



# 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 26 Number 9

September 2015

## HHS September Meeting

Wednesday,  
September 16th  
7:00 p.m.  
Holliday Park  
Nature Center



Guest Speaker:

**Dan Madigan,  
(Indianapolis Zoo)**

**Topic: "Tropical Herping": A Photographic Journey"**

The Hoosier Herpetological Society welcomes Dan Madigan as this month's guest speaker. Dan has been a Senior Keeper in the Deserts Biome at the Indianapolis Zoo for the past 5 years. Previously he worked at the National Aquarium in Baltimore as one of their Australian departments Herpetologist. He has over 15 years experience working with herps and 9 years of zoological experience. Dan has taken three trips to Central and South America and has spent a total of 6 weeks in these regions.

His topic "Tropical Herping: A Photographic Journey" is taken from trips in which he and his wife encountered and photographed many tropical reptiles and amphibians! He has conducted field research in Peru, Mexico and Costa Rica. **Be sure to attend this exciting tropical adventure!**

## Welcome New Members!

### NEW

Nancy Kloskowsky  
Jack Bennett  
Dale L. Bolejack  
Zane Libke

### RENEWALS

Garrett Kazmiersky  
Gerald Zimmerman  
Charles King Family  
Mary Hylton  
Douglas Stemke

# Copperhead!

By Mary Hylton

As a young girl growing up in eastern Ohio the opportunity to see a copperhead seemed to be slim and none. Not that I pined for one, mind you. Although I'd often heard my mother mention copperheads I was never sure if she had actually ever seen one. She also used to tell me that if you smell cucumbers out in the field then there's a good chance a copperhead nearby so be careful. I had never been able to find verification of this before researching this article. As a young child I had, on occasion, seen a black rat snake or two in the field at home but never a copperhead. It's quite possible they just weren't in the vicinity of our four acre homestead.

I often wondered what it would be like to actually run across one in the wild. While I'd seen them at zoos well, that just didn't quite satisfy my desire to encounter them in their natural habitat. Of course, knowing they were "poisonous" (or venomous as I am now correctly informed) somehow heightened the thrill of a possible encounter. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I would have to wait many years until I saw my first copperhead out in the wild. Thank goodness I was in the company of experienced herpers at the time! The sighting occurred during my very first Hoosier Herp-Out in 2011. Although the rainy weather had dampened the ground that day it didn't dampen herper spirits. We ended up calling it quits early in the afternoon when lightning and thunder began. Fortunately, just before that moment, underneath the very last tin that we flipped there lay a fine specimen of what I'd been longing to see-- my very first copperhead up close (but not too close) and personal. There it was in all its coppery glory! Needless to say my day was made.

One thing I've discovered in this relatively "new" herping hobby is that I'm always learning something new. I am pleased, however, when I can recognize how far I've come in terms of the knowledge I now possess especially when chatting with non-herpers. Guess I must have learned something along the way.

## **Copperhead Facts—Not all of the facts but some interesting ones!**

Copperheads are social. So social, in fact, that they have been known to hibernate in a communal den with other copperheads and even other species of snakes including timber rattlesnakes and black rat snakes. It is not uncommon for them to return to the same den year after year. Copperheads can be found close to one another near sites where routine activities such as

denning, sunning, courting, mating, eating, and drinking occur. Migration occurs late in the spring when they seek summer feeding territories. In early autumn the migration trek reverses.

Copperheads have been reported to climb into low bushes or trees after prey or to bask in the sun. They have also been seen voluntarily entering water and swimming on numerous occasions.

The northern copperhead (*A. c. mokasen*) has the largest range of the five different subspecies. It inhabits northern Georgia and Alabama north to Massachusetts and west to Illinois.



Northern copperhead – photo by Mary Hylton

Copperheads are carnivores. Adults eat mostly mice but also small birds, lizards, small snakes, amphibians, and insects--especially cicadas.

They are most active April through late October, diurnal in the spring and fall, and nocturnal during the summer. The breeding season is from February to May and from August to October. Copperheads have a gestation period of three to nine months. They are a live-bearing snake, typically producing two to ten young. Females produce large, yolk-filled eggs and store the eggs in the reproductive tract for development. The embryo, during this time, receives no nourishment from the female, only from the yolk. The young are expelled in a membranous sac and weigh less than an ounce and measure seven to ten inches in length. Newborn copperheads are alone from the very beginning – there is no parental involvement among snakes. They're left to their own devices when it comes to their ability to catch a meal or two before burrowing underground to hibernate through their first winter.

Northern copperheads are medium-sized snakes that brumate, which is very similar to hibernation but involves different metabolic processes and allows the animal to be mostly asleep but still capable of occasional activity, such as waking up to drink water, communally through the cold winter months, emerge in the spring, and then disperse.

They tend to be particularly active on humid, warm nights immediately during or after rain. (Great time for nighttime road cruising!) One reason for this is that their prey – small animals-- also tend to be most active on rainy nights.

The copperhead is the cause of many snake bites yearly but they are rarely fatal. Bites occur when people

accidentally step on or touch the snake, which tends to be well camouflaged in its surroundings. When touched, the copperhead quickly strikes or remains quiet and tries to crawl away. Sometimes when touched, they emit a musk that smells like cucumbers. I have read this fact in several articles so it must really be true! If someone can prove otherwise I would very much like to hear the supporting facts. I have never handled one—a task I wouldn't volunteer to do—to know if this is true. I think, therefore, that I will defer to the two sources (cited below) from where I gleaned this information.

Last of all but not least, the life span of the copperhead is up to 18 years.

**Sources:** Smithsonian National Zoological Park <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/ReptilesAmphibians/Facts/FactSheets/Northerncopperhead.cfm>

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore: <http://www.marylandzoo.org/animals-conservation/reptiles/northern-copperhead/>

## Last month's meeting

By Jim Horton

Dr. Douglas Stemke, (University of Indianapolis) gave us a very thorough travel log of his time spent in the land down under. His topic was "*A Naturalist in Gondwanaland, Herping the Southern Exposure*". This was a trip to all corners of Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji. His colorful descriptions included not only herps but birds, mammals, insects, and plants.

His main travels were to study marine life along the coast. But this presentation included everything from whales to wallabies, geckos to pythons, monitors to fruit bats. It was an incredible talk that had us all wanting to grab out cameras and get a plane ticket to Australia.

He camped along the way and mainly traveled alone. Apparently venomous snakes and crocs aren't the scary things in Australia. The jack jumping ant is the most venomous species in the insect world. This tiny insect is what he feared the most.

Other notable animals included right whales, lowland copperheads, shingleback skink, mudskippers, Saguana monitor, magpie geese, black headed python, Tasmanian devil, powerful owl, humpback and sperm whales, and a carpet python.

Doug was photographing a barking gecko when it suddenly "barked" and Doug jumped. Another interesting species was the humpback penguin – the rarest on Earth. He shared his photo of the Eucalyptus tree mentioned that it is the largest flowering plant on Earth. Rocket frogs may jump 15 feet. He had several pics of those.

If you missed Doug's talk, you missed a very fulfilling and educational one.

## SURPRISE

by Ed Ferrer

I was cleaning my snake containers when I received a surprise. I had just cleaned out three containers of a rack system (two corn snakes and one grey banded king snake.) I took my California king snake and put him in a tub like the others while I cleaned and replaced the newspaper bedding of his cage. After the cleaning I reached in to put "Rex", the cal king back in his cage. On the transfer he bit me! I was very surprised because I have handled him for over ten years without any incident. Whenever I get bit I always stop and think what might have caused the action. There is always a reason. Maybe I moved too quickly or reached toward his head. Then it dawned on me what must have happened. In nature the preferred prey of California king snakes is other snakes. Since I had put three other snakes in the holding tub before him he must have picked up their scent and just struck in a automatic reaction to the smell of the three previous snakes. Now when I clean my cages I make sure to clean Rex's cage first and also make sure the tub is thoroughly clean before I place him in the holding tub.



# Kayak Herping (HHS boat trip review)

By Jim Horton

HHS members in attendance - Pat Hammond, Heather and Kara White, Rick Marrs, Mary Hylton, Holly Carter, Neil Jones, Jim Horton.

Sunday sun and perfect temperatures was all we needed for successful herping on the water. Although we only had nine members, the day was not a disappointment.



*HHS kayakers*

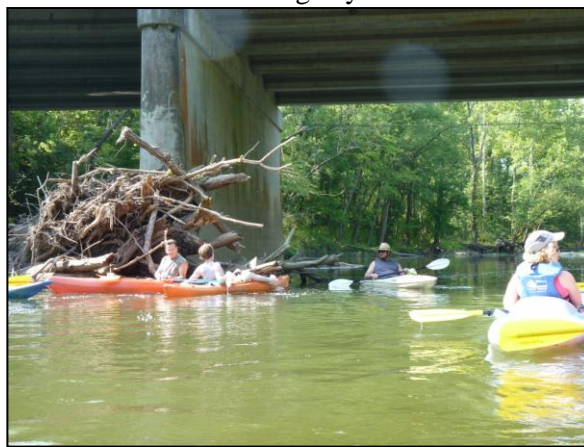
Water temperatures were cooler than usual but that didn't stop Neil Jones from immediately jumping in with his snorkel gear on. He didn't see much underwater but he wanted to try out his new gear.



*Neil Jones snorkeling for herps*

The first herp of the day was quickly spotted by Rick Marrs; A nice plump northern water snake. This female was gravid and appeared ready to deliver young in the

coming days.



*Going after a water snake*

Turtles were the big hit again this year. We lost count after 65 and rounded out totals to 70 turtles for the day. Not only were the numbers high but the species count was as well. We found a total of 8 species. With the highest numbers first - Common map turtle, spiny softshell turtles, false map, smooth softshell, red ear slider, painted turtle, snapping turtle, Eastern box turtle.

Yes, a box turtle. Pat Hammond spotted it along the shoreline. This female was covered in mud and barely recognizable as a turtle (and not a rock). We cleaned off her carapace, took some shots, and let her go.



*Eastern Box turtle at the river edge.*

Smooth softshells aren't as common as the spinys so it is always a treat for us to see them. We saw several and some were larger than a dinner plate. The majority found were spiny softshells (*Apalone spinifera*).

We easily captured a small map turtle and place it in a wet depression for photos. This youngster turned out to be an Ouachita map turtle (*Graptemys ouachitensis*), and a nice find for the day.



*Ouachita map turtle*

I spotted a small snapping turtle sitting motionless at the bottom. This was a youngster most likely hatched last year. It was photographed and released.



*Common snapping turtle*

Along the way, we found numerous water snakes basking on fallen branches and snags. Some were only quickly seen as swiftly cruised by on rapids. Others were captured for more photos. A bridge foundation contained cracks and dark fissures which proved excellent hideouts for northern water snakes.



*Northern water snake in rock crevice*

Heather spied one in the foundation which had its mid-body exposed. Neil captured it and for his celebratory bite and we released it back in the foundation.

This was a seven mile trip and it was long enough to take the many stops along the way.

Again it was a most beautiful day and we all had a blast.

## President's message

Jim Horton

Our annual float down the Driftwood River last month (August 23) was a great time. As in the past, we saw a good variety of turtle species, water snakes, kingfishers, herons, fish, and other wildlife.

Would you like to show your favorite amphibian or reptilian to the audience for our Herp of the Month? We need members and their animals at our monthly meetings. If you are interested, please contact me or any board member.

Don't forget to register for the **30<sup>th</sup> Midwest Herpetological Symposium** in November. This year it is located in Madison, WI. A group of HHS members will be at this event which runs from November 6-8. This is an excellent event and you won't regret going. Register now for \$75.00 before the October deadline. After this date it is \$95.00

We are always in need of articles and other herp related information for this newsletter. If you would like to contribute with an article or submission, please feel free to contact me at [stardali84@hotmail.com](mailto:stardali84@hotmail.com)



# A HERPER'S VIEW OF "JURASSIC WORLD"

by Ed Ferrer

The public has always been fascinated by dinosaurs and they were always big hits in the earliest movies such as "The Lost World" and "Godzilla" to the modern "Jurassic" franchise. The current "Jurassic World" ruled the box office as number one for the first four weeks as it smashed all records! The computer graphics were amazing and the actors from Bryce Dallas Howard (Ron Howard's, daughter) and Chris Pratt along with the other players were believable and did their part to get you involved in this movie thrill ride. But as a former science teacher and geology major in college I always pay close attention to how the dinosaurs are portrayed.

Since their first discovery dinosaurs were always presented as huge lizards. In fact the name dinosaur actually means "terrible lizard". Along with that they were thought to be slow and stupid and that perception was reinforced by how they were seen in early films as actors in clumsy costumes or by stop action clay figure techniques. Dinosaurs were reconstructed as lizards with a splayed stance. In fact, Tyrannosaurus rex was depicted as standing on two legs but with its tail dragging the ground in a tripod stance. But in the early 1970's Robert Bakker, a paleontologist (a scientist specializing in the study of dinosaurs) at John Hopkins University, presented a renaissance in new image of dinosaur reconstruction. New fossils showed the dinosaurs legs were positioned under the body instead of to the side which meant that it took a lot more metabolism. (Anyone who worked on their feet all day long can attest to the energy that is needed.) As far as being stupid, Tyrannosaurus rex had one of the largest brain cavities in the animal kingdom. Furthermore when dinosaur fossil bones were viewed under microscopes they revealed many blood capillaries similar to birds and mammals which help maintain a high metabolism generating heat internally instead of relying on outside sources as reptiles. Further studies showed that the tails instead of dragging the ground were in the air probably used for balance like that of a cat. Some dinosaur fossils showed imprints of feathers! In fact a couple of years ago our Children's Museum exhibited feathered dinosaurs from China. Since they weren't used for flying this implied that they were used for warmth. Other evidence has showed that some dinosaurs migrated and moved in herds, formed colonial nesting sites, and showed parental care of their young. Measuring dino footprints showed that many were fast. These are all traits of warm blooded mammals and birds, not cold blooded reptiles. In fact many books when showing the evolutionary family tree of life now place the dinosaurs in their own branch either called Arcosauria or Dinosauria.

Dr. Jack Horner, one of the world's foremost paleontologists, served as the technical adviser for the Jurassic movies. So these movies not only entertained audiences but also educated them with the new evidence regarding dinosaurs. As many as forty new dinosaurs may be found each year meaning there will surely be more evidence that will give us a much more clearer view of these magnificent creatures. And the public won't have to wait some twenty years for the next in the series as there are already plans for a new Jurassic movie set for release around 2018.

## SWORDS AND HERP ART (Part 1)

Photos & text by Roger Carter

Most of the swords in my collection are Japanese style Katana swords.

I got this sword from the catalog of the Smokey Mountain Knife Works in Sevierville, Tennessee, years ago. The ad said it was covered in fake snake skin. Out of the scabbard the sword is thirty-six and one-half inches long and everything seems to have been crudely made. The scabbard seems to be a cheap flimsy wood, the brass-like caps and bands are very thin and dented and the "snake skin" covering doesn't look like much care was taken in wrapping it around everything. There are no markings to identify where it was made or what any of the material is and the edge isn't very sharp. This sword is a little disappointing for me.



## 2015 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

**September 16, 2015** – HHS meeting, 7:00 PM, Holliday Park Nature Center, Guest Speaker: Dan Madigan (Indianapolis Zoo). Topic – *“Tropical Herping, A Photographic Journey”*

**October 4, 2015** - Indiana Reptile Expo in Noblesville, IN on the first Sunday of each month from 10 AM to 4 PM at the Hamilton County Exhibition Center & 4-H Grounds.

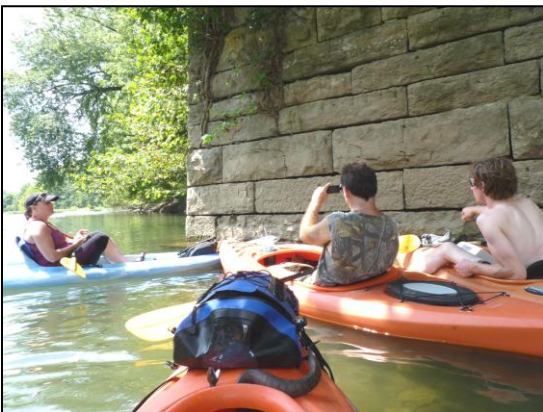
**October 16, 2015** - Midwest Reptile Show, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Southwest Pavilion, Indiana State Fairgrounds, Indianapolis. \$5.00 admission, reptiles, amphibians, books, cages, feeder animals, and other supplies. Sell your herps and dry goods free of charge at our H.H.S. information booth (HHS members only) [www.midwestreptile.com](http://www.midwestreptile.com)

**November 6 - 8, 2015** – 30<sup>th</sup> Midwest Herpetological Symposium, hosted by the Madison Area Herp Society. Held at the Monona Terrace, 1 John Nolen Dr, Madison, WI 53703. Hotel accommodations at the Hilton (9 E Wilson St, Madison, WI 53703) ph (608) 255-510

### ***Your HHS Board of Directors for 2015***

PRESIDENT	Jim Horton	(317) 443-4845	<a href="mailto:stardali84@hotmail.com">stardali84@hotmail.com</a>
VICE-PRESIDENT	Mary Hylton	(317) 966-4591	<a href="mailto:liblady81@hotmail.com">liblady81@hotmail.com</a>
SECRETARY	Holly Carter	(317) 873-6561	<a href="mailto:drymarchonzz@hotmail.com">drymarchonzz@hotmail.com</a>
TREASURER/MEMBERSHIP	Roger Carter	(317) 873-6561	<a href="mailto:drymarchonzz@hotmail.com">drymarchonzz@hotmail.com</a>
SERGEANT AT ARMS	Will Brown	(765) 278-1480	<a href="mailto:wrbrown15@aol.com">wrbrown15@aol.com</a>
EDITOR	Jim Horton	(317) 443.4845	<a href="mailto:Stardali84@hotmail.com">Stardali84@hotmail.com</a>
PROGRAM DIRECTOR	Ed Ferrer	(317) 787-7448	<a href="mailto:pythonpals1@msn.com">pythonpals1@msn.com</a>
WAYS AND MEANS CHAIR	Angela Thomas	(317) 882-5266	<a href="mailto:necali@comcast.net">necali@comcast.net</a>
WEBSITE COORDINATOR	Barbara Filtri		<a href="mailto:webmaster@hoosierherpsoc.org">webmaster@hoosierherpsoc.org</a>
MEMBERS AT LARGE	Pat Hammond	(317) 656-9496	<a href="mailto:gnawbone92@yahoo.com">gnawbone92@yahoo.com</a>
	Rick Marrs		<a href="mailto:rickmarrs@ymail.com">rickmarrs@ymail.com</a>
	Dale Schoentrup		<a href="mailto:eyelashviper@hotmail.com">eyelashviper@hotmail.com</a>

### **More from the HHS kayak float**



Banded water snake

**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

\_\_\_\_ **New Member**

\_\_\_\_ **Renewal**

\_\_\_\_ **Name**

\_\_\_\_ **Date**

\_\_\_\_ **Address**

\_\_\_\_ **City**

\_\_\_\_ **State**

\_\_\_\_ **Zip Code**

\_\_\_\_ **Phone**

\_\_\_\_ **Email Address**

\_\_\_\_ **Individual/Family Membership \$20.00**

\_\_\_\_ **Sustaining Membership \$25.00 or more**

\_\_\_\_ **Herpetological Interest(s)**

---

---

---

**Hoosier Herpetological Society**  
**P.O. Box 40544**  
**Indianapolis, Indiana, 46240-0544**



Dated Material Enclosed

Address Correction Requested

\_\_\_\_ If this area is checked, it's time to renew your membership!