

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 5 May 2015

HHS Monthly Meeting May 20th 7:00 p.m. Holliday Park Auditorium Guest Speaker: Dan Dourson, Wildlife Biologist Topic: "Herps of Belize"

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to announce Dan Dourson as this month's guest speaker. Dan has been a wildlife biologist for nearly 35 years. He first began his career after graduating with a degree in wildlife biology from Hocking College in Ohio. Dan was the wildlife biologist for the USFS for nearly 20 years on the Stanton Ranger District in the Red River Gorge area of Kentucky. He was the co-founder and coordinator for Herpetology Weekend at Natural Bridge in Kentucky until 2007. Dan spent most of his career in the Forest Service working to support and benefit non-game species including reptiles and amphibians through the construction of ephemeral wetlands as well as surveys for frogs, salamanders and snakes. He conducted a statewide Herp Survey with John MacGregor in 2005 focusing on all the Wildlife Management Areas across the state.

Since resigning from the Forest Service on 2001, Dan has done independent biological consulting across the Eastern United States. In 2006, he and his wife. Judy, moved to Belize to manage a biological field station in the rainforest. During their seven years in Belize, Dan studied the wildlife of Belize and in particular, the snail-eating snakes. In addition, he and Judy found and documented three snakes new to science from Belize as well as one salamander!

His presentation will show all the reptiles and amphibians they encountered, numerous frogs, lizards, snakes (including venomous species) turtles, and beautiful frogs and salamanders. Other animals shown include jaguars, howler monkeys, tapirs and caimans. They recently published a book titled <u>Biodiversity of the Maya Mountains in Belize</u> The book sells for \$45.00 with \$5.00 going to support conservation efforts in Belize. I know I plan to purchase a copy! I have seen this program last year and it is one of the very best presentations I have seen in the last few years! Make sure you plan to attend this special evening!

15th Annual Hoosier Herpout - June 6

Hardin Ridge Recreation Area, Bloomington

President's message

Jim Horton

Thank you to our contributing members who have done their part for this organization. I appreciate all who have taken the time to be at our live animal programs and those who continue to write for this newsletter. We aren't a successful club without members like you. As a reminder, each and every HHS member is always welcome to any of our events and our board meetings as well.

Here's a great opportunity for our turtle and tortoise lovers. *World Turtle Day* at Zionsville Nature Center is May 23rd in Zionsville, IN. We need members and their chelonians for this event. All you have to do is display them and answering questions from visitors. Contact me if interested - <u>Stardali84@hotmail.com</u>

I'd like to extend a big welcome to our new and returning members!

I presented a frog and toad program at McCloud Nature Center in Hendrix County on Saturday, April 25. This was to celebrate Frog Day at the nature center. Unfortunately the weather was cold, rainy, and windy. The turnout was low but we had a good time anyway. A donation was given to the HHS for this program.

If you enjoy the outdoors and field herping, then you won't want to miss our largest outdoor event. The 15th Annual **Hoosier Herpout** will be at Hardin Ridge Recreation Area at Monroe Lake on Saturday, June 6. This involves field herping all day, a cookout, camping, and an evening presentation at the amphitheater. I hope to see many of our members at this event.

Brookview science night

HHS members, Dale Schoentrup, Roger Carter and Jim Horton displayed their animals at the Brookview Elementary Science Night. A mix of tortoises and turtles, snakes, lizards, frogs and salamanders delighted parents and kids alike. Even the teachers who were brave enough to enter the "reptile room" enjoyed the scene. A small donation was given to the HHS for this event.





Herpetology Weekend

Text and photos by Jim Horton

The date of April 17 and 18 was earlier than in past years but that didn't stop the fun, the attendance, or the herps from coming out to Herpetology Weekend in Slade, Kentucky. This event has now passed the 20 year mark. In fact, it is now on to the 22nd year for 2016. Kentucky is a beautiful state and the Red River George (RRG) area of Daniel Boone National Forest is astounding! The flora in RRG was spectacular and wildflowers were at their peak. This weekend is always filled with herpetological fun. We had a great HHS presence at this event this year with over 12 members!



HHS members and our friends from Kentucky



Green salamander (Aneides aeneus)

Friday and Saturday evening featured guest speakers at the activity center. **Tim Cole** spoke about citizen science and conservation at the Texas Rattlesnake Festival and Snake Days. Kentucky Herpetologist, **John MacGregor** presented - *Kentucky's Rare Herps*. **Dan Dourson** had a gorgeous travelogue of his survey work in Florida. The Kentucky Reptile Zoo provided a live animal program with turtles of the United States. Door prizes were also given out to the audience. An excellent live exhibit of native Kentucky herps was provided by the Kentucky Reptile Zoo and The Kentucky Herpetological Society.

Some of the highlights from the field hikes included our find of 10 green salamanders in about ½ hour. Another spot revealed several female four-toed salamanders with eggs. Read more about this event and green salamanders and Ed Ferrer's review in this issue.

Ecoblitz at MMSF

Thanks to Roger Carter and Dale Schoentrup for taking their weekend to help out at the EcoBlitz at Morgan Monroe State Forest. The Indiana Forest Alliance is keeping track of all wildlife in the backcountry area in hopes to put a stop to logging in the area.

The herpetology team was lead by Dr. Bob Brodman of St. Joseph College. The HHS assisted in the surveys that were held both days. Large numbers of amphibians were found along with a worm snake and a large black rat snake.

WELCOME NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS!!

Lia Hicks Jet Kaiser Will Brown John Olson Jennifer Laughlin William Phillipy

New member Ian McMillan

GREEN SALAMANDERS GALORE!

By Mary Hylton

Our president, Jim Horton, has already described Herpetology Weekend in another article in this newsletter so I thought I would spend a little time focusing upon a related theme –a herp that is rare in Indiana but commonly found in Kentucky and accompanied by much excitement upon its sighting—the green salamander (Aneides aeneus). While green salamanders are not easy to spot in Indiana (and if you could you'd be most likely be able to spot them in the southernmost parts) they thrive in Kentucky. Perhaps that was the key reason why several HHS members (Jim Horton, Pat Hammond, Rick Marrs, Laura Broadwater Kafka, Angela Thomas and yours truly) signed on to join the Herpetology Weekend afternoon field trip that encompassed some challenging climbing skills in order to fulfill the hope of turning up some of the little green guys in the beautiful Red River Gorge area of southeastern Kentucky.

So what's so special about the Green Salamander? For starters they are rarely seen in Indiana and that automatically ups their "cool" factor. How do you know when you've spotted a green salamander beyond knowing that "green" is somehow involved?



Green Salamanders are 3 ¼-5 inches long with flattened heads and square toes. An especially cool physical characteristic is how the combination of their coloration and pattern of green lichen-like markings on a dark background work together to provide them with camouflage that helps hide them from their predators. In North America the range of the green salamander extends throughout the Appalachian mountain region. Eastern Tennessee and Kentucky harbor stronghold populations. Scattered populations also exist in the Blue Ridge Mountains of north Georgia, western North Carolina, and northwestern South Carolina. They are very rare in Indiana and have been found in only 2

locations in south central Indiana near the Ohio River.



They can typically be found in habitat that contains moist stones and logs in moist forests. They are usually found in cliff faces, but recently there have been multiple accounts of this species found under bark of trees. They are often seen wedged deep into damp rock crevices such as the ten (yes, I said ten) individuals that were located within a short amount of time –30 minutes, I believe, if that much. Each discovery met with great excitement and led to photo frenzy as group members excitedly snapped pictures of each new find. (I know several of you "get" the whole photo frenzy thing and may have even participated in a few yourselves.)

Mating typically takes place in May and June, but can occur later in the year. Females generally deposit around 15 to 20 eggs by attaching them to the inside wall of a moist rock crevice. They usually stay with their eggs during the ten to eleven week incubation period.

Unlike many of the other terrestrial salamanders, green salamanders spend very little time on the forest floor and are at home among the narrow cracks and crevices of their rocky habitat. These nocturnal salamanders are most active at night when they emerge to forage for food which consists mainly of beetles, spiders, mites and ants. Male green salamanders have been known to forcefully defend their territories against other salamanders that might try to infringe upon their domain. They often use their strong jaws and projecting upper jaw teeth to bite and shove one another during territorial struggles.

The green salamander was first reported in Indiana in 1993. While it is thought that this species was probably never abundant in the state, logging near suitable cliff faces may have affected green salamander populations. The limited occurrence of rocky, cliff-like structures in Indiana is likely the most restrictive factor for this species. Consequently,

it should be no surprise that the green salamander has been declared an endangered species in the state of Indiana.

Investigation of rocky, cliff-like habitats along the Ohio River valley may potentially reveal additional populations of the green salamander in the state. The two sites where this species is known to occur in Indiana are currently managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, however, it is also necessary to protect the habitats

adjacent to these sites, creating a buffer zone, which would further protect the core habitat of this species.

Hopefully improved management of habitat will someday result in increased populations of green salamanders in Indiana. Hey...I can dream, can't I?

References: Corser, Jeffrey D. 2000. Decline of disjunct green salamander (Aneides aeneus) populations in the southern Appalachians. Biological Conservation 97 (2001) 119-126.

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Hellbender weekend

"Help the Hellbender" was the slogan of the weekend at O'Bannon Woods State Park in Corydon on April 11. This particular weekend is an annual event that enlightens the fact that these large aquatic salamanders are endangered and need help. Getting the word to the local folks that this salamander is endangered and needs help is key at this event.

A 5k run called the "Hellbender Hustle" is popular with hundreds participating each year. Feast like a Hellbender is also part of the day. Participants get to chow on a great feast of crayfish (crawdads), a Cajun mix of etouffee, rice, and other goodies. Door prizes were given after the feast.



HHS live display and signage.



Herbie the Hellbender mascot.

Dr. Rod Williams of Purdue assembles this event with his students. Students were on hand with posters featuring biology and other facts about hellbenders.

The HHS was also ready with amphibians on exhibit. Jim Horton and Dale Schoentrup made the trip with an assortment of native Indiana species. Our animals were a big hit and we've been invited to be a part of hellbender weekend next year.

2015 Herpetology Weekend April 17th-18, Slade, Kentucky

by Ed Ferrer

For the past decade or more I have made a point to attend the Herpetology Weekend. It is based at the Natural Bridge Resort Park and features field trips around the Red River Gorge and Natural Bridge area. It offers herpetology programs on Friday and Saturday evenings and field trips during Saturday morning and afternoon. It even offers special "herping" events for the children! It is usually held around the first weekend in May but this year it was scheduled for mid April. The last two years it was unseasonably cold and rainy which limited some of the species found on the field trips. When I first heard about this years date I was concerned that it might be too cold. Sure enough throughout the first two weeks of April it was very cold and rainy. But besides my concerns about the weather. I planned to attend anyway. As it turned out the weekend was actually the warmest part of the month just in time for the weekend's events.

When I woke up Saturday morning I heard running water and I was concerned that it might be raining but upon walking outside I found the water was just the brook cascading down the hill behind the lodge.

My morning field trip I chose was the Mesoderm Farm. Dan and Judy Dourson bought a 40 acre tobacco farm at an auction and then purchased an adjacent 60 acre property later. After building a cabin, they began converting this 100 acre area into a wildlife sanctuary. The property all ready had a large lake but they added about 20 vernal ponds. These ponds are excellent habitat for salamanders and frogs because since they don't hold water all year long there are no fish to prey on the amphibian eggs and larva. They transplanted all sorts of trees, even importing some bamboo. I always try to go on this trip because it offers a wide variety of reptiles and amphibians.



Spring salamander -photo - Jim Horton

Dan and Judy along with Les Meade led the trip and offered expert facts about the species that we found. We first found a couple of American toads as we started out. A search of a large pile of wood planks, tree limbs and cover boards provided two brown snakes, a ground skink, a couple of ring neck snakes, and a large, beautiful black king snake. Dan pointed out that the black triangle shaped markings along the mouth actually looked like teeth that make it appear more dangerous to potential predators but it was actually quite docile, letting many people hold it and take a lot of photos.

The many vernal ponds offered many amphibians, including a Fowler's toad, a two-line salamander, a seal salamander, red spotted newt and a mole salamander along with numerous egg masses and wood frog tadpoles. Throughout the trip we found three black racers, three more black king snakes, and five box turtles. On my very first trip here many years ago we found three copperheads (my favorite native snake). Since then over the next eight years or so we have never found a copperhead. As we were going back toward the cars we turned over one last tin and there was a large, beautiful copperhead! It was very docile and allowed Dan and Les to position it for a lot of photos. A great end to our field trip! On the way back to the lodge we stopped and ushered another black racer across the road. The weather turned out to be perfect, reaching close to 80 degrees as we ended our morning trip. It was a great trip!

On Friday evening we had two speakers. John MacGregor, the state herpetologist of Kentucky, presented "Species of Greatest Conservation Need of Kentucky" He showed photos and range maps of documented sightings of many species. He mentioned that many of the sightings were very old and lacked more recent sightings. For example, only two photos of alligator snapping turtles were shown and one of them was of a carcass that was caught in a fisherman's net and drowned. Most of the reason for concern was habitat destruction or habitat fragmentation, some pollution and

climate change.



The other speaker was Tim Cole who discussed "The Texas Rattlesnake Festival & Snakedays" His festival offers a positive view of rattlesnakes and offers an educational approach to the true understanding of these remarkable predators and how they are actually beneficial to humans because they largely prey on rodents that cause humans problems. This is a welcome contrast to the other "Rattlesnake Roundups" that usually feature destructive exploitation based on fear, ignorance and sensationalized misinformation and the needless slaughter of rattlesnakes. No rattlesnakes are harmed during Tim's festival and all are returned close to their original site of capture at the end of the festival.

Saturday evening featured Dan Dourson talking about his field census study of a section in Southwest Florida and the surrounding islands featuring many photos of "herps". Kat, an employee of the Kentucky Reptile Zoo, provided a live program featuring many of the turtles that they currently house at the zoo. I liked Kat's

enthusiasm and her positive way of handling the children's questions.



Kat from the KRZ with a large snapping turtle.

Herpetology Weekend offers something for every "herp" hobbyist, no matter how old or young or area of expertise.

15th Annual Hoosier Herpout

Saturday, June 6 - 9:00 A.M.

Hardin Ridge Recreation Area (Hoosier National Forest), Monroe Reservoir, Bloomington, IN

Meet at the shelter house #1 near the boat launch ramp parking lot.
Rain or shine (herping is always good, even in rain)

Schedule:

We will leave to herp the area shortly after 9:00 a.m. and return before 12:00 p.m. for the cookout. We will herp again after lunch. Saturday evening the HHS will present a PowerPoint presentation of The Herps of the Hardin Ridge Area.

Several members will be camping at one of the many campgrounds. We will also herp on Sunday. The herpout is a chance for our members to get out and field herp the hills of beautiful Southern Indiana. We should see a variety of herps with the possibility of venomous species. We will also be taking counts on our finds in the wild. Wear the proper gear and herp at your own risk. The H.H.S. assumes no responsibility for accidents or injuries. Please be careful and have fun!!

The Barbeque

The H.H.S. will provide the burgers and dogs. Please bring a covered dish and your own beverages. Hardin Ridge offers class "A" camping (showers, electrical hookup) and class "B" (showers) camping. For more information, call or email Jim Horton (317) 443.4845 email - stardali84@hotmail.com

April's Speakers Review

by Ed Ferrer

When I was teaching middle school we always had yearly workshops attending programs by "experts" in education. We often joked that "experts" were anyone that was 50 miles away. Meaning we had people in our own district that was just as qualified. That is certainly true of some of our own members of HHS. Jim Horton and Pat Hammond are experienced field herpers and excellent photographers. When I saw some of the photos they entered in our photo contest last January I knew their program on their trip to Arizona would be a fine presentation. Since Arizona is known as the "Rattlesnake Capital of the World" that fact added to my anticipation.

Jim and Pat spent a week herping the "monsoon season" of Arizona. Usually Arizona is known for its dry arid weather but during the monsoon season there may be sporadic heavy rains that produce flash floods when traveling stops. In fact, there is a law called the "stupid driver law" that states that if a driver's car is caught in the mud, the driver has the responsibility to pay to get their car towed out. The most common species found during their trip was predictably the Western diamondback rattler, Crotalus atrox, and the Greater short horned lizards often called "horned toads" by the locals. They were somewhat surprised to find another common find was the Sonoran desert sidewinder. Crotalus cerates cercobombus, which they filmed a video of its unique sidewinding motion along with photos. Other rattlesnakes found were the Arizona black rattlesnake, Crotalus cerberus, and the Rock rattlesnake, Crotalus lepidus, but the monsoon came at the end of

their trip and ended their hopes of finding the Southwestern Speckled rattlesnake, Crotalus mitchelli pyrrbus. Other snakes found were a green rat snake, an Arizona glossy snake, a Western Lyre snake, and a few black-necked garter snakes. Also found was a Madrean alligator lizard and some Sonoran desert toads. Non herp finds were several large brown tarantulas and a Southwestern myotis bat. A few dead snakes found included a Sonoran mountain king snake, a coachwhip snake and a long nose snake. Jim also took many photos of various beautiful flowers and several species of cactus and ended the program with a beautiful Arizona sun set. A difference from normal herping behavior was that night road cruising was against the law. Any night herping had to be done walking on foot with their car parked off the road. When asked about their experience with the border patrol, Pat mentioned that they were often stopped but once they mentioned what they were doing they were "cool"with them. Obviously they were more concerned about drug traffic, smugglers, and illegal aliens than to be concerned about two Hoosier herpers. Jim and Pat both said they planned to return in the future.

Jim and I decided to show some snakes that are found in Arizona as a tie-in to the presentation. I showed a California king snake and a Mexican black king snake. Jim displayed his rubber boa, rosy boa, some rattlesnake rattles and the largest, most beautiful Arizona king snake that I have ever seen.







HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR INDIANA LIZARDS?

By Jim Horton

This is a two-part series featuring the lizards that inhabit the many regions of our state.

The northern regions of the U. S. aren't exactly known for a large variety of lizard species. Here in Indiana, we're lucky to have 6 different lizards. Our long, vertical shaped state features many natural habitats, waterways, and terrain.

Three species of skink (Scincidae) are found in Indiana, all three are different in size and behavior.

Let s take a look at our smallest one – the **ground skink** *Scincella lateralis*. The ground skink measures only 3 to 5 inches and five inches are really big ones.



Ground skinks are found among leaf litter, under rocks, rotten logs and even under unnatural debris. They prefer dry, sparse woodland areas. I rarely see them climbing. They are usually seen scattering about at ground level among leaf litter and other vegetation. You'll find them in the southern half of Indiana in the unglaciated region and southwest. I've found these little skinks to be the most difficult of the three species to capture and photograph. May and June is when this little skink is most active.

Our next skink species is the **five-lined skink** <u>Eumeces</u> <u>fasciatus</u>. This one is found almost state-wide and is our most commonly encountered lizard. These are quick moving lizards and it is interesting to watch them move about foraging in their twitching movements.



The attractive youngsters with the blue tail and five bright yellow stripes over black background is arguably our most beautiful lizard. Adults lose most of the coloration with more earth tones of tan, bronze, and brown colors. Females will retain light stripes but the males take on the solid bronze coloration with red on the head (red is more prominently during breeding season). These skittish lizards will usually zip out of sight as soon after they've been seen. Five to eight inches is the size range of these midsize skinks. I typically see them in the 5 to 6 inch range.

Five-lines may be found in a variety of terrain. Rock and log piles, trash piles, rock crevices, and other natural areas are safe retreats for this lizard. Moist areas with adequate sunlight is a must.

Females will lay 5-8 oval shaped eggs under loose bark or other safe cover. I've found females under these conditions surrounding the eggs under close guard beneath flat rocks and bark. Five-lined skinks may be found through most of the warm season in Indiana.

The largest skink (and one of the largest lizards of Indiana) is the **broad head skink** *Eumeces laticeps*. Another fast moving species taking to the trees when encountered. They've been known to quickly ascend 40 feet in to the treetops when alarmed.

Adult broadheads may measure up to 12 inches but are typically 8 to 10 inches. They look similar to five-line skinks but are much larger in size. Scale counts also differ between the two species. Males have a larger, wider, head (as the name states) than the five-lined skink. Males also exhibit more red throughout the head during breeding season.



The range is in central and southern Indiana. I've never seen an adult in Indiana but have seen a juvenile along the banks of Monroe Reservoir. They favor trees, rocky outcrops, and abandon buildings. It is a woodland species preferring a drier habitat. Female will guard eggs similar to the five-lined skinks. Large males will deliver a nasty bite if captured. I've captured them in South Carolina for photographs and I can tell you that large male broadheads will defend themselves quite well.

KNIVES AND HERP ART

Photos & text by Roger Carter







This is a very interesting knife manufactured under the Colt Firearms Company logo and patterned after the coral snake. There were several sizes in the series and I have the largest one. On the top of the box is a picture of a coral snake and the Colt logo. On the front of the box is the identifier "COLT CORAL SNAKE SERIES" and on the inside cover is a picture of Samuel Colt with the phrase "Red on black is a friend of Jack. Red on yellow can kill a fellow." On the bottom of the box is a note "Produced under license of New Colt Hold Corp." As you can see there are two blades. Each blade has a thumb notch to open. On the left hand blade is etched "RED ON BLACK IS A FRIEND OF JACK RED ON YELLOW COULD KILL A FELLOW" and on the right hand blade is etched the figure of a banded snake. The body of the knife is banded in red, yellow and black bands to represent a coral snake. The Colt logo is etched at the base of each blade and on the back side of the left hand blade is etched "CT560", "Quality Since 1836" and "China". This knife is 10 7/8 inches long with both blades open and four and seven/sixteenths inches closed. Both blades are sharp.





Your HHS Board of Directors for 2015

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

2015 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

May 23, 2015 – World Turtle Day at Zionsville Nature Center, Zionsville, IN. HHS members are needed to display live turtles at this event. Please contact Jim Horton for details (stardali84@hotmail.com)

June 6, 2015 – 15th Annual Hoosier Herpout, Hardin Ridge Recreation Area, Lake Monroe, Bloomington, IN A weekend of field herping, camping, and a cookout. Free to all HHS members.

June 7, 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.

June 28 - 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: August 30, 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) 255-5100

www.hoosierherpsoc.org

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