



# 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

Volume 18 Number 9

September 2007

## President's Message

Jim Horton

.Wow! I can't believe it is September already. I hope you have been enjoying your summer.

The last General Meeting featured Mr. Mike Pingleton as our Guest Speaker. Mike is a field herper extordinaire. He showcased his years in herping our great nation with great stories and thoughts. He has seen more than most of us will see in our lifetimes!

It was very impressive and I now have even more of an itch to get out and herp before the cooler weather sets in.

The H.H.S. has donated more funds to another worthy herpetological organization. The Kentucky Reptile Zoo has received \$200.00 from the H.H.S. to show our support in the research and development of venom. We believe that even the smallest amount will help out.

Richard Searcey has been working on our website. Our website has now been updated with Wikapedia. The site will feature pics of Indiana herps with information on each species.

This month we are teaming up with the Eiteljorg Museum for their *Western Festival*, September 28 &29. We will be exhibiting "Western" herps on Saturday from 10am-5pm. If you keep herps from the *Great West*, please consider showing them at this event.

Holly Carter has included a review of the last Midwest Herp Symposium here in Indianapolis. She has submitted it to hopefully remind and drum up some attendees for the Symposium in November in Des Moines, Iowa. This year, it is hosted by the Iowa Herpetological Society. Ed has our Herp of the Month and

As reminder, our next few General Meetings will be held in Gallahue Hall, room #105 for the next few months. Please mark it on your calendars.

### WELCOME NEW AND RENEWED H.H.S. MEMBERS!

#### New

Todd Pierson – (Sustaining Membership)

David Summers

#### Renewals

Gerald Zimmerman

Cedric Hall

Barry Hammer

## **HHS website is looking for your help**

HHS Website Coordinator, Richard Searcey, has updated our website to include information on the amphibians and reptiles of Indiana. A short bio and photo will accompany each Indiana herp. We would like our members to participate in this project. We need pictures of Indiana amphibians and reptiles.

### **Herpetology Greats**

Hampton Wilder Parker  
1891-1968

A British herpetologist at the British Museum of Natural History in London. His publications include the monograph, *Frogs of the Family Microhylidae* (1934), and the standard handbook *Snakes: A Natural History* (1977) which he co-authored with A.G.C. Grandison.

## **EMBARRASSING MOMENTS IN HERPING**

By Pat Hammond

Several years ago I took a trip to the Okeetee (S.C.) with Jim Horton and a couple other friends. The first place we searched was a boat ramp on the Savannah River. I spotted the first snake of the trip; it was a large brown water snake sunning itself on the boat dock. Ken got out his video camera to document the catch. I skillfully snuck up on the sleeping snake trying not to wake it. As I stealthfully crept upon the snake with my heart pounding, I could hear Ken narrating the event as it was happening. I got within a foot or two of the snake, got into position and grabbed the snake...just to discover it was dead. Someone had found it before us and killed it. Pretty embarrassing moment; especially since it is forever preserved on film.

## **HERP SOCIETY TO HOLD EXHIBIT**

The Hoosier Herpetological Society has been invited to exhibit amphibians and reptilians of the "Great West". The Eiteljorg Museum will host a Western Festival on September 28-29 and the H.H.S. will be a part of it.

All H.H.S. members are encouraged to participate with their animals. If you work with herps from the Western United States, we would like you to attend at least part of the day if at all possible. This is the first ever exhibit at the Eiteljorg the the H.H.S.

The exhibit is from 10:am to 5:pm and a Chuckwagon lunch is on the house. A family membership to the museum will also be available to for those interested. Parking will be validated for the 29<sup>th</sup> as well for participants.

## **Hurray for Tourism!**

As Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula girded for hurricane Dean; resorts sent tourists home and boarded windows. However, the Ritz-Carlton Cancun went one step further after the guests left on August 20th. The staff with a few lingering guests canvassed the beach for eggs of Leatherback and Green Sea Turtles. The eggs and some hatchlings were sequestered in the resort till calm had returned.

Chris and Ellen Daney of Boston, who were honeymooning at the Ritz helped out. Said Chris; " We boxed up about 100 turtles. We were drenched in sweat and in sand."

Experts describe hurricane as a danger to sea turtles because highly developed beach areas are very prone to erosion, thus wiping out many nests and hatchlings. Although hurricanes aren't the worst peril for dwindling turtle populations; growing beachfront development with fishing and climate change make survival more difficult.

The Herp World doffs their carapaces to those who cared enough to help another species survive.

Dave Mitchell

RE: Wall Street Journal 8/21/97, Candace Jackson

**General Meeting: Wednesday September 19th, 7:30 p.m.**  
**Guest Speaker: Rick Howard, Purdue University**  
**Topic: "Some Local Salamanders"**  
**Butler University, Gallahue Hall, Room#105**

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to announce that this month's guest speaker is Rick Howard from Purdue University. Rick received both his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Texas at Austin and his Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Michigan. He has been an Assistant Professor of Biology at Purdue University from 1979-1994 and a Professor of biology at Purdue since 1995. He has published many herpetology articles and is the Chair of the Honors Committee in Biology since 2005. He will be discussing some of Indiana's salamanders in his talk. I know since I am primarily a "snake guy", I am looking forward to learning more about salamanders and field work and research in Indiana. **Our meetings for the rest of this year will be in room#105. See you there!**

**BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

**Richard D. Howard**

Department of Biological Sciences  
Purdue University

***Professional Preparation***

University of Texas at Austin, Zoology, B.A., 1970  
University of Texas at Austin, Zoology, M.A., 1972  
University of Michigan, Zoology, Ph.D., 1977

**Appointments**

1995- Professor, Department of Biological Science, Purdue University  
1979-1984 Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Purdue University  
1977-1979 Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Bowling Green State University  
1972-1977 Teaching Assistant, Division of Biological Sciences, University of Michigan  
1972-1974 Research Assistant, Museum of Zoology, Fish Division and Insect Division, University of Michigan  
1970-1972 Research Assistant, Department of Zoology, University of Texas at Austin

**Selected Publications**

- Howard, R. D., J. A. DeWoody, W. M. Muir. 2004. Transgenic male mating advantage provides opportunity for Trojan gene effect in a fish. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 101: 2934-2938.
- Howard, R. D. and J. R. Young. 1998. Individual variation in male vocal traits and female mating preferences in *Bufo americanus*. *Animal Behaviour* 55:1165-1179.
- Howard, R. D., R. S. Martens, S. A. Innis, J. M. Drnevich, and J. Hale. 1998. Mate choice and mate competition influence male body size in Japanese medaka. *Animal Behaviour* 55:1151-1163.
- Howard, R. D., Moorman, R. S. & Whiteman, H. H. 1997. Differential effects of mate competition and mate choice on eastern tiger salamanders. *Anim. Behav.* 53: 1345-1356.
- Lucas, J. R., Howard, R. D. & Palmer, J. G. 1996. Callers and satellites: chorus behaviour in anurans as a stochastic dynamic game. *Anim. Behav.*, 51, 501-518.
- Muir, W. M. and R. D. Howard. 2002. Assessment of possible ecological risks and hazards of transgenic fish with implications for other sexually reproducing organisms. *Transgenic Research* 11: 101-114.
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- Muir, W. M. and R. D. Howard. 2001. Fitness components and ecological risk of transgenic release: a model using Japanese medaka (*Oryzias latipes*). *The American Naturalist* 158 (July 2001).
- Muir, W. M. and R. D. Howard. 1999. Possible ecological risks of transgenic organism release when transgenes affect mating success: sexual selection and the Trojan gene hypothesis. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 96:13853-13856.

# Herp of the Month

## Black Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*)

by Ed Ferrer  
(Photos by Jim Horton)

Often after I present my live snake program to groups, people will come up to me to share their experiences with snakes in nature. Many times they tell of a large black, six-foot (snake stories are often like "fish stories" with the length of the serpent increasing every time it is told.) snake and want to know if it is dangerous or if it is a water moccasin. After finding out where their encounter occurred, I normally suggest that they probably saw a black rat snake, *Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*. The black rat snake is one of the largest and most common snakes found in Indiana. They can be found all throughout our Hoosier state with the exception of a small area of prairie habitat in the far Northwestern part of the state. The color is predominantly black to dark brown with some light speckling scattered throughout its scales, sometimes in a faint chain link pattern. Hatchling black rat snakes look much different from the adults as they are a light grey ground color with darker grey blotches or saddles. This spring three people have come to me with neonate snakes asking me to identify them. They were surprised when I tell them they have a young black rat snake. Adult black rat snakes can exceed 6 feet in length with a record length of between 71 $\frac{1}{4}$  to 76 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, depending on what source you want to believe. They have long heads with moderately large eyes with round pupils. As the snake matures its scale color become darker until it reaches sexual maturity and its iris changes from silverish to brownish grey.



Its habitat is normally forests, more common upland but may appear in swamps and floodplains. It may be found in pastures, orchards, and farms but normally disappears from land that has been deforested or heavily cultivated. However, it may appear in wooded suburbs and city parks. They are occasionally found in barns, old buildings and houses. Black rat snakes are diurnal and often arboreal. I have found them in the trees during field trips. Sometimes they take shelter under sheet metal, boards, or rock slabs. They are normally slow moving and when encountered in the open often freeze. Most large specimens can be picked up with little or no resistance. (Although, I was once bitten by a black rat snake that I was showing to summer campers.) Smaller ones often vibrate their tails and strike when people try to handle them.

Sometimes called "pilot snakes", they often hibernate in large groups, sharing their den with other black rat snakes, black racers, copperheads and timber rattlesnakes. Black rat snakes have been seen as early as March and as late as October 31st but the peak time to observe them is in late May and June. Mating occurs in early summer and clutches of 6 to 22 eggs are laid during July and hatch in September. Small mammals and birds comprised about 90 percent of their diet. Although the black rat is a quite successful predator, it is preyed upon by raccoons, hawks and owls, especially red-tailed hawks. Many adult black rat snakes have scars and damaged ribs as evidence of struggles from either prey items or other animals. This species is often known as "cow suckers" in Southern Indiana and Kentucky probably because it is often found in barns and pastures, leading to the belief that they sucked the milk of cows. Of course, they were actually around farms as they hunted mice and rats that steal our grain and contaminate our food. They are an ally of farmers! They are also called "chicken snakes" by Southern Hoosiers.

The black rat snake, like all snakes and other reptiles and amphibians, is threatened by loss of habitat because of human encroachment. It is often run over by vehicles as more and more roads cut through favorable wildlife habitats. In cooler weather snakes tend to bask on roads as the road

surfaces maintain heat leaving them particularly vulnerable to human traffic. I have found several snakes and box turtles that have been killed on roads. If motorists will be a little more careful and observant when traveling the back roads of our state perhaps the black rat snake will continue to be a successful part of Indiana's wildlife.

Sources:

Amphibians and Reptiles of Indiana, Sherman A. Minton, Jr., 2001, Indiana Academy of Science  
Peterson Field Guide, Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern/Central North America, Roger Conant/Joseph T. Collins, 1998, Houghton Mifflin Co.

## HERP HAPPENINGS

**September 16, 2007** - 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. information booth. For info: (317) 861-5550, [www.midwestreptile.com](http://www.midwestreptile.com) Other dates: 10/21, 11/18

**September 29, 2007** - Western Festival, Eiteljorg Museum, White River State Park, Indianapolis. Herpetological display of Western herps by H.H.S. members. 10A.M. – 5 P.M.

**October 21, 2007** – Midwest Reptile Show, Indiana State Fairgrounds, Southwest Pavilion. 10am-4pm, Admission-5.00.

**November 3-5** – Indiana Pet Expo, Indiana state fairgrounds, Indianapolis.

**November 10-11, 2007** – 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Midwest Herpetological Symposium, Des Moines, Iowa. The exclusive conference in the Midwest featuring talks, auctions, and sale. [www.iaherp.org](http://www.iaherp.org)

**November 17, 2007** – Evansville Reptile Show and Sale, Evansville, IN. [www.evansvillereptileshow.com](http://www.evansvillereptileshow.com)

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# **Notes on Midwest Herpetological Symposium Indianapolis, Indiana, November 3-5 2006, hosted by the Hoosier Herpetological Society.**

Compiled and written by:

Holly Carter

Secretary – Hoosier Herpetological Society

The Hoosier Herpetological Society hosted the annual Midwest conference that was held at the Westin Hotel in downtown Indianapolis.

This reptile and amphibian conference travels around the Midwest and is hosted by that area's herpetological society. This has been going on for 22 years and is a must on many peoples calendar.

The local herpetological society has the daunting task of putting the symposium together by arranging hotel/lecture areas, speakers, hospitality, audio/visual equipment, travel, banquet and activities. Most of the symposiums also put on an animal /dry goods sale as well. Thanks to Brian Hahn of Midwest Reptile Show, the Hoosier Herpetological Society was able to provide the attendees with this segment in the form of The Indy Reptile Expo.

The speakers are chosen to represent different areas of herpetology. Speakers are not only informative yet not so academic that the beginner as well as experienced herper can enjoy while learning.

The HHS members worked throughout the year prior to the conference to obtain examples of amphibians and reptiles to develop a native Indiana display to have at the symposium, that meant keeping these creatures maintained and healthy to have for the November showing. The HHS worked with the Indiana Department on Natural Resources to arrange an outstanding display of animals from the O'bannon Nature Center in Corydon, Indiana. Our thanks to Jarrett Manek and Chris Bell for staying all weekend, helping with photography and answering questions and making everyone wish it was spring instead of winter so they could go out and find some of these animals that were presented.

The HHS opened the symposium with the Friday night icebreaker, this allowed people to meet and greet both old and new friends. The Minnesota Herpetological Society included entertainment at the last years meeting and we thought it was a good idea, so we arranged some also.

Larry Battson of (Wildlife Education Services in Greencastle Indiana) brought in some live specimens of Gila Monster, Alligator, 5' Monitor and huge Alligator Snapping Turtle. He gave a humorous yet knowledgeable presentation on each animal.

Rupert Boneham (Survivor TV Series) and Indianapolis native hilariously recounted some of his experiences on the show and in real life. He also did an outstanding job of being auctioneer and commentator during our fund-raising auction.

Mark Heimrich and Jerry Young (CD Alterna Rush) entertained with songs from the CD that is all herp oriented which many of us herpers could all relate to. (Lyrics are phrased to appeal to those with a herpers sense of humor.

We then adjourned to the hotel hospitality suite where a dynamic view of downtown Indianapolis greeted everyone. Munchies of pizza, chips, fruits, veggies wine and beer, beer, beer were readily consumed. One area was showing field and other herpetology slides with ready commentary on different aspects of photography, nature and travel. Another area had everyone relaxing with conversations all around well into the wee hours.

Saturday morning, after the continental breakfast to get everyone jump-started, we began the talks.

Bob Ashley and Tell Hicks discussed their fieldwork in Arizona for preparation on the book "Rattlesnakes of Arizona". Tell Hicks is illustrator for the project.

Richard Reams of Indianapolis Zoo told what it was like to go herping in Australia. Not only did he find over 100 species of herps there, but Australia is developed with good roads, English-speaking and is a safe environment to explore.

Dr Bruce Kingsbury (Biology Professor at IU/Purdue in Ft Wayne, Indiana) talked about field research with Timber Rattlesnakes and Massasaugas citing habitat, camouflage, hibernation and legal protection.

James Harding (Michigan State University) discussed the plight of the Wood Turtle. Due to taking a long time to mature, heavy predation and collection has taken its toll. Head-starting turtles won't help if adult population is down.

Zach Walker (Indiana State Herpetologist, Indiana Department on Natural Resources) began his talk on the DNR monitoring five species: Hellbender, Green and Mole Salamanders, Green Treefrog and Crawfish Frog. Pollution and habitat changes are main areas of concern.

Greg Maxwell (Author of The Complete Chondro) told of husbandry and breeding of this species with regard to caging, humidity and privacy. Feeding regimens were suggested for both adults and juveniles.

Ed Kowalski (Philadelphia Zoo) covered the husbandry and natural history of three species of Caecilians. These watery salamanders can grow to 5-ft long but has not been studied well due to the difficulty in locating them.

Will Bird and Phil Peak (President and Vice-president, Kentucky Herpetological Society) became designated agents of the Kentucky Wildlife Department confirming locations and concentrations of herps on areas across the state.

Completing the daylong schedule was Dr. Brady Barr of National Geographic's Reptile World and Dangerous Encounters. Dr. Barr had spent 5 years teaching high school in Indianapolis, Indiana before going on to complete his PhD and spent 15 years working with crocodiles world-wide. Barr took us behind the scenes of his TV productions in which time he has captured all 23 species of crocodiles and related how he is currently working on laser equipment that can give the exact length of a snake which he tested by flying over a basking python then capturing it and hand measuring to show the accuracy. He is also working on ways to measure "bite force". He got an 18-foot crocodile to bite and it showed 9,000 lbs. of force.

Dinnertime arrived with a banquet, then speaker Whit Gibbons, professor of Ecology at the University of Georgia and head of the Environmental outreach and education program at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory. Gibbons touched upon many environmental concerns. Development, pollution, disease, climate change and invasive species and stressed ecological research and education are needed to lead to conservation.

The annual auction followed, encompassing generous donations of herp-related items as well as animals helped with many dollars being raised. Hospitality suite remained open after the auction to allow more discussions and get togethers.

The Sunday events included free admission to Indy Reptile Expo, Indianapolis Zoo (with behind the scenes tours) and Indiana State Museum.

I encourage everyone to get involved with the Herpetological societies and the many symposiums that occur around the country. The next Midwest Herpetological Symposium will be held in Des Moines, Iowa on November 10-11, 2007, sponsored by the Iowa Herpetological Society (563) 785-6338 or [www.iaherp.org](http://www.iaherp.org).

**Reference from Gene Holmes – Central Illinois Herpetological Society**

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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.**

**2007 OFFICERS**

PRESIDENT <a href="mailto:Stardali84@hotmail.com">Stardali84@hotmail.com</a>	Jim Horton	(317) 865-0464
VICE-PRESIDENT <a href="mailto:necali@insightbb.com">necali@insightbb.com</a>	Angela Thomas	(317) 882-5266
SECRETARY <a href="mailto:drymarchonzz@hotmail.com">drymarchonzz@hotmail.com</a>	Holly Carter	(317) 873-6561
TREASURER/MEMBERSHIP <a href="mailto:turtlelovin@comcast.net">turtlelovin@comcast.net</a>	Dave Mitchell	(317) 570-9643
SERGEANT AT ARMS <a href="mailto:Gnawbone92@yahoo.com">Gnawbone92@yahoo.com</a>	Pat Hammond	(317) 241-2793

**Appointees for 2007**

EDITOR <a href="mailto:Stardali84@hotmail.com">Stardali84@hotmail.com</a>	Jim Horton	(317) 865-0464
PROGRAM DIRECTOR/PAST PRESIDENT <a href="mailto:pythonpals1@msn.com">pythonpals1@msn.com</a>	Ed Ferrer	(317) 787-7448 Cell - 727-7553
SOCIAL CHAIRPERSON WAYS AND MEANS <a href="mailto:necali@insightbb.com">necali@insightbb.com</a>	Anita Carter Angela Thomas	(317) 299-2749 (317) 882-5266
WEBSITE COORDINATOR <a href="mailto:ighaus@insightbb.com">ighaus@insightbb.com</a>	Richard Searcy	(765) 349-2347
MEMBERS AT LARGE <a href="mailto:copperhead210@sbcglobal.net">copperhead210@sbcglobal.net</a>	Dave and Elliot Stahl	(317) 842-2648
MEMBER AT LARGE <a href="mailto:drymarchonzz@hotmail.com">drymarchonzz@hotmail.com</a>	Roger Carter	(317) 873-6561
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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 PC or compatible, formatted, 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.