

I lived at the bottom of the Suriwongse Road. Only youngsters came there, up to 12 or 13 feet in length. There was usually no difficulty in catching them as the python is inclined to remain on its ground rather than escape when discovered; and it was good sport. There is no venom in their bite, but they have a fine set of teeth and can inflict nasty wounds.

There are many ways of tackling big snakes but the following method is as simple as any of them. I have never seen it adopted by anyone else, and pass it on now for those who would like to try it. Take a bath towel and wrap it several times round the left hand so as to protect it completely. Push this into the snake's face. It will be at once seized and before the creature can free its teeth for a second bite it can be gripped round the neck and carried off. The rest of the snake's body will get wound round yours in the process, but the constricting power of a Reticulated Python that is not more than 12 or 13 feet in length is not great. It is as well however to have someone at hand to seize the tail and unwind in case a coil gets round your neck. There was no bath towel handy when I met the python in Newman's Mile, so I threw my coat over it and then sat on top while I felt for its head.

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No. II. Breeding Habits of the Indian Cobra.

In the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London for 1931, Mr. George Jennison published a note on the breeding habits of a pair of cobras in the Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester. In the two succeeding years they again bred, and confirmation of the "nesting" habit and further information concerning gestation and incubation were gained. In 1934 they unfortunately died and it will be of interest now to summarize the whole story. The procedure on each occasion was watched by Mr. James Craythorne, who had charge of the snakes, under the guidance of Mr. Jennison, at that time Director of the Gardens, and every care has been taken to record the facts accurately.

The snakes arrived at Belle Vue in 1928 and were then apparently adult. Sexual maturity in the cobra is reached at the age of three, and full growth in about a year or two later; the snakes therefore when they arrived must have been at least three years old. The records of the three years breeding are as follows:—

1931

Date of copulation not known. Eighteen eggs were laid on March 8th or perhaps earlier. Seven young were born, the first being seen on May 12th.

1932

Copulation was first observed on Feb. 15th, but as the "nest" had been made about a week before it is probable that it was not the first coupling of that season. Nine eggs were laid on March 2nd. Five young were born, the first being seen on May 21st.

1933

Copulation was first observed on Dec. 13th (1932). Eggs were laid on Feb. 2nd, but their number is not known as the nest was not disturbed. Three young were born, the first being seen on April 28th.

The dates on which the eggs were laid in 1932 and 1933 are known exactly and the incubation for those two years is 79 and 84 days respectively. Copulation was witnessed on several occasions during each mating period. The gestation period for 1931 is not known and for 1932 it is doubtful; for 1933 it was 51 days. The pair were closely watched during that time, and it is believed that the coupling which took place on Dec. 13th was the first of that season.

Mating began about a month before the pair made their nest, and during that time they kept continually together, although at other times of the year they lived apart, even within the small area of their cage which was approximately 9 by 9 ft. and 8 ft. in height. During their first two years they were confined in a much smaller cage and provided only with a gravel floor, and this lack of suitable environment no doubt accounts for the fact that they did not breed during those years. When they were moved into the new cage they were provided with a large mound of earth with sods of grass on the top, the whole pile being some 15 inches high. Into this mound they burrowed, digging their way into it at different places with their noses and finally meeting in the middle where they formed a cavity large enough to contain them both. The cavity was some eight inches below the surface and had several holes leading to it which were used indiscriminately for entrance and exit.

That the female cobra guards her eggs during the incubating period is already known, but the fact that the male also took a share in the work is new. The female did most of it, but every day for two or three hours she would leave the eggs and come out into the cage to drink and lie about; sometimes she fed. During that time the male kept guard.

The story of the Belle Vue cobras suggests that given proper environment, many other species of snakes, about whose habits we know little or nothing, could be induced to breed in captivity. Parental feeling is not a strong character in reptiles, and for that reason it is all the more interesting when it does occur.