

The Shell Keepers' Notes

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FEEDING TINY BABY BOXIES

By Jean Trimble

The first food introduced was live food chopped (and I mean very finely chopped into no longer than 1/4" long segments) small earthworms. When it was too cold to find worms outside, I bought Georgia Jumpers at Los Ranchos Gun Shop. They're packed in peat moss in a vented carton and seem to keep best at room temperature. I rinse about 1 worm per hatchling in water and the warms start jumping till I get them cut into small pieces. Then I cut these pieces as small as possible. I put them in a pile on a margarine tub lid which has the upright edge trimmed off. I pull the hatchlings out of there hiding places and set them on a very small water dish of lukewarm water to soak each morning. This assures they get some water and wakes them enough to be interested in food (sometimes). I usually fed every other day.

If I couldn't get them to eat, I used a plastic disposable knife and gently rub the side of their heads or under their chin until they open their mouth and all the while I have a piece of chopped worm on the end of the plastic knife, ready to pop in their mouth. Some babies resist and I just try to get them to eat a few bites. Other babies take a few bites and then will eat from tiny piles of worm pieces on their own.

I started introducing other food with worm pieces such as finely minced apple or mashed strawberry or cantaloupe almost liquefied in a mini food processor and soft vegetables such as mashed cooked sweet potato or mashed cooked carrot. When I started trying to add tomato or romaine, they were minced as tiny as I could cut them.

If I were out of worms, I'd substitute trout chow soaked in hot water and added to fruits and vegetables. Once in awhile I'd use very finely minced unseasoned cooked chicken with the fruit and vegetables.

~ Jean has been successful in raising hatchlings for decades and those of us who were guests at her home for the club picnic a few years back saw some of her techniques first hand.

In addition to a good diet (all hatchings are basically carnivorous at birth and need whole foods) it is important to remember that they need to be kept warm, be able

to dig a small burrow, have a hide box or other secure hiding spot, and have a daily soak in a dish no deeper than 1/4" lest they drown.

If you keep your hatchlings indoors, a large Rubbermaid tub is suitable when it is provided with a full-spectrum UVA/UVB light, a heat lamp on one end of the tub and a nice moist substrate in which to dig. Orchid moss atop or mixed into top soil or Bed-A-Beast works well for this purpose.

Rearing hatchlings is a very time-consuming proposition but well worth all your efforts.

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