



Breeder Profile:

Dan Mulleary

Born on 16th October, 1970 in southern California as Daniel Patrick Mulleary, Dan was raised in a pretty typical sort of home, with a younger brother and nothing spectacular in way of animals - just a cat, dog and a small parakeet. He did have a very strict upbringing though, inheriting high moral values from his father who was the Deputy Sheriff for Los Angeles County.

From the age of four onwards, Dan was fascinated with dinosaurs and knew all of their scientific names, such as *Stegosaurus* and *Gastonia*. Two years later, and young Dan had started to collect insects that he found in his backyard, keeping them in jam jars and Tupperware boxes, like many kids.

Shortly after his eighth birthday, Dan's father purchased a small boat, thus causing his love for nature to turn towards the open sea. He started to watch and study sharks and whales at every opportunity that he could.

Exposure to snakes

As a close family unit, camping was something that the Mullearys would regularly do, and on one of these trips, when he was nine years old, Dan caught his first ever snake. It was just a common garter snake, but to him, it was fantastic and something that lit a passion that nothing else had been able to spark, up until that point.

He was lucky enough to be able to keep the snake with his parents' blessing, and it became almost like an open door from then onwards, in terms of building up a "collection". While he was attending Junior High School, the teacher was looking for a holiday home for the gopher snake that was kept in his classroom. With a parental permission slip, this snake was soon on its way to the family home.

Imagine if Vin Diesel was into reptile keeping; well, the nearest you will get to this is breeder, retailer and importer Dan Mulleary! Christian Castille reports.





Dan with a green iguana. Once he had a car, he was able to travel further afield, in search of stock.

▲ Dan with herpetologist and pioneering television presenter Mark O'Shea.

Dan began to spend much of his time at the library, reading and absorbing everything reptilian, rather like a herpetological sponge. Aside from books, nature programmes were another valuable source of information. Being 30 years ago though, there was no Internet, no Facebook groups, no forums or Youtube, so the only way of networking and finding other keepers and breeders was through the few small specialist reptile shops that existed back then.

Dan started saving up enough money to buy his first ever red-tailed boa constrictor. During this time, he did have

a few hermit crabs, tarantulas and iguanas, but that was about it. His parents were quite tolerant though, and although he started off slowly, things soon became like a snowflake rolling down a snowy embankment, quickly turning into a large snowball!

Increasing contact

At 15, Dan began to work at his local pet store. Since it was not a specialist reptile outlet, so Dan's knowledge meant that anything to do with reptiles became his area of expertise.

Without his father's knowledge, his

mother would occasionally make up excuses so he didn't have to attend school on certain days. This meant that he could go with his manager to the local animal importer, and choose the stock that they wanted to retail.

Dan recalls there were caimans, giant mata mata turtles, huge monitors and all sorts of other creatures there that he had only read about before. He developed a love-hate relationship with such visits though, because he often found himself spending money that he didn't really have, building up his own bedroom collection.

The first red-tailed boa that he brought three years earlier turned out to be a female and was ready to breed by now, so Dan's manager lent him a male. This unexpectedly gave Dan a litter of seven babies. It was a turning point for him. Now, instead of wanting an awesome collection of everything, he decided to concentrate on particular species that he could breed successfully.

An unexpected gift

Once he was able to drive, Dan was able to visit other importers further afield. He started getting bigger and better cages, and, yes, more books as well. Not that he always needed to venture out to build up his collection. While working at the shop, someone once gave him a 1.5m (5ft) Dumeril's monitor (*Varanus dumerilii*).

Dan still clearly remembers as if it was yesterday coming into work straight from high school, and his boss telling him that there was something that had been left for him in the back of the shop. In one of the dog kennels, there was this giant monitor flicking its tongue! Dan was intimidated at first, which is not surprising considering how he was not familiar with this giant lizard, but it proved to be very docile and made a great companion. The monitor would slip out into his bedroom from time to time though, and then Dan would have to lure him out of the closet or from under the bed with processed ham! ▶

◀ Dan at an early age with one of his first snakes.



Career decisions made

In order to please his father, Dan embarked on a career in law enforcement at the age of 18 and for him, work became just that - he decided that he would work to live, rather than live to work. However, the money wasn't too bad and it still allowed him to continue his passion for reptiles and other exotic pets.

During 1988, Dan attended his first ever reptile show and this opened up even more avenues to him. He studied magazines for the latest information about reptiles, and sent off for price lists. Two years later, he moved out of his parents' house but dedicated a room of his new home to breeding reptiles. He was becoming very successful in this field, and started to acquire an enviable reputation for his knowledge and expertise.

There were many times when he considered quitting his job and opening up his own exotic pet show, but the reality of it was he could not throw away a good, steady, respectable job for something that was a childhood dream. Yet the darker that his police work became, so he would use his hobby to escape from the grasp of depression that was starting to take a firm hold on him.

By the mid-90s, so the Internet was beginning to have an influence on the hobby, and in 1996, he attended his first ever reptile show as a vendor, helping a good friend. This show taught him how the trade worked from the breeder's side, instead of the retail perspective with which he was familiar.

The following year, with a lot of surplus stock in the form of boas and pythons, he took the plunge to become a vendor, registering as a business. His first show went so well that he attended every single major reptile event for the next four years.



▲ Dan's travels have resulted in a lot of field herping.



▼ Dan is a very experienced snake wrangler.



Changing times

In October 2001, Dan found himself at one of the biggest reptile shows in the US. The mood was sombre, as it was just a month after the 9/11 attacks in New York, and there was a very poor turnout. It was the last show of the year, and faced with a lot of surplus stock, so Dan turned to the Internet and saw it was actually a good route to reach fellow enthusiasts.

He asked a computer whizz-kid friend to set up a website for him. In next to no time, he realised just how amazing the Internet was for a reptile breeder. It was so much easier than spending days working up to a reptile show where there was a real element of chance when it came to

selling stock. Within a month, Dan had largely sold out of everything that he had. He then took the decision not to exhibit at reptile shows for a few years, but instead, he would build up his breeding stock and began to produce animals on a massive scale.

Dan is one of the most honest and genuine people in the hobby, so trusting him has never been an issue for anyone. It was his customers that started pushing him to the top as a "good guy". He was never the biggest and he never will be the biggest. He just continued working with the animals that he enjoyed and had a good time at it.

Since he was not doing this for a living,



Chondros are a particular favourite of Dan's, and well-represented in his collection.



◀ Venturing into caves in search of monsters within holds no fear for Dan.



trips that kept him grounded and in tune with reality. Once he was back home, the memories and experiences of every trip would surface on a daily basis and it really became food for his soul. Dan had wanted to visit Komodo to see the dragons since he had first read about them as a youngster, and he finally achieved this goal in 2004. Even now, he still remembers the emotion of finally walking up to the old archway on Komodo Island. Dan started to import stock as well, sourced through his contacts in Asia. He arranged everything on the US side, but was always there to finish his deals face to face with the exporters. Soon enough, he was receiving shipments from further afield, such as Hong Kong. One of his contacts in Bangkok began to introduce him to other dealers and this allowed him to network further afield, through their extended families.

▶ Snakes remain amongst Dan's favourite reptiles.



so he never had a reason to make any poor decisions that revolved around customers and money. He once told me: "I couldn't believe how some of the most well-respected people in the business had everyone fooled. It taught me that relying on your animals for a living puts a monetary value on everything. It creates a pressure in your life and on your animals, and that greed is what was fuelling lots of the crazy things that were going on in the hobby...not with everyone for sure, but definitely for some individuals."

The faces in the hobby were changing at this point, and there were more and more new people offering their stock at the expos, as shows are known there. The "old school" guys all knew Dan under his selling name of "DM Exotics" but there was a new generation of people that didn't know the guy behind DM Exotics. With that in mind, he decided to start doing the shows again.

Broader horizons

When Dan turned 30, he realised that he needed to explore the world and discover more about some of the animals that he kept. Travelling light, with a suitable suitcase and snakehook, plus a passport and entry permits, he was ready to go.

In 2003, he arranged a trip to Thailand on his own and loved the place. He heard from the locals that Chatujak market in the centre of Bangkok was a good place to visit if you were into reptiles. It was fascinating, and he kept returning again and again whenever he could get away there.

He started to explore neighbouring countries too, and again, he soon began to get to know the market dealers, and friendships started to develop. Every four months, he would return back. As his policework continued to take a toll on his emotional health, it was these

Things take an unexpected turn

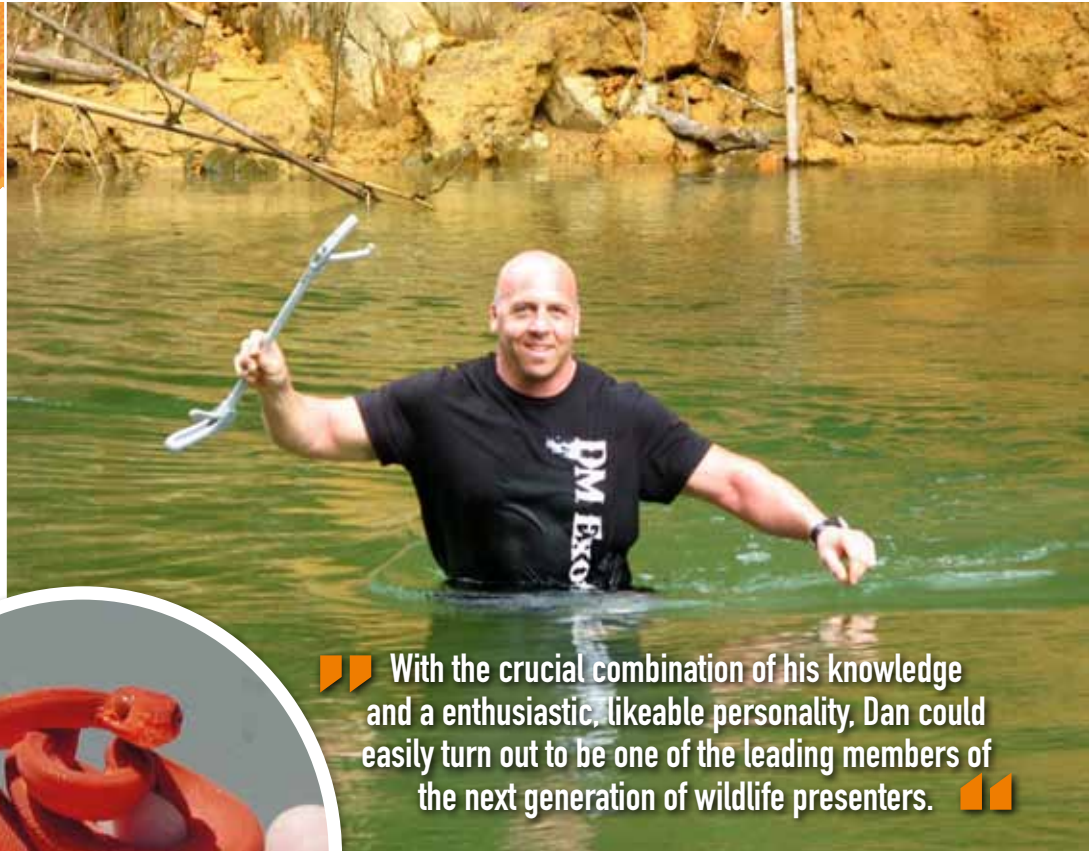
Unfortunately, there was one deal that had gone wrong, and Dan was promised that it would be sorted out. As was his custom, he flew out to resolve the issue face to face with his supplier. Things were different on this occasion though. Dan instantly got a bad feeling about what was happening, particularly when he noticed two guys at the dealer's premises giving a poor impression of cleaning out the snake enclosures.

It turned nasty, with the dealer accusing Dan of owing him tens of thousands of dollars. If Dan wanted to leave the compound alive, he would have to pay the money. To this day, Dan still doesn't know how it became his fault. The two workers behind Dan began to get close in on him, but thankfully, this is where his alternative career probably saved him.

Trained as an officer of the law, and used to dealing with violence on a regular basis, as well as being built rather like the Incredible Hulk had its advantages. Dan basically did what he had to do to protect himself, and got out, so he returned safely home to his family. It was just as well that Dan was the type of guy who could stand up for himself, because otherwise things could have gone seriously wrong for him at that meeting.

He quickly returned to his hotel, packed his stuff and found another place to stay, as he knew he would be followed and watched. He ditched that guy as a contact and was put in touch with another person in Malaysia instead. They have since become very good friends and business partners.

Thanks to a combination of travelling and networking, Dan has established an enviable list of



With the crucial combination of his knowledge and a enthusiastic, likeable personality, Dan could easily turn out to be one of the leading members of the next generation of wildlife presenters.



▲ Bright red is not a common colour in snakes.

reliable suppliers, and has "field herped" in most countries – in fact, it is easier to ask him for a list of where he hasn't explored in search of reptiles! From playing with elephants to bottle-feeding baby tigers, Dan has done it all and he hasn't given up yet!

Creating a record

Over the last few years, he has taken a keen interest in videography. Armed with a amateur video camera, Dan started to realise that people generally were so much more interested in watching him interact with wildlife on video than in still photos.

It is a different dynamic - you can hear what is happening and watch at the same time, so it draws in the viewer. He began documenting everything on video. Remembering where he had been and the experiences that he had already, he knew just where to go to get some great footage.

As someone who had seen all of the television shows, he knew he had visited more interesting places than viewers had seen before. Before it was just Dan trying to be as casual and stoic as possible, letting the animals on film be the star of the segment. Yet as viewers increased so did his fan base.

Attracting a bigger audience

Other video opportunities started to arise and his perception of what good video was had changed. Soon he was being asked to do small guest segments on video projects, and most recently, he has filmed an entire trip under contract for a production company. From this industry standpoint, they wanted more of a host, to guide viewers, rather than just a programme portraying the animals.

With the crucial combination of his knowledge and a enthusiastic, likeable personality, Dan could easily turn out to be one of the leading members of the next generation of wildlife presenters. Keep your eyes on the television schedules therefore, so as not to miss him!

Dan still does a lot of importing and working with many people in the hobby, in addition to breeding some of the highest quality reptiles you will ever see, ranging from geckos to chondros (green tree pythons). He has worked with some very rare and unusual species over the years and his knowledge seems endless.

He is perhaps best-known for his work in breeding tiger rat snakes and of course, scrub pythons - a love we both share. No matter how his situation has changed over the years though, Dan still remains the same honest family guy, who is doing fundamentally what he was doing 20 years ago, and that's living his passion through his hobby. ❖



Contact points

If you would like to get into contact Dan to discuss snake husbandry or to acquire stock from him, visit his website at <http://www.dmexotics.com>



▼ Breeding snakes is a way of life for Dan.