

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 29 Number 11

November 2018

www.hoosierherpsoc.org

H.H.S. Monthly Meeting Holliday Park Nature Center Auditorium Wednesday November 21st

**Guest Speakers: Esmeralda DeLaCruz & Aaron Esch
Of Sassquash Exotic Pets & Reptiles**

**Topics: Husbandry & Breeding of Savanna Monitors,
Bearded Dragons & California king snakes**

Esmeralda and Aaron began taking in reptiles that needed medical attention, getting them back to health and finding them new homes. From that start they formed the business of Sassquash Exotic Pets and Reptiles for the past thirteen years. They started breeding reptiles just four years ago. They will discuss the different needs of each species, such as housing, feeding, and breeding. It will be a good chance to ask questions regarding these popular species.

Welcome HHS members!

RENEWALS

Holly and Roger Carter
Richard Nohr
Will Phillipi
Kimberly A. Scott
Martha Horton

NEW

Kathy Bottles
Laura E. Wooley
Meredith J. Rodriguez
Ben Kugler
Aubrey Kenefict
Rhoda Johnson

President's message

Jim Horton

Thanks to Mr. Andrew Ahl for his presentation last month on the Radiated tortoises in Madagascar. This talk was both uplifting and upsetting due to the nature of the possible outcome for this species.

This month we will vote for 2019 HHS officer positions. There is still time to take nominations so if you would like to nominate yourself or someone else, please do so at the next meeting.

Our Christmas party is coming up quick! Its Saturday, December 1st at MCL Cafeteria on the south side of Indy. Look for the flier in this issue. We won't have a meeting or newsletter for December.

Our first meeting of the New Year will be January 16. This is going to be our **annual photography contest**. Judging will be from our members at the meeting. Cash prizes for the winners! More info to come in the next newsletter.

Just another reminder: the Christmas party will take the place of our regular meeting. There will be no newsletter for December.

I'd like to welcome our new members for this month and those who've joined up this year! Thanks so much for your support!

2019 HHS ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Nominees:

President – Jim Horton (unopposed)

Vice-President – Heather White, Rex Morell, Dale Schoentrup, Rick Marrs

Treasurer – Roger Carter (unopposed)

Secretary – Holly Carter (unopposed)

Sergeant At Arms – Pat Hammond, Rex Morell, Dale Schoentrup

October meeting (Review)

By Jim Horton

Last month's guest speaker, Mr. Andrew Ahl, spoke about the work that the Turtle Survival Alliance is doing with a huge confiscation of radiated tortoises in Madagascar. In April of this year, Madagascar authorities found a house filled with over 10,000 radiated tortoises (10,976 to be exact). These animals were taken from wild populations and were most likely headed for the black market.

This was an unsuspecting house in a normal setting. Andrew reported that the tortoises were detected by a strong unpleasant odor coming from the house.

From the time of his presentation, they had already lost 1,097 tortoises due to the horrid conditions in the house.

Many of the tortoises were taken to village in Madagascar called Des Tortues. Here they were counted, hydrated, and were given exams. Many had problems with malnourishment, broken bones, and prolapses. A small house served as the base and was equipped with a crude ICU for medical examinations. Necropsies were performed on the deceased animals to indicate death probabilities.

Each medicated tortoise was painted with colored dots indicating the type of drugs used and times it was given.

A large group of tortoises were taken to an island near Madagascar mainland called, Lava Volo. Here they housed 17,000 tortoises from other confiscations.

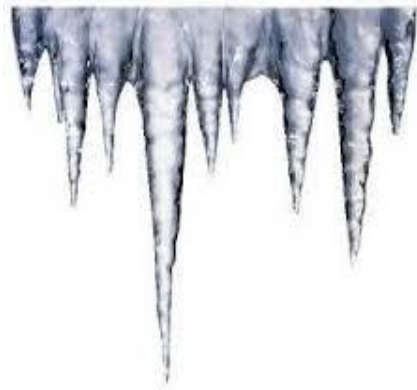
The island was in need of caging and facilities. Andrew assisted in building a clinic and other needed structures. He noted that the TSA's mission was to focus on four things - Educating the people of the villages, raising awareness on the plight of the radiated tortoises, and complete building of facilities.

A few facts from Andrew's talk: 65% of the natural range of this tortoise is depleted. This species is assessed to be extinct in the wild in 20-40 years. Radiated tortoises on the black market are sold and sent overseas. Many adults are sent to Asia for consumption. The liver is believed to have medicinal properties. Juveniles are sold for the pet trade.

Special note: just days after Andrew's talk, another large group of these tortoises had been confiscated. Madagascar has its share of wildlife pitfalls. It is unfortunate that fighting this problem will most certainly be an ongoing effort.

Be prepared for winter!

Icy/frigid conditions could be hazardous to your herps. Whether our animals are tropical or temperate species, it's always a good idea to have a backup plan in the case of power failure. When Indiana winters are at the worst, you don't want your beloved animals to succumb to life without light and heat. Good temporary sources are personal/pocket heat pads, generators, propane heat, and kerosene heaters.



Indianapolis Zoo Deserts Exhibit: Behind the Scenes

By Heather White, Vice President

On the Sunday of the Midwest Herpetological Symposium, about 27 attendees took a tour of the Indianapolis Zoo Deserts exhibit. The tour was led by zookeeper Andrew Ahl, who has also been a speaker at our HHS monthly meetings.



The display area is kept around 84 degrees year around to keep all of the reptiles warm and healthy. It houses several species including iguanas, tortoises, spiny tail lizards, plated lizards, and even meerkats. The



keepers begin their day by checking on all of the animals in the display area and those needing medical care behind the scene (below left). The exhibit is cleaned and water refreshed. Salads are prepared (below right) 4 days a week for foraging species in addition to all the daily food fed to the others.

There is a separate section where the snakes are on display but that is currently closed for remodeling. These enclosures are in need of a face-lift so the snakes will be kept behind the scenes until completed in 2019. The geometric glass done ceiling will also be replaced in 2019 due to age. Below are some photos of a few snakes in their collection.



Besides caring for their resident educational animals, the zoo participates in many conservation projects. The Deserts keepers have bred Jamaican iguanas which were once thought to be extinct. They are kept in special enclosures where they have privacy for breeding purposes.

It was great to see these amazing animals being so well cared for so that everyone can enjoy and become educated about them. Below are a few more reptiles from the exhibit.



2018 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

November 21, 2018 – HHS meeting, 7:00PM, Holliday Park Nature Center. Guest speaker: Esmeralda DeLaCruz and Aron Esch, (Sassquach Exotic Pets and Reptiles). Topic – “Husbandry and Breeding of Savanna Monitors, Bearded Dragons, and California Kingsnakes.”

December 1, 2018 – HHS Christmas party at MCL south, 650 south East St. Indianapolis. Time: 6 – 8:30 More info. to come.

January 13, 2019 - 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 (HHS members only) www.midwestreptile.com Other dates: 2/24, 4/7, 6/2, 8/25, 11/10

January 16, 2019 – HHS meeting, Holliday Park Nature Center, 7:00PM, HHS annual photography contest. All entries should be in 8x10 formats (framed). Wild and Captive categories. Cash prizes for winners.

February 20, 2019 – HHS meeting. Holliday Park Nature Center, 7:00PM, Topic - TBA

SNAKE ROAD

By Jim Horton

By now many of you have heard, or even have visited the famous “Snake Road”. This place is like no other natural herpetological happening – anywhere! People come from all over the Midwest, the country, and even around the world to see this phenomenon.

Southern Illinois is littered with forests, rivers, and lowland watersheds. One such place has it all. The LaRue/Pine Hills Ecological Area in the Trail of Tears State Forest is located in southeast Illinois just east of the Mississippi River.

Large sandstone pillared bluffs beautify the area as they tower above the road. The road bisects these natural rock formations from the swamps, woodlands, and the Big Muddy River. Many snake species spend the warmer season in these areas and retreat to the giant rocks for the winter. In fact, this happens every year and has for a very long time; probably longer than modern man has been around.

The road is blocked or gated from vehicular traffic every spring and every fall for a few months. This timeline is when most herpetological enthusiasts, professionals, students, naturalists, and just the curious gather here. We’ve met folks from Canada, Germany, and other countries. Of course you’ll converse with many herpers from Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois and Missouri but they will come from almost everywhere.

This region is a where many southern species meet their most northern range. Northern species also extend their range here and some interbreed. The speckled king and the black king snake is one example. The kings here, known to herpers as “Shawnee kings”, exhibit light yellow speckling throughout the black colored body. They’re quite a treat to find. Green treefrogs are more of a southern/costal species.



Green tree frog rests by day on green brier.

They are quite common here. Bird-voiced treefrogs are also found in this region.

I would say that the most iconic species to be encountered here are the Western cottonmouths. They are typically found all over the deep south in or near swamps and rivers. Here, they’re the most common snake on the road. On a good day, one might see as many as 60 or more! This also gives the place a bit of danger. You must be careful where placing feet and hands. In the fall, the brown, rust, and tan patterns of the young

cottonmouths will blend in perfectly with leaf litter.



Young cottonmouth blends with decaying eaves.

Larger adults may be found on the road, in the woodland edge, at the base of the sandstone bluffs, or traversing uphill to reach the rock.

Second most common might be either the rough green, plain belly, or ribbon snakes. We see them on a regular basis on or near the road. Rough greens and ribbons may be found basking in briar tangles near the water edge. But more often we find them stretched out, moving towards the giant rock face that lies just beyond the woodlands.

If you visit here enough, you’ll get to see species that you may not have ever encountered. I’ve recently encountered some firsts. Last year, we found Mississippi green water snakes. This year, I was finally able to lock down a red milk. It was on a whim. We had just traveled most of the road and it was getting late. While contemplating what to do next, I turned around and glanced at a large red milk snake slowly making its way up an incline. Bingo!!



Red milk snake (adult)

That is why we come here! We took many photos of this beauty. Shortly after, a large group of students and their professor from Ball State University showed up. We left it with them assuming they would release it after photos.

I'm not the best at seeing the tiny ground dwellers such as the ringneck, earth, and redbelly snakes. Just not lucky enough I guess. On our last trip, Neill Jones remarkably spotted a young redbelly snake among the leaf litter.

On that same day we were headed back to the car because the sun was going down, wind was picking up, and temps were in the low 50's. Pat Hammond spied the last snake on the road. It was a tiny hatchling black rat snake. It blended in perfectly with the dusty, slate/gray gravel. This little guy (or girl) was cold to the touch and wasn't moving much. We took

pics and left it safely off of the road.

I still haven't seen a timber on the road itself. I have found them in other areas in the region. Haven't seen a western mud snake yet either but it will come.

Remember: everything is protected. No bags, containers, or hooks allowed.

If you haven't made the trek to southern Illinois for Snake Road, you might want to consider it next spring or fall.

HAND HELD HERPS (Arizona)

Article by Roger Carter - Photos – Roger Carter



The Western Lyresnake, *Trimorphodon biscutatus*, measures twenty-four to forty inches long. The background color is gray with un-even blotches that are a reddish-brown color with light gray centers. There is a lyre shaped pattern on the top of the head. These snakes can be found in rocky areas and on mountain slopes mostly in southern Arizona and parts of central Arizona. Prey consists of lizards, bats, rodents and birds. It has a mild venom that has no effect on humans and they may coil around their prey to either hold it or to constrict it.

We are still at the International Herpetological Symposium near Rodeo, New Mexico, and, one night after that day's speakers, many of us spread out for some night time road cruising. A couple of the guys took us to a mountain area to drive the road spiraling up and down the mountain. We found some Western Diamondback Rattlesnakes, *Crotalus atrox*, an Arizona Tarantula, *Aphonopelma chalcodes*, my first tarantula in the wild, and we found this nice Western Lyresnake crossing the road. It didn't try to bite or put up any kind of a fuss. I don't remember it even musking on any of us. On the way back to the conference center, we saw a few Mojave Rattlesnakes, *Crotalus scutulatus*, crossing the road.



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HHS Board of Directors - 2018

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Appointed Board Members for 2018

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	Rex Morrell		wrmorell@gmail.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.**

MEMBERSHIP FORM

____ New Member

____ Renewal

____ Name

____ Address

____ City

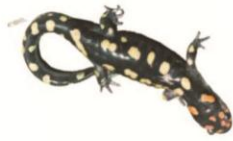
____ Email Address

____ Individual/Family Membership \$20.00

____ Sustaining Membership \$25.00 or more

____ Herpetological Interest(s)

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



____ Dated Material Enclosed

____ Address Correction Requested

____ If this area is checked, it's time to renew your membership!