

PORKA AND THE BOILER FITTER

How many odd animals have they had, I hear you cry. Please stop. Sadly, we've had loads and unless Jenny lets me off my commitment to provide one for each of the 'News from around ADS' issues I'll have to continue.

Today's tale involves, Porka a Western hognose snake and an unsuspecting boiler fitter. But first a bit of background.

Western hognose snakes originate from the western plains of North America and have an odd nose they use for burrowing. In reality it's a hardened scale at the front of the face but nose sounds better 😊



They are technically rear fanged and venomous though the venom is very mild, thank God, and will only cause harm to people allergic to it.

They are a grumpy snake and Porka is no exception. But they are all front, or at least Porka is and despite the hissing and trying to look like a cobra by flattening the space directly behind its skull to form a hood, it backs off fairly, quickly. That's not to say I haven't been covered in whatever greasy musk it is they release which stinks!

Houdini and the pact with the cat

Porka was a bit of an escape artist and at first would regularly get out and we'd find it curled up on top of the vivarium over the heat lamp. In fact, this got so regular that we were convinced the cat was aiding and abetting the escapes. We did ask and were told that as they had such a strong nose, unless you have a lock on the vivarium, they could push so hard with the odd nose they have that they could open the doors.

We much preferred the narrative that it was in cahoots with the cat who had history with some other animals we've had which did have a lock on the viv door. So, despite no opposable thumb we were still convinced it was a pact between Porka and the cat. Never the less we agreed to get a lock.

Freezing to death with no hot water

Unfortunately, before we bought the lock our boiler bust. It had been on the blink for a while and finally gave up the ghost. As usual it happened at entirely the wrong time of year and we were freezing. No hot water and no central heating.

We got on to a friend of ours who had just married a plumber 😊. Adam duly rode to the rescue sourced a new boiler and then agreed a date to come and start fitting it.

The inevitable

We should have known. Two days before Adam was due to come and begin the



process of taking out the old boiler and installing the new one. Porka went missing FFS!

What made it worse was that Adam was aware we had snakes in the house and had sought assurance that they both be safely locked in their vivs. So much so that he insisted that the dates he came had to coincide with me working from home.

We spent hours looking for the damn thing, checking everywhere, including emptying wardrobes and drawers. Nothing.

Luckily our youngest, in whose bedroom Porka resided and was presumably still lurking somewhere within, didn't bat an eye. In fact, it was him who raised the potential problem. "wouldn't it be funny if when Adam was here Porka appeared and hissed at him."

No, the thought of Adam running from the house refusing to fit the boiler and leaving us in the cold with no hot water, was possibly the least funny thing we'd heard for a long time.

The dilemma

Despite looking everywhere, so we thought, we couldn't find the damn thing anywhere. The night before Adam was due to start, we had the conversation about whether to tell him or not. To cut a long story short we decided not to. The best rationale we could come up with for this being OK was that Adam would be downstairs at first removing the old boiler and we were fairly sure Porka was upstairs. The idea was that as I worked from a room upstairs if Porka was disturbed by Adams working it would come out and I could grab it and get it back in its viv before Adam was aware.

The day of reckoning

Well come the day and still no sign of Porka. Stern words were exchanged with Dylan threatening the end of civilisation if he bounced in from school and asked whether Porka was still loose when Adam was here.

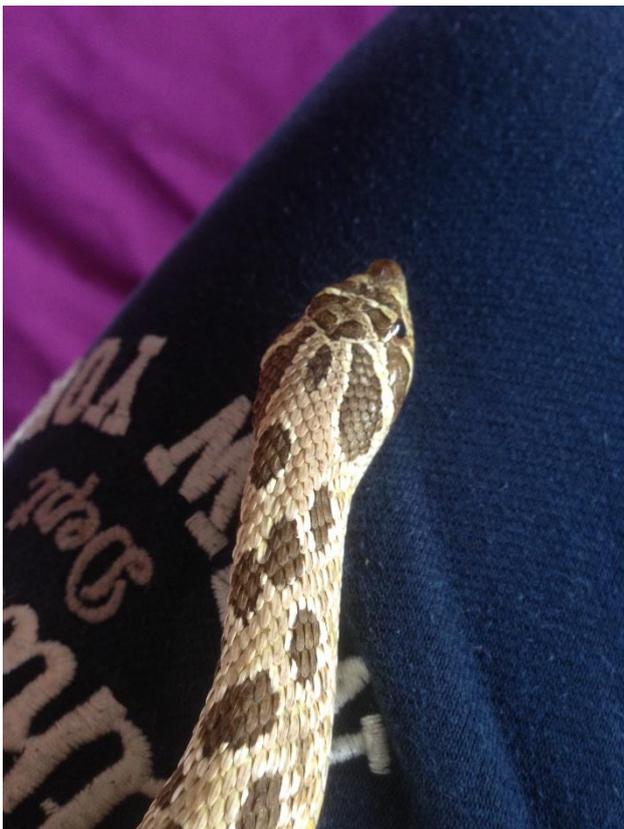
The first hour was a nightmare. Every shadow I was convinced was Porka and I was up and out of the room I was working in more times than I could count. Lunch time. FFS the damn snake was still on the loose and I had to make small talk with Adam as he munched his lunch upstairs with me. I carefully checked out whether he'd be working upstairs that day, hoping he wouldn't be. At first, he raised my hopes by saying the old boiler was proving such a pain that it didn't look like it. However,

shooting my hopes down in flames he quickly said, “but don’t worry I’ll stay on a bit so I can come up here and set up for tomorrow.”

A miracle

Could I concentrate, could I hell. The time ticked by and I got more and more concerned. The cat, I should have mentioned earlier is an aggressive sod too and will launch a full on attack while purring all the time. About half way through the afternoon such an attack was launched on me so I chased the cat out of the room and into the next.

Some time, later I heard the cat having a real go at something in the next room and went to investigate. It was stalking around a pile of books on the floor. A flash of hope!



Chasing the cat, shutting the door and finally moving the books. There it was, Porka. Brilliant!

Of course, it was not happy to be caught and hissed and pretended to be a cobra, and when I did pick it up covered me in stink.

Anyway, I got it back in the viv and shut the door. We had one lock on one viv only at the time, which was on the biggest snake, Bob. Bob is not grumpy at all, but he is big, about 5 feet long. So, I nicked the lock from Bob’s and locked Porka in. I made sure the door to the room was also

closed when Adam came up to do his prep for the next day.

That night we went straight out and bought several vivarium locks and to this day Porka is still locked up tight.

As you can see below, here he is, the grumpiest snake back in secure accommodation.

