



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 35 Number 1

January 2024

HHS Monthly Meeting

January 17, 7:00PM, Holliday Park Nature Center

Guest Speaker – Nate Engbrecht (Indiana State Herpetologist)

Topic – *“Developments in Indiana Herpetology: An Update from the Indiana DNR Herpetology Program.”*

“Nate Engbrecht oversees the Herpetology Program for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, a role he has held since 2017. As the agency herpetologist, Nate conducts survey and monitoring projects around the state, including work with state endangered crawfish frogs, plains leopard frogs, green salamanders, and Kirtland’s snakes. He earned his Bachelor’s Degree at Bethel University and completed his Master’s of Science at Indiana State University studying crawfish frogs. In his spare time, Nate enjoys beekeeping, bladesmithing, nature photography, and growing carnivorous plants.”

2024 officer/election results

Congratulations to our 2024 Board of Directors

President – Jim Horton

Vice-President – Katie Kulcon

Treasurer – Brenten Ruest

Secretary – Holly Carter

Sergeant at Arms – Louis Studer

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!

Renewals

Kathy Bottles
Ed Ferrer
Joy Fulk
Robert Hansen
William Hodapp
Mary Hylton
Garrett Kasmierski
David Miller
Mark and Tonya Phillabaum
Brenten Reust

New Members

Calleigh Weiss
Gary Anderson
Ravi Shanker

Snake in a Church Program

by Ed Ferrer

When I was performing educational snake programs, I would normally stop once a week in a Greenwood pet store to get rodents for my snakes and other items. One day the manager, as he noticed the size of my rodent order, asked me about what I do with my snakes. I told him that I did programs for, libraries, schools, scout meetings and other organizations. He then asked me what was the largest snake in my collection. I told him my largest snake was a 12-foot-long albino yellow and white Burmese python. He then asked if it was used to being handled. I told my python was the last of my snakes in my program and was always the hit of my show. After the show most of the children and their parents would line up and pet my python. They were always impressed by how docile but how strong it was and that its scales were dry and not slimy. He told me he was looking for a large snake to use for a program depicting the Bible story of the serpent tempting Eve to taste the apple of the tree of knowledge. I told him that it would be a fun night and I thought it would be enjoyable for the audience. I told him that I would hold the python and they would have to figure out a way to keep me out of view.

The next week I met with the crew and they gave me a black costume along with a black mask and I would hold my snake along a tree branch prop so I was invisible to the audience. I would move my python along with its lines in the program spoken over the loud speaker by someone off stage. During the actual program, the stage was dark except for the actress and the snake which were in two separate spotlights. Then when the actor, playing an angry God, condemned the snake to forever crawl on its belly, I moved my snake to the floor. The audience applauded loudly and it worked very well. When I went back to the pet store, the manager always told me what a big hit the play was and the congregation kept talking about it for a long time. He always thanked me for helping with the play. I joked with him and said that that was the first time my snake ever played a villain. Of course, in my shows the central theme was that all snakes are normally very beneficial to the environment and that the only reason they would strike anyone is when they are being stepped on or being attacked. But it was a fun experience and I was glad I could help out.

Snakes Through the Ages: Myths & Symbols

Mary A. Hylton

Mythology has always fascinated me and so when it came time to choose a particular focus for this article, I thought it might be fun to explore snakes and the roles they have played in ancient cultures—zeroing in on their powerful and unique symbolism. The following article is the first in a series centered around the theme of serpentine mythology—delving into their significance across different cultures, religions and tribes. I realize this may not be everyone’s cup of tea or brand of beer but I hope you’ll be game to come along for the ride!

Snakes, or serpents, as they were more commonly referred to in mythology, have endured a love-hate relationship with humans for a very long time. Snakes—you either love ‘em or hate ‘em. How often have we heard the quip, “The only good snake is a dead snake”? In my humble opinion, snakes have gotten a bad rap down through the ages and are truly one of, if not THE, most misunderstood, and consequently feared, creatures. Given that, I’m surprised that so many words in the English language begin with the letter “S” which is in the shape of, yes, a serpent! Think about it!

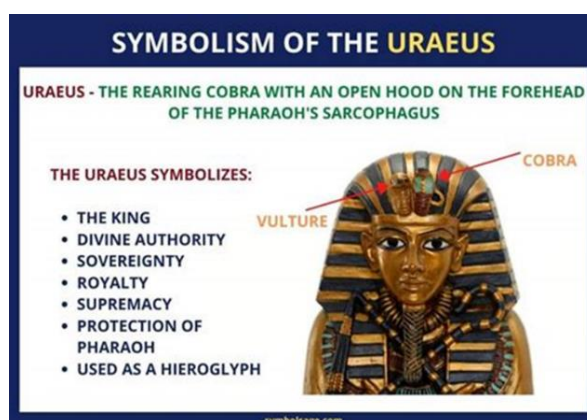
From the ancient Egyptians to the Bible, the serpent has been regarded as a complex symbol of either good or evil across different cultures, religions, and tribes. These powerful creatures, as lowly as they appear, were feared and respected at the same time and have a wide array of symbolic meanings, many of which will be explored in this and subsequent articles.

Now that you’ve traveled this far, let’s take our first journey down the Nile to ancient Egypt. Throughout Egyptian history, serpents were extremely prominent as a protective symbol of both pharaohs and commoners.

Divination was taken very seriously in the ancient world, especially among the leaders—chiefly, the pharaohs. In fact, it was fairly common for them to consult an oracle or seer before an important undertaking. The tradition of such a practice may have originated with the oracle of the Egyptian goddess Wadjet at Per-Wadjet (modern-day Desouk, near Alexandria). As one of the oldest deities, Wadjet was regarded as a protector of Egypt and its people and the guardian of the cosmos warding off chaos and evil. She was often depicted as a snake, usually an Egyptian cobra. Or she was depicted as a snake with the head of a woman, or a woman with the head of a snake, or two snake heads. She nursed the infant Horus and protected Ra by coiling herself upon his head.

The serpent goddess figurines excavated in the Minoan palace at Knossos may have been connected to Wadjet, as is the Uraeus emblem which was the stylized upright cobra used as a symbol of sovereignty and divine authority, and mounted, among others, onto the crowns and masks of the pharaohs including, famously, Tutankhamun.

(Illustration below courtesy of symbolsage.com)



Sometimes, the Egyptian moon goddess Isis is depicted as half human, half serpent. She was also considered to be the protector of children and women and had healing powers.

The legend says that the Egyptian god Atum, the god of creation, had a serpent's appearance as well. It was believed that Atum would shed his skin every morning and would emerge reborn with the first rays of sunlight.

In old Egyptian texts, another serpent-like mythological creature called Ouroboros often appeared. The Ouroboros was depicted as a snake swallowing its own tail symbolizing the cyclic nature of birth, death, and rebirth.

Snakes are truly a living paradox—existing as both positive and negative aspects in this world of ours—realistically and symbolically!

Sources: <https://symbolsage.com/serpents-meaning-and-symbolism> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-seek/202105/the-symbolism-snakes>

Sherman A. Minton Jr.

Jim Horton

Sherman Anthony Minton Jr. (24 February 1919 – 15 June 1999) was an American physician, herpetologist and toxicologist, who conducted the earliest detailed modern studies of amphibians and reptiles in Pakistan. He was a leading expert on sea snakes, snake bites, and venom properties.

He has been dubbed, “The Father of Modern Indiana and Pakistani Herpetology.”

Sherman grew up in New Albany Indiana and quickly developed an interest in herpetology. We went to Indiana University and earned a degree in zoology. He went on to Michigan to study herpetology and then, Indiana University School of Medicine.

He accepted a position at the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at IU School of Medicine. There, he remained on staff until retiring in 1984.

His father, Sherman Minton Sr. was a Senator and later, an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. The Sherman Minton Bridge linking Indiana to Kentucky is named in his honor.

Dr. Minton Jr. was a lifelong Indiana resident and world-renowned herpetologist. His work took him across the globe.

Here in Indiana, we are familiar with his field guide, *Amphibians and Reptiles of Indiana*. This book to this day, is the most comprehensive reference to our native herps. The first book, three decades in the making, was published in 1972 and a revised second edition was released in 2001. Unfortunately, due to his passing, Sherman Minton wasn't able to see this guide come to fruition.

The 1962 manual, *Poisonous Snakes of the World*, was issued by the Office of Naval Intelligence for use in training amphibious forces. It was later revised but Minton and published again in 1968.

Handbook to Middle East Amphibians and Reptiles (1992) was coauthored by Alan E. Leviton, Steven C. Anderson, Kraig Adler, and Sherman Minton Jr. This book was written with an urgency due to the lack of a comprehensive guide to the herps of the region. It was to be used for troops and ancillary civilian groups serving in the area of military operations for herpetological identification during “Desert Storm” or the Gulf War.

He published more than 150 papers and books. Two popular books of note are *Giant Reptiles* (1973) and *Venomous Reptiles* (1969). Both were co-authored by his wife, Madge Rutherford Minton. Other books of note are *Venom Diseases* (1974), *A Contribution to the Herpetology of West Pakistan* (1966), and *Life, Love, and Reptiles* (an autobiography) 2001.

Dr. Minton was a member of the Board of Governors of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. He served as president of the International Society of Toxicology and of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles.

Sherman Joined the Naval Reserve in 1941. While on the ship, the USS Brooks, he survived being hit by a kamikaze Japanese Zero aircraft.

He and his life-long assistant, Madge, traveled the world. The two collected data on herps, worked with sea snakes in the South Pacific, treated people in Central America with tropical diseases. The two lived in Pakistan for four years with their three daughters.

In his later years, after retirement, he gave presentations at conferences and symposia around the United States. Locally, he frequented Hoosier Herpetological Society meetings and other HHS events. He was given a lifetime membership by the HHS board. We were thrilled to have this well respected, modest, herpetological giant in our midst.

References:

Handbook to Middle East Amphibians and Reptiles (1992)
Life, Love, and Reptiles, An Autobiography (2001)

President's message

Jim Horton

Happy New Year! I can't believe we're here already! New year, new adventures, and new members! Frogs and salamanders will be out moving before we know it.

We've had a few changes from my last announcement. January is typically the month we hold our photo contest. The photo contest will be postponed to a later date. We have one of our favorite guest speakers for January. Mr. Nate Engbrecht, our Indiana DNR herpetologist, has graciously agreed to give a presentation! Come on out and meet your state herpetologist!

This year marks 25 years since the passing of Dr. Sherman Minton. Dr. Minton was a world-renowned herpetologist who lived right here in Indianapolis. Dr. Minton was also a lifetime HHS member. The board wants to honor his legacy this year. We've got a few ideas to look at and will keep you informed about the possible choices. I've written an article in this issue featuring his most eventful life.

A big thanks to Mary Hylton and Ed Ferrer for their articles in this issue. I appreciate your commitment to this newsletter and the organization.

We're happy to announce the continuance of the Student Presentation Award. If you know any students working on projects/papers related to herpetology, feel free to give them a heads up.

A *thumbs up* to Ethan Estabrook for his work with our website and social media. He has organized and kept us up to date with our communications. Thanks Ethan!

Next month is our FrogWatchUSA training and in March we have Mr. Yusnaviel Garica-Padron with a presentation of the Herpetology of Cuba!

Don't miss Nate Engbrecht (Indiana State Herpetologist) January 17, 7:00PM Holliday Park Nature Center

2024 Student Presentation Award

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is offering an educational award of \$300 for outstanding herpetological research projects. The Student Presentation Award is being offered to students from academic organizations within Indiana. The awarded applicant will present the research topic at one of our upcoming meetings in 2024. Meetings are held every third Wednesday at Holliday Park @ 7:00pm in Indianapolis, IN. To be considered, please provide a description of the research topic and provide contact information by April 1st, 2024. Email application materials to (treasurer@hoosierherpsoc.org)

Past Recipients:

2021, Jacob Pressler, Marian University – The bite force awakens: Sexual dimorphism in head morphology and bite force in Sceloporus lizards

2022, Shelby Royal, Purdue University – Experimental approaches to advancing hellbender head-starting

2023, Sarah Simmons, IU University – The Impact of lowhead dams on turtles.

2024 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

January 14, 2024 - Midwest Reptile Show, 10:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. 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

January 17, 2024 – HHS meeting, guest speaker – Nate Engbrecht (State Herpetologist)

February 17, 2024 – HHS live animal exhibit at Garfield Park Conservatory. 10 – 2 PM

February 17, 2024 – HHS at Marsh Madness event. Linton IN

February 21, 2024 – HHS meeting, Topic – FrogWatchUSA training.

March 20, 2024 – HHS meeting, guest speaker - Yusnaviel Garica-Padron, topic – Herpetology of Cuba

April 17, 2024 – HHS meeting, guest Speaker - TBA

May 3-4, 2024 – Herpetology Weekend, Natural Bridge State Park, Slade, KY. A weekend of presentations, hikes, and herpetological fun!

www.hoosierherpsociety.org



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Look for the HHS
on social media

HHS Board of Directors - 2024

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| | | | |
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| | Dale Schoentrup | | eyelashviper@hotmail.com |



HHS board meetings

Board meetings are always the second Wednesday of the month, 7:00pm
All members are welcome to attend. Contact any board member for the current locations.

**Our new website features swag for sale!
You can find shirts, hats, stickers, and more.**

www.hoosierherpsociety.org

Membership Form

new member

renewal

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____ Email Address _____

Individual/Family Membership \$25.00

Herpetological Interests

Hoosier Herpetological Society
P.O. Box 40544
Indianapolis, IN 46240-0544

Dated Material Enclosed

Address Correction Requested

If this box is checked, it's time to renew your membership