



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 18 Number 3

March 2007

President's Message

Jim Horton

Greetings fellow herpers!

It's that time again. Time to get those herps out of cooling and get them ready for the active season!

Those of us who are ready to take in the first sights and sounds of spring are anxiously waiting. There are a few reports of some amphibian activity around the state (as of press time) but the full chorus and congregations haven't seemed to have arrived in full just yet.

Please keep your calendar open for some of the many herpetological related activities that are on the calendar this year. It is still early but spring will be here before we know it.

Richard Reams is back from herping in Australia. This Wednesday, he will give us a look at what he found during Australia's summer season!

We have a great list of Guest Speakers for the next few months. Look inside at the "Herp Happening's" section to find out more.

We have a great article on the issues of feeding herps by Damon Theis and a nice piece on keeping large snakes by Ed Ferrer.

Enjoy!

General Meeting: Wednesday March 21st, 7:30 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Richard Reams, Indianapolis Zoo

Topic: Hunt for Red Australia Part II

Butler University, Gallahue Hall, Lecture Room #108

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to announce our guest speaker for March is Richard Reams. Richard has worked as a zoo herpetologist for over 16 years. He is currently the Desert Dome Manager at the Indianapolis Zoo. He has published several papers in peer reviewed journals, conducted field work in Peru, Mexico, Texas, Indiana and Australia. Those who attended last November's Midwest Herpetological Symposium saw him present a program on herps that he encountered in Australia. The day after that presentation he traveled on another trip to Australia. Richard told me he found many new species. Join us and find out what new herps Richard found in the land down under!

The Great Debate

By Damon Theis

Hello from a new member. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to those of you that I have not met either on line or in person. My name is Damon Theis. Some of you may know me as “bigretic” on line or as the man behind the Degei Husbandry Database. I am from Crown Point, IN and reside there with my patient and understanding wife and my eight-year-old son. I am delighted to finally be a member of the HHS and look forward to many years of membership. The following is an excerpt from a document that author to from time to time when I feel the need to express my thoughts on the various areas of captive husbandry. I hope you will find it of some use, particularly any of you that may be fledglings in the hobby.

In various internet forum threads I always notice conversations that give birth to debates of prey items. I normally don't care to add my comments to those threads, but I still believe some good points get brought up and they are worth sharing and discussing. There are also some comments that need not be repeated. In addition, there are other aspects of captive husbandry that are discussed with much passion by parties on both sides of the fence in regards to the topic at hand. Although I am certainly no expert, I have learned a few things during the 15+ years I have maintained the reptiles that have become part of my life. There have been many improvements in reptile husbandry over the years, but there is still progress to be made in some areas and myths that still exist. Herein I will attempt to convey my thoughts on the issues we as keepers face on a daily basis and what I see as preferred methods of action for a given scenario.

While knowledge has improved, there are still many areas of confusion, especially for the beginner. Feeding and caging are always at the top of the list. Prey items, size of meals, and frequency of feedings are common questions. While requirements differ from species to species, there are basic guidelines that can be applied to most that will yield the desired results. Methods of care also differ based on personal preference of the snake's keeper. One of the most common debates associated with feeding is the use of live feeders versus pre-killed or frozen/thawed prey. I cannot say that one of these is right while the other is wrong, but I can help to provide my thoughts so **you** can be better prepared to decide which method works for your situation. Caging can vary greatly in design and size even within the range of discussing a single species. Again, this depends on the personal preference of the snake's keeper. There are some that will say that there is one certain way that a specific species should be housed and turn their nose up at any other method. In reality, most species can be housed in a variety of ways quite adequately as long as the cage is designed and setup to maintain the environmental variables correctly. In addition to the above mentioned topics, I am quite sure I will digress into other areas of the captive husbandry of snakes as this document progresses. I hope that the endeavors to follow will be of some benefit to those entering this wonderful hobby.

Live vs. Dead

I hate this debate, but since it seems to be the hottest of topics in many cases and brings out some of the most emotionally driven comments I have ever seen, so I will start here and get it out of the way.

The use of live prey increases a snake's exposure to parasites and possible injury. **Face the facts:** A mouse, rat or any prey item, does not want to be eaten. A live animal will try to defend itself in the face of necessity. Rodents are capable of doing so against many animals, including snakes. Those who have had an animal injured by a prey item almost always swear they will never use a live feeder again. However, in some circumstances, a live item may be more effective, if not necessary to invoke a feeding response in an animal that needs to eat. This is a gray area and up to the better judgment of the keeper. True anti-live feeder zealots would

(Continued on next page)

say to force feed instead of using live prey. I view force-feeding as a dangerous activity, placing a huge amount of stress on the animal and a last ditch effort to save a non-eating animal. Use of a live prey item is a natural thing for the snake that can get them on track. I say “better judgment” because you need to be careful when using a live prey item. No live rodent should ever be left in a cage with a snake unattended. Let me repeat that. **No live rodent should ever be left in a cage with a snake unattended.** A live rodent can cause a considerable amount of damage to a snake that does not want to eat it. Snakes are often killed or die from injuries inflicted on them by live rodents left in the cage over night or unmonitored for extended periods. Does all this mean that people that feed live prey are irresponsible and putting their animals at risk? No. If you choose to feed a live prey item for whatever reason, you simply need to monitor the activity. If the snake is hesitant to take the prey you will probably need to remove it promptly, however, certain live prey items (typically mouse pinks or fuzzies) can be left in a cage overnight. You will be able to learn your snake’s habits in a relatively short amount of time with it and have the ability to tell if it is going to eat or not. Feeding live prey, if done correctly poses minimal risk to the snake. Do not feed live prey to an animal that does not expect it. Animals established on pre-killed or frozen-thawed prey should be kept on that standard. Introduction of a live prey item to an animal that is not familiar with such increases the risk to the animal. These animals are made to do this in the wild and have been successful in doing so long before they were brought into captivity by humans. They are efficient hunters that rarely take risks with prey items. However, in the wild, the snake has the opportunity to flee from a disturbance. It has no such option in a captive environment. *Be careful.*

Pre-killed or frozen/thawed prey will work very well for nearly everyone. The freezing of prey items minimizes the likelihood of parasite or disease transmission to the snake and there is virtually no chance of injury to the snake. Prey items are presented with hemostats, forceps or tongs depending on the size of the prey and the size of the snake to be fed. Some animals only require that the prey item be placed in the cage on the floor and they will find and consume it without any other intervention. Other animals require a bit of movement simulating the look of live prey. In most instances, a few small, subtle shakes will do the trick. Many keepers opt to by frozen feeders due to cost and convenience. They come in bulk and are easily stored. No feeding or maintenance of them is required, further reducing expense of maintaining your captives. Some say that they are less nutritious than a live or pre-killed prey item due to the freezing process. Common sense dictates to me that the level of nutrient loss from freezing is minimal if even a measurable issue. Practice the same inventory control with frozen feeders as you would with your own frozen meat. I recommend not keeping frozen feeders any more than 6 months before discarding for fresh supply. Simple record keeping will allow you to monitor your feeder inventory consumption and have planned reorder points so that frozen feeders on hand are used within 1-2 months and replenished with new. Frozen feeders are thawed in the same manner you thaw meat. You want to thaw them without cooking the tissue. They can be set out for an hour or so, depending on size to thaw and then brought up to feeding temperature by placing in warm water. You can also thaw directly in warm water, but do not rush the process. Thawing too quickly will result in the tissue of the abdomen wall becoming weak and can cause the prey to explode when constricted by the snake. This is neither visually attractive nor pleasant to the nasal cavity and should be avoided. Prey items may be brought up to feeding temperature directly in water or placed inside plastic bags before being placed in the water. The end result is having either a wet or dry food item to present to the snake. Some animals will prefer one over the other, while others will not care. Particular animals will only take dry in my experience. Animals referred to as “garbage disposals” will take even the soggiest of prey. Wet prey can also be extremely beneficial in adding hydration to an animal that needs it.

Pre-killed prey items are nearly as effective as live prey items when trying to trigger a feeding response from stubborn eaters, but not always. Pre-killed prey is presented the same as frozen/thawed. The only difference on the part of the keeper is that the killing of the prey item is required. The difference to the snake is mainly smell, as far as I can imagine. Of course, the fur

(continued on next page)

issues with the demise of the prey at your hand, (or via dry ice chamber, CO2 box, ect.) pre-killed prey will prove a most successful and safe alternative to the use of live prey.

What method do I use? I have and continue to use all of them. I am aware of the risks and benefits associated with each method, and clearly see the usefulness of each. The use of live feeders is not an indication of poor care as some may suggest. I am comfortable with utilizing live feeders for my animals and will continue to do so. I use frozen/thawed and pre-killed prey whenever possible. Of the three, frozen/thawed is my preference, but the individual situation of animals in my care dictate the use of live and pre-killed prey on a regular basis.

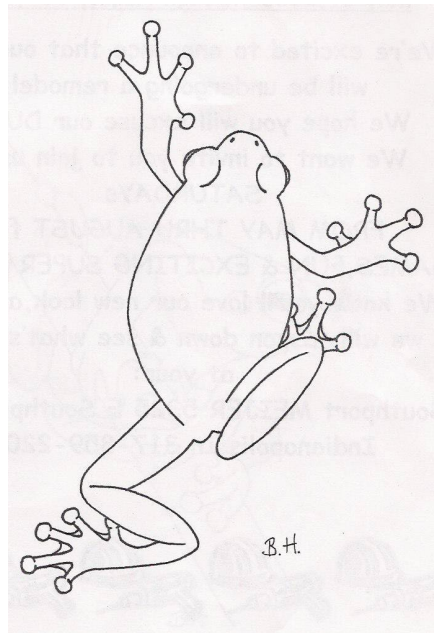
Damon Theis
www.degei.com



Pat Hammond, Holly Carter, and Angela Thomas work the H.H.S. booth at the Midwest Reptile Show.



Patrons looking for the best deals in herps!



Artwork by Barry Hammer

Keeping Large "Constricting" Snakes The Rewards vs. The Responsibilities

By Ed Ferrer

As a herp hobbyist for 30 years I have kept in my collection many large "constricting" snakes. Although the general public often thinks of "constricting" snakes as being huge pythons or boas, actually a majority of snakes subdue their prey by constricting. That includes corn snakes, numerous other rat snakes, king snakes and milk snakes. But the large snakes always capture the public's imagination. When I do my snake programs for schools, libraries, scout troops, and other groups the hands down favorites of my audiences are my large Burmese pythons and reticulated pythons. Their beauty and size always leave a lasting impression with them. But I always emphasize that these species are not for beginning "herpers" and I always caution about the possible consequences of handling large snakes. Anyone thinking about keeping these large species needs to do a lot of research regarding their intentions.

What snakes grow to a size that makes them potentially dangerous to humans? Only five species reach a size that might be considered a risk to humans. These are the (1.) Indian python, *Python molurus*, (of which the popular Burmese python, *Python molurus bivittatus*, is a subspecies; (2.) reticulated python, *Python reticulatus*; (3.) African rock python, *Python sebae*; (4.) green anaconda, *Eunectes murinus*; and (5.) amethystine python, *Morelia amethystina*. Only two of these species, the Burmese python and the reticulated python, are commonly kept in the pet trade. These snakes are normally docile giants and hardy, undemanding "pets" that adapt well to captivity. But these snakes are deceptively strong and respond to primitive stimuli. Occasionally a mistake with these serpents have met with human fatality.

How can these snakes be kept safely? Let's examine what might make a snake bite. Snakes generally have poor eyesight. Therefore, a fast movement scares a snake that might result in a defensive strike. So whenever in the proximity of a snake, make sure your movements slow as not to upset your snake. Snakes are "head shy", They may perceive a movement toward their head as a threat, which may result in a strike. How can I remove a snake when I can't be certain that I reach toward their head? I slowly put a towel or pillow over their head and then take them out of their cage. I have never been struck using this method of removing a snake from its cage.

It has been my experience that if you are careful with your movements and then follow the below rules these giant snakes can be kept safely.

(1.) Never handle a large snake alone. I always emphasize that any herper should strictly follow the "eight foot rule". When dealing with any snake over eight feet always have a second person with you. If dealing with a snake over 12 feet a third person is a good idea. Whenever I exhibit any of my large pythons in my programs, I always get two or three "volunteers" from my audience to help handle them or they don't come out.

(2.) Never allow the scent of a warm blooded animal (a prey species such as a mouse or rat) or perhaps a dog or cat be on your clothes or body when handling a snake. These animals react to the primitive stimulus of such a scent and then may strike anything that moves. (They aren't the "sharpest tool in the shed".) Make sure your hands and arms are washed clean before handling your snake.

(3.) Never allow a large snake to roam freely in a room occupied by humans. Sometimes people may make a fast or threatening movement around a snake or accidentally step or trip over them leading to a potentially dangerous encounter.

(4.) Always keep your large snake in a securely locked, escape-proof cage. It should be only accessible to the owner. Aquariums with screen tops are never to be used with large snakes as they are certainly not strong enough to contain a large serpent.

(5.) Never handle a large constricting snake while drinking alcohol! (duh!) Often

drinking alcohol makes people take liberties they normally wouldn't try.

(6.) Never allow a large snake to drape around your shoulders and neck. Since they are so strong, these snakes can cause problems by just holding on. If a snake is startled, they often respond by tightening its grip which could lead to a very dangerous accidental situation.

There have been rare occasions when a mistake dealing with these snakes have lead to a human death. In all my research I have only found one such case in Indiana. Last September a 21 year old man attempted to apply Listerine to an 11 foot long reticulated python alone. He was found later in the snake room dead. The best guess is that trying to administer the Listerine to the snake's mouth, the snake reacted to the probable burning sensation by tightening around the man's neck. Apparently the man had the snake on its shoulders when trying to administer the medicine. It is important to realize that the snake did not bite the man, so apparently it wasn't an attack just an unfortunate response to the medicine. Partly because of this incident there were two bills proposed to the Indiana legislature that would make all constricting snakes with the potential of reaching a length of 6 feet to be "prohibited". Fortunately both measures did not make it out of committee this year. While this incident was tragic, I must point out that if the above rules #1 and #6 were followed this death certainly would have been avoided.

Another fact to consider is that these snakes are not a danger to the general public. There has never been a case of an escaped snake causing a human death. The danger is only to the owners of these animals. I don't go cliff diving because I don't think I could jump far enough to not end up crashing into the side of the cliff. I don't ride motorcycles. (I prefer to have metal around me and not just under me.) I wouldn't consider going quail hunting with Vice President Chaney either. But after considerable research and taking reasonable precautions I have decided to keep large constricting snakes. Why should hundreds (and perhaps thousands) of responsible herpers be limited because of one incident? There are drownings every year but a ban on swimming isn't considered. People have to be responsible for their actions. If a person acts irresponsibly with a large snake, that person should be prohibited from owning these animals and the animals given to a responsible person, just like a person who is convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol might loose his privilege of driving.

Clearly the best answer is the education regarding these snakes not legislation. The Hoosier Herpetological Society is dedicated to educating the public regarding all reptiles and amphibians and the conservation of these often misunderstood species. We have done numerous public displays and programs throughout the years and would volunteer our services and knowledge to help lead to the more responsible ownership of these species.

A THOUGHT ON HERP REGULATIONS

If anyone should be concerned about large reptiles, it's the state of Florida. They have more nonnative species of reptiles and amphibians than native ones, What does the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission[FWC] do ? They don't ban the ownership of certain animals; they require that the reptiles be implanted with radio frequency identification [RFID] technology. These rules take effect on January 1' 2008 for new pet owners; and current owners have until July 1' 2008 to comply with the law. The species requiring tags are Burmese python, Reticulated python, African rock python, Amethystine python, Green anaconda and Nile monitor. These animals were named as "reptiles of concern" and a possible threat if they get into the environment. Owners have to submit a written plan for recapture in the event of a natural disaster or a wily escape.

The FWC then has a data bank, that if the animals show up in the wild; whether thru escape or release; to trace back to the owner. Then the people can be held accountable with fines. The tags are about \$50. This might be something the Indiana Legislature might consider. I had to get my Box turtles tagged.

Dave Mitchell

RE: Miami Herald 2/14/07, Herp Digest Vol.1 issue 26 2/20/07

HERP OF THE MONTH

Spring Peeper *Pseudacris crucifer*

By Wendell Zetterbrrg

The Spring Peeper is a small frog heard much more often than seen. According to Frogwatch USA, it is the most abundant frog heard in the United States. This small treefrog can be from fawn to yellow gray to dark brown, but usually has an “X” on its back, occasionally broken up (the origin of it’s Latin name, crucifer). Small toe pads are found at the end of slightly webbed feet. It is found in most of the eastern half of the US and statewide in Indiana. Its size ranges from 19-33.5mm with females slightly larger than males, and northern regions slightly smaller. The males call is a loud “PEEP” and when large choruses call it sounds like sleigh bells. During their breeding season is the best time to find them. In early March to early May, large groups migrate to their breeding pools. The calls can be deafening! Occasionally found and heard during the summer, winter and fall. I heard one in Clinton County in September and have read reports of callers in Southern IN this January.

Though very abundant, their populations are localized near woodland areas.

Source: Minton, Sherman A. 2001, Amphibians and Reptiles of Indiana (revised second edition), Indiana Academy of Science

Inkley, Douglas B. 2006, Final Report Assessment of Frogwatch USA Data 1998-2005, for USGS.



(Photo- Wendell Z.) Spring peeper *Pseudacris crucifer*

Cold blooded facts

Submitted by Jim Horton

Long lives of herps.

The Marine toad has been known to live up to 24 years.

Ball pythons may live up to 45 years.

A captive Tiger salamander has lived to 20 years.

An adult wild caught Mexican Beaded lizard lived to be 33 years of age.

Source: Longevity of Reptiles and Amphibians in North American Collections, Second Edition –
bSnider A. and Bowler K.

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

New

Randy Swenson

Degei Inc. (Sustaining membership)

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Field Herpers

It's time to renew your annual hunting/fishing license for the season. The current 2006 license becomes invalid at the end of this month. Indiana State law requires at least a hunting or fishing license to collect herps in the state. Persons with a registered license may collect up to four of each species of non-endangered amphibians and reptiles.

Be a part of the
Central Indiana Frog Watchers
Local Chapter
www.frogwatch.org

Meetings are the first Wednesday of each Month
The first meeting will be April 4th 2007

With special guest speaker

Zack Walker
*Indiana's State
Herpetologist*

(Herpetologist is someone that studies
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22nd Midwest Herpetological Symposium Shot glasses

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Now available – Beautiful blue shot glasses from the 22nd Midwest Herpetological Symposium. Get them at the General Meetings or at the Midwest Reptile Show – HHS booth for only \$2.00 each

SYMPOSIUM SHIRTS FOR SALE

2006 Midwest Herpetological Symposium "official" shirts are now on sale at the reduced price of \$12.00. These shirts feature amphibians and reptiles from Indiana. Sizes are limited so hurry for best selection! Look for them at the Midwest Reptile Show or the General Meetings!



Close up of design



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For Sale: 75 gallon saltwater aquarium and all accessories. Like new, \$200.00 obo. Call (317) 373-6010

For Sale: Green tree pythons c.b. 03/03/06 high yellow parents, 400.00 each. All animals guaranteed to be eating and healthy. Mike Wood 574-269-3441 or email at: 2bears@myvine.com

Ride Needed: Bloomington HHS member in need of a ride to the meetings, and possibly the Midwest Reptile Show. Will chip in \$ for gas. Please tell me I'm not the only HHS member in the Bloomington/Bedford area! Contact Sheryl at Roseroar1@aol.com

Monty's Reptiles, Education and Adoption

A non-profit organization based in Terre Haute, IN dedicated to educating the public about local and exotic reptiles. We also take in unwanted reptiles, and find new appropriate homes for them.

Website: www.montysreptiles.org Steve Nard (812) 210-8505 email – montysreptiles@yahoo.com

HERP HAPPENINGS

March 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

April 18, 2007 – General Meeting, Special Guest Speaker: Byram Feltner, Kentucky Reptile Zoo, Topic – *Gila Monsters and Beaded Lizards*.

April 21, 2007 – HHS Live herp exhibit, Garfield Park Conservatory. Time – 11am – 3pm. Focusing on rainforest herps.

April 28, 2007 – Earth Day Indiana. Downtown Indianapolis at the War Memorial Park.

May 4th & 5th 2007 – Herpetology Weekend. A funfilled weekend of herp presentations, live animal demonstrations, and field trips! Natural Bridge State Resort Park, Slade, KY

May 16, 2007 – General Meeting, Special Guest Speaker, Dean Allesandrini, Greater Cincinnati Herp Society; Topic: Surviving a cottonmouth bite and conservation projects of Greater Cincy Herp Society

May 19, 2007 – Hoosier Herpout. Hardin Ridge Recreation Area, Hoosier National Forest, Monroe Reservoir, Bloomington.

June 9&10, 2007 – Reptile Invasion, Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve, Evansville, IN. One of the largest fundraisers of the year. Features programs and live animal exhibits.

July 14 and 15 – Indiana Pet Expo, White River State Park, Indianapolis.

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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.**

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**Hoosier Herpetological Society
MEMBERSHIP FORM**

☐ **New Member**

☐ **Renewal**

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Herpetological Interest(s)

**Hoosier Herpetological Society
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Address Correction Requested

☐ If this area is checked, your membership will expire this month!