



THE MONITOR

NEWSLETTER OF THE HOOSIER HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A non-profit organization dedicated to the education of its membership and the
Conservation of all reptiles and amphibians

Volume 18 Number 10

October 2007

President's Message

Jim Horton

Boo! I think the chilly season is here and I hope you've enjoyed the extended summer season as much as I have.

I've written a herp of the month featuring one of our local herps that has a little orange on it, considering it is the Halloween season.

Our last Guest Speaker was Mr. Rick Howard from Purdue University. His talk encompassed local mole salamanders of the upper mid section of Indiana where Rick's studies occur. We learned that

I would like to thank those who exhibited their animals for the day at the Westfest in the Eiteljorg Museum on Saturday, September 29. The staff graciously donated \$250 to the HHS for the day! We also were treated to a free lunch and a free family membership to the museum. Unfortunately, I had other obligations and had to leave for a good portion of the day. Kudos to those who were there at the beginning and stuck it out... especially Roger and Holly Carter, Dave, Elliot and Tristan Stahl.

Here we go again. Its almost time to vote for HHS Officers for the coming year. We will take more nominations next week.

In this issue, Elliot Stahl will refresh you on our trip to "Snake Road". We have another Embarrassing Moment in Herping with Mike Wood, a piece on accidental snake bites in Florida, and more!

We have another great Guest Speaker this month that you won't want to miss...read on. Happy Herping and see you at the meeting!

WELCOME NEW AND RENEWED H.H.S. MEMBERS!

New

Brian Callahan

Beth Ann Breitweiser, DVM (All Wild Things) Indpls.

Renewals

Robert Hansen, Parkridge, Il. (Sustaining member)

Martha Horton

Garry Gryan

Leonard Gray (sustaining member) Warsaw, In

Southern Illinois Herping Trip

Story and photos by, Elliot Stahl

On Friday September 21st Dave Stahl and I drove to the town of Jonesborough in Southern Illinois, to do some herping that weekend. Saturday morning we met up with Roger Carter, Rick Mars, Tim Cole (Texas) and his girlfriend, to begin herping. After breakfast we headed to nearby Snake Road, in the Larue Pine Hills Ecological Area. On the way we stopped at a roadside tin site and flipped an adult garter snake, then continued to Snake Road. This road is closed twice a year for the large migration of snakes that takes place from the Larue swamp into and out of their hibernacula in the Pine Hill Bluffs. Shortly down the trail Tim found our first snake on Snake Road, a juvenile western cottonmouth that was sitting under some loose bark on a stump. This was my very first cottonmouth to see in the wild. I then made my way up to the base of the bluffs while the others walked the road. As I turned a corner I spotted the head of a large yellowbelly water snake protruding from a crevice in the bluff. As I neared him, he slipped away before I could get a picture. Not long after that though, Rick found another yellow belly lying on the road. Further down the road Rick stopped to examine a bush by the swamp and quickly spotted a small rough green snake lying in the branches. As we were looking at the small rough green snake, Tim spotted a large adult rough green snake hanging out in the branches above our heads. When we finished photographing the green snakes we made our way further down the trail. The next snake we found was a larger cottonmouth that was lying next to the trail. He cooperated well and opened his mouth for some pictures. Down the trail from there the bluffs get closer to the swamp. At one spot along the bluffs I got off the trail and searched the edge of the bluffs where I spotted two more cottonmouths before they crawled back into there crevices. After pointing them out to the group and watching them disappear we turned to go back to the trail, and Tim spotted another cottonmouth right behind us that we walked right by, that cottonmouth soon joined the others by

slipping into a crack at the base of the bluffs. Near the end of the gated portion of road I spotted another cottonmouth lying next to the road, and we took some photos of him. Then on the return walk, we saw a green tree frog along the trail. The entire day we had also been seeing numerous leopard frogs as well as other frogs along the swamp. While walking back to the vehicles Rick and I got ahead of the others, and as we neared the gate I happened to look down in front of me just as I stepped right in front of another cottonmouth that was lying in the trail. The others caught up with us as I was photographing this snake and reported seeing another cottonmouth that we missed further back, along with a few more green snakes and an adult black rat snake. When we finished walking Snake Road we drove to a nearby tin site and flipped a lot of tin, but found nothing more than a garter snake under the tin however Rick spotted a green snake in a bush by the tin site. We then headed to a small stream where we observed numerous cricket frogs, and a few northern water snakes. After we finished at the creek we headed back to the hotels to clean up. Then after dinner Rick, Dave and I returned to snake road that night to see what we could find. On the way there we found a DOR western ribbon snake. Soon after we began hiking the road at night, Rick spotted a large rough green snake in a bush along the trail. Then only a short ways down the trail he spotted another even larger rough green snake. Then we hiked the trail a little longer and encountered a large northern copperhead stretched out across the trail. Then as we returned to the vehicles we found yet another copperhead in the road. On the way back to the hotel that night we road cruised a bit, but all we found other than numerous frogs was a DOR juvenile black rat snake. Sunday morning Rick, Dave and I got up a bit earlier than the rest of the group, which now included Jim Horton and Pat Hammond who came down Saturday night, and the three of us headed out early to snake road while the others got ready. On the gravel drive to the Larue Pine Hills area, we spotted about a two-foot long black rat

snake in the road. The very pretty colored rat snake had traces of red and yellow in its pattern, and he posed for a few pictures on the road. When we arrived at snake road, we hiked a good ways before I spotted the first snake, a young cottonmouth was lying next to the trail, very obvious with green algae still covering it, having just crawled out of the swamp. We photographed it and then headed down the trail. Soon after we encountered another cottonmouth this one larger then the other also lying alongside the trail, we looked at him and then kept walking. As we approached the bluffs again where we had seen cottonmouths before, I crept off the trail up to the bluffs, and immediately spotted two more cottonmouths sitting along the bluffs. After they spotted me they slipped away into the crevices. Then as I walked further down the bluff, I spotted another cottonmouth up ahead, and I as I began walking towards it, I looked down to see yet another even larger cottonmouth lying in the leaf litter in front of me. The two snakes also quickly crawled back into their dens. We then walked to the other gate without seeing anymore snakes. Soon after we turned around we ran into the rest of our group. They reported not seeing any snakes walking in. As we walked the other way I checked out some of the bluffs that I did not on the way in. I spotted the head of a cottonmouth just barely before it disappeared into a hole in the bluff. As I was up by the bluffs the others found a young black racer on the road. Then further along the bluff I came upon another cottonmouth this time lying on the other side of me away from the bluff, and the others in the group were able to get some photos of the snake. When we neared the bluff that we saw the other

cottonmouths at, I quickly spotted another one heading out of the bluff. As I approached it crawled toward the bluff, and just passed where it was lying I found another yellowbellied water snake in the leaf litter. As I was approaching the water snake we spotted two more cottonmouths up ahead next to the bluff, as Pat approached them he realized that they were mating. A few of us were able to get shots of the pair before they retreated to their den. Then back on the road Jim found a small earth snake on the trail. Then further down the trail Roger found a rough green snake crossing the road. After that I went up by the bluffs again and found another rough green snake crawling into one of the crevices. When we neared the swamp again Dave spotted another cottonmouth lying next to the road by the swamp. Further down the trail from that cottonmouth we came up on another one lying right in the road, and took some photos of him. Then as we neared the gate again we found yet another large rough green snake lying on the road, and after we took some photos of it, we returned to the vehicles. The weekend turned out to be very productive, in all I saw 20 cottonmouths, 7 rough green snakes, 3 yellowbellied water snakes, 2 copperheads, 2 northern water snakes, 1 garter snake, 1 black rat snake, 1 black racer, and 1 earth snake. Along with the numerous sightings of bullfrogs, green frogs, leopard frogs, toads, cricket frogs, green tree frogs, ground skinks, five lined skinks and fence lizards. We also saw a few longtail salamanders, two lined salamanders, a red eft, and some slimy salamanders, not bad for my very first trip to snake road. After that Dave Stahl and I headed home after a great herping trip in southern Illinois.



Western Cottonmouth



Rough Earth Snake

General Meeting Oct. 17th 7:30 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Brian MacGowan, Purdue University

Topic: Conservation of Box Turtles and Timber Rattlesnakes in Southern Indiana"

Place: Butler University, Gallahue Hall (Science Bldg.) Room #105

The Hoosier Herp Society is pleased to announce that October's guest speaker is Brian MacGowan from Purdue University. Brian is an Extension Wildlife Specialist in the Department of Forestry & Natural Resources. He earned his B.S. in Natural Resources from Ohio University and M.S. in Wildlife Science from Purdue University. His research currently focuses upon forest wildlife management, human-wildlife conflicts and the conservation and ecology of native fauna. His topic of the conservation of box turtles and timber rattlesnakes in Southern Indiana is of great interest to all of our members. **This is a Can't Miss Program" See you there!**

SHED SKINS NEEDED

The Indiana State Museum is in need of your snake's shed skins. The museum is hosting an Education Day for school children in March. The skins will be utilized as a craft project and a souvenir for the kids to take home. They are expecting in excess of over 1000 kids during that day. Please bring your collected shed skins to the General Meeting and Ed Ferrer or Jim Horton will deliver them.

EMBARRASSING MOMENTS IN HERPING

Mike Wood

30 yrs ago my wife and me had only been married for a month and we were having her parents over for dinner, Back then I just kept my frozen rodents in the freezer part of the refrigerator and had never had any problems.

My plans were after we were married to save some money and get a freezer with in the next six months and put it in the garage so the rodents were not in my bride's refrigerator.

But.....my new mother in law, who I had only meant one other time opened the freezer to get the "steaks" out. I was in another room visiting with my new father in law when I heard a blood curling scream. She had opened a bag and out came 8 jumbo frozen rats onto the counter.

So hears my wife trying to calm her down by telling her there not our food....its for his snakes....At this point things were a little bumpy cause now she discovers there's live snakes in the house, and her daughter married this weirdo.

We ended up going out for dinner and I was open and honest about my interest in snakes. They seem to accept it well and came home and went into the snake room, they were a little nervous but all was going well, at that time most snakes were wild caught and not the friendliest creatures on the planet.

Then we turned the corner and there was "Kong" a fresh wild caught kingsnake that was rattling his tail like a rattlesnake. They couldn't get out of the room fast enough!

30 years later...they never visit with out looking around the snake room, and my best looking high yellow green tree python is named after my mother in law, and we all still laugh about her getting the rats out of the freezer. I still have that old freezer for frozen rodents, its had a few repairs but I just don't want to give in a pull the plug.

I am very thankful to my family who has supported my love of reptiles over the years.

Herpetology Greats

Clifford H. Pope (1899-1974)

He was most known for his work as the Curator of Reptiles and Amphibians at the Chicago Natural History Museum from 1940 to 1953. His publications included: *Reptiles of China* (1935), *Turtles of the United States and Canada* (1939), *Amphibians and Reptiles of the Chicago area* (1944), *Giant Snakes* (1962), and *The Reptile World* (1955).

HALLOWEEN HERPS

Copperbelly Water snake *Nerodia erythrogaster neglecta*

With Autumn in full swing and this being the month of scary spooks, I thought I'd write our *Herp of the Month* about one of Indiana's orange and black reptiles. One of our reptiles that adorns those colors is the copperbelly water snake. This handsome herp is one of our more unique water snakes for several reasons. One is that their chief prey item is frogs and tadpoles, unlike most water snakes which feed mainly upon fish (alive and dead), but will take salamanders. They also inhabit wetlands that tend to dry up early in the season. These wetlands are fishless which gives their tendency to consume frogs. Copperbellies also stray far away from their main water source. They have been known to travel back and forth between different wetlands and some have been found far from these watersheds (unlike the typical water snake).

These gorgeous snakes reach lengths of 50 inches and the largest water snake record in Indiana is a copperbelly, which had a length of 55 ½ inches (Minton 2001). The young are beautiful with a reddish brown background saddled by dark blotches that reach the underbelly. The bottom is a pinkish and as they mature, the orange hues will begin to appear.

Adults are sometimes vividly marked beneath with orange to coppery red but some will appear less showy with pale orange to peach colors. Dorsal patterns are non-existent; only dark brown to black appears on the keeled scales of these snakes. The orange coloration usually extends to the head to the upper labials.

Copperbelly water snakes are a subspecies of the Redbelly (*N. erythrogaster*) water snake and it intergrades with the Yellowbelly (*N. erythrogaster flavigaster*) water snakes further south. Together there are six subspecies of *N. erythrogaster*.

The range of *N. neglecta* is only in the Midwestern United States, and they occur rather spotty. Southern Michigan, northwestern Ohio, northern Kentucky and southeast Illinois are the only states where these rare snakes occur.

Copperbellies are listed as Endangered in Indiana and have been listed as Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Indiana specimens are found in small numbers in fragmented localities in extreme northeastern and north central counties. Their occurrence in the extreme southwestern counties is stable as well as in the Muscatatuck lowlands.

The copperbelly water snake is constantly in a fight to survive due to the drainage of swampland and other habitat destruction. We can help this animal by giving to the non-game portion of your state tax forms. As Indiana residents, we need to help protect our wetlands and monitor healthy populations of one of our most unique water snakes.



References:

- Minton, A. S. 2001. Amphibians and Reptiles of Indiana, Indiana Academy of Science
Gibbons, W., Dorcas, M. 2004. North American Water snakes-A Natural History

Nominations for 2008 Officers

As of the September meeting, these are the current nominations for officers.

President – Rick Marrs, Angela Thomas, Jim Horton

Vice-President – Pat Hammond, Richard Searcey, Amy Baird

Secretary – Holly Carter

Treasurer – Dave Mitchell

Sergant At Arms – Wendell Zetterberg, Dave Stahl, Roger Carter

WestFest, A Success!

Members of the Hoosier Herpetological Society presented their animals and educational tools during the Annual *WestFest* at the Eiteljorg Museum on Saturday, September 29. As expected, we were a huge hit. HHS members in attendance were: Amy Baird, Roger and Holly Carter, Ed Ferrer, Rick Marrs, Dave and Elliot Stahl, and Jim Horton.



Roger and a Cribo



Western Herp Posters



Ed and Amy at the HHS exhibit

HERP HAPPENINGS

October 18, 2007 – 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: 11/18

November 3-5 – Indiana Pet Expo, Indiana state fairgrounds, Indianapolis.

November 10-11, 2007 – 23rd Annual Midwest Herpetological Symposium, Des Moines, Iowa. The exclusive conference in the Midwest featuring talks, auctions, and sale. www.iaherp.org

November 17, 2007 – Evansville Reptile Show and Sale, Evansville, IN. www.evansvillereptileshow.com

November 21, 2007 – HHS General Meeting, Guest Speaker - TBA

March 14, 2008 - Reptile Day School Festival – Indiana State Museum, from 9:30 to 2:00

Reptile Days public event -Indiana State Museum - July 26 from 11 to 4 & July 27 from 12 to 4

Visit the H.H.S. website at:
www.HoosierHerpSociety.org

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.**

2007 OFFICERS

PRESIDENT Stardali84@hotmail.com	Jim Horton	(317) 865-0464
VICE-PRESIDENT necali@insightbb.com	Angela Thomas	(317) 882-5266
SECRETARY drymarchonzz@hotmail.com	Holly Carter	(317) 873-6561
TREASURER/MEMBERSHIP turtlelovin@comcast.net	Dave Mitchell	(317) 570-9643
SERGEANT AT ARMS Gnawbone92@yahoo.com	Pat Hammond	(317) 241-2793

Appointees for 2007

EDITOR Stardali84@hotmail.com	Jim Horton	(317) 865-0464
PROGRAM DIRECTOR/PAST PRESIDENT pythonpals1@msn.com	Ed Ferrer	(317) 787-7448 Cell - 727-7553
SOCIAL CHAIRPERSON WAYS AND MEANS necali@insightbb.com	Anita Carter Angela Thomas	(317) 299-2749 (317) 882-5266
WEBSITE COORDINATOR ighaus@insightbb.com	Richard Searcy	(765) 349-2347
MEMBERS AT LARGE copperhead210@sbcglobal.net	Dave and Elliot Stahl	(317) 842-2648
MEMBER AT LARGE drymarchonzz@hotmail.com	Roger Carter	(317) 873-6561
MEMBERS AT LARGE	Ralph and Blake McBee	(317) 714-5367
MEMBER AT LARGE	Rick Marrs	(317) 549-3673
MEMBER AT LARGE	Mike Wood	twobears@embarqmail.com