General Info

This is the last issue... of the first volume. (There were 8 issues in Volume 1 to bring us to the end of the year. Subsequent volumes will have 6 issues, volume 2 beginning with the February 1992 issue.) This is also the first issue in which memberships are up for renewal. If your mailing label indicates the last issue as Volume 1 Number 8, your renewal fees are due. No other notices will be sent.

The enclosed questionnaire is designed to bring you “closer” to other members of Varanix. A previous version of this questionnaire was sent to people who had received VaranNews from the beginning. This form is more focused and is aimed at building a membership roster which will be available to other members of Varanix. As noted on the form, one of its purposes is to allow inquiring varanominds to contact those “in the know” for a given species. (New members often ask questions of the form: “Please send me all the info you have on V. prashutzi?”)

Even if you returned the previous questionnaire (still on file), you are requested to return this one as well. The reason for this “redundancy” is to insure only the information you desire to be published appear on the member list. A copy of the member list will be sent out with the next issue of VaranNews.

Legislation and You

Pending legislation governing the importation of exotic birds was reported in an article by Anje Mills entitled Pet Trade vs. The Law: The Host is On!, which appeared in the November 1991 issue of Pet Product News.

The article reported on the Exotic Bird Conservation Act (EBCA H.R. 2541) which calls for the phasing out of imports for the pet trade over five years.

This bill allows continued imports for registered Audubonists and permits wild-caught bird imports for the pet trade coming only from approved breeding programs where the habitat, the birds and the local community benefit from controlled harvesting.

The Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1991 (H.R. 2540) calls for an immediate ban on wild birds as pets. Imports would be allowed for captive breeding only when the need for genetic diversity can be demonstrated.

The article goes on to state that major airline carriers now refuse to transport birds because of “excessive mortality in the wild bird trade, the inability of foreign governments to properly regulate their wildlife resources, the necessity to protect wildlife in their natural habitats and substantial pressure from activist groups.”

A New Jersey law, which takes effect in December, bans the trade and possession of wild-caught birds without a permit (except budgies, cockatiels and common canaries).

Permits for wild-caught imports will be limited to those breeders who can prove a need for genetic diversity. Pre-sale captive-bred as well as wild-caught birds will be subject to marking that differentiates illegal and legal birds as well.

Below is an excerpt from a Herpeton message thread, authored by Don Bloomer, commenting on the same legislation:

On 4 June (1991), the Exotic Bird Conservation Act was introduced in the House of Representatives as H.R.2541 by Congressmen Budish and Belinchenko. The same day, the bill was also introduced in the Senate as S.1218 as an amendment to the Lacey Act by Senators Bentsen and Chafee. This is the bill supported by the Cooperative Working Group on Bird Trade. The CWGBT includes American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, National Audubon Society and the World Wildlife Fund among others. The same day, similar bills, H.R.2540 and S.1219, were introduced. These bills were supported by the Humane Society of the United States, Defenders of Wildlife and the Animal Welfare Institute. One of the main differences between the bills is that the CWGBT bill is a 5 year phase-out of imports of wild birds for sale as pets with gradually declining import quotas. The Animal Defenders bill is an immediate ban on pet imports.
You can see that the CHORET bill would allow pet
bird breeders a little time to bring in new bloodlines,
(If the birds were not endangered). The other bill
would leave them high and dry. But the animal
"rights" groups could not care less about private
people that wish to own and breed non-domestic
animals.

Will haris be the next thing Animal "Rights" groups
try to ban? If you have worked at breeder exotic
animals of any sort, you know that five years is not a
very long time. If you want unrelated haris imported
from the wild for your breeding, the time to get them
is NOW. But, if you want pet haris, PLEASE, get
them from a breeder.

Note 1: A "message thread" is the collection of questions and
responses which typically begins with someone's question or
comment on a particular topic. Sysop(s) (system operators) will
often save the more significant threads to a file which users are
able to read and readdress as needed.

Note 2: To those of you frequenting HopNet (or any other
electronic BBS), it would be most helpful if you could capture
message threads of importance to VaranCV readers and mail
them to VaranCV for inclusion in this newsletter. Thread
uploads can be mailed to me on Hopnet or on Computerve (see
page 2 for address,). Please include the message headers (Date,
From, To, Subject) in order to give proper credits.

The legislative issue as it affects varanophiles has
been touched on in previous issues, the most notable
being a report in VaranCV News (5) on the San Diego
County law, Section 44.0305, restricting the captive
maintenance of larger reptiles, with monitors limited
to those species that attain an adult weight of no
more than ten (10) pounds and adult total length of
three (3) feet or less.

This report prompted one reader to send in his
thoughts on the problem. At the time Robert Sacha
wrote in, similar legislation was pending in his state.

Anyone can now go into a pet shop and purchase any
reptile, as long as they have the backs to do so.

Including those that freeze nothing of the species they
purchased. How many of these poor creatures die
from the consequences of such a purchase? I'm all for
the idea that as responsible owners of exotic pets,
we should register our pets, but without the threat of
having them taken from our custody. Anyone
wanting to purchase a monitor, python, boa or any of
the crocoids should be required to provide
information/proof that they know how to care for the
animal. This might also keep down the number of
unwanted reptiles that are "donated" to various
zoological parks.

Robert went on to mention that the law pending in
his city (and perhaps, state) was because someone
was abusive to his animals. Bringing unnecessary
attention to large snakes in particular. In response
to this letter, I asked Robert to follow-up with his

VaraNews is the newsletter of Varanix, the
Varanix Information Exchange. Varanix was
founded to promote responsible care of
varanids in captivity through education
and the open exchange of information.

A primary function of the eXchange is to
build a collective knowledge base that
will serve to improve our understanding of
the family Varanidae. The goal of these
efforts is to improve their chances of survival,
both in captivity and in the wild.

Editorial submissions:
May be written, typed or in electronic form (preferred). Both
PC and Mac diskettes are acceptable, in ASCII,
MS Word, WordPerfect or RTF format.

Please indicate any special conditions of publication,
such as withholding the name/organization or
giving credit to a person or publication.

Back Issues:
To receive the issues listed below, send:
Number 0: $1.10 thru 1: $1.50

Inquiries and Membership:
One-year membership in Varanix is:
* $10.00/Year (USA)
* $12.00/Year (foreign)

Members receive VaranCV News, the newsletter of Varanix.
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VaranCV News is free to 200 upon request and to herp societies
participating in a newsletter exchange program.

Address all inquiries and memberships to:
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Messages may also be left via computer & modem on:
* HopNet - Online Network. - (213) 464-3562
* (HopNet is a US based electronic form which can be
accessed at any modem speed. The caller pays only for the
gate call. System operator: Mark Miller, Settings: N:1-1 P:1
Send Mail to "Greg Naceiko"
* Computerve - send mail to user ID: 71320,721
Specify "Monitor" or "Varanix" as the keyword/ subject

Editorial Review Board:

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following provisions: the material is reproduced without
change, appropriate credits are given, and a copy of the
publication is sent to Varanix.
There's much more to be said... and a whole lot more to be done. What are your thoughts?

SSAR Call for Papers
At the 1992 annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles in El Paso, Texas, the Regional Society Liaison Committee will be sponsoring a one-day conference on "Federal and State Wildlife Laws and Regulations and How They Affect Regional Herpetological Societies." At this time, the committee is issuing a call for papers for anyone wishing to speak on this topic. Topics addressed can be on any subject pertaining to the conference title and can be as formal or informal as the speaker desires. Papers will be limited to twenty (20) minutes in length. Complete audiovisual services will be available. Those wishing to present a paper should send title and a brief abstract no later than 15 December 1991 to Eric M. Rundquist, Dept of Herpetology, Sedgwick County Zoo, 3555 Zoo Blvd, Wichita, KS 67212, fax (316) 942-3781. Please let him know if you have any audiovisual needs and detail same. He will contact you after the conference schedule is established to notify you of the date, place and time for your paper.

Tips & Tricks
How are you dealing with the environmental necessities of captive care for your varand? This is where your helpful hints on topics as food feeding, heating, water, lighting, habitat design, and maintenance will be shared with the readership.

Mark Miller, the sysop of Herpet, had the following suggestions after reading the humidity control system described in Varanews 1(7):2-3.

You might want to remind readers to either drill through the pigmented and mount the wires outside the enclosure or use metal conduit to protect the wires from being damaged by the lizards. Also, the fan should be mounted outside with both a grate and a screen on the inside. As with all 120 v wiring near water or large animals, it should go through a ground fault interrupter (GFI). One GFI can usually provide service to all electrical devices (lights, controllers, small heaters, pumps). They are usually well under $20 at all home supply centers or hardware stores. It's a low cost item that provides a great deal of safety for both the reptiles and their owners.

Mark's comments underscore the importance of evaluating and questioning everything you read rather than simply accepting the printed (as well as spoken) word as gospel. In this case, the points Mark made were "obvious" to me since I was looking at the system when describing it and such, I overlooked the importance of stressing the safety precautions required. Thanks to Mark for his critical eye.

Note: The system which was described is above and away from the water and out of reach of the animals. The fans do have a protective grate (which was not mentioned in the article), though some are open enough that an additional screen might be required in cases where an animal has access.

Publications
This is where books, magazines, newsletters, articles, etc. of interest to Varanix members will be discussed. Many people are looking for sources of good literature about varanids if you know of any good publications, send in the title, author, publisher, and publication date/issue. Comments on its focus and usefulness are most welcome.

DATZ Address
DATZ, Verlag Eugen Ullmer, Postfach 70056, W-7000 Stuttgart 70, Germany. (Several issues of the magazine were mentioned in Varanews (17)).

Captive Husbandry: Herb Medicine
In The Varanix 3(2):23-27, Kevin Wright, DVM, authored an article on herpetological medicine entitled "Husbandry: An Essential Component of Diagnosing Disease in Reptiles and Amphibians." When diagnosing a sick animal, Dr. Wright begins by looking to the captive environment, stressing "a thorough review of the husbandry practices may reveal clues to the current condition of the animal." A guide to proper cage construction which provides a stress-free and easily maintained habitat follows the section on the importance of being familiar with an animal's origins (how else can the proper habitat be designed?). (Routine maintenance note: Disinfecting the cage on a regular basis with dilute chlorine bleach, 1:32 in water, is recommended.) Environmental requirements and the importance of observing each animal and its habits is stressed. "Careful monitoring of the defecatory habits of captive herptiles is essential to good husbandry practice."

Contact: AVH, P.O. Box 1131, Lakeside, CA 92030.

Fages 20 - 25 of the Sept/Oct 1991 issue of Reptile & Amphibian Magazine contain an article entitled: "Control and Treatment of the Enteric Parasites of Reptiles in Captivity" by Michael S. Bodie, VMD, MS. The article begins: "Reptiles new to a collection, especially a collection that maintains species from different parts of the world, should have a fecal examination as part of their initial physical workup." Dr. Bodie finishes the introduction with a description of how to accomplish this.
The article then touches on the captive environment parameters, which cause animals in captivity, harboring the same parasites as those in the wild, to become sick whereas their wild brethren do not.

The ensuing discussion of protozoa, helminths and miscellaneous parasites is accompanied by 12 black & white plates of some of the little beings.

Treatment and dosages accompany each category.

Contact: Reptile & Amphibian Magazine, RD3, Box 3270, Pittsville, PA 17961.

Original Articles

Possible topics include, but are not limited to, any aspect of captive care, reports on captive breeding, personal experiences, description of natural habitats, flora & fauna, legislation.

A Review of Some Soviet Literature Concerning the Grey Monitor Lizard, Varanus griseus caspius (Eichwald)

by Darriel Bennett and Maria Shnamskaya

The grey monitor lizard, Varanus griseus, is one of the most widespread members of the family Varanidae. It is found in deserts from north Africa east through the Arabian peninsula, southern states of the USSR, eastern Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and western India. Mertens (1954) recognized three sub-species: V. griseus griseus (Daudin) from the west, V. g. caspius (Eichwald) from eastern Iran and the southern USSR and V. g. konetzyn (Mertens) from eastern parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and western India. V. g. caspius is distinguished mainly by its compressed tail (found in cross section in griseus and only slightly compressed in konetzyni (Mertens 1954)) and its greater size (up to 150 cm total length and over 3000 g in weight) (Darevsky & Sokolov (ed) 1985)). The Caspian monitor has a different pattern than its relatives; Mertens (1954) records 5-8 crossbands on the back and 13-19 bands on the tail, compared with 5-8 dorsal and 19-28 caudal stripes in the nominate race and 3-5 and 8-13, respectively, in konetzyni.

Distribution

In the U.S.S.R., V. g. caspius occurs in the states of Turkmenistan, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan,uzbekistan, and Kirgiziya, as far north as 46°, as far east as 25° and west to the Caspian Sea (Makayev 1982). It is widespread throughout Turkmenistan to elevations up to 800 metres above sea level (Shnamskov 1981).

Size

Maximum weights for males are given as 2850 g for males and 2700 g for females. Greatest snout-vent length 385 mm for males, 460 mm for females.

Mean snout-vent lengths 442 mm for males, 402 mm for females. The smallest recorded was 125 mm SVL, weight 21 g (Shnamskov 1981).

Densities

Most records of densities are expressed as frequencies of sightings per day. V. griseus is a common reptile in the Surhandarja Basin. Yadgarov (1968) records sightings of 4-5 specimens per 2-2.5 hour excursion around the clay desert of the Babatag Range, less than 3-4 specimens per excursion on the Aral Pajganbar Islands, but only one or two specimens per excursion on the plains of Sherabad, Karasu and near western Gissar (Kenguruz). Makayev (1982) records stable densities of 2-3 monitors per square kilometre in the sandy deserts of Turkmenistan, typically higher than in the clay deserts of the south east. Where rodent populations are dense, monitor density increases: 10-12 per km² on the edge of Karabi, close to the Margab River and in the sandy desert of Karkan Nigiz (Tadjikistan). 0.5 monitors per km² were recorded in Salhan Valley (Uzbekistan), while Zaribagz (1981). In Makayev (1982) records 9-12 specimens per km² on the fixed sands of Sugunskak. In river valleys between 1-2.5 specimens per km² were recorded at Sambar, Chandiz and Margab (Turkmenistan) and Yakhsh River (Tadjikistan). Around Kara-Kala (Turkmenistan), 3 specimens per km² were found on sand, 5 specimens per km² on clay (Makayev 1982). Populations in the Ferghana Valley and Gobushan Steppe are said to have been greatly reduced as a result of economic development (Darevsky & Orlov 1988).

Habitat

V. g. caspius is found on stabilised and semi-stabilised sand and saltmarsh in the River Surhandarja Basin (Yadgarov 1968), near precipices on riverbanks, foothills and highland steppes and in some irrigated areas such as God-Tepa (Turkmenistan), where it occurs in reedbeds fields (Shnamskov 1981). Makayev found them mainly on plains of clay and sand and reports that they readily settle in foothills and on riverbanks, where they live in elevated burrows. (The Caspian monitor is a strong swimmer.) In agricultural areas, monitor lizards are often destroyed. V. g. caspius has been exterminated in Gobushan and Dalverzinskaya steppe where cotton plantations have been established (Bogdanov in Makayev 1982). When land is cleared for agriculture, monitor lizards often mass on the edges of fields to feed on the mammals which have been attracted by the new crops. In this case, V. g. caspius is concentrated in small areas making it very easy for people to find and kill them. Livestock raising, however, seems to have little effect on monitor populations (Makayev 1982).
Shelters
The Caspian monitor usually shelters in burrows which are often excavated by other animals (rodents, tortoise and birds) and enlarged by the lizards. They will also dig their own burrows in sand which can be as deep as 200 cm (Makayev 1982) and as long as 560 cm (Yadgarov 1969). They will also winter in wattle and deb houses (Shammak 1981). For a short description of a hibernation burrow in Kara Kum see Bennett (1990).

Diet
The following animals are recorded as being preved upon by the Caspian monitor; Agroloma horsfieldi, (Horsfield’s tortoise), Ophiurus apodes (=Psuedopus apodus, glass lizard), beetles, Moriones libyce (Libyan jird) (Yadgarov 1968); caterpillars, Echis carbonarius (saw-scaled viper, phoenoas), Viper hirtissima (Levantine viper) and Naja naja (Rjumin 1966); grasshoppers; katydids, locusts, beetles (Corinae, Burpestidae, Tenebrionidae), Lepidopteras (butterflies & moths), Agama sanyainolenta (=Trachelus sanyainolentus, steppe agama), Phrynopsyllus mystacicus (toad-headed agama), Bubonius gramineus (cattail juncus), Spermophilus lepidaerous (long-clawed ground squirrel), Rhabdonurus olivaceus (great gerbil, giant day jird) (Shammak 1981), Teratoscincus scincus (Makayev 1982); Henicurus auritus (long-eared hedgehog), birds, frogs, toads, freshwater crabs (Potamon), scorpions, ants, Salamag. eggs of tortoise and birds, (including chicken eggs (Sokolov 1985), and other monitors (Makayev 1985).

Records of cannibalism in free-living, unmolested monitors are extremely rare. Makayev (1985) reports an incident where a male V. grisaeus (46 cm SVL) was captured in the Cyaur district of Ashkobob, Turkmenistan and provoked into regurgitating its stomach contents, which included several new born A. horsfieldi, egg shells and a male V. grisaeus (30 cm SVL). The stomach of this monitor contained live newborn geckos. Lacerated wounds on the body of the swallowed monitor, and the presence of fresh, undigested food in its stomach testifed to the fact that it was killed and swallowed due to an aggressive contact (the two animals probably encountered each other in a herd colony).

Prey alters seasonally and varies with habitat. In southern Turkmenistan, young A. horsfieldi, large beetles, caterpillars and rodents are the main items of prey in April. In May, tortoise eggs are also eaten, whereas lizards are an uncommon prey item. In the Murgab basin, V. libyce is eaten by all adult monitors, although in other areas they are not eaten at all (Rjumin 1968). Yadgarov examined 46 monitor stomachs (of which 28 were empty) from the Sbundariza Basin. Of ten animals from the Bektal region, nine had fed exclusively on young A. horsfieldi (up to four in each stomach), the other had eaten an O. apodes. Seven from Aral Island, collected between 15 June and 29 August contained beetles, Salamag. and small mammals (rodents, including M. libyce, and hare) (Yadgarov 1968).

Shammak examined 22 stomachs of Caspian monitors from various parts of Turkmenistan. Insects were the predominant prey by frequency (65%), of which Tenebrionid beetles were most common (409%), followed by Lepidopteras (18.2%), Acridoidae (9.1%), Teelitidae. Homopteras, Corinae and Burpestidae (3.5% each). A. horsfieldi and A. sanyainolenta were the most common vertebrates (13.6%), followed by R. olivaceus (9.1%), P. mystacicus, E. gramineus and S. lepidaerous (4.5% each). He also notes that toads, ten species of lizards, six species of snakes, six species of rodents and insectivorous mammals, and four species of birds and their eggs are also eaten (Shammak 1981).

Makayev notes that the Caspian monitor will eat any animal it is able to catch. He found a V. libyceus, total length circa 120 cm, in one stomach and a T. scincus in another. The gekko had probably been excavated by the monitor during the day. Plant remains were found in many stomachs, but were attributed to accidental ingestion (Makayev 1982).

Seasonal Behaviour
V. g. caspius usually emerges from hibernation in April, although specimens have been found on the surface as early as 15 March. Yadgarov found that they were active throughout the day until the end of May, emerging only in the cooler parts of the day in June and July. By late July, activity was restricted to very short periods in early morning and evening. They were rarely seen in August and September and were completely inactive by October (Yadgarov 1969). Shammak found Caspian monitors active as early as 3 March near Kurtinskoye Lake, north of Ashkobob. He found active animals at air temperatures between 17°C and 36°C, usually between April and early October. In May, the monitors spent as much as 12 hours a day above ground, with peaks of activity between 10h00 - 13h00 and 17h00 - 19h00. From June until August, they were active between 07h00 - 10h00 and 17h00 - 20h00 and in August and September only between 12h00 - 16h00. V. grisaeus emerges later and hibernates earlier than other lizards in Turkmenistan. Torpid animals were collected in late October from burrows 70 - 85 cm deep (Shammak 1981).
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