

## **The European long-nose-viper, *Vipera ammodytes***

- Systematics
- Field observations
- Keeping and breeding in captivity

In systematics till now we now 6 subspecies of the long nose viper:

*Vipera a. ammodytes*

*Vipera a. meridionalis*

*Vipera a. montandoni*

*Vipera a. transcaucasiana*

*Vipera a. ruffoi*

*Vipera a. gregorwallneri*.

The last two are not recognized by all scientific people and *Vipera a. transcaucasiana* is given a full species rank by some.

A “very old” subspecies, *Vipera a. illyrica*, Laurenti 1768 was re-established by Sochurek in 1983.

The common name sand-viper (in German: Sandviper) as well as the scientific name *Vipera ammodytes* (what means sand-diver) doesn't describe correct habitat use. This viper prefers rocky hillsides, sunny forests and sometime lives in very dry, but rocky (Karstic) habitats. So the author prefers the common name Long-nose-viper, or in German, European horn viper.

The author shows all these subspecies, named above, in pictures and gives a lot of information on their habitat

preference. He has visited many populations in Austria, Italy, along the Dalmatian coast (Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro), Greece and Anatolia. Some of these populations have been visited many times in the last 30 years during different times of the year.

Therefore he has many data on the snakes activity during the year as well as during the daytime. No nocturnal activity could be observed while all these times. *Vipera ammodytes*, in Europe, lives from sealevel (sometimes very close to the shoreline) up to 1.800 meters (own observations). In Asian Turkey it has been found from 400 to 1.200 meters a.s.l.

The author is keeping and breeding *Vipera ammodytes* for about 30 years now. During this time he has kept all subspecies from many populations. Since the first time he separated animals from different populations (about 20 km diameter) in separate terrariums. No interbreeding between populations have been done.

All vipers are kept in terrariums 90 x 60 x 70 cm. In one terrarium there are 1,1 or 1,2 snakes. The vipers stay in these cages all the year round.

The temperature is 15 – 22° C in spring, 19 – 28° C during summer and 15 – 22° C during autumn again, depending on the natural weather conditions. Beneath a spot light, during the whole activity season there is a temperature between 35 – 40° C.

All snakes hibernate in their terrariums. The temperature of the snake room drops down during the winter to a minimum of 2° C, mostly between 5 and 8° C. The

hibernation period last from 3 to 4 months, depending on the outside temperatures.

Males awake some (mostly 2 to 3) weeks before the females. Within 4 weeks after the end of hibernation the males will shed. They look for the females before, but mating will take place 1 – 2 weeks after shedding of males. The females will be shed or not.

About 90 to 120 days after copulation the females give birth to the young. The authors vipers had offsprings between 1 and 12. There is a strength correlation between the number of babies and their size and weight.

*Vipera ammodytes* sheds within a few hours after birth, mostly within a few minutes. One or two weeks later first feeding takes place.

Vipers, which will not eat by themselves, will be argued with a dead baby-mouse till they bite one or more times. I never had forcefeed my *Vipera ammodytes*. Within a few weeks all start to feed by themselves.

At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, most reach about 40 to 45 cm. The author doesn't like to feed them to maturity within 8 or 10 month, as he has seen at other keepers.

So the vipers reach a good age. The oldest *Vipera ammodytes* of mine are now 26 years and still breeding every or every second year.

In 1986 he put a *Vipera a. ruffoi* male to a *Vipera aspis francisceredi* female together in one cage (just for some hours, to clean the terrariums). Within these time these two vipers copulate and 8 hybrids have been born. Till now it was not possible to get a F2 generation. A rebreed between a hybrid male and an another *Vipera a. francisceredi* was successful, but the babies died within a few weeks. A rebreed between a hybrid female an a

Vipera a. ammodytes or Vipera a. meridionalis male  
didn't work till now.