



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 19 Number 9

September 2008

President's Message

Jim Horton

Hello HHS members! Autumn is coming soon and its almost time to crank up those heat pads.

Our website coordinator, Richard Searcey, has resigned his position. I would like to thank Richard for all that he has done in the past with our website. We are currently in the process of rebuilding our website. We ask that you please be patient and bare with us. I hope to have member participation on our website after the completion of construction.

As many of our members are aware, there are a few show coming up this fall during the same weekend. The Midwest Herpetological Symposium (Nov.7-9) and the Midwest Reptile Expo (Nov. 8,9). Most of our Board Members who normally staff the HHS table at the Midwest Reptile Expo here in Indy will be at the symposium in Detroit, MI. I'm asking any of our members who may have one or even both those days available to please step up. It is important that we be at shows such as these to recruit members and to aid patrons in their questions about native Indiana herps, husbandry of herps in general, and any questions regarding the HHS. If you have the time and the interest, please contact me at: (317) 865-0464 or email at: stardali84@hotmail.com

If you have an Embarrassing Herp Moment, please send it in to me and we can share your embarrassing experience with everyone. I will also welcome any Herp Hints and other submissions for this publication.

Don't miss this the Special Guest Speaker this month - Andrew Hoffman (student-Hanover College). Andrew is a great photographer and field herper. He has done fieldwork in Indiana for several years and his presentation is sure to be a crowd pleaser!

We have two great original articles from our members in this issue. Enjoy and see you at the meeting.

September General Meeting: Wednesday, Sept. 17th, 7:30 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Andrew Hoffman, Hanover College

Topic: Reptiles and Amphibians of Indiana's Bluegrass Region

Butler University, Gallahue Center, Room #108

September's speaker is Andrew Hoffman. He is a junior at Hanover College majoring in biology and minoring in environmental science and Spanish. He is an experienced field herper and excellent photographer. Andrew has been involved in research projects on Eastern box turtles, timber rattlesnakes and crawfish frogs in Southern Indiana as well as numerous other herp surveys in other areas. His topic will be **Reptiles and Amphibians of Indiana's Bluegrass Natural Region** (Southeastern Indiana). This includes three distinct geographic sections; the Scottsburg lowlands, the Muskatatuck Flats and Canyons and the Switzerland Hills. He will offer a general overview of the herp diversity and ecology within this region with a special emphasis on the unique herps such as Kirtland snakes, four-toed salamanders, copper-bellied water snakes streamside salamanders and much more.

Florida Herping Trip

By Elliot Stahl

On Friday August 1st Dave Stahl and I arrived in western Florida in Jackson County near the town of Marianna, where we set up our camp for the week at Florida Caverns State Park. We had come to Florida to meet up with some friends of ours to do some caving and in our case herping around that area of Florida before a National Caving Convention being held in Lake City Florida. The herping started off that afternoon when we went to a local spring fed creek and went snorkeling. While swimming around I captured and photographed a juvenile yellow-bellied turtle. I also saw another one but was not able to catch it. Throughout the rest of the week we returned to this spot and saw yellow bellied turtles just about every time. Then later on that evening several of us took a hike in the state park along the road at night and saw several DOR and AOR grey tree frogs, green tree frogs, and a few live eastern spadefoot toads. The next day (Saturday August 2nd) while driving out of the park we encountered our first snake of the trip, an adult Oak Phase Grey Rat Snake lying alive and well along the road.



We quickly moved him to a safer location and took some photos. Then while waiting around at the park office I spotted a juvenile fence lizard sitting on a nearby rock that posed nicely for a photo. Then we visited a few caves and while hiking back from the last one I saw the tail end of a large Florida Cottonmouth as it slipped into a hole we were not able to retrieve it out of. However just after that we went swimming at the Spring Creek again and as I was walking along the shoreline I spotted next to the water where a swampy area meets the creek another adult Florida Cottonmouth on a log, without camera or snake hook all I could do was approach slowly and watch it as it slithered away. Then just after that I caught a juvenile stinkpot turtle swimming in the water along the bank. Then that evening we went

canoeing along a river in the state park and saw about a three-foot alligator sunning on a branch. The next day, Sunday, we went out to a property that contained several caves. The first one we went to had numerous large three lined salamanders living in it which we took many photos of. Then we visited another cave where we saw a few green frogs living in a pool not too far inside the cave. I then exited the cave and decided to go check out the swamp about fifty feet away from the cave entrance, to see if I could see any snakes. Then a few minutes later I walked up on a dead stump and sitting coiled up in the leaves on top was yet another adult Florida Cottonmouth. This one I was able to get several good photos of, along with a few other snake enthusiasts in the group, before letting it be. Then later on while outside the entrance of another cave I photographed an adult southern leopard frog sitting in the leaf litter next to the cave, and as I was walking to the second entrance nearby I caught an adult Green Anole, which were of course very commonly seen throughout our trip. Then we visited a cave which had a deep pool in it that we swam across and were able to net and get closer looks at two very rare Georgia Blind Cave Salamanders, which are a very light white color, with gills and as the name says no eyes, totally adapted for living only in caves. Sunday evening, while at camp, I saw two more eastern spadefoot toads hanging out around our shelter. On Monday we went canoeing along the Chipola River, it was not long before someone spotted a large watersnake that I leaped out of the canoe and successfully caught. It turned out to be an adult Plain Bellied Watersnake; we took a few photos and then let it go. Then as we were pulling up on the bank to hike to some caves a small juvenile green anole jumped off a tree right onto my shirt, unfortunately we did not get a photo of the apparently unfrightened lizard. Then in one of the caves we visited which was about a ten-foot drop down to a pool of water, I climbed down to the water and caught a young Florida Watersnake that had most likely fallen in, so I took him out and photographed it. Then later on as we were nearing the end of our canoeing Dave and I spotted a huge Florida Watersnake sunning on a log along the river, but as we neared it slipped into the water.

Tuesday we visited a few caves near Marianna, and in the first one we went to which was about an 8 foot undercut climb-down entrance, we

found a juvenile Florida Cottonmouth coiled up in the sunlight just below the entrance.



We took many photos of the snake that had apparently fallen the short distance in and could not climb out the sheer walls. So I used my snake hook to carry him out of the cave and let him go over in the woods safely away from the hole. Then that evening on the way back to camp in the park Dave and I decided to take a detour down one road that went out into the woods and do some nighttime road cruising, and it was not long at all until I slammed on the brakes and jumped out to catch a beautiful adult Scarlet Kingsnake crossing the road. We took many photos of the very pretty tri-colored snake before letting it go safely away from the road.



Wednesday we went with a bunch of other people to a Nature Preserve along the Apalachicola Bluffs, where we took a long hike. Along the way we saw several adult Broad Banded Skinks and also several Race Runners. Then while walking through a hilly area I spotted a juvenile southern copperhead coiled up in the end of a hollow log. We took a few photos of the neat little snake; this was actually the first true southern copperhead I have seen in the wild. Thursday the only significant reptile we saw was the eye shine of a small alligator in a pond at the state park at night. Then Friday the only herp we saw was another adult oak phase gray rat snake on the road at night in the state park. Saturday we drove

east to Lake City Florida where we were going to based out of for that week. Then we went with some friends of ours from Georgia who were leading us around the week before, to an area just north of Lake City called Big Shoals. There we took a hike along the Suwannee River; we were in a forest full of palmettos on a bluff above the river. I was constantly scanning under the palmettos down the trail. Then as I stopped to take a look at the river on an overlook a dark spot under one of the palmettos caught my eye and I leaned down to see just what I had been looking for, an small although it was an adult Dusky Pigmy Rattlesnake. Once the snakes coiled and sat still I was able to get some very nice photos of it, and it even rattled a little bit, although it sounded like a faint buzzing more like an insect then a rattlesnake. Very satisfied with our find we hiked a little more and then turned around, on the way back to our car I spotted a large black racer cruising next to the trail, but it soon disappeared into the palmettos.

On Sunday August 10 Dave and I went along with a caving friend of ours from Tennessee, up to the Okefenokee Swamp in Southern Georgia not far from Lake City. Almost immediately upon arriving at Stephen Foster State Park we saw several adult American Alligators in the water at the boat dock. Then we put our canoe in the water and paddled through a canal out to the main swamp. There we spent several hours paddling around and in all we probably saw close to twenty adult alligators swimming around in the swamp, some of which let us paddle right up to them and get some good photos. Then we took a walk along a boardwalk there and saw a few lizards including one very large Green Anole. Then that evening Dave and I went night driving on a road through Osceola National Forest where we found an adult Ribbon Snake and a juvenile Florida watersnake. The rest of the week we did not do as much herping and therefore the only other herps we saw were a pair of adult stinkpot turtles and some large yellow-bellied turtles we saw while snorkeling at Itchetucknee springs. We then began heading home the following Saturday after a very successful herping trip to Florida, especially since the trip was not dedicated to just herping, we were quite satisfied with our find

September General Meeting: Wednesday, Sept. 17th, 7:30 p.m.
Guest Speaker: Andrew Hoffman, Hanover College
Topic: Reptiles and Amphibians of Indiana's Bluegrass Region
Butler University, Gallahue Center, Room #108

September's speaker is Andrew Hoffman. He is a junior at Hanover College majoring in biology and minoring in environmental science and Spanish. He is an experienced field herper and excellent photographer. Andrew has been involved in research projects on Eastern box turtles, timber rattlesnakes and crawfish frogs in Southern Indiana as well as numerous other herp surveys in other areas. His topic will be **Reptiles and Amphibians of Indiana's Bluegrass Natural Region** (Southeastern Indiana). This includes three distinct geographic sections; the Scottsburg lowlands, the Muskatatuck Flats and Canyons and the Switzerland Hills. He will offer a general overview of the herp diversity and ecology within this region with a special emphasis on the unique herps such as Kirtland snakes, four-toed salamanders, copper-bellied water snakes streamside salamanders and much more.

HHS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT PROFILE

Name – Rick Marrs

Town or city - Lawrence

Age you found interest in herpetology? My fascination began in utero.

What (amphibians/reptiles) do you like? Currently I'm focusing on native species, particularly those that are endangered and/or have restricted ranges.

Do you exhibit your animals at HHS shows? Frequently

What do you like most about the HHS? I enjoy the opportunity to co-mingle with people who share my interests and the educational benefits.

When did you join the HHS? Early "91" – I was pleasantly surprised to meet people who were as much into it as I am!

Other hobbies? Too many to list: guitar, videography, Japanese culture, cultural & physical anthropology, - just for starters.

Do you field herp? I live to field herp. I've been to all the adjoining states, Texas, Arizona, Columbia, and the Southeastern states, but I still really enjoy herping Indiana. There is tons of stuff I still have to learn about in my own "back yard."

Where do you get your herps? Some from the field. Most of my exotic critters are from our adoption program.

Have you ever bred any herp species? (if so, what kind) I've incubated many eggs of native Indiana species that have been laid while in my care. I once accidentally bred an eastern milk snake with a Pueblan milk snake and the babies looked really cool!

Anything else you would like to add? Even though the public at large is beginning to assume a more enlightened attitude about herps in general (and snakes in particular), there is still so much that we – as individuals and as a society – can do to educate people about the roles herps play in our world.

HERP HAPPENINGS

September 14, 2008 – 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, August 24.)

October 11/12 2008 – (NARBC) North American Reptile Breeders Conference and Tradeshow. Tinley Park, IL. Sat.10-5 & Sun.11-4. Info. www.narbc.com

October 18 2008 - Midwest Frog Fest, Joliet, IL, midwestfrogfest.com - presentations, workshops, auction (proceeds go to the Costa Rican Amphibian Research Center), Animal and supply sale.

November 7-9, 2008 – 24th Annual Midwest Herpetological Symposium, Detroit MI Hosted by the Michigan Society of Herpetologists.

November 8-9 2008 – Midwest Reptile Expo, Indiana State Fairgrounds. Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 10am-4pm www.midwestreptile.com

November 22, 2008 – Evansville Reptile Show and Sale.

A Story of Site Three

BY ANGELA THOMAS

Site Three doesn't look like much. The first time I saw this spot, described as a 'wet field' in the list of sites on the NAAMP frog survey route Ed Ferrer and I had just signed up for, I was very unimpressed. The corner of the field our map indicated was bordered by paved roads on two sides. It had a tangle of gas lines studded with warning signs poking out of the ground at one edge, and at that time only the stunted look of the corn growing there suggested it ever held water. Several other sites on the route had permanent water, either ponds or streams, and looked much more inviting. I would soon learn that Site Three is a case of looks being deceptive; for the local anurans, it is an important location and many of the most important events in their lives revolve around this unlikely-looking spot. Over many years of stopping there at night to record the frog species calling, I'd become very familiar with one chapter in the story of the pond. On this visit, I would get a look at the next part of the story.

I arrived at Site Three at about eight PM on a beautiful summer evening. I was hoping to catch some tadpoles, though it was a little late in the season and I knew many of them would have transformed already. Thanks to all of the rain, water was still plentiful, though a wide strip of bare mud all around the edge showed how much the temporary pool had shrunk.

As soon as I got out of the car, I heard the startled squawks and splashing as small green frogs dove for cover in the water. Gathering up my net and a plastic container, I cautiously approached the water's edge. As I came into view, several more small frogs dove into the water. Some distance away, a toad hopped sedately into the cover of the tall grass (though I searched for it later, I never found it). Standing still for a moment, I scanned the area for other signs of amphibians, but they all seemed to have departed. The water near the edge of the pond was covered with a scum of greenish algae, concealing any tadpoles and promising to make searching for them a messy affair, so I decided to walk along the edges first and see what there was to see.

The ground at Site Three is as deceptive as everything else: in one spot it will be squelchy on top, but firm underneath, while one pace away it will look almost identical, but be soft enough for you to sink instantly to footwear-swallowing depths. Fortunately, moving slowly is a good idea when seeking amphibians, and my cautious progress gave me plenty of time to scan the ground. At first I saw only mud, grass, and a

multitude of tracks from wildlife that had come to the pond. There were many deer tracks, the delicate footprints of birds, and also many large canine tracks which in that area might be either dogs or coyotes. Then a tiny gray speck, the exact color of the ground, went bouncing away from my feet. Negotiating a deer track – a giant pit for so tiny a creature – slowed it enough that I could put my container in front of it and chase it in for closer examination. As I had thought, it was a miniscule toad, newly metamorphosed and sticking close to the pond where it would not be in danger of drying out. Once I'd seen one, they became easier to spot and I saw more with almost every step I took. Barely a quarter of an inch long, the little toads must have many predators, and only their vast numbers insure that some survive long enough to mature and return here to breed.

Before I left the pond I saw so many of the tiny toads that it would have been impossible to count them all. I also found two that were much larger, one about half an inch long and the other almost an inch in length. These two were no easier to spot than the smaller ones, and had they not moved I would probably have walked right past them. While the tiniest toads were a uniform gray-brown, with barely a trace of markings, and fairly smooth-skinned like the tadpoles that had so recently been, these larger ones were clearly identifiable as Fowler's toads. The smaller one hadn't really developed warts yet, but the dark spots on his back were already clearly defined, and the largest toadlet was already a perfect miniature toad, with all of the expected markings and warts. The variation in size led me to wonder how quickly these small toads grow. Are these larger toads actually last year's offspring, just at the pond because of the dampness it provides? Or are they the fortunate ones from this year, the tadpoles that matured and metamorphosed first, with only a few weeks' head start on their tiny siblings?

A bit further along the bank, my progress disturbed something hiding in the tall grass and weeds, and it began leaping about. After following it for a little ways, the unseen amphibian came to a tangle of branches on the ground where no grass grew and I got a glimpse of it: a young bullfrog, perhaps four inches long. One more leap carried it into the cover of a clump of weeds. Before I could go search for it, I was distracted by something much smaller leaping away from me. Whatever it was, I hadn't seen it until it jumped; like the toads, its dark skin blended so well with the soil. Fortunately for me, its next leap landed it in a clump of grass where it was clearly visible against the bright green stems. I only had time to identify it as a juvenile cricket frog before it leapt again and disappeared. While I was distracted, the bullfrog had made good his escape as well, and though I searched all through the patch of weeds, I didn't find him again.

Having seen one cricket frog, I set about looking for more, and soon discovered that they were almost as plentiful as the tiny toads. The little half-inch frogs were excellent jumpers, and could cover a foot or more with one leap. They weren't content with just one jump, however, but preferred to make at least two, with a sharp turn between the first leap and the next. This zigzag progress was hard to follow, and given that their camouflage was so good they virtually disappeared as soon as they stopped, I had some trouble tracking them. My net proved invaluable in catching some. One of the interesting things about these tiny frogs is the variety of bright markings they can have. Some individuals have a bold grass green or rust stripe down the back, while others have green speckles scattered all over the body. One particularly attractive frog I found had the dark triangle between its eyes outlined in bright lime green. Their background color is also variable, and can darken to almost black, as these frogs were, or lighten to a pale tan depending on the lighting and the frog's surroundings. In addition to dozens of the juvenile frogs, I found one large adult. Catching it, I discovered it was a male, optimistically hanging around the pond in hopes of attracting a mate.

While searching among the grass for more frogs, I noticed the shed skin of an insect stuck to some grass blades. It was the skin of a dragonfly nymph, left behind on the grass when it crawled from the water for the first time and transformed into an adult dragonfly. The nymphs choose a location fairly high on the grass blades for this final shed, so the left behind skins are easy to spot and I soon found dozens of them. The pond, with its abundance of tadpoles, must have been a smorgasbord for these predatory insects.

Examining the grass more closely also led me to my next amphibian find: a newly metamorphosed gray tree frog. The little frog, still with a tiny dark blob of tail, had turned a bright green color that blended in beautifully with the color of the grass. So small that his weight wouldn't bend the grass blades, he was already an excellent climber. I wondered how many of these tree frogs were in the grass around the pond's edge. Surely I had walked past more of them without ever seeing them. Unlike the toads and cricket frogs, they were very reluctant to leap and give away their position, and in all the time I was there I saw only one more. The second frog was even more recently transformed than the first, and still had a stub tail about half the length of his body.

During all of this walking around I had been examining the water for signs of tadpoles, and other than some small disturbances of the surface out near the center, I saw very little. Hoping to discover that the tadpoles were merely concealed by the algae, I swept my net through the water several times, but was rewarded only with mud and a net full of green slime. Finally, a movement at the very edge of the pond caught my eye. There, in a depression at the edge about the size of my hand and only an inch or two deep, were three tadpoles. Placing the net between the tadpoles and the rest of the pond, I scooped them into the net with my hand. Transferring them into a container of water, along with the inevitable mud that I had gotten with them, I discovered that I'd also managed to catch a water boatman and a damselfly larva. After returning the insects to the pond, I got a good look at the tadpoles. All three had well-developed back legs, and one had the odd, angular look that tadpoles get when their front legs are pressed against the skin on the inside, ready to emerge. Their tiny feet already had distinct toe pads: these were gray tree frog tadpoles. Two of them also had unusually short and ragged tails, perhaps evidence of a new crop of predatory insects that had been sharing the pond with them.

By this time, the sun was low in the west, and I knew it was time to head home. I had seen many of the amphibians that inhabit Site Three at a crucial time, when some were ending the first part of their lives in the water and others had just begun the second part of their lives on the land. Perhaps the next time I returned, this unremarkable-looking temporary pond would reveal more of its story, and the stories of the creatures that lived there.



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.**

2008 OFFICERS

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

Appointees for 2008

EDITOR	Jim Horton	(317) 865-0464	Stardali84@hotmail.com
PROGRAM DIRECTOR	Ed Ferrer	(317) 787-7448	pythonpals1@msn.com
Cell - 727-7553			
WAYS AND MEANS	Angela Thomas	(317) 882-5266	
necali@insightbb.com			
MEMBERS AT LARGE			
Richard Searcy		(765) 349-2347	ighaus@comcast.net
Dave and Elliot Stahl		(317) 842-2648	
copperhead210@sbcglobal.net			
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