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J A X H E R P N E W S

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Editor: John Berger

CRITTER OF THE MONTH: CORN SNAKE (*Elaphe guttata*)

Contributed by: John Rossi

The corn snake (red rat snake) is an outrageously beautiful and popular snake. They are wonderful eaters at all ages except possibly the hatchling stage. They start off life about 9-12 inches long and grow at a fairly rapid rate. At this tender age they are fond of anoles and other small lizards but may need some help catching them. Lizards, dead or alive, may be offered with tongs and if the snake refuses this, a dead lizard may be gently forced to the baby snake. It's not a coincidence that baby anoles and baby rat snakes hatch out the same time. Some babies will go right after pinkies but sooner or later all of them will take to small mice. They will also take rats, moles, birds, and eggs if they are of the correct size.

In addition to being beautiful and good eaters, they are very hardy snakes that rarely get sick even if conditions are sub-optimal. In fact, this snake often does so well in captivity, one often wonders if its natural habitat doesn't include aquariums, wooden cages, and artificial lights!

Their personality varies, and some can be snappy, but most calm down under the right conditions. They also are good breeders in captivity if given enough room. One large female can lay over 20 eggs which hatch in about 2 months under the right conditions.

In short, corn snakes make excellent pets. The Museum has had one in captivity for 30 years!

TIP OF THE MONTH: HIDE BOXES

"Hide boxes" are an important factor in the success of many reptiles and amphibians in captivity. Some experts have suggested that hide boxes may extend the life of some reptiles by 5 years! Why? It gives the animals a sense of security. They have a place to go when they are getting ready to shed, frightened, or right after that big meal (the solitude probably aids digestion and helps prevent vomiting). Some reptiles will actually refuse to eat unless they have a hide box. With the racers, whipsnakes, and even some garter snakes its an absolute necessity, but all snakes, lizards, turtles, and amphibians will benefit from these little retreats.

The hide boxes can be easily constructed out of wood, an old shoe box, or my favorite... a plastic flower pot (either a square or round base). Just cut a little door out of one side. These have an advantage because they can be easily washed, disinfected, and reused.

John Rossi

### LAST MEETING

Our August meeting went great! Over 50 guests attended. Highlights of the meeting included the tour of the marsh room, the fox snake (*Elaphe vulpina*) presentation by Bill Mceller, and the slide show by Dr. Rossi. Numerous snakes were sexed by probing. Many pet snakes and a few lizards were present including some very unusual and one controversial snake.

### NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, Sept. 16th at 7:30 PM in the Church Room of the Jax Museum of Arts and Sciences. Topics will include a discussion on choosing a "first" pet snake by John Berger. This talk will concentrate on exotic species. Mike Rossi will talk about turtles, and there is going to be a surprise feature. At the October meeting, Vic Morgan will give a special presentation for pet store owners that will be very informative for all of us.

### MEMBERSHIP CARDS

Membership cards are on the way. We hope to have them within the next month or two.

### WELCOME

Lets extend a warm welcome to Mike Rossi. He just moved here last month from New York. Mike's interests include herps of all kinds but his main interest are turtles and he'll be writing a page devoted entirely to turtles and tortoises starting with this issue.

### DISEASES IN SNAKES

There are many different types of diseases or ailments that occur in snakes. One we see often is the "common cold". In minor colds the treatment is nothing more than keeping the snake at a temperature of about 80 degrees and well fed. The cold should clear up in a few days. Worst cases involve pneumonia-like conditions which are fatal if broad-spectrum antibiotics are not used. Whether the cold is minor or pneumonia-like, it is highly contagious and will pass on to other snakes unless isolated.

Another common disease is mouth-rot. This disease can happen when a tooth is torn out by a prey that has struggled to free itself from the snakes jaws. If the gum does not heal quickly, the infected area begins to spread until the whole mouth is infected. If this disease is not treated soon the snake will die. In captivity this disease can be treated by pouring a capful of hydrogen peroxide in the snakes mouth two to three times per treatment and two to three times a day.

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Snakes also have a tendency to develop tumors. When present, they appear as a large abnormal bulge on the body of the snake. Depending on the location of the tumor, it sometimes can be removed safely by an experienced veterinarian. In some cases where it cannot be removed, the snake may live a long life. In other cases, the tumor may be pressing against a vital organ and eventually kill the snake.

Also, as in the case of Cuttles, my Eastern Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis g. getelus*), the tumor may block the anal opening and therefore prevent the normal passage of waste material, resulting in the collecting of waste products just before the anal opening which could cause excruciating pain for the snake. Another problem that can occur are cysts, which are more easily treated than tumors. Sometimes cysts may even rupture and heal spontaneously. Tumors on the other hand are not as easy to treat, even if they are noticed in time.

Parasites are another cause for concern. Ticks and mites are quite common and can spread quite rapidly through a collection of snakes if not checked immediately. Treatment is generally easy for ticks. The best way to get rid of them is to suffocate them with a coating of olive oil or glycerin.

Mites are harder to get rid of especially if they have gone unnoticed until they have become firmly established. Soaking the snakes in water will drown most of the mites. The ones that manage to crawl to the snakes head can be coated with olive oil. The easiest and most efficient method now is an injection given by a veterinarian. It is harmless to the snake and very effective. The habitat must be thoroughly cleaned. Aquariums are easy to clean but wooden cages pose more of a problem. Because of the porous nature of wood, mites have plenty of cracks to hide in, therefore only a complete refinishing of the wood will completely eliminate this problem.

Mark E. Elliot, Jr.

#### HATCHING OF SNAKE EGGS

There are several different methods of hatching snake eggs. The method I prefer is to use vermiculite in the bottom of a sweater box. The eggs are laid halfway in the vermiculite and misted lightly once or twice a week (depending on how dry the vermiculite has become). The sweater box is then stored in a warm dark place. The biggest danger to the eggs when stored is over-misting, which can cause fungus to grow on the eggs. I have had this happen, but if the eggs are checked frequently, the fungus can be brushed off with an old toothbrush. This can be bad for the eggs because the fungus grows through the shell and will kill the embryo. Once the snakes hatch they require very small food and discovering the proper food for a particular type of snake can be frustrating since there is very little written that describes how to feed the young snakes.

Mark E. Elliot, Jr.

### Questions & Answers

Question: How long should Tegus eggs be incubated before being discarded as infertile?

Answer: At least 3 months.

Question: Will a female Tegus lay eggs even after being separated from the male?

Answer: I could not find answers to this question before the newsletter went out. I will continue to look for information, but you may wish to contact a state university or college, or check with the reptile keeper at a zoo or museum. I will try to have an answer by the next newsletter.

Question: At what age do Burmese pythons become sexually mature?

Answer: Normally at age 3 to 5 years. Depending upon feeding habits and housing conditions, the length of the snake will probably be between 7 ft. and 10 ft.

The Q&A section is open to all questions concerning reptiles and amphibians. Please direct questions to John Berger at 778-3341 or mail your questions to:

Jacksonville Herpetological Society  
6054A Seahorse Ct.  
NAS Jacksonville, FL 32212

All questions will be answered and put into the newsletter as soon as is reasonably possible.

### Dues

Members who have not yet paid their dues will receive the newsletter through issue number 4. After that issue those persons who have not paid their dues will be "dropped" from the mailing list. We want to have as many people as possible get the letter but it is only fair to those people who have paid their dues that we do this. Please get your dues paid by the October meeting.

Dues can be paid at the monthly meetings or checks can be sent to the following address:

Jacksonville Herpetological Society  
6054A Seahorse Ct.  
NAS Jacksonville, FL 32212

A written receipt will be mailed to you within 2 working days so be sure to include a return address. Make check or money order payable to **The Jacksonville Herpetological Society**. The above address will be the mailing address for all dues until a treasurer can be elected.

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Dues are currently \$12.00 for single membership, \$15.00 for family memberships, and \$40.00 for business memberships (this includes 2 quarter page ads free of charge.)



## The Turtle Pen



Move over snake people. Make room for the wonderful and fascinating world of turtles. This new section of the newspaper will be devoted to informative and entertaining information of turtles for our members. Plus, I will be adding size, weight, food preferences and proper lodging for each guest turtle of the month. Each turtle mentioned will be at the following meeting to be further discussed and enjoyed.

I cannot think of any other turtle to begin with than the infamous **SNAPPING TURTLE** (Chelydra serpentina) Now you're probably wondering why I would pick such a mud-loving, ugly turtle. The truth is that if you are thinking of getting a small turtle to start or add to your collection, then this is the specimen to begin with.

Cute as a hatchling, this sees-all-eats-all 1-1/4 inch baby does extremely well in a 5 1/2-gallon tank. Within the 2" inch water depth, it will impress you by eating fish, tadpoles, crayfish, insects, chunks of meat and some vegetation. Palmetto roaches think twice before entering my home. As it grows (and grow it does) the food list includes mice, birds and other unfortunate mammals. Of course, the living quarters must increase in size as the turtle grows or stunting may take place.

This turtle can grow up to 2-3 feet long and weigh to 35 lbs. When it reaches this size the only way to hold it is by the tail. With a temper that rates right up there with Jaws, beware of its beak. They are extremely powerful! It is fine to keep it with other turtles when it is young. It is a scavenger and will help eat extra scraps. But when it reaches a formidable size, it may be wise to let it go in any permanent body of water. This turtle rarely basks (probably afraid of getting a nice complexion). It would rather wallow in the mud and capture unsuspecting prey. You may want a freshly caught snapper to be dewormed since tapeworms do well in its digestive tract. All in all, though it is not a very pretty turtle, it will never let you down when feeding time rolls around. Booger, my pet snapper, will be present at the next meeting. Next MONTH - The Box turtle

- Markus 😊