

# 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 37 Numb

May 2026

## HHS Monthly Meeting

**Guest Speaker** - Gracie Hedgpeth, PhD student, Notre Dame

**Topic:** “Developing and Implementing a Prophylaxis  
Treatment Against Chytrid Fungus”

**Wednesday, May 20, 7:00PM**

**Holliday Park Nature Center**



Red-backed salamander  
(*Plethodon cinereus*)

# President's message

Jim Horton

Hello HHS members!

I hope your spring is going well so far. The weather has been beautiful and local herps are active!

We hope to have good results for the Herpout. I'll have a review in next newsletter next month. There are a good number of new members who have RSVP'd to attend this year. I can't wait to field herp with our group! Wish us luck!

Congratulations to our photo contest winners from last month! This month we have our Sherman Minton Presentation Award winner – Gracie Hedgpeth from Notre Dame. I hope you are able to attend this meeting to support her.

I would like to thank our members for their continuing support! I'd like to welcome new members as well!

The HHS is hosting the 47<sup>th</sup> Midwest Herpetological Symposium in November! This MHS is a fundraiser for the HHS as well as an entertaining and educational gathering. We will need our members to help make this a successful conference. If you would like to help with this event, please contact any of our board members.

We are looking for unique herp-related items for the auction. Artwork, sculptures, books, or any item(s) that might help raise funds. Please contact any board member for information on donating to the symposium auction.

## Welcome new and returning members

### Renewals

Hollyn Anderson  
Stephanie Buchenberger  
Anita Carter  
Mary Hylton  
Neill Jones  
Addison Marshall  
Dale Schoentrup  
Jackson Schoettle  
Jordan Sirosky  
Abbie Watson

### NEW

Lori Breitweiser  
Stephanie Mogenhan  
Stephanie Scurtu

[www.hoosierherpsociety.org](http://www.hoosierherpsociety.org)



HOOSIER  
HERPETOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY

## Sherman A. Minton Jr. Award

The Hoosier Herpetological Society is proud to offer a \$400 award in honor of Sherman A. Minton Jr. to support outstanding herpetological research projects. This annual award is open to students from Indiana-based academic institutions, with research topics welcomed from anywhere in the world.

The recipient will be invited to present their research at a 2026 or 2027 Hoosier Herpetological Society meeting, held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM at Holliday Park (6363 Spring Mill Rd, Indianapolis, IN).

### Application Details:

- **Submit a one-page or less description of your research topic.**
- **Be sure to include details on:**
  1. **Why this research is important**
  2. **How and why you chose this topic**
  3. **Where your research might lead in the future**
- **Include your contact information.**
- **Applications are due by June 1, 2026.**
- **Email materials to [treasurer@hoosierherpsociety.org](mailto:treasurer@hoosierherpsociety.org).**

For more information, visit: <https://www.hoosierherpsociety.org/sherman-a-minton-jr-studentpresentation->

The HHS is selling this comprehensive Indiana field guide for  
\$40 each.

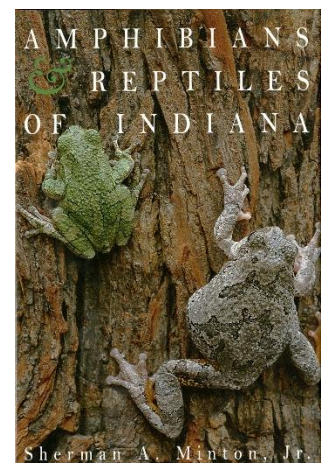
Get your Indiana field guide!

Amphibians & Reptiles of Indiana, Revised Second Edition

**Minton, Sherman A. Jr.**

ISBN 10: 1883362105 / ISBN 13: 9781883362102

Published by Indiana Academy of Science, 2001



**47<sup>th</sup> Midwest Herpetological Symposium**  
**Indianapolis Indiana**  
**November 13/14, 2026**  
Hosted by the Hoosier Herpetological Society



**Featured guest speakers:**

Dr. Thomas Pauley - Marshall University  
Nate Engbrecht - State Herpetologist, Indiana  
Jason Holzworth - Wildlife Photographer  
Terry Vandeventer – Herpetologist, Miss  
Bethannie Perrine – Indiana State University



# HHS 2026 Photography Contest

Last month, The HHS held its annual photo contest at the monthly meeting. HHS members were treated to a plethora of outstanding photos from fellow members. Before the contest, vice-president, Katie Kolcun presented our April, Herp of the Month. She brought “Buddy,” her black and white tegu. Buddy is a beautiful, well behaved tegu. Shes spent much time interacting and caring for him and it was evident due to its calm disposition. Thanks Katie!



The photo contest featured both a ‘wild’ and ‘captive’ category. The audience members judged the contests. Pat Hammond provided multitudes of pennies for judging. Solo cups were placed at each photo. To put it simply, the most pennies won first place, followed by second and third places.

## Congratulations to our winners:

### Wild Category

Doug Stemke - First Place (Male/female treefrogs)  
Jim Horton – Second Place (Bull Snake),  
Pat Hammond – (Rock rattlesnake)

### Captive Category

Roger Carter – First Place (Green tree python)  
Roger Carter - Second Place (Bearded dragon/Uromastyx)  
Jim Horton - Third Place (Kenyan sand boa)



The Monitor is printed  
courtesy of  
HardingPoorman

Look for the HHS  
on social media



# The Red-Backed Salamander: A Tiny Giant of Forest Biomass

Jim Horton

Deep beneath the fallen leaves of lives one of the most abundant the red-backed salamander small enough to fit in the palm of collectively represent an biomass and play a major role in

The red-backed salamander is a measuring between 2.5 and 5 for the reddish or orange stripe some individuals are completely dark gray or black. These salamanders thrive in cool, moist deciduous forests

where they hide beneath logs, rocks, bark, and leaf litter.



eastern North American forests vertebrates on the continent: (Plethodon cinereus). Though a hand, these salamanders astonishing amount of forest woodland ecosystems.

lungless salamander typically inches long. It is best known that runs down its back, though

Unlike frogs, red-backed salamanders do not need ponds or streams for reproduction. Females lay eggs in moist underground chambers, and young salamanders hatch as miniature adults. This adaptation allows the species to live far from standing water, increasing its range across forests from Canada to the southeastern United States.

Biomass refers to the total mass of living organisms within a given area. In ecology, biomass helps scientists understand how energy moves through ecosystems and which organisms dominate an environment.

Although individual red-backed salamanders weigh only a few grams, their populations can reach extraordinary densities. In some forests, **scientists have recorded more than 1,000 salamanders per acre**. When combined, their biomass may exceed that of birds and small mammals living in the same habitat.

Researchers studying Appalachian forests found that salamander biomass can rival or surpass the biomass of all breeding birds combined. This is remarkable because salamanders are rarely seen, yet they form a hidden foundation of forest life.

Red-backed salamanders are voracious predators of insects, mites, spiders, worms, and other tiny invertebrates. By consuming large numbers of leaf-litter organisms, they help regulate populations that affect decomposition and nutrient cycling.

Because these salamanders influence decomposer communities, they indirectly affect how quickly leaves break down on the forest floor. Slower decomposition can alter the movement of carbon through forest ecosystems, linking salamanders to broader climate-related processes.

Despite being predators themselves, red-backed salamanders also serve as prey for snakes, birds, small mammals, and larger amphibians. Their massive collective biomass makes them an important energy source within forest food webs.

Scientists often use red-backed salamanders as indicators of environmental quality. Since they breathe through their skin, they are highly sensitive to pollution, temperature changes, and moisture loss. Healthy salamander populations usually indicate healthy forests.

Deforestation, climate change, and habitat fragmentation threaten many salamander populations by drying forest floors and reducing shelter. Because their survival depends on moist environments, even small

environmental changes can have large impacts.

The red-backed salamander may not attract the same attention as bears, deer, or eagles, but its ecological importance is immense. Its extraordinary biomass demonstrates that even tiny, secretive animals can shape entire ecosystems.

Beneath every rotting log and layer of damp leaves, these salamanders quietly maintain the balance of the forest — proving that some of nature's most powerful forces are also its smallest.

## **HHS Board of Directors - 2026**

PRESIDENT	Jim Horton	(317) 443-4845	<a href="mailto:president@hoosierherpsoc.org">president@hoosierherpsoc.org</a>
VICE-PRESIDENT	Katie Kolcun		<a href="mailto:k.a.kolcun@gmail.com">k.a.kolcun@gmail.com</a>
SECRETARY	Holly Carter	(317) 873-6561	<a href="mailto:drymarchonzz@hotmail.com">drymarchonzz@hotmail.com</a>
TREASURER/MEMBERSHIP	Brenten Reust		<a href="mailto:treasurer@hoosierherpsoc.org">treasurer@hoosierherpsoc.org</a>

## **Appointed Board Members for 2026**

EDUCATION/OUTREACH	Steve Striedinger		<a href="mailto:Steve.striedinger@gmail.com">Steve.striedinger@gmail.com</a>
EDITOR	Jim Horton	(317) 443-4845	<a href="mailto:stardali84@hotmail.com">stardali84@hotmail.com</a>
WEBSITE COORDINATOR	Ethan Estabrook		
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	Ethan Estabrook	(317) 650-7650	<a href="mailto:ekestabrook@gmail.com">ekestabrook@gmail.com</a>
	Kimberly Scott	(317) 306-1597	<a href="mailto:silverskydragon@att.net">silverskydragon@att.net</a>
	Dale Schoentrup		<a href="mailto:eyelashviper@hotmail.com">eyelashviper@hotmail.com</a>

## **2026 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS**

**May 20, 2026** – HHS monthly meeting. Guest Speaker: Sherman Minton Student Presentation Award winner – Gracie Hedgpeth, PhD student, Notre Dame.

**June 14, 2026** - Midwest Reptile Show – Indiana State Fairgrounds, Agriculture/Horticulture Bldg. 10:00AM-5:00PM Indiana State Fairgrounds, Indianapolis. \$9.00 admission, reptiles, amphibians, books, cages, feeder animals, and other supplies. [www.midwestreptile.com](http://www.midwestreptile.com)

**June 17, 2026** – HHS monthly meeting, Topic: TBD

**July 15, 2026** – HHS monthly meeting. Topic – Annual Show and Tell meeting. Members are encouraged to bring their favorite live herps, artwork, field guides, or other herpetology related items.

**July 18, 2026** - Snake Fest, Brown County State Park. 11:00AM-5PM, Presentations, live snake displays, rattlesnake walk, and more.

**August 8, 2026** – HHS river float. Join HHS members in a kayak/canoe for a day of enjoying nature. Water snakes, turtles, and other wildlife are abundant on this trip.

**November 13/14, 2026** - Midwest Herpetological Symposium, Hosted by the HHS. Guest speakers (Fri/Sat) Ice-breaker, Live and silent auctions, banquet and more.

# Membership Form

new member

renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Individual/Family Membership \$25.00

Herpetological Interests

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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