

The Maine Herpetological Society

Newsletter



Volume 17 Number 12

Feb 2009

Upcoming MHS Meetings and Regional Events Mark Your Calendar!

Saturday Feb 21	Regular Meeting Island Apt. Show & Tell
Saturday Mar 21	Regular Meeting Island Apt.
Saturday April 11	New England Reptile Expo Manchester, NH
Saturday April 18	No Regular Meeting
Sunday August 30	9th Annual Portland Reptile Expo

New and Renewed Memberships

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

Kevin Murphy	Auburn	Family
Brian Lewis	South Paris	Individual

Next Meeting

At our February meeting we will be having an always popular Show & Tell. Please come and bring your favorite herp to share with the members. Don't worry you won't be asked to give a talk on your pet. Just answer a few questions. These are always fun for both the exhibitors and the members present. Please plan to attend and we will provide a lunch.

Last Meeting

There were quite a number of members at the January meeting. Most of the meeting was a business meeting. We watched an excellent video produced by Phil Roy. The video was of an operation performed on a corn snake of Doug Kranich's. We got to see a complete operation on the egg-bound corn snake, from anesthesia to suturing. With comments from Dr. Alan Slack during the proceedings.

During the business meeting we tentatively scheduled the entire year's meetings and field trips. Also, in the works we have membership cards, letters of introduction for new members and an MHS brochure. We are also planning on new t-shirts. Anyone can submit a logo suggestion and design for these. If you're handy at this sort of stuff send it in to Bob Dubois. We will be putting a weekly ad in Uncle Henry's. Additionally as you will see later in the newsletter we are working on an adoption program. To top it all off we have started on the 9th Annual Portland Reptile Expo. So we're pretty busy and you all can help by attending meetings and getting involved.

Legislative Alert Clay Davenport ARB Reptiles

Everyone needs to be aware of two bills that have been introduced into Congress on 1/26/09 and 2/3/09.

H.R. 669 introduced into the House by Rep. Madeleine Bordallo [GU], and S.373 in the Senate introduced by Sen. Bill Nelson [FL].

S.373

I'll deal with the second one first since it is simpler. S.373 is a bill proposing the amendment of Title 18 of the US code. This title concerns the importation and interstate transport of injurious wildlife. The text of the bill is short and is as follows:

Section 42(a)(1) of title 18, United States Code, is amended in the first sentence by inserting `; of the constrictor snake of the species Python genera' after `polymorpha'.

What this bill will do if passed is include the entire *Python* genus in the list of species banned from importation and interstate transport and commerce, labeling them all as injurious.

This means everything from Retics to Savu pythons, and yes this includes Balls. Importation will be stopped entirely, and all interstate shipping and transport of all pythons will end if this bill is passed. S.373 has been referred to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. See the bottom of the page for a link to the members of this committee. I urge you to contact them while it is still under their review.

H.R. 669

H.R. 669 is an even worse bill. I'll quote USARK on what this bill means to the hobby, because they said it very well:

"If passed as written this bill will BAN the import, purchase, sale, trade and breeding of many, many reptiles and amphibians... including Boa, Python and Eunectes. If this bill passes it will destroy the reptile community and industry overnight!"

That statement is not an exaggeration, it is a fact. The Humane Society of the United States is in full

support of this bill. For those of you in the hobby that have doubted the threat of HSUS that I and others have been talking about for years this should finally convince you.

Below is a direct quote from the HSUS website concerning this bill. The page on their site can be seen here <http://tinyurl.com/dk4nsc>

The Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International welcomed the introduction yesterday of the Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act (H.R. 669) in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-Guam).

The bill is designed to prevent the introduction and establishment in the United States of nonnative wildlife species that may harm the economy, the environment, human health or native wildlife. H.R. 669 would require the federal government to assess the risk of nonnative wildlife species proposed for importation and, with public input, decide if the importation of these animals should be allowed or prohibited.

"Each year, millions of wild animals are captured overseas and imported into the United States," said Michael Markarian, executive vice president of The HSUS. "This trade results in the suffering and death of large numbers of animals, poses unnecessary risks to public health and jeopardizes native wildlife populations here and abroad. We are grateful to Congresswoman Bordallo for working to address this global problem."

Imported wild animals may escape or may be let loose by owners who cannot properly care for them. These animals sometimes die from starvation, predation or exposure. Sometimes, however, they thrive — putting people, domestic pets and native wildlife at risk.

H.R. 669 is a much more complex bill and carries further reaching consequences than S.373. It will not only ban the import and interstate transportation of all Boa species, all Python species, and Anacondas, it will also ban their possession and contains NO grandfather clause to allow you to keep the animals you currently have. If this is passed then all the ball python collections people have that are

(Continued on page 3)

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valued in the tens of thousands of dollars will instantly become illegal to possess.
Here is a quote from the text of H.R. 669:

SEC. 6. PROHIBITIONS AND PENALTIES.

(a) Prohibitions- Except as provided in this section or in section 7, it is unlawful for any person subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to -

- (1) import into or export from the United States any nonnative wildlife species that is not included in the list of approved species issued under section 4;**
- (2) transport between any State by any means whatsoever any nonnative wildlife species that is not included in the list of approved species issued under section 4;**
- (3) violate any term or condition of a permit issued under section 7;**
- (4) possess (except as provided in section 3(f)), sell or offer to sell, purchase or offer to purchase, or barter for or offer to barter for, any nonnative wildlife species that is prohibited from being imported under paragraph (1);**
- (5) release into the wild any nonnative wildlife species that is prohibited from being imported under paragraph (1); or**
- (6) breed any nonnative wildlife species that is prohibited from being imported under paragraph (1), or provide any such species to another person for breeding purposes.**

Pay very close attention to numbers 2, 4, and 6. No transporting across state lines, no selling or trading, and **NO BREEDING** of species on the list.

That's correct, folks, even the possession of any of the species they decide to add to the list will be illegal.

Now here's the kicker. These two bills actually are worded so that if both are passed they will work together. H.R. does not actually name specific species, those will be named and amended as time goes on, and any species proposed for inclusion will be subject to public comment.

It does however include by default any species listed in Title 18. If S.373 is passed as well, the entire *Python* genus will be added to Title 18 and therefore included by default as being banned by H.R. 669 **without** public comment.

This is absolutely the most serious attack on our

hobby in our history. Neither of these bills must be allowed to pass.

H.R.669 has been referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources. See below for a link to a list of the members of this committee. We should contact them now as well, while the bill remains under their review. It should be noted that Bordello herself, who introduced this bill, is a member of this committee.

Everyone, regardless of what reptiles you currently keep, needs to contact their state senators and representatives and demand they vote no on both of these bills. The information on where to contact your congressmen will be listed at the end of this page.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough the importance of fighting these bills by every means at our disposal. When writing your congressmen keep a few things in mind. Be civil and professional. Do not use foul language or insulting comments. Be sure to mention the negative economic impact these bills will have on you personally as well as the industry as a whole.

The potential for economic effects carries significant weight with lawmakers. They will consider that more seriously than just our own enjoyment of keeping these animals.

Do not think that this will just go away, or that others will take up the fight for you. Every herper must do his part and make his voice heard. Now is the time for action, our hobby has never before seen a threat of such magnitude.

<http://www.house.gov/> - U.S. House of Representatives. Find your Representative here

<http://www.senate.gov/> - U.S. Senate. Find your Senator here.

[U.S. Code Title 18](#) - Read the section of Title 18 regarding injurious wildlife

[HSUS statement](#) - The page on the HSUS site stating their support for H.R. 669

[USARK](#) - The homepage of United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK)

[PIJAC](#) - The homepage of the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC)

[House Committee on Natural Resources](#) - Member list for this committee

[Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works](#) - Member list for this committee

How do baby turtles survive winter?

2/15/2009 12:29 AM

By WHIT GIBBONS
Columnist for
the Aikens
Standard.

Questions about how various animals survive winter come across my desk (or rather my computer screen) rather frequently. Every species living in the temperate zone has to cope in some way with winter cold. Birds fly south as winter approaches.

Mammals add a layer of body fat when cold weather arrives. Trees lose their leaves before they freeze. Turtles, one of the most conspicuous animals in warm weather, have special ways to deal with winter.

What happened to the turtles you saw basking on logs or sun-warmed rocks during spring, summer and fall? They have disappeared. Where did they go, and why? Turtles are reptiles, so their surroundings determine their body temperature. At body temperatures of about 40 to 50 degrees, most reptiles become sluggish, stop eating and seek hiding places to get safely through the winter.

Many aquatic turtles go into the bottom mud or under the bank where the water is cold but does not freeze. An advantage reptiles have over most mammals is that their metabolism drops with their body temperature, meaning that they require less oxygen. Some turtles can stay underwater for days at a time without taking a breath, as long as the water stays cold.

Recently-born baby turtles have a different strategy. Turtles lay their eggs on land, usually by digging a hole in dirt or sand and then covering the nest. Most turtle eggs hatch in autumn, but the hatchlings often do not leave the nest until the following spring, a year or more after the eggs are laid. This phenomenon, known as overwintering in the nest, occurs worldwide among many different kinds of turtles.

Overwintering may sound like a reasonable way for a helpless baby turtle in mild-wintered Alabama or Florida to pass its first cold spells and avoid predators. But what do baby turtles do in Canada, Michigan and Minnesota,



where painted turtle hatchlings are entombed only a few inches beneath the soil for the winter months? Even in an underground nest, soil temperatures drop as low as 25 degrees. Most animals deal with these extremely low winter temperatures by seeking a warmer place. Not so for baby painted turtles.

In Michigan, hatchling turtles that overwinter on land differ in body composition from those that leave the nest during late summer. The eggs of overwintering hatchlings have proportionally more body fat and oils than do the eggs of turtles that leave the nest early. The overwintering baby turtles can survive from late summer to the following spring on their own fat reserves, without eating. This added energy easily gets them through a long, cold winter.

Some hatchling turtles are also believed to be capable of producing antifreeze compounds. Hatchling painted turtles exposed to subfreezing temperatures produce significantly higher levels of glucose in the blood than do those kept at normal temperatures. The glucose and other body products may function as a form of antifreeze, although how the process works is unknown.

An even more important discovery is that some baby turtles can survive when more than half their internal body water freezes. The painted turtle is one of the highest vertebrate life forms known in which the freezing of body fluids is tolerated during hibernation. This does not mean that other animals are incapable of surviving such an assault, only that scientists have not yet documented the phenomenon.

If you go for a walk around the edge of a lake this winter, consider that adult turtles are lying dormant beneath the lake's surface and that baby turtles may be on land beneath your feet. Both the adults and hatchlings have a good chance of enduring anything winter has to offer, in the South as well as the North.

Hibernating underwater by adult reptiles is not particularly uncommon, but the phenomenon of hatchlings overwintering in the nest is unusual behavior. Both methods of surviving winter are indicative of just how versatile and endlessly fascinating the natural history of native wildlife is. And we still have much to learn about how even the most common of animals around us survive in the natural world.

Maine Herpetological Society Adoption Program

We have decided to reinstate the position of Adoption Officer and attempt to build an adoption network throughout the State. We are looking for several people to complete this program.

First we are looking for an Adoption Officer. This individual will oversee his committee of animal care givers throughout the State to make sure that they animals given up to adoption are given the proper care and medical assistance. Here's what it states in our by-laws about the position:

"Adoption Officer shall receive and have charge of animals given to the society for adoption. He/She shall be in charge of the animal while in the society's possession. He/she shall set fees for the adoption of the animal. He/she shall be in charge of all monies generated by the adoptions of animals, although the funds shall be deposited in the Society's account and monies spent accounted for by the treasurer. The purpose of said monies shall be for the care and medical expenses of future adoptees. The Adoption Officer's term shall be one year."

We may be tweaking this a bit but for the most part it explains the position. The by-laws will probably be changed to allow it being an appointed position rather than an elected one. It's too important for our society to allow it to be a popularity contest. If things go as planned the adoption office will have several persons throughout the State that are available to care for animals within their expertise. We are looking for volunteers to fill these positions and everyone is welcome. You will only be asked to care for animals that you are comfortable with so don't be afraid to lend a hand. If you think you can only handle lizards limit it to that.

Please don't take these positions lightly. Some of the animals that will be given up to adoption are in pretty rough shape and could potentially harm the animals you currently have. The ability to provide a quarantine area is a must. Please contact Bob Dubois @r.a.dubois@hotmail.com for an application for either position.

The Chickadee Check-Off

It's tax time again and I hope everyone considers donating to the chickadee check-off when they do their taxes. This money goes to the Maine Endangered and Non-game Wildlife Fund which benefits all of our threatened and endangered herps. Here is a statement off the Maine Endangered and Non-game Species web page.

Chickadee Check-off

Already on a slow decline, income from the chickadee check-off dropped dramatically (40-50%) in 1998, when the check-off was unexpectedly moved from the primary tax form to a supplemental form. Income in 2004 remained at a greatly reduced level, when only 0.06% of taxpayers contributed. Participation rates have steadily declined from highs of over 5% in the mid-1980's to 1.5-2.0% just prior to moving the check-off to the supplemental form (see table below). However, average donations have increased steadily from \$4-\$5 in the 1980's to over \$13.00 in 2004. If contribution levels could be increased to the 3-4% range, income from the check-off would increase to \$221,098 - \$294,408 at current average levels of giving. This could provide substantial increases for non-game and endangered species programs.

As you can see they can use our help. The Endangered Species Group of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife collects data and performs field research on many herps as well as many other of native non-game wildlife. They also publish guidelines for harvesting timber near vernal pools. Vernal pools provide much needed habitat for many herps. They publish the popular book that many of us have in our collections, "Maine Amphibians and Reptiles". This book allows everyone to get involved with the Maine Reptile and Amphibian Atlas project, an on-going survey by this group, by submitting our own finds from the field.

I know we are all concerned about the future of our native herps so please consider the check-off when you submit your taxes this year.

Feeding Baby Snakes (Rodent Eating Species)

By Robert Applegate www.applegatereptiles.com

Bob gave me permission to reprint this from his web site. For those that are not familiar with Bob Applegate he has been breeding reptiles since the 70's and first to produce many species in captivity. He wrote the book on designing reptile rooms in the early days. His most recent publication is Kingsnakes and Milksnakes in Captivity.

My hobby is raising, breeding, hatching, and selling snakes. I feel I am providing a desirable animal, with better than a wild animal's chance of thriving in captivity, and in no way harming the environment or continually depleting wild populations. The species I raise are adapted to life as captives, evidenced by the fact that most of my breeders were themselves captive hatched, raised to adult size, and started breeding in 9 months to 2.5 years. Sometimes a baby snake will refuse to eat what we want it to, and we would prefer that it eat a conveniently available source of nourishment, mice! This paper, which is my first revision of a 1983 paper by the same title, offers suggestions and techniques that I have used successfully over the years to get problem feeder snakes to accept domestic mice as a regular food. While aimed at hatchlings, these techniques can be used on larger snakes, using appropriately sized food items.

Before we can expect a problem snake to feed, we must provide a suitable environment. The cage should be clean, dry, 80-90 degrees in temperature (preferably with subfloor heat with warmer and cooler areas available), have clean drinking water, and a secure place for the snake to hide in both the warm and cool zones of the cage. The substrate can be of various types. Avoid any treated substances such as cat litter. Silica sand, newspaper, or pine shavings are fine, but don't use cedar or redwood products. The snake should be confined alone, and all food items offered should be of a size that can be easily swallowed without leaving a large lump in the snake. The food item should be left in the cage for several hours, and the cage should not be disturbed during that time, preferably with no one in the room. Some snakes feed nocturnally, so you may have to try these techniques day and night. Best results are obtained after a shed, and I would suggest waiting if the snake is "blue" or opaque.

1. Most babies will feed on live newborn mice (pinkies). Place a live pinkie in the opening to the snake's favorite hiding place. If uneaten in a few hours, replace with a dead pinkie.

2. Wash a pinkie in soap and water, rinse well, dry, and place it in the opening. The washing removes some of the domestic mouse scent. Try a live pinkie and then a dead one.

3. Get a feed lizard (*Uta* or *Sceloporus*) and rub it all over the pinkie, prepared as steps 1 and 2. You may have to cut a small piece of the lizard's tail off, rub the lizard's blood around the face of the pinkie, and put a piece of the tail in the pinkie's mouth.

4. Kill a pinkie, cut open the top of the head, smear the brain material around, then place the pinkie in the hiding place. This grisly technique works surprisingly often, but I don't like to use if the other techniques work.

5. At this point if the snake still has not fed, offer it any natural food item you think it might accept, just to get a meal into it. On non-poisonous species, offer the item (small lizard, tree frog, baby wild mouse) by hand first. If the snake will accept food from your hand, it will be easier to offer two food items at the same time and cause the snake to "miss" its target and take the pinkie next to it. Always leave a pinkie in the cage after a snake has accepted a different food item. Often the snake will follow the first meal with the pinkie.

Usually a snake will have fed before we reach this point, and once it has eaten, it is usually pretty easy to reverse the steps to get it to accept plain pinkies. If it has not eaten yet, heavily mist the cage with a water spray to raise the humidity and try the steps again. Don't keep the snake in a wet cage more than a few days, and be sure the cage is warm. Sometimes a plastic container filled with damp shavings and having a small entrance hole will serve as a secure hiding place and encourage a feeding response when a pinkie is dropped inside with the snake. Some baby snake tract badly to constant contact with damp peat moss, suffering a dermatitis from the acid medium. Whatever material you use, keep alert for signs of skin disease when using wet media. The problem may show up as an inability to shed, a premature shed, sticking skin, or as skin blisters. These lesions when healed may leave discolored scales.

If your snake has not eaten 4 weeks after its first shed, which should come 5-12 days after hatching, you may have to force feed. Kill a pinkie and gently stick the head inside the snake's mouth, using the nose of the pinkie (or other small dull object) to open the snake's mouth. When the pinkie's head is inside the snake's mouth, gently apply pressure to the outside of the upper and lower jaws of the snake with your fingers and gently pull on the pinkie. This will stick the pinkie on the snake's teeth and make it more difficult for it to spit it out. Wait until the snake is not struggling and gently put it down in the cage and don't move!! You may have to repeat this several times, but often the snake will accept and swallow the pinkie. If this first approach at force feeding fails after a couple of tries, start the pinkie down the same way, then gently shove the pinkie down the snake's throat using a very dull object. Gently massage the pinkie down the snake's throat to a distance of one-quarter to one-third of its length.

If you have several problem feeders, don't have suitable sized food items, or don't have the time to "play" with feeding problems, there are "pinkie pumps" available. They are expensive but pay for themselves if you save one valuable snake. They can be used to force feed baby snakes assembly line style and keep them alive and growing until they will accept pinkies on their own or grow large enough to accept larger food items.

Most snakes I hatch will feed readily on pinkies from the start, so the other "tricks" won't be necessary, but you should have an idea of what to try if a

snake won't feed. Some baby snakes, particularly those hatched late in the season, will not accept pinkies until the following spring. I usually try to feed several lizards to such snakes and then "hibernate" them until the following spring. Usually it is not worth the effort to work with one of these problem late hatchlings over the winter. Snakes lose very little weight when hibernating, and if a snake has any body reserves it will be fine the following spring. Usually, with spring comes an appetite and a much better chance for easy success. One suitable sized meal per week (large enough to show a small lump) will give a good rate of growth. One meal every two weeks will provide healthy but slow growth. My records indicate you can't overfeed a baby snake in terms of frequency, but avoid oversized meals. My snakes seem to eat and grow in spurts.

When they are accepting food, I provide a baby snake as much as it will eat. I have experienced very rapid growth rates. I have had male snakes breeding successfully at less than one year of age. I have one female that laid two clutches of eggs, all of which hatched before she was two years old! If a snake regurgitates, give it a few days off, then slow down the pace and feed a small meal for a few times, separated by 4-6 days between feedings -- then resume the growth program. Growth, maintenance, and raising snakes are beyond the intent of this paper, so I will leave off here. your snake should be feeding by now, so you are on your way.

Classified Advertisements

Classified advertisements are free to dues paying members. The format for the ads should be as follows: 1.1.1 The first number represents the number of males, the second represents the number of females, and the third, the number of unknown sex. Please use the species name whenever possible. The Maine Herpetological Society is not responsible for content, prices, or errors in classified ads, nor do we receive any compensation from the sales resulting from these ads. **

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

For Sale: For Sale: 08 Tangerine albino Hondurans, wickedly beautiful. \$125ea or \$225pr. 08 Eastern chain kings \$40 ea. or \$75pr. 08 Transpecos ratsnakes (het blonde) \$55ea or \$95pr; Doug Kranich, Millinocket 723-4108 or email kranich@verizon.net

For Just about everything J & J Reptiles, Check out his web site at: jnreptiles.com if he doesn't have what you want call him at (207) 479-6658 and Josh will get it for you.

For Sale: Nicaraguan boas \$125.00 ea.; ball pythons \$25.00 ea. Contact Kevin Murphy - 207-576-0157 kmurphy70192@roadrunner.com