



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 20 Number 2

February 2009

President's Message

Jim Horton

Thanks to HHS members who participated in our field trip to the Columbus Zoo last month. The temps were freezing but we overlooked that and had a good time. Another zoo trip may be scheduled later this year.

I'd like to welcome the new members who I had met at our last meeting. Sorry if I forget your names right, I'll catch on soon – I promise!

This winter weather has played havoc on our members in the southern half of the state, particularly in the Evansville area. As of this printing, power had been off for over a week in those areas hardest hit. Lets wish our members, their families, and their animals well in these trying times.

Our Annual trip to the amphibian breeding ponds is right around the corner. The first warm rains will trigger amphibian activity. I'll keep you posted on the HHS website (www.hoosierherpsociety.org) when the time is suitable for a club trip to visit the ponds.

New HHS T-shirts are currently in the *works* featuring our 20th Anniversary and a Kirtland's snake. More information is to come on when and where you can purchase one.

Our last meeting was the Annual Photo Contest. We were a little unprepared for how the judging would go but we were able to improvise. There were a total of 40 entries! It was hard to pick one winner as there were so many worthy choices. Maybe next year we can divide it into categories. Special thanks goes to Brittany Davis for donating her 1st place framed photo to the raffle!

February General Meeting: Wednesday, Feb. 18th 7:30 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Todd Pierson

Topic: "Herping Adventure to Guyana"

Butler University, Gallahue Center (science building) Room#108

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to announce that our guest speaker for February is Todd Pierson.

His topic will be "Herping Adventure in Guyana". Todd is an excellent photographer and veteran field "herper". Anyone who remembers his program on field photography of herps last year will be sure to want to attend this presentation! See you there!

www.HoosierHerpSociety.org

WELCOME NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS!

NEW MEMBERS

Sarah Lingle
Amanda Perez

RENEWALS

Wanda Horner
Juan Horner

Thanks for you membership and continued interest in the HHS!

Helpful Herp Hints

Using distilled water rather than tap water will reduce water spots. Distilled water has no minerals to dirty up your glass aquaria and water bowls. Over time, hard water deposits build up and it is very difficult to remove.

Embarrassing Herp Moments

"Back Seat Drivers"

by Ed Ferrer

I was transporting my snakes down I-67 to a scout meeting. I heard a "pop" but I didn't think anything of it. I just thought it was a rock that I had run over and have it hit the underside of my car. About 15 minutes later I noticed the head of "Tigger", my 10 foot reticulated python, slowly moving across my dashboard. I turned at the first intersection and drove into a parking lot. The pop that I heard must have come from my snake pushing out of its container. He had slithered under the passenger seat (It was a good thing I was traveling alone!) and proceeded along the dashboard. I had to be careful taking him out from under the seat so it wouldn't scar him or scratch its scales. He cooperated and I removed him without much trouble but I restacked my "cargo" so that another cage was on top of his container so it would be more difficult for him to escape again. But for the rest of the way there and back it seemed like I had one eye on the road and another on the back seat.

On another trip on highway I-70 back from a library show in Winchester, I looked into the rear view mirror and saw the head of "Bart", my 12-foot Burmese python, looking back at me! I had just passed an exit and it was too cold and windy to pull over on the shoulder so I had to travel on for what seemed like forever before I came upon the next exit. I pulled into a truck stop parking lot and got out. I had to take the container out of the car because "Bart" was already over half way out. Putting the container on the ground, I wrestled Bart back into place. A few truck drivers thought it was pretty interesting, but I noticed none of them volunteered to lend a helping hand. After I closed the lid, I used duct tape to secure the closure. After the first incident, I have always had a roll of duct tape for any "emergencies".

2009 HHS PHOTO CONTEST

Winners:

First Place – Brittany Davis (timber rattler in water)

Second Place – Todd Pierson (Tiger monkey frog)

Third Place – Todd Pierson (Burmese in Everglades)

Ancient fossil find: This snake could eat a cow!

By MALCOLM RITTER, AP Science Writer – Wed Feb 4, 5:46 pm ET

NEW YORK – Never mind the 40-foot snake that menaced Jennifer Lopez in the 1997 movie "Anaconda." Not even Hollywood could match a new discovery from the ancient world. Fossils from northeastern Colombia reveal the biggest snake ever discovered: a behemoth that stretched 42 to 45 feet long, reaching more than 2,500 pounds. "This thing weighs more than a bison and is longer than a city bus," enthused snake expert Jack Conrad of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, who was familiar with the find. "It could easily eat something the size of a cow. A human would just be toast immediately."

"If it tried to enter my office to eat me, it would have a hard time squeezing through the door," reckoned paleontologist Jason Head of the University of Toronto Missisauga.

Actually, the beast probably munched on ancient relatives of crocodiles in its rainforest home some 58 million to 60 million years ago, he said.

Head is senior author of a report on the find in Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature*.

(The same issue carries another significant report from the distant past. Scientists said they'd found the oldest known evidence of animal life, remnants of steroids produced by sponges more than 635 million years ago in Oman.)

The discoverers of the snake named it *Titanoboa cerrejonensis* ("ty-TAN-o-BO-ah sare-ah-HONE-ensiss"). That means "titanic boa from Cerrejon," the region where it was found.

While related to modern boa constrictors, it behaved more like an anaconda and spent almost all its time in the water, Head said. It could slither on land as well as swim.

vertebra of a 17-foot-long modern green anaconda.

Conrad, who wasn't involved in the discovery, called the find "just unbelievable.... It mocks your preconceptions about how big a snake can get." *Titanoboa* breaks the record for snake length by about 11 feet, surpassing a creature that lived about 40 million years ago in Egypt, Head said. Among living snake species, the record holder is an individual python measured at about 30 feet long, which is some 12 to 15 feet shorter than typical *Titanoboa*s, said study co-author Jonathan Bloch. The beast was revealed in early 2007 at the University of Florida's Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville. Bones collected at a huge open-pit coal mine in Colombia were being unpacked, said Bloch, the museum's curator of vertebrate paleontology.

Graduate students unwrapping the fossils "realized they were looking at the bones of a snake. Not only a snake, but a really big snake."

So they quickly consulted the skeleton of a 17-foot anaconda for comparison. A backbone from that creature is about the size of a silver dollar, Bloch said, while a backbone from *Titanoboa* is "the size of a large Florida grapefruit."

So far the scientists have found about 180 fossils of backbone and ribs that came from about two dozen individual snakes, and now they hope to go back to Colombia to find parts of the skull, Bloch said.

Titanoboa's size gives clues about its environment. A snake's size is related to how warm its environment is. The fossils suggest equatorial temperatures in its day were significantly warmer than they are now, during a time when the world as a whole was warmer. So equatorial temperatures apparently rose along with the global levels, in contrast to the competing hypothesis that they would not go up much, Head noted.

"It's a leap" to apply the conditions of the past to modern climate change, Head said. But given that, the finding still has "some potentially scary implications for what we're doing to the climate today," he said.

The finding suggests the equatorial regions will warm up along with the planet, he said.

"We won't have giant snakes, however, because we are removing most of their habitats by development and deforestation" in equatorial regions, he said.



Jason Head of the University of Toronto holds up a giant vertebra of *Titanoboa*, left, and the

Herp Opportunities in Indiana

Wendell Zetterberg

Spring is finally almost here, which means amphibians and reptiles will be emerging from their hibernaculum and beginning the 2009 field herping season! One Frog/Toad training workshop with the Indiana Amphibian Monitoring program is already behind us, and there are two more coming up. On February 28th, at Salamaonie Lake Reservoir 2-4pm and March 1st Spring Mill State Park 2-4pm. For more information contact Angie Garcia at agarcia@dnr.in.gov

Purdue is also seeking Crew Leader, CrewMember and field techs positions in their research on the Timber Rattlesnake and the Eastern Box Turtle. Look here for job descriptions and info- <http://www.fnr.purdue.edu/HEE/People/jobs.htm> Applications will be accepted until Feb28 and Mar 1 (depending on position).

While structured herping is great, there is nothing better than just getting out and seeing what there is to find. This year's season will be beginning and there will be many opportunities to get out and find some of Indiana's wonderful herpetofauna. It is very likely that the amphibians will be breeding before the end of the month. The peeps of the Spring Peepers, quacks of the woodfrogs, the trill of the chorus frogs will soon be filling the air of the evenings. Many of the Ambystomas (tigers, smallmouths, spotted, jeffersons, hybrids) will also be making their trek to their breeding ponds. Please remember to always disinfect your boots and nets between ponds to prevent the spread of any diseases. (Such as Chytrid) Also use extreme caution whenever driving, especially on rainy nights.

By the time you receive your March Monitor, American Toads will be joining in the night's chorus and many of the reptiles will be starting to emerge. Be sure to check the message board on the HHS website www.hoosierherpsociety.org to see what other members are finding in the field, as well as posting your own herping experiences.

New Zealand reptile becomes dad at 111 years old

By RAY LILLEY, Associated Press Writer –
Mon Jan 26, 7:18 am ET

WELLINGTON, New Zealand – A captive reptile in New Zealand has unexpectedly become a father at the ripe old age of 111 after receiving treatment for a cancer that made him hostile toward prospective mates.

The centenarian tuatara, named Henry, was thought well past the mating game until he was caught canoodling with a female named Mildred last March — a consummation that resulted in 11 babies being hatched on Monday.

Tuatara are indigenous New Zealand creatures that resemble lizards but descend from a distinct lineage of reptile that walked the earth with the dinosaurs 225 million years ago, zoologists say. An endangered species, the hatchlings born at the Southland Museum and Art Gallery will provide a badly needed boost to the tuatara's genetic diversity, said the gallery's tuatara curator, Lindsay Hazley.

Henry was at least 70 years old when he arrived at the museum, "a grumpy old man" who attacked

other reptiles, including females, until a cancerous tumor was removed from his genitals in 2002, said Hazley.

"I went off the idea he was good for breeding," Hazley told The Associated Press, but once the tumor was removed, "he was no longer aggressive."

The museum now has 72 of the reptiles after 42 hatchings in the past two years.

Hazley hopes to use Henry regularly in the breeding program that is helping expand tuatara numbers after they had been savaged by predators.

Tuatara are estimated to number about 50,000, most of them living in predator-free sanctuaries, including offshore islands.

A male Tuatara takes 70 years to fully mature but reaches sexual maturity about age 20.

While there's no scientific data on the life span of the ancient reptiles, "they go beyond 100 well and truly," Hazley said. "They can be around for 150 to 250 years."

Columbus Zoo Field Trip Account!

By Ed Ferrer

Photos by Jim Horton

In several of our herp board meetings we discussed what we might do during the winter months. We decided to arrange a field trip to the Columbus Zoo in Ohio. We picked the date of January 26 so that we could have the possibility of visiting both the zoo and the Reptile Show also in Columbus that day. When I found out how large the Columbus Zoo was, Angela Thomas and I decided to skip the reptile show and go straight to the zoo so we would be more likely to see most of the exhibits. We started at 6:15 and arrived at the zoo about 9:30 after taking a short stop at a convenient mart for a few snacks. When we arrived the temperature was 8 degrees with a strong wind. We planned to arrange our venture to alternate the outside exhibits with the exhibits inside buildings. We started at the aquarium. It was full of large tanks of beautiful fish and very realistic coral and other sea formations. Angela quickly started taking numerous photos of the many fish when she discovered that her batteries were running low. We then went to the gift shop to get batteries and chart out our course through the zoo. We decided to stop at the deli and have a quick lunch before

braving the arctic temperatures. We then went back to the aquarium and finished the photos. The colors on the fish were so brilliant with shades of blue, yellow, silver, orange and black. I particularly liked the sharks which were hard to photograph because they moved much faster than most of the other fish.

One thing I liked about the zoo's organization is that the exhibits were basically arranged by geographic boundaries. We next went to the North American exhibit (outside-burr!). We found both Mexican and timber wolves which trotted along in the snow and seemed very curious about us. As I have visited zoos, I have found that many of the animals are more active in cold weather than in hot weather. This was true here as we found two grizzly bears wrestling and we saw two beautiful bobcats stalking each other, chasing around and playing in the snow just like house cats. It was great sight! We found trumpeter swans and a couple of otters playing in the water. We noticed two American eagles with their feathers fluffed out to better insulate them from the cold.

Next on our list was the reptile house. We found very realistic displays that were also arranged according to continents and biomes. There were a great number of turtles, snakes, and lizards. Some of my personal favorites were the Gila monsters and beaded lizards, the king cobra, some huge, beautiful scrub pythons, eyelash vipers, copperheads and rattlesnakes and blood pythons.



Inside the Reptile House

We then went to the Asian Quest. Inside we encountered impressive, huge flying fox bats and a large water monitor. My personal favorite was "Fluffy", the largest captive reticulated python in the world. I was told that this snake was recently purchased from Bob Clark, one of the world's foremost breeders of pythons for \$500,000! It was measured to be 24 feet long and weighed 303 pounds! Angela took a few photos of it with me to provide some scale. It was an awesome reptile! There was also a large family of langur monkeys and a sun bear. In the outside part of the display we found markhorns, the world's largest goats with majestic spiral horns. We also saw a magnificent Siberian (Amur) tiger pacing back and forth.



HHS members near the Reptile House

We then met our 11 other herp members arriving from the Columbus reptile show and went to the Komodo dragon exhibit for our first "behind the scenes" presentation. John Curtain described how they managed to keep medical records of these potentially dangerous reptiles. He showed us how they trained both lizards to go into a rectangular holding box by putting meat in the box. As they went in to eat the meal they were shut in and special plates were positioned so that their legs were immobilized so they could take blood samples and give medication to them without causing danger to the handlers or hurt themselves by thrashing about in the confined area.

The two Komodo dragons were obtained from the Miami Zoo and are about ten years old. The female, Audrey, and the male, Buru are brother and sister.

The male is much larger, measuring in at over nine feet long and weighing 150 pounds. They allow them to mate as that is part of their natural instinct but they try to discover and collect the eggs before they hatch. It was quite fascinating to see these prehistoric looking creatures close up and learn how quickly they adapt to the routines set for them by the keepers.

We then went back to the reptile house where Elizabeth Burke and Jeff Dawson described their duties. Liz showed us the refrigerator that stores the antivenin and described the precautions and procedures in place that any zoo must follow if they keep venomous reptiles. Liz also shared with us some of her turtle breeding programs. Jeff Dawson showed us some awesome alligator snapping turtles and described some of the lizards they were breeding.



Alligator snapper

Seeing behind the scenes programs emphasizes that besides educating the public about animal and conservation issues, zoos also play an equally important role in breeding endangered species and insuring that certain species will continue to survive.

We next went to the aquarium for our last behind the scenes tour. They demonstrated how they grew elkhorn coral. We next went above and behind the large (85,000 gallon) aquarium as they told us how they were able to keep 35 different species of fish co-habiting in the 76 degree water. They explained how they fed the various fish and how they fed the two species of sharks separately.

After our behind the scenes tours were finished, Angela and I went to the African exhibit. There we found a sleeping leopard and some brightly colored mandrill baboons. We then went to the gorilla compound where we found several family members of various ages. Among the gorillas was Colo, the oldest female gorilla in captivity. Angela took a photo of me sitting next to one of the huge silver backs for scale.



Adult female gorilla

We had a great trip and the whole staff of the zoo went out of their way to be helpful and informative. Several of us plan to return this spring when the weather will be more inviting. For people with children, there is also a water park and picnic area that would make for a great day for the whole family. I highly recommend the Columbus Zoo for anyone interested in seeing and learning about a wide range of animals.

We will plan more field trips in the future. If you have any ideas about where you would like us to go and what you would like us to do, don't hesitate to let us know.

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.**

Your HHS OFFICERS for 2009

PRESIDENT stardali84@hotmail.com	Jim Horton	(317) 865-0464
VICE-PRESIDENT pythonpals1@msn.com	Ed Ferrer	(317) 787-7448
SECRETARY drymarchonzz@hotmail.com	Holly Carter	(317) 873-6561
TREASURER/MEMBERSHIP turtlelovin@att.net	Dave Mitchell	(317) 570-9643
SERGEANT AT ARMS bluemoosey8@yahoo.com	Brittany Davis	

Appointees for 2009

EDITOR Stardali84@hotmail.com	Jim Horton	(317) 865-0464
PROGRAM DIRECTOR pythonpals1@msn.com	Ed Ferrer	(317) 787-7448
WAYS AND MEANS necali@insightbb.com	Angela Thomas	Cell - 727-7553 (317) 882-5266

MEMBERS AT LARGE

Richard Searcey	(765) 349-2347	ighaus@comcast.net
Dave and Elliot Stahl	(317) 842-2648	copperhead210@sbcglobal.net
Pat Hammond	(317) 241-2793	gnawbone92@yahoo.com
Roger Carter	(317) 873-6561	drymarchonzz@hotmail.com
Rick Marrs	(317) 549-3673	
Mike Wood		twobears@embarqmail.com
Amy Baird		

Suggestions and articles for *The Monitor* are welcome. Submit your typed or legibly hand written articles by the first Wednesday of each month to: PO. Box 40544, Indianapolis, IN 4620-0544 or 7712 Miracle road, Indianapolis, IN, 46237. Articles on PC or compatible, formatted, 3½ dis4ks or CD's are accepted. To have your disk returned, you must provide a self addressed, stamped envelope within your mailing to us. Back issues of *The Monitor* are available. Send requests to our PO. Box, or contact Holly Carter. Quarterly Advertisement Rates for publishing your ad in *The Monitor* are: ¼ Page - \$10.00; ½ Page - \$15.00; and Full Page - \$25.00. Classified Ads are free to all paid H.H.S. members and will be printed for two months. All ads must be submitted in writing to the Editor by the first Wednesday of each month. All artwork is copyrighted and cannot be reproduced without written permission from the artist.