

The Maine Herpetological Society

Newsletter



Volume 16 Number 1 February 2008

Upcoming MHS Meetings and Regional Events Mark Your Calendar!

Saturday March 15	Regular Meeting Island Apt. Ross Lasley Parasites
Tuesday April 1	Unity College Reptile Around the World See write - up inside
Sunday April 5 - (no regular meeting)	Manchester Herp Show http://www.reptileexpo.com/nefirst.htm (see write-up inside)
Sunday April 20	New York Metro Reptile Expo 10:00AM to 4:00pm White Plains, NY http://www.reptileexpo.com/

Memberships

We would like to thank the following for joining our society.

Daniel & Nicole Brown	Eddington	Family
Mark Mullen	Unity	Student
Clover Street	Unity	Student

And we thank the following for renewing their MHS membership:

Daniel & Krissy Leonard	Liberty	Family
Dan Bates	Kennebunkport	Family
Travis Cossette	Florida	Individual
Lee Rowe	Calais	Individual
Robert DuBois	Milo	Individual
Jon Conceison	Scarborough	Individual
Pam & Bryan Wells	Old Town	Family

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

Last Meeting

This was a great meeting. There was a good turn-out and many brought a few herp friends to share. At first we attempted to be pretty organized in showing the herps but to be honest the more that came out the less organized we got.

Guest Tirzah Nichols came with a beautiful Blue Tongue Skink, Trevor Brown and Nichole Pinette brought their Hog Island Boa and Kristen Brawn a very nice ball python. Robert Easton brought his corn snake. Dan and Nicole Brown brought in their tegu and I believe it was, Rick Manchester, that brought in a very tame Tokay Gecko. If I got any names wrong I apologize. There were others too, Rick, Frank and myself each brought a few things. As I said, everyone had fun.

Prior to bringing out the animals there was a short business meeting. For most of the business meeting we discussed the proposed changes to Maine's restricted species list. Clint Smith gave us an update, as did John Chapman and Phil Roy. These members, along with Ross Lasley have put in a lot of work on updating the species list and getting changes implemented.. An extensive list has been submitted for review by the committee and it's our hope that it gets approved intact.

We also spoke about the request for information on boas and pythons by the US Dept. of the Interior. Kevin Murphy suggested that we consider joining PIJAC to help in this fight. Since several of those present didn't know what PIJAC was it was suggested that Kevin come to the next meeting with more information

The Anaconda Experience Sequel

By Douglass Kranich— Part Three

Ed Note: This article has actually been four parts starting with the November newsletter. Since it began we have had quite a few new and renewed memberships. Please let me know if you didn't get the entire sequence and I can send you the whole article in a word document. Thanks Kevin

If you recall Doug had just left by the Thompson Zoo in Clewiston, Florida but it was closed.

Another interesting place we stopped on our northward journey was called 'Gatorama'. It was a tourist attraction that had thousands of alligators housed together in giant outdoor pens. They were grouped together by size and a walkway allowed you to walk over the pens and observe the masses of crocodilians below and around you. The numbers of these species was truly overwhelming; I had never seen so many in one place before.

We stayed with a relative in Lakeland and I knew this was my best (and last!) chance at getting to Tampa to trade snakes. I don't know how I ever talked my dad into this one, but one of the two evenings we were in that area, we drove the 30 miles west to Tampa to find the place. I don't even remember calling, I just had the street address to go by. When we got there it was dark and the house turned out to be quite a ways north of Interstate-4.

I'll never forget that house as long as I live. It was so much more than any private collection of reptiles I had ever seen or imagined. This place was like a commune of reptile nuts; several of the bedrooms were completely devoted to their reptile collections. I walked around in those rooms in awe. Even the bathroom had herps in it; There was a gigantic glass jar (10 gallons?) with a half dozen tree frogs sitting right next to the commode!

They had some innovative ways of housing large numbers of snakes. At that time, all of my snakes were in individual homemade box-type cages with glass fronts. These guys had chest-of-drawer-type setups similar to those suggested in current snake-keeping books like Mattison's Keeping and Breeding Snakes. The difference was that there were no drawers. Each compartment's opening was covered by a glass pane which slid snugly into routed slots.

I only remember a few of the individual species that I saw that evening. One of the guys had several Trans-Pecos rat snakes that fascinated me; I had never seen any before. There were lots of corn snakes and these

guys were breeding them at that time (that was 25 years ago!!!)

My dad and I also walked around rather warily because one of the collections was almost entirely dwarf rattlesnakes. While we were in that room, one of the guys glanced up on top of a group of cages and said "Well, look what's loose up there!" The one we were following on the 'tour' looked up and said "That's where that yellow rat went to!" At first, I didn't see a yellow rat, but only a stuffed eastern diamondback rattlesnake in the coiled-and-ready-to-strike position. A closer look revealed the head of a small 2' yellow rat peering out from the coils of the huge rattler! The guy looked at me after reaching up and grabbing that snake and asked if I would like to have it. What do you think I said!?

Of course, we finally got around to the trade business. He pulled out a gorgeous 5' female corn snake and asked if I would like it. I couldn't believe he was offering it to me but I was more than happy to take it in trade. Then he slid the bull snake out of the bag and as you might guess, it began to hiss. Despite that, he seemed pleased with the sheer size and condition of the beast.

Before we left the man asked me if I had ever hatched any snake eggs-- to which I responded "no." When asked if I would like to try, I replied that I would love to if he would be willing to give me some instructions. He went to his incubator and came back with three eggs: two corn snakes and one Florida king snake. His instructions were: 1) Soak wadded newspapers and then squeeze out as much water as possible. 2) Place two inches of the wrung paper on the bottom of a glass, gallon jar and position the three eggs on top of that layer. 3) Cover those with three more inches of the paper. 4) Replace the lid and make some small holes in it. 5) Place the jar in a room whose temperature was in the 70's. 6) Wait!

I don't recall how long it took for them to hatch, but I did follow his guidelines as closely as possible. After a month, I got impatient and decided to open one of the corn snake eggs. Inside was a perfectly formed but still-developing corn. I decided that the other two must be fine and would be left alone. The king hatched first and I just marveled at its miniature perfection; it was placed in a small aquarium. A week later, about the time the king was going into a shed, the corn also hatched so I placed it in the same aquarium as the king. Bad idea.

A few days later, the king snake shed its skin and as

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I was removing the shed, I was also looking unsuccessfully for the corn. I feared that it had escaped until I got a good look at the Florida king. The body had an obese appearance and it finally occurred to me what had happened. I learned the hard way where the meaning of 'king' snake originated from.

I hope you can conclude that my long awaited meeting with the gentleman in Tampa was a lot more than I had hoped for. It seemed to me that he was way ahead of his time when it came to keeping reptiles. I'm sorry that I can't remember his name and for all I know it was Bill Love, Wayne Hill, or Tom Crutchfield!! In any case, I would love to know, and chances are that whoever it was, they are still deeply involved in the reptile hobby/industry to this day down in Florida.

Thanks Doug great trip and article. Kevin

Notes on the upcoming reptile show in Manchester NH

**Saturday,
April 5, 2008**

10:00 am-4:00 pm
Radisson Hotel
700 Elm Street
Manchester, NH 03101
Just off of I-293 Exit 5

As we do every year we have reserved a few tables at this show for the MHS and it's members. We also reserve 1 or 2 rooms at the Radisson Hotel so that members do not need to drive as far. Members are welcome to use the table and share in the rooms but there are a few things you must do. First you need to contact Doug Kranich immediately to let him know of your plans. He needs to know how many rooms to get and who is going to be using the table. Second, if you are using the tables or the rooms you must commit to assisting in set-up prior to the show. Doug's telephone number is (207) 723-4108

MHS 2007 Financial Statement
Submitted by Doug Kranich - Treasurer

	2006	2007
opening balance 1/1	4708.42	5377.5
INCOME :		
Memberships-new	(47) \$450.00	(20) \$244.00
Memberships-renew	(52) \$714.00	(51) \$655.00
toy animal sales	79.50	58.00
t shirt sales	344.00	101.00
hat sales	80.00	42.00
book/magazine/poster sales	432.00	153.00
expo vendor tables	1081.50	874.50
Gate receipts from expo	3067.00	2066.00
credit union dividends	16.48	20.04
frozen rodent sales	1083.00	1581.25
Jan 06 field trip	180.00	0
misc. income	7.80	0
Total Income	7535.28	5794.79
EXPENDITURES :		
postage	236.09	473.00
expo license	150.00	150.00
expo hall rental	952.79	927.79
expo/U Henry's advertising	315.00	432.00
copier/printing expenses	180.00	65.94
food-meetings/picnics/potluck	308.33	318.81
expo motel rooms	1517.16	888.88
herp show tables	405.00	150.00
website domain cost	69.35	150.00
mouse purchases	1126.22	1931.79
gasoline	198.02	0
poster/book purchases	383.64	144.00
t-shirt/hat purchases	894.60	0
meeting speakers	100.00	50.00
vacuum packager	0	93.00
misc. purchases/expenses	30.00	79.13
Total Expenses	6866.20	5854.34
Closing Balance 12/31	5377.50	5317.95

Important

As many of you are aware we are working on a 3 day field trip to New York for this September. The plan is the get behind the scene tours of both the Staten Island and Bronx Zoos and attend the New York Reptile Expo in White Plains.

This may be partially subsidized by the society but there would be some expenses. We are not asking for commitments at this time but we would like to know who at least has some interest. We are researching transportation and accommodations as well as the zoo tours. Please email Doug, Rick or myself - editor@maineherp.org.

The Foxsnake House

'Assembled' by Doug Kranich, Millinocket, Maine

This interesting story caught my attention for two reasons. One is because it's about the western fox snake, a species that I grew up with in Illinois, collecting and keeping in captivity. The second is that it also describes a cellar being used as a snake hibernaculum. The only place I've ever heard of that is Travis Cossette's (MHS member) house in Franklin, Maine, where a number of Eastern Milkshakes have annually invaded. After reading the article to Travis, he wrote directly to Dr. Corn to inquire about it and he received a response from the good Doctor. Although the reply was a bit brief and disappointing, it was nonetheless a response.

This total article includes the assemblage of the original minutes found in the December 2007 (Vol 42, Number 12) Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society, Travis' email to Dr. Corn, and Dr. Corn's response to Travis. D. Kranich

From the Nov. 28, 07 meeting minutes of the CHS, written by John Archer

At the November 28, 2007 meeting of the Chicago Herpetological Society, Dr. Michael Corn spoke about a unique situation he encountered, a 'fox snake house.' He is a longtime member of the CHS as well as a past president. He has also taught biology and zoology at the College of Lake County (CLC) since 1970. He holds B.S. and M.A. degrees from Eastern Illinois University and a Ph.D. from the University of Florida where he studied under Dr. Archie Carr. He has taught field courses in Costa Rica, Suriname, and the southwestern and southeastern US, including the Everglades. Now officially retired, he still teaches and leads field trips. You may want to look at his spring field trip to Costa Rica at <http://www.clcillinois.edu/dredit/academics/fieldstudytrips.asp>. He invites anyone interested and you can earn college credit.

Dr. Corn talked about a summer house, probably built sometime around World War II, in Lake County, northwest of Chicago. The house was tiny, with a concrete block foundation surrounding a basement and supporting the wood-framed house. Some years later, an addition was built, and still the house was small. When it first came to the attention of Mike in 1997, the house, not too well constructed in the first place, was showing its age, with settling concrete porches and many holes through the walls and foundation. The yard was not in the best of shape and the probably once wild setting was now replaced by farm fields and heavily traveled highways, slowly being filled in by

strip malls and housing developments. The house sat on property that backed against a marsh winding its way for miles and defying the civilization threatening to overrun the county. That was a good thing. The other good thing was the new owners of the house in 1997. They had the sense to contact Dr. Corn, and then to rent the house to Sandie Cosner, who worked with Dr. Corn at CLC. Sandie had assisted with other snake research projects, and was not afraid to share her house with snakes. Thus did Dr. Corn become involved with the 'fox snake house.'

Probably for decades, western fox snakes (*Elaphe vulpina*) have moved between the marsh and the basement of this little house, and for about two months in the fall and one month in the spring, the basement comes alive with snakes, nearly all of them fox snakes. It was Mike's good luck that the owners contacted him about seeing snakes, and then for the next seven years, Sandie allowed him and his students access to her house and to the snakes. Until 2004, Mike had the unique opportunity to study wild snakes in an accessible hibernaculum, getting some exciting data that would otherwise be unobtainable. He was able to PIT tag (an implanted microchip) many snakes, radio tag a few, and use marking patterns to individually identify almost all of the snakes they caught. The next time you look at a fox snake, check out the Mickey Mouse spots on the back, each a different shape and in different locations than on other fox snakes. PIT tags could be read through the concrete block, making it possible to tell which snakes moved a lot during hibernation, and which snakes stayed in one place. Population models suggested that the house must be the wintering place for nearly all the fox snakes in the marsh. One year with 129 captures, Mike estimated an adult fox snake population of nearly 160 animals! Dr. Corn and his helpers studied growth rates, sexual differences, juvenile survival rates, and weight to length ratios. Then the studies stopped.

In 2004, Sandie moved out, and the little house was rented to a less cooperative tenant. Dr. Corn no longer had the access he needed to conduct his studies. Neighboring lots were being sold to developers, and the price of the land was increasing. Most of the land around the little house will no doubt be bulldozed. No one knows what will happen to the snakes in that case.

There is hope. Most of the wetlands are owned by the Lake County Forest Preserve, and while they are reluctant to buy land that is not quite contiguous with existing holdings, Mike still holds hope that they can be talked into buying the little house.

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Snake Fans Worry About Federal Inquiry

By LINDA LOMBARDI
For The Associated Press

Owners of pet snakes don't expect a lot of sympathy from outsiders. So when headlines like "Feds move to ban pythons and boas" started to show up on message boards and blogs, the hobbyist community caught fire. Hundreds rushed to post messages decrying the possibility of adding pythons and boas to the list of species that it's illegal to import or transport between states.

Snakes are more popular pets than you might believe. An estimated 4.8 million American households own one or more pet reptiles, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

Although some special expertise is needed, the care of snakes is not time consuming, and for many who are fascinated by them, it's hard to stop at just one. Some species are even bred for special colors and patterns, like more familiar pets.

The Fish and Wildlife Service says it is just gathering information about which species might be of environmental concern at the moment, and what the economic impact might be. No new rules have been proposed. The agency is accepting public comments until April 30, and if any new species end up being proposed to add to the regulated list, there will be another comment period at that point.

The inquiry began after Florida began coping with a growing number of released Burmese pythons.

Snake expert David Barker of Texas, says that these snakes, which can grow to 20 feet long and over 200 pounds, are valuable when they're small and when very large. But in between, at about 8-10 feet in length, owners often find that they've become a handful, and are unable to sell them.

"They get irritable - they're teenagers," he says. "You can't get rid of one, you can't give it away."

This can lead irresponsible owners to release their pet into the wild.

Linda Friar of Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Park says the problem there has been increasing: in 1993, they found only about 27 of these snakes, but in 2007 the number was 250, and the educated guess is that "for every one we find, they are 10 more."

Officials are concerned about possible effects of these snakes on native species.

Snake enthusiasts like Barker, author of two books and numerous scientific articles, don't discount environmental issues. In fact, he says he chose to focus on ball pythons back in the 1970s because he expected that they'd eventually need protection by captive breeding.

But it's somewhat understandable that snake owners react strongly to the threat of legislation, given the confusing patchwork of widely varying local and state laws that affect them. For example, conservation regulations in some states ban the keeping of native species- even individuals bred in captivity- to protect them from being collected from the wild. This worthy goal means it can be illegal to own, for example, a corn snake, which is a good first pet snake for children.

Reptiles may also fall under laws regulating dangerous animals, wildlife, or exotic pets, which may ban or require permits for certain species. The logic behind the laws doesn't always make sense to snake enthusiasts.

For example, the city of Baltimore bans any snake longer than 5 feet. But there are 5-foot long snakes that are not much thicker than your thumb, and are unlikely to endanger anything bigger than a mouse. And Delaware currently requires a permit for any non-native species of reptile, no matter how small and inoffensive.

Regulating snakes as "wildlife" also raises the question of how long an animal must be bred in captivity before it is no longer considered wild. Barker argues that his ball pythons now essentially domesticated: "They're selected for their ease of feeding, their temperaments. They're been bred in captivity for 10 generations."

Of course, domestication doesn't mean no regulation - after all, in most places you have to license and vaccinate your dogs. Barker points approvingly to Florida's approach: new laws require the giant species of snakes to be micro-chipped so that, if released, the owner can be identified and penalized.

Florida legislation also treats captive-bred varieties differently in one case: regulations on red-eared slider turtles have an exception for those that have been bred in special colors.

But hobbyists are passionate in their defense of the rewards of keeping snakes - and the freedom for responsible owners to make their own choice about which animals share their lives. As one poster to the government Web site put it, "Not everyone is a puppy, kitten sort of person."

Fox Snake House continued

He was also joined in the project by one of his former students, Rob Carmichael, now director of the Wildlife Discovery Center in Lake Forest. Tracking a few fox snakes with Rob's radios--implanted by Steve Barten--revealed that in the summer the snakes used the wettest parts of the marsh, not simply the edges as was previously believed. If all else fails, Dr. Corn is exploring the possibility of constructing an artificial hibernaculum on forest preserve property. There are many questions about fox snakes that still need answers, but time is running out.

Travis' email to Dr. Corn, Jan 2, 2008

Hello Dr. Corn,

I received a phone call from a good friend of mine up in Maine tonight and he actually read me an article from the Chicago Herpetological Society Newsletter over the phone regarding your Fox Snake Hibernaculum you are involved with just NW of Chicago. I must say that it was a very interesting article and I wanted to share with you my story of a basement used as hibernation from my hometown.

Currently, I live in Florida but I grew up in a tiny coastal town in Maine called Franklin. My parents bought the house about 30 years ago. Both parents are severely Ophidophobic and ever since I can remember we have had a spring and fall migration of Eastern Milk Snakes (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*) moving in and out of the basement. The house was built in the mid to late 1800's and has the very old field stone foundation which provides numerous holes in which these snakes can access the basement. Winter temps reach -10 regularly and there is really 3 months of decent weather in our area. I can remember catching up to a dozen snakes per spring as they started coming out of hibernation and moving around the basement. My father actually found one inside the living areas of the house one morning.

Sadly, until I was about 17 years old, each snake that was captured met their death in the hands of my father. Now that I have explained to my Dad the importance of these snakes he has tried to relocate them when he finds them. As suspected, numbers of these snakes has dropped year by year and now only 1-2 per year are discovered. On a recent trip up to Maine I actually found a Milk Snake shed in the basement which proves that they are still around at least.

Back in 2001, I was able to capture an adult female and kept her in my private snake collection up until this year. I have no idea how old she was because she never really grew at all, which meant I

took her into captivity as an adult. She did very well and died just a few months ago.

I just wanted to share this quick story of a similar situation with Eastern Milk snakes. Although the snake numbers are no where near the numbers of the Fox Snakes you were involved with. Most of the members in my herp society up in Maine have rarely seen an E. Milk in the wild and were pretty excited to hear of this situation.

Take care, Travis Cossette, Gainesville, FL

Dr. Corn's email response to Travis, Jan. 2, 2008

Travis,

Thanks for the interesting information. As you can imagine, the fox snakes aren't doing much at the moment. I'm looking forward to this spring to see what's happening with the population. Hopefully your milk snakes are still around. We used to have many milk snakes in Lake County, IL, but they've pretty much disappeared also.

Hope you're enjoying Gainesville -- a great place to be. (I'm in Dade City, FL at the moment, and it was down to 27 degrees last night!)

Mike

Dr. Michael J. Corn
College of Lake County

April 1st at Unity College

Upcoming presentation at Unity College
Performing Arts Center - Tuesday April 1st.
6 - 8 pm. Open to the public.

Jamie Pastika of the Reptile and Amphibian Discovery Zoo, in Owatonna, MN. will be giving a presentation on education programs in herpetology. For more information email Mark Mullen at:
mmullen04@unity.edu

If you want more information on Jamie Pastika go here: <http://www.theradzoo.com/>

Spotted Salamanders

Erin Crowley - Maine DEP Website

Have you met any amphibians living in your back yard?

The spotted salamander, present throughout the state of Maine, might be thriving nearby. Its long (4 to 7 inches) dark brown/black body decorated with two irregular rows of vivid yellow spots, is distinctive. But it's possible you may not notice your guest.

For about 95% of the year, these shy amphibians conceal themselves under logs, leaves, and rocks, or in burrows and tunnels made by other animals. At night they emerge to feast on insects and other invertebrates.

The rest of the time they spend in vernal pools elsewhere in your neighborhood. While spotted salamanders may visit vernal pools for only a handful of days each year, these special wetlands are crucial to the amphibians' life cycle.

Vernal pools are not well understood, although they are common in Maine. It would be easy to pass by one of these giant forested puddles without even recognizing it as a wetland. Simply stated: a vernal pool is a temporary, isolated pool of water. These pools typically fill in between the winter and spring and dry up in the late summer, making fish survival impossible .

This lack of fish makes vernal pools essential to the spotted salamander life cycle. Amphibian eggs and larvae would make a very tasty treat for hungry fish. As a result, spotted salamanders have come to rely on vernal pools for mating and laying eggs.

Some moist night between mid-March and the end of April, these amphibians migrate in mass to their

local vernal pool. Once there, the congress of salamanders will participate in a nuptial dance so vigorous that the water around them may appear to boil.

A few days later, the females will lay several masses of eggs, each with 25 to 250 eggs. Having done their part, the adults return to their forested upland hideouts—the next generation must fend for themselves.

Within a few weeks the larvae begin to emerge from their eggs. They look something like dull, yellow-green speckled tadpoles, with long feathery gills protruding from either side of their heads. They spend the better part of the spring and summer growing into their legs, feasting on a bounty of aquatic insects in the vernal pools. By the time the pool dries up, they are ready to use lungs rather than gills. They set out to find a new home, usually within a few hundred feet of the now empty vernal pool.

Spotted salamanders are particularly sensitive to development: destruction of vernal pools will interfere with breeding, while destruction of forests within a half-mile radius of the pools will destroy adult habitat. Roads are particularly dangerous.

Within the northeastern United States, several states have already named the spotted salamander a Species of Special Concern. To do your part to protect salamanders, be aware of the vernal pools in your neighborhood and help protect them from development.

For information and educational resources on vernal pools and the amphibians that rely on them, check out www.vernalpool.org

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. ** MAINE PERMIT REQUIRED

For Sale: For Sale: 1.1 07 tangerine albino Hondurans \$400pr., 0.0.1 '07 children's python \$75. Doug Kranich kranich@verizon.net 207 723 4108.

For Sale: Taking names for 2008 Albino, Albino Spiders, Pastels and Super Pastel Ball Pythons. 08 CBB Normal Ball pythons out of the egg for \$10 in 50 lots. Why pay the same for imports when you can have US CBB's for the same price. 08 Colombian boas – Already here - \$45-100 depending upon quantity, sex and color. 08 Cal Kings \$22-40 depending upon the amount of white Contact Ben Cole – at BCherps@yahoo.com

For Sale: 100's of Balls, Boas & Colures 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