

The Maine Herpetological Society

Newsletter

Volume 15 Number 10

November 2007



Happy Holidays

Christmas Potluck Dinner

Saturday December 15 - 11:15am - 1:30 pm
At the Island Apartments in Fairfield

It's a Pot Luck so bring your favorite dish. We would also like each person in attendance to bring a small gift to exchange for a Yankee Gift Swap. Please bring a gift that is herp related and don't spend much money on it. This is a lot of fun. See you there!

All MHS members and guests are welcome to attend. Please RSVP so that the society knows in advance how many to be prepared for.



IMPORTANT

Everyone planning to attend must call:

Frank Maccarrone - 645-2065

Or Email him at:

fmaccarrone@midmaine.com.

Frank is coordinating the Christmas Party so please contact him if you're attending, whether you can bring a dish or not.

Upcoming MHS Meetings and Regional Events Mark Your Calendar!

Saturday - Dec 15	Annual Christmas Party Island Apartments - Fairfield
Saturday Jan 20	Regular Meeting Island Apts.
Saturday Feb 17	Regular Meeting Island Apts.
Saturday March 17	Regular Meeting Island Apts. <i>Erin Go Bragh</i>
Sunday April 15 -	Manchester Herp Show

Memberships

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

Debbie Seeber	East Millinocket	Family
Rick Slack	Oxford	Family
Chris Depew	Dixmont	Individual

If this is your last issue
PLEASE RENEW TODAY!

That 'Anaconda' Experience By Douglas Kranich

I was sitting in a 5th period sophomore English class when the message came to the classroom door. "Tell Doug Kranich his father is here to pick him up." I knew exactly why--a long planned for and awaited shipment of snakes had arrived by 'REA air express' at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

The year was 1972, at which time I was in high school living in Bourbonnais IL (about 50 miles south of Chicago). My parents had finally decided that I could handle the responsibility and gave me permission to purchase some exotic snakes. I would be allowed to purchase and keep them as long as they would stay in my bedroom. The fact that I had begun my working life by this time (a paper route!) and was producing some income to afford such things helped also.

Up until this time, I had to be satisfied to catch and keep the native herps. Although northern Illinois' list (fox, hognose, bullsnakes and blue racers) sounds better than anything Maine has to offer, it certainly didn't stack up to the likes of the boas, indigos, corns, and kingsnakes that I was reading about in books.

For several years I had been deep into snakes reading what little I could get my hands on. Finding books on reptiles, other than field guides was pretty difficult; of course it was even harder finding information on captive snake care and husbandry. One major inspiration was an eighth grade reading story entitled "Episode with the Bushmaster" by Raymond L. Ditmars. I'll never forget how excited I was when I read that story. I read it over and over. It would be interesting to know how many others were launched into this hobby by that very story. My combing of the literature available helped me to make the decisions as to which species I would try to purchase. My top choices were to buy a classic boa constrictor, an indigo snake, a corn snake, and a California kingsnake.

Despite working my way through that decision-making process, it all was ultimately driven by what I could actually find for sale. At that time I only knew of two sources of snakes that were within my means and reach. One was a pet shop that actually specialized (unheard of!) in snakes in Brookfield, IL. I had found it on one of my many trips to the Brookfield Zoo which was located in Chicago's western suburbs. The other source was the Thompson Wild Animal Farm and Zoo in Clewiston, FL. I had been a subscriber to Field and Stream magazine and this place advertised regularly in the want ad section. They offered their list of animals available to

the public for the grand sum of 10¢. I sent many a dime to Florida to have a wish list sent my way. (Neither are still in existence today.)

The Brookfield Pet Shop was a marvelous place. It was like a zoo except that you could actually take away any herp that you fell in love with as long as you had the money. They usually had a large inventory and the shop was the site of my first major snake purchase. It was a gorgeous red-tailed boa about 4 1/2 ft. long and was bought at the sweet tune of \$25. Although I had seen my three other 'most-wanted' snakes in stock before, they weren't available when I could afford them. At that point, I turned to the Thompson Zoo in Florida.

I considered this long-distance dealing an encounter with the 'Great Unknown' and when you realize the outcome, you will understand my feelings. As I recall, there was only one phone call made. I ordered the following: 1 Eastern Indigo @ \$20, 1 3'-Red rat (corn) snake @\$2.50/ft., and 1 3'-Florida Kingsnake (I found no California kings available), also @\$2.50/ft. The next day, I happily sent my \$35 check written through my parents' account off to Florida, and waited. This was the largest purchase of my life and there was more because I still was going to have to pay that incredible \$5.75 air freight bill to get them to Chicago.

Now, I envisioned these people getting this order together in one of two ways. One was pulling these three serpents right out of their size and species cages like in a well-stocked store and sending them right up to me. The other was a bit naive as well because my idea of southern Florida was simply snakes everywhere! When they got an order like mine, all they had to do was to go out and catch them. Why maintain them in captivity when nature is so willing to do it for you! I was about to be educated.

Back where we started. I hurriedly got my homework together from my locker and took that long privileged walk down the empty hall past all the other classes in session. My father was sitting in the car waiting and when I reached him, he said the words that I most wanted to hear. "The airport called and said your shipment of snakes is in." Dad was pretty good when it came to my love of reptiles. I mean, what other dad would clear his afternoon schedule to take his high school son on a four hour round trip to pick up some snakes? Although he was never actively involved in the snakes' care or handling, he was always fascinated with my desire to learn about

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them and fully supported my herp interests. He still listens to my stories with great interest to this day.

We headed north toward O'Hare Airport and those 90 long miles gave my imagination a little more time to play. I imagined the very finest color pictures I had ever seen of my three ordered snakes and just knew that those at the airport would look better. I wondered if the air freight people would be impressed by my cargo. I even wondered if the cargo box that held them would fit in the back seat of the car!

I was somewhat shocked when that small wooden box was handed over to me at the airport. Could this possibly contain those three massive snakes I ordered? This new chapter of suspense lasted a few more hours while we returned the incredibly long way home. The small wooden crate was nailed shut and we had no way to open it even if I'd wanted to, so I was content to let it sit on my lap for the whole return trip.

When the great opening finally occurred that evening, it was truly a bittersweet moment for me. The box was carefully pried open to reveal three muslin bags that obviously contained something but none of them displayed any movement. As I recall, there was no paperwork to be found. To my delight, the first bag opened contained a robust and nicely marked 3' Florida kingsnake. I carefully pulled the ball it was coiled in from the bag and watched as its tongue repeatedly flicked out to check on this new environment. The snake appeared to be docile but remained in its defensive ball as I set it in its new wooden box cage that I had built and prepared for it. I watched with approval as it slowly, cautiously stretched out of that position into its hidebox.

The next bag contained my first surprise. I expected this bag to contain that beautiful corn snake that I'd been dreaming about. What I found inside was merely a relative in the rat snake family, a four foot long yellow rat snake. I realize now that what I had was a beautiful orange specimen of the Everglades rat snake, but it didn't measure up when I'd had my heart set on that corn. It moved very quickly when I removed it from its bag and I was somewhat fearful as well as disappointed as I gingerly placed it in its cage.

Well, no matter, I thought, because my prize still awaited in the remaining bag. That last bag appeared to contain the largest of the three animals, but it was rather small for an indigo snake. I decided that it must be a young one because indigos are one of North America's largest species. Adults reach eight feet in length. My shock of seeing the

contents of that third bag slowly turned to anger as I pulled not the prized indigo out, but rather a small green ANACONDA which was also coiled in a tight olive-green ball splattered with round black dots. How could this mistake have been made!? What was I going to do with a snake whose massive adult size I had often stared at in disbelief while visiting the reptile house at the zoo? These things grew to nearly 30 feet and 250 pounds, not to mention their usually nasty disposition!

As I sat there holding this coiled beast, it added to my despair when it very slowly began to pull its head out of the ball and proceeded to deliberately latch its long teeth right into the palm of my hand. I had to pry it off while the blood slowly dripped to the floor. This just wasn't the joy I had in mind for opening up this so long-awaited box.

Needless to say, the next afternoon I was on the phone to Clewiston, Florida to find out what went wrong. The gentleman on the other end of the line was very matter of fact about the situation and was not apologetic in the least. His explanation about the corn was that they simply didn't have any in stock, so they felt the best substitute was the yellow rat. When asked about not receiving the indigo, he explained that the state of Florida had just passed its law to protect the species and he was no longer allowed to capture them from the wild and ship them. As you probably know, this law still stands today. In light of that legislation, they could not send me an indigo and felt that the anaconda would be a fair substitute.

So there I was, left holding the phone receiver in my hand, knowing that there wasn't a thing that I could do about the situation. I had to live with it. I kept the three snakes and made the best of it. The anaconda especially generated a few more stories that I'll save for a future article.

It wasn't until 17 years later that I dealt long distance with another snake dealer and had some more snakes shipped my way. This more recent experience along with several other 'good' shipments has restored my faith in the process. Today I find that the communication between buyer and seller is at a much higher level and it usually fills those gaps which my first experience was characterized by. I still often wonder though how many people had to go through one of those "anaconda" experiences like I did.

Product Review

Degei Husbandry Database
 Designed by Damon Theis
<http://www.eyehit.com/degei/>
 Cost: \$25.00

I have used this product for about three years and find it an easy way to keep track of all my herp inventory. You can enter of the pertinent data on a newly acquired animal and then track the activity related to the care of that animal while you have it.

On the General Tab you can enter as much information as you would like. The program can either generate an automatic unique ID or you can enter one yourself. I like IDs that tell me a little about the animal so I never go with the generic one. Then you enter common name, species, when and where you purchased it from or when it was born in your facility. There are about 30 items that you can enter on this tab and I can't think of one that is missing. You can add pictures for future reference, genealogy and keep track of who you sold it to if applicable.

On the Activity Tab you enter feedings, defecations, sheds, cage cleaning, weights, measurements and plenty of other things. You can also keep track of your feeder inventory here. The program will keep deducting animals from your feeder inventory and let you know when to reorder. I actually don't use this feature because it required too much work to keep the inventory up to date. It would be easy if you only purchased your inventory but if you breed your own as well then it gets more cumbersome to keep up. You can also print out a pick list, which is a list of your animals that need to be fed. This is based upon a feeding interval that you set up when entering your animal in the database. You just print out the pick list and it tells you how many of each kind and size food animal you're going to need for that night's feeding. You use the list to check off whether they ate or not. Since I don't currently have any problem feeders I don't keep track of refused meals right away. Invariably it is because the animal is in shed, which I also don't keep track off. I keep track of actual sheds but I don't mark an animal as cloudy because it will never come up on the pick list until I mark it shed and could be overlooked for awhile. After you feed your animals you either enter them individually or with the "bulk activity" feature. With bulk activity you just enter the food animal and click on each animal that fed on that size from the inventory list. It is pretty quick and you can enter 50 or so feedings in seconds.

There are other tabs for clutch data, genealogy and breeding and also a photo gallery. It took me awhile to understand how to enter the breeding information. After you get the hang of it, it is pretty cool. It

keeps track of the pairs, eggs or newborns. With the animals bred by you you'll always be able to tell who the parents are. Once you mark down that they were either hatched or born they are automatically added to inventory.

There are plenty of reports that can be entered. The pick list as mentioned. You can print out the current inventory of both your herps and food animals, cage cards which give the general information and the last 8 or so activity entries. This is handy for shows. You can get a report on problem animals if you have any and even where your animals are located in your herp room. The program backs up your database upon exit.

This year because I have been using the program for a while, I'll know when my animals copulated last year, when my boas ovulated and when the babies were born or eggs laid. With this information I can tweak it for better results this year.

After you get used to it the program is easy to use. I don't use half the features but I find the ones that I do use very useful.

Some web-sites to check out:

<http://nlbif.eti.uva.nl/bis/turtles.php>

This is titled *Turtles of the World*. It has a fun little quiz you can play around with. At first I put it on easy because I am not that knowledgeable about the different turtles species. I thought I was doing pretty well (100% correct) until I realized easy just meant that you had 3 tries of the 4 choices. I didn't do so well when I switched it to hard.

<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/classification/Squamata.html>

This is from the University Of Michigan. Pretty good to find the classification of the different species. Tells you a little about many of them with pictures. It looks like a site that you may want to bookmark so you can find it again if you're re-searching something.

Of all the mnemonics this one is the best I found for remembering the order of kingdom through species.

Did Karen's Pups Chew On Furry Grey Squirrels?

(Domain-Kingdom-Phylum-Class-Order-Family-Genus-Species)

Who knows when that might come in handy. You may be on Jeopardy some day!

Non-Venomous Asian Snakes 'Borrow' Defensive Poison from Toxic Toads

Reprinted from the National Science Foundation
web site Jan. 2007



Most snakes are born with poisonous bites they use for defense. But what can non-poisonous snakes do to ward off predators?

What if they could borrow a dose of poison by eating toxic toads, then recycling the toxins?

That's exactly what happens in the relationship between an Asian snake and a species of toad, according to a team of researchers funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) Division of Integrative Organismal Systems (IOS).

Herpetologists Deborah Hutchinson, Alan Savitzky of Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., and colleagues published results of research on the snake's dependence on certain toads in this week's online issue of the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Hutchinson studied the Asian snake *Rhabdophis tigrinus* and its relationship to a species of toxic toad it eats. In the *PNAS* paper, she and co-authors describe dietary sequestration of toxins by the snakes. The process allows the snakes to store toxins from the toads in their neck glands. When under attack, the snakes re-release the poisons from these neck glands.

Many invertebrates sequester dietary toxins for use in defense, including milkweed insects and sea slugs. But vertebrate examples of toxin sequestration, especially from vertebrate prey, are rare. "A

snake that's dependent on a diet of toads for chemical defense is highly unusual," said Hutchinson.

Hutchinson said the research had identified six compounds in the snakes that may hold promise in medical treatments for people suffering from hypertension and related blood pressure disorders.

The researchers made their case by testing *Rhabdophis tigrinus* on several Japanese islands, one with a large population of the toxic toads and another with none, and compared them with snakes from the Japanese island of Honshu, where toads are few. The presence of toxins in the snakes' neck glands depended upon their access to the toads. Snakes without the borrowed toxins were more likely to turn and flee from danger than to hold their ground and perform a toxin-releasing defensive maneuver.

"Sequestration of toxins in a specialized [neck gland] structure in a vertebrate is a remarkable finding," said William Zamer, IOS deputy director at NSF. "This finding offers new insights into the complex mechanisms underlying ecological relationships and will lead to important insights about fundamental biological questions."

Coluber constrictor

A lithe black form is stretched upon the top of an old stone wall. The long and slender body lies in slightly suggested undulations. It appears tense and yet again soft and pliant as its outline follows the slightly uneven surface of the stones. Its hue is really blue-black and it glows with the luster of a new gun-barrel. The effect upon the average observer is three-fold. The thing is startling, it is decorative, and it is wholly incongruous – this vivid form so bold in contrast to its surroundings. The head quivers slightly. If the observer's eyes are keen this is seen to be caused by the rapid darting of a forked tongue. Then the black object appears to flow over the opposite side of the wall. There is a rustling murmur among dried leaves – a hissing-scraper – the sound so characteristic of a rapidly moving snake, and the thing is gone. Thus we meet the blacksnake

Excerpt from "Snakes of the World" by Raymond Ditmars 1931

Enigmatic Decline of a Protected Population of Eastern Kingsnakes, *Lampropeltis Getula*, in South Carolina

Christopher T. Winne, John D. Willson, Brian D. Todd, Kimberly M. Andrews, and J Whitfield. Gibbons

Although recent reports of global amphibian declines have received considerable attention, reptile declines have gone largely unreported. Among reptiles, snakes are particularly difficult to quantitatively sample, and thus, most reports of snake declines are based on qualitative or anecdotal evidence.

Recently, several sources have suggested that Eastern Kingsnakes (*Lampropeltis getula*) have declined over a substantial portion of their range in the southeastern United States, particularly in Florida. However, published evidence for *L. getula* declines or their potential causes are limited.

We monitored the status of a population of *L. getula* on the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site (SRS) in Aiken, South Carolina, USA, from 1975 to 2006. Herpetofaunal populations on the Savannah River Site have been protected from the pressures of collecting and development since 1951 due to site access restrictions. Here, we document a decline in both abundance and body condition of *L. getula* inhabiting the vicinity of a large isolated wetland over the past three decades. Because this *L. getula* population was protected from anthropogenic habitat degradation, collection, and road mortality, we are able to exclude these factors as possible causes of the documented decline.

Although the definitive cause of the decline remains enigmatic, natural succession of the surrounding uplands, periodic extreme droughts, shifts in community composition (e.g., increased *Agkistrodon piscivorus* abundance), introduced fire ants, or disease are all potential contributors to the decline.

Copeia

Article: pp. 507–519 | Abstract
Volume 2007, Issue 3 (September 2007)

MHS Library List of Currently Available Books, Movies and Printouts. Contact Carol Demeter if you want to reserve anything on this list.

Books

How to Tame Your Lizard

The Green Iguana Manual

Care/Breeding Panther, Jackson's Veiled & Parsons Chameleons

Keeping and Breeding Snakes

Bearded Dragons Care

Understanding Reptile Parasites

Tokay Geckos Care

The Guide to the Reptile Body

Popular Tortoise Care

Horned Frog Care

Milk Snake Care

Field Guide to North American Insects & Spiders

Care & Breeding Snakes & Lizards in Captivity

Snakes - An Illustrated Guide

Captive Propagation & Husbandry of Reptiles and Amphians (1989)

VHS Tapes

How to Tame Your Lizard, The Movie

Green Iguanas, Care & Breeding

Bearded Dragons Care

Boas & Pythons, Care & Husbandry

America's Deadliest Snakes & Anacondas

The Life History of The Argentine B/W Tegu

Hunters: Eye of the Serpent, Toad skinning Magic & King Cobra Snake Stories

Barker's Video: Super Tiger Retics

Lectures on Crocodylians, Pythons & Iguanas

Bill Love's Lecture on Madagascar, Blood Pythons & 1998 New Herp Show

Bill Love's Lecture on Madagascar (Part 2)

New York Herp Show

Board Meetings Minutes - November 17 Submitted by Carol Demeter

MHS Board meeting was convened with three officers present. Rick Sisco put into nomination the name of Bob DuBois for interim Vice President. This nomination was seconded and he was voted into the position for the remainder of this years term. Rick also informed us that both Linda and Steve Gerry had resigned from their standing positions due to time constraints. Carol Demeter will take over the additional position of librarian for the remaining term of this year.

Our next meeting will be the Holiday pot luck and \$5 gift swap (herp related) on December 15. Family and friends are also invited to this meeting. Frank Maccarrone will coordinate any offerings of food for the potluck. He can be reached at 645-2065 or at fmaccarrone@midmaine.com.

Please let him know if you plan to attend and what you might contribute so that we are sure to have enough food for everyone.

There was a short discussion regarding extending terms in office from 1 to 2 years. There was also a suggestion of alternating terms of

positions so that there is not a complete change over from year to year. This will be discussed further at a future meeting.

A suggestion was also made to have members who might be interested, who breed specific animals, to provide care sheets on those animals that could be included in the newsletter, or website, for use by members.

A suggestion was also made to send a welcome letter to all new members immediately on receiving their membership that would include details on location, directions and times of meetings, as well as names of board members and phone numbers for contact. That way new members would know that they are welcomed on board and have necessary information.

The next herp show that we normally attend will be in Manchester, NH on April 15th. Put that date on your calendar.

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 Herpetological Society is not responsible for content, prices, or errors in classified ads, nor do we receive any compensation from the sales resulting from these ads. **

MHS Items for sale Members prices: New MHS T- shirts and hats \$10 ea. 4 sizes available, Adult S,M,L,XL Maine Reptile and Amphibian Book including the frog CD, \$15 each; ME Herp Posters, 4 varieties, snakes, turtles, amphibians and vernal pools. \$3 ea.; They are also available by contacting Doug Kranich (723 4108) or kranich@verizon.net They can be mailed but shipping will be added to the cost.

High Quality Unusual Carpets: 2007 High Yellow Jungles from \$595, 2007 Tri Stripes Het for Tiger from one of two clutches ever produced in the US from \$1295, 2005 Carpondro Female \$4,000. Details - including our database showing complete feeding, stool, weight, shedding, and care log information - can be found at www.SpruceNubbleFarm.com (207)-684-3539

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 BCherps@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>