

The Maine Herpetological Society

Newsletter

Volume 15 Number 9

October 2007



Upcoming MHS Meetings and Regional Events
Mark Your Calendar!

Memberships

*We would like to welcome the following
new members:*

*Eric Rovegno, Pueblo, CO., Family
Leigh Wadleigh, Veazie, Ind
Maria Fochler, Buxton, Ind
Zach Bain, Lewiston, - Student*

*And we thank the following for renewing
their MHS membership:*

**If this is your last issue
PLEASE RENEW TODAY!**

Society Notes

Our last meeting was held on September 15th. At that meeting both Jason and Carrie Patterson announced that because of other obligations (not the least of which is a new child on the way) they needed to step back from the responsibilities with the MHS. Although I did get to know Jason and Carrie I asked Doug Kranich to write a few words about them:

Jason and Carrie Patterson

Every successful organization features a handful of key personnel with passion, commitment and energy. Jason and Carrie Patterson have been examples of that in the Maine Herpetological Society.

Not everyone may know that they have recently stepped back from leadership positions after nearly nine years of service. We want to make sure they know how much we have appreciated their efforts.

Both Jason and Carrie joined this society at the annual reptile show held at Bangor's Pet Quarters in September 1998. In February of the following year, Jason was chosen as an MHS director and has never looked back. Carrie has served as MHS secretary for most of that time and Jason has worked his way up to vice president, and most recently president. Since joining, either Jason, Carrie or both have been a part of nearly every single MHS meeting, field trip, expo and event that the MHS has been a part of. That's a record that few of us can compete with.

As most of you may know, starting a family is a life-changing event and for the Patterson's it was no exception. With a toddler at home and another on the way, they have felt that a change was in order. As a result, both have given up their leadership roles.

I believe the MHS supports that change and we wish them all the best but I'm sure we'll still see them at future meetings and expos. Thanks Jason and Carrie for your dedication to the MHS over the past nine years.

Doug Kranich

Rick Sisco has taken over the MHS presidents position. I do believe the board has appointed an interim vice-president but I'll need to announce that in the November newsletter.

Showtime

By John Archer

Reprinted from the Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society

Ed note: I thought this was a pretty good article. I know there aren't a lot of shows in our area but the information is useful just the same

Most of us happily show off our animals whenever we get the chance. We can easily spend an afternoon showing an interested person our collection, even if the collection consists of a single animal. As the attendance at our annual June show-and-tell meeting demonstrates, we like sharing our animals with other people. That's one of the reasons we belong to the CHS. What's the point of having cool critters if no one else knows about them? And the desire to let others know about our animals fits closely with one of the stated missions of the society, to educate the public about reptiles and amphibians. One of the primary ways that we accomplish this is by bringing our animals to some of the numerous live-animal shows that the society is asked to do.

Having done these shows for a few years, and having worked with ReptileFest numerous times, I think I've gained a few insights into the do's and don'ts of presenting your animals to the public. I don't know everything, and I don't pretend that my way is the only way, but I'm the one writing the article. If you want to express your views, write your own article. Remember that I'm striving for the ideal. I have never done a perfect show, nor do I think that you'll achieve that after you've read this article, but if I can prevent you from making some of the larger mistakes, you'll be ahead of the game the next time you stand in front of a crowd of people asking questions and wanting to handle your very special bearded dragon.

The shows that I'm referring to are not the type where you'd stand on a stage with a hands-free mike and wow the crowd with your great stories and terrific animals. I don't do those kind, and they require skills I probably don't have. I'm not even talking about giving school presentations or performing in front of your local boy scout troop. Those types of shows usually require more than one animal, a script or a lot of practice, and stage presence that most of us lack. I leave those shows to the Bavirshas or Jim

Nesci or Dick Buchholz. The shows I'm talking about are to demonstrations, where I stand around with an animal in my hand or next to their cage and wait for people to come to me. The CHS does these for museums, park districts, libraries, and other venues and they are essentially miniature ReptileFests. I'll discuss four major aspects of these shows: you; the animal; the audience; and the setting.

You

You're probably smarter than you think you are. You may not know the scientific name for the blue-tongued skink, or how many chambers an amphibian's heart has, but you do know your animal and your interactions with it. Don't lie if you don't know the answer to a question. /but the two most frequently asked questions are "Does it bite?" and "Is it poisonous?" I bet you know the answers to both of those, and you know more about YOUR animal than anyone else. People want to know how you interact with it, how you care for it, and what you find fascinating about it. Of course, you may not be as smart as you think you are and the person you're talking with may not be as stupid as you think they are, so don't condescend. Talking down to someone or putting them in their place can backfire when your audience turns out to be a professor of herpetology at Kansas State University. Besides, none of us like to be reminded of how ignorant we are. You're not there to show how much you know; you're there to help others understand and maybe respect these animals. And, especially for younger show people, never try and scare people with your animals or make fun of those who are afraid. Everyone is afraid of something.

Check you appearance before you leave for the show. Maybe today is not the day to wear your "Bloodwatch, Vampires at War" T-shirt. Nor would it be good to grab something from the bottom of the laundry basket. Casual is OK, but this may not be

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the best time for in-your-face clothing. Also keep in mind that few of the animals that we casually drape over our shoulders can be housebroken, so a spare shirt may come in handy. And you'll be talking to people at a close distance. Maybe skipping the garlic pizza for lunch is a good idea.

Listen to what your audience has to say. Almost everyone has an animal story that they want to share. Let them. You may learn something, but more importantly, as ambassadors for our animals, listening allows us to connect with our audience. I rarely will directly contradict some of the wilder tales I hear. I use the term "unlikely" when someone swears they had a Gabon viper in their basement, and I try not to correct all the technicalities that he speaker has gotten wrong. I'm not trying to turn these folks into herpetologists, and good biologists will rarely state definite facts, especially when they involve animal behavior. Besides, with the popularity of reptiles increasing, and knowing how easily these animals escape, who am I to say that it wasn't a Gabon viper.

The Animal

Perhaps the first thing that your audience will notice is your animal's appearance, but that doesn't necessarily mean you should bring only your best looking animals. A malformed, deformed, or injured animal can be a valuable teaching tool, demonstrating how people abuse or mistreat animals. The animal should be healthy, however. Shows are stressful enough for the animals when they are healthy, and you should make sure they stay healthy. This may mean bringing heat pads or ice blocks (for amphibians) to keep your animals as comfortable as possible. Make sure your animal gets breaks from being handled. They can get really tired from being passed from person to person. Animals that appear in public should have a temperament that can handle crowds. An excitable or worse, a biting animal, should be left at home. My animals' safety is the most important thing to me at a show. And while I don't yell at children who mishandle my turtle, I will gently correct them and I expect everyone who touches or holds my animals to follow my rules. They are MY animals. Also, if the animals are handled correctly, I worry less about the safety of the people.

If you have animals that are in cages, make sure that the cage looks attractive and is kept clean. People judge us on what they see. I have a sign that

states clearly that the display cages are not the cages the animals live in. I made it after it was pointed out to me that the public might assume that it's alright to keep a ten-inch tiger salamander in a two-and-a-half gallon aquarium all the time. And make some attractive labels or signs for the cages. A scrawled name on a scrap of paper is better than no name, but a neatly printed sign makes a much better impression.

The Audience

Watch the people who come by. I bring out different animals for different groups. Small turtles are rarely happy being mauled by a group of toddlers, but a tortoise might handle the attention with aplomb, or at least apathy. Baby snakes do not get handled by kids, but, if adults are nervous, they may have an easier time holding a small snake. Kid groups are always boisterous, but some group activities can easily engage them. I have amphibians, which I don't let people handle, but kids love to feed them. And I often invite a child who seems genuinely interested and responsible to help me put my away my salamanders and frogs at the end of a show. Genuinely interested and responsible kids are also allowed to be one of my snake wranglers. I let them handle the snakes, giving them tips on how to pass the animal, how to watch the person taking the animal, and how to protect the animal. You may not feel comfortable doing this, but if you are, and you judge your kids correctly, it can make a kid an animal lover for life, and you can take a little break. No, you can't go to lunch, but you can stay nearby and not have to work so hard. Some of these kids have shown up at later shows, coming just to do my work for me. As a friend of mine once said, "Who'd of thought that there were reptile groupies?" Always respect the audience and avoid those assumptions, either good or bad, that prevent you from really understanding and connecting with them. And if you're really thinking about the audience, you'll have hand sanitizer.

The Venue

You need to know the conditions that you and your animals will have to cope with. Where's the parking? How far do I have to transport my animals, and how will I do that? Is the show indoors or out? Do they have access to electricity or water? Is there a trash can (what do you do when your animals defecate?) Is there a special theme to this event? Museum shows are different from Chicago Park District

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Tiny pet turtles could make a comeback

If you were a kid in the 1960s or early 1970s, you probably had a red-eared slider as a pet — or at least one of your friends did. The baby turtles with dark-green shells, striped legs and faces marked by a red streak behind the eye were the “it” pet for a generation of kids until the Food and Drug Administration banned their sale.

Now, the pocket-sized turtles may be ready to make a comeback. The sale of turtles with shells smaller than 4 inches was banned in 1975 because the sweet-faced reptiles harbored a dirty little secret: They shed salmonella. Kids became infected with the dangerous germ after putting their turtle-tainted fingers — or the turtles themselves — in their mouths. Regulators figured by banning turtles smaller than 4 inches, they’d curb the pet’s popularity, and at least bigger shells wouldn’t be able to fit into kids’ mouths.

Salmonella poisoning strikes kids particularly hard, and can cause vomiting, diarrhea, joint aches, headaches, and in some cases even death. A 4-week-old infant in Florida died earlier this year from salmonella acquired from a pet turtle, says Stephen Sundlof, director of the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine.

Before the ban went into place in 1975, an estimated 100,000 cases of salmonella sickness occurred each year as the result of baby turtles and other pet reptiles, Sundlof says. Since the tiny-turtle prohibition, that number has gone down by about a quarter.

Help in high places

Democratic Sen. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana believes it’s time to lift the baby turtle ban. Arguing that new technology developed in her home state makes turtles safer to keep as pets, she introduced an amendment to the FDA Revitalization Act to once again permit their sale.

The Siebeling method, developed at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, disinfects turtle eggs so baby turtles can emerge salmonella-free. Landrieu’s amendment calls for states in which turtles are raised — primarily Louisiana and Mississippi — to issue a certificate of sanitization signed by a federally certified veterinarian to ensure that turtles offered for sale have been treated by the Siebeling or a similar method.

The Senate passed the bill containing Landrieu’s amendment last month, and the House is expected to vote Thursday. Will it pass? “I think we have a pretty good chance,” Landrieu says.

But while the Siebeling method can drastically reduce the presence of salmonella in turtles, it doesn’t eradicate it. That’s because turtles can continue to shed salmonella throughout their lives even after treatment.

“The bacteria is in their intestinal tract. Sometimes they shed it, sometimes they don’t, so it’s not easy to tell when the animals are perfectly salmonella-free, even following treatment,” Sundlof says.

Despite their dirty reputation, the little turtles would likely become a big hit with kids and parents if the ban were lifted, says Helen Ogaldez, an assistant manager at Fairwood Pet Center in Renton, Wash.

“I think if they were made legal, people would learn more about them and be able to purchase and care for them properly,” she says.

The Humane Society of the United States would like to see the ban remain in place. “In addition to the health risks, selling small turtles threatens animal welfare and the environment,” says Beth Preiss, director of the society’s exotic pets campaign. Preiss says many turtles die from poor shipping conditions and improper care. People who tire of them often release them into local ponds or lakes, where they wreak environmental havoc. Released turtles can spread disease and parasites to wild turtles.

Long-term, costly commitment

Veterinarians are concerned that most people aren’t prepared to care for the baby turtles. Sure, red-eared sliders start out looking like a little toy, but they can grow to be 10 to 12 inches long and could potentially live for 50 to 70 years, given good care.

Turtle safety

When it comes to preventing salmonella infection, remember what your mother told you: wash your hands. Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling turtles, cleaning tanks and feeding turtles. Even indirect contact can spread salmonella because it can live on surfaces for days.

Salmonella can be spread by reptiles and amphibians other than turtles, including iguanas, snakes, geckos and frogs, so the same hygiene precautions apply to handling and caring for them.

Keep turtles out of reach of infants and young children. The semi-aquatic turtles need water deep enough for swimming, a dry spot where they can get some sun or warmth provided by a heat lamp, full-spectrum light and a water heater, as well as a filtration system and weekly partial water changes to prevent the buildup of waste products, says Scott H. Weldy, a veterinarian at Serrano Animal and Bird Hospital in Lake Forest, Calif. The cost of an indoor setup can run up to \$200.

Inadequate care is a concern, Landrieu acknowledges. “We have some language in the bill about care of the turtles and appropriate ways to raise them so it’s done in a safe and humane way. Also, I think there’s a trend in the pet industry toward responsible pet ownership and how to raise and care for animals in their proper habitat.”

Ginny Guidry of Spring Valley, Calif., had baby turtles as a kid and would love to get one for her 11-year-old son, but says she’d teach him to take better care of his turtle.

New Zealand scientists have found what appears to be a cure for the disease that is responsible for wiping out many of the world's frog populations.

Chloramphenicol, currently used as an eye ointment for humans, may be a lifesaver for the amphibians, they say. The researchers found frogs bathed in the solution became resistant to the killer disease, chytridiomycosis. The fungal disease has been blamed for the extinction of one-third of the 120 species lost since 1980. Fearful that chytridiomycosis might wipe out New Zealand's critically endangered Archey's frog (*Leiopelma archeyi*), the researchers have been hunting for a compound that would kill off the disease's trigger, the fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*.

They tested the chloramphenicol candidate on two species introduced to New Zealand from Australia: the brown tree frog (*Litoria ewingii*) and the southern bell frog (*L. raniformis*). "We found that we could cure them completely of chytrids," said Phil Bishop from the University of Otago. "And even when they were really sick in the control group, we managed to bring them back almost from the dead." "You could put them on their back and they just wouldn't right themselves, they would just lie there. You could then treat them with chloramphenicol and they would come right," Dr Bishop explained.

We are losing an awful lot of these creatures now and if we don't do something intelligent, then we're going to lose an awful lot more

Professor Russell Poulter,
Researcher

But the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) expressed caution at the news. Wildlife epidemiologist Dr Trent Garner said there would be reluctance to take up chloramphenicol as a solution, certainly in Europe and North America, because of the chemical's link to harmful side-effects in humans.

Captive solution

The NZ researchers tried using chloramphenicol as both an ointment, applied to the frogs' backs, and as a solution. They found that placing the animals in the solution delivered the best results. The team has admitted it was surprised by the outcome.

"You don't usually expect antibiotics to do anything to fungi at all. And it does. We don't understand why it does, but it does," said Russell Poulter.

If you live in Southern Maine

SPRINGVALE — Birds, snakes and turtles will be among the special guests at York County Extension Association's annual meeting Nov. 28 in Springvale. While it is an unusual assortment of guests, they will be present to highlight the special efforts of a local wildlife rehabilitation and rescue facility that treats over 1,500 animals a year and is one of the largest rehabilitators in New England.

Karen McElmurry, managing director of the Center for Wildlife in Cape Neddick, will be the keynote speaker at the meeting that will occur at the Anderson Learning Center. She will provide information and education of the many wonderful wild species that live among us and a heightened sensitivity to the impacts we humans have on their lives.

The meeting is part of York County Extension Association's annual meeting and is open to the public, and parents and children are encouraged to attend. It will start at 6:30 p.m. with a dessert social, business meeting and volunteer recognition awards. The keynote presentation will start at 7 p.m.

shows, and both are totally different from the “expos” – different crowds, different facilities, different treatment from the host of the event. I have a box that I take to every show that contains tape, scissors, paper, heating pads, spare bulbs, zip ties, extra cage furniture, spare shirt, etc. I admit that I even have a general check list that I review as I’m packing. I don’t want to show up at an unheated event in the middle of January without some way of keeping my animals warm, and while most venues can supply you with many items, it’s always faster and easier if you already have everything you’ll need when you arrive.

I could write much more, and I repeat that I don’t have all the answers, but if there are those among you who are considering showing your animals, I hope I have given you the basics. The main reason I do show is because they’re fun. The more I learn about my animals, the more fun I have teaching others. Learning new information allows me to expand on my answers when people ask questions, and keeps me from repeating myself and becoming bored. I’m constantly learning from other society members around me at shows. Many snakes really do feel like basketballs, as Mike Scott asserts, and that’s a much better analogy than a wallet. Being alongside people like Jenny Vollman, Bob Bavirsha or Rich Crowley provides a huge opportunity not only to learn how to better present your animals, but also to learn more about her-

petology in general.

Anyone who has done a show will tell you that they are a lot of work. They take time and energy from you and your animals. So why do I do them? Because I get to watch as a toddler bursts into the room and freezes as she sees the ten-foot python sliding across the floor. She slowly approaches, and with a look awe on her face, she gently extends a hand and strokes the snake’s back. No fear in this two-year old, just a recognition of shared life. Or I watch as a south-side teenager taller than me overcomes his fear and winds up holding my milksnake up to his girlfriend, proudly explaining that “This snake won’t hurt you. It’s a good snake.” I get to swap snake stories with a 92-year-old grandmother who has kept many reptiles and amphibians over the years, as I recognize first to my surprise that this lady likes these animals, and then realize that we are a very diverse group that is impossible to physically qualify. School kids shriek and scream as my slothful tiger salamander makes a lightning-fast grab at the mealworm one of them is holding, then all clamor to be the next to feed him. Snakes aren’t slimy; amphibians are. Get out there and teach people that.

Classified Advertisements

Classified advertisements are free to dues paying members. The format for the ads should be as follows: 1.1.1 The first number represents the number of males, the second represents the number of females, and the third, the number of unknown sex. Please use the species name whenever possible. The Maine Herpeto-

For Sale: 100's of Balls, Boas & Colubrids Available. Largest variety around. Inventory changing constantly if you are looking for something call. Thanks, J&J Reptiles sales@jnreptiles.com (207)479-6658 Check out our website at: www.jnreptiles.com

For Sale: (20) 900-1100gram female balls (taking offers), albino balls 650, corn snakes 100 lots \$1500
Contact: Ben Cole at BCheps@yahoo.com

For Sale: 0.2 Peruvian red-tailed boas 9 ft. \$350 ea.; 6.9 Okeetee corn snake \$20.00 ea. 2.2 Nicaraguan boas 125.00 ea.; ball pythons \$25.00 ea. Contact Kevin Murphy - 207-576-0157 kmurphy70192@roadrunner.com

For Sale: 2007 hatchlings: 3.0 Mexican Night Snakes- \$75 ea. 1.1 tangerine albino Hondurans \$400 pr. 0.0.3 childrens pythons \$75 ea. Doug Kranich kranich@verizon.net 207 723 4108

Forsale: 2007 Corn snakes for sale: 10.4 Butter het Motley \$50ea, 4.4 Amel het anery \$30ea poss het lavender stripe, 5.1 snow \$30ea poss het lavender, stripe, 3.0 classics het Amel, Anery, Caramel, Diffused, Motley \$125ea. Contact: Mary Boyd,
Email: sales@PyxisReptiles.com
Website: <http://www.pyxisreptiles.com>

Adopt or Surrender a Reptile or Amphibian The New England Amphibian & Reptile Rescue (NEARR) provides permanent placement & adoption to herps of all sorts; including, but not limited to; snakes, lizards, frogs and turtles.
Contact Information: Phone: 207-399-4631 Email: rescue@reptilerescue.net Website: <http://www.ReptileRescue.net>