

SHHS *Rattle!*



News and Info for SHHS Members

In This Issue: Red diamonds and Sea snakes

www.VenomousReptiles.org

SHHS Officer Receives Recognition

At a special awards ceremony on Wednesday, 18 September 2002, Captain Frank P. Stagl, the Chief of Staff for Commander Submarine Group Ten, awarded the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal to Chief Electronics Technician, Submarines, Karl H. Betz for his continuing work with local public school systems. The award is designed to recognize military members who perform outstanding volunteer community service of a sustained, direct and consequential nature.

Chief Betz started taking snakes to public schools to show children what they look like and how they could be expected to behave in 1976. Since then, at every duty station, he has made himself available to school grades of every level (K through 12) as well as Military Spouse Support Groups, Scout Groups, and even Real Estate Representatives in an effort to educate the public regarding snakes that can be found in their local area.

Chief Betz's award reads, in part:

"Your efforts significantly enhanced the establishment of a dialogue between the Navy and local community. You contributed to several significant and long-lasting improvements, leaving a lasting mark showing that you made a difference. Your volunteerism is exemplary and reflects great credit upon yourself and the United States Naval Service.

Congratulations on a job "well done."

Karl is currently the Assistant Vice President of the Southeastern Hot Herp Society and continues to be deeply involved in educating the public with regards to conservation of venomous snakes.

"It is not every day that you can get an award for doing something that you love. However, it is great when those "lasting marks" come up to me at Walmart, introduce me to their new spouses and ask me will I still be doing snake lectures when their children start school. I just wish more people would become involved in educating our children about nature before we watch it all disappear.

SHHS Assistant VP Karl Betz (R) receives award from the US Navy for his work in the area of public education on venomous reptiles.



“Raising Rubers”

By Bill Panos

The Red Diamond Rattlesnake

Crotalus ruber ruber

At this time, information on the Red Diamond Rattlesnake is limited.

There is even some debate as to species from the northern and southern ranges. This rattlesnake ranges from San Bernardino County in southern California, i.e. San Diego, to Cabo San Lucas in Baja California Del Sur. The San Diego Natural History Museum field guide, as of March 2001, described *C. ruber* in the northern range and *C. exsul* in the Southern range, but they state “it was determined that the two species (*C. ruber* and *C. exsul*) represent a single form.

The *C. exsul* was collected from Isla Cedros, Mexico and was the first of the two to be described and therefore would be the holotype specimen”.

Holotype being described as “The specimen of an animal (or plant) which is designated in the publication when the organism is named, as

representing what is meant by the new name.” The holotype specimen may or may not be the first ever collected, and may or may not be a good example of its kind. But it is the official designation: “THIS name refers to THIS animal.” Often, other specimens are cited in the same publication, and are called “secondary types”. As I am not a herp biologist, I’ll let those people figure it out.

That being said, let’s get to raising rubers. We have all heard the question “what’s the best first hot.” Is the best first hot one that is less likely to bite you, or one that is less likely to really hurt you if it does bite? *C. ruber* has a reputation for being docile and mine seem to live up to that. They are very curious and come right up to the front of the enclosure to see what’s going on. While they may not be quick to strike, they are large enough to cause some serious problems if you do get bit. I don’t put a lot of stock in LD 50 statistics, as I’m not a lab rat with a high metabolic rate. But the stats do indicate



that rubers have a yield of 150 to 300 mg. of venom and a lethal dose is 100 mg. This should be taken seriously.

Description:

Most adult individuals are in the three to four foot range, with five feet and five inches being the record.

Color varies greatly, from a beautiful deep red to a reddish brown. While the Red Diamond Rattlesnake ranges from the west coast to the desert slopes of the mountains, it is not usually found in the lower desert or at elevations above 5,000 feet. It is most often found in rocky areas and brushland.

Their diet consists mainly of rodents, small rabbits and other small mammals, although being opportunistic feeders, they will take birds and lizards.

Habitat and Housing:

I have kept my rubers at 70 deg. nighttime to 82 deg. daytime temps. [All temps given are Fahrenheit.] During what is considered the rainy season, August, September, and October I mist them down as it rains. I keep a window open in the herp room just for "real world" temps, humidity, and senses. There is a definite aroma to the desert during the "monsoon" season and I take advantage of that. I keep my adults in separate enclosures except for breeding, 48"X 24"X 20" has worked well for me.

For substrate I cover the entire floor with news paper and then cover about a quarter of one side with cypress mulch. This is were I place some type of hide box.

I also put a fairly large branch in the enclosures, you'd be surprised how much time a heavy-bodied, terrestrial rattlesnake will spend elevated on a branch if it has the opportunity.

I do not use any heat source in the floor of the enclosures. The fluorescent fixtures do give off some heat but I keep my entire herp room at a controlled temperature. The juveniles are kept in a communal enclosure with the same setup on a smaller scale. They are placed in separate sterilite containers for feeding.

Breeding:

I acquired my pair of rubers in June of 2000. By their size I believed them to be about a year

old so I waited a year to attempt breeding. I fed them their last meal at the end of October. After about a two-week period, for the rubers to digest and defecate, I cooled them down to 60 degs. over a period of ten days.

I covered the front of the enclosures with newspaper or a blanket to minimize light and disturbances in general. I checked them on a weekly basis and made sure they had fresh, clean water but did not disturb them other than that.

I brought them back up to temperature slowly over the first or second week of February.

The female ate on March 3rd and March 7th and breeding was observed March 16th. The female ate every week up to June 15th. She refused food on June 22nd but held good body weight. On July 29th she started dropping babies at two o'clock in the afternoon. It took about forty-five minutes. There were five baby rubers and one was very small, only nine inches. The rest were ten to twelve inches and there were only two slugs. I didn't expect the small one to last more then a few days, but it held on for a month before it expired. That's natural selection and that's how it's supposed to work. The strong survive and we breed the best animals.

The babies are doing very well. They would not take pinkies for there first meal,

but jumped at fuzzy mice. When they are born, their color is a disappointing

black and gray, but with the first shed they start to show some nice color starting at the tail and get better with time.

In conclusion, *Crotalus ruber/exsul* is a wonderful animal to work with. They are active, beautiful, and not as high strung as many medium to large crotalus species.

I would not recommend them as a beginner species, but for the intermediate keeper to advanced breeder they can be very rewarding.

References:

San Diego Natural History Museum 3/2001
SHHS Venom Chart

Venomous News Items of Note

Snake handler out of hospital after nasty bite

By Robin Campbell staff writer

October 9, 2002

PORT ST. LUCIE(FL) The general manager and snake handler for a local exotic pet business, bitten by an Indonesian snake Monday night, was released from the hospital Tuesday in good condition.

Ray Hunter, a 17-year snake handler, said the bite he received Monday from a Hagen's pit viper was neither the worst he's received nor does he expect it to be the last.

Port St. Lucie police spokesman Chuck Johnson said Hunter was preparing some snakes for transport in a warehouse at Exotics R Us a Port St. Lucie business that imports, exports and sells exotic reptiles when he was bitten on the finger by the venomous snake.

A witness told police that Hunter took his eyes off the snake only for a moment as he was moving it and the snake instinctively defended itself.

As a precaution, an antivenin serum was immediately shipped from Miami to St. Lucie Medical Center, where Hunter was taken for treatment.

Hunter, however, said he was sure that he would be fine, so he opted not to take the serum sent by the Miami-Dade County snake-bite unit.

"I opted not to use the serum because I was getting better, not worse," Hunter said. "I'm sure it wasn't the last bite, so why hyper-sensitize myself (to the antivenin)."

Hunter admitted that the bite hurt "immensely." He said his hand is still in a great deal of pain because of the swelling.

Hunter said he was released from the hospital Tuesday with pain medication and an antibiotic prescription for the swelling.

[Http://www.tcpalm.com/tcp/the_news_local_news/article/0,1651,TCP_1028_1468660,00.html](http://www.tcpalm.com/tcp/the_news_local_news/article/0,1651,TCP_1028_1468660,00.html)

Footnote:

*SHHS member Tanith Tyrr corresponded with Professor David P. Warrell at Oxford University regarding this envenomation, and apparently there are no known antivenoms cross reactive to *T. hageni*. Recommended treatment is conservative medical management of the symptoms. To the contrary, www.Toxinology.com listed Thai Red Cross Green Pitviper Antivenom for *Trimeresurus hageni*. We'll have to wait to see why though.*

Venomous reptiles targeted by proposed law

South Carolina

By Paul Alongi STAFF WRITER

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Pet owners would need a permit for cobras, copperheads and other poisonous snakes but could keep boa constrictors and pythons without one under a proposed law.

The law would require permits for all venomous reptiles, including lizards such as Gila monsters. Owners would have to meet caging requirements, pay \$10 a year and have some experience or education to qualify for a permit.

Enforcement would fall to the state Department of Natural Resources. That would leave a cash-strapped agency dealing with exotic animals for the first time, said DNR biologist Steve Bennett.

Greenville County requires permits for venomous snakes and lizards. But in some parts of the state, the proposal would be the first regulation of the animals.

"The fact of the matter is that someone, without any statutes out there, can own a spitting cobra," said state Rep. J. Adam Taylor, a Republican from Laurens who has made the proposal. "There would be no regulations against him. That's a problem."

Taylor turned his attention to exotic animals after a pet cobra nearly killed a Laurens man on July 4, 2001. Taylor's effort to ban exotic animals failed in the Legislature last session.

He asked the DNR for help on the newest regulations. The proposal is a rough draft that could change, Bennett said.

Taylor said he would like to expand the proposal to include other exotic animals, such as tigers.

Martin Babb, who sells poisonous snakes at All God's Creatures Pet Shop & Grooming in Berea, said he supports permitting for venomous reptiles, although he sees problems enforcing what pet owners do in their homes.

"You could have venomous snakes and people would never know," Babb said.

Bennett said reptile experts from around the state helped come up with the regulations, which borrow heavily from Florida's law.

Under the proposal, owners who show their reptiles to the public would have to post a \$10,000 bond as insurance in case someone were hurt. Zoos, research institutions and veterinarians would be exempt.

Pet owners would have to do one of the following: attend a seminar on handling reptiles, complete at least a bachelor's degree in zoology or have 100 hours' experience working with venomous reptiles at a zoo, museum or other institution.

DNR would be able to inspect venomous reptiles after giving two days notice. If owners failed to correct unsafe housing within 30 days, their permits could be revoked.

Jonathan Benson of Pickens County, who owns nine rattlesnakes, said he supports the education component.

"A lot of people get snakes because they want one, and they get bit," he said. "They don't know much about it."

If the proposal makes it to the Legislature, it would go through the House Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee.

The chairman, Rep. Charles Sharpe, R-Wagner, said he would support regulations for venomous snakes.

"It's pretty dangerous," he said. "If they get out, it affects the neighbor. The neighbors need to know they're protected, too."

Footnote:

Although I have heard several people already complaining about this new law, myself and the other SHHS officers support it. SHHS member Roark Ferguson actually participated in its design. And SC hot keepers should be grateful for that. When governmental agencies are left to decide the structure of these types of laws themselves, without the benefit of venomous herpetology experts, they tend lean towards total prohibition of exotic venomous reptiles. i.e., Alabama. It should also be pointed out here that the high profile cobra envenomation in South Carolina a couple of years ago was one of the major instigators in the creation of this law.

The benefit of a system where venomous keepers receive a license is that other government agencies cannot cite you with a violation. Without the permit, DFACS can cite you with child endangerment for instance. Also, where there are no laws in place, the threat of total prohibition constantly looms over you. This certainly seems to be the trend of the day.

The bottom line is, when you have a permit, your right to keep venomous reptiles is protected by law.

The following article backs up what I have said.

Austintown forbids exotic, endangered pets

TRIBUNE-CHRONICLE (Warren, Ohio) 13 August 02 (Justin Post)

Austintown: No exotic or endangered pets allowed. That is what township trustees told residents Monday night when they unanimously adopted a resolution that forbids residents from keeping unusual animals.

The law will go into effect in 30 days, with violators being fined \$250 for the first offense.

The exotic pets resolution is the first to be approved by the board under home rule statute, which was approved in March by the board. Home rule allows trustees to adopt ordinances.

Resident Dave Bisignani favored the decision.

"We can't take care of the cats and dogs that we have; we certainly don't need exotic animals," Bisignani said. "Democracy is not a free-for-all. We have to have laws so we all can live together in peace."

The resolution, numbered 02-01, also forbids residents from owning animals that are protected under the federal government's Endangered Species Act.

Exotic animals are defined in the resolution as any animal that is native to a foreign country or a foreign origin or character, is not native to the United States or was introduced from abroad such as lions, tigers, leopards, elephants, camels, antelope, anteaters, kangaroos and water buffalo.

Dangerous reptiles are included.

The law also prohibits residents from owning predatory animals that are not indigenous to Ohio and are capable of harming residents. Trustees said some of those animals may include bears, alligators and crocodiles.

Animals licensed and approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of the Interior or Ohio Department of Natural Resources are exempt from the law, according to trustees. In that case, the resident must register with the township zoning inspector, carry liability insurance of \$1 million, pay an annual fee of \$100 and ensure the animals won't get loose.

Administrator Michael Dockery said township officials know of one resident who keeps exotic animals at his Ohltown Road home and is licensed by the feds.

"We have a guy here who has a federal license to keep certain animals and bring them back to health," he said. "Most people don't even know he exists, and we have never had a problem with him."

Dockery said officials opted to pursue home rule last year after a Caiman reptile escaped from the home of a College Park residence. The reptile was found roaming the area after it kicked open its cage and slipped out a second-story window, Dockery said.

The Mahoning County prosecutor will determine in the coming weeks whether people already keeping exotic or endangered animals would be grandfathered into the law.

http://www.tribune-chronicle.com/news/story/08132002_new10.asp

FOOTNOTE:

Obviously, the SHHS has no problem with a law against keeping endangered animals. The rest of the law mentioned in the above article however, is completely idiotic. That law was generated by the phobias of non-herp folks within that local government. When it says, "Dangerous reptiles are included", it doesn't define the word "dangerous". Turtles can pass salmonella to humans -- so does that make them dangerous? Only the Mahoning county prosecutor knows the answer to that one.

Notice that the article mentions that animals that are licensed by the USDA and the DNR are "exempt". This backs up the point that a licensed animal is a protected animal. I hope that the SC keepers are starting to see the light here. ~CH

DINNER BITES BACK

From August 20 2002

The Age

Hanoi: Witnesses were cited as saying today that a gourmet chef in Vietnam died after being bitten by a venomous sea snake that he was to cook as the nightly special. Le Hung Cuong, 22, died en route to hospital in the northern port city of Haiphong last Thursday, said Nguyen Lien, owner of the restaurant that specialised in such delicacies as stir-fried and stewed snake. Cuong picked up the half-metre sea snake from the glass aquarium it was kept in to prepare the restaurant's speciality, porridge with snake's blood. The snake lashed around and bit his left hand, Lien said. "It was bad luck for him and for our restaurant," she said. "He was careless and did not wear the plastic gloves as required."

[Http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/08/20/1029114103437.html](http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/08/20/1029114103437.html)

FOOTNOTE: *Someone tell Bryan G. Fry to buy some of those "plastic gloves". ~CH*

CroFab: A voice of experience speaks

This is from my personal email correspondence with an envenomation specialist (that many of you know). Due to legal restrictions however, he shall remain nameless.

About CroFab he said:

"There are recurrence phenomena with CroFab, but it's still a very good medication. After treating a child with a particularly serious Mojave rattlesnake envenomation, I went around calling it a "miracle drug" for weeks. I like it much, much better than Wyeth's Antivenin, mainly because it is safer and more effective. Local recurrence can be a problem if additional injury occurs, but this can be avoided with appropriate physician and nurse vigilance. Recurrent coagulopathy occurs, but it isn't really a problem unless the patient bleeds, which is actually very rare. A lot of the reason that CroFab is getting bashed is because doctors just want to order it once and forget about it. You can't do that with CroFab. Serial evaluations and reevaluations are necessary and repeat dosing is sometimes indicated. The problem is that we don't understand CroFab's pharmacodynamics and pharmacokinetics very well yet. Once we understand this better, we'll be able to optimize dosing. Studies on this are underway..."

Well, that made me feel better. ~CH

Husbandry of two species of Australian Hydrophiids (Sea Snakes)

by

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Introduction:

Recently I had the pleasure of going to the Melbourne Aquarium, not to look at the many wonderful species of fish and other marine creatures, but to observe the habits of their Reptile collection.

Craig Thorburn, the Curator of the Melbourne Aquarium was more than happy to show Simon Watharow and myself around its facilities on and off public display.

Species held at the Melbourne Aquarium are as follows Chelodina longicollis (Eastern Snake Necked or Long Neck Tortoise), Emydura macquarii (the Murray or Maquarie Tortoise), Chelonia mydas (the Green Turtle), Lapemis hardwickii (Hardwick's Sea Snake) and Pelamis platurus (the Yellow Bellied or Pelagic Sea Snake).

This paper will cover the history and present husbandry of the Melbourne Aquarium's Sea Snakes.

I also feel that it's important to let you all know of reasons the snakes are kept. Besides the education and "thrill factor" of keeping these reptiles, the snakes are also used to potentially save lives. The Australian Venom Research Unit is currently working in close conjunction with the Melbourne Aquarium to make Antivenom for Australian and Indo Chinese species of sea snakes. This is sent to many Countries without which, people would surely die without Antivenom. As well as making Antivenom the A. R. V. U also breaks down venoms for use in medical and other industries.

Additional observations on husbandry in Sea Snakes is provided in West 1990.



Lapemis hardwickii: Hardwick's or Spine Bellied Sea Snake (Gray, 1835)

Melbourne Aquarium has only been open a short period of time, (approximately 2 years) so it's one of the most up to date facilities in the world.

General Species Introductions:

Lapemis hardwickii: Hardwick's or Spine Bellied Sea Snake (Gray, 1835)

L. hardwickii is a relatively common species over much of Australia's Tropical north, ranging from Brisbane in Queensland, right around the coast to Broome in Western Australia. Occasionally specimens are found outside of this range but this is generally due to storms and strong currents. It is also found throughout the Indo- Chinese Sea.

It is found in a wide range of habitats (Cogger, 2000) from reefs to estuaries.

Average length is about 1 metre with a maximum length of 1.2 metres. Scallation is as follows Midbodies: 23 to 45 rows, Ventrals 110 to 240, Preanal scales are barely enlarged (Cogger, 2000). Colouration of this snake is greatly varied from pale through to dark grey and occasionally brown. Its ventral aspect is creamish white to yellowish below the 2 colours joining in an irregular line. The darker dorsal colours can form blotches numbering from 30 to 55 against the lighter ventral colours. (Cogger, 2000).

L. hardwickii is known to reproduce almost all year round, with a litter size of 1 to 15 with an average of 5 (Greer, 97), neonate sizes range from 254 to 279 mm (Greer, 97).

It is generally diurnal species preferring sand in the wild as substrate (Greer, 97).

In the wild the main prey of *L. hardwickii* is fish however some invertebrates are taken.

It's highly venomous, with at least one fatality recorded overseas (Ehmann, 1992).

Pelamis platurus: Yellow Bellied or Pelagic Sea Snake (Linnaeus, 1766)

The Pelagic Sea Snake is one of the most widespread species of reptiles in the world. It is the only species found in the Americas with a distribution from the West Coast of the Americas right through the Pacific Ocean around the Eastern, Northern and Western Side of Australia and through the Indian Ocean to the Eastern Coast of Africa. There are suspect reports of this snake being in the Carribean Sea however this has not been proven as yet. It been found in Victoria near Mallacoota (Coventry and Robertson, 1986) and also into Tasmania (Cogger, 2000). These specimens are however, generally regarded as "strays" being taken off course by large storms.

P. platurus are generally found more commonly in warmer waters.

It is the only species of "true" sea snake that can be found in the ocean and has adapted itself in many ways to this.

They average about 700 mm in length, with a maximum length of 1.13 metres. Scallation is as follows, Midbodies: 47 to 69 and the ventrals 264 to 406 (Cogger, 2000). They are spectacular looking snakes, the dorsal half being a bluish black or dark Brown and the ventral colouration being a bright yellow through to cream. The Tail is usually a white to yellow colour with Black blotches on the sides. Very smooth to touch.

Reproduction occurs year round with a litter size of 1 to 6 with an average of 3 (Greer, 97). The neonates size at birth ranges from 230 to 280 mm with a weight of 7 to 9 grams in juveniles averaging 250 mm (Greer, 97).

In the wild, it mainly feeds of surface species of fish but has in captivity also taken Frogs (Switak, 1998). The feeding of *P. platurus* is very different to

many other species of Hydrophiids, as it is an ambush predator. The snake lies motionless at the surface and waits, In the open ocean small fish congregate around any cover including sea snakes. So the snake waits until a small group of fish are surrounding the snake and slowly swims backwards so



the fish are now more or less around the head of the snake. A quick sideways strike snares one of the fish and the snake begins to swallow it in "normal" fashion. The mouth has evolved for this with the Fangs being pushed back from the front of the mouth and are now mounted in the middle of the mouth, this is probably so the chances of envenomation of prey are significantly higher.

It is extremely venomous with a powerful neurotoxin, a number of fatalities have been recorded (Hoser, 89).

Another feature of this unique snake is that it occasionally "slicks", this is where thousands and thousand of snakes swim together forming a writhing mass, and no one actually knows why *P. platurus* does this.

HOUSING:

A pair of *L. Hardwickii* is housed in a very large display tank in the public area of the Melbourne Aquarium. The tank is made from an acrylic plastic that is 80 mm thick; this is due to the fact that the tank holds 75, 000 litres of water. The snakes are in half of this, which is separated by 2 walls made from a heavy gauge wire mesh, which is cleverly disguised with rocks that are tied through the mesh. This separates they snakes from a few fish but one in particular a Hump-Head Maori Wrasse *Cheilinus undulatus* which used to attack the *L. hardwickii*, the *P. platurus* and Actually ate another species of Sea Snake previously held at the aquarium (*Acalyptophis peronii* the Horned Sea Snake).

The thickness of the walls of the tank is not because of the snakes but the 75 tonnes of water it must prevent from escaping. Both cages have fresh treated seawater that is continually pumped through both cages to maintain clarity for visibility and the general health of the enclosure. The substrate in display tank is a crushed coral, which seems to do well for the snakes. However, in the wild they tend to be found over a sand bottom (Greer, 97). Other objects within the cage is a "mock" coral reef, in which there are many suitable hiding places. Lighting above the aquarium is mainly for the coral and fish; it is lit by a series of 1,000-watt metal halide lights. General wiping with a cloth cleans both enclosures.

The *P. platurus* are now held off display in a small tub, which is 120 cm's across by 45 cm's tall. The water depth in the tank is about 30 cm's. This

enclosure holds two sub adult snakes that are approximately 50 cm's in length. The substrate is a fine layer of gravel. The cage is very basic in design with a piece of plastic sea kelp that is used for a refuge in the snake's enclosure. The water temperature is the same as for *L. hardwickii* at 26 degrees Celsius, the water for both aquariums originally comes from Port Phillip Bay (Melbourne) where it goes through a number of filtration systems before it reaches the snakes. The process is as follows: The water is shipped to the aquarium where it goes through the first stage of cleaning via Bio Balls...this takes most of the large matter out of the water. It is then pumped through an Ozone filter, which kills any live organisms still living in the water. From there it goes through a protein skimmer and a pressure sand filter, then again back through the Ozone filter and then heated to the desired temperature (in this case 26 degrees Celsius) and finally into the tank. The pH or acidity/ Base of the water is at an optimum level of 8.3. The water is also what's known as "a low nitrate/ammonia" water which emulates true seawater.

No Lighting is used above the *P. platurus*, however some daylight finds its way into the cooling tower where the snakes are kept, so they get a natural Melbourne photoperiod.

Feeding:

L. hardwickii is fed by hand. A diver goes into the cage approaches one of the snakes at a time and offers it a dead comparatively sized fish, if the snake is hungry its takes this and feeds in a typical snake fashion, the amount of food taken is shown in table 1.

P. platurus is fed the by introducing a number of small fish to its enclosure and it feeds naturally, this is observed to rule out a risk of cannibalism. Initially they where reluctant to feed and had to be force-fed but after time the problem snake took food naturally. See table 2.

Growth:

The Hardwick's Sea Snakes *L. hardwickii* held by the aquarium are sub adults so they tend to grow slower than their younger counterparts (Yellow Bellied Sea Snakes *Pelamis platurus*).

Conclusion:

In summary I believe that these would be an incredible group of reptiles to keep in captivity, however the high maintenance and cost of keeping

these species puts them out of reach for most private herpetologists. As well as this we are not allowed by the Natural Resources and Environment to do so would be illegal.

Another problem is Antivenom, while an Antivenom is available its protection is not completely fool proof, as well as the fact that it's generally not available in hospitals as readily as say Tiger or Brown Snake Antivenom.

Acknowledgements:

First off thanks must go to Craig Thorburn and the Melbourne Aquarium for their various assistances. And to Steve Comber, Marlon Herft, Raymond Hoser, Peter Mantell, Simon Watharow and Doug Wintle for proofing the manuscript.

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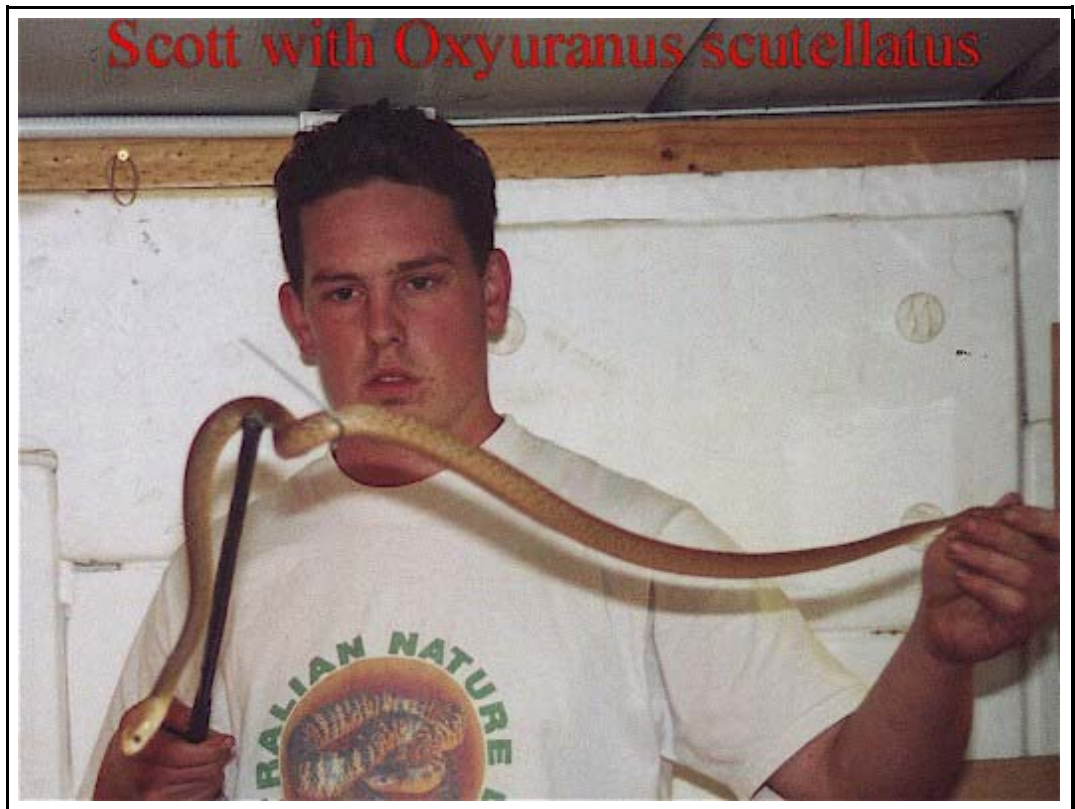
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About myself:

I am 21 years old, and have been keeping reptiles since a very young age, my favourite genera is *Acanthophis*, *Oxyuranus* and *Pseudechis*. I am also a licensed Snake Catcher.



Keeping the Irian Jaya Kingbrown in Captivity

By Richard Mastebroek

Taxonomical note:

Just like most of the Elapid snakes of Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea, this species is still under research. In 2000, Raymond Hoser described this species as a new species in the genus Pailsus. He had previously described this new genus based on a specimen found in the Queensland, Australia, which he named *Pailsus pailsei* (Hoser, 1998). In 2000 he published a paper on a new species of the *Pailsus* genus found in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya (former Dutch New Guinea), named *Pailsus rossignolii*. Hoser described this snake on the basis of a holotype preserved in the Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense, Bogor, Indonesia. The description was based on a brief e-mail from a contact at the Museum. All the information given on the article of A New Species of Snake from Irian Jaya by Raymond Hoser in December 2000 is really doubtful due to lack of scientific proof and research. In this article, we will speak of *Pseudechis australis* till proven differently.

More information on taxonomy of this species can be found on the website of Wolfgang Wuster BA, Ph.D. Phylogeny and classification of Australo-Papuan black snakes and mulga snakes: comments on genus *Pailsus* Hoser, 1998

Zoological Description:

The head is not clearly distinct from the neck. The head is broad and a little bit flattened with a stumpy nose. The eyes are small. The tail is reasonably short. When threatened, Kingbrowns are able to flatten their neck like several different Elapid snakes we know. This flattening of the neck is not comparable with the

genus *Naja* because they don't have a hood and are not able to stand up like a real cobra.

Length:

My adult animals are all between 90-118 cm in length and are wild caught specimens from the Merauke area. Exact sizes can be seen in table 1.1. My personal opinion is that they don't grow bigger than this size. Mark O'Shea describes in his book *A Guide to the Snakes of Papua New Guinea* that they grow to a size of 244-275 cm, which is probably based on the Australian Kingbrown. All Irian Jaya specimens that I have seen were no bigger than 110 cm. I especially think this is a maximum size for these snakes because I have bred them at this size. Females seem to be more strongly built than males which always look quite slender in comparison to the females.

Table 1.1 Sizes from Wild caught adult breeding kingbrowns

Males	Size	Females	Size
Male 1	97 cm	Female 1	109 cm
Male 2	102 cm	Female 2	112 cm
Male 3	109 cm	Female 3	118 cm

Colour:

The dorsal colour of the Kingbrown can be very variable but is always uniform throughout the body. I have seen differently coloured animals varying from olive brown to reddish brown. The ventral side is much paler and can be yellowish cream. Some specimens can have a paler head, which also can be grey or yellowish cream in colour. The colour of the belly is, most of the time, paler than the dorsal colour but can also be creams or greys. Some ventral scales can have small darker dots on them but this is not seen often. The rostral scale can be pinkish or flesh coloured but this is due to their digging and rubbing nature. The scales on the head are often seen to have wide spaces between them which show the flesh colour in between the scales. The eyes of the kingbrown are orange with a large round black pupil. The tongue is mostly black but I have seen specimens with a pinkish coloured tongue.

Scalation:

The scale-counts given in both tables were counted on 6



Photo by Scott Eipper

individual kingbrown snakes with an equal sex ratio of 3:3 (3 ? + 3 ?). Any information previously found in published literature on the Irian Jaya Kingbrown gives only scale count information of the Kingbrown from mainland Australia. The scales are smooth.

Table 2.1 Headscalation of the Irian jaya Kingbrown (*Pseudechis australis*)

<i>Pseudechis australis</i>	Number of scales
Rostral	1
Internasal	2
Frontal	1
Parietal	2
Prefrontal	2
Subocular	1
Temporal	1 + 3
Mental	1
Sublingual	4
Lower Labials	6
Preocular	1
Loral	Absent
Postrostral	1
Prenasal	1
Upper Labials	6
Subocular	Absent
Postocular	2

Table 2.2 Body scalation of the Irian jaya Kingbrown (*Pseudechis australis*)

<i>Pseudechis australis</i>	Number of scales
Number of dorsal scales	9
Number of ventral scales	178 – 187
Number of caudal scales	58 - 68
Divided/ Entire - caudal	Entire
Divided/ Entire - anal	Entire

Geographical distribution:

They are only known from two areas in South-eastern Irian Jaya in the vicinity of Etna bay and the Merauke area. They are not recorded yet in Papua New Guinea but are possibly present in the Western Province west of the Fly River and in the Morehead/Bensbach region near the frontier with Irian Jaya. Parker (1982).

Kingbrowns in the Wild:

There is not much known about these wonderful creatures in the wild. Kingbrowns are known to be diurnal animals that are mostly active during the morning and late afternoon. To avoid the

heat of the day kingbrowns become nocturnal. During these times of the day they search for food between the scrub of the savannah and savannah woodlands where they live. Looking at their nature in captivity, they eat a wide variety of prey items but probably feed mainly on skinks and other smaller ground dwelling lizards. They will also eat small mammals, birds and other snakes. Breeding in the wild probably happens shortly before the rainy season.

Venom:

There is little known about the venom of the Irian Jaya Kingbrown, although venom studies on the venom reveal it is haemolytic, cytotoxic and weakly neurotoxic as well as myotoxic. This also shows that the venom is relatively the same as the venom of the Kingbrown from mainland Australia which makes this smaller species more similar to their bigger cousins.

No specific antivenom is produced against a bite of this species but CSL Monovalent Blacksnake antivenom, and Polyvalent Papua New Guinea and Australia should neutralize the venom.

Kingbrowns in captivity:

The Irian Jaya Kingbrown is not a snake that is frequently kept in captivity. Most people think that they are quite plain snakes that are too nervous, quick and dangerous to keep. Also, the colour of these snakes is not very spectacular and is often called boring. Another reason that the species is not commonly available is because many of the Indonesian reptile exporters do not deal with them or have their trappers in an area where the species occurs.

In my opinion these snakes are my favourites because of their behaviour. They are active animals that manage to make me laugh every now and then. They try to climb to the most impossible places in their enclosure but are not built to climb and fall down easily. New objects in their enclosure can keep them busy for several hours.

Behavioural notes from specimens in captivity:

In my personal experience, there is a major difference between the behaviour of the Kingbrowns from Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea compared to their cousins from mainland Australia. First, there is their panicked way of moving when approached: they flatten their neck immediately when someone comes too close to their enclosures. They lift up their body about 5 cm and move their head and neck in a sort of banded and sloping position, while keeping the rest of their body straight. From this position, they strike and

are capable of jumping with almost their whole body length in the direction of the threat. When kept for some time they will quiet down as long as quick movements are avoided. When handling these snakes a quick reaction is necessary. They do not stay on the hook and slide off quickly. When tailing them, they start thrashing around and will bite everything they can get hold of and they hold on. I have also noticed that when handling these snakes by the tail, they don't come back up to your hand, but are just busy trying to escape. Still, there are some individuals that calm down fairly well and they can even be handled easily by hook and tailing method but this is more of a rarity than a given rule. When kingbrowns need to be restrained or grabbed behind the head for medical treatment or the removal from an eye cap that is left behind after shedding, they start dribbling venom without giving the venom glands a massage. This is something that is pretty unusual for most snake species but I have also noticed that the Australian Kingbrown dribbles venom when grabbed behind the head, even though the nature of this animal seems more friendly than their smaller cousins from Irian Jaya.

The Kingbrowns are active during the day, and when left alone, they crawl around the whole day in search of food. They are also quite curious and every new object in the enclosure is well inspected by them. For this reason, I think that these snakes need a well-decorated enclosure to keep them busy. I feed my Kingbrowns mostly dead prey items (defrosted or pre-killed mice or small rats). When feeding on live mice or rats, they attack fiercely and really hunt their prey down delivering multiple bites. Some of them hold onto their prey even when it bites back. I have seen this before on a few specimens that gave a bite in a snake bag or at a hook and just held on for several minutes. I have even seen a Kingbrown striking the glass and then getting snagged on a piece of tree root, which he didn't let go for quite some time.

I bought my first Kingbrown in October 1998 from a German snake collector, who didn't want this animal any more because of its aggression. He also told me that he had been bitten by it three times without the animal injecting venom. After all of my years of keeping these snakes, I still think this is really strange because I have enjoyed seeing them doing strange things.

I keep my Kingbrowns together even though their cousins of mainland Australia are known to be ophiophagous (snake eating). I never had problems with them biting each other or even getting hold of the

same prey item. I also have seen that usually a prey item bitten by one specimen is not taken by another specimen. But for all rules there are exceptions and one of my females has eaten her male after not having been fed for 2 months. My idea was that this female was too fat and after several clutches of eggs that were not fertile, I decided to put her on a diet. Obviously she didn't like this at all and decided to eat the male, which she regurgitated a few days later.

Captive care:

Kingbrowns are active animals that need their space. I keep my animals paired for most of the year and only separate them a few months every year to give them an extra feed before I want them to mate. I keep my Kingbrowns in enclosures from 120 x 50 x 50 cm (4 x 1.6 x 1.6 feet). I use a mixture of river sand which is washed out and disinfected with high temperatures in the oven, because of the many worms, parasites and bacteria that live in there. This river sand is mixed up with coco peat which is a substrate made from the bark of coconut palm trees and is used as a potting soil for plants. This mixture of substrate absorbs fluid and faeces very well, which clot together so it can be easily removed from the enclosure. This substrate is kept dry and is only sprayed with water when it gets dusty. On top of this substrate I throw a layer of French tree bark and leaf litter which I also sterilize in the oven against small living creatures in there. This substrate gives the snakes the opportunity to dig in as they really like to do. I also have a big bowl in the enclosure with a moisture substrate from coco peat and sphagnum, which helps the animals to shed and provides an area to lay their eggs in. Kingbrowns don't like a humid surrounding to live in but when they come up for a shed and are kept too dry they have problems shedding their skin. Although kingbrowns don't really like water, they will take a bath from time to time and for that reason there is a large water bowl in the enclosure. The water bowl is also often used as a toilet which makes the cage much easier to clean. Because of their active and curious nature, I use a lot of decorative materials in the enclosures. Some plastic plants are hung from the ceiling of the cage, and pieces of tree trunk are brought into the enclosure for climbing and hiding spots. I also use some rocks which can be used as climbing materials.

The enclosure is heated with a 60 watt spotlight, on the right side of the enclosure above a flat rock, which is used after the night as a place to heat up for the day. At night time I keep a 5 watt heat pad as a warm spot in the

enclosure. This heat pad (heat Tape) is placed partly under the bowl with moisture substrate as this keeps the humidity at night reasonably high and gives a sort of dew in the morning when the heating lights go on. The dew is used as drinking water by the snakes as kingbrowns do not often drink from the bowl. The dew is also good because the substrate that is used is kind of dusty and this keeps it moist enough to keep the dust down. The temperature in the enclosures during daytime is around 28-31°C (82-89°F) and at night the temperature drops by about 5°C (41°F). Directly under the spotlight, temperatures of 50°C (122°F) are pretty normal. The average humidity in daytime is around 60%. Kingbrowns kept at a temperature that is too low can have problems with shedding even when the humidity level is good.

Breeding:

All information in this chapter is purely based on my own experience on the Internet and in the literature I could not find any information on breeding of the kingbrowns from Irian Jaya.

Kingbrowns are oviparous and lay between 4 and 14 eggs. In captivity, they will breed the whole year round. Looking at my own breeding experience, I think the average time between mating and laying the eggs is around 65 – 76 days, which is quite long. I hatched the eggs in a dry incubator on vermiculite at 27-29°C (80,6 – 84,2°F) 24 hours a day. I keep the eggs humid by sprinkling them with water if necessary. They hatched after 61-75 days, my personal opinion is that this can be very variable but this is probable dependent on the time of the year.

In two tables I show the process from two individual pairs in the year 2000.

Table 3.1. winter mating

	January	February	March	April	May
Male introduction	8/01/00				
Mating	15/01/00				
Sloughing before laying		07/03/00			
Laying		17/03/00 – 18/03/00			
Clutch size		8			
Hatching first egg					24/05/00
Hatching last egg					30/05/00

Table 3.2. Summer mating

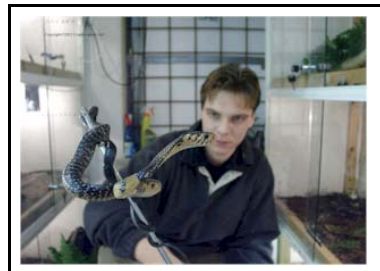
	June	July	August	September	October
Male introduction	06/06/00				
Mating	09/06/00				
Sloughing before laying			11/08/00		
Laying			19/08/00		
Clutch size			12		
Hatching first egg					21/10/00
Hatching last egg					22/10/00

Nothing is done specially to get the animals to breed. I keep the animals more humid some months than others, but there is no structure in this. In the year 2001 I had several mating but no eggs were laid. I cannot give a good reason for this, but there is a chance that the females that have laid eggs will take a year off and they will produce again the year after that. More details will be available from my side as soon as I have more information and breeding results.

I never have weighed or measured the eggs, but the size of the eggs is quite similar in size to that of a corn snake (*Elaphe guttata*). The eggs are bright white in colour and do not stick together. The hatchlings have an average size of 10 – 12 cm (3”-4”), some of them will slough after 9 – 11 days after which I offered them food. I first tried to feed them with live baby mice which they killed but did not eat. I also offered them crickets and small grasshoppers that some of them will accept as food, the others were force fed with little slices of cow heart. Juvenile kingbrowns grow fairly quick and reach a size of 35 – 50 cm in their first year, all juveniles lived accepted live baby mice after they reached a size of 18 – 20 cm and had sturdier bodies.

Last note:

Kingbrowns are not good snakes for beginner snakes or novice venomous snakekeepers. In my opinion, they can be placed on the same list as mambas, taipans, and other big Elapid snakes.



Richard Masenbroek resides in the Netherlands.

Important Information!!!

South Carolina Reptile & Exotic Animal Show

VENOMOUS ALLOWED

- Oct 26th and 27th 10am to 5pm
- Jamil Temple Interstate 26, St. Andrews Road Exi
Columbia, South Carolina
- 100 breeder booths, vendors from around the country. All reptiles including venomous, amphibians, exotics, pocket pets
- For more

info:<http://www.reptileandexoticanimalshow.com/sc/index.html>

- Contact: Tony Cueto (919) 496-7872

SHHS Banquet Info

SATURDAY NIGHT - OCTOBER 26th - 7pm
Hilltop Restaurant (same as last year)

Keynote Speaker:

Dr. Samuel Seashole, DVM

Topic:

Veterinary Care of Captive Venomous Reptiles

We need CARE SHEETS

A note from Chris Harper

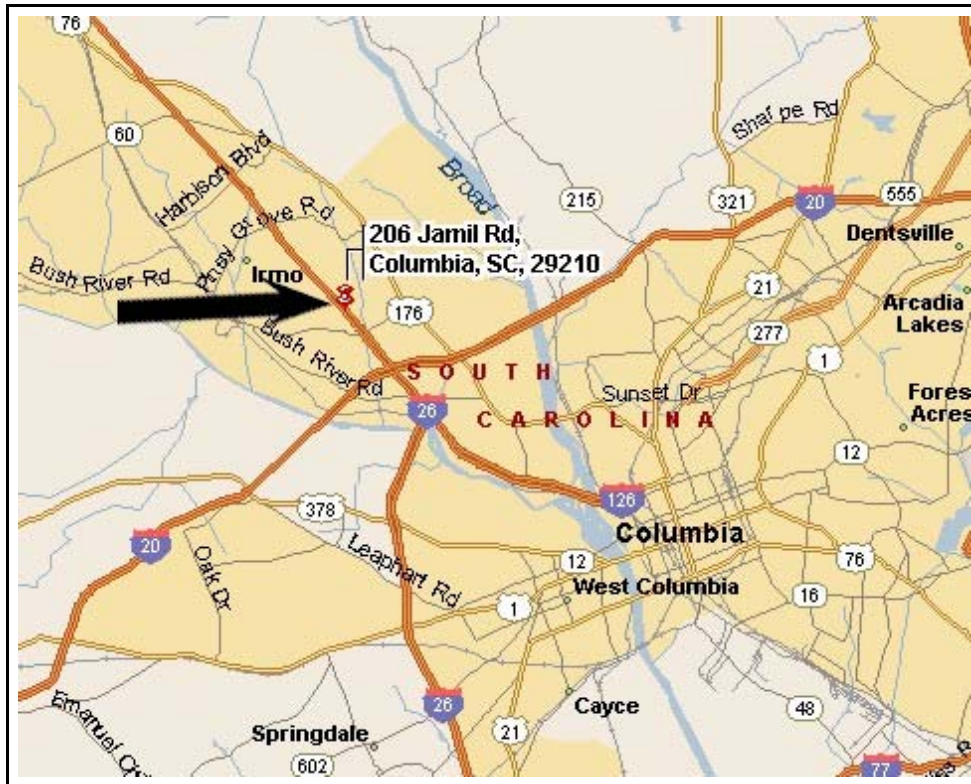
Can you believe that we don't have ANY!?!

The following 3 pages contain an example of a captive care sheet . Anyone can write a care sheet and submit it to my email address:

webmaster@VenomousReptiles.org

I intend to set up a file library (on the website) of care sheets in PDF format when I have collected enough.

Then, anyone that needs one can access them for free, thereby fulfilling #3 of our mission statement.



Captive Care of the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake

Crotalus adamanteus

By Chris Harper

**DANGEROUSLY VENOMOUS: POTENTIALLY LETHAL
DO NOT ATTEMPT CAPTIVE CARE WITHOUT TRAINING!**



Size: 3 to 5 feet **Max:** 8 feet

Life expectancy: About 20 years

Distribution: Southeastern U.S.; South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi. Formerly also in Louisiana and North Carolina.

Caging: The size of a cage is generally the most overlooked factor by private keepers. As a general rule to keep snakes healthy, the bigger the better. Glass fish aquariums should not be used. A full grown eastern diamondback will require a cage at least as long as its own body. Height is not a major factor; however 2 feet tall should be the minimum. A hide spot should be provided. Juveniles have been found to spend the majority of their life underground.

Substrate: A thick bed of dried cypress mulch alone or mixed with aspen shavings. Aspen shavings alone tend to be too dry. *Never use cedar or pine shavings!* Pine straw and pine bark have also been reported to have detrimental effects and are not recommended.

Diet: Mice and rat pups for juveniles. Pre-killed rats, small rabbits or baby chicks are taken by adults. Any wild prey items such as gray squirrels should be frozen for at least 2 weeks to kill internal parasites. Any frozen items should be completely thawed and warmed (the sun, heat

lamp, blow dryer) to around 100F. [Heat is a major factor in getting a captive eastern diamondback to strike.]

Tip for successful feeding: Using a pair of tongs or long hemostats, the heated prey item is suspended in front of the snake until it strikes. The item is then immediately dropped, the cage closed and the keeper leaves the room.

Water: A large water bowl should be provided for adults. This helps maintain humidity levels in the cage. Captive snakes are susceptible to respiratory infections which can often be traced to low humidity levels which dry and inflame mucous membranes. Additionally to prevent dehydration, about once every 10 days, an eastern diamondback can be soaked in a large container of clean cool water for about 2 hours. Maintain a close watch in the event that the snake defecates in the water, so that you can remove it and place it in more clean water. The water should be no deeper than the diameter/thickness of the snake.

Temperature: 76F is the optimal daytime temperature for adult eastern diamondbacks according to research conducted at the Webb Research Center in South Carolina. Anything above 84F is stressful and may cause regurgitation or anorexia. Summer night time temps – 68 – 72F. Winter brumation temps - 48F – 60F.

Humidity: Moderate. Mist cage with clean water periodically. Cage ventilation temps and room humidity's will have to determine the frequency of misting.

Light: Normal light cycles should be imitated. This can be easily accomplished by the use of timers attached to lights. A basking light on one end of the cage is preferable for thermoregulation purposes.

Brumation: Eastern diamondbacks usually stop eating around October or November and start back around March. Prior to brumation, the snake should be allowed to defecate it's last meal at a normal temperature. During brumation, it is preferable to allow temps to drop variably from 48 to 60F. This will slow the snake's metabolism and allow it to live off of fat stores for a much longer period. Clean water should be provided throughout the dormant cycle.

Breeding: Brumation is required for successful breeding to take place. Copulation occurs in the late summer or early fall, however the eggs do not enter the oviducts until much later on. (Bruce Means, Ph.D. pers.comm.) Gestation is around 25 to 29 weeks and from 8 to 21 live young are born in the seclusion of gopher tortoise burrows or stump holes. Prior to giving birth, females can be expected to stop eating. Females reproduce every two to 3 years.

Misc: Keep feces and shed skins removed. Keep drinking water clean! Replace at least every 5 days. Animals housed together should be similarly sized. Animals should be separated during feeding.

Note: *Wild caught adult eastern diamondbacks make terrible captive animals. They rattle constantly, strike at every possible chance, and often refuse to eat. If possible, captive born/bred specimens are preferred.*

Snakebite: Eastern diamondback bites should ALWAYS be treated by a physician in an emergency room. Even the mildest bites can lead to the loss of a finger or its use. Here's what to do if you are bitten by a captive specimen:

- Remain calm and secure the snake (*but only if it is possible to do so without sustaining another bite.*)
- Immediately call 911 and activate EMS. *Within 5 to 10 minutes you might not be able to walk or talk.*

- DO NOT WAIT FOR SYMPTOMS TO APPEAR! You will be much better off in an emergency room if they do.
- Remove any rings or watches, as swelling can be expected almost immediately.

At this stage, hopefully someone will be with you to complete the following tasks.

- For bites by vipers or pitvipers, splint the limb as you would for a fracture.
- Do not apply tourniquets or ice. Do not use electrical shock treatments. Do not cut and suck. All of these treatments have been shown to have detrimental effects.
- Keep the affected limb in a neutral position in relation to the heart.
- Treat for shock. If the patient becomes pale and sweaty, have them lie down and elevate their legs (20 to 30 degrees of elevation is adequate). However, do not elevate a bitten leg.
- If the victim becomes unconscious, roll him on to his unbitten side. This will greatly reduce the possibility that the victim will inhale his own vomit.
- Begin rescue breathing or CPR as indicated.
- Get to the nearest hospital as quickly as possible. (*Ambulances are the safest way to accomplish this.*) Rapid antivenom treatment is critical to the successful recovery of a snakebite victim.

Antivenoms:

Antivenom Code: SAmPRO01

Antivenom Name: Polyvalent crotalid antivenom (CroFab), Ovine, Fab

Manufacturer: Protherics Inc. (US)

Phone: ++1-615-327-1027

Address: 1207 17th Avenue South

Suite 103, Nashville

Tennessee 37212

Country: U.S.A.

Antivenom Code: SAmIBB07

Antivenom Name: Soro antitropico-crotalico

Manufacturer: Instituto Butantan

Address: Av. Vital Brasil, 1500 Butanta

05503-900

Sao Paulo - SP

Country: Brazil

Antivenom Code: SAmIBM06

Antivenom Name: Antivipmyn

Manufacturer: Instituto Bioclon

Phone: ++525-488-3716

Address: Calzada de Tlalpan No. 4687

Toriello Guerra

C.P. 14050

Mexico, D.F.,

Country: Mexico

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Zoological Director of Alligator Adventure

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Contact us: Tongs.com or 1-877-87TONGS

The Southeastern Hot Herp Society, Inc.

PLEASE RETURN WITH EACH RENEWAL!!!

APPLICATION for MEMBERSHIP

Mail To: Chris Harper, 71 Ridgeway Drive, Danielsville, GA 30633 -- USA

Please enclose \$25. Make all checks payable to the Southeastern Hot Herp Society.

Our Mission Statement

The main goals of the Southeastern Hot Herp Society are:

1. To provide a forum for information exchange on the ecology natural history and behavior of venomous snakes.
2. To promote conservation and protection of indigenous venomous snakes.
3. To encourage responsible animal husbandry by venomous snake keepers.
4. To educate the general public to the benefits of venomous snakes in nature.
5. To serve as a clearinghouse of information on venomous snakes.

New Membership _____ **Renewal** _____ **Today's Date:** _____

Please print:

(First name _____ (M.I.) _____ (Last Name) _____ (Age) _____

Mailing Address: (Street)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

Home Phone Number: () _____ **Email Address:**

Primary area of interest in SHHS: ie. husbandry, conservation, education, etc.

**Level of Education:

Occupation: _____

**Do you own any Venomous Snakes? _____ If so list what you keep (basically):

Membership Agreement:

By signing your name, you indicate that you understand the purpose of the society and, to the best of your ability, agree to favorably support The Southeastern Hot Herp Society Inc.'s efforts (further known as SHHS in this document) The SHHS in no way encourages members to keep venomous reptiles. Venomous reptiles are inherently dangerous and a bite can result in permanent injury or death. Activities of the SHHS at times include close contact with venomous reptiles. By signing your name, you agree not to hold SHHS responsible for any injury or bite by venomous reptile that you may receive while participating in any activities associated with the Southeastern Hot Herp Society. Any person perceived by SHHS officers to have reckless behavior associated with venomous reptile handling will be banned from participation in the society. All members are expected to abide by the laws of their state, county and city.

I have read all of the above and agree.

Applicant: Print Name _____

(Signature) _____ (Date) _____

(Guardian if applicable): _____ (Date) _____

** This information is optional, but we are interested in the demographics of the society.

The Southeastern Hot Herp Society

Our History

The Southeastern Hot Herp Society is a non profit organization dedicated to venomous reptile conservation through education. The society was formed in September 1998 as a response to the lack of an official body specifically for venomous reptile keepers, and due to an ever present apathy toward venomous reptile conservation. The society is primarily composed of venomous reptile keepers and is based out of the Northeast Georgia area.

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The main goals of the Southeastern Hot Herp Society are:

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2. To promote conservation and protection of venomous reptiles.
3. To encourage responsible animal husbandry by venomous reptile keepers.
4. To educate the general public to the benefits of venomous reptiles in nature.
5. To serve as a clearinghouse of information on venomous reptiles.

Our Position On The Pet Trade

Although the SHHS condones the selling and trading of live animals, we do not support the exploitative, or illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians. Summarily, the conservation of wild populations AND a sustainable, responsible pet trade is what the SHHS represents. Commercial interests who wish to join the SHHS must agree to abide by this philosophy.

Disclaimer

The Southeastern Hot Herp Society in no way encourages anyone to keep venomous reptiles. Venomous reptiles are inherently dangerous and a bite / envenomation can lead to permanent injury or death. If a person keeps venomous reptiles or is planning to keep venomous reptiles, and is over the age of 18, the Southeastern Hot Herp Society feels that it is that person's right to do so, as long as they accept the responsibility that comes with it. This includes responsibility for their own safety as well as the safety of others around them. All members are expected to abide by the laws of their state, county, and city. Preferrably, anyone wishing to work with venomous reptiles should apprentice with a knowledgeable, experienced keeper.