

# E LAPHE BIMACULATA



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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1996 I acquired six *Elaphe bimaculata*, two males and four females. All the animals fed well and grew accordingly. In November 1996 I found one of the males dead in the terrarium. Strangely, part of the prey item, a baby mouse, was still stuck halfway in its mouth. I can only suspect the animal probably suffocated, despite the fact that the prey was of a suitable size. I searched for another male and obtained one from a breeder in Belgium.

## DESCRIPTION

*Elaphe bimaculata* is a typical *Elaphe*, as can be seen from the shape of the head as well as the form of the body. It grows to about one meter long and is one of the smaller *Elaphe* species, due to its slender build it appears even smaller.

The ground colour varies from brownish-yellow to reddish-brown with two rows of blotches that can form stripes on the neck. The pair-wise blotches can merge and are reddish/brown with a black edge. The blotches/stripes are sometimes superimposed over a brown stripe, giving the snake a striped appearance with both blotches and stripes. There are 8 to 10, sometimes 11 dorsal labials and 18 to 20 teeth in the upper jaw.



*Elaphe bimaculata*

## RANGE

This Asian species is found in the mountainous areas of south-east China.

## HOUSING

The second male, who was a lot smaller than the other animals, was housed separately in a 40x40x40 cm (LxWxH) terrarium in order to feed him frequently. The other animals, (one male and four females), were housed in a 90x30x60 cm (LxWxH) terrarium. The terrarium had a play sand substrate and was decorated with pieces of wood, branches and artificial plants. There was also a tunnel-shaped piece of cork bark that the animals frequently used as a hide. Lighting was achieved via a 25 Watt incandescent lamp. The animals don't require a lot of heat, 25 degrees Celsius is sufficient.

## FEEDING

Food consisted of pinkies, furry mice or, at most, hopper mice. Larger prey animals were strangled, but not usually swallowed.

## BREEDING

In the wild these animals mature at about two years of age. In captivity they can breed after a year, due to the specimens often being fed during their first winter, whilst in the wild they hibernate for about 4-6 months. It is recommended that these animals are hibernated for at least three months at about 15 degrees Celsius. Mating that leads to egg laying in spring often occurs during the previous summer/autumn (sperm retention). Mating is also observed in spring, but, according to literature,

have a reduced or no influence on egg fertilisation of that year.

## FIRST BREEDING

At the end of May 1997 one of the females laid her first four eggs, three fertile and one infertile. The infertile egg was discarded after a week. The eggs were very large in comparison to the size of the female, at 20x45 mm and weighing between 10 and 15 gram. They were put in an incubator in an open tray with moist vermiculite. I subsequently used moist wood shavings. The incubation temperature was between 26 and 28 degrees Celsius. The eggs hatched after between 25 and 40 days. This seems like a very short incubation time, but is understandable in view of their short active period in the wild. The length of the incubation period is also related to incubation temperature.

At the beginning of July the first egg hatched, yielding a very pretty female. The other two eggs were opened 14 days later and contained two incompletely developed young. It is not clear what went wrong in their case. I still have that first female neonate in my collection.

## SECOND BREEDING

During the summer and autumn of 1997 I saw the original male, (the Belgian male was still being kept separately), mate repeatedly with several females. I hibernated the animals in the basement at a temperature of between 3 and 16 degrees Celsius, from the beginning of November till the end of January. After hibernation the animals remained very calm during February and fed very little, often refusing food. During March and April the females ate voraciously. This indicated to me that the females



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were gravid, and was shown to be the case, from the end of April and throughout May all four females deposited eggs. In total 12 fertile eggs and 2 infertile ones. All 12 fertile eggs hatched between the end of May and the end of June. The sex ratio was six males and four females. All hatchlings started to feed quickly.

### BELGIUM MALE AND THE 1997 FEMALE

Both the Belgian male and the first female I had bred were fed throughout the winter of 1997/1998. During this time the male hardly fed, in contrast to the female who fed well and grew bigger than the Belgian male which was one year older.

### THIRD BREEDING

One month after the females had deposited their eggs I added the male from Belgium and the 1997 female, until then had been housed separately, to the rest of the group, this resulted in a group of two males and five females. Similar to the previous year repeated mating was observed during summer and autumn, this time both males mated with several females. In December 1998 I placed all 7 animals in a box in a refrigerator that is used only for hibernating reptiles. The temperature was between 5 and 10 degrees Celsius and much more stable than the previous year in the basement. Between the end of February and the beginning of March they were taken out of hibernation. It remains to be seen what this year, 1999, will bring.

### SUMMARY

*Elaphe bimaculata* is, in my opinion, a calm species, that is easy to keep and that remains

small as an adult. The advantages are that you don't need a very large terrarium to keep them and that prey animals don't have to be larger than a hopper mouse. The small prey is certainly an advantage for me, as all the species I keep eat small prey. If the animals are kept properly it is certainly possible to breed them at an age of one year. My advice, however, is to wait another year to give the females time to fully develop. A period of hibernation is recommended, but is not necessary, as can be seen from the first breeding results. This means they can be enjoyed during the winter as well as the summer. They are a little shy, but if several animals are kept in one terrarium some animals will usually be visible. These snakes are not aggressive, but they are curious. I think anyone who has these animals or is considering obtaining them, will enjoy them immensely.

### LITERATURE

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