



# THE MONITOR

NEWSLETTER OF THE HOOSIER HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A non-profit organization dedicated to the education of its membership and the  
Conservation of all reptiles and amphibians

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## President's Message

Ed Ferrer

We have had a very mild winter in Hoosier land. January 2006 has been the second warmest January in history. Many of the days featured temperatures in the 50's. Some of our club members actually found some herps during this month. If you were lucky enough to see a herp during January be sure to document your encounter and inform us so we can record your findings.

We had a great speaker in January. Omar Attum from Indiana/Purdue at Ft. Wayne gave a very interesting and informative presentation. His method of training nomadic farmers to gather information even though they didn't read or write was nothing short of ingenious. We gained an appreciation for the dedicated field work that was needed to protect the endangered Egyptian tortoises.

Please put the following weekend on your calendar. For years our annual Reptile Day exhibit has been one of the Indiana State Museum's most successful events. This year they are going to extend it from one day to a weekend! Hours are 11:00-4:00 on Friday and Saturday and 12:00-4:00 on Sunday, July 14-16. We will need to work out a rotation of members to fill these days. There will be other organizations that will participate so we won't have to take care of the whole lobby display but we will have a large part of it.

Also, we will have an exhibit in Wessleman Woods in Evansville on June 10 and 11. This is a great chance to meet other herp people and share experiences with our friends in the "Pocket City". Both events are fund-raising events for our society. We would appreciate as much participation as possible.

We look forward to seeing you at our next meeting on Feb 15th. Our guest speaker will be Scott Shupe and he will be discussing his new book A U.S. Guide to Venomous Snakes and Their Mimics as well as many other herp related experiences. See you there!

**Don't forget to purchase your 2006 fishing/hunting licenses!**

**Indiana law states that anyone collecting reptiles/amphibians must have a current state fishing or hunting license (under the age of 18 – exempt).**

**Indiana citizens may lawfully collect up to four of each (unprotected) species of reptile or amphibian.**

***Herpetology Weekend April 21st – 22nd***  
***Natural Bridge State Park, Slade, Kentucky***

Learn about nature's most misunderstood critters! Experienced herpetologists will lead field trips in to the Red River Gorge to observe reptiles and amphibians in their native habitat. Collection is prohibited. Demonstrations will include live venomous snakes! Evening presentations will focus on reptile and amphibian conversation. Registration fee is \$5 per adult and \$2 per child.

***WELCOME NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS!!!***

***New***

Amber Jenks (sustaining member), Michigan City, IN  
David Hemrich, Terre Haute, IN  
Fredrick Schwomeyer, Indpls. IN

***Renewals***

Eugene Holmes  
Jeff Wines  
Pat Hammond  
Richard Nohr (sustaining member)

**General Meeting: Wednesday Feb. 15th, 7:30 p.m.**

**Guest Speaker: Scott Shupe**

**Topic: Venomous Snakes and their Mimics**

**Butler University, Gallahue Hall, Lecture Room#108**

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to present Scott Shupe as our guest speaker. Scott has recently published a book: [A U.S. Guide to Venomous Snakes and Their Mimics](#). Scott has many herp related experiences. He has worked at the Ross Allen Reptile Institute in Silver Springs, Florida, the St Augustine Alligator Farm and the Reptile Gardens in Rapid City, SD. He also operated a school assembly business that specialized in life science education and owned a private zoo/nature center. He also has produced educational wildlife videos. Besides writing his next book on great herping places in America he also runs a fund raising business for herp societies. This presentation will offer something for everyone so don't miss it!

# Hoosier Herp of the Month

## Bull Snake *Pituophis catenifer sayi*

by Ed Ferrer

The bull snake is a large yellowish snake with dark brown or black blotches and a rather pointed nose. It is often confused in the field with the Western fox snake, *Elaphe vulpina vulpina*, because the two have similar color patterns and are fairly large. However, the fox snake has a rounded nose that distinguishes it from the bull snake's pointed nose. If both bulk and length are considered, the bull snake is the largest of Indiana's snakes. The record size for an Indiana bull snake is 73 1/2 inches. This specimen grew about a third of its length in 14 years of captivity. The largest wildcaught specimen measured 67 inches.

Populations of bull snakes in Indiana are considered relicts. The major bull snake habitat is in the sand prairie of Northwestern Indiana, south of the Kankakee River and east to extreme western Starke and Pulaski counties. There may also be a relict population in Knox county in Southwestern Indiana. It is at home in dry, sandy soil in woods, prairie, pastures and farm yards. A pronounced tendency to burrow helps this snake survive in agricultural districts. By using its pointed snout, a large bull snake can move over four pounds of sand in about 30 minutes. This talent enables this reptile to enter burrows of mammals to hunt and to construct shelter for itself and its eggs. Observers agree that bull snakes feed on small mammals and ground-nesting birds. Squirrels, voles, mice, pocket gophers and rabbits are often eaten. Farmers often recognize the value of bull snakes as rodent predators, however they may be considered a pest to game bird farms and bird refuges. Larger prey is often killed by constriction or by just pressing the victim against a solid surface. Captive individuals are less skilled at killing prey in the open than racers or rat snakes. This supports the belief that much of the bull snake's feeding is done in burrows of rodents.

When bull snakes are encountered in the field they are often belligerent. Usually they will hiss loudly, vibrate their tails, and often do not hesitate to bite. The popular name of bull snake probably refers to its large size and aggressive attitude. A few years ago I went with a few other Hoosier herp society members and explored the Northwest prairie region on our way to Iowa for that year's Midwest Herpetological Symposium hoping to find bull snakes. We did find a lot of rodents but unfortunately no bull snakes. Being in October it was probably too late in the year to expect to find any. However, I do remember some painful cactus reminders that found their way into a hole of my shoes. Hopefully the prairie region of Indiana will remain intact and the bull snake will continue to be a resident of Indiana.

Ref. [Amphibians and Reptiles of Indiana](#), Sherman A. Minton, Jr. 2001  
[Peterson Field Guide, Reptiles and Amphibians Eastern/Central North America](#), Roger Conant/Joseph T. Collins, 1998



Pictures from the Center for Reptile and Amphibian Conservation and Management website

## **Janurary Meeting in Review**

by Pat Hammond

Omar Auttum presented the HHS with a special presentation on the endangered Egyptian tortoise. Omar did work in the field in Egypt with captive tortoises. The tortoises were kept in pins on the roofs of buildings in Cairo.

Omar hired a local man to guard the tortoises from poachers who steal tortoises for the pet trade. Omar's helper expressed interest in doing research work with the captive animals. Omar made worksheets to record data including size, sex, habitat preference, food preference, etc. Through his work the basic natural history of the tortoises was finally being understood. With the information obtained in this study Omar was able to establish what needed to be protected in the wild to help protect the populations of tortoises. Including food preferences and natural cover. After Omar and his helper built a friendship and trust the helper asked Omar if he wanted to see some turtles in the wild. So he took Omar to an area where the tortoises were. Since then the locals have shown him several other areas where the tortoises still exist.

Through working with the locals, Omar has been able to help protect the wild populations of tortoises and he has helped the locals benefit from them. In the past locals would capture tortoises and sell them for the pet trade. Now they use the tortoises in their crafts, which they sell. Omar brought several pieces with him to sell at our meeting. I bought a key chain to help raise funds for the locals.

## **HERP HAPPENINGS**

**Febuary 26, 2006 – Midwest Reptile Show, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Southwest Pavilion, Indiana State Fairgrounds, Indianapolis. \$5.00 admission, reptiles, amphibians, books, cages, feeder animals, and other supplies. Sell your herps and dry goods free of charge at our H.H.S. info. table. For info: (317) 861-5550, [www.midwestreptile.com](http://www.midwestreptile.com)**

**April 21-22, 2006 – Herpetology Weekend, Natural Bridge Park, Slade, KY.**

**June 10-11, 2006 – Reptile Invasion, Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve, Evansville, IN**

**November 3-5, 2006 – Midwest Herpetological Symposium, Indianapolis, Indiana**

## **20 new species of frogs found in Indonesia**

(Submitted by Janet Ponach) (Rephrased by Jim Horton)

MSNBC staff and news service reports

Updated: 11:49 a.m. ET Feb. 7, 2006

*The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.*

Jakarta, Indonesia - Scientists have penetrated one of Indonesia's most tropical jungles and are calling it "As close to the Garden of Eden as you're going to find on Earth."

Last December, an eleven member team of scientists from the U.S., Indonesia, and Australia, explored the Foja Mountains of Papua province. The area covers more than two million acres of old growth tropical forest.

One species of Rhododendron found is possibly the largest ever – measuring six-inches across. Four new butterflies and more than twenty species of frogs have been reported. A species of bird, the honeyeater, has not been recorded in Indonesia since 1939. A primitive egg-laying mammal known as the Long-Beaked Echidna, has been hunted near extinction elsewhere. But, here it was in abundance. Another mammal, the Golden-mantled Tree Kangaroo, was also thought to be near extinction.

Scientists also discovered a tiny microhylid species of frog, less than half an inch in length. Five new species of Palm were discovered there as well.

It could take six months to several years to officially classify the new species.

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the education of its membership and the conservation of all reptiles and amphibians. General monthly meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at Butler University, Gallahue Hall, Room 105 or 108. Membership is open to all interested individuals. **No venomous animals are allowed at the General Meetings.**

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Suggestions and articles for *The Monitor* are welcome. Submit your typed or legibly hand written articles by the first Wednesday of each month to: PO. Box 40544, Indianapolis, IN 46240-0544 or 7712 Miracle road, Indianapolis, IN, 46237. Articles on IBM or compatible, formatted, 5¼ or 3½ disks are accepted. To have your disk returned, you must provide a self addressed, stamped envelope within your mailing to us. Back issues of *The Monitor* are available. Send requests to our PO. Box, or contact Holly Carter. Quarterly Advertisement Rates for publishing your ad in *The Monitor* are: ¼ Page - \$10.00; ½ Page - \$15.00; and Full Page - \$25.00. Classified Ads are free to all paid H.H.S. members and will be printed for two months. All ads must be submitted in writing to the Editor by the first Wednesday of each month. All artwork is copyrighted and cannot be reproduced without written permission from the artist.