

Endurance

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Consistently producing babies is the only way to prove the efficiency of an alternative method for captive breeding an extremely sensitive species like the Atlantic bushmaster, *Lachesis muta rhombeata*. According to Zamudio and Greene (1997), “the Atlantic bushmaster will continue to be recognized as a subspecies by those who feel that category fills a useful role in systematics.” I include myself among those few.

In my 2006 paper [Concerning *Lachesis* and Capoeira, Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 41(4):65-68] I stated that at that time, my breeding program was a complete failure, but that accumulated knowledge would soon lead to our first positive results.

My 2007 paper [Reproduction of the Atlantic Bushmaster (*Lachesis muta rhombeata*) for the First Time in Captivity, Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 42(3):41-43] shows how we managed to achieve success. But would we be able to repeat it in those low-tech chicken houses within the jungle, where parasite control

seemed impossible?

The answer is yes, and in a 2008 paper with Dr. Earl Turner and Rob Carmichael [Dialogues on the Tao of *Lachesis*, Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 43(10):157-164] my “primitive herpetoculture” was presented in detail. That’s the path that led to the images we intend to share now, concluding the process of proving a method: 32 babies in 2009.

Again, the forest provided all elements for the incubation period. Temperature, humidity, light — everything was natural. At 24–25°C we may have recorded the longest period of time from egg laying to pipping for the genus *Lachesis*: 92 days.

To me, it’s at miracle level to even think of an egg surviving for three months in the jungle. That alone would be enough trouble for the species, but let’s also remember the 93% habitat destruction.



It took some endurance to stick to our own beliefs amidst so much prejudice and doubt, but in the end, it was worth it.

And perhaps the most exciting aspect about this genus is that its history is being written at this very moment. Captive breeding challenges apart, even its range distribution has just changed. It's 10 June 2009 7:10 P.M., and after months of

search, for the very first time one can place *Lachesis* in Maranhão State, Brazil (Dr. Marluze Pastor, Chief of the Federal Agency Ibama in Maranhão, and colleagues, detailed personal communication). A true never-ending story.

(Photos by Rod Souza, Fabio Coppola and Sandy Hill)

Literature Cited

Zamudio, K. R., and H. W. Greene. 1997. Phylogeography of the bushmaster (*Lachesis muta*: Viperidae): Implications for Neotropical biogeography, systematics, and conservation. *Biol. J. Linnean Soc.* 62:421-44.

