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 8 August 2015

August monthly HHS meeting

Wednesday August 19th 7:00 p.m.

Holliday Park Nature Center

Guest Speaker: Dr. Douglas Stemke, (University of Indianapolis)

Topic: *"A Naturalist in Gondwanaland, Herping the Southern Exposure"*

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is pleased to welcome Dr. Douglas Stemke as this month's guest speaker.

Dr. Stempke is an Environmental Microbiologist at the University of Indianapolis. He has been a lifelong Naturalist and hobbyist nature photographer having chased "herps" all his life. (He was once 'saved' by an endangered species of toad (Houston Toad) after stepping on a Water Moccasin in Texas.) He recently took a sabbatical leave and traveled through Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand searching for "herps". Australia has long been famous for its unusual and fascinating forms of wildlife. (For example, over half the species of snakes found in Australia are venomous!) **Be sure to plan on attending this meeting and find out what Dr. Stemke found in his exotic adventure!**

www.hoosierherpsoc.org

Last month's meeting

Jim Horton

Last month, Greg Ammon from the Kentucky Herpetological Society gave an informal talk encompassing his trip to the Yucatan Peninsula. His trip was originally supposed to be a honeymoon but turned out to be a little something more. After seeing some local lizards, Greg decided to search further along the peninsula area. He rented a Jeep and visited several towns doing what he called "Touristy Stuff". Visiting zoos, snorkeling, and dining were all part of the fun. He even visited ancient Mayan temples where he saw more lizards. His pics featured many of the local smaller species of lizards and the larger spiny tail lizards as well as a few frogs and turtles.

Probably his best find was when he paid a local man for a jungle tour. They had bushwhacked their way through vegetation in the forest for hours. Finally he was able to witness a neo-tropical rattlesnake. The jungle guides wanted to kill the snake but Greg talked them out of it. He was sure that they thought he was just another insane American. Greg finished by giving some of his best advice on his travels. He said to "get out and look around, you never know what you'll find".

Annual HHS Canoe/Kayak Trip

A DAY ON THE WATER WITH FELLOW HHS MEMBERS

HHS Canoe/Kayak Float – Sunday, August 23rd

(9:30 A.M. at Blues Canoes in Edinburgh)

Join fellow HHS members for a canoe/kayak trip down the beautiful Driftwood River. There are many turtles and water snakes along the Driftwood. We will be counting turtle and snake species while on the river.

What to bring – drinks, lunch, waterproof baggies, camera (not your best one), binoculars, sunscreen, bug spray, swimsuit, sunglasses, *old* shoes.

For more information - www.**bluescanoelivery.com** 812.526.9851

Look for any updates or cancellations on the HHS website or Facebook page

Keeping African Short-Necked Skinks

By Angela Thomas

I have always liked skinks of all kinds, and a couple of years ago I had the good fortune to purchase a pair of African short-necked skinks (Trachylepis dichroma). These skinks have become some of my favorite pets. They are good-sized, stout-bodied skinks with a very mellow disposition. Adults are about 10 inches in length. The females are banded in gray and black , while males are a beautiful coppery brown, brighter on the sides than the back, with a black throat. Juveniles have the same pattern as the females, but the colors contrast more, leading to another common name - zebra skinks.

The few sources available on Trachylepis state they are omnivores, but mine only show interest in insects, canned foods, and (in the case of adults), pinkie mice. Juveniles need to be fed daily to grow properly, but adults can be fed every second or third day when not breeding. Even as adults these skinks will accept small insects as readily as larger ones, and in fact my adults will pass up superworms in favor of mealworms every time (though they ear the superworms readily enough when they are offered alone). Juveniles need regular calcium supplements, and vitamin supplements may also be helpful.

I keep my zebra skinks in a terrarium heated with a heat pad underneath, with a bark or aspen substrate. UV light does not seem necessary. The skinks appreciate a secure hide box, and will often be seen partly hidden, with just their heads peering out. They are primarily ground dwellers but if provided with rocks or low branches they will use them as 'lookout spots', as the male in the photo is doing. These skinks like temps in the upper 80's by day, with a hot spot over the heat pad in the low 90's. Nighttime temps can be a bit lower. When the skinks are shedding I moisten the hide box. I provide water daily or every other day, but let the bowl dry out in between waterings as they tend to either spill it or fill it with bedding, making the terrarium too damp.

Short-necked skinks give birth to live young, and are easy to breed in captivity. However, the babies are extremely challenging to raise successfully. Atypically, the babies **must** remain with the parents for several months after birth if they are to survive. The adults do not do anything that I have ever observed to actually care for the babies, but they are very careful of them and, despite the considerable size difference between adults and newborns, the babies are almost never harmed by the adults. The young skinks grow quickly, and feeding daily seems to be essential to their well-being. These skinks can reach adult size in 1-2 years.

President's message

Jim Horton

I would like to thank Mr. Greg Ammon for his donation to the HHS for fundraising. A young captive-bred painted agama is now in my care and will be sold to the best caregiver. All proceeds will benefit the HHS.

Our annual float down the Driftwood River is this month (August 23), Hope you can make it. We usually see a plethora of turtles as well as water snakes, birds, fish, and more.

Next month we have a live herp exhibit at Bradford Woods. This is a chance to get with other HHS members and showcase your favorite animals. This event called the HandiCapable Camp, benefits individuals with Down Syndrome. A contribution to the HHS will be made for our efforts. More information on this event will be in the coming weeks.

Thanks to members who have submitted articles to this month's newsletter. Holly Carter, Angela Thomas, and Neil Jones all added great original pieces for this issue. If you would like to contribute with an article or submission, please feel free to contact me at stardali84@hotmail.com

Turtles need homes. Are you a turtle fanatic? Could you handle another turtle or two in your collection? If so, we have three red –eared sliders that are in need of re-homing. Please contact me if you are interested.

My First Tortoise Experience

By Holly Carter

The Home's Hingeback Tortoise (Kinixys homeana) is a species found in East Africa and reach a size of about ten inches long and five inches wide. They have a recessed front to the shell that allows them to fully retract their heads and pull their legs in tight in front of their heads, also having a rear hinge to drop down over the rear legs and tail, this tortoise becomes a box that is impossible to open. The front legs have hard plates on them and, with the recessed shell, encases the animal quite well.

I have had a female of this species for over 15 years, she was a wild caught adult and had been with another person for two years before I adopted her. She developed mis-shapened scutes due to the former owners being unable to get her to eat a proper diet. (strawberries and bananas was all she would eat).

I have an outdoor turtle pen for my box turtles and so after a quarantine period, I put the hingeback female in with them to enjoy the natural sunshine. After a few days, I noticed her eating canned vegetables and fruits along with salad leaves. I would also add softened dog food once a week for the box turtles and saw she was eating that as well. After I decided she had acclimated to my indoor and outdoor caging and foods, I set about looking for a male tortoise. It took a while before I found a healthy one and that was able to acclimate as well.

Finally in 2013, I heard a strange noise from our reptile room downstairs and went to investigate. I found that the male was mating with my female and he had his mouth wide open and making the strangest sound. I was able to be easily heard upstairs in the house. This was repeated at other times including after being put into spring/summer outdoor caging.

After I brought the tortoise indoors to winter holding September 1st of 2013, on September 19, I saw there were 2 eggs in the mulch substrate. I took the eggs and put them in an incubator. I tried to maintain a temperature of about 85 degrees. My incubator had some temperature spikes in it that took a while to become stable. Anyway on April 1, 2014, I noticed some liquid around one of the eggs, I picked it up and it was split on the bottom. I could see the shell of the tortoise was folded around it like a bat covering itself with its wings. I checked it each day and could see it was slowly unfolding. On April 4th, I saw the baby tortoise sitting next to the egg just resting. It took two more days for the baby to start moving around. The baby tortoise shell is covered with sharp points all around

it, most likely to keep from being swallowed by other animals.

I set about to house it in a large critter keeper on sphagnum moss with a hide box and a low water dish. I tried it on soft fruits and vegetables at first, but it showed no interest in it. I finally tried it on small red worms and it would run around the cage trying to catch them, then grab them in its mouth and use its feet to try to pull it apart, then, eat the smaller pieces.

The other egg did not do as well, the tortoise pipped its shell and came out like a regular turtle but after hatching, it died.

I still have the first baby tortoise, and it is eating well on fruits, vegetables, and worms. It has grown some and is fairly active.

I would say that this is a very good species of tortoise to be kept as a pet. They do not get very big, and after, getting used to its housing and care accommodations is very easy to take care of.

Finding Timber Rattlesnakes - Herping the Yellowwood State Forest Area

By Neil Jones

The dog days of late July is a great time to find Timber Rattlesnakes in Southern Indiana. These elusive predators mate during the summer months and give birth to live young in late summer. They are a threatened species in Indiana. It can take them anywhere from 4 to 15 years of age to become sexually mature and they can live up to 30 years in the wild!

I met up with Jim Horton at Morgan Monroe state Forest one hot and muggy Monday afternoon. From there we drove down to a spot where we heard there were two Timbers coiled up inside a log. Unfortunately it poured down rain as we were driving. There were flash flood warnings in the area and our hopes of finding the Timbers were sinking. We were able to out drive the storm by just a few minutes and found the log that was said to shelter the Timbers. I peeked inside and there they were; two timber Rattlesnakes coiled up on top of each other deep inside the log! We only stayed for a few minutes to get a good look as we did not want to bother them too much. It started raining very hard, so we called it a night.

Jim and I met again later that same week on a Saturday afternoon in the Yellowwood State Forest. We set up our camp and set out to find Herps. We road cruised the area hoping to find a Timber Rattlesnake stretched out across the road. We found a Garter snake and two black Rat Snakes on the road, but no Timbers. The next morning however, we found another pair of Timbers just north of where we looked previously. They too were coiled deep inside a log. We stayed for a few minutes and listened to them rattle. On the way back to the car, I catch a huge Black Racer, and we find a box turtle crossing the road.

It was so great to see these elusive predators and it pains me to think they are a threatened species. Habitat loss, road fatalities, and fear of these animals are what make them such a threatened species. That and the fact that they take so long to become sexually mature only makes things worse for this snake. Conservation and education is definitely needed to help save this awesome reptile.

LETTER OPENERS AND HERP ART (Part 1)

Photos & story by Roger Carter

This letter opener shows a hooded cobra wrapped around the remains of a tree and loosely wrapped around some human skulls on the ground. The letter opener is protruding from one of the skulls like a sword. The top of the cobra is five and three/eighths inches from the base and the letter opener is eight inches from the base. The letter opener itself is seven and one/half inches long with the blade five and one/quarter inches long and is not

sharp. The cobra and the letter opener are both silver. This also doesn't have any engravings to identify where this was made or anything else.

Next month I start a series on SWORDS AND HERP ART.

First Venomous Frogs Described Use Heads As Deadly Weapons

Poisonous many may be, but scientists had yet to discover a species of frog that is venomous. That is, one that not only produces toxic substances, but also possesses a means to deliver them to another organism as a defense mechanism. Finally, a new discovery has put not just one venomous species on scientists' radars, but two. Both residing in Brazil, these frogs are adorned with bony spines that pierce the skin where their venom concentrates, effectively turning their heads into dangerous weapons.

Entering scientific literature in true style, the nasty substances they produce were found to be so toxic that they even outrank the venom produced by pit vipers found throughout Central and South America. The fascinating discovery has been published in Current Biology.

Though many may appear feeble and defenseless, nature often reminds us to not let looks be deceiving: amphibians have toxic tricks up their sleeves. Well, skin. Most amphibian species produce noxious agents contained within skin glands, although some sequester them from their diet. These compounds range in toxicity, from mild irritants to some of the most powerful poisons known.

Corythomantis greeningi Spines. Jared et al., Current Biology. Photo courtesy of Utah State University.

"We were amazed at the level of toxicity in these frogs," Brodie told IFLScience. According to their calculations, a gram of *A. brunoi*'s potent skin secretions would probably be sufficient to end the lives of 300,000 mice, or 80 humans. Needless to say, these frogs have no known predators. But why the need for such a pokey mechanism? Brodie explains to IFLScience that while the substance is extremely toxic, only very small amounts will be transferred by the tiny head spines.

"What we see here is animals using small amounts of very strong venoms to protect themselves from predators," he added.

Interestingly, Brodie says that other members of the genera to which these two frogs belong do not appear to have these specializations, but the team plans to continue their research by studying other species that they suspect could be venomous.

Although the researchers do not know exactly how the venom acts, this is also something the team is pursuing. Preliminary results indicate that the toxic components are similar to those found in other venomous animals, such as enzymes that are known to be able to trigger tissue damage, Brodie says.

2015 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

August 19, 2015 – HHS meeting, 7:00PM Holliday Park Nature Center, Guest Speaker – Dr. Douglas Stemke (University of Indianapolis), Topic: *"A Naturalist in Gondwanaland, Herping the Southern Exposure"*.

August 23, 2015 – HHS Canoe/Kayak trip, Blues Canoes on the Driftwood River in Edinburg, IN

August 30, 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 Other dates - October 18

September 6, 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**.**

September 12, 2015 – Live HHS animal show for the Handi-Capable Camp, Bradford Woods, Martinsville, IN

November 6 - 8, 2015 – 30th 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

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