

JUNIOR AQUARIST

Lacerta viridis

by H. G. B. Gilpin B.Sc.

COMMONLY CALLED THE Green or Jersey Lizard, this handsome saurian ranges from S. Europe to the Channel Islands. It is neither native nor, in spite of a number of specimens being released on occasions, feral in Britain as far as I know at present. I have seen them basking in the heat on sunny stone walls in Portugal where they look magnificent. They are naturally alert and are not easy to approach closely in their own native environment.

Viridis is a singularly beautiful lizard which reaches some fifteen inches to sixteen inches in length. The tail is graceful and slender and accounts for two thirds of the total length. The upper body colour varies from yellowish green to vivid grass green and the underside from yellowish white to deep, clear yellow. It is related to the much larger Ocellated Lizard.

Provided it is given a reasonable amount of room, *viridis* is an excellent vivarium animal, not the least of its virtues being the ease with which it can be sexed. Adult males in breeding condition have rich, cobalt blue throats but this alone is not an entirely decisive characteristic as young males are sometimes entirely innocent of any blue coloration and on occasion one encounters females in which it is quite pronounced. A more reliable differentiating factor is the colour of the upper parts of the body. In males the basic green is profusely speckled with tiny black spots, whilst in females the black is confined to large black patches. Sometimes the female is plain self green, completely free from markings and sometimes she carries from two to four whitish stripes. The males also have stronger, coarser heads than the females and have a

thicker root to the tail. Completely dark, practically black specimens, are not unknown. The young are brownish and sometimes, but not always, spotted with white.

Green Lizards are extremely active and capable of moving with considerable rapidity but are not unduly nervous or highly strung in captivity. In fact, they are particularly easy to tame and under confined conditions soon become familiar with their owners. A pair I have at present, imported through the trade from Italy, fed freely on inch long locust-hoppers within half an hour of their coming into my possession and in less than twenty-four hours the male accepted mealworms from my fingers. Inside a week both of them could be picked up and handled without difficulty.

A not inconsiderable recommendation for these lizards as vivarium inmates is their habit of remaining almost constantly on view. The floor of the converted aquarium in which I keep mine is covered with a couple of inches of fairly coarse gravel and one corner is occupied by a bark covered log. Very rarely one or other of them will retire for a short spell behind the log and even more rarely do they bury themselves in the gravel. The majority of the time however they

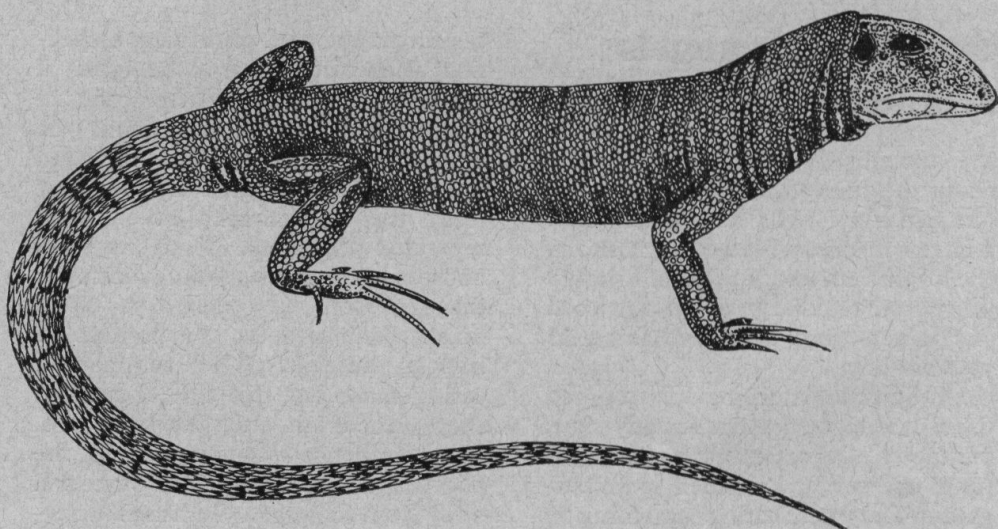
spend revelling in the heat beneath the electric light bulb or stalking through their domain hunting for food.

Green Lizards are oviparous, the clutch consisting of some five to twenty eggs. Under natural conditions the female buries her eggs in damp sand. According to different authorities the incubation period varies between one and three months and the parents are reported to remain in the vicinity until they hatch.

I am hoping my current pair will help to establish the facts more accurately. They were seen to mate on May 16th. The behaviour of the male was somewhat violent but no damage to either participant resulted. He clamped his jaws on the back of the female's neck, coiled himself along her length and for a brief moment their vents came into contact.

I have seen it stated that six to eight weeks elapse between copulation and egg production. In view of the fact that she started to deposit her eggs the following day there is no doubt that this female had been previously mated before she came into my possession.

Depositing her eggs satisfactorily involved the female in a protracted outburst of energy, lasting throughout the day. She scraped out a large hole



under the log by vigorously hurling the gravel in all directions, violently scratching it out with both fore and hind feet. She was still working away when I left her for the night but by the next morning calm had returned to the vivarium. The female appeared to be considerably thinner than she had been and not only was the hole filled in but the gravel had been scraped up from all directions until it sloped gently, almost to the top of the log. Both lizards were sprawled peacefully across the summit of the pile but the sight of food galvanised them into immediate action and between them they consumed four fully adult locusts and a dozen mealworms in a matter of minutes. Evidently their attempts at propagation had involved a considerable expenditure of energy.

Green Lizards are said to eat earthworms and sometimes soft fruits.

Personally I have not succeeded in persuading them to take fruit but, when short of more acceptable fare, they have eaten earthworms of up to four inches in length. Given the choice they much prefer locusts, particularly half grown hoppers, blow flies, spiders, maggots and mealworms. They need water, drinking it fairly freely, and will take it from a pot.

In the wild these lizards hibernate in winter but under vivarium conditions I like to keep them active throughout the year by the use of a thermostatically controlled heater maintaining a fairly constant temperature of 80°F. I know of one reptile enthusiast who keeps Green Lizards in an unheated greenhouse. They appear to do well and spend the winter hibernating in artificially constructed underground burrows.

Although male Green Lizards tend to fight among themselves when in

breeding condition they will live amicably with other species of comparable size. I kept one pair for some time together with a pair of Skinks of approximately equal length but rather greater bulk, and both species seemed perfectly content and indifferent to the presence of the others. I should not, however, be inclined to trust them with lizards much smaller than themselves.

Green Lizards are not difficult to obtain and are frequently offered for sale in pet shops. They are inexpensive to buy and their beauty of shape and colour together with their active habits, tameness and adaptability make them well worth a place in the vivarium. Personally I would recommend them highly as the first choice of a beginner in reptile keeping wishing to gain experience of lizard culture before venturing upon more exotic and more difficult species.

Fish Food Review

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on to the surface of the water and is greedily eaten by young fry.

'Gordon's Formula' is a fish food which was devised by Dr. Gordon a number of years ago. The recipe is given in some of the smaller books for guppies. The food was rather difficult to prepare from fresh liver, etc., and required heating. The resulting paste-like gel was not too easy to keep fresh for long periods but the food was thought very highly of by American guppy breeders. The freeze-dried version has removed all the bother of preparation and the food comes in about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. square cubes. I have found this food most useful if small pieces are crushed between finger and thumb and scattered on the tank water. Fish of varying sizes and ages can then feed on appropriately sized pieces. All of my fish seem to be very fond of this food as they do of the mosquito larvae. These are in the form of small, almost black granules and powder, and they have a fairly strong smell which apparently attracts the fish quickly. The final freeze-dried food which I have had the chance to

test so far is the red worms. These are ordinary freeze-dried tubifex worms which have not been compressed into blocks and which have retained a more natural colour than those in cube form. My fish seemed to prefer these loose worms to those in cubes as they were more easily taken and eaten.

The analysis of each food is given on the side of the pack, and most of them are high in protein content, this being the constituent which builds strong, large and healthy fish. One can see that the prices vary considerably, and by careful selection one can obtain best value for money; e.g. cubes of tubifex are 3s. 3d. for 5 grams and 'free' red worm tubifex costs 5s. 6d. for 12 grams.

Although these freeze-dried foods, as with other brands, are quite expensive, the trouble that they save one in not introducing diseases or pests, nor having to buy, rear or catch live foods, is worth the cost. One can, of course, include both live foods and freeze-dried foods in the fishes' diet, as well as the normal stable diet of various ordinary dried foods and fresh foods from the kitchen or garden at home. The other foods, especially the daphnia, interest me and I hope to review these in the future. B. W.

Goldfish Fanciers Criticised

Fishing and goldfish breeding have come under attack in the Shanghai newspaper, "Liberation Daily," which describes the hobby as "an evil wind" spread by chairman Mao Tse-Tung's opponents.

Quite a number of young people had become influenced by this "evil wind" and were spending most of their time "frantically fighting" to buy materials to make fish tanks, according to an article in the newspaper.

The newspaper said some people used state materials and utilised their working hours to manufacture their goldfish bowls in the factory workshops and thus help spread anarchism.

What is it?

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ANSWER

Swim Bladder of
Veiltail Goldfish