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HERPETOCULTURE NOTES

SQUAMATA — SNAKES

LEPTODEIRA RHOMBIFERA (Common Cat-eyed Snake). **LONGEVITY AND AGING IN CAPTIVITY.** Beginning in April, 1967, the late Robert H. Wilson, radiation biologist (University of Rochester [New York]) and herpetoculturist (see Wilson 1959. *In* Strong 1959. *Sci. Amer.* 201:145–152), began correspondence with the late Charles E. Shaw (San Diego Zoological Garden) in response to a request for snake longevity records. In that letter Wilson reported “a cateyed [sic] snake” in his collection that would meet Shaw’s 10-year minimum requirement for longevity records. Shaw responded (February 1968) with a request to be notified of any snakes having lived at least 10 years as of 1 January 1968, and sent a follow-up request (December 1969) expressing interest in the cat-eyed snake if Wilson had a positive species identification and date of collection. Wilson responded (10 January 1970) “The cateyed [sic] snake died last summer, about six months short of being eligible for your tabulation,” and in a follow-up letter (26 January 1970) explained “It was sent to me by a young fellow who was an exchange student in Panama in the summer of 1960...the snake died August 5, 1969...very close to 9 years in my collection....”

That *Leptodeira rhombifera* (Fig. 1) was captured between 2 and 30 July, 1960, one of several individuals collected in Los Santos, Los Santos Province, Panama (7.94149°N, 80.41738°W), as later reported (Busack 1966. *Copeia* 1966:371). Its identification is supported by Carnegie Museum specimens 43596–43597. Using mid-August (16th) as the day of capture, Wilson’s specimen provides a longevity record in captivity of nine years, one month, and 21 days for *L. rhombifera*. Of *Leptodeira* species reported, only *L. septentrionalis* has been reported with a longer life span in captivity (10 years, 11 months, 26 days; Snider and Bowler 1992. *Longevity of Reptiles and Amphibians in North American Collections*, 2nd Edition. SSAR Herpetol. Circ. 21).

While further sharing his experience with this species, Wilson (1970, *in litt.*) addressed an external morphological manifestation of aging which, to the best of my knowledge, has been rarely reported in snakes (Millichamp et al. 1983. *J. Amer. Vet. Med. Assoc.* 183:1205–1212; Cosgrove and Anderson 1984. *In* Hoff et al. [eds], *Diseases of Amphibians and Reptiles*, pp. 625–632. Plenum Press, New York).



FIG. 1. Captive *Leptodeira rhombifera* feeding on *Pseudacris regilla*, April, 1961.

“[...] This is the only snake I’ve ever known to show any sign whatever of aging. Almost a year before it died it developed what I am sure were cataracts. I first noticed that the snake seemed to look only approximately in the direction of a proffered frog (the only food it would take) and the grab was frequently inaccurate. Then I noticed that the eyes were cloudy, but in a manner different from a pre-shed opacity in that only the pupil area showed the cloudiness. Subsequent shedding, which occurred at least once prior to death, did not improve the condition and also permitted verification of casting of the eyecaps [= spectacles, SDB] as the opacity could not have been a build-up of these.[...] The aging shown in this cateye... indicate[s] that at least this one aspect of aging can occur.”

Connie Wilson who, with her late husband, provided many years of documented care to reptiles from around the world, graciously provided access to her home, library, and to her late husband’s herpetological correspondence. Without her appreciation for the possible relevance of Wilson’s correspondence and documentation these data would have been lost.

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