

LAST MEETING

The last meeting featured Mr. Jack Myer of the Jacksonville Zoo. Jack discussed current reptile events at the zoo and brought several interesting reptiles with him. The first captive hatched Aldabara Island Tortoise in the western hemisphere was displayed. She was 4 years old and was already about 40 pounds.

NEXT MEETING

This month's meeting will be a guided tour of the reptile facilities at the zoo on Saturday, January 23rd at 3:00 p.m. This will serve as our regular club meeting.

TIP OF THE MONTH

--continued from last month. If you can't feed "clean" food to your pet snakes, etc. you must assume that your snake is contaminated with some sort of intestinal or blood parasite, or parasite encysted in muscle or subcutaneously. In fact, 50 to 90% of all water snakes examined in a previous study contained encysted tapeworms in the muscle and subcutaneously, presumably from eating contaminated frogs, toads and fish. Therefore it is very helpful if native snakes such as watersnakes, garter snakes, hog-nosed snakes or any snake that has fish or frogs as a regular part of its diet, can be routinely treated for these parasites. In addition, you should never house one of these snakes with a non-contaminated snake, especially an exotic snake.

PARKING

As you may have noticed, parking around the museum is like trying to find scarlet king snakes in your living room..... not easy! After extensive research, we have found that the Jacksonville Hotel (formerly the Hilton) has a huge, free, usually empty parking lot that is only about one block from the museum right off Gulf Life Drive. Just take San Marco Drive right to the end and make a right turn on Gulf Life Drive. The parking lot will be on your left. For our Zoo field trip, park near the zoo educational center. Mr. Myer has assured us there will be no charge, but it would be a good idea to take along some money for refreshments.

GOPHER TORTOISES

The Society has taken the necessary steps to attain a permit to transport gopher tortoises. Please let Jim

Hartman know if you are able to help this spring with relocations. If every member volunteers just one morning or afternoon we would have enough volunteers to catch and relocate hundreds of turtles. There is no need to volunteer for a specific time now, but just call up Jim and let him know you are interested, what day of the week would be best for you, and your phone number. Jim's number is (904) 389-4389. John Rossi has written a letter to Gov. Martinez asking him to stop the legal harvesting of gopher tortoises. A copy will be passed around at the meeting on Jan. 23, at the Jacksonville Zoo for all of us to sign. Please come and show your support!

ANIMAL FAIR '88: Gerald Lute has brought to our attention the FLORIDA STATE MUSEUM'S 1988 Animal Fair. It will be held on Feb. 13 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Museum in Gainesville. Mr. Lute has entered the Herp Society in the fair, and we are planning to discuss all the details at the meeting at the Zoo on Jan. 23rd.

WANT ADS

The newsletter represents a great way for you to let most of the other herp fanciers in town know what you want to sell. Feel free to call Kathy Berger at 778-3341 and place an ad. The cost is free to non-business members (please limit to 4 lines) and \$5.00 per half page to non-members and businesses. You can send a copy of your ad to the following address:

JAX HERP. SOCIETY
6054A Sea Horse Ct.
NAS JAX, FL. 32212

Make checks payable to: The Jacksonville Herp. Society

SNAKE HUNTING

who has a snake and a good story to tell. It's a good exercise, a sport, a commune with nature, and/or a social event. If you have stories about your adventures in the woods, please share them with the other club members. In the future we will be printing some of the greatest adventure stories of all time..... right here in the Jax Herp News!!!!

NATIVE SNAKE OF THE MONTH: THE RED BELLIED SNAKE

The red bellied snake (*Storeria occipitomaculata*) is a common local snake usually found in moist forested areas, although occasionally it can be found in or near human habitation or debris. It is a small snake not exceeding one foot in length. It is the most common snake in the east

with a plain red belly with the exception of the red bellied water snake - which is much larger and the black swamp snake which has smooth,, not keeled scales). It can be brown, black or grey above, with faint stripes running the entire length of the back. Ringneck snakes, which can look very similar usually have orange bellies and a double row of half moons running the entire length of the belly. Also, ringneck snakes have a solid ring around the neck (hence the name), while red bellied snakes in this area usually have 3 large dots on the neck. These dots may fuse to a ring in some specimens however, making this a poor distinguishing characteristic.

Mating usually takes place in the spring, with 2 to 7 live young born in the late spring. The babies are only about 3 inches long, so they are very difficult to find. This beautiful but small snake does fairly well in captivity. They will do equally well on indoor/outdoor carpet or soil but with the latter, there is greater risk of skin disease or intestinal obstruction. The size of the cage can be fairly small and a 10 gallon aquarium provides plenty of room for this species. A low water dish (this species does not climb frequently) and plenty of hiding places are necessary.

Some of these snakes will voraciously devour earthworms but most of the specimens from northern Florida will flatly refuse worms and eat only slugs. Furthermore, they may only eat small smooth grey slugs (we are working on the species identification). Very large slugs and black or rough textured slugs are usually ignored by Florida Red Bellies although northern specimens will tackle them. Unfortunately the smooth grey slugs may be difficult to find after the spring. Tubifex worms may be taken by some Florida specimens but you will have better luck if you chop them into short pieces. If you have one that eats earthworms or tubifex worms, try to avoid feeding slugs at all as some specimens we have done this with have refused to go back to worms afterward. One specimen which refused to eat anything but slugs (the usual small grey ones) did eat a piece of a large slug that had been sliced finely. Slugs that have been frozen and thawed will also be taken but the snake will have much more difficulty swallowing a dead slug as the mechanics of swallowing a slug appears to involve the movement of the slug.

Interestingly, Florida Red Bellies will gladly devour slugs captured in the northeastern states.

Underground heat does not seem necessary and neither do vitalites, but I would recommend both anyway.

FOODS: Slugs; earthworms; tubifex worms

CAGE: 10- gallon suggested

BOTTOM: Indoor/outdoor carpet; soil

LIGHT: Natural light or vita light

ACCES: Hide boxes; shallow water dish

Contributed by John Rossi

EXOTIC PET OF THE MONTH: THE RAINBOW BOA

The rainbow boa (*Epicrates cenchria*) belongs to the genera *Epicrates* and includes nine sub-species. They are located throughout South America and Central America from Costa Rica to Northern Argentina. The most attractive is the nominate (first named) subspecies *Epicrates cenchria cenchria*, colored orange to mahogany with darker (blue to black) circles dorsally, with the entire skin being highly iridescent. It is much smaller than the boa constrictor and even other *Epicrates* such as the Cuban boa. It reaches about 5 feet and as many pounds.

Rainbow boas are primarily nocturnal and feed on rodents, birds and lizards (I feed mine only mice and rats).

Rainbows, like most *Epicrates* are gentle snakes, although when angry or scared will strike (but generally will not bite). Also if frightened, a rainbow will musk you (urinate) but will stop once it gets to know you. All *Epicrates* I've seen have deep blue mouth tissue, which is rare and most attractive.

To finish, I think rainbow boas are good snakes to have. If you are in the market for one, and ordering by mail, be sure to find out the sub-species you want or you might end up with an ordinary looking snake.

FOODS: Rodents, birds, lizards

CAGE: 10 to 25 gal. aquarium

BOTTOM: Indoor outdoor carpet recommended

LIGHT: Vita-lite

ACCES: Hide boxes; water bowl; heat rock

Contributed by Sherry LeClair

AMMPHIBIAN OF THE MONTH: FLORIDA CRICKET FROG

The call of the Florida cricket frog (*Acris gryllus dorsalis*), from which its name derives, is familiar to all who have ventured near a pond or grassy roadside ditch after dark. The metallic, fast-paced, "gick, gick, gick," compared of the late Archie Carr to "the sound made by scratching the teeth of a comb," may be traced, with the aid

of a flashlight, to an inch-long froglet that may be gray or green or brown but can readily be distinguished from other small frogs by a light stripe that rides up the center of the back to the base of the head, where it forks, creating a "Y" pattern overall.

Though a member of the family Hylidae, or tree frogs, the cricket frog is not a climber, but frequents aquatic situations that range from marshes to weedy lake margins, preferring open areas exposed to sunlight. It is active year-round, becoming dormant only during the very coldest days of winter, when it secretes itself beneath piles of leaves, to emerge once more when the temperature has reached an acceptable level.

The Florida cricket frog breeds year-round, though most commonly from February to July. The eggs, numbering about 250, are expelled singularly rather than in a mass, and are attached to aquatic vegetation (or terrestrial vegetation when breeding takes place in an inundated field) or simply strewn across the bottom. The tadpoles, easily identified as cricket frogs by their black-tipped tails, develop their adult form after 50 to 90 days.

An interesting trivial - or not-so-trivial fact is that cricket frogs are among a minute percentage of vertebrates possessing an immunity to pesticides. So when, in fifty years, the fish and birds have been poisoned into extinction, we will at least have noisy choruses of cricket frogs for company.

Contributed by Rex Rowan

THE TURTLE PEN: SOFT SHELL TURTLES

Softshell turtles (Family Trionychidae) are one of our bizzare reptiles that can be a rewarding pet, if kept properly. They are powerful swimmers, and can run on land with great speed. They get their names by having soft and leathery shells (sometimes called pancake turtles, but leave Aunt Jemima out of this). The shells are completely without scales or scutes and all species are aquatic. Florida softshells prefer lakes, while all other types prefer rivers. Softshells delight in burrowing in mud or sand in shallow water with only the eyes and snout exposed. Their nostrils are located on a long pipe-like snout which pokes the surface of the water.

Males tend to keep their juvenile patterns and colorations, but the females, which grow much larger, undergo marked changes in patterns. Males have a much longer and stouter tail than the females.

Handle softshells with caution. Their sharp claws and mouths deserve respect. Softshells enjoy all aquatic foods. They are scavengers, fish, crayfish, worms, repto-min, and krill are some of their favorites. Freeze-dried krill can be purchased at a local pet store.

Though the softshell is a "tough" turtle the wary owner should be aware of keeping it with other herps. Aquatic turtles may pick on the baby softshells and alligators (caimans) find young softshells delightful (take it from a mourner). Try not to keep the softshell with rough objects and be on top of water temp. and cleanliness. NEXT MONTH: Painted turtles.

Contributed by Mike Rossi

NOTES ON REPTILE HUSBANDRY

SNAKES: Cage should be as long as snake and half as wide. Escape-proof, smooth sides; not wire. Substrate: paper, artificial turf. Water bowl and rough rock to aid shedding. Branches if arboreal. Cage should provide a gradient of temperatures -- overhead heat source for basking, can get burns from "hot rock". Hiding places (box or part of flower pot). 50% humidity. Bigger snake-- bigger food.

LIZARDS: Terrarium (at least 10 gal. size) with gradient of temperatures, hiding area. Bowls of water provide humidity but some species do not drink from them -- water must be sprinkled or misted on them and plants in terrarium. Special lighting essential: UV light from unfiltered sunlight (don't overheat) or Vitalite. Can give trout chow or dog (not cat) food as protein source. Vitamin/mineral powdered supplement on food, especially necessary on insect diet. Remove uneaten food daily.

TURTLES (AQUATIC): Must bask; needs Vitalite. Heat from lamps and underwater heaters. Sanitation essential: must use pump/filter in water, also can use a bucket or other container for feeding to decrease fouling of water. Water pH 6.0 to 6.5 (use test paper. Can use trout chow or dog food. Vitamin/mineral powdered supplement on food.

TURTLES (TERRESTRIAL): Paper, artificial turf as substrate. Also need light for heat and for basking; also Vitalite. Warm water in bowl so animal can soak at least every other day. Same general feeding as aquatic turtles.

THESE REPTILES ARE NOT DOMESTIC PETS --- THEY ARE WILD ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY. TO THRIVE, THEIR NATURAL HABITAT MUST BE DUPLICATED AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE. DETAILS OF NATURAL HISTORY OF THE SPECIES MUST BE OBTAINED, I.E. BOOKS, OTHER HERPETOLOGICAL PERIODICALS. ALSO OBSERVE GOOD PERSONAL HYGIENE AFTER HANDLING THESE ANIMALS OR CHANGING SUBSTRATE AND WATER.

Contributed by John Rossi

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WALLS OF PETS now open! Let's welcome the first pet store in our area to feature REPTILES and reptile supplies. We visited JERRY WALLS of Walls of Pets and were delighted to see such a variety of reptiles under the same roof! WALLS OF PETS carries such items as:

- Domestic and imported snakes, amphibians, fish, spiders, lizards and birds
- Custom ordering (herps and supplies)
- \$.89 mice to Herp Society Members (pinkies usually available)
- Hot Rocks, Cages, Vitamins, artificial logs (great hide boxes)
- Field trips organized

WALLS OF PETS is located at 400 Madison Ave. Suite 104, take Blanding Blvd. towards Middleburg, you can't miss it!

BURMESE PYTHON: 10 Foot Female Burmese Python with metal cage for sale. \$150.00 Call Gary Brannon 725-9328

BALL PYTHON: 3-4 Foot male Ball Python with metal cage \$50.00 Call Gary Brannon 725-9328

RETICULATED PYTHON: 5 Foot Retic. Python \$100.00 Call Teresa Quintal (Home) 642-8694 (Work) 772-5384

TEN GAL. AQUARIUM: Includes top; water bowl; I/O carpet;
\$15.00 Call Scott Crawford 260-4887

WANTED: Grey rat snakes; corn snakes; any kingsnakes. Call
Scott Crawford at 260-4887.

WANTED: Young Colubrid snakes. Call Mark Hauge 730-7358

*****DRAWING CONTEST*****

Kids ages 10 and under are invited to DRAW YOUR FAVORITE
REPTILE! You may use crayons, markers, pencils, or ink pens!
Use your imagination! Trophies will be given for 1st; 2nd;
and 3rd place pictures. DEADLINE: please have your picture
turned in to:

John Berger
6054A Sea Horse Ct.
NAS JAX, FL
32212

Carla Colley
3390 Green Oak Lane
Middleburg, FL
32068

BY FEBRUARY 15TH. Trophies will be given out at the Feb.
meeting.