

The Maine Herpetological Society

Newsletter



Volume 16 Number 4 May 2008

Upcoming MHS Meetings and Regional Events Mark Your Calendar!

- July 19 - Annual picnic and Herping
Island Apartments & Hinkley School
- Aug 31 8th Annual Portland Reptile Expo
Holiday Inn West
Portland Maine
- Sept 5 - 7th - Trip to New York - White Plains Show
and Staten Island Zoo
- Sept 7 New York Reptile Expo
White Plains New York
- Oct 4 New England Reptile Expo
Manchester, NH

Memberships

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

Ross Swiechowicz Individual

And we thank the following for renewing their MHS membership:

Dallas Quarles Individual

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

Update

I don't know if anyone realized it but it's been awhile since you've received a newsletter. Pretty much lack of articles was the primary reason. Doug Kranich though has come through for us once again and received permission from all parties to reprint an article written by Dave Barker. Hopefully this will inspire some members to write their own.

For the past two meetings we really haven't had a program scheduled so they were basically business meetings. They were short and only the stalwarts attended. This is understandable though, with the price of gas and no program. We are not sure whether there is a meeting in August. I believe that this will be discussed at the picnic this weekend. Here are the minutes of the June meeting presented by Secretary Carol Demeter:

Minutes of June 21, 2008 MHS meeting

Rick Manchester was contacted to reschedule the field trip for the 3rd Saturday of July, between noon and 5 pm.

Carol will contact the Staten Island zoo to set up tour in September. The date of the White Plains Show is Sunday, September 7, 2008 so the tour would have to be on Saturday September 6.

Doug feels we should limit the trip attendees to 1 van and 2 rooms. Attendees felt we would need 3 rooms. We will take a \$20 deposit for gas contribution by July meeting. Someone needs to check on the van pricing and the hotel costs. The attendees will share the cost of gas, and everyone will pay for their own meals and admissions.

Anyone who purchases permitted animals at the show will be allowed to bring them back in the van presuming there is room.

Portland Expo: there are approximately 40-50 tables. An additional 2 checks for tables at the show have been received.

Rick will confirm the expo room rental with Doug.

Amy from Unity College is looking for a herp teacher for the Fall.

Obviously these are a little behind and most of tasks that were given out during this meeting have already been done. Which reminds me - Do I have your email address? If not please send it to editor@maineherp.org. I send out notices etc. via email and would like to get 100% participation. Thanks - MHS Newsletter Editor

Will They Come in out of the Cold?

Observations of Large Constrictors in Cool and Cold Conditions

David G. Barker
vpi@beecreek.net

reprinted with permission from the Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 43(6):93-97, 2008

In the winter of 1968, I landed what I considered to be a dream job. I was hired by Mural's Pet Center in Crystal Lake, Illinois, to care for their menagerie. There were fish, birds, rodents, lizards, turtles and frogs. There was a young boa that I stared at, I memorized, I worshipped; eventually it was to become mine, the first snake that my mother allowed in the house.

More exciting, however, was the brooding, dark-natured reticulated python that was housed in the cage next to the boa. The boa was about two feet long; the reticulated python was closer to eight feet and the biggest snake I had ever been near. He was a big-headed, slender, unpleasant snake. He did not hesitate to bite when he had the chance. I was enchanted by him, but I was afraid of him. We all feared him, and the day he was discovered to have escaped from his cage was a day of stressful anticipation.

We searched, cautiously, but we didn't find him. He was a presence in the store for a couple of weeks. Overnight raids on the guinea pigs and hamsters let us know he was there, lurking in the attic by day and roaming the store at night. One cold Saturday morning, we found him in the parking area behind the store. During the night he had left the store through a roof vent, crawled down to the gutter, then down a pipe, and headed back to the alley.

We knew this because there was a fresh eight inches of snow on the ground. We could see exactly where he had been, and how he had arrived at the spot where he was found. He was stretched out in a normal crawling position, breaking a trail through the snow, head up, frozen as hard as a rock.

During the following six years that I lived in northern and central Illinois, I learned of three more occasions when large constrictors left a warm house to die outside in freezing temperatures.

In 1971, another reticulated python escaped the same pet store in a manner similar to the first, with similar results. Then there was a young, six-foot Burmese py-

thon, and a mature, five-foot Colombian boa constrictor that escaped warm houses to die in snow just feet from the houses.

Burmese Pythons and Cold Temperatures

Skipping forward a few years, the late 1970s were an innovative period for herpetoculture. From my perspective, this was the true advent of captive breeding, brought on, in part, by the discovery of a successful means to "hibernate" snakes in captivity.

In those days, I was employed as a keeper in the Dallas Zoo Department of Herpetology, and I had a large personal collection of snakes as well. My collection was comprised predominantly of kingsnakes and rattlesnakes, all species that hibernated in nature. However, prior to that period of time, there had been a widely accepted belief that it was difficult or impossible to hibernate snakes in captivity.

Snake keepers generally knew snakes could tolerate periods of cool temperatures, 16EC (60EF) or even 13EC (55EF), but it didn't occur to us that those temperatures WERE hibernation for most captive snakes. Many keepers attempting to replicate "hibernation" had been trying to take their snakes down below 4 or 5EC (40EF), emulating the well-known behavior of groundhogs and bears. Few snakes survived those attempts.

One of my two snake rooms was kept fairly warm throughout the year, but the other was a back bedroom in which I experimented with low temperatures by opening the large windows that were on two sides of the room. There was a thermostatically controlled gas space heater that kept the room temperatures from dipping too low.

I had Burmese pythons back then; the species had been breeding in my collection since 1974. I had lots of young Burmese pythons around, and I decided to include them in my experiment with cool winter temperatures. I never even considered that Burmese pythons

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

needed to hibernate, or that they hibernated in nature, but I was curious about their reaction to cool and cold temperatures. I also included two Colombian boa constrictors, for similar reasons, but they both suffered respiratory illnesses when I cooled them and I moved them back to my warm room. The pythons proved to be somewhat more resilient.

I thought of this as an experiment, but really it was just observations. I had mercury thermometers in several places around the room and a few in cages; I constantly monitored temperatures and watched what the snakes were doing. Over the course of three winters, I observed some behaviors from my chilled kingsnakes, rattlesnakes and Burmese pythons that today I believe are generally true of most snakes.

One observation was that my snakes began to lose interest in feeding as the environment got colder. Some Burmese pythons quit feeding at 24EC (75EF); others ate at 18EC (65EF), occasionally even down to 17EC (63EF). In general, the young Burmese pythons were more eager to eat at low ambient temperatures than were the kingsnakes and rattlesnakes.

However, a second point I noticed was that the ability to digest and absorb food seemed to be temperature-related; at some point, a cold snake with food inside of it is forced to regurgitate. In general, the larger the meal, the warmer a snake must be to keep it down. Pythons begin to have problems digesting large meals at temperatures below 24EC (75EF); I observed pythons kept at 15EC (60EF) regurgitate rats that had been consumed two weeks previously, decomposed but not digested.

Regurgitation is dangerous to snakes, particularly chilled snakes. I never kept detailed records that would allow me to make accurate estimations, but then and in the years since, I observed that a significant number of snakes that regurgitate develop serious and often fatal respiratory infections a week or two later. This probably occurs because snakes aspirate some of the fluids that come up with the regurgitations.

As temperatures drop, snakes become less active. At temperatures of 13EC (55EF), most snakes move about slowly, flick their tongues out in slow motion, and will drink water. As temperatures drop further, most snakes become torpid and are unable to move or to react to stimuli.

As temperatures decrease below the point of torpor, there is an increasing chance that when warmed up the snake will suffer cold shock syndrome [CSS]. However, rarely are snakes killed outright when chilled to core-body temperatures of 4–7EC (40–45EF) for only a few hours; if the duration has been short, most will warm up with few, if any ill effects; however, after even a quick chill, some snakes may suffer CSS or other problems upon warming up. At temperatures below 10EC (50EF), pythons suffer an increasing chance of dying as the duration of exposure to cold temperature increases.

When warmed to temperatures where activity is possible, snakes suffering CSS will not be able to move in a coordinated manner. They may exhibit what appear to be violent seizures if disturbed or handled. Snakes with this condition may die within 48 hours of being warmed; if they survive past that period of time, they likely will recover, but full recovery to normal coordinated movement can take more than a year.

It was my observation that Burmese pythons had an increasing chance of suffering CSS as temperatures dropped below 10EC (50EF). The lower the ambient temperature and the longer they are at a low temperature, the more likely they will suffer CSS. Over the years I've seen six Burmese that were kept at 8EC (45EF) for longer than a couple of days, none survived; some died with CSS when they warmed up while others died while cold.

Will They Come in out of the Cold?

Fast forward a few more years. Tracy and I worked with all the largest python species for 11 years, beginning in 1988. During that period of time we experimented with several methods of confinement and housing for the big snakes, some approaching 200 pounds. We worked to evaluate what we felt might be the best way to keep large numbers of large snakes. We placed the greatest emphasis on efficiency of maintenance and on the safety of the keepers of the animals. Our thoughts at the time were that the caging and maintenance protocols that we designed might in the future prove to be valuable if ever there were need to establish large colonies of the largest snakes for conservation or research purposes.

In the winter of 1993, Tracy and I traveled to Australia to research our first *Pythons of the World* volume. There we saw outdoor cages for fruit bats at the Territory Wildlife Park in Berry Springs, Northern

continued next page

Territory. We decided then and there to create a similar cage for the large constrictors we were maintaining at VPI.

We constructed eight cages (see floor plan below), each with climate-controlled, 2.4-m-high indoor rooms that had concrete floors measuring 2 m × 2.3 m. Each indoor cage had two shelves, one above the other, on which snakes could sit; each shelf measured .9 m × 2.3 m.

In the winter we heated the indoor cages using oil-filled electric radiators that were thermostatically controlled to keep the air temperatures at a relatively constant 18EC (65EF). The air was kept moving with oscillating fans, so that temperatures did not stratify. The radiators and fans were placed outside the cages in the walkway that passed in front of all the cages. Each cage had three regulated heating pads, one on the floor

The outdoor cages as the wire panels were being assembled. Black PVC-coated, welded wire mesh was used. Each vertical panel sits on a 4-inch-wide concrete beam. (18EC; 65EF), one on the lower shelf (24EC; 75EF) and on the upper shelf (28EC; 82EF). In the winter, the temperature of the concrete floor during the coldest weather was 13–16EC (55– 60EF). Temperatures were monitored with a Raynger non-contact remote-sensing temperature gun.

Each indoor cage connected to a wire-enclosed outdoor run that measured 2 m × 5 m × 2.5 m (h). The substrate of the outdoor enclosures was large smooth river rock. Each enclosure had a large oak log with branches. Access between each indoor and outdoor enclosure was through a small doorway that closed with a vertical drop-gate panel. There was a locked outside access door at the far end of each of the outdoor runs.

Here in the Texas Hill Country we have some winter cold spells, but temperatures on many winter days are suitable for pythons and boas to be outside. Nighttime temperatures, however may dip to dangerous lows; on average there are more than 30 days a year when the daily minimum temperature is # 0EC (32EF or colder). Most years include several “blue northers,” each lasting several days. During such periods nighttime lows are -10 to -7EC (14 to 19EF), days are gray and cold, and daytime maximum temperatures may not exceed 0EC (32EF).

From the summer of 1994 through the winter of 1997/1998, we maintained large constrictors in these indoor/outdoor cages. We were excited at

the prospect of giving the snakes the option to live inside or outside 24/7, at their discretion. We wanted to know, if given choices, would large constrictors come in out of the cold? We posed the question because it would be an important aspect of the maintenance protocol of large constrictors in this type of enclosure.

Many species of subtropical reptiles and most species of reptiles from strongly seasonal climates are reported to be aware of dangerous low temperatures and react by seeking shelter. Bert Langerwerf had reported success with several large lizard species in indoor/outdoor enclosures in cold Alabama winters. Several turtle keepers told us that some species of tortoises would seek shelter in cold weather. We had seen that some of the larger North American snake species did well year-round in indoor/outdoor cages. If pythons and boas could be counted on to reliably come in from the cold, it would allow them access to their outdoor enclosures during the periods of favorable temperatures that are typical of a Texas winter.

It also occurred to us that indoor/outdoor cages might be very effective exhibits for large constrictors maintained in zoos. This type of caging would allow more space to the snakes at less cost, reduce maintenance, and, done correctly, could increase the level of keeper safety when working very large snakes.

I was particularly intrigued with the project, as I had not forgotten the snakes that crawled into snow. I wanted to better understand that phenomenon.

In each cage we propped the drop-gate open and masked most of the opening to create a passageway that was 25 cm × 25 cm. We draped a piece of soft carpet over the opening to block some of the coldest air, creating a “doggy door” for snakes. They readily went in and out of the opening. When we were not supervising the snakes closely, the drop-gate panels could be shut, closing access to the outdoor cages.

When the weather was cold, we checked the snakes at dusk, 10 P.M., sometimes at midnight, and just after dawn. Over the four winters that we watched the snakes, we worked with Burmese pythons (from Thai lineages), reticulated pythons (two from Thailand, one from Borneo, three of unknown provenance), African pythons (from Ghana) and boa constrictors (from Colombia, Peru and Argentina).

Our evaluations of indoor/outdoor cages were positive. The snakes prospered, they reproduced,

maintenance was dramatically decreased, and it was possible to safely work with the biggest snakes. However, it became apparent that this would not be an effective way to exhibit snakes in a zoo for the reason that snakes rarely ever went outside voluntarily during daylight hours. From May through mid-October, it was extremely rare to witness any snake in the outdoor cages during daylight hours. In fact, no reticulated python was ever witnessed to go outside in daylight, no matter the time of year.

However, at night all the snakes roamed their outdoor enclosures. They stretched, they prowled, and they climbed on their logs. Often they would emerge at dark, investigate around for a while, and then coil in a hunting position, to remain motionless



Tracy handles one of the reticulated pythons living in the indoor/outdoor cages.

until dawn when they would return indoors.

During the early spring and the late fall, the Burmese pythons and the African pythons would occasionally remain out in the cool mornings until the sun shone strongly on them, then returning indoors.

Pythons in the Cold

During the winter, December through mid-March, we never saw any python go outside in the day. What we observed was that the pythons spent most of the winter sitting indoors on the floor. Most of the winter they maintained body temperatures of 16–18EC (60–65EF), even

though warmer temperatures were possible by sitting on the various heating pads. In very cold weather the extended low temperatures and the howling winter winds would overwhelm our heaters, and chill the floor below normal winter temperatures; pythons on the floor would have a body temperature of 10–13EC (50–55EF).

We took most temperatures the quick and easy way, using a RayTech Raynger noncontact temperature gun. In the first year, when the snakes were so cold as to be relatively immobilized, we did take some cloacal temperatures with a mercury thermometer. When the snakes had been sitting in one position for longer than a day, we found close agreement with values registered by the temperature gun for the surface temperature of the snake and for the temperature of the substrate on which the snake was sitting.

At temperatures ≥ 10 EC (50EF or above) the snakes could voluntarily move. Their big tongues flicked out slowly, and they seemed very deliberate in their movements. Every now and then, each animal would rouse, and change positions, maybe get a drink. Once in a while a python would sit on the coolest heat pad, sometimes for a few days in a row. These big snakes would sometimes remain coiled and motionless for longer than a week. Most movements that we observed were when we happened to encounter a snake getting a drink. They did seem to us to drink fairly often, but there were extended periods when they were not being observed.

Every now and then, a snake would go outside, usually at night. Sometimes when we checked at night we would find them prowling slowly in the cold air, even below freezing; in those cases we always dragged them back indoors. But sometimes snakes would move in the night after our last check. At the morning check we would find them outside, coiled, at the point of torpor and sometimes completely unable to move. Again, we would drag them indoors and in a short time they had warmed back up.

It appeared to us that their movements to the outside were relatively independent of the temperature. They were about as likely to go outside and coil when it was a fatal -5EC (23EF) or a survivable 16EC (60EF).

All of the large pythons were observed to move outside in dangerously low temperatures --- always at night. Twice we found a Burmese python and once an African rock python that were coiled outside after nights with low temps of -4 to -7EC (20–25EF), covered in frost and insensate. We nearly started an autopsy on the first python we discovered in this condition before we realized it was still living. We took cloacal temperatures and

found that these chilled snakes had internal temperatures of 4 to 7EC (40–45EF). We pulled the snakes inside and put a 21EC (70EF) soft spray of water on them, and in the period of an hour, all three appeared to recover.

Boas in the Cold

The boas provided an interesting contrast to the pythons. There were six large adult boas housed together in one of the indoor/outdoor enclosures. Two large females were captive-raised Colombian boas (*Boa constrictor imperator*), two large females were captive-raised Peruvian boas (*Boa constrictor constrictor*), and there was a captive-bred pair (male and female) of Argentine boas (*Boa constrictor occidentalis*).

All boas did well in the indoor/outdoor cages during the warm months. However, the boas from Colombia and Peru did not do well when cold weather arrived. Unlike the pythons, they often sat on the middle-level and upper-level heating pads for extended periods of time. They persisted in going outside during the day and at night. Several times we found them cold to the point of torpor. One Peruvian boa came down with a severe respiratory ailment by the middle of December, and by the end of December we felt it in the best interests of the remaining three snakes to remove them to the warm main snake building.

Of all the snakes that we kept in the indoor/outdoor cages, boas and pythons, only the Argentine boas did well in the winter. They never went outside at night, and they never went outside in the day when the weather was unfavorable. They regularly went outside in the winter when they could bask in sunlight. If the weather was calm and clear, they sometimes would emerge from the indoor cage in mid-morning to sit on the dark log or beside the log on the sunny side even when the ambient temperature was as cool as 8EC (46EF). When they were basking, we often measured them with the temp gun to have a surface temperature as much as 12–14EC (21–25EF) warmer than the ambient air temperature. They could be warm to the touch even when sitting on rocks that were still cold from the previous night.

Conclusions

As has often happened, what started out as an investigation of one thing ended up unveiling other revelations more interesting and, perhaps, of greater significance. Tracy and I built the indoor/outdoor cages to investigate their practicality and efficiency as a means to house large colonies of large constrictors. However, in light of the questions currently being raised regarding the possi-

bilities of nonnative boas and pythons becoming established in the continental United States, our observations of the responses of boas and pythons to cold weather seem particularly significant. To our surprise, we can find no previous reports of any similar experimentation that has been done with this particular group of animals.

I publish this account of our observations as an anecdotal report simply because it was not any sort of quantified experiment. However, I consider that our observations are of interest and importance in the matter of ascertaining the risk of any of the large constrictors to become established and invasive.

Based on our observations, we came to the conclusion that large tropical pythons and boas are able to tolerate “uncomfortable cold” and will modify their behaviors accordingly. Undoubtedly, some of the behaviors seen were the metabolic consequences of significantly lower body temperatures --- the snakes moved slowly, they moved less, they quit eating. However, we observed that the snakes made conscious decisions on how to react to colder temperatures. The pythons usually chose to not sit on warm heating pads that were always available to them. The boas did sit on the heating pads for extended periods of time, apparently less willing to allow a lower body temperature.

However, based on the behaviors and actions that we observed when the weather was near or below freezing, Tracy and I, much to our keen disappointment, concluded that the pythons and the four tropical boas did not appear to be motivated to seek shelter in an environment of “fatal cold.” They did not appear to us to be able to behave in a manner that reflected the reality that in certain weather conditions it is not an option for a snake to fail to seek shelter. They were less likely to go outside at night in the winter than in the summer, but in the winter they were as likely to go outside when it was fatally cold as when it was only uncomfortably cold. They did not or could not make the distinction.

In fact, the pythons in the indoor/outdoor enclosures all were descended from tropical populations of animals where freezing weather is unknown. I suggest that the simplest explanation of their apparent inability to shelter from fatally cold temperatures is that such behavior is unnecessary in their native ranges where fatal cold extremes are unknown.

This is in contrast to the behavior of the two large Argentine boas. Even though they were strongly nocturnal during the summer, and spent nearly every night in their outdoor cage, once winter arrived they were not ob-

served to venture outside at night. Even though this particular pair was captive-bred, and had never been outdoors before, they behaved as having strong instincts to shelter from cold extremes.

Argentine boas are a subtropical species found at lower elevations in central northern Argentina from the area of the border with Paraguay south to about 33ES latitude. The climate in the range of the species is moderate and seasonal; there are periods of cold winter temperatures. The species is known to shelter underground in the winter. This is a race of boas that has made morphological and behavioral modifications to live in a temperate climate, a rarity among the larger boa and python species.

Finally, it is my conclusion that the action of a python or boa to seek shelter in response to cold winter temperatures is not an innate behavior common to all species in the families Boidae and Pythonidae. Quite the opposite, it is a rare ability of only a few taxa. It is my observation that those species native to the tropics and other areas where low winter temperatures are unknown have no specific ability to protect themselves from periods of fatal cold.

Acknowledgments

I thank Tracy Barker, my wife, friend and partner.

Snakes in the news in Maine

Here's a couple of snake stories that appeared in the Lewiston paper this week. In the first check out the picture of the "python".

Now for something completely different: a python in Lewiston

By Max Mogensen , Staff Writer
 Tuesday, July 15, 2008

LEWISTON - Several Pine Street residents got a cold-blooded surprise Monday when they found a strange snake in their backyard.

Tenants at 172 Pine St., who chose to remain unidentified, found the snake around 4:30 in the evening. A resident's son discovered the snake in the yard behind the apartment building. "He came and got me," said his mother, who called police.

"I can tell you it was a ball python," said a young man who lives in the building. "It was about two and a half feet long. He was hungry and he was mad."

The snake escaped from a nearby building where it is kept as a pet, according to residents.

Police responded to the call just before 5 p.m. Officers Raymond Vega and Ryan Guay used a piece of wood to coax the snake into a shoebox. Before removing the animal, the snake leapt from the shoebox in an attempt to escape. However, the officers were able to safely remove the animal.

Ball pythons, or royal pythons, are popular as pets. They are non-venomous and pet pythons are often vibrantly colored. The snakes generally grow to be between 2 and 4 feet long.

Police took the snake to a local pet store because there was "not any space facility for these types of snakes at the shelter," explained Sgt. Randy St. Laurent.

As of Monday evening, the snake was "resting comfortably," according to St. Laurent.

The police are looking for the python's owners.

No one was injured, though the residents say they received quite a shock



This one has some many inaccuracies that I'll not comment on. The picture with the article was of a reticulated python but here's the caption; you'll see:

"Nuisance wildlife specialist Richard Burton holds a venomous reticulated python as wildlife rehabilitator Jen Lewis calls a friend to positively identify the type of snake at The Kennel Shop in Lewiston on Wednesday. The snake was found in a Gorham women's washing machine. "

Serpent causes scare, draws stares

By Mark LaFlamme , Staff Writer
Thursday, July 17, 2008

LEWISTON - Richard Burton was told he would be capturing a 3-foot snake, but the serpent that rose out of the washing machine just kept coming.

All 8 feet of it.

"That thing came right up at me and almost got me in the eyeballs," Burton said. "It was a lot bigger than I expected it to be."

It was no picnic for the woman who discovered the snake, either. That was a Gorham woman who was retrieving a load of laundry from her washer at about 6 p.m. She pulled out a pair of wet jeans and reached back in.

That's when she felt something slither under her hand.

"She was still crying when I left her house," Burton said, hours after he was called to retrieve the animal.

Animals experts later identified the snake as most likely a reticulated python, one of the longest snakes in the world.

Burton, who operates Maine Animal Damage Control, brought the snake to Lewiston from Gorham so it could be identified and handled by experts here.

An animal control officer in Gorham did not want to handle it. Police begged off the task, as well.

Burton retrieved the snake by reaching into the washing machine for it with nothing more than a pair of welding gloves. It was not a loving relationship between man and beast.

"When I pulled it out of the machine, he sprayed all over the place," Burton said. "He got around my hand and just shut the blood flow right off. He's not very happy

with anybody. I think he's hungry."

Burton got the snake into a bag and made the long drive to Lewiston. Animal Control Officer Wendell Strout was waiting for him. So was Jen Lewis, a wildlife rehabilitator who works at the Kennel Shop on East Avenue.

Lewis is said to have an eye for snakes and was crucial to identifying it so the others would know what to do with it. Based on an early description, it was believed the snake might be an Anaconda.

"I expected its head to be broader," Lewis said after getting her first glimpse of the snake. "His eyes are absolutely gorgeous. It looks like he has copper pennies for eyes."

Strout called some of his people. Lewis called experts of her own. The final conclusion: The snake was most likely a fanged python.

"I'm nearly a hundred percent sure," Lewis said.

Burton stood in the center of the Kennel Shop with the snake coiled around his wrist while the various experts discussed it. There was some question over whether the python might be venomous.

However, further research revealed that though reticulated pythons kill prey with their teeth, they are non-venomous.

Which may or may not be a source of relief for the woman who found it. She was not identified Wednesday night.

Lewis and Strout made plans to house the snake overnight before it would be taken to a wildlife refuge, possibly a zoo in York.

How the snake got into a washing machine in Gorham remained a mystery. Burton, the wildlife handler, said the woman who found it owns the building and is certain that no snakes were kept there as pets.

"It just appeared there," Strout said. "They will likely never know how it got there."

He also advised that he does not expect to see more of this type of python in a residential setting any time soon. It was his first in 10 years.

"That type of snake in this area is very, very rare," Strout said. "This is certainly an isolated incident."

I have to admit I would have been a little surprised by this one. Don't know if I would have crashed though.

Surprise snake leads to crash

DRESDEN—An unexpected passenger is being blamed for an Indian Road crash last week.

The 16-year-old Wiscasset driver told police following the July 1 crash that a garden snake crawled from a bag of returnable bottles in the back seat and crawled across her shoulder, according to a Lincoln County Sheriff 's deputy.

The surprised girl, whose name was withheld due to her age, drove her vehicle into trees off the side of the road. The girl was not injured.

The 2002 Saturn the girl was driving sustained an estimated \$4,000 in damage.

Rare turtle washes up on Cape Cod

July 4, 2008

Cape Cod had an unusual visitor from the open ocean Wednesday night. A dead leatherback sea turtle weighing several hundred pounds washed ashore at Popponesset Beach in Mashpee, a spokesman for the New England Aquarium said.

Tony LaCasse said leatherbacks are an endangered species. This one was 6 to 7 feet across and had been dead for a long time. The body was too decomposed for an necropsy to be performed, he said.

A biologist from the University of New Hampshire, which is working with the aquarium and the Massachusetts Audubon Society to research the turtles, took tissue samples and measured the body before it was removed from the beach, LaCasse said.

It is unusual for a leatherback to wash ashore on a Massachusetts beach, because they stay in the open water where they feed on jellyfish, he added. Some leatherbacks have been found weighing as much as a ton.

Leatherbacks are unusual reptiles, LaCasse said, in that they can shunt blood to their outer extremities. This allows them to travel to colder temperatures than most turtles, as far as the Gulf of Maine and the Canadian sea provinces.

Strange Thing Happened To Me

by Kevin Murphy

Carol and were headed to Florida last month. Our plan was to drive to Washington where her folks live and hook up with her brother and take a plane from there. We wanted to get to Washington at a reasonable hour so we planned on leaving at 5:00am.

As a last check I walked through snake room to make sure everything was okay and noticed that one of my Peruvians had upset her water bowl - a very rare occurrence. I didn't think too much of it though. I then noticed that her tail was twitching. Just slowing moving back and forth. Now this was strange. Still not too concerned I decided to have a look at the whole snake. I pulled out her hide box, which doesn't have a bottom to it. I thought the snake was partly in the hide box. Nope she was beside it under the newspaper. Okay so I pulled the newspaper off her to find a very disheartening problem.

About 6 months ago I drilled a 1 1/4" hole in the cage to allow wires for heat and a thermostat control to pass through. The wires themselves fill up about half the space. Keep in mind this is a 6 1/2 to 7 foot boa with a head the size of baseball. Well she decided she was going through that hole. The problem is that she squeezed her head through but because of the shape of her head, she was stuck. Besides that, she was pulling so hard to get free I thought she was going to pull her head off. From the outside her head was so distorted you would think there would be permanent damage.

I have to admit panic did start to enter into the picture. At first we had no plan for her release that would assure no injury to the snake. We then decided to drill a series of small holes so that we could break the cage to make the hole bigger.

With me pushing against the snake with all my might to keep her from pulling against the hole and possibly hurting herself, Carol drilled the series of holes. We finally got the job done.

Fortunately she appeared to be none the worst for wear. Aside from some scuffed scales and a disjointed jaw she was okay. We waited until she got her jaw back in shape and left her alone. She's fine now and has eaten without a problem.