

Herpetoculture House

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From the Editors Cage

So here we are! It's 2012 & the world is about to end according to the Mayan calendar that is, unless of course you count almost every television show running on the History channel. Regardless, 2011 was one hell of a year for reptiles and the people who enjoy keeping them as pets. If you haven't heard yet for some reason or another we have a new Creative Director Kevin Oskow who has stepped into this position to help us out and build up Herpetoculture House to the awesomeness that is the best damn digital reptiles magazine ever. Now if you don't recognize the name Kevin Oskow he is the mastermind behind [Big Reptile Network](#) which you should be familiar with as it's the newest tool to help you find every single thing that you need when it comes to herpetoculture.

We of course welcome back the always incredible Melissa Coakley as she continues to guide us through the wild world of field herping with her exclusive column Tails & Trails. Personally, I am not satisfied with just reading her column and I don't think you are either so make sure and check out her website [Snake Hunting Chick](#). This month she talks with us in an open discussion about the ethics behind field herping which I must say while it is a touchy subject I am very happy she covered this topic as it is very eye opening.

Another great welcome to Olga Zalabak who is now our staff photographer, see the photo essay and you will know it was a no brainer to bring Olga on board. Look forward to seeing more of her amazing shots!

Speaking of eye opening and awareness. We should all be aware by now that the herpetoculture community is under attack and it's not only in the United States. Our friends in the great white north AKA Canada are under some serious fire as well as is explained by Luke Halstead who writes about Changing the Laws. Take heed America, he has some real advice for not only his own country but ours too. We have feature articles from Bruce Riker on Carpet Pythons, then we have False Water Cobras by Ashley Dezan

Carpet Pythons

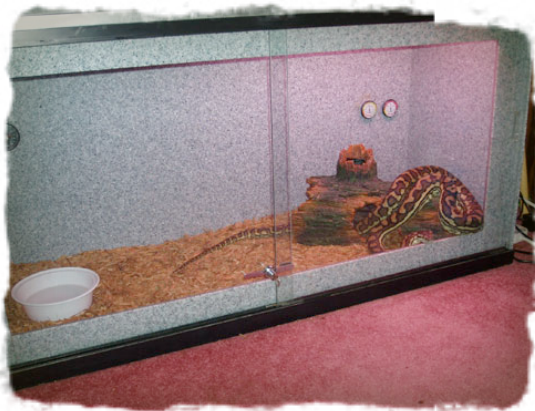
By Bruce Riker

Carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota*) are quickly becoming a popular snake in the hobby with many subspecies and morphs to choose from.

Here we will discuss the three most popular subspecies that are commonly kept in the US – coastal carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota mcdowelli*), jungle carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota cheynei*), and Irian Jaya or West Papuan carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota harrisoni*).

Coastal carpet pythons and jungle carpet pythons are Australian in origin where they can still be commonly found in the wild. Coastals come from the areas of eastern Queensland and northeastern New South Wales while jungles can be found in northeastern Queensland. Irian Jayas come from the Merauke region of Papua New Guinea and also along the northern coast of Australia.

Temperament: All subspecies of carpet pythons are similar in temperament. Most are nippy as babies and typically grow out of this behavior by the time they reach a year old with regular handling from a calm and patient



keeper. Some keepers may feel the necessity to use a hook when removing carpet pythons from their enclosures. Hook training is not a

bad idea considering their adult size especially that of coastal carpet pythons.

Size: Coastals are the largest of the group averaging lengths of 7-9 feet with extremely large females growing to an excess of 10 feet or more. Jungles average 5-7 feet with

some individuals reaching 9 foot lengths. Irian Jayas are the smallest of the three reaching a maximum length of 6 feet but averaging only 4-5 feet.

Feeding: Carpet pythons tend to have voracious appetites and feeding is typically not a problem. In my experience I have never had one refuse a meal. However, some keepers will experience an issue with converting them from mice to rats. My best advice is to start them feeding on rats as soon as possible and in the case of a stubborn feeder scenting with mice.

Enclosures: Hatchlings and juveniles can be kept in simple 10 or 20 gallon glass tanks or similarly sized plastic enclosures. Once they reach about four feet in length a 36"x24"x18" would be perfect. Larger adults that are six foot plus will need an enclosure that is at least 48"x24"x18". Carpet pythons are semi-arboreal and will enjoy

having cage furnishings that allow them to climb. I use 2-3 naturalistic bamboo poles (some keepers use PVC pipe) mounted on varying levels for this purpose, it is also possible to install a shelf in some enclosures for the snake to use as a perch. An appropriately sized hide should be provided (carpet pythons can commonly be seen perching atop their hides) and a bowl of fresh water should always be available.

Temperature/Humidity:

As with all reptiles, carpet python enclosures should have a hot side and a cool side which will allow the snakes to thermoregulate. The cool end of their enclosures should range between 75-80 degrees while the hot side should range from 85-90 degrees. Radiant heat panels or heat lamps mounted on top of their enclosures work well since these semi-arboreal creatures will bask under the heat. Carpet pythons do not require extremely high humidity and keeping the humidity around 50- 65 percent is more than adequate. Humidity can be maintained by misting once or twice a day.

Substrates: Carpet pythons can be kept on a variety of substrates but it would be best to keep them on something that will hold some humidity. I recommend choosing cypress mulch or shredded newspaper, both of which hold humidity well and make cleaning relatively easy.

Breeding: The most important factor before breeding snakes is making sure that both

animals are healthy and of appropriate age and size. To be considered breeding age, carpet pythons should be at least three years old (although males have been bred as young as 18 months old) while some breeders prefer to wait until the female is in her fourth year. Some breeders will prep their carpet pythons for breeding by “cooling” them for a period of time. Cooling simulates the natural climate change they would experience during winter

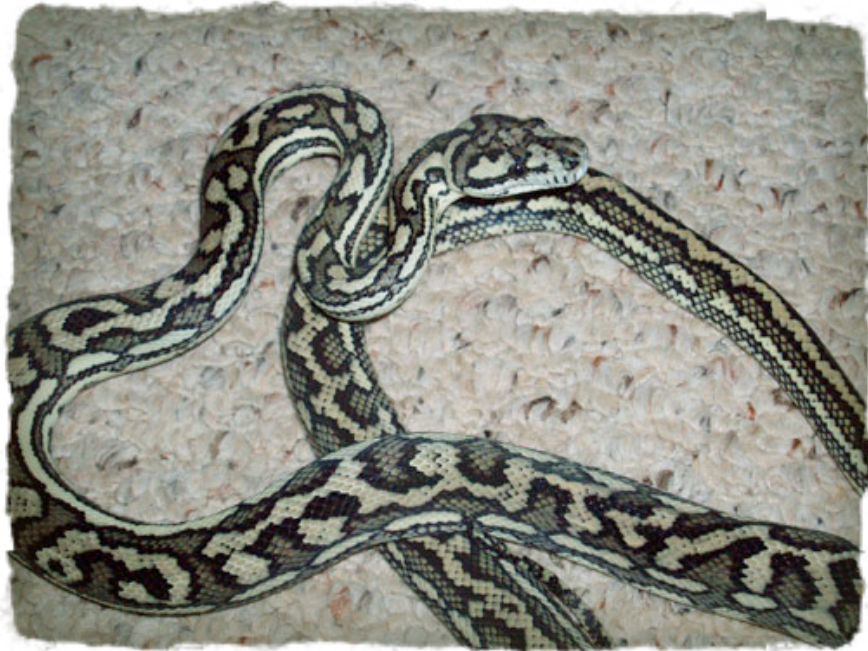


before the spring breeding season. During the cooling period carpet pythons should experience regular daytime temperatures but heating can be turned off at night to allow for temperatures to

drop into the range of 70-80 degrees. During the cooling period it is possible to periodically introduce the male into the female's enclosure. When the male is ready to breed, he will spur the female's back and if she is receptive copulation will typically occur within twenty-four hours. The couple can then be left together for a few days until they no longer show an interest in each other. If the female has been successfully bred, she will then start to show signs of ovulation and the last third of her body will appear to swell. A few weeks after ovulation, the female will have her pre-lay shed which signals another 3-4 weeks until the eggs are laid. Once the female has shed a nest box should be placed inside her enclosure. A 15 quart plastic container with a large hole cut in the lid and filled with sphagnum moss works well. The

female should remain undisturbed while she is laying until she is finished and coils around the eggs. Removal of the eggs from the female can be tricky as the mother may be protective of her eggs, it is recommended that gloves be worn by the keeper to defend against a bad bite. The eggs should then be placed inside an egg box filled with moist perlite which is then placed inside a ready incubator that is set to maintain temperatures at 87-88 degrees. After approximately 55-60 days of incubation the eggs will be ready to hatch and

baby
pythons
will cut
through the
eggs with
their egg
tooth. Once
the babies
have
pipped they
will stay
within the
egg for a
couple of
days while
they finish
absorbing
their yolk
sacs and will eventually leave the egg.



Keeping and breeding carpet pythons can be a very rewarding experience as these animals are highly intelligent and personable. As more information becomes available in the care of this species and with the large amount of subspecies and morphs to work with the popularity of these pythons will only continue to rise.

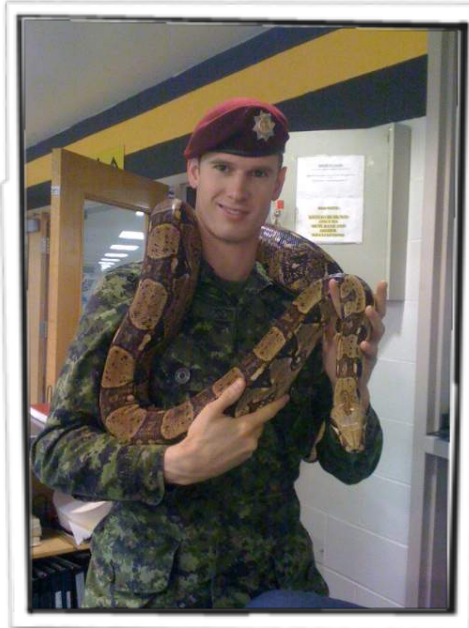
Changing the Laws - The Logical Approach to Fight for our Animals!

By Luke Halstead

It is becoming increasingly common around the world for reptile and other exotic animal keepers of all persuasions to find themselves all of a sudden in contravention of the law, as new municipal, state/provincial and federal regulations are drafted to control our hobby. This is sometimes understandable with the regulation of dangerous exotics, but in some places like my township near Ottawa, Canada, all reptiles, amphibians and arachnids are banned outright! I believe personally that a prospective owner should have to prove their competence in order to keep an animal that could harm someone, or an animal that could be invasive to the local environment if escaped or released. They should have to keep and maintain a license for as long as they have such animals and I think that's only fair. However, there is nothing dangerous or invasive about keeping a leopard gecko in Canada!

This is where we as a community of reptile keepers come into the picture. Reptile keepers as a whole have failed on a variety of fronts. We have not succeeded policing ourselves as a community and holding our peers accountable for their mistakes. We must realize that most people at best don't understand, and at worst fear and despise our hobby. Our actions and the actions of those around us reflect upon us all in circumstances where exotic animal keepers make bad press or present a negative public image of our hobby. That may entail releasing a non-native

turtle into the local pond, or taking a pet boa out to the mall for a shopping trip. We've all read newspaper articles like that at some point or another. We must act as good ambassadors for herpetoculture, be respectful of others and the environment, and insist that our peers do the same. If there were never any bad press surrounding our hobby, there would be no reason to regulate it.



And speaking of the reptile community policing itself, perhaps our biggest failing as reptile keepers is the profound lack of the very community to participate in! Other exotic animal keepers (such as those involved in falconry) have banded together to fight for the ownership of their animals, why not us? In my experience, excluding some herpetological societies and dedicated hardcore keepers, there is not much of a sense of community among

herpetoculturists – and what little there is certainly is not strong enough to be able or willing to mobilize enough resources and people power to stave off the constant battles with the animal rights groups and the politicians that want to make ‘popular’ decisions. Recent years have seen USARK take on the fight for reptiles, but the tide of battle has been turning against them – and therefore us.

So, now that you're feeling thoroughly depressed and hopeless, here is what you can do, or rather what WE can do. My battle against my local laws has been 2 years in the making. In order to fight a law that is already

in place (or one that is about to take effect) you must first find out the reasons for their creation. In my township, there was really no good reason other than the local animal enforcement officer not wanting to deal with reptiles. The justification for the laws ranged from the risks of Salmonella infection, to dangers to emergency services workers, to improper training for police or animal control to distinguish a dangerous reptile from a harmless one. My primary argument was comparing the risk of reptile ownership with owning dogs and cats – which if you do the research, you will find is much more dangerous statistically. If a person is allowed to have a cat or dog, they should be allowed to keep a reptile and any bans on human health grounds are built on a straw man argument (excluding venomous animals or large crocodylians).

sure you have done your homework. You will be expected to have a clear and logical, succinct and linear argument against each of the reasons for the laws being enacted. If there are indeed issues in your area (such as invasive species, recent escapes of dangerous pets, or accidents) you have a chance to be creative and find solutions to those problems that don't involve outright bans or over-regulation.

Bring to the dangers of such bans (like creating an underground market and criminalizing otherwise responsible keepers) to the attention of officials. Cite your references and ensure they are reputable! This point can not be stressed enough. Try to stay away from references from exotic animal interest groups. Take them straight from sources like the CDC, medical journals or government studies. This is more time consuming, but it will make you appear to be less biased and your work will stand up to stronger scrutiny.

Avoid pointing fingers at other members of our exotic animal keeping family. Condemning those who keep tigers, venomous reptiles, primates and other exotics to justify keeping your animals does not do anybody any favours. We need to fight the solidarity of the animal rights groups (who would take away all pets) with solidarity of our own. We need all hands on deck for this fight and shutting out

responsible keepers of even the most dangerous exotics is doomed to failure.

If you feel the urge to take it upon yourself to write to your local politician or speak in front of your town council about these issues, make



We need strength in numbers. If every single person who owned an anole or a corn snake were to band together, we could create a voice that politicians would listen to. Reptile societies, herp clubs and exotic animal organizations should not be left to the statistically insignificant amount of seriously dedicated, semi-professional keepers, breeders etc. Indeed, if we want to make headway against hasty and ignorant

laws, we MUST accept and encourage everyone's involvement! Most of us have been to a reptile expo or two; now imagine for a moment if everyone standing in those packed meeting halls and fumbling over cash and breeding racks were marching outside city hall! If there is a local herp society in your area, join it! If there isn't, start one!

Finally, on the home front in my town, I presented my 2 years of research on reptiles as companion animals to my local council on the 15th of November, 2011. It has made it past the first stage, but the battle is far from over. The proposition was voted to be reviewed by a committee (on which that closed-minded animal control officer sits). So far, all this activity has begun to bring local reptile owners out of the woodwork. I have started an exotic animal keeper's society

which is growing every day. Others in neighbouring towns have started to speak out against their unreasonable laws surrounding pet ownership and we are becoming a force to be reckoned with! In a small community

where town councillors may only have won their seats by a few votes, even a small group of people showing their solidarity can make a difference. We plan to pack the first committee

meeting to the gills, reminiscent of the feel

one would get when wading through the crowd at an expo.

I urge any other conscientious reptile lover reading this who feels restricted by local laws to do what I did – stand up and plant the flag of responsible exotic animal ownership. Create a sense of community, of family, in those around you and fight for our hobby together. I have no idea yet what side my town will take in changing the laws, but I would never have found out without first trying. Stay tuned!



Photo by Olga Zalabak

Hmmm, I see your dilemma...



And your point is what...exactly?



He is my friend...I will not eat him.

So you let my cousins get banned, eh? Am I next?



PERVERT!



Oh SNAP, check out her spots!



O-M-G! You haven't Donated to [USARK?!](#)



Donate to [USARK](#) now and I PROMISE not to EAT the puppy!



Honey, I am telling you...DONATE NOW.



[USARK](#) DONATE NOW

Field Herping Ethics

When I'm not out in the field stalking snakes and other fascinating creatures, I can often be found teaching Ethics in a classroom at the local community college. Ethics is a branch

of philosophy that

focuses on how human beings "ought" to act.

During the last semester I started to think about combining these two interests in terms of "field herping

ethics". Field herping ethics includes conversation and consideration of the following: destruction of natural habitat, handling or not handling the animals, dealing with invasive species, and field collecting. Below I consider each one of these issues.

This is a difficult and heavily debated subject and my goal is simply to illuminate the issues. I try, when possible, to remain neutral keeping my opinion to myself as I feel it is best for herpers to weight the issues personally.

The matter concerning destruction of habitat comes to the fore in a few different ways. Habitat destruction includes moving shelters and not placing them back where they were found. Moving a shelter, for example a log, and not putting it back exactly where it was can destroy the microhabitat (possibly making it useless for other herps). Habitat destruction also includes destroying trees, etc. For

instance, scarlet snakes (*Cemophora coccinea*) are often found hiding under loose bark. There are people who, here in Florida, are so determined to find scarlet snakes that they will destroy trees by ripping the bark off of the trees in order to find the snakes hiding. I have been out with friends who have shown me several trees that were, presumably, destroyed by scarlet snake hunters. Of course scarlet snakes are not the only snakes known for hiding under bark – various other snakes in the USA will take secret shelter underneath loose bark. The question here is: where do responsible herpers draw the line? Clearly field herpers want to continue finding the animals in the wild. Most of the field herpers I know treat herping like a serious addiction – so, though this addiction calls for herpers to find as many creatures as possible, it also demands that herpers maintain the hobby for future personal excitement and for all the animals herpers love so very much. Habitat destruction, in the long run will not maintain the hobby. Many hobbyists fight against habitat destruction when it comes from other sources such as big business and construction companies. Habitat destruction seems to be even more difficult to deal with when the hobbyists are the ones guilty of the destruction. Again, I try not to offer my own opinion in terms of field herping ethics – but, this issue may be the easiest to resolve simply because habitat destruction is essentially destruction of the hobby.

The second discussion is whether or not we ought to handle the herps we find. Does it stress them out? Does it force them, through



stress, to find another shelter or home range? Part of the fun of herping, for many, is the chance to handle and experience a short

interaction with a variety of wild reptiles. But, one must wonder if excessive handling affects the animals, and if so – how? There are many serious and well respected herpers



who believe people ought to think about this very carefully. Some of the concern comes from the possible negative effects that might be realized in terms of the animal's health. Many lizards will drop their tails when they are frightened. Also, some turtles and tortoises will void their stored water which could possibly lead to dehydration. What if the herp in question just ate? Excessive handling after a large meal can, of course, lead to regurgitation. I've been on herping trips where we collected the animals and brought them back to our rooms so that we could photograph them another day. After we got our photos we released the animals – however, not in the exact places they were found. This could be an issue for several reasons. For example, if the animal is ill (or if we made the animals ill) it could now potentially spread its illness over new territory. Another aspect of this is whether or not we should interfere with herps in danger of dying. Most of us move herps off the road when we can, but how should we

deal with more imminent threats? For instance, when witnessing a snake about to eat a defenseless little lizard what is the best course of action? Should we jump in or casually observe?

Ever encounter a herp loaded with ticks? Should we pull them



off or send him on his way with all the ticks intact?

One of the most pervasive issues right now is how field herpers handle invasive species. One night my reptile club had a guest speaker lecturing on the topic of *Osteopilus septentrionalis* the Cuban tree frogs. She

asked that we all kill (and she gave us several "humane" ways to do so) each Cuban tree frog that we see. The room was



split over this – some members thought it was odd that she was talking to herp lovers about this and some members thought that it was their duty to rid the state of these invasive amphibians. An additional example is the famous pythons in the Everglades. If a herper

sees a Burm – should she turn it in to be killed or should she pretend she didn't see the serpent? I'm not convinced that herpers will ever come to an agreement on this, but one thing is certain the more invasive species that are found the more bad press the herpetocultural hobby seems to receive.

Finally, the area that sets field herpers at odds with each other more than any other is the debate regarding collecting in the field. How should this be best handled? I

have been out with people who take everything they find, in attempt to "pay for the trip".

Sometimes these herpers even catch rodents from the same area as they believe it is the only way certain snakes will eat. I've also

been out with people who have the "take only pictures, leave only footprints" mentality. Is there room for a compromising middle ground? Should herpers only take what they are personally going to keep or breed? Is there anything wrong with selling wild caught reptiles? Does taking a few herps from the wild cause problems for the population in that area? Is it even possible to vouch for the health of a recently captured herp? For example, a reptile dealer can't tell if a snake has been exposed to or affected by pesticides. Reptiles are notoriously adept at hiding their weakness

or sickness. What risks are taken by adding wild caught herps to our collections? These questions are worthy of serious consideration.

It is my hope that these categories have given pause and have allowed readers to think about the future of this precious hobby. Field herping ethics is an area of field herping that deserves attention. I'm interested in learning what opinions are held regarding these various aspects of field herping ethics. As a

final note, the one area of field

herping ethics that I will happily provide my opinion on is my belief that herpers have a duty to involve interested parties from the younger generation. Many kids have the desire to learn about and observe herps in their native habitat.

But, they don't

always have the means. Perhaps the best field herpers are the ones who will take the time to indulge the curious young minds out there hoping to catch a glimpse of a snake or a turtle in its native habitat. After all, this is our chance to pass on the hobby along with the ethics required to maintain the beautiful wild creatures that so fuel our adrenaline just by existing.



So You Want a False Water Cobra?

by

Ashley Dezan

With a flaring hood, large, powerful body and an eagerness to indulge in food can make this colubrid an intimidating beast. These magnificent creatures can grow up to 8' and when it comes to food, eat anything they can fit in their mouth. Just watch out for your toes when you feed them! They have a brilliant dove grey background with ink black blotches that start from head down to the tail. The False Water Cobra, sometimes known as the Brazilian Smooth Snake is found in the countries of Brazil, Paraguay and the surrounding area.

Size alone in False Water Cobras may be intimidating but they are a rear-fanged species. The muscular strength they have can cut off circulation and the venom just makes the snake that much more "dangerous". The venom in False Water Cobras is poorly understood. I have seen some posts in online venom forums (Ex: Venomdoc) that they may be as potent as a Timber Rattlesnake (*C. horridus*) and some posts saying they're only as "dangerous" as a wee little Garter Snake. I personally take



Hydrodynastes as you may never know what your reaction will be. To my knowledge, no serious studies have yet to be done on *Hydrodynastes*. I've been chewed on my finger a few times from

fresh hatchlings, and it's no more than a tingle. Though I can only imagine what an 8' individual would do. I would suggest to never attempt to get bit or even put yourself into that position. Best to be safe rather than sorry.



One mystery that comes with keeping these majestic animals is the environment. Some say they need it humid where as some say a bit dryer. They

can thrive in either condition from my experience but in reality, which is better? If you think about it, South America has wet and dry seasons. Both humid and dry environments can be correct. I put mine through a drier period for a few months at around 50% humidity and eventually give them a heavy misting daily for a few months after. What this changes, well, I'm not sure yet. While on topic of environment and captivity, if one was to decide to take on the responsibility of keeping a False Water Cobra I would strongly suggest giving them the largest enclosure possible. Mine are kept in 4' PVCs but even that seems to small.

Food plays a huge role in a False Water Cobras life. Again, responsibility as well as respect for the species come into play even for feeding. I would consider this to be the most dangerous (not fatal) time of keeping Falsies. The split second a rat, mouse, fish, or anything really is noticed either a) close the enclosure as much as you can to feed or b) toss it in. Before I started doing that, I've been chased across the basement. Not only for the food, but my toes were viewed as food as well! That was an interesting encounter but no toes were harmed. After that, I feed them

as quickly and as safely as possible. Avoid having the door wide open.



Handling False Water Cobras often require hooks. At the very least to pull them out of their enclosure. Make sure it is a sturdy hook as they can be heavy. I would not recommend free handling this species even if they do have a calm disposition as you never know what can happen. If you have the slightest scent of rodent, fish or anything that may be food, you have a high risk in getting bit.

Something I would like to mention has to do with breeding. Many keepers claim that False Water Cobras are ridiculously easy to breed. The thing is, most of these "breeders" have never produced any eggs. I have always wondered about that prior to keeping the species as I've always seen adults go up for sale on occasion but never, not once seen babies. Even sub-adults for that matter. What I have noticed is that male False Water Cobras will practically rape females to the point of stressing them out. I've even seen them attempt to breed an under-aged, immature female. Goes to show that they are easy to breed, yes, but easy to reproduce? Not really. It's a balancing act to get them to successfully breed and produce viable eggs.

If and when you get a viable clutch of eggs, put them in the incubator at around 82-86F. I've had eggs incubate at 80-82 that produced all females, and the ones at 84-86 were always

males. Strange coincidence? Not so sure. It's something I would like to find out. After about 60-70 days little brown, heavily patterned babies will emerge rearing their hoods at you. I never have problems getting them to take their first meal. Just after first shed I offer a thawed out mouse hopper and they tend to eat overnight.

In the past few years I've seen heavily banded, golden yellow False Water Cobras both in collections and online. After close inspection I've noticed they have different scale count, especially on the head and with the ocular scales around the eye. The head shape on the greys and yellows are different as well as the overall body pattern. The greys and yellows are to this date considered the same species but I personally think otherwise. Even when a yellow and a grey breed the babies

look quite different. Hopefully one day I can get a DNA test done to confirm if they are indeed different or not. As of right now, only a few species exist; *Hydrodynaste gigas*, *Hydrodynastes melanogigas* and *Hydrodynastes bicinctus*.





Snakehuntingchick.com

The Field Herping Adventures of
Melissa Coakley






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