



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 36 Number 10

October 2025

HHS Monthly Meeting

Guest Speaker – Roger Carter (HHS Board Member)

Topic – Knives, Swords, and Herpetological Art

Roger has been collecting these herpetological related items for years. He had written articles about them in this newsletter for 3 ½ years. This presentation will feature some of the most prized pieces in his collection.

Wednesday, October 15, 7:00PM
Holliday Park Nature Center

www.hoosierherpsociety.org

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

Nancy Kloskowski
Rachel Monday
David Rubin

New Members

Hannah McKay

Herps in Harmony

Mary A. Hylton

If you're longing for a bit of peace and harmony in the world these days, take a drive down to Posey County in the southwest corner of the state, approximately 30 miles north of Evansville, to the tiny town of New Harmony. There you just might find a slice of that peace you're seeking. Every couple of years, my husband and I travel to this beloved destination to restore peace of mind and restoration of spirit. Before we retired, such jaunts became extremely important and even necessary! Even nowadays, since we've retired, we still relish the time we spend there. We always return refreshed and mellow. Its name, New Harmony, speaks for itself as we bask in a "new harmony" of spirit that we experience during our visit.

New Harmony, however, is so much more than just a place to retreat for rest and relaxation. To background you a bit, New Harmony is the site of not just one, but two early American utopian communities. The Harmony Society, led by George Rapp, arrived in the United States in 1804 and settled in Pennsylvania before purchasing 20,000 acres on the Wabash River and moving to Indiana in 1814. The Harmonists were religious Separatists from Germany who pursued Christian perfection through every aspect of their daily conduct. They sold New Harmony in 1825 to Robert Owen, a Welsh-born industrialist and social reformer.

Owen, along with his business partner William Maclure, an educator and the "Father of American Geology", hoped to establish a second utopia that was to be a new moral world based on equal education and equal social status. They brought the "Boatload of Knowledge" to New Harmony, navigating there with many scientists and educators including Entomologist, Conchologist and Herpetologist, Thomas Say. Years after Say's death, his firefly became Indiana's official state insect on March 23, 2018. Although their utopian vision eventually dissolved, the creative efforts of the Owen/Maclure period are still evident today.

You may ask, "what does all of this have to do with herps?" Well, among the forty passengers (or "Boatloaders") was Thomas Say, the Academy of Sciences' Librarian who was also a renowned American entomologist, conchologist, and...drum roll...herpetologist. His studies of insects and shells, numerous contributions to scientific journals, and scientific expeditions to Florida, Georgia, the Rocky Mountains, Mexico, and elsewhere made him an internationally known naturalist. Say has been called the father of American descriptive entomology and American conchology. He also served as curator at the American Philosophical Society (elected in 1817), and professor of natural history at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1819-20, Say's official account of an expedition to the Rocky Mountains and the tributaries of the Missouri River included the first descriptions of several mammals and birds as well as reptiles that included: checkered whiptail lizard, collared lizard, ground skink, western rat snake, and western ribbon snake. At New Harmony, Thomas Say carried on his monumental work describing insects and mollusks. Many of the scientific names assigned by Say are no longer accepted. Lists of the former names matched with current scientific and common names are available.

Coming back to the future, it goes without saying that New Harmony is a truly fascinating place. AND...a trek to New Harmony would not be complete without visiting the Working Men's Institute! It was founded in 1838 and is Indiana's oldest continuously operating public library. Its special collections and second floor museum are a "must-see." Free and open to the public, the museum includes exhibits of history, reproductions of art masterpieces and natural history specimens. It's the natural history portion that contains a wealth of curious oddities (i.e., 8-legged calf-you have to see for yourself) along with various specimens of bird skulls, eggs, an alligator gar, snakes preserved in jars, and amphibian and reptile specimens of yesteryear (see below). New Harmony has something for everyone. Be sure to check it out!



American bullfrog



Eastern painted turtle



Eastern box turtle



Diamondback rattlesnake



Common snapping turtle

Sources:

- <https://www.visitindiana.com/listing/new-harmony-state-historic-site/1604>
- <https://www.visitnewharmony.com/welcome>
- <https://workingmensinstitute.org/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Say
- <https://daily.jstor.org/a-boatload-of-knowledge-for-new-harmony/>
- <https://www.usi.edu/science/geology-and-physics/new-harmony/boatload-of-knowledge>

46th Annual Midwest Herp Conference

By Holly Carter

This conference was held October 3-5 by the Southwest Missouri Herp Society in Springfield, Mo. This has been an annual event hosted by various herp societies around the Midwest. In 2020, things lost their momentum when Covid hit the world. We (members of these societies) have been trying to regain our former activities.

The Friday night icebreaker had SMHS President Nathan Stigall welcoming and presenting upcoming talks and activities for the weekend, with information on the silent and live auctions which are an integral part of funding for these events.

Talks started with Dr. Day Ligon. MO State University, Springfield, MO.

Presenting Conservation and Ecology of Mesoamerica's Endangered Central American River Turtle

This turtle is highly aquatic, often doesn't even leave the water to lay eggs. These eggs are incredible as to keeping the embryos alive and not drowning them. If adult turtles are even picked up from underwater (the only way to catch and study them) they become stressed.

Scientists have to do most of their counting and studies underwater but luckily, they have found out a lot about them. Males and females stay near each other, (sort of like cattle in herds) and wend their way through the waterway as they go about their Daily living.

Professor Ashley Exendine. College of Ozarks, Point Lookout, MO.
Presented Stewardship of Herpetofauna at College of the Ozarks

As well as teaching the biological aspects of reptiles and amphibians, she strives to teach students as well as the general public in the behavior of These animals to ease their fears and phobias for a course in better understanding, bringing less fear and more tolerance of these animals.

Lillian Hinds (Young Herpetologist Winner) Fort Wayne, IN.
Presented Conservation of Blue Poison Dart Frogs

She detailed the micro habitat and how feeding on the local insects such as ants contributes to the toxicity of these frogs and that toxicity is retained In the skin of the frog, then told of the poison being diluted out of the frog when is kept on a different diet in captivity. She reported on how the male and female frogs tend to the eggs and tadpoles with the female visiting daily to deposit an infertile egg to each tadpole as a food source.

Kate Blau (Young Herpetologist Winner) Raleigh, NC.
Presented Green Anoles: An Overlooked Reptile Gem

A discussion of green anoles, their unique characteristics and history. Their past as a beginner reptile pets in herpetology, and discoursing on their proper care and feeding. She brought up difficulty with feeding and caring for hatchlings as well as needed hiding places.

Daniel Yates (Neurobiologist, St. Louis, MO).
Neuroscience of Reptiles

Basis vertebrate brains share a common morphology, but reptile brains also show a wide Variety of structural differences. By comparing these differences and pathways, we get a better insight into how different reptiles react to their environment and humans.

Dr, Bridget Zacharias (Galloway Village Veterinary, Springfield, MO
Advancing and Improving the Lives of Our Reptile Companions.)

Enhancing the lives of our captive reptiles by stimulating natural behaviors, promoting physical and mental well-being, and preventing boredom. She covers environment, cognitive, and enrichment activities tailored to the specific needs of the species.

Dr, Brian Greene (MO State University, Springfield, MO)
Sources of Variation in Diet and Foraging Behavior of Northern Cottonmouths

Cottonmouths feed on a wide assortment of prey types that vary with location and snake size. Feeding behavior also varies with type of prey and temperature of location. Results of data were integrated between observation in the wild as well as laboratory animals. These snakes know rodents are dangerous to the snake as well, so they bite, envenomate, let go and track down this prey. But when they catch a fish, frogs, or bird, they hang on to their prey as these animals cannot be tracked.

Dr. Jeff Briggler (MO State Herpetologist, Jefferson City, MO)
Life and Times of a State Agency Herpetologist

Presentation provided a summary of job responsibilities such as: Research, Survey, Monitoring, Regulations and Educational Efforts. Emphasis is placed on recovery activities associated with several rare or endangered amphibian and reptile species in Missouri.

It was a time for banquet feasting, some drinking, and a lot of socializing. A time for renewing old friendships and meeting new ones. The conference ended with a behind the scenes visit to the Dickerson Park Zoo and for discounts at the Wild World Zoo in Branson MO. The next conference will be held in Indianapolis! Stay tuned!

What you missed at the last meeting

By Holly Carter

The September Speaker was Nate Engbrecht, State of Indiana Herpetologist with the Dept. of Natural Resources.

TOPIC: Hellbenders, Crawfish Frogs, and Kirtland's Snakes:

Hellbenders: Ongoing study and head starting release of Hellbenders into the Blue River drainage with some recaptures (they are microchipped).

Rocks are being removed in places along the river by people not aware of these animals and not knowing this can cause death if a hellbender gets crushed by rocks tipping over.

They are still being head-started to a size that doesn't fit a usual predator. Juveniles have been found and that shows reproduction is remarkable as only older adults had been found.

Flooding has happened and this can move a hellbender out into a flooded field with not only a build up of silt on the animal (it breathes thru its skin) but getting trapped out in a field when the water subsides, They are not built for walking.

Crawfish Frogs: Some have been relocated to historic areas (now replanted and set up with the crayfish they share a home with).

An area known as Angels Mounds near Evansville was a historic area and after getting some from a thriving community, the DNR sought to re-make this area, seed it with conspecifics, and restart the area. The eggs that were taken were also head-started to give these animals every chance. Things are looking good with the frogs and more areas are being planned.

Kirtland's Snakes: A small snake native to the Midwest United states is being studied by the Sycamore Land Trust, IN. DNR, and INDY Zoo's species survival have joined together to plan wetland conservation areas and the Kirtland's have been found on some of their planned sites as well as areas that hadn't been thought of before.

They have relocated 80 animals from developing land projects to safer but similar habitats.

Meet the robo-bunny: This tiny, furry robot is taking on invasive pythons in Florida

Burmese pythons have terrorized the Florida Everglades for years. Scientists are hoping robotic bunnies will end the reptile's reign over the region.

USA Today July 17, 2005

Among the cypress and saw grass of South Florida, a new weapon in the state's fight to remove invasive pythons lurks, waiting to entice its prey.

Yes, it's a mechanical rabbit. Just don't call it the Energizer bunny.

Researchers at the University of Florida have outfitted 40 furry, fake toy rabbits with motors and tiny heaters that work together to mimic the movements and body temperature of a marsh rabbit – a favorite python meal.

The fluffy army's mission? Help conservationists remove the highly destructive serpents that have invaded the state's ecosystem.

Why are they using robot rabbits?

The bunnies spin. They shake. They move randomly, and their creation is based on more than a decade of scientific review that began with a 2012 study that transported rabbits into Everglades National Park to see if, and how quickly, they would become python prey.

"The rabbits didn't fare well," said Robert McCleery, a UF professor of wildlife ecology and conservation who's leading the robot bunny study that launched this summer.

Subsequent studies revealed that pythons are drawn to live rabbits in pens with an average python attraction rate of about one snake per week. But having multiple live rabbits in pens spread across a formidable landscape is cumbersome and requires too much manpower to care for them.

So, why not robot bunnies?

“We want to capture all of the processes that an actual rabbit would give off,” McCleery said. “But I’m an ecologist. I’m not someone who sits around making robots.”

Instead, colleague Chris Dutton, also a UF ecology professor but more mechanically adept, pulled the stuffing out of a toy rabbit and replaced it with 30 electronic components that are solar-powered and controlled remotely so that researchers can turn them on and off at specific times.

The rabbits were placed in different areas of South Florida in July 2025 for a test phase that includes a camera programmed to recognize python movement and alert researchers when one nears the rabbit pen. One of the biggest challenges was waterproofing the bunnies so the correct temperature could still be radiated. McCleery was reluctant to give specifics on where the rabbit pens are located.

“I don’t want people hunting down my robo-bunnies,” he said.

Version 2.0 of the study will add bunny scent to the stuffed rabbits if motion and heat aren’t enough to fool the snakes.

Why are Burmese pythons a problem?

Burmese pythons aren’t native to Florida. They were introduced to the state through the pet trade in the 1970s and released over time into the wild. The snakes gained a foothold in Everglades National Park by the mid-1980s, according to the 2021 Florida Python Control plan, and quickly proliferated, threatening other key species in the ecosystem.

A 2012 study by the United States Geological Survey found the pythons had contributed to population declines of a half-dozen animals, including raccoons, opossums, bobcats, foxes, marsh rabbits and cottontail rabbits

The USGS puts the Burmese python population in the Everglades in the tens of thousands.

Pythons have migrated north from the park, and researchers believe they may be able to survive as far north as Georgia if temperatures continue to warm and the snakes burrow during cold snaps.

What else is Florida doing to control the python population?

State officials trying to mitigate the python population have turned to many strategies, with varying degrees of success.

Renowned snake hunters from the Irula tribe in India were brought in to hunt and share their skills. People have used near-infrared cameras for python detection and specially designed traps. Some pythons are tracked by the DNA they shed in water.

The annual Florida Python Challenge has also gained legendary status, attracting hundreds of hunters each year vying for the \$10,000 grand prize. The 10-day challenge was developed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to remove the pythons from state land. This year’s challenge runs through July 20.

Starting in 2017, the South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission also began paying 100 bounty hunters hourly wages and bonuses based on the length of the snake caught.

The hunters have removed an estimated 15,800 snakes since 2019 and were called the “most effective management strategy in the history of the issue” by district invasive animal biologist Mike Kirkland.

Kirkland oversees the district’s hunters and is involved in other python removal projects, including the robo-bunny experiment.

“It’s projects like (McCleery’s) that can be used in areas of important ecological significance where we can entice the pythons to come out of their hiding places and come to us,” Kirkland said at the board meeting. “It could be a bit of a game changer.”

McCleery said he’s pleased state officials are willing to experiment.

“Our partners have allowed us to trial these things that may sound a little crazy,” McCleery said. “Working in the Everglades for 10 years, you get tired of documenting the problem. You want to address it.”

McCleery said researchers did not name robot rabbits, although he did bring one home that needed repair. His son named it “Bunbun.”

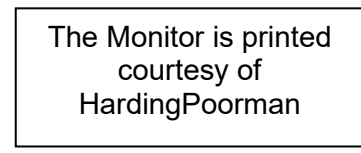
President's Message

Jim Horton

It's October and the field season is winding down. Hope you had a chance to participate in one of our events over the summer.

The 46th Annual Midwest Herpetological Symposium was held in Springfield, Missouri. I'm sad that I missed it again this year. Roger and Holly Carter were the event earlier this month and Holly covered the guest speakers in an article in this issue.

Roger Carter will be presenting his talk on knives, swords, and herp art this month. We'll close out the year with guest speaker, Daniel Yates (St. Louis Herp society) in November. Hope to see you at these meetings.



HHS Board of Directors - 2025

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2025 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

October 15, 2025 – Roger Carter (HHS), Topic – Knives, Swords, and Herp Art.

November 16, 2025 – Midwest Reptile Show, Indianapolis State Fairgrounds

November 19, 2025 – Daniel Yates (St. Louis Herp Society). Topic – Neuro Science in Reptiles.

Membership Form

new member renewal

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