

COLLETT'S SNAKE
Pseudechis colletti
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Introduction:

The Collett's Snake *Pseudechis colletti* is one of Australia's most beautiful elapids, this has made it one of the most commonly kept species of venomous snake in Australia both in public (zoos etc) and privately owned collections.

The adult colouration of *Pseudechis colletti* may vary between a dark tan to almost black above with irregular cross bands. The colour of the cross bands may vary between cream to orange-red. The belly is the same colour as the bands on the dorsal aspect of the snake with faded dark spots or small blotches which are more prominent in young specimens. Juveniles have the same colouration as the adults but are brighter and far more contrasting however this fades with age.

The size of a reproductive adult varies between male and females, females grow to 2100mm but are sexually mature at 1240mm in length. Males can reach 2600mm but are sexually mature at 1320mm in length. Neonates at hatching are the largest for the *Pseudechis* genus at a 370mm in length and weigh up to 25 grams (Eipper,2000), (Shine 1989).

Known from 49 different localities in Queensland (Longmore 1986). (Nonda, Richmond, Aramac, Julia Creek, Winton, Hughenden and Hamilton Downs Cattle Station are a few spots where they are fairly common.) They are listed as sparse (Ehmann 1992).

Found in dry non-swampy areas, on plains including the barren black-soil type. Usually seen crossing roads at night or hunting in the deep cracks in the soil.

The threat display of Collett's Snakes is very similar to the other members of its genus, making loud, short hisses and holding its flattened neck and forebody close to the ground in a low arc or sinuous wave. Even though a placid snake, if they pressed further they may make a series of strikes not meaning harm but as a warning. If pressed further they will bite. I have been bitten by a juvenile and it is not a pleasant experience. The bite caused swelling, a headache, nausea and vomiting, dizziness and slight necrosis. A number of other keepers have been bitten by this species and had very severe systemic effects, **a bite or suspected bite should be treated in hospital.**

Housing:

I would recommend a lockable cage of the following dimensions: 1200mm long by 600mm deep by 700mm high to house a pair of adults.

The substrate used could be gravel or paper; gravel looks better than paper but is harder to generally keep clean than paper. I recommend paper, as it is easier to keep clean thus reducing the risk of disease.

Cages should have a thermal gradient being 30 to 32⁰c at the warm end of the cage and about 20 to 24⁰c at the cool end. A pair of "blue globes"(40 watt maximum) at the warm end of the cage will produce the desired amount of heat, the globe must be hooked up to a thermostat to regulate the temperature inside the cage. Note the globes should be inside a box so the snake cannot burn itself. A hide should be placed about 200mm from the light-bulb box so the reptile has a "hot spot".

Cage decorations should include a water bowl, 2 hides one in the warm end the other in the cooler end and a rough rock for shedding upon.

Food and Feeding:

In the wild this species eats frogs (*Crinia sp*, *Limnodynastes sp* and *Litoria sp*.) and the plague rat (*Rattus sp*). In captivity, they readily eat mice and rats, but juveniles may initially need to be feed on elvers or small goldfish and then eventually weaned on to pinky or fuzzy mice.

In captivity, most Collett's tend to be aggressive feeders, as soon as they smell food and they strike at any perceived movement in the cage. I have found that they watch their prey before going in for the kill. They strike in a side-ways manner, latching on to what ever they hit, when they hit their target they tend to chew on their prey, pumping venom into the prey item. Then they "walk" along the prey (using its fangs) to the head to commence swallowing; this is enabled because of the snake's ability to separate its jaws. There has been known cases of cannibalism in this species.

Reproduction: In the wild the mating season is from August to October, with hatchlings emerging from October to December. In captivity I have had successful matings can take place from June provided that both sexes have been cooled long enough (I find about 8 weeks at 19 degrees Celsius with a week lead in and out and not being fed during this time) prior to introduction for mating.

In one mating I observed, the male (150 CMS approx.) Started to develop an interest in the female (180 CMS approx.). The male positioned his vent adjacent to the females vent and started to rub his chin up and down on the dorsal side of the neck region of the female. Then the male's hemipenis everted and mating commenced, during mating the male continued to rub his chin on the female's

neck and move his tail in an erratic movements, this lasted for 57 minutes. This resulted in a successful clutch of 12 eggs. (Eipper, 2000)

They are oviparous with a clutch from 7 to 17 eggs laid.

When the female is obviously gravid a laying container with moist sphagnum moss is provided and checked daily until the eggs are laid.

The eggs of this are quite large, with a length of 55 mm and are 35 mm wide. From the moment of conception to when the eggs are laid it takes approximately 60 days and another 55 to 91 days for the eggs to hatch. Male combat has been observed in this species. The eggs of *P. colletti* are quite hardy and can withstand large temperature fluctuations (22⁰c to 32⁰c). This species is a great captive, reproducing on a regular basis.

Generally eggs take about 63 days to hatch at 30.5 degrees Celsius.

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