

Captive breeding of Whitaker's boa, *Eryx whitakeri* Das, 1991 in Pilikula Biological Park, Mangalore, Karnataka, India

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Abstract

Whitaker's boa is a non venomous, burrowing, viviparous snake, endemic to Western Ghats. In order to carry out breeding programme snakes were housed in a spacious 2×2m enclosure. The enclosure was enriched with plant growth, dead wood, water pit, stones with soil bedding etc. Breeding behaviour of this snake was observed for six years.

Introduction

Pilikula Biological Park is one of the major zoos in India. Pilikula is a well known zoo in the country to breed some of the endangered reptiles, mammals and birds of Western Ghats. Pilikula zoo houses nearly 1000 animals of nearly 100 species.

Whitaker's boa is a recently described species. It is a non venomous, nocturnal, burrowing viviparous snake (Fig 1). In India, Whitaker's boa is endemic to Western Ghats found in Karnataka, Kerala, Goa and Maharashtra states (Whitaker & Captain 2004).

The average length of snakes at birth ranges from 100-110mm and the maximum length of the adult Whitaker's boa was recorded to be 790 mm.

The Whitaker's boa snake has a small head, thick and robust body marked with irregular sepia patches, smooth scales and thick tail covered with smooth scales. It feeds mainly on small mammals especially rodents and lizards, killing its prey by constriction method.

Mainly nocturnal and burrowing but can be seen at day time while foraging and preying. Spend most of its time burrowing in soil. Sometimes climbing behaviour is also seen. Move very slowly and lethargic. If disturbed hides its head, in aggressive mood it



Fig 1. Adult Whitaker's boa



Fig 2. Head of an adult Whitaker's boa

flattens its body and suddenly strikes.

Very little is known about the breeding behaviour. Breeding season varies from June to August (Whitaker & Captain 2004). Female is viviparous gives birth upto 12 young ones.

Materials and Methods

Snakes were housed in a spacious 2×2mts enclosure.

The enclosure was enriched with plant growth, dead wood, water pit, stones etc. Mud and leaf litter were used as a substrate in the enclosure. The roof of the enclosure was covered with a mesh so as to provide proper nature light and also aeration.

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Fig 3. Four month old Whitaker's boa feeding on mice

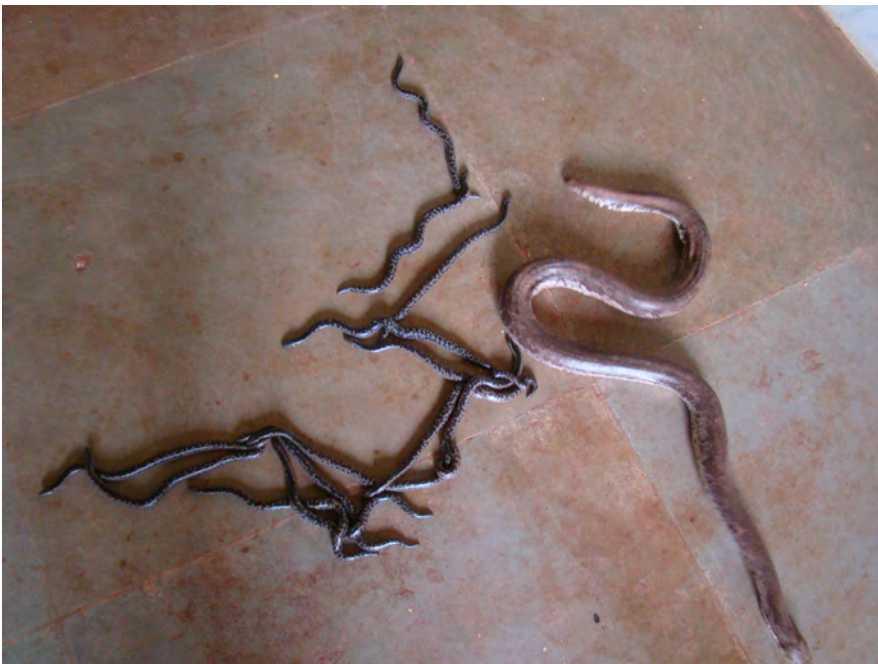


Fig 4. Female Whitaker's boa with young ones

Table 1: Showing the No. of births of Whitaker's boa per year

Year	Month	No. of females gave birth	No. of young ones
2014	July	3	8, 11 and 13
2013	June	2	4 and 8
2012	June	1	12
2011	June	1	6
2010	May	1	17
2009	June	1	8

Five pairs of adult Whitaker's boa were selected for breeding purpose. They were kept together and observed. The captive snakes were fed with mice and lizards. The enclosure was regularly cleaned and maintained hygienically with an ambient temperature of 22-28°C and relative humidity ranging from 80-90%.

Results

Breeding behaviour of Whitaker's boa was observed for a period of six years in Pilikula Biological Park. The number of births per year is mentioned in Table 1.

Clutch size was 4 to 17 respectively (Fig 4). The average weight of the one day old snakes recorded was 18g. The new born snakes started to feed pink mice after 30 days of birth.

Discussion

During the present study Whitaker's boa birth was recorded during May-July and the snake breed only once in a year. The minimum number of young ones born was recorded 4 and the maximum was recorded to be 17.

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Reference

Whitaker, R. & A. Captain (2004). *Snakes of India The field guide.* Draco Books.