

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 31 Number 6

June 2020

HHS June Meeting

Wednesday, June 17, 7:00PM

Holliday Park Shelter house

Guest Speaker: Jim Horton, HHS

Topic: "Herping Costa Rica"

We still aren't sure when Indy Parks will give the OK on meetings and activities for the indoor venue. They will inform us when facilities open. Our next meeting will be outdoors under the shelter house at Holliday Park. Ed Ferrer has reserved the shelter house for this purpose. Please stay at least 6 feet apart if possible. Wear masks as needed.

Please check our social media and website for updated information. We're sorry for the inconvenience.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Thank you and welcome to the Hoosier Herpetological Society!

Thank you to our returning members!

Without all of you, we wouldn't be the organization that we've grown to be today!

RENEWAL MEMBERS

Ed Ferrer
Ian Hahus
David Miller
David Stahl

NEW MEMBERS

Charles Konkler
Nicholas Olinger
Nicholas Podlaski

Snakes, Folklore, Fiction and Facts

by Ed Ferrer, photos by Jim Horton

When I am doing snake programs, I get a lot of questions. I also get a good share of snake folklore. So I thought I would relay some answers and opinions about snakes that I have gathered over the years.

One of my most asked questions concerns Indiana's venomous snakes and how to tell the difference from the four native venomous snakes, the timber rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*, the Eastern massasauga, *Sistrurus catenatus*, the Eastern copperhead, *Agkistrodon contortrix*, and the Northern cottonmouth, *Agkistrodon piscivorus* from Indiana's 30 nonvenomous species. (I include the cottonmouth in this list because according to the latest Peterson field guide there are supposed to be two rare relic populations in Southern part our state. However, to my knowledge there haven't been any documented sightings in several years.) If you want to find cottonmouths you would have much better luck in Southern Illinois, Western Kentucky or Tennessee of along the flood plain of the Mississippi River.



Northern (formerly western) cottonmouth

The first thing that is mentioned is "If the snake has a triangular shaped head it is venomous". This is because the venom glands located at the end of the snake skull cause the head to have a triangular shape. However, any snake has a head that is slightly wider at the neck because of the jaw bones and also several native snakes when threatened will flatten themselves particularly at the head to appear larger to discourage a potential threat. This is especially true of the Easter hog-nose snake,

Heterodon platirhinos, and Northern water snake, *Nerodia sipedon*



Midland water snake

Looking through weeds, etc. the untrained observer possibly being afraid may think that it has a triangle shaped head. (By the way the hog-nose snake is actually a rear-fanged venomous snake, but its venom is weak meant primarily for toads, its favorite prey item, and not a significant danger to humans.) Another way of telling venomous snakes from harmless species is by the shape of their pupils in their eyes. If they have cat like slit pupils they are venomous if they have round pupils they are not. Actually the shape of the pupils is an adaption to when they usually hunt. Vipers tend to hunt during dawn or twilight during low light situations. The slit pupils help them avoid the glare of direct sun during the day. However, if you are road cruising at night and come upon a viper its pupils would be expanded to allow more light and then appear to be more rounded. The third way to distinguish venomous snakes from nonvenomous species is that all vipers have heat sensitive pits that help them find warm blooded prey such as rodents and squirrels. Nonvenomous snakes do not have them. I always caution people that if they have to use the shape of their pupils or finding the two sensory pits you are probably too close for comfort anyway. The best thing I would suggest is learn the color patterns of each of the venomous snakes by using field guides. The good guides would also show color variations as they grow from

neonates to adults. Also, occasionally both rattlesnakes may have darker colors because of increased melanin pigment that will look much darker or obscure some of the pattern. (This is similar to the black panther which is actually just a regular leopard more black pigment.)

Also, I have been told that a person is sure what they saw was a rattlesnake because they heard the snake rattling. Many king snakes and rat snakes among other nonvenomous species tend to rattle their tails against dry leaves or other solid objects to make a buzzing sound that sounds very much like a rattler as either a warning or bluff when they feel threatened. I have a California king snake that makes that sound most of the time when I open its cage. I have been told that you can tell if a snake is a cottonmouth when it swims. If most of its body floats above the water it is a cottonmouth but if only its head and neck is above the water it is not. Although it is true that vipers tend to inflate their bodies when they swim, I wouldn't take that to the bank. By the way, all snakes seem to naturally be good swimmers using their tails like alligators. Some Eastern diamond back rattle snakes have been known to swim from the Eastern mainland to several close islands in search of new hunting grounds.



Eastern hognose

By the way when we discussed the shape of the head in identifying venomous snakes, I was talking about Indiana's native pit vipers. The family Elapidae which includes cobras and mambas do not

have triangle shape heads and these snakes have some of the most toxic venom of all snakes! But in the Southeastern and Southwestern states of our country we do have some coral snakes, which are part of the Elapidae family and they do not have triangle shaped heads. They have a bright red, yellow and black pattern that serves as a warning just like the brightly colored poison dart frogs of the Southern hemisphere. There are also some nonvenomous snakes that also sport the same colors as their disguise. The idea is this mimicry helps them escape predators. But there is a rhyme that can be used to tell the coral snakes from their mimics. "Red touches yellow, kill a fellow, Red Touches black friend of Jack". That only works in the U.S. In Central and South America there are many coral snakes that have all kinds of color schemes.



Young timber rattlesnake

Venomous snakes are some of the most highly evolved of all the snakes and they deserve to be protected. They like most snakes do humans a great service by preying on harmful rodents but some of their venom is also being used to make medicines that show promise in developing medicines to cure many diseases.

Treasurers Report (May 2020)

Roger Carter – Treasurer

Checking \$994.25, Savings \$9,259.46, CD \$5,151.56

President's message

Jim Horton

We are still unsure of when facilities will open for meetings at Holliday Park. However, we have available use of the outdoor shelter house. Our next meeting will be at the shelter house and will include a PowerPoint presentation by yours truly. I'll be presenting "Herping Costa Rica" from a trip back in 2009.

Please check our website, Facebook and Instagram pages for updated information regarding our monthly meetings and other club functions. If Indy Parks changes the options for meetings or activities, we will post it.

As always, if you've got a good story to tell about herps you've seen in the wild, herp husbandry, or even one of your favorite animals, we'd like to see it in the Monitor. Can't wait to see what you've got! Jim

Indiana DNR looking for volunteers to observe wildlife by paddling through waterways

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources is looking for volunteers to observe wildlife by paddling through the state's waterways.

The DNR is looking to gather more information about wildlife in Indiana's waterways and is asking for people who use canoes, kayaks or other non-motorized paddlecraft on Indiana's waterways to help.

The DNR is asking volunteers to complete a paddling trip postcard by documenting the wildlife they observe while out on the waterways from **June 1 to July 31**.

The department is looking to gather key information on these species that are either challenging to study or are lacking Indiana-specific information:

- Bald eagle
- Blanding's turtle
- Beaver
- Great blue heron
- Great egret
- Kingfisher
- Mink
- Muskrat
- Osprey
- Painted turtle
- Red eared slider
- River otter

Researchers are looking to document the number of wildlife seen per hours floated and per mile floated so they can gauge changes in wildlife populations over time. Paddlers can also help them discover new locations that wildlife may be living.

2020 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

ALL DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE OR CANCEL DUE TO THE COVID19 VIRUS SITUATION

June 17, 2020 – HHS meeting, 7:00PM at Holliday Park Shelter house, guest speaker – Jim Horton (HHS) Topic: Herping Costa Rica.

July 12, 2020 - Midwest Reptile Show, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Harvest 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

July 15, 2020 – HHS meeting, Annual Show and Tell meeting. Members are encouraged to bring their favorite snake, lizard, frog, turtle, salamander, book, artwork, etc. to share with the audience.

July 18, 2020 – Snake Fest, exhibits, live animals, presentations from a variety of organizations. Brown County State Park, Nashville, IN

August 1, 2020 – HHS live herpetological display/presentations at Greenwood Nature Center.

October 3, 2020 – HHS live herpetological exhibit at Eagle Library, 1- 4PM

A new critically endangered frog named after 'the man from the floodplain full of frogs'

May 25, 2020 Source: sciencedaily.com



photo - novataxa.blogspot.com

A new species proposed to be classified as Critically Endangered of miniaturised stump-toed frog of the genus *Stumpffia*, found in Madagascar, is named *Stumpffia froschaueri* after "the man from the floodplain full of frogs," Christoph Froschauer. The namesake of the new frog is famous for being the first, and European wide renowned, printer from Zürich, famous for printing "Historia animalium" and the "Zürich Bible."

Christoph Froschauer's (ca. 1490 -- April 1564) family name means "the man from the floodplain full of frogs," and the printer used to sign his books with a woodcut, showing frogs under a tree in a landscape. Amongst his publications are works by Zwingli, Bullinger, Gessner, Erasmus von Rotterdam and Luther, and as a gift for his art, the printer was given citizenship in Zürich in 1519. Now, scientists have also honoured Froschauer's great contributions by naming a new frog species after him.

The discovery, made by an international team of scientists from CIBIO (Research Centre in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources) of the University of Porto, Zoological Society of London, University of Lisbon, University of Brighton, University of Bristol, University of Antananarivo and Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali, is published in the open-access peer-reviewed journal *ZooKeys*.

The new species is reliably known only from a few specimens collected in three forest patches of the Sahamalaza region, an area severely threatened by fire, drought and high levels of forest clearance.

"In Anketsakely and Ankarafa this species has been found only in areas with relatively undisturbed forest, and active individuals were found during the day within the leaf-litter on the forest floor, where discreet calling males were also detected," shares lead author Dr. Angelica Crottini from CIBIO.

The scientists suggest to classify *Stumpffia froschaueri* as a Critically Endangered species according to criteria of the IUCN Red List.

"We here reiterate the need to continue with field survey activities, giving particular attention to small and marginal areas, where several microendemic candidate species are likely waiting to be discovered and formally described. This description confirms the Sahamalaza Peninsula as an important hotspot of amphibian diversity, with several threatened species relying almost entirely on the persistence of these residual forest fragments," concludes Dr. Crottini.

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HAND HELD HERPS-ARIZONA 2019

Story and photos by Roger Carter

The California kingsnake, *Lampropeltis californiae*, measures thirty inches to sixty inches long. Typically this species has black and white or black and yellow bands around the body. There is even a striped pattern. Found in Arizona from the southeast corner to the middle part of the western border with California and the northwest corner across almost to the New Mexico border in desert scrub, grasslands and plains. This is a strong constrictor that will eat snakes (including venomous snakes), small mammals, small birds, and some amphibians.

We were road cruising at night near Wickenburg, Arizona, when we found two juvenile California kingsnakes on the road near a golf course. We found the first one, stopped to get several pictures of it and continued road cruising. On our way back near the same golf course we found another juvenile California kingsnake and, naturally, we stopped to get pictures of this one. It was the same size as the first one and, for a few minutes, we wondered if this was the same snake that we found earlier. Pat examined the pictures in his camera and determined that there were slight differences in the pattern which assured us that this was a different individual. When I got home and looked at the pictures from my computer, I noticed that the light-colored bands from the first snake were lighter in color than the bands on the second snake which seemed more yellow. Neither one of these snakes bit. Considering where we found these kingsnakes near a golf course it's too bad that we can't say that we found "FORE" (golf joke) of them.



HHS Board of Directors - 2020

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Appointed Board Members for 2020

EDITOR	Jim Horton	(317) 443-4845	stardali84@hotmail.com
PROGRAM DIRECTOR	Ed Ferrer	(317) 787-7448	pythonpals1@msn.com
WAYS AND MEANS CHAIR	Angela Thomas	(317) 882-5266	necali@comcast.net
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	Heather White	(765) 404-2860	v-president@hoosierherpsoc.org
	Kimberly Scott	(317) 306-1597	silverskydragon@att.net
	Dale Schoentrup		eyelashviper@hotmail.com

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.**

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Don't forget to check out the HHS on Social Media!



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Hoosier Herpetological Society
P.O. Box 40544
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