

A VISIT TO TWO WESTERN HERPETOLOGISTS

by
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As I am embarking on a study of a number of species of the genus Lampropeltis (milksnakes and kingsnakes), I have spent the past year studying and learning from other herpetologists in our country who have expertise with this genus of snakes.

One who stands out in this field is Terry Lilley of Moro Bay, the owner and founder of the Central Coast Reptile Research Center. His main interest is the research and breeding of reptiles and amphibians that are rare and difficult to collect. He works under permits from State and Federal agencies and operates in accordance with the American Association of Zoos, Parks and Aquariums.

He states, " Our intent is to establish a large scale commercial operation supported by the sale of captive-born U.S. and foreign reptiles. We intend to write and publish the results of our research in various areas of herpetology. Our research is geared toward captive care and breeding of many of the world's rare reptile species. We examine vitamin requirements, growth rates, environmental changes, behavior, and reproductive activities. Our goal is to produce large colonies of reptiles through captive breeding, and to supply zoos, institutions, schools, and private collectors and breeders with healthy captive-bred reptiles. In doing so, we believe we can relieve some of the pressure placed on wild populations by reptile collectors and dealers. We also believe that when an animal disappears in the wild, whether because of habitat destruction or collecting pressure, it should not cease to exist altogether. This makes captive breeding their last hope for survival."

I also had heard of Ernie Wagner, Curator of reptiles at the Seattle Zoo, as a breeder of milk and king snakes. So the goal of my trip was to meet him also and learn more from observation and exchange of ideas.

I headed my car north to Moro Bay and called Terry. His friendly invitation, "Come on over," led me to his house and reptile center. I spent a number of hours with Terry and saw his entire collection which includes breeding pairs of Baja Rosy Boas, Columbian Boas, Brazilian Red-tailed Boas,

Burmese Pythons (one female was incubating a large clutch), African Rock Pythons, Eastern Indigos, all the subspecies and color phases of Mexican King snakes (Lampropeltis mexicana). Then I saw the Mexican Mountain Kingsnakes (L. ruthveni) for the first time. I was able later to obtain a male ruthveni from Ernie Wagner in Seattle, who has a article in this issue of HERPETOLOGY on this beautiful snake. Terry also breeds L. pyromelana, L. t. annulata, and L. t. sinaloae. He has beautiful albino California kings, heterozygous Prairie kings (L. calligaster) and three albino rat snakes: E. guttata, E. climacophora, and E. obsoleta, all breeding pairs. It was a wonderful visit with a fascinating new friend.

I then went up to visit Ron Cauble, the reptile dealer in San Francisco. I procured a baby Sonoran Black Kingsnake (L. g. nigrilus) and a Pale Milk snake (L. t. multistrata), two new additions to my growing collection. Then I headed toward Seattle and Ernie Wagner.

Arriving in Seattle I phoned the zoo and learned Ernie was home for a week's vacation. I called him and got the friendly "Come on over". Arriving at his home and going into the living room I saw a huge terrarium with a pair of South American horned frogs which Ernie is trying to breed. They were sitting under an artificial rain drizzle that Ernie had rigged up to stimulate breeding. Then he took me into his snake room. I felt like a kid in a candy shop! The room was lined with large cages of reptilian treasures. Ernie has developed a type of cage with a hole going down to a lower level. Here the snakes live and breed, coming out of the hole to the sawdust covered surface to feed and move around. Ernie has all the rare Mexican kings including the most beautiful Blairs and alterna phases I have ever seen. He has a pair of breeding Willards rattlesnakes. He has breeding L. ruthveni and treasured new kingsnake, the Pueblo king, that has not yet been officially named. He has beautiful pairs of Greer's kings, Thayer's kings, and Arizona Mountain Kingsnakes. He discussed the probability that greeri and mexicana mexicana are one subspecies of two color phases such as blairi and alterna. He and Terry both discussed how snakes must be hibernated for three or four months to stimulate breeding. He showed me albino prairie kings (L. calligaster) and speckled kings (L. g. holbrooki), all adult breeding beauties.

He then took me to the reptile house at the Zoo and showed me how the reptiles are kept in exhibits that simulate their natural environment. The 1000 mile trip home past Mt. St. Helena (a perfect day) gave me many hours to digest and appreciate the hospitality of these two wonderful herpetologists.