



THE MONITOR

NEWSLETTER OF THE HOOSIER HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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

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President's Message

Jim Horton

Our website has a great new look!!! I'm proud to direct future and current members to our site now. It will even feature a paperless edition of the "Monitor" if you so desire. It is such a great feeling to finally have a functioning and user friendly website. Myself, Pat Hammond and Barbara Filtri have been working hard on this project. Please check in when you can, give us comments and please, use our message board. Extra special thanks to Barbara Filtri for all of her hard work in redesigning and updating the site!

Getting tired of seeing my articles? Me too. We are looking for original articles, comments, stories, and other herp related submissions. You now have a whole month to get one in for the next issue of The Monitor. Anyone can submit articles to the newsletter.

We are still looking for signatures for the Indiana State Reptile campaign. If you would like to help, you can now download a copy of the petition from our website.

This issue features an article by Maryann Watson about a rescue turtle named Turtle Girl. I've written one on road cruising in the summer months, and more.

WELCOME NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS!

Renewals:

Amy Baird (sustaining)

Wendell Zetterberg

Thanks for your membership and continued interest in the HHS!

HHS T-shirts are in!

The new shirts feature a Kirtland's snake and our 20th Anniversary logo beside it. They are available for \$10.00 each at the general meetings and at the reptile show.

June meeting review

Jim Horton

Roger Carter brought along his favorite snake for the Herp of the Month. Roger's scrub python (*Morelia amethystina*) is an especially good tempered snake. I believe he said it is somewhere around 13 feet in length.

Mr. John Roe, IUPUI Ft. Wayne, was our speaker for the evening. The rapidly declining copperbelly water snake (*Nerodia erythrogaster neglecta*) are his species of study. He is currently working with Dr Bruce Kingsbury and Mike Frank on the ecology and management of copperbelly water snakes.

John mentioned that other water snakes such as the Northern water snake share the same habitat, and they are thriving.

With the help of radio telemetry, he and his colleagues found that copperbellies move from wetland to wetland. In his words he said they were "shopping" for a suitable spot. One of their study specimens moved 42 times in one year.

They also found that 8-10% of these snakes are eaten by snapping turtles and great blue herons. John is currently using Northern water snakes as "surrogates" to study their behaviors through direct relocation, resident control, and reared head starts (growing young in captivity). This way they can easily study how Northern water snakes survive through these situations before using actual copperbellies. Young water snakes were placed in artificial hibernation "cylinders" below the ground before the winter months. There was a low survival rate – 40%.

This is an ongoing study, and we hope to have Mr. Roe back in the future to present his results.

Other fact about these to species of snakes:

Copperbellies use temporary wetlands

Northern water snakes use permanent wetlands.

Copperbellies feed mainly on frogs and toads.

Northerns feed mainly on fish and some frogs.

Copperbellies move over land.

Northerns move aquatically.



Photo – Andrew Hoffman 2007



Photo – Center for Reptile and Amphibian Conservation and Management

www.hoosierherpsociety.org

Thank you

Hoosier Mouse Supply for their donation of 50 free mice to our raffle.

July HHS Meeting: July 15th, 7:30 p.m.
Guest Speaker: Todd Pierson
Topic: Herping Trip Through California
Butler University, Gallahue Center (science building)
Room #108 (lecture hall)

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to announce that our July guest speaker is Todd Pierson. Todd is an experienced field herper and outstanding wildlife photographer. If you have been to one of his two previous presentations for HHS you know that this talk is a **"Can't Miss Event!"**

Todd has told me that he has a huge number of photos and experiences to share from his trip to California!

Todd's field experiences were recently featured in the North Indy section of the [Indianapolis Star!](#)

SUMMER ROAD CRUISING

By Jim Horton

Summer has officially arrived and its time for that hot, sticky July/August weather. This is the season when the snakes and other reptiles become active in the dark/cool of night. Mid to late summer is very dry and hot here in Indiana. Even flipping tin in the early morning may not produce much. Road hunting, driving, or cruising, whatever you wish to call it, can be quite productive if you get the right night. The right night means just that – luck. You need luck to be there when a serpent happens to cross your path.

Driving the right roads helps, too. You don't want a busy road or even a human populated road. Our favorite roads to cruise are in the Southern hill country. The wooded hills of rural Southern Indiana are fun to drive. You'll find more herps there as well. You can find herps right here in Marion county, but not the "hot"(venomous) variety. In fact, you can drive a country road just after a rain to find frogs and toads. I do it in early spring when I need my herping fix or if I need a temporary captive for HHS programs.

Safety is crucial! You may be driving only 20-25 mph but anything can happen (even at those speeds). When driving the roads, look for any object that looks to have a life-like appearance. You can usually spot a snake in the headlights. Most have a light color or a white hue. With others, the shine of the scales will give it away. Still, I don't know how many sticks, fan belts, and banana peels I've stopped for. Stopping can be dangerous for you and the snake. You may not stop in time and crush the animal. Or, a car could be behind you and then you just can't stop. When you do spot a snake in the road, you usually have to stop directly in the middle of the road. Pull over quickly and turn on your emergency lights. This will at least give some indication to those behind you that you are stopped.

If you happen upon a venomous snake, use caution and have a hook or tongs ready. I usually take my photos in the road where the snake was found. Have your camera already set up for night shots. This will shorten any confusion when you are hurrying before it leaves the road.

Some folks time their driving trip by the phase of the moon. A new moon is said to be best. Most road cruiser's live by it. That's when animals are safer from predators and can go about their business without being seen. Sometimes, it can be a long night before a herp is seen. Some nights don't produce anything and others will be excellent!

Have a hook or tongs ready to safely remove the animal from the road. If you are hunting herps from the roads at night, it is still, hunting herps. You will need to have an Indiana hunting or fishing license with you.

Unfortunately, a good sign when you get to your destination are DOA'S or roadkills. This gives the driver an indication that herps are moving.

Some of the smaller snakes such as worm snakes, ringnecks, redbellies and earthsnakes are difficult to spot due to their size. There is usually some movement that will give them away.

Other pleasant surprises for naturalists while road hunting may be wildlife such as owls, whip-poor-wills, various rodents, and other mammals. Insects such as lunar moths and cecropia moths also show up in the headlights.

I've found that the best time for road cruising seems to be just at or after dusk. Snakes seem to move most between dusk and about 11:00pm to 12:00am. I usually don't see too much after that. In the early to late morning, the dew starts to settle and for me, herping slows down rapidly.

Lastly, if you get a case of insomnia, as I readily do. It is best to have a buddy on board for a second set of eyes and someone to keep you awake. Let them drive while you take a short rejuvenating nap. I have coffee on hand and or, a strong energy drink to help pep me up for the night.

Happy herping and be safe!

“ Turtle Girl”

By Maryann Watson

“ My dad said you might want to see this,” said Jake Steffenhagen, son of one of my science cohorts at Memorial High School in Evansville, IN. I said, “Ok”, and he handed over a medium sized cardboard box.

“ Oh my!” What I saw was a large female Red Eared Slider with a gumball size protrusion near her left eye. Closer inspection showed that the “gumball”was her eye – “ Oh my” indeed.

Jake answered my first question – “ My dad found her over on Washington” (a busy, four lane street about six blocks from my school.) “ He thought maybe she'd been hit by a car, and she was just sitting there in the street.”

School hadn't started yet, so I called my turtle friend, Dr. Heather Kalb, who quickly came over from the University of Evansville. After a brief eye rinse which washed off some small maggots (about .5 cm), we could see that the entire eye was protruding from her face. She was alert and squirmy, and her skin and shell looked fine. Heather called Epperson Veterinary Services to see if she could take the turtle there for examination and treatment. So started several months of caring for Turtle Girl.

Dr. Sarah Henry's clinic notes indicated “a large (1,372 gr) female, red eared slider presented with a prolapsed eyeball with maggot infestation. The wound extended from the eye socket to the oropharynx and nasopharynx but did not penetrate the esophagus, oropharynx or trachea. Ketaset and Torbutal were used for sedation and analgesia, and suturing the inside of the mouth and outer orbit skin was attempted. Hemostatic gel (Hema Block, microporous polysaccharide beads) was placed in the left eye socket to stop bleeding.” Based on the size and angle of the entry wound, we all decided that someone had shot her with perhaps a BB gun.

After treatment by Dr. Henry, Dr. Kalb collected Turtle Girl the next day and took her home where she ultrasounded her to see if she had any eggs to lay. That was negative, and on May 10, Turtle Girl came home with me where I housed her in a large plastic tub with just enough water in it to help keep her skin

moist. I apologized to her profusely before, during and after each of her prescribed daily Baytril injections.

Turtle Girl's wound reopened on May 17, and I returned to the clinic where she was seen by Dr. Tom Kilbane. More maggots – much larger now, so I knew they weren't new – were removed and Dr. Kilbane noted that the eye socket again communicated with the mouth. Since T G had not eaten since her rescue, an esophagostomy tube (a 41 cm Kendall Sovereign Feeding Tube and Urethral Catheter) was deemed necessary. My directions stated that “ a large plastic syringe was to be filled with approximately 40 cc of a food mixture – human turkey or chicken baby food with veggies and enough water to allow the mixture to flow easily through the tube. The tube was to be kept unclogged by instilling 2-3 cc of flat Coca Cola after the daily feeding.”

Surprisingly, to me anyway, the tube feeding was actually pretty easy. I would put T G in my utility sink after I'd prepared the food and then just slowly administered the meal. She did, however, pull out the tube so we had to return to the clinic where I was pleased to discover that she'd actually gained weight ! After the tube was replaced, we returned home – Let me add here that the clinic is about a 45 minute drive from my home, so TG got to go to school with me and then on to the clinic after school. Back home, I continued to house her inside, primarily because I didn't want flies around her head. The tube feedings continued until she again managed to pull out the tube. Dr. Kilbane checked her over and decided we should let her try to feed on her own. At this visit, he also tried to close the communication between the eye socket and mouth with an acrylic resin (Jarvet Technovit liquid plus powder). Since she now had no open wounds, I moved her outside to the deck where she could swim around in a larger tub. I offered her various food items: insects (crickets, lightning bugs, flies), minnows, worms, repti-sticks, cat food (dry and canned), and yes, I even tried ground beef ! No luck. The resin also gave way and came out on its own.

By late June, I was pretty worried and decided to try to force feed her using a 5 ml syringe and a yummy concoction of watered down baby food and repti-sticks. I'll now try to describe my feeding technique which Turtle Girl did not like at all. I would stand her up in a small, deep plastic tub with her carapace against the wall and hold that in my lap with her facing away from me. For someone who had gone without food for so long, she had an amazing reservoir of strength. So, while she's standing on her hind legs and scratching away with her front feet, I would use my left fingers to open her mouth enough to allow the insertion of the food-filled syringe with my right hand. Yes, a prehensile tail would come in handy sometimes ! I tried to feed her twice a day and the feeding log showed amounts varying from 4 ml to 10 ml per feeding. Since some of the food taken in would ooze out of her left eye socket when she swallowed, it was impossible to measure exactly how much she was taking in, but I figured some food was better than no food.

Thanks to my intrepid neighbor Elias Theodosios who watches my critters when I'm out of town, we were able to continue T G's forced feedings. By the middle of August, I began to worry about what I would do with her for the winter since I'm really not geared up for any aquatics . Heather Kalb put me in touch with Marty La Prees from Indiana Turtle Care, a non-profit organization dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and conservation of turtles. While Marty and I began to email back and forth, Turtle Girl began to eat on her own ! One morning while eating my daily banana, I tossed a small bit of banana into her tub, walked inside and discovered the banana gone when I went back out. Hmmmm?? I tossed in another small bit of banana and waited --- yes ! Over the next two days she ate a worm, a small dab of canned cat food, some fish pellets, and repti-sticks. Dr. Kilban's final comment about T G noted that on August 25 the turtle, minus her feeding tube and acrylic eye patch, had begun to eat naturally on her own. Dr. Kalb, who was taking a group of her students to the Indianapolis Zoo, helped Turtle Girl make the road trip to Marty's facility.

My thanks to everyone who helped make T G's rescue and rehab a success.

Bioblitz at Loblolly Marsh

Jim Horton

The Bioblitz at Loblolly Marsh in Geneva, Indiana was another enjoyable event. It was good to meet like-minded nature enthusiasts, biologists, and researchers. I was pleasantly surprised to see Mr. Dave Fox (former program director at the Indiana State Museum). He had a nice display of herp replicas brought from the Indiana State Museum.

Roger Carter and myself made the trip to the northeast section of the state. Andrew Hoffman and Clint Cunningham had spent the previous evening and most of the day herp surveying and they came up with good numbers. In fact, they found most of the herps suspected to be in the area. Roger and I arrived late in the morning and helped survey the area. We saw a few frogs and some diseased turtles but that was it.

Jamie Faller, Program Developer at Limberlost State Historic Site, had this to say. "Thanks again for all your help!! We had over 20 biologists and a total of over 60 people at our BioBlitz. It was definitely a great experience. There were over 360 plants/flowers, over 25 reptiles/amphibians, over 25 butterflies/dragonflies/insects, and we had about 4 mammals."



Live specimens for viewing/photography



Reptile replicas (from ISM)

HERP HAPPENINGS

June 21– 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

July 15, 2009 – HHS General Meeting, Guest Speaker: Todd Pierson, Topic – “*Herping Trip Through California.*”

July 18, 2009 – HHS live herp exhibit, Johnson County Library. 10am-2pm (exhibitors needed, please contact Holly Carter 873-6561)

July 24 and August 7, 2009 – Friday night frogwatch programs, Eagle Creek Park, Earth Discovery Center, 9:00pm to 10:30 pm. \$5.00/person . Pre-registration required. Call 317.327.7148.

September 25-27 – Hoosier Outdoor Expo, Ft. Harrison State Park.

October 9-11, 2009 – Midwest Herpetological Symposium, hosted by the Chicago Herp Society. www.chicagoherp.org

Got Rodents?

Hoosier Mouse Supply can take your orders for rodents and they will deliver to the monthly meeting on Wednesday, the 17th. (317) 831-1219

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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