

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

I have recently become a member of the I.H.S., and have received and read my first copy (i.e. March 1980 edition) of 'Herptile'. I found the magazine of high quality and the topics brought up and discussed in it interested me greatly. Living in Australia, I thought that my comments on certain herpetological aspects might be of interest to your British members.

First let me refer to Nigel Bournes' letter dealing with "indiscriminate herpetology", or bad keeping of reptiles in captivity. Nigel appears to be upset with the fact that at least one I.H.S. member is not maintaining proper herpetological ethics. Whilst in England recently, I saw a surprisingly large number of people involved in Herpetology not keeping their reptiles up to proper standard, particularly amongst people in the pet trade. This surprised me, as I thought that with reptiles being relatively hard to obtain in England, that once people got hold of reptiles in England, they would take extra care in looking after them. I even saw in various places, badly kept Chondropython viridis, Morelia spilotes varigata, Python reticulatus, P. molurus etc. In Australia, where reptiles are very easy to obtain (relatively speaking) a large number of 'amateur herpetologists' maintain reptiles in substandard conditions, knowing that when their reptiles die or escape, they can be replaced without too much difficulty. This includes species almost unheard of in Britain, such as Python oenpelliensis, Liases amethystinus, Morelia spilotes spilotes etc. This is despite very strict protection laws that supposedly prevent people from holding reptiles except for scientific purposes, in all states.

In Australia, the counterpart of the I.H.S. is the A.A.H.S. (Australian Affiliation of Herpetological Societies), for years it had problems with individual members who failed to maintain correct herpetological ethics, thereby damaging the reputations of such societies. Over the past twenty four months there has been a slightly harder line taken against "indiscriminate herpetologists" by societies who belong to the affiliation, with a moderate degree of success. The problem in Australia being that such a huge portion of the amateur herpetological community fail to maintain correct herpetological ethics, that to rid ourselves of this segment is virtually impossible.

In reference to Oliphant F. Jackson's letter, in Australia, many people treat reptiles with drugs unnecessarily for all types of ailments and pseudo-ailments in lieu of supplying the correct conditions for their reptiles. For example, many amateur herpetologists will treat snakes' scale ailments (contracted since the animal had been in captivity) with various antibiotics rather than simply initially supplying the correct conditions for the animal. These situations always end up with the reptile dying over a period

of time. Another example can be seen in the western suburbs of Sydney where some "indiscriminate herpetologists" intramuscularly inject all newly obtained reptiles with mega-doses of multivitamins and are then surprised when half their reptiles die of hyper-vitaminosis shortly afterwards.

An important point brought out in Oliphant F. Jackson's letter is that for every ailment, there is a cause. An important theme stemming from this is that prevention is always better than cure. Referring back to Nigel Bourne's letter, I would advise all reptile keepers to quarantine new reptiles for a period of at least 3 months (for several obvious reasons that I won't detail), and that all amateur herpetologists should have the lowest possible turnover of reptiles. By doing this, more accurate, long term research on individual specimens can be carried out and the likelihood of outside infections attacking a collection are reduced.

It is probable that the best guideline as to when reptiles are kept properly is when they breed. Briefly, I have found that to maximize breeding in all reptiles it is best to maintain all reptiles in a non-obese condition, in perfect physical health, and some form of periodic temperature variation scheme should be practised. (I realize that everybody seems to have recipes for breeding reptiles, but obviously if certain reptiles breed according to some specific formula, that's all that matters).

Before I sign off, I should just touch on the lines of herpetological research in Australia. Much work is being done on thermoregulation, genetics, and general ecology by various individuals; Australia is a world leader in many fields of herpetology. Many very close colleagues of mine are involved in research work on the physiology of aquatic reptiles. I myself am involved in research on the breeding of various Australian reptile species, and detailed research on all aspects of the biology of Death adders (Acanthopis antarcticus), although thus far with regard to Death Adders, most of my research has been dealing with metabolic rates and breeding. I hope that I haven't been longwinded, and trust that this letter has enlightened 'Herptile' readers about comparative aspects of Australian herpetology.

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