

ARMATURE FOR HEAT LAMPS IN THE SNAKE TERRARIUM



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■ INTRODUCTION

Two *Boa constrictors*, each with a length of 2.5 m. and a weight of 12 kg are my heaviest snakes. Their terrarium has a floor surface of 1 x 2 m. and is 90 cm high at its highest point. During the night, the temperature does not go below 17°C, thanks to a thermostat. During the day the temperature locally rises to about 25-28 °C. For the heating I use two reflector lamps of 120 Watt which I dim for 20% to lengthen their duration of life.

■ HEATING

Next to surface-heating by means of a little mat or a heat cable, heating with heatlamps is also necessary for (sub-)tropical species. For the smaller snake-species a 15 - 40 Watt lamp in a solid armature is enough. For

Schematic presentation of the bracket (dismounted).

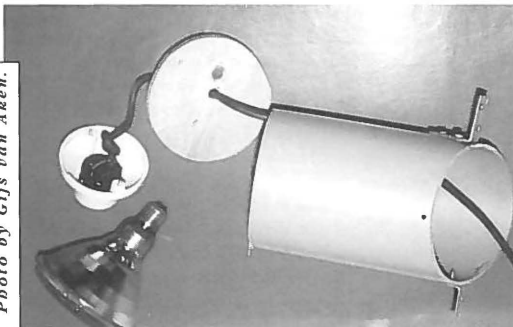


Photo by Gijs van Aken.

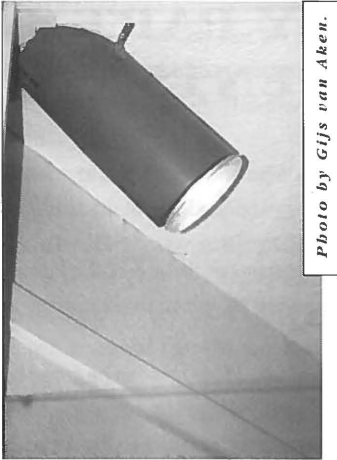
larger *Python*- and *Boa*-species you will need larger terraria and also lamps with a higher wattage. Lamps with a higher wattage (80 - 150 Watt) bring dangers with them. The most important are burning and electrification.

■ BURNING

Pythons and Boas react, compared to *Elaphe*-species, for instance, more slowly. When they get the chance to lie close to a heat lamp or on it, they will certainly visit this relatively warm spot during the night. When this lamp starts burning in the morning, they will not get off it immediately. Only at the moment when it gets too hot the snake will start getting of the lamp. I have seen large scars which were caused by burns.

■ ELECTRIFIC SHOCK

Electric shock is a second danger. Because of the weight and strong force of large pythons and boa's you cannot install electricity-cables in the terrarium in another way than in a special gully. Next to that you also cannot fit lamps without some form of protection in the terrarium. During the snakes nightly climbing activities they will wind themselves around the lamps, and there is a danger that the lamps will break. The most common advice is to fit the lamp in some kind of bracket in the terrarium. A snake will not wind itself around a lamp that hangs loose in the terrarium.



The lamp installed in the terrarium.

■ BRACKET

I did not like a lamp hanging loose in my terrarium and I went looking for an alternative. For the last three years I have used PVC-tubes as brackets for my heat-lamps. This solution works well, is safe, costs (almost) nothing and is easy to make.

Working method

- Take a PVC-tube with a diameter of 12 cm. and a length of about 30 cm. (I get my pieces out of the garbage containers at construction sites)
- At one side saw the tube at an angle of 45 degrees.
- Out of a piece of wood (at least 18 mm thick) you saw a piece that fits exactly in the tube. In the middle you drill a hole through which you can lead the electricity wire, connect the wire with a ceiling-fitting.
- Screw the fitting on the round piece of wood and put a reflector lamp in it.
- Shove the lamp in the tube until it almost links up. Determine how deep the wood is in the tube and than you can fasten it with some screws through the

tube.

- Fasten the PVC tube with small pieces of bent iron and screws at the sides or on the ceiling of the terrarium. Put the electricity-wire in a gully.

■ CONCLUDING REMARKS

- By sawing the tube at an angle it is possible to aim the lamp. When you direct the lamps in the terrarium, you do not have to look in the light yourself.
- When the tube is fastened at an angle the snakes cannot use the tube to climb on; they will slide off.
- I have used reflector lamps without a dimmer. These lamps caused no deformation (melting) of the PVC. I don't think that you can use other kinds of lamps (without reflectors) in this bracket.

Translation from Dutch by Fons Sleijpen.

English corrections by Chris Mattison.