temperature is between 25 and 30 degrees C. During the night it drops by 5 to 10 degrees. I do not measure the humidity. I placed a large water bowl in the cooler part of the terrarium and I only spray the animals when they are about to slough. So



*Acrantophis dumerili*. Photo: Harold van der Ploeg



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far this has worked well since the animals always slough without problems. My animals never bathe in their water bowl, not even when they are about to slough.

When I feed the snakes I place them in separate cages. In this way I handle the animals at least once a week and I don't have to be afraid that they will try to eat the same prey. My juvenile dumerili's I always fed mice. I started with half-grown but I could soon switch to adult mice. One can offer rats to adult dumerili's. I always feed my animals mice and rats from the freezer since these can not harm the snakes and this food is always at hand. They react differently to the food. Sometimes they grab the prey like lightning, other times they do not appear to be interested. In that case I leave the food in the cage for a couple of hours and nine times out of ten it is eaten. There is one case known of a dumerili boa that attacked and ate another snake but generally other reptiles are not on the menu of this boa. (Terry, personal communication: Ross, 1990)

Unfortunately my animals are still too young to breed. Generally, dumerili boas are mature after four to five years (males sometimes even after three years). To promote copulation a cooling period does not seem to be necessary. Yet most breeders prefer a cool period of two months in which the temperature drops to 22 degrees C. The animals can be placed together from November onwards, since they can mate from November to April. By placing two males with one female, one increases the chance of a successful copulation. In such a case it may happen that the males will fight and they can even bite each other. Depending on the time of

copulation the young can be born between May and October. Litters of two to 21 young are known. There is one report of a dumerili female of 25 years old that still delivered offspring.

### CONCLUSION

The dumerili boa is a very beautiful animal that one can enjoy for many years. Over the last few years they have become affordable, through the relative large numbers of captive-bred animals offered. This indicates that it is definitively possible to breed them. Since dumerili boas generally are animals with a very pleasant character, I expect that this species will gain a lot in popularity.

More information on my boas, pythons and other snakes can be found at:  
<http://home.conceptsf.nl/~harolddd>

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