

## A NEST OF THE MONTPELLIER SNAKE

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Little information is available on the breeding ecology of the Montpellier snake (*Malpolon monspessulanus*). Several authors (Boulenger 1913, Hellmich 1962, Hvass 1972) pass on the observation of Werner (in Boulenger 1913) that clutch size is 4 to 12 eggs, hatching in October. Steward (1971) gives a clutch of 4 to 20, usually below 12, hatching in September or October in western Europe, earlier in the east.

Several of these snakes were seen in the oak-chestnut woodland of the Massif des Maures, Provence, France, usually in clearings, during August 1981. Seventeen adult cast skins, identified by head scalation, were found in one olive grove alone (fig. 1). On 28 August 1981 five skins of juveniles were found around a hole at the edge of a terrace which had partly collapsed (Plate 1); they had not been there the previous day. These skins were removed, and on the following three days 7, 3 and 4 more skins appeared, respectively. No more were found, although the site was visited for two weeks thereafter. In total 19 juvenile skins were thus found around this hole, the furthest being five metres away. Size and scalation of the complete skins is given in table 1.

At midday on the 29 August 1981 a small snake was seen moving along the terrace ten metres from the hole, and after sunset two juvenile Montpellier snakes were found under stones a few metres from the hole. Their size is given in table 2, together with that of another captured at a different site in the forest, on 31 August 1981. A juvenile of similar size was seen at a third site on 24 August 1981.

At least 19 juveniles thus emerged from this hole over a four day period, sloughed in the immediate vicinity, and probably dispersed. The nest may have been a considerable distance below ground, in the crevices of the buried stone wall. There were signs of disturbance around the hole as though caused by a large animal trying to dig out the eggs; wild boars have been seen in the area. In view of the short period of emergence and small variation between the skins it seems likely that it was a clutch from a single female. It is not known whether emergence and sloughing occurred immediately after hatching or after some time in the nest.

Montpellier snakes do well in captivity, feeding readily on mice. I would be grateful if any readers having captive specimens of this species would send me sloughed skins and details of the snout-vent and tail lengths of the snakes at the time of sloughing, and the origin of the snake if known.

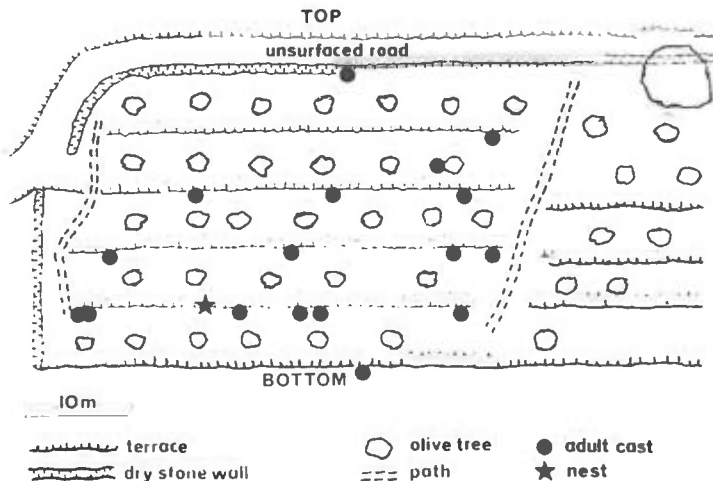


Fig. 1. Map of Olive Grove

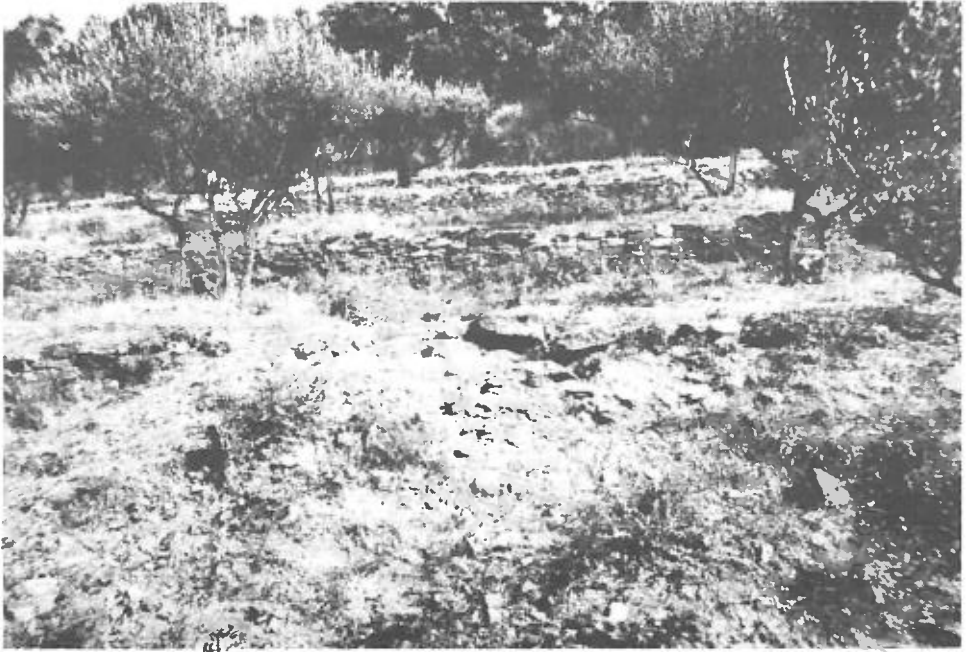


Plate 1. Nest Entrance (centre)

Table 1. Characteristics of complete juvenile skins

	n	range	mean	standard deviation
snout-vent length, mm	9	297-323	308.3	8.1
tail length, mm	7	89-100	94.7	4.2
no. of ventrals	9	173-179	175.1	2.2
no. of caudals	8	83-89	87.0	2.4

Table 2. Size of juveniles

	neonates		other juvenile
snout-vent length, mm	243	246	256
tail length, mm	72	74	78
weight, g	7.0	6.9	7.7

#### REFERENCES

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