Volume 1 Number 3 10 February 1991

VaraNews

VaraNews is published by ©Varanix, the Varanid Information eXchange, dedicated to the responsible captive care of monitor lizards through education and the open exchange of all information pertaining to Varanidae.

General Info

Doòni doòni kononin bé nyaga da.

Welcome to the fourth issue of VaraNews. Based on the comments and responses that have been received, we're on the right track. The concept of Varanix and where it can go in the immediate future becomes clearer with each issue. As with most organizations, a core group of active participants is forming. They bring a wealth of resources and experience to Varanix and several have pledged articles in the future.

It was pure coincidence that the deadline for membership dues coincided with the now infamous 15 January 1991. The middle of the month was picked simply to allow a few weeks prior to mailing. As it turned out, this issue was sent to everyone who had previously requested a copy. Several letters had been received indicating that VaraNews 1(1), sent in October 1990, never arrived. Hopefully, following up with this issue will improve the odds that at least one gets through to anyone wanting to see what VaraNews has to offer.

For future reference, the intent is to mail VaraNews the first week of every even month... April, June, etc. If you have not received your copy by the first week of each odd month, let Varanix know.

You may now phone in your comments and questions (odds are you will be asked to leave a message). The phone number is on page 2.

Those of you reading VaraNews for the first time (or perhaps even the fourth time!) may be asking yourself: What is the Varanid Information eXchange? Varanix is intended to serve as a world-wide communication tool between you and other "herpeto-varanists". There is no pre-established charter of projects and events; the eXchange will become what you make of it.

Currently, the most tangible aspect of Varanix is VaraNews, the fourth issue which you have in your hands. Progress has been made in defining WHAT members are looking for, topics ranging from basic husbandry information to the establishment of captive breeding programs. Each issue will report on the status of current projects and offer new ones suggested by you. Whether an idea or concept, of which there are many, takes shape depends on participation. (By now, many of you are probably wondering how many times this can be repeated! Hint: This won't be the last time, especially since there are indications that the technique works. One reader's response to the repeated call for volunteers in producing Care in Captivity sheets was: "OK OK, I volunteer to act as compiler for the Savannah Monitor".) If you want to discuss an idea, don't hesitate to contact me. If you are interested in writing a regular (or even irregular) column, step forward..

Varanix is trying its best to make participation as simple and straight-forward as possible. All of your questions, comments and, yes, criticisms are of value in helping Varanix contribute to the survival of varanids (and hence, herpeto-varanists!) in an increasingly environmentally hostile world.

The stated goal of Varanix to improve the standard of living of varanids in the captive world should not imply discussion in this newsletter is limited to captive husbandry techniques. This is an open forum and there is no intent, implied or otherwise, to limit the range of topics. VaraNews will reflect the ideas of those who take time to write or call. And only those ideas that get a response and willingness to participate will come to anything.

All information about Varanidae contributes to the accomplishment of the stated goal, whether it be discussion of their ancestors millions of years ago or a tutorial on taxonomy and the proper pronunciation of scientific names. The better we understand our animals, the better we can care for them. Let your voice be heard.

The first sentence of this issue is a West African proverb, yet universal in scope, which applies to Varanix:

Little by little the small bird builds its nest.

It Is/Could Be the Law

The following comment by Rainer Thissen of West Germany reaffirms the importance of establishing successful captive breeding programs in light of worldwide legislation affecting the future of maintaining animals in captivity.

> *"I think it is useful to think about international breeding programs, because according to the situation which is given by international laws, e.g. Washington Convention, it cannot make any sense that somebody is keeping single specimens."*

Restrictive legislation governing the captive care of many animals is being introduced at all levels. Sometime last year, the San Diego Herp Society newsletter reported that it is/will be illegal in San Diego county to possess a monitor lizard which grows to greater than 3 feet TOTAL Length. (I am unable to locate the issue in which it appears; if you have it, a copy would be most appreciated.) The committee, including people from the San Diego Zoo and SDHS, worked hard to limit the restrictive nature of the proposed legislation concerning reptiles. An SDHS member acknowledged there was hesitation to push too hard on the length limitations for monitors for fear of jeopardizing the gains already achieved.

The group's efforts show that herpetoculturists can work together within the system to preserve the privilege of maintaining reptiles in captivity. However, it also points out that there is a need for representation on behalf of varanids. It is an understatement to say this 3-foot limit drastically restricts the selection of Varanidae, especially if you look at the majority of the animals maintained by the readership (details in the next issue)!

As herpeto-varanists are few and far, there is little if any specific representation on the part of varanids to fight restrictive legislation. It would make most sense to work together with local herp societies, zoos, etc. involved in the struggle. How this can be achieved is another story, but it's something we all have to think about. There are several things we can do as individuals beginning with education.

It is not enough that we educate ourselves to properly care for our animals. When possible, we must assist in the education of others involved in the trade of varanids, indeed all reptiles. This includes both buyers and sellers. The important thing is to offer a positive, informative approach. People making their living in the pet trade are not going to take kindly to some stranger trying to limit their sales, especially in economic belt tightening. And nobody likes to be ***told*** what to do... especially yours truly!

VaraNews is the newsletter of Varanix, the Varanid 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 improve their chances of survival, both in captivity and in the wild and .

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 mention of name/organization or giving credit to a person or publication.

Back Issues:

For the issues listed, send a legal-size, or preferaby 6"x9", SASE with the following postage: 50¢ for a single copy and 25¢ for each additional copy (e.g., 3 copies of would require $1 postage).

- Number 0, Vol1 Num1, Vol1 Num2, Vol1 Num3

Inquiries and Membership:

Membership in Varanix for one-year costs:

- $10/year (USA)
- $12/year (foreign)

Members receive VaraNews bi-monthly. VaraNews is free to zoos upon request and to herp societies wishing to participate in a newsletter exchange program.

Address all inquiries & memberships to:

Greg Naclerio
Varanix
8726D S. Sepulveda Bl. #243
Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA

Telephone: (213) 768-8669

Messages may also be left via computer & modem on:

- Herpetology Online Network - (215) 464-3562
  (Herp-Net is a US-based electronic forum which can be accessed at any modem speed. The caller pays only for the phone call.)
- CompuServe - send mail to user ID: 71320,721
  Specify "monitor" as the keyword or subject

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Many herp societies offer their expertise to pet stores selling reptiles, providing a profile of an animal and advising on captive requirements. One important point with varanids is informing the potential buyer about adult size. One of the most common reasons people get rid of their "pet" monitor is that "it got too big"... this wouldn't have come as a surprise if the facts had been known at the point of purchase. It's better to have one less irresponsible reptile owner, than one more abused or abandoned reptile to deal with.

And where's the first place people look for a home for their it-got-too-big reptile? The local zoo. It's not hard to see why many zoos may oppose captive care of large reptiles on the part of individuals, as they feel the brunt of this problem. The zoo is put in an awkward position. If the animal is turned away, the person trying to unload the responsibility will probably badmouth the institution saying, "I thought zoos cared about animals. Obviously, they don't give a hiss!" On the other hand, accepting unwanted animals would quickly put an overwhelming burden on the limited resources available.

Establishing a good relationship with zoos is also important; we amateurs need as many professionals on our side as possible. If zoo officials see progress being made in reducing the number of reptiles being left on their doorstep, they might be more inclined to support responsible amateur herpetologists.

What response do you give when asked: "Should large lizards, such as monitors, be kept in captivity? If so, by whom?" Hopefully, you didn't have to think too long about a response. You may have to answer that question one day to someone working to take away your privilege of keeping them.

Take time to think about the question. If possible, take a few extra minutes to jot down the answer and send it to Mike Wood of the Michigan Herp Society (Mike Wood, 1025 Shady Lane, Warsaw, IN 46580). Mike writes a question & answer type column entitled Editorial Opinions and this is the topic before MHS readers. We will report on the responses. (If you prefer to include your comments in a letter to Varanix, they will be forwarded to Mike.) This topic should provoke a healthy, constructive debate.

As a starting point for a group effort, help Varanix compile a list of laws governing the captive care of varanids, to be organized by country, state, county and city. Are there restrictions/special requirements in your area? If you can provide the statute itself, all the better. When permits are required, how do you go about acquiring them? Also, let Varanix know about any proposed legislation affecting the captive care of varanids.

Now is the time to open discussion on this issue and come up with a game plan. I urge you to let your voice be heard. Let's provide the well-intentioned herpetoculturist with the proper tools to do the job.

$ $ $ Revisited

This is the last issue that will be mailed free of charge. As mentioned in previous issues, the dues go toward the fixed costs of printing and mailing. To this date, 50 people have paid. Special thanks goes to those of you who sent an extra $5 and $10.

If you would like to continue receiving VaraNews, but are truly hard-pressed for funds, let me know. The extra money sent in ($35 total) will be used to sponsor others.

Other means of covering expenses are in the works; more next time.

Extry Extry

One member suggested making copies of VaraNews available to stores selling varanids so they can give a free copy with each sale. If you would like extra copies to distribute, let me know how many and your request will be met when possible.

Also, as noted on page 2, VaraNews will be sent to zoos upon request.

Newsletter Exchange

The following societies have been added since those listed in VaraNews 1(1):

Reptile Breeding Foundation (Ontario, Canada)
Reptile Defense Fund (Baton Rouge, LA)

Traffic International (Cambridge, UK) is also participating. Their publication, Traffic Bulletin, covers all aspects of international trade in wild animals, plants and wildlife products.

Méli–mélo

This section is where you will find the various and sundry, including your amusing stories, quips and anecdotes.

Hogwarmer Revisited

There's a lot of useful equipment to be found in areas other than those which specifically target the reptile trade. The aquarium trade is one of the more obvious; the livestock trade also has some interesting things to offer.

A previous issue mentioned seeing a hogwarmer used as a "big lizard" hot rock and asked for any information on locating them. One member suggested contacting Jeffers Vet Supply in Missouri. On page 117 of the Winter 1990-1991 catalog, Heat Pads by Stanfield are described:

Constructed of fiberglass reinforced plastic with a 10 ft cord, these pads provide a uniformly warm surface of 30 - 35 F above air temperature without the use of an internal thermostat. Three sizes are available:

One-litter pad (100 watt)	1.5 x 2 ft	$28.95
Two-litter pad (160 watt)	2 x 3 ft	$49.95
(2 pads which can be separated)		
Large pad (200 watt)	2 x 4 ft	$59.95

There is also an automatic regulator which can be purchased ($146) to provide a constant, pre-selected temperature on multiple heat pads. Alternatively, the Power Control Model F911 ($29.95) is a non-thermostatic, manually set temperature control unit.

For heating water, page 118 shows a sealed, thermostat-controlled 1500-watt stock tank heater for $25.95 plus a guard ($5.56) for use in non-metallic tanks. (This is about the same price as a 250-watt submersible aquarium heater. But, you would only need 1500-watts if you had several hundred gallons to heat.)

Thanks to Brad Morris for letting Varanix know about Jeffers; their number is 1-800-533-3377.

Herp Hot Spots

One reader asked: *Is there a way that I can find out what Varanidae are available in my general area?* If the reader were in Denver, Colorado, John Levell has a recommendation. Doing what any *serious* herpetologist does when away from home, John spent some of his free time looking for *our type of place* to hang out. He states that Reptilian Haven "deals strictly with herps and is so clean it should be the model for the captive maintenance of reptiles and amphibians". He found their prices very reasonable and goes on to describe their unique sales policy: Each animal sold comes with a free exam by local veterinarian Tom Boyer and 5 free meals. Owners Sandy Iwaniuk & Randy Kawamoto are "friendly, knowledgeable and show a definite caring for their animals".

Reptilian Haven (303) 431 8802
5500 W. 44th Ave.
Denver, CO 80212

John also recommends a visit to the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, whose herps include a Malayan water monitor, *V. salvator*, and both green and black tree monitors, *V. prasinus prasinus* and *V. p. beccarii*. The address and phone number: 2200 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago, IL 60614 (312) 294 4660

Now that you know where to go when in Denver and Chicago, let other readers know of organizations and institutions in your area that might be of interest. Send in the name, address and a short description of what to look for. By the way, the reader who asked about finding locally available varanids lives in New York... he's waiting for your help.

1000 Words

Readers of all ages are invited to send in sketches, photos and cartoons for publication.

Herpetological Societies

Congratulations are in order to the Chicago Herp Society which is celebrating its 25th anniversary. As many of you know, the monthly CHS Bulletin has something for everybody from the entertaining and informative, such as HerpWatch and HerPET-POURRI, to the scientific and technical.

Annual membership is $17.50 (individual), $20 (family), $25 (sustaining), $30 (institutions) and $100 contributing. Members may also receive "Care in Captivity, Husbandry Techniques for Amphibians and Reptiles". This 88-page publication (1990) contains general information on captive husbandry and a collection of Care in Captivity sheets. It starts off with a discussion entitled "Before You Choose Your Pet", followed by 13 pages devoted to basic husbandry techniques of reptiles & amphibians. (I've contacted CHS about the possibility of making copies of these sections available to you.)

The publication should serve as an inspiration to Varanix members in compiling varanid Care in Captivity sheets! (Note: The 1990 edition had no varanid care sheets, but CHS welcomes our help in providing them.)

CHS's address is found in the Publication section of this newsletter.

International Herpetological Symposium

The schedule of events for this 4-day symposium (20 - 23 June 1991) in Seattle, WA has an impressive list of speakers and workshops. Of particular interest is a presentation on the *Captive Husbandry of the Bengal Monitor* by Thomas Huff of the Reptile Breeding Foundation, Ontario, Canada and a *Workshop on Varanid Management* also by Mr. Huff and Michael J. Uricheck, Ph.D. of the Western Connecticut St. University, Danbury, CT.

Registration before 15 April 1991 is $135, after $175. Partial registration can also be had for $85, but this does not include admission to paper/ workshop sessions and the Proceedings. For further information, contact:

Brian P. Backner, MD
17 Margaret Road
Sharon, MA 02067

Projects

This section will discuss the projects which have been suggested by the readership. If you are looking for ways to help Varanix grow and prosper, this section is for you.

Love Connection Revisited

For those of you who responded to The Love Connection in the previous issue (a way for you to come into direct contact with others interested in the same species), you will receive your list of members as soon as there are some names. Curiously, there haven't been many responses. It occurred to me that many of you returned the Info Sheets about yourself and your animals, indicating that you would like your name and address made available to others. Thus, responding to The Love Connection might seem redundant.

This brings up a general point worth noting. The organization of Varanix is still coming together. This means that there may be some duplicity of effort. Had it occurred to me when creating the Info Sheets, the following line would have been included: "Do you want your name and address sent to others sharing an interest in the same species?"

I thought of compiling the lists of names for each species based on the Info Sheets. But this would mean 100 or so individual mailings and the associated cost of material and postage. For the moment, the respondents will be listed in VaraNews and you may contact them directly.

As well, there's some overlap between the offer in The Love Connection and the call for species-specific Care in Captivity sheet Compilers/ Reviewers. It makes sense to list them together.

The following people have responded to the call:

Mark Bayless, 1406 Holly, Berkeley, CA 94703
Compiler: *V. exanthematicus, V. albigularis, V. gouldii, V. flavescens, V. griseus*
Reviewer: *V. exanthematicus, V. albigularis, V. griseus*
Love Connection: all species above +*V. bengalensis*

John Miles, 32570 Eiffel, Warren, MI 48093
Compiler: *V. salvator*
Love Connection: *V. exanthematicus, V. salvator*

Doug Mehaffey, Central Florida Zoological Park, P.O. Box 309, Lake Monroe, FL 32747-0309
Compiler/Reviewer: *V. rudicollis, V. bengalensis, V. dumerilii, , V. karlschmidti, V. salvadorii, V. prasinus, V. indicus*

Greg Naclerio, (address page 2)
Compiler/Reviewer: *V. niloticus*

This is the first step. However, properly done Care in Captivity sheets require time and effort and one individual cannot be expected to take on the job alone, much less for five or more species. Give these people your support by contacting them and discussing what it will take to get the first draft together, the most time-consuming part of the project. Once the Compilers have authored the necessities of captive care (a checklist of items is listed in VaraNews 1(1):4-5) and composed a final draft, the most critical job falls on the Reviewers, who must verify the technical accuracy of the care sheets.

Monitor Rescue

One reader proposed a "Monitor Rescue" which would help relocate and house varanids looking for a home. On the average, the organization he works for is offered one monitor per month because the owner didn't know what he or she was getting into when acquiring the animal. The reasons most often cited are: "It got too big", or "The animal has an attitude problem"... Naw. (The most commonly mentioned orphans are *V. exanthematicus, V. niloticus,* and *V. salvator*.)

Many herp societies have adoption programs where anyone, member or otherwise, can offer their reptile for adoption by one of the members. The obvious complication for Varanix in operating such a program is the geographical range of the members. However, if you know of a monitor looking for a home (and you just ain't got no more space!), let Varanix know, providing as much information about the animal as possible.

Before you rush to call in your offer to provide a home for rejected reptiles of the varanid persuasion, let's hear your ideas on how such a project could be managed. Perhaps, a network of regional contacts could be set up to receive, care for and forward the animals.

There is the obvious task of arranging transportation for the animal. Another potential complication could be a "one varanid-many people relationship" and establishing an equitable means of determining who is selected. This could turn a noble effort into a political issue.

These are but a few considerations. Share your ideas on how a monitor rescue program could be managed.

returned a couple weeks later. Checking my notes, I found that I had been giving them raw egg *right before these symptoms, so I kind of suspected the eggs but I couldn't understand why. And eggs are supposed to be so nutritious."*

Publications

This is where books, magazines, newsletter articles, etc. of interest to Varanix members will be discussed. Many people are looking for a source 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 usefullness are most welcome.

International Zoo Yearbook, Volume 28 (1989)

Sounds like a winner! This work contains a review by H.G. Horn and colleagues of varanid breedings in captivity as well as papers on *V. komodoensis* and *V. dumerilii*. And, it is on the book list accompanying the January 1991 Chicago Herp Society newsletter. It carries a member price of $99 + $2 shipping. (I don't recall the non-member price... naturally, I sent my order within minutes of spotting it and no longer have the price list available.) For further information, you many contact:

Chicago Herpetological Society
Books
2001 N. Clark St.
Chicago IL 60614

Australia's GEO magazine, 9(3):92-107, contains an excellent piece on monitors (the issue is about 3 years old; it also comes with a poster of *V. varius* and a mislabelled *V. gouldii*.) I have not been able to locate GEO in any book stores. However, copies can be had for $5 +$5 airpost (or 16 $ Australian) from GEO, POB 170, Willoughby, NSW 2068, Australia. (For you impatient types, credit card telephone orders are accepted: 011 61 2 415 9222. They are 18 hours ahead of the west coast USA time; calling at 6PM Sunday will get you 12 noon Monday.)

Many thanks to Robert Sprackland for taking the time to let us know about these 2 publications. I also came across an article by Mr. Sprackland entitled "A Myriad of Monitors" in the January 1991 issue of Tropical Fish Hobbyist magazine 39(5):130-138, including 14 color photos. TFH magazine has begun publishing a regular section entitled "Herpetology" featuring articles on reptiles & amphibians.

The address:

TFH Publications
One TFH Plaza
Neptune City, NJ 07753.

Madras Crocodile Bank

Curator Harry Andrews has offered members of Varanix the opportunity to receive reprints of several publications from his part of the world. Anyone interested in the publications listed below may contact Mr. Andrews directly. He is also very interested in any reprints you might be able to offer in return.

Whitaker, R & Whitaker, Z. 1978. Distribution and status of V. salvator in India Sri Lanka. Herpetol. Rev. 11(3):81-82

Anon. 1979. V. salvator breeding at the Madras Snake Park. Hamadryad 3(2):4

Anon. 1980. Eggs of the water monitor (V. salvator) laid in captivity. Indian Forester 106(3):230.

Biswas, S. & Kar, S. 1981. Some observations on nesting habits and biology of V. salvator (Laurenti) of Bhitar Kanika Sanctuary, Orissa. J. Bombay Nat. History Society 78(2):303-308

Whitaker, R. & Khan, M.A.R. 1982. Monitor lizards: identity and sexing problem. Hamadryad 7(3):8

Biswas, S. 1982. Two new records of the species belonging to the Genus Varanus Merren, 1820 (Reptilia - Sauria: Varanidae) from Orissa.

Das, I. 1988. Distributional map of monitor lizards (genus Varanus Merrem, 1820) of India. Report to the IUCN Conservation Monitoring Centre. 16 pgs.

____ 1989. Indian monitor lizard. A review of human utilisation patterns. Hamadryad 14(1):16-19

____ 1989. New evidence of the occurrence of water monitor, V. salvator, in Meghalaya. J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Society 86(2):253

Auffenberg, W., Hafizur Rahman, Fehmida Iffat & Zahida Perveen. 1989. A study of V. falvescens (Hardwicke & Gray) (Sauria: Varanidae). J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Society 86(3):286-307

____ Notes on the biology of V. griseus koniecznyi. Mertens (Sauria: Varanidae)

Harry Andrews, Curator
Madras Crocodile Bank
Post Bag No. 4
Mamallapuram - 603 104
T.N., South India

Other Varanid Literature

Yes, *mes amis*, there is a wealth of printed matter on varanids out there... locating it is the trick. Several members have been taking time to send in copies of articles from their library. A list of available works will be compiled and published in a future issue. I realize many of you are anxious to get information on your animal(s) and will get the list together as soon as possible.

As many of you are aware, a wealth of published material originates in German. I have had several translations done by a retiree who charges $5 per page for German -> English translations

(institutions usually charge $20+ per page). It's a good rate, but it still adds up.

Are there any of you who would be interested in translating some of these articles? If you've done this before, you know it's time consuming. One member has offered to provide a photocopy of *Die Familie der Warane* (The Monitor Family) by Mertens in exchange for a copy of the English translation. Speak up if you would like to get involved in the translation project, especially if you have any ideas on how to fund such a massive project... we're talking 300-some pages.

Français: If you send in articles in French, I will translate them and return the translation ATA (as time allows).

But Is He Housebroken?

This is slightly off the general subject, but what the hay!

An article in the Los Angeles Times told of the misadventure of a hyena in Kruger National Park S.A. It seems the poor fellow accidentally wandered into a house and managed to lock himself in the bathroom. Not pleased, the hyena proceeded to trash the place, pulling down curtains, ripping the medicine chest off the wall, smashing the toilet seat and puncturing aerosol cans.

The *coup de grace* was turning on the shower, flooding the house. Rangers were called when neighbors saw water running out the front door. Happy ending: the hyena was tranquilized and returned to his neck of the woods.

Ads / Notices

Reasonable-length line ads are free and should relate to the intended audience of this newsletter. Display ads will be discussed when the readership base has been established. Varanix is not responsible for the quality of merchandise advertised and reserves the right to refuse any ad deemed inappropriate.

Consumers are invited to inform Varanix of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a product/service. Your comments will remain confidential and on record.

HERPETOLOGY BOOKS: For a free list, write to: Paul Gritis, 1731 W. Market #12, Bethlehem, PA 18018 (215) 867-9723 (evenings & weekends)

VARANIDS: many species available. Call or write for current list. East Bay Vivarium, 1827 5th St., Berkeley, CA 94710. Phone 415-841-1400.

FOR SALE: *Varanus salvadorii*, 6 ft TL, long-term captive. *Varanus prasinus*, 3 ft. TL (approx.). Serious inquiries only. Call Eric 213-391-8588.

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