

## **Summer Wooden**

Junior Animal Sciences

### *To Buy Or Not To Buy A Rat*

This project was a study of the relationship between a ball python's tongue-flicking rate compared to incidence of eating. I chose this topic because I am a new ball python owner, and I discovered that ball pythons are known for going for months without eating. Therefore, I wanted to know when I should be spending my money on a rat. I observed my ball python's tongue-flicking once a day for one-minute intervals for two one-week trials. One tongue-flick was defined as the tongue sticking out of the mouth, then retreating back into the mouth. The snake was offered a rat to eat the last day of each trial. In the first trial, there was a definite trend of increase number of tongue-flicks as the time until feeding decreased, 165.4% from Day 6 to the Day of Feeding, possibly indicating that tongue-flicking increased as the snake got hungrier. However, the second trial showed more random tongue-flick rates, without a clear trend. Also, in both trials, the snake refused to eat the rat offered with no apparent relationship to tongue-flicking rates. In this project, my data was inconclusive, and more data would be needed to prove or disprove if there is a relationship between tongue-flicking rates and incidence of eating. A follow-up experiment could research other things that could affect a ball python's incidence of eating, such as the weather or the shedding cycle.