

# The Monthly Meeting

## Minutes of the September 20th, 2008 Meeting

By Steve Campbell

Levi Dawson, conducting his presidential obligations, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:15 PM – our customary time to initiate meetings.

*Visitors:* K.C. and Ashlee Watkins were recognized and welcomed for attending their first DFWHS meeting. The Watkins keep ball pythons and an Asian box turtle.

*Program:* Our guest speaker for the evening was Ari Flagle, who spent the last decade or so of his life studying and working captive as well as wild populations of *Morellia boeleni*, the New Guinea black python or Boeleon's python, pronounced Bow - LENSE. Ari used a number of colorful monikers to describe this species beyond the multiple common and scientific names, such as the "holy grail, Rolls Royce, and Cadillac of all pythons." His presentation was focused on a documentary film he took part in entitled "Project Black Python."



Black pythons are among the 18 species of *Morellia* that inhabit Indo-Australia. These snakes have jet-black bodies with yellow or cream-colored, depending on locality, and the typical sheen that accompanies all *Boa*, *Python*, and their allies. Although what might be added here is that black pythons have an exceptional sheen, like that of oil spilt on water. These dark beauties are slender and average 6 to 8 feet (1.8-2.4m) in length, but have been known to exceed 12 feet (3.6m) or even 14 feet (4.2m). It is currently unclear if the dark body coloration is an effective absorber of heat or a means that allows a quick reduction in body temperature.

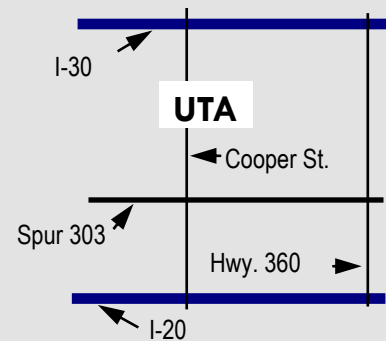
This species is confined primarily to Western Papua and Papua New Guinea, by a geopolitical boundary, although efforts at reunification of this island have recently taken place. Here there are basically just two seasonal variations – dry and rainy. The rainy season ranges from November to April but peaks in January. It is at this time when rains may come several times each day and each lasting for hours. During the rainy season the climate is generally humid and muggy. These pythons experience rather severe daily temperature shifts; in the central highlands morning temperature may begin at 49.9°F (9.9°C), but reach the 90s (32°C+) by late afternoon.

Most of the information we have on black or Boelen's pythons comes from the records of captive specimens. Much remains to be learned about free ranging individuals and captive breeding efforts remain hit or miss, but unfortunately mostly miss.



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### Meeting Location at UTA



### Coming to the next meeting?

We meet at the University of Texas at Arlington, Life Sciences Building, Room 117. **The meeting starts at 7:00pm** and we encourage you to get there a little early. Meetings are the **3rd Saturday** of the month, but if that falls on or near a holiday, the date may be moved. Check the newsletter for confirmed dates. When you get just south of UTA, from Cooper St. turn east on Mitchell and then turn north at the first street (you enter the parking lot from that street). Find a parking place near the building. Once you are there, enter the west building. There are entrances in the breezeway between the two buildings.

A reminder: Our rules require that any animals brought to meetings be in secure containers (you cannot walk around with your herp on your shoulder). **No** venomous snakes and **no** large boas/pythons, please.

At the conclusion of the meeting, members may sell captive-bred herps if they wish. **Only** members, please, and **only** animals that have been captive-bred.

Thanks! We look forward to seeing you!

## Minutes of the September Meeting Cont.

Black pythons have been known to restrict themselves to nesting area of 1,500 square feet (149sm), establishing nesting sites within rock crevices among dead vegetation. The entrances to these nesting sites are provided with scat and old sheds.

Hatchlings range from rust to brick red in coloration. This may be due to the high concentration of iron oxide in the soil. Visually matching the surrounding soil may be all a hatchling *Boelen's* python needs to survive to adulthood.

Captive breeding seems to remain a mystery with these species, but others have proven to be equally challenging. It would appear that unlocking the reproductive requirements for *Morellia boeleni* might simply be just a matter of time.

Ari concluded his presentation with an appeal for other *Morellia boeleni* breeders and researchers to put aside their egos and cooperate, sharing all data, for the continued success of the species, and calling for a halt to all egocentric behaviors.

DFWHS members wanting to learn more about this exotic and reclusive python species might best be advise to remain on the lookout for Ari's book, *Black Python: Morelia Boeleni* coming soon from Chimara Publications.

### *Conclusion of Meeting:*

After a Q & A session with Ari, a session that provided a number of seemingly possible scenarios I might add, Mark Pyle concluded with two requests for help for upcoming events for the education committee –

*October 11<sup>th</sup>* – Elm Fork Nature Preserve; Mark is scheduled to make a four-minute presentation as well as provide a display.

*November 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>* - the DFWHS has been invited to provide a display as well as guest speakers for the Dallas Museum of Nature and Science at Fair Park for Reptile Fest.

Please contact Mark if you wish to assist in either of these efforts at [ratsnake@charter.net](mailto:ratsnake@charter.net) or (817) 501-4544.

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