

Acknowledgments

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Longevity Records for the Gray-banded Kingsnake, *Lampropeltis alterna*

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Longevity records for captive snakes have been compiled by Bowler (1977), Snider and Bowler (1992), and Slavens and Slavens (1997). To date, published information on longevity for the gray-banded kingsnake, *Lampropeltis alterna*, gives records of 15 years, 6 months (Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle, Washington) and 14 years, 4 months at the Baltimore Zoo, Maryland (Slavens and Slavens, 1997). Both specimens are deceased. Here we report ages of four specimens of this species that exceed those given in previous reports.

One female *L. alterna* was collected near Langtry, Val Verde County, Texas, in early June 1973 and received by one of us (BWT) later in that month. This specimen is shown in Figure 4 in Murphy et al. (1978) and was part of a successful breeding program for a number of years (Tryon and Murphy, 1982). It was transferred to the Knoxville Zoo, Tennessee, in 1985, and was euthanized due to severely declining health on 23 February 1993. Actual time in captivity was 19 years, 7 months, but because this snake was collected as an adult, actual age was well over 20 years.

A male specimen was hatched in captivity in the above breeding group in September 1979 and was transferred to the Wildlife Conservation Park/Bronx Zoo on 25 April 1980 (WCS Herpetology number 800090). It was later transferred to one of us (GTS) in March 1990 and is alive at the time of this writing. Age as of 1 July 1997 was 17 years, 10 months.

A male collected on 18 June 1978 at California Mountain (Pepper's Hill) in Southern Brewster County, Texas, has been maintained to date in one collection (GPM). Time in captivity as of 1 July 1997 was 19 years, 0 months. Because this specimen was a young adult when collected, actual age is over 20 years.

Another male specimen was collected 7 km N Comstock, Val Verde County, Texas, on 14 July 1977 and received by one of us (BWT) in September of that year. It was transferred to the Knoxville Zoo, Tennessee, in 1985 where it has been maintained since that time. Time in captivity as of 1 July 1997 was 19 years, 11 months. Based on its size at the time of collection, it is estimated that it hatched in late summer or fall 1976, thus actual age is over 20 years.

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1. Wildlife Conservation Park/Bronx Zoo, 185th Street and Southern Boulevard, Bronx, NY 10460-1099.
 2. Knoxville Zoological Gardens, P.O. Box 6040, Knoxville, TN 37914.
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Book Review: *Komodo, The Living Dragon* (revised edition) by Dick Lutz and J. Marie Lutz 1997. Dimi Press, Salem. OR 97302. 193 pp. ISBN 0-931625-27-0. Softbound. \$16.95

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Whenever I meet someone who isn't a reptile enthusiast and the subject of family pets comes up, the reaction I get is predictable.

“What kind of pets to you have?”

“Oh, three cats and about 60 lizards,” is my usual reply.

“Lizards?! Wow! Do you have any of those Komodo dragons?” is the question that often follows. Komodo dragons are the only lizard many people can name. And to some, this infamous varanid ranks right up there with the great white shark or the alligator as a malicious, calculating man-eater just waiting to prey on anyone unfortunate enough to cross its path.

One can easily see how these animals could gain such a reputation. Inhabiting four of the Lesser Sunda Islands east of Bali and south of Borneo in the independent Republic of Indonesia (formerly the Dutch East Indies), they existed only in legend to most of the world until their official “discovery” in 1910.

The dragons of Komodo should be seen as they truly are—magnificent reptiles that just happen to be at the top of the food chain in an island ecosystem where large carnivorous mammals failed to establish themselves. In the second edition of their book, *Komodo, The Living Dragon*, authors Dick Lutz and J. Marie Lutz (father and daughter) view these creatures in exactly this way. They chronicle the discovery of the dragons and early attempts at keeping them in zoos around the world, the history of which is quite depressing. They also detail the animal's current status both in captivity and in the wild. And for those readers who might want to experience these impressive creatures in their natural habitat, the book contains useful information about traveling to Komodo and its neighboring islands.

The book is divided into three main sections, the first of which comprises four chapters: “Komodo Dragons in the Wild”; “Traveling to Komodo Island”; “How Komodo Dragons Were Discovered”; and “The Unhappy Beginning of Dragon Zookeeping.” Having only seen PBS documentaries on the dragons' behaviors and environment, I personally found this first section to be the most interesting. It includes accurate and colorful accounts of the animals, a description of their island home, and a detailed history of their discovery. A discussion of the first woefully unsuccessful attempts at keeping these animals in zoos around the world, with most of the dragons dying, sometimes only months after their arrival, brings the reader to the second section of the book.

Section Two has three chapters: “Komodo Dragons in Modern Indonesia”; “Komodo Dragons and the Modern Zoo”; and “The New Generation.” These chapters detail the status of dragons during the last few years and at present. Recent successes in keeping and breeding Komodos in zoos, as well as the opportunity for the authors to correct some mistakes that had appeared in the first edition were two of the main reasons for revising that edition.

The third section has two chapters: “Hope for the Future” and “The Cincinnati Zoo Maintains Current Zoo Populations.” These are followed by an appendix describing the National Zoo's support of field research on Komodos, and finally a bibliography and index.

The book is written to provide the average person an accurate view of the life and natural history of one of the world's most fascinating and misunderstood lizards, the Komodo dragon. I would suggest that anyone interested in these animals read this informative and well-written edition of *Komodo, The Living Dragon*.