
NEWS NOTES

Ugandans turn to varanid lizard blood for AIDS cure

The White-throated monitor lizard (*Varanus albigularis*), known locally in Yumbe district, northwestern Uganda as *Lepe*, has seen much recent attention from AIDS patients in search of a cure. People living with the HIV/AIDS virus in Yumbe district have been reported to be injecting themselves with the blood of *V. albigularis*, which natives believe to be a cure for the virus. According to reports, this practice has spread to several other rural sub-counties, and more Yumbe residents are discontinuing anti-retroviral therapy to pursue this treatment.

As a result of these anecdotal curative claims, *Varanus albigularis* is reported to have become an expensive item in the Ugandan black market, with reports of individuals selling for more than \$175 US.

Komodo Dragon parthenogen hatches at Sedgwick County Zoo

The Sedgwick County Zoo in Wichita, Kansas recently became the first US zoo to successfully hatch out parthenogenic Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) offspring according to a recent press release. Although previously documented in *V. komodoensis* at the London and Chester Zoos, this event represents the third reported case of parthenogenesis in varanid lizards; the other case involving *V. panoptes*.

According to the press release, one of two adult female *V. komodoensis* maintained at the zoo laid a clutch of 17 eggs between 19 and 20 May 2007. Two eggs were incubated to further document parthenogenesis in *V. komodoensis*, of which one hatched on 31 January 2008. The hatchling measured ca. 43 cm and 104 g. As of this writing, the remaining egg awaits hatching.

Varanus melinus hatch at Wildlife Conservation Society's Bronx Zoo

Quince monitors, native to the Sula Islands of Indonesia, were first described only a decade ago. Soon after they were known to science, the Department of Herpetology at the Wildlife Conservation Society's



(WCS) Bronx Zoo headquarters acquired a group of these animals with the goal of starting a captive breeding program. For several years of effort by Bronx Zoo keepers, a fertile clutch of eggs was finally collected. After incubating at the World of Reptiles Nursery for the past six months seven beautiful hatchlings recently emerged. This is only the second successful breeding of Quince monitors in the United States and the first time scientists were able to collect critical breeding and incubation data for this species.

Curator of Herpetology Jennifer Pramuk commented on this occasion, "This is the

Photograph by Julie Larsen Maher/WCS

latest in a long history of breeding accomplishments for our department and we are quite excited. We have the meticulous, collaborative work of our zookeepers to thank for this success. Because this has important relevance for international captive conservation efforts, our keepers are being encouraged to publish their protocols and breeding data. Protocols refined at the Bronx Zoo may help other institutions breed the Quince monitor and other related species.” After the animals hatched in the Department’s Nursery incubators, a thorough neonatal exam was performed on them.

Quince monitors are carnivorous throughout their lives. The hatchlings are approximately 9 inches (23 cm) in total length and as adults may achieve a total length of 47 inches (120 cm). The conservation status of this species is likely vulnerable due to habitat loss and collection for the pet trade. Some of these Quince monitors hatched at the Bronx Zoo will be sent to other accredited Association of American Zoos & Aquarium (AZA) institutions that have reptile conservation programs of their own.

-Modified from a WCS press release

Groupement d’ Etude des Varanidés (GEV)

The Groupement d’Etude des Varanidés (GEV) is a French varanid association created in November 2007 by varanid enthusiasts. The primary objective of the GEV is to create and maintain a database for the study of behavior and reproduction of varanid lizards in captivity. With this database, the GEV seeks to ameliorate the management and reproduction of varanids in captivity.

The GEV has also set up captive breeding programs intended for gathering information on the biology and husbandry of monitor lizards. Programs currently exist for several species, including *Varanus gilleni*, *V. timorensis*, *V. exanthematicus* and *V. tristis orientalis*. The GEV shall publish an annual report documenting all observations and results collected through these programs.

In addition to studying captive varanid lizards, the GEV seeks to assist in varanid conservation through monetary contributions obtained from the sale of merchandise bearing the GEV logo.

Contact Information:

ARNAUD COLLIN

Président, Groupement d’ Etude des Varanidés (GEV)

E-mail: indicus@msn.com

