



GREAT SHAKES AT SNAKES
 . . . Bruce McMillan holds indigo snake. Bob Cross pets black snake and spreading adder.

Maitland Youths Maintain Snake Farm In Back Yard

By EMMA MOODY

MAITLAND— Bob Cross, son of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Cross, Minnehaha Cir., is quite a collector—of snakes! He now has 16 of them, all nonpoisonous varieties, housed in neat, screened cages in the back yard of his home.

He handles them as if they were kittens, but has marks on his hands to prove that they are not quite as tame as feline pets.

It all started when Bob was nine years old and was taking swimming lessons from Fleet Peoples in Winter Park. He went on a camping trip with his instructor and caught his first snake at that time. This

piqued his interest and he began reading books about reptiles to be able to distinguish various types of snakes common to the area.

Last summer, he was joined in his collecting by a neighbor, Bruce McMillan, son of Mr. and Mrs. Jack McMillan. They ended the summer with a small collection which they released before returning to school. Their interest received another boost in their science class last year when a display of snakes was shown.

The boys, now 16 and juniors in Winter Park High School for the coming session, started with a vengeance as soon as school was out this summer. They have combed local lakes and swamps and caught most of their specimens close to home. Every trip away from home is turned into a collecting trip—they caught one of the largest an indigo snake, on Deep Creek, on the St. Johns River.

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Bob, formerly kept his snakes in his bedroom. His father soon posted a reward for the recapture of any that escaped in the house.

Mrs. Cross, who must be the most patient and understanding of mothers, eventually became accustomed to her son's strange collection, but she put her foot down when the num-

ber of snakes in the house reached 15. Bob then built the cages and moved his pets to the yard.

One of the snakes captured, a banded water snake, gave a bonus when she gave birth to a dozen babies. These are now about five or six inches long and are as quick as greased lightning. The mother snake has since died, but the babies seem healthy and destined to reach adulthood.

Feeding the pets is something of a chore as the boys have to catch toads, small fish (live), and small snakes for their food. Fresh water

must be kept in the cages at all times and, for the water snakes, enough water for them to get into to wet their skins.

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In their various trips to hunt snakes or food for them, the boys have come across poisonous snakes which they have killed. There is a coral snake, kept in a jar of alcohol in Bob's room, and he has two long rattlesnake skins mounted on boards.

The boys have no plans to follow in the footsteps of Ross Allen, but get their fun from trying to find as many varieties of nonpoisonous snakes as they can. They are well-known in the neighborhood and are frequently called to identify or catch snakes.

They are undecided as to whether to release the snakes or not when school starts. They feel they may keep them to use as a display in science class, so other students may learn to recognize harmless snakes which are beneficial man.