



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

Volume 19 Number 8

August 2008

President's Message

Jim Horton

This issue marks the last of the color (brown) masthead for the Monitor. In order to save funds, we have decided to go with an all black format. Hope you like it!

This year also marks the Year of the Frog. A special campaign to boost awareness of frogs, their biology, and status in the wild. Why just now recognize it you ask? Well, because I forgot. And, to me, every day is the Year of the Frog in the herpetological community. One way to boost your own awareness is to attend the Midwest Frog Fest in Joliet, IL. It promises to fulfill all of your froggy interests.

Thank you to all of our members who dedicated their weekend to support the education of the public regarding amphibians and reptiles during the "Reptile Days". Your expertise was appreciated by our audience who learned a great deal about these most interesting animals!

We are interested in having another club outing. Maybe in the field or at a zoo (behind the scenes). Any takers? Please let me know of your interests on this subject at the General Meeting.

The month of August is an active one for Southern Indiana's pit vipers. As luck would have it, we are welcoming a Guest Speaker from Brown County State Park to talk on the two venomous snakes from Brown County!

Classes will soon start up at Butler and the parking situation will be difficult. Construction is also ongoing near Gallahue Hall. Please be patient and come early.

See you at the meeting

Jim

WELCOME NEW AND RE-SUBSCRIBING MEMBERS!

New Members

Ashley Kidd

Kris Kuzeff

I.R. Herp

Renewals

Jerry Zimmerman

Cedric Hall

Ralph, Blake, and Dillon McBee – Sustaining membership

Carter and Kurt Ball – Sustaining membership

General Meeting: August 20th, 7:30 p.m.
Guest Speaker: Brittany Davis, Interpretive Naturalist,
Brown County State Park
Topic: "Pit Vipers of Brown County"
Butler University, Gallahue Center, Room #108 or #105

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to present Brittany Davis as our guest speaker for August. Brittany is the interpretive naturalist at Brown County State Park and her topic will be the "Pit Vipers of Brown County". Be sure to attend to hear the latest information from the fieldwork on the northern copperheads, *Akistrodon contortrix mokasen*, and the timber rattlesnakes, *Crotalus horridus*. These two snakes have been some of the most misunderstood and often feared of all our Indiana snakes. Don't miss this chance to find out the latest research on these two magnificent snake species. See you there!

Embarrassing Herp moment

Jim Horton

Recently at one of our HHS Board Meetings, I had a truly embarrassing moment.

To start off, I was traveling to the meeting on state road 334 when the truck in front of me quickly swerve to avoid an animal. That animal was up high on all four's and crossing the road. I didn't recognize it at first but then saw the shell. It was a huge mud and algae covered snapping turtle.

I immediately stopped my car in the middle of the road to keep vehicles from hitting the disoriented beast.

Upon catching and releasing it to the adjacent roadside, it headed back for the road (opposite direction). Suddenly a police officer sounded his siren and lights behind my car while I was still on the road embankment. I told him I was taking it to a nearby waterway. He said I needed to move my car from the road right away. I gave him a wave and he was on his way. (The turtle was coming from a fresh housing project in development.)

I was very close to the meeting place so I thought I'd show the others my find. Roger Carter offered a tall Rubbermaid tub to temporarily house the gigantic snapper in my car. We went on with our meeting and at the end, Dave Mitchell said, "Where's this big turtle?" "It's in the tall container in the back seat." I exclaimed. "No it isn't!" Dave sternly noted. "Oh ____, I can't believe it".

The snapper somehow managed to escape the tall tub and maneuver itself into the front seat where the only window was open and you can guess the rest. The evidence was clear, no turtle, mud tracks around the interior, and scratch marks down my door.

We searched the neighboring area and didn't see it anywhere. It turtle was definitely on a mission. The carters live in a somewhat rural area so we didn't fret horribly of its welfare. These natural "tanks" are well prepared to fend for themselves in most situations.

I hope the big snapper made it safely to its destination.



REPTILE DAYS (2008) INDIANA STATE MUSEUM

Jim Horton

The Annual Reptile Days at the Indiana State Museum was a great success! Vendors, or educators from our own Richard Searcey (Indianapolis Zoo) to the DNR

The museum had several herp activity booths that kept youngsters busy. One involved spinning the wheel where one could guess the herp question and win a prize. Another allowed kids to make their own one of a kind, laminated Reptile Days card. There were others where kids could get a hands on opportunity to learn about herps.

A professional lighting system and camera equipped with a printer was available for pictures with a big snake for a mere three dollars.

DNR Conservation Officer, Gregg Dye was on hand to answer questions involving herp



regulations. He also had several handouts for attendees to take with them. Speaking of the DNR, our friends from O'Bannon Woods State Park made the trip from Corydon to the museum for both days. They brought a huge variety of Indiana snakes, including the four venomous snakes – very impressive! They presented talks on the stage regarding Indiana snakes. Richard Searcey also gave a talk both days on the Cyclura Iguana projects at the Indianapolis Zoo.

Did I mention the herp society? Oh yeah, our members of the HHS (and their animals) were the main event for these two days. I can't remember everyone who participated but they showed up in full force! We had more displays and herps than they had room. I want to thank our dedicated members who donated their time and brought some of their most interesting herps for this great event!



Jerrett Manek (O'Bannon Woods State Park) holds an Alligator snapping turtle.

HHS exhibitors in attendance

Roger and Holly Carter, Ed Ferrer, Jim Horton, Chris and Mitchell Wehrle, Wendell and Peggy Zetterberg, Pat Hammond, Rick Marrs, Elliott, David, and Triston Stahl, David and Laurie Mitchell Angela Thomas, Carter and Kurt Ball.

CLASSIFIEDS

For sale: 2004 Biak female "mustard phase" green tree python 1000.00 she is featured in Greg Maxwell's book "the more complete green tree python. 2 female 2007 tri-colored hog nose 100.00 each. 1 pair of 2004 grayband kingsnakes " blackcap phase" 300.00 for the pair.

2 young virgin female Indian Ornamental Tarantulas (P. Regalis) 100.00 each, and a wide variety of captive born tarantulas to many to list (Inquire) All snakes are eating frozen thawed rodents, all animals are guaranteed healthy and properly sexed. Mike Wood 574-269-3441 twobears@embarqmail.com

For sale: Argentine Boas (cb 8/08) \$90.00, Corn snakes (Okeetee phase) cb 8/08, parents-(female bright, male deep red) \$20.00. Jim Horton (317) 865-0464 email – stardali84@hotmail.com

Scientist: World's smallest snake in Barbados

Submitted by Jim Horton

By DAVID McFADDEN, Associated Press Writer *Sun Aug 3, 7:48 PM ET*

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - A U.S. scientist said Sunday he has discovered the globe's tiniest species of snake in the easternmost Caribbean island of Barbados, with full-grown adults typically stretching less than 4 inches (10 centimeters) long. S. Blair Hedges, an evolutionary biologist at Penn State University whose research teams also have discovered the world's tiniest lizard in the Dominican Republic and the smallest frog in Cuba, said the snake was found slithering beneath a rock near a patch of Barbadian forest.

Hedges said the tiny-title-holding snake, which is so diminutive it can curl up on a U.S. quarter, is the smallest of the roughly 3,100 known snake species. It will be introduced to the scientific world in the journal "Zootaxa" on Monday.

"New and interesting species are still being discovered on Caribbean islands, despite the very small amount of natural forests remaining," said Hedges, who christened the miniature brown snake "Leptotyphlops carlae" after his herpetologist wife, Carla Ann Hass.

The Barbadian snake apparently eats termites and insect larvae, but nothing is yet known of its ecology and behavior. Genetic tests identified the snake as a new species, according to Hedges. It is not venomous.

Zoologist Roy McDiarmid, curator of amphibians and reptiles at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, said he has seen a specimen of the diminutive creature. He saw no reason to argue with the assertion that it is the world's smallest snake.

McDiarmid said the Barbados creature is a type of thread snake, also called worm snake, which are mostly found in the tropics. "We really know very little about these things," he said in a Sunday telephone interview from his Virginia home.

Finding the globe's tiniest snake demonstrates the remarkable diversity of the ecologically delicate Caribbean. It also illustrates a fundamental ecological principle: Since Darwin's days, scientists have noticed that islands often are home to both oversized and miniaturized beasts.

Hedges said the world's smallest bird species, the bee hummingbird, can be found in Cuba. The globe's second-smallest snake lives in Martinique. At the other end of the scale, one of the largest swallowtail butterflies lives in Jamaica.

Scientists say islands often host odd-sized creatures because they're usually inhabited by a less diverse set of species than continents. So island beasts and insects often grow or shrink to fill ecological roles that otherwise would be filled by entirely different species.



HERPING ETHICS – IN THE FIELD

It has been brought to our attention by concerned HHS members that someone has been out there flipping cover and not returning it. Is that against the law? No but maybe it should be. Each time someone peeks under a rock, log, board or any suitable cover and doesn't return it, they may ruin critical habitat. Habitat for herps, rodents, insects, fungi, and a host of other life forms that call these areas home. It also ruins the herping site for the next guy (or girl). Not to mention it's just plain ugly to see. We (the HHS) would like to ask anyone who has been practicing field herping in this way to please stop.

Also, we have had several folks on our HHS website message board posting specific localities to where they've found herps. It might be a good idea to keep some of those sites to ourselves in the future. It would be best to mention the section of the state or a vast patch of woods instead of an exact location. There are poachers out there monitoring herp society and herp forum websites just for these localities.

More and more, local herpers have noticed that at some of the favorite spots, the herps have diminished. The problem most likely isn't HHS members but there may be others who read this publication and hopefully it will sink in.

HHS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT PROFILE

Name – David Summers

Town or city - Indianapolis

Age you found interest in herpetology? 13

What (amphibians/reptiles) do you like? Mostly snakes but some lizards too.

Do you exhibit your animals at HHS shows? I have in the past

What do you like most about the HHS? Just being around people that have some of the same interests as me.

When did you join the HHS? I think it was back in 2004

Other hobbies? I play guitar

Do you field herp? Yes, I've been mostly in Indiana.

Where do you get your herps? In the wild. I have never bought any.

Have you ever bred any herp species? (if so, what kind) No.

Anything else you would like to add? No.

INDIANATURTLECARE.COM

Indiana Turtle Care, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, dedicated to the conservation, rehabilitation, education and rescue of turtles and tortoises.

Central Indiana Frog Watchers

(the local chapter of the National Wildlife Federation's Frogwatch). Monthly meetings are held at the Camp Cullom Nature Center in Frankfort, IN. For more info. Contact Wendell Zetterberg at

wzetterberg@hotmail.com or (765) 249-2298



Nothern Copperhead *Agkistrodon contortrix*



Timber Rattlesnake *Crotalus horridus*

Photos by Jim Horton

HERP HAPPENINGS

September 14, 2008 – 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 (Other dates, August 24.)

October 11/12 2008 – (NARBC) North American Reptile Breeders Conference and Tradeshow. Tinley Park, IL. Sat.10-5 & Sun.11-4 Info. www.narbc.com

October 18 2008 - Midwest Frog Fest, Joliet, IL, midwestfrogfest.com - presentations, workshops, auction (proceeds go to the Costa Rican Amphibian Research Center), Animal and supply sale.

November 7-9, 2008 – 24th Annual Midwest Herpetological Symposium, Detroit MI Hosted by the Michigan Society of Herpetologists.

November 8-9 2008 – Midwest Reptile Expo, Indiana State Fairgrounds. Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 10am-4pm

November 22, 2008 – Evansville Reptile Show and Sale.

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A Story of Site Three

By Angela Thomas

Site Three doesn't look like much.

The first time I saw this spot, described as a 'wet field' in the list of sites on the NAAMP frog survey route Ed Ferrer and I had just signed up for, I was very unimpressed. The corner of the field our map indicated was bordered by paved roads on two sides. It had a tangle of gas lines studded with warning signs poking out of the ground at one edge, and at that time only the stunted look of the corn growing there suggested it ever held water. Several other sites on the route had permanent water, either ponds or streams, and looked much more inviting. I would soon learn that Site Three is case of looks being dece ptive; for the local anurans, it is an important location and many of the most important events in their lives revolve around this unlikely-looking spot. Over many years of stopping there at night to record the frog species calling, I'd become very familiar with one chapter in the story of the pond. On this visit, I would get a look at the next part of the story.

I arrived at Site Three at about eight PM on a beautiful summer evening. I was hoping to catch some tadpoles, though it was a little late in the season and I knew many of them would have transformed already. Thanks to all of the rain, water was still plentiful, though a wide strip of bare mud all around the edge showed how much the temporary pool had shrunk.

As soon as I got out of the car, I heard the startled squawks and splashing as small green frogs dove for cover in the water. Gathering up my net and a plastic container, I cautiously approached the water's edge. As I came into view, several more small frogs dove into the water. Some distance away, a toad hopped sedately into the cover of the tall grass (though I searched for it later, I never found it). Standing still for a moment, I scanned the area for other signs of amphibians, but they all seemed to have departed. The water near the edge of the pond was covered with a scum of greenish algae, concealing any tadpoles and promising to make searching for them a messy affair, so I decided to walk along the edges first and see what there was to see.

The ground at Site Three is as deceptive as everything else: in one spot it will be squelchy on top, but firm underneath, while one pace away it will look almost identical, but be soft enough for you to sink instantly to footwear-swallowing depths. Fortunately, moving slowly is a good idea when seeking amphibians, and my cautious progress gave me plenty of time to scan the ground. At first I saw only mud, grass, and a multitude of tracks from wildlife that had come to the pond. There were many deer tracks, the delicate footprints of birds, and also many large canine tracks which in that area might be either dogs or coyotes. Then a tiny gray speck, the exact color of the ground, went bouncing away from my feet. Negotiating a deer track – a giant pit for so tiny a creature – slowed it enough that I could put my container in front of it and chase it in for closer examination. As I had thought, it was a miniscule toad, newly metamorphosed and sticking close to the pond where it would not be in danger of drying out. Once I'd seen one, they became easier to spot and I saw more with almost every step I took. Barely a quarter of an inch long, the little toads must have many predators, and only their vast numbers insure that some survive long enough to mature and return here to breed.

Before I left the pond I saw so many of the tiny toads that it would have been impossible to count them all. I also found two that were much larger, one about half an inch long and the other almost an inch in length. These two were no easier to spot than the smaller ones, and had they not moved I would probably have walked right past them. While the tiniest toads were a uniform gray-brown, with barely a trace of markings, and fairly smooth-skinned like the tadpoles that had so recently been, these larger ones were clearly identifiable as Fowler's toads. The smaller one hadn't really developed warts yet, but the dark spots on his back were already clearly defined, and the largest toadlet was already a perfect miniature toad, with all of the expected markings and warts. The variation in size led me to wonder how quickly these small toads grow. Are these larger toads actually last year's offspring, just at the pond because of the dampness it provides? Or are they the fortunate ones from this year, the tadpoles that matured and metamorphosed first, with only a few weeks' head start on their tiny siblings?

A bit further along the bank, my progress disturbed something hiding in the tall grass and weeds, and it began leaping about. After following it for a little ways, the unseen amphibian came to a tangle of branches on the ground where no grass grew and I got a glimpse of it: a young bullfrog, perhaps four inches long. One more leap carried it into the cover of a clump of weeds. Before I could go search for it, I was distracted by something much smaller leaping away from me. Whatever it was, I hadn't seen it until it jumped; like the toads, its dark skin blended to o well with the soil. Fortunately for me, its next leap landed it in a clump of grass where it was clearly visible against the bright green stems. I only had time to identify it as a juvenile cricket frog before it leapt again and disappeared. While I was distracted, the bullfrog had made good his escape as well, and though I searched all through the patch of weeds, I didn't find him again.

Having seen one cricket frog, I set about looking for more, and soon discovered that they were almost as plentiful as the tiny toads. The little half-inch frogs were excellent jumpers, and could cover a foot or more with one leap. They weren't content with just one jump, however, but preferred to make at least two, with a sharp turn between the first leap and the next. This zigzag

progress was hard to follow, and given that their camouflage was so good they virtually disappeared as soon as they stopped, I had some trouble tracking them. My net proved invaluable in catching some. One of the interesting things about these tiny frogs is the variety of bright markings they can have. Some individuals have a bold grass green or rust stripe down the back, while others have green speckles scattered all over the body. One particularly attractive frog I found had the dark triangle between its eyes outlined in bright lime green. Their background color is also variable, and can darken to almost black, as these frogs were, or lighten to a pale tan depending on the lighting and the frog's surroundings. In addition to dozens of the juvenile frogs, I found one large adult. Catching it, I discovered it was a male, optimistically hanging around the pond in hopes of attracting a mate.

While searching among the grass for more frogs, I noticed the shed skin of an insect stuck to some grass blades. It was the skin of a dragonfly nymph, left behind on the grass when it crawled from the water for the first time and transformed into an adult dragonfly. The nymphs choose a location fairly high on the grass blades for this final shed, so the left behind skins are easy to spot and I soon found dozens of them. The pond, with its abundance of tadpoles, must have been a smorgasbord for these predatory insects.

Examining the grass more closely also led me to my next amphibian find: a newly metamorphosed gray tree frog. The little frog, still with a tiny dark blob of tail, had turned a bright green color that blended in beautifully with the color of the grass. So small that his weight wouldn't bend the grass blades, he was already an excellent climber. I wondered how many of these tree frogs were in the grass around the pond's edge. Surely I had walked past more of them without ever seeing them. Unlike the toads and cricket frogs, they were very reluctant to leap and give away their position, and in all the time I was there I saw only one more. The second frog was even more recently transformed than the first, and still had a stub tail about half the length of his body.

During all of this walking around I had been examining the water for signs of tadpoles, and other than some small disturbances of the surface out near the center, I saw very little. Hoping to discover that the tadpoles were merely concealed by the algae, I swept my net through the water several times, but was rewarded only with mud and a net full of green slime. Finally, a movement at the very edge of the pond caught my eye. There, in a depression at the edge about the size of my hand and only an inch or two deep, were three tadpoles. Placing the net between the tadpoles and the rest of the pond, I scooped them into the net with my hand. Transferring them into a container of water, along with the inevitable mud that I had gotten with them, I discovered that I'd also managed to catch a water boatman and a damselfly larva. After returning the insects to the pond, I got a good look at the tadpoles. All three had well-developed back legs, and one had the odd, angular look that tadpoles get when their front legs are pressed against the skin on the inside, ready to emerge. Their tiny feet already had distinct toe pads: these were gray tree frog tadpoles. Two of them also had unusually short and ragged tails, perhaps evidence of a new crop of predatory insects that had been sharing the pond with them.

By this time, the sun was low in the west, and I knew it was time to head home. I had seen many of the amphibians that inhabit Site Three at a crucial time, when some were ending the first part of their lives in the water and others had just begun the second part of their lives on the land. Perhaps the next time I returned, this unremarkable-looking temporary pond would reveal more of its story, and the stories of the creatures that lived there.

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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.**

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