



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 7

July 2015

July HHS meeting

July 15th 7:00 p.m.

Holliday Park Auditorium

Guest Speaker: Greg Ammon, Kentucky "Herp" Society

Topic: "Herping the Yucatan Peninsula"

Greg Ammon is a veteran field "herper" and wildlife photographer who has traveled extensively throughout the world in search of reptiles and amphibians and documenting his findings. His topic is "Herping the Yucatan Peninsula" in Central America. I remember from my geology classes at I.U. that the Yucatan Peninsula is the site where paleontologists believe the asteroid or meteor or comet landed that probably hastened the extinction of the dinosaurs about 65 million years ago. Be sure to attend this meeting for an exotic adventure and find what animals survived that catastrophic geologic event!

Welcome New Members/Welcome Back Renewals

New member

Katie Kolcun

Renewals

Mitchell Wherle, Peter Baird, Ed Ferrer, Mark and Sue Henderson, Paul Hofsommer

www.hoosierherpsoc.org

Beautiful but Deadly: Coral Snakes

by Ed Ferrer

Usually when I do snake programs for schools, libraries, scouts, etc. I discuss the four venomous snakes of Indiana. I show posters, describe generally where they might be found, and discuss field marks so they can be distinguished from the 30 non-venomous Hoosier snake species. Then I talk about coral snakes, explaining that they belong to the Elapidae family which also include mambas, cobras, kraits and sea snakes. I mention that most of the pit vipers, (rattlesnakes, cottonmouths and copperheads) employ a venom that is largely haemotoxic, which works to destroy tissue causing painful wounds but is relatively slow acting. Coral snakes (like all elapids) employ a highly potent neurotoxic venom that works through the victim's nervous system. This type of venom rapidly disrupts nerve transmission, causing respiratory failure and paralysis. A coral snake bite should be considered a serious medical emergency that is capable of causing major paralysis, cardiac arrest and even death. I describe these facts while handling my "coral snake" with a snake hook and work gloves! Then I relieve my audience by reciting the rhyme, "red touches yellow kill a fellow, red meets black venom lack"! I then reveal that my "coral snake" is actually a Sinaloan milk snake, one of the dozen or so coral snake "mimics". Herpetologists theorize that this striking coloration prevents possible predators such as foxes, hawks, etc. from attacking the snake or at least hesitating allowing it to escape. This rhyme only holds true in the United States as there are numerous coral snake species throughout South and Central America that have a wide variety of color patterns.

There are currently three species of coral snakes in the United States. (I say three currently because further study may conclude that one of the species may be split into two species status.) They basically lead a secretive fossorial life style, meaning they spend most of their time underground. Occasionally they venture out of their underground burrows and are sometimes found on the surface, usually after a spring or summer rain. Their slick, smooth scales allow them to move efficiently through loose or sandy soils which also provides protection from predators. In areas where the substrate is rocky or more compact coral snakes usually use existing burrows used by rodents and insects etc. They also use cracks or fissures in rock formations.

Coral snakes are opportunistic hunters and sometimes prey on a variety of lizards, newly born rodents, eggs but their most common prey items are other snakes. These prey animals are quickly killed by the coral snake's powerful venom. They will even occasionally prey on small venomous snakes such as diamondback rattlers.

Even though coral snakes show some resistance to other snake's venom, they are not totally immune.

The Eastern Coral Snake, *Micrurus fulvius*, can be found from Southeast North Carolina through all of Florida and westward to eastern and central Louisiana.



Eastern coral snake (*Micrurus fulvius*) Photo-carnivoraforum.com

Although they have been known to reach a length of four feet, the average length is more normally two feet. Because of its wide distribution this species is the most well known and frequently encountered of the United States species. Because of their docile nature (and perhaps being mistaken for one of the mimics) they are sometimes handled by people who then find out that they can readily bite, possibly with serious consequences. Some people have the notion that coral snakes have to chew to inject venom. That is not true. Even though they have short fixed fangs, they have a fast efficient method for injecting venom. (Jeff Corwin once told me that while handling an Eastern Coral Snake for a T.V. program he was bitten. He admitted that he was a bit careless and was fortunately only struck by one fang and so he was able to recover quickly.)

The Texas Coral Snake, *Micrurus tener*, can be found from the western half of Louisiana, southwest Arkansas, southwest Oklahoma and a large section of southeast and central Texas.



Texas coral snake (*Micrurus tener*) Photo-Matthijs Hollanders

The average size of this specie is about two feet in length but there have been occasional individuals that have rarely been reported to reach twice that size. This specie is very similar to the Eastern Coral Snake (It was formerly thought to be part of that specie.) being largely fossorial and surfacing normally after showers. Bites are rare because most people in this area know to leave it alone when encountered.

The Sonoran Coral Snake, *Micruroides euryxanthus*, is the smallest of the coral snake species, seldom reaching a length of two feet. It can be found from the southwestern part of New Mexico through central Arizona and into Mexico.



Sonoran coral snake (*Micruroides euryxanthus*) Photo- Natalie McNear

Scientists often call this specie the most handsome of the three because of its lighter color and vivid shades of red, black and yellow (sometimes white replaces yellow making for more contrast.) Besides the vivid

coloration as a warning to potential predators, it has another unique defense. When threatened, the Sonoran Coral Snake will sometimes raise its tail emitting a loud popping sound. This possibly confuses the *would be* attacker, offering a few more seconds to make its escape.

It's habitat is dry, rocky desert instead of the moist subtropical climate of its two eastern cousins. So it doesn't burrow like the eastern species. Instead it takes over existing underground passage ways used by rodents and other burrowing species. It is rarely seen as it chooses to remain hidden underground presumably taking advantage of the increased humidity and cooler temperatures to offer more comfort.

There is some concern regarding coral snake bites because the antivenom needed to neutralize the effects their potent neurotoxic venom is in short supply. The relatively small yield of venom makes creating the antivenom costly and time consuming. However there is one company that is starting to produce more of the antivenom.

The coral snakes unmatched beauty coupled with their deadly venom has long captivated scientists and "herp" hobbyists alike. Certain properties of coral snake venom may yield important medical discoveries in the future. No matter the reasons for interest, these beauties will always be some of the most fascinating and unique snakes on earth.

Source: Reptiles magazine, July/August 2015, "Three Banded Beauties", Doug Hotle, P. 54-57

Ruling de-regulates some wild animal possession permits

Niki Kelly The Journal Gazette July 01, 2015

INDIANAPOLIS - More than 30 wild animals around the state - from alligators to bears and bobcats - will no longer be regulated by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

The agency recently sent letters to anyone with a wild animal possession permit saying an appellate court ruling - and the Supreme Court's refusal to review the case last month - means they have no authority to impose rules, restrictions or permits on legally-owned wild animals.

"The DNR has really protected public safety - keeping track of potential bad guys and knowing where the safety risks are in the state," said Lori Gagen, executive director of the Black Pine Animal Sanctuary in Albion. "The DNR had everyone's back and now there is nothing. This ruling has stripped them of all their authority."

DNR Spokesman Phil Bloom said there were 263 wild animal possession permits. The vast majority are for smaller animals,

such as raccoons, squirrels and striped skunks. But 38 of them were considered Class 3 animals. Those included 12 venomous snakes; eight black bears; seven alligators; six bobcats; two gila monsters; one wolf; one tiger and one cougar.

The Indiana Court of Appeals ruling related to whether the DNR had the ability to regulate or ban the hunting of deer behind fences on private property, also known as captive hunting. It said the legislature has the authority but

attempts to reach a middle ground on high-fenced hunting failed this session. Then the Indiana Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

The wild animal possession permit is in administrative rules - not statute passed by legislators.

"This basically throws open the door," Bloom said. "It's something that we regulated for a period of time in very public and open process through administrative rules procedures. We'll just have to see where it goes from here and what the will of the legislature is."

Many animals would still be covered under a federal U.S.

Department of Agriculture permit but not all of them. For instance, the federal permit covers only mammals. But the state permit covered venomous snakes or alligators and crocodiles over five feet long.

Gagen said she received a letter because Black Pine had a wild animal possession permit for Gus the alligator - who is about 9 feet long. She said the letter was very brief and didn't reference what animals were affected. She became alarmed and immediately called for clarification.

Also, the USDA requires a federal license only if the person is exhibiting, breeding or selling the animals.

The state permit went further to cover anyone simply possessing wild animals as pets. It had extensive enclosure and care requirements for the animals, as well as inspection powers.

The DNR also is no longer issuing or regulating game breeder permits for animals such as pheasants, quail and deer. This was expected but the extension of the court ruling to exotic wild animals has been surprising.

"This could get out of control," said Sen. Sue Glick, R-LaGrange. She hadn't heard from the DNR and didn't fully understand the legal reasoning.

Show and Tell meeting – June 2015

The last HHS meeting featured our members and their animals. Our annual Show and Tell meeting is always popular with members. This special meeting gives everyone a chance to showcase their favorite amphibians, reptilians, books, artwork, photography, or just about anything herpetology related.

This year we had ten members up front and center with a nice variety of lizards, turtles, toads, and even a wood sculpture.

Members participating included: **Neil Jones** had a beautiful reticulated python, a spiny soft shell turtle, an American alligator, and a tarantula. **Nikki Shonk** displayed a small acrylic case with a poison dart frog. **Ed Ferrer** showed a black milk snake and a Sinaloan/Nelson cross milk snake. **Holly Carter** had Eastern and three-toed box turtles. **Pat Hammond** had the only non-living herp – it was a wood carving of a red-eye treefrog. **Angela Thomas** showed and fed a Schneider's skink, a Peter's banded skink, and a Tokay gecko. **Heather White** had a blue tongue skink and a corn snake. **Mitch Wherle** discussed his new position at the Indianapolis zoo and he showed a green tree python. **Jim Horton** brought a redfoot tortoise, everglades rat snake and an albino eastern garter snake. **Roger Carter** brought a carpet python. Thanks to everyone who participated this year!

President's message

Jim Horton

We have another program this month featuring an exotic locale that is sure to include some of your favorite jungle herps. Mr. Greg Ammon from the Kentucky Herp Society will showcase his trip to the Yucatan Peninsula. This is should be in interesting talk.

Our annual summer canoe/kayak trip is August 23rd. This is always a fun time and we see tons of turtles along the Driftwood River. More information to come in the next newsletter.

As you may have seen in recent news (and in this issue), the Indiana DNR no longer regulates wild animal permits. This will potentially cause problems in our hobby. The HHS has yet to take an official statement on this issue until more details are presented. Mr. **Phil Goss**, president of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK), will talk briefly about what all this means and what action might be taken at the next meeting.

MORE TIMBERS

By Roger Carter

On Friday before Labor Day 2014, Pat and I went into southern Indiana to check out a hollow log that timber rattlesnakes, *Crotallus horridus*, have been using. This log was discovered in June when several of us were participating in an eco-blitz, a survey of plants and animals that was initiated by the Indiana Forest Alliance whose headquarters is in Bloomington, Indiana. At that time, two timbers were seen that quickly hid in the log and we were sure that there was a third one in another cavity in that log. Whether there was either two or three animals every one of them were buzzing their tails vigorously.



It was a nice day and, after parking my truck near the trail entrance, Pat and I arrived at the log after a short walk. I was looking around the log when Pat called out that the timbers were in the log. There was a very nice looking female with several baby timbers behind her. We had seen some dark timbers in the past but this female was lighter in color. I don't know how many babies there were but, at a guess, there might have been around ten of them. Pat and I got several good pictures of them and then continued down the trail. We examined several more logs, Pat found a toad near a log and some sulphur shelf fungi, *Laetiporus sulphureus*, growing on a log. These are very pretty yellow and orange.



After examining more logs, we decided to try some other spots but we stopped back at that log and got several more good pictures of the snakes in there. We checked out a few more locations without finding anything and, after deciding to call it a day, we checked one more spot where there were some old boards (under some of these boards I had seen Midwest worm snakes, *Carphophis amoenus helenae* before). Under the biggest board we found a very nice Northern copperhead, *Agkistrodon contortrix mokasen*. This one disappeared into the tall grass before we could get our cameras ready but at least we saw it. This was a good end to a very good day.



Days later Pat told me that when he was examining his pictures he discovered that the female timber was in the process of giving birth when we found the snakes. Some of the babies must have been from another female and had been born a little while ago because they were clean and dry. Some of the other babies near the female were wet from having just been born.



LETTER OPENERS AND HERP ART (Part 1)

Photos & story by Roger Carter

This letter opener is in an ancient Egyptian design similar to the knife in Part 32. This has a base with four cobras hooded up near the top of the base and the letter opener sits in the top of the base. The entire unit is nine and one-half inches tall and, when separated, the letter opener is eight and three-quarter inches long with the blade four and one-quarter inches long. Because it is a letter opener the blade is not sharp. The base is mostly white with the cobras being silver and, at each corner there is the image of Anubis and hieroglyphics on the base. The handle of the letter opener is in the shape of Anubis the jackal headed god of ancient Egypt. The torso of Anubis is mostly black with a little gold at the ears and the headdress. The base of Anubis is gold and has phony hieroglyphics in it. There aren't any engravings to identify where this was made or anything else.



2015 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

July 15, 2015 – HHS Meeting, 7:00pm Holliday Park Auditorium. Special guest speaker: Greg Ammon (Kentucky Herpetological Society), Topic – *“Herping the Yucatan Peninsula.”*

August 2, 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.

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 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

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 7:00 p.m. at Holliday Park Nature Center. Membership is open to all interested individuals. **No venomous animals are allowed at the General Meetings.**

HHS HELPS IN MID-SUMMER ECOBLITZ

JIM HORTON

The Indiana Forest Alliance is still surveying the back country of Morgan Monroe Forest to gather data on the flora and fauna in the area. This information will aid them in their fight to keep the area 'wild'. The state wants to log the area and it wasn't set aside for management.

The HHS has joined them in the search for herps on the forest property. Earlier in the year, Dale Schoentrup and Roger Carter joined the survey headed by Dr. Bob Brodman of St. Joseph College. They had found good numbers of amphibians and a few nice finds in the reptile category.

I helped out on Saturday, June 27th. The day was cloudy, windy and cool – horrible weather for herping.

We did manage to find a few box turtles, some ringnecks, a worm snake, a wood frog, and several salamanders.



An unusually marked wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*)

This survey will continue in September. If you are an HHS member, have field experience, and are good with identifying Indiana herps, please contact me and we can get you on the list to help out.

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