Successful breeding of *Rhamphiophis rostratus* by Nicole Tam

The pair of snakes were acquired 9 November 2017. They were sold to me as unsexed adults, originally imported as juveniles from Dodoma, Tanzania in 2014. Once they were in my care, they were quarantined for 3 months. I checked for external parasites and had faecal sample tests run to check for internal parasites. As they were morbidly obese upon arrival, they were also placed on a strict diet and given plenty of space and branches to stimulate exercise. During the quarantine period, both snakes shed twice. Based on the sheds, I was confident in that I had a pair.

Once out of quarantine, both snakes were moved into a PVC enclosure measuring 183 cm L x 61 cm W x 61 cm T. Substrate is 2:1:1 sand, top soil, peat moss. UVB is provided via a T5 6% Arcadia bulb. Lighting is provided via a T5 6500K plant light. Basking spot at 40-43 C, cool end of vivarium around 25-26 C. No heating during night, though apartment ambient temperature is kept at 23 C. Photo period during summer was 14 hrs, winter 8 hrs.

In the particular room the snakes were in, it is possible that at night the temperature dropped to 20° C on certain winter days. Other than that, the only thing deliberately altered from winter up to now was the photoperiod. Cage decor included tall dead grasses, large branches for climbing opportunities, and multiple cork tubes. Substrate depth is around 10 cm at the deepest point.

I first paired them on 13 March 2018. The male showed immediate interest in the female, but I witnessed no successful copulation. The male courted the female for three hours late at night (roughly starting at 10 PM) by slowly rubbing his head over the female's head in side to side movements, rubbing his body over hers, and rubbing his cloaca near and over the female's also in slow side to side movements. When she showed no reception, he gave up but remained near her constantly. Occasionally, he would rub her sides using the Ms
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The female shed on 11 April 2018. Male showed renewed interest and resumed courting behavior. I could not witness direct copulation due to the snakes' position behind décor, but the female lifted her tail and both snakes held still for several minutes. From that observation I hoped it indicated successful mating. After mating, I left the pair together for a week before separating them and placing the male into an enclosure measuring 121 cm L x 61 cm W x 61 cm T. The furnishings were similar to those of the larger enclosure.

After the week passed, I noticed barely visible swelling in the lower half of the female's body. She was fed once a week with various prey items (adult frozen/thawed mice, frozen/thawed quail chicks). There was a post-ovulation shed on 8 June 2018. I provided an egg laying box for the female, but she did not use it and laid her eggs underneath a dead grass clump where the substrate was slightly damp. She nearly uprooted the plant in doing so. I did see her rooting around inside the provided egg box, but I guess it wasn't satisfactory enough. It was 50 cm L x 30 cm W x 30 cm T, and filled with a mix of peat moss and sphagnum moss.

The eggs were laid on 22 June 2018. She laid 10 eggs, 9 definitely fertile and 1 questionable. The eggs were placed in a plastic container with several holes punched in its sides. They were incubated on a 1:1 water to vermiculite mixture at 27° C. Up until they hatched, I never had to add more water to the incubation media.

A week after the female laid her eggs I placed the male back into the cage with her. He did not show any interest any more, but both snakes are almost always together in their activities. I kept a close eye on him in case he would harass the female, but as he did not I felt safe leaving them together. The questionable egg began to mould in the first week of incubation. Despite my attempts to wipe the mould off, the egg eventually collapsed and died. This left me with 9 healthy, fertile eggs. Hatching started on 21 September 2018.
Housing of the hatchlings

An example of one of the hatchling tubs can be seen in the following photograph.

I have three of these set ups, almost all identical. Each tub measures 50 cm L x 33 cm T x 35 cm W.

Substrate: mix of top soil, play sand and peat moss with a layer of oak leaves.

UVB

UVB is provided via a T5 6% UVB Arcadia linear light bulb. There is a small basking spot provided (temp is 38°C), using a small lamp fixture and incandescent bulb. There is no heating at night. The photoperiod is as described previously.

Three hatchlings are in each set up. As they grow older, I plan to move them into progressively larger naturalistic set ups.

So far I’ve seen the hatchlings basking and hiding together. As of now none of them have shed yet, but I will keep informed in later editions of this article.
As for the following pictures: I observed that my adult rostratus showed were 'hooding', but didn't succeed in making a photograph of that. One of the hatchlings did it too, however, as you can see in the picture.