

# The Maine Herpetological Society

## Newsletter



Volume 18 Number 1

March 2009

### Upcoming MHS Meetings and Regional Events Mark Your Calendar!

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

### New and Renewed Memberships

*We would like to welcome the following  
new members:*

Jillian & Larry Kitchen	Holden	Family
Josh Conklin	Bangor	Individual

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

Kevin Murphy	Auburn	Family
Brian Lewis	South Paris	Individual
Jim Olmsted	Warren	Individual

### Important

April 11 is the day of the New England Reptile Expo in Manchester, NH. The Society has rented tables for members to use. We also get at least 1 room at the Radisson for members that want to go down the night before. You must contact Doug Kranich 723-4108 if you want to use either the room, or have space on the table.

**Don't expect to use either one if you  
didn't call Doug first.**

### Next Meeting

At our March 21 meeting Jonathan Mays of the Reptile, Amphibian and Invertebrate Group, a division of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, will give a talk on their Maine Amphibian and Reptile Atlas Project (MARAP). This is an important project that everyone can help out with. There are specific guidelines to follow that Jonathan will tell us about. It would be real nice if we could have a good turn out for this meeting. Any speaker that volunteers his time to come to our meetings and talk deserves our support. Plan on coming.

### Last Meeting

At the last meeting we had a Show & Tell. It was fairly well attended as show and tells usually are. Members Mike Myers, Frank Maccarrone, Dan Brown and Josh Conklin brought animals to show. At the business portion of the meeting Bob Dubois said that two members have indicated the desire to be the Adoption Officer but there hasn't been much response in general in regards to the network of volunteers.

For this reason we are posting the request for volunteers again this month with hopes of getting the program finalized soon afterwards. Look for the request elsewhere in this newsletter.

We spoke again about joining PIJAC. Actually this had been voted on previously but it was brought up again. Kevin will get the application to Doug. Kevin is also supposed to bring information regarding USARK to the next meeting. Bob was going to check into purchasing the herp video "Rattlers, Peepers and Snappers" for the library. It was voted on to purchase the video. It was also voted on for the society reimburse Bob Dubois for the brochure "Don't Release Your Pet". Bob also informed everyone that a new website is being worked on.

We spoke at length about the unrestricted list. Several members are working with the State on this and more information will be given later.

Editor Note: The following article was re-printed with permission from the Western New York Herpetological Society website. I found this when looking for an article on the Eastern Milk Snake. In another month or so some of our members may be dealing with an eastern. They are probably the least kept milk snakes, which is surprising because they are beautiful snakes. Also, I do not believe you need a permit to keep a single eastern milk snake in Maine but under law you're not supposed to breed or sell them. Visit: <http://www.wnyherp.org/> and I want to thank their newsletter editor Lauren Madar for allowing me to reprint this.



## Milk Snake Care Sheet and Information

Common Name: Milk Snake

Latin name: *Lampropeltis triangulum*

Native to: Southeastern Canada to northern South America

Size: From 6" to 28" for *L. t. elapsoides*, the Scarlet Kingsnake to 16" to 48" for *L. t. gaigae* the Black Milk Snake and *L. t. hondurensis*, the Honduran Milk Snake.

Life span: 20+ years, average is 15 years.

### General appearance:

Milk snakes are represented by three general pattern types: tri-colored in which the snake possesses bold rings of white/yellow, black, and red/orange, which may or may not extend onto the belly and completely encircle the snake. The other commonly encountered pattern type for this species is that of a light tan, gray or cream background color with darker red, russet or brown dorsal and lateral blotches. The last pattern type belongs only to the black milk snake *L. t. gaigae*. This snake starts out tri-colored but turns into a completely patternless black snake by two years of age.

Depending on the sub-species, milk snakes can be either heavy bodied (Pueblan, Black and Mexican) or slim (Sinaloan, Nelson's and Scarlet Kingsnake).

**Housing requirements:**

**Enclosure:** Milk snakes are secretive animals that prefer to conceal themselves. Because of their desire to squeeze into the tiniest of cracks and crevices, they are also born escape artists. Their enclosure should reflect these characteristics. The length of a milk snake's cage should be at least 2/3's of the snake's body length and should possess multiple hiding areas. Baby milk snakes will do well in either plastic shoe box containers or small glass aquaria, 2½ to 5 gallons. Adults can be successfully maintained in 16" by 24" plastic sweater boxes or larger glass aquaria, 20 to 30-gallon long tanks. In all cases, the opening to the enclosure must be secure or the snake will escape.

**Temperature:** Being a temperate to a sub-tropical species, milk snakes will do well with daytime ambient air temperatures ranging from 78° to 82° F. The air temperature may be allowed to drop to 65° to 70° F. at night.

Unless they are being brumated (hibernated) milk snakes should always have access to warmer localized temperatures to aid in digestion, immune function and metabolism. These higher temperatures are most easily achieved by placing a heat pad underneath ¼ to 1/3 of the enclosure and either set to the low setting or adjusted with a rheostat (dimmer switch) and monitored to make sure it stays within the appropriate range of 84° - 88° F. This thermal gradient will allow the snake to choose the temperature that suits its immediate needs.

**Heat/Light:** Added light is not necessary if temperatures can be maintained within the desired ranges with a heat pad. Milk snakes are crepuscular, meaning they come out during the subdued lighting of dawn and dusk. They do not like bright light.

If lighting proves to be necessary in order to maintain adequate temperatures, keepers should either use blue, red or black colored lights to reduce the brightness within the tank. If no other option is available, low wattage incandescent "white" lights can be used as long as the snake has adequate hiding areas and the lights are turned off in the evening. As with the other heat sources, temperatures should be monitored with an accurate thermometer.

**Substrate:** Being secretive, milk snakes will thrive in particulate substrates that they can bury themselves in. Acceptable choices are pine and aspen shavings as well as cypress mulch for larger specimens. Other acceptable substrates include newspaper, butcher paper, paper towel and indoor - outdoor carpeting (astro-turf). Never use cedar shavings as they exude compounds that can be irritable to the snake's mucus membranes.

**Environment:** The enclosure of a milk snake should always be dry. It should contain multiple hiding areas and a sturdy bowl for drinking. Water should be changed at least once a week.

**Diet:**

In nature, milk snakes feed on a number of small vertebrates, including frogs, small rodents, other snakes and lizards. In captivity, most milk snakes will eagerly feed on domestically bred, pre-killed mice. Snakes should be well started on rodents prior to sale in a retail outlet. Never feed your milk snake foods procured from the wild, as they will transmit harmful internal parasites. As the snake grows it should be given proportionately larger food items. Babies will start on pre-killed pink mice, while adults of most sub-species can handle pre-killed sub-adult mice. A good rule of thumb when feeding any captive snake is that the food item should not be larger than 1½ times the girth of the snake at its widest point.

**Maintenance:**

If kept in a dry cage with a sturdy water bowl, milk snakes can be very easy to maintain. The cage should be spot cleaned for feces daily if particulate substrates are used (mulch, shavings etc.) If paper substrates are used they should also be changed as they are soiled. The entire cage should be cleaned with an antibacterial dish detergent at least monthly. As stated earlier, the water bowl should be disinfected with antibacterial soap and changed at least weekly.

## Prehistoric Turtle Threatened by Modern Menace

Science News March 13

Leatherback turtles, the most widely distributed reptiles on Earth, are threatened with extinction themselves, in large part due to the carelessness of humans. A Dalhousie University professor addresses the threat of plastics to this endangered species.

They survived the extinction of the dinosaurs. They're descendants of one of the oldest family trees in history, spanning 100 million years. But today leatherback turtles, the most widely distributed reptiles on Earth, are threatened with extinction themselves, in large part due to the carelessness of humans.

We've seen reference to the dangers plastic poses to marine life, garbage that we humans directly and indirectly deposit in the oceans, but how clearly have we received the message? Not well enough according to a recent article in the journal *Marine Pollution Bulletin* entitled "Leatherback turtles: The menace of plastic," co-authored by Dalhousie University's Mike James. "We wanted to see if plastics ingestion in leatherbacks was hype or reality," says Dr. James, senior species at risk biologist for Fisheries and Oceans Canada and adjunct professor with Dalhousie's Department of Biology.

"It was a monumental effort that looked back at necropsies over the last century from all over the world," he explains. (Necropsies are post-mortem examinations performed on animals.) "After reviewing the results of 371 necropsies since 1968, we discovered over one third of the turtles had ingested plastic."

Since leatherbacks prefer eating jellyfish, it's widely believed they mistake bags or other plastics for their meals. Since jellyfish and marine debris concentrate where ocean water masses meet, leatherbacks feeding in these areas are vulnerable to ingesting plastic. Once leatherbacks ingest plastic, thousands of spines lining the throat and esophagus make it nearly impossible to regurgitate. The plastic can lead to partial or even complete obstruction of the gastrointestinal tract, resulting in decreased digestive efficiency, energetic and reproductive costs and, for some, starvation.

"Plastics ingestion doesn't always cause death, but there are clearly health risks to the turtles," says Dr. James. Fascinated by reptiles as a child, Dr. James developed a lifelong interest in turtles, from raising them as a kid, to his PhD research and now as a biologist and conservationist. He says there are simple ways to stop these ongoing threats. "The frustrating, yet hopeful aspect is that humans can easily begin addressing the solution, without major lifestyle changes," says Dr. James. "It's as simple as reducing packaging and moving towards alternative, biodegradable materials and recycling."

Leatherback turtles are classified as critically endangered world-wide. The true population size is not precisely known, as only adult females come ashore for nesting in remote tropical locations. During the summer and fall, Canadian waters support the highest density of foraging leatherbacks in the North Atlantic.

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## Garter Snake Gardening

by John Brunner

After years of struggling with a number of species of garter snakes in conventional snake cages, I discovered the secret to keeping garters in good health with a minimum of maintenance. I moved them into outdoor pens adjacent to my vegetable garden. Now my garters are fun to watch and I never have to clean a cage. They are healthy and breed readily. Even the colors of the snakes are brighter when kept in the fresh air and sunshine.

The garters are active above ground from April to late September. I have observed garters on October 17th, temperature 50 degrees, snow flurries the night before. Around 1 PM, with the sun shining, I was able to observe several garters basking in the last sun of the season. They will soon retreat to the hibernating dens I have built for them, not to emerge until the frost leaves the ground again in April.

The past spring I saw the 1st one (black male sirtalis) on March 25th. It was about 40 degrees, windy and sunny that spring day. The basking black garters felt warm to the touch, moved quickly, and bit me when I tried to pick up. I have photographs of one crawling across a small snow bank still remaining on the shady side of the pen.

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## The Wild Okefenokee Swamp

By  
Eric Bruce

Editor's note: I found this article on the internet. I couldn't find any contact information on it and the link that was with the article didn't work for me. I hope Eric doesn't mind my reprinting it. I liked this article because this trip sounds like a great idea for a camping trip someday. I've always wanted to visit The Okefenokee and this looks like the way to do it. I think he was pressing his luck with the gator though especially with to young boys in the canoe.

There are not many wilderness areas in Georgia but one of the wildest places is the Okefenokee Swamp in southeast corner of the state. The 438,000 acre National Wildlife Refuge is remote and wild and few people penetrate its interior. A few tourists take motor boat rides into portions of the swamp and many walk the boardwalks and tour the visitors centers. I had done that too, but yearned for more adventure, something into the bowels of the real swamp.

After some research, I learned about the 120 miles of boat and canoe trails that course through the 700 square miles of wetlands. Miles of watery pathways wind about lily pads and cypress trees. Along the way are camping spots for the longer trips. Reservations were made for the campsites and I planned to take my son and his friend, who were thirteen years old at the time.

As is usually the case, I just told my son that we were going and he went along. His friend had little outdoor experience and was somewhat excited, but really didn't know what to expect. We planned a three-day two-night trip with two camping stops in the swamp. All our gear would be carried in the canoe which would be our home and transportation for the next few days. We had to carry a tent, sleeping bags, food, cookware, clothes, and a portable toilet. That last item was requirement so as not to leave any waste material in the pristine wilderness. I told the boys to hold it till we find a park service restroom because I was not about to tote their turds out of the swamp in the canoe.

Our first day included twelve miles of paddling. Most of it was down the Suwanee Canal which was a straight river-like channel with little variety. The worse part were the tourist-filled motorboats buzzing by us as we exerted manual labor with our paddles for propulsion. We eventually turned off the canal onto a motor-prohibited canoe trail.

There the trail narrowed and the scenery expanded. There were Spanish moss-draped cypress trees, mats of floating peat, and assorted wildflowers decorating the landscape.

The first night was spent at a campsite called 'Round Top'. It was basically a wooden deck on stilts standing in the lily pad-filled water. It had a small roof and a port-a-potty. After setting up our tent and eating some supper, we gazed at the au-burn-colored sunset over the swamp, and relished the remoteness of being so far from civilization, cars, people, phones, and noise. The next day was only six miles of paddling and was probably the most scenic.

There were birds of all kinds, herons, storks, cranes, and other feathered fowl whom I knew not the names. But what the Okefenokee is most known for was its alligators. And we saw plenty of them, all sorts of sizes and locations. The boys began counting them from the start and totaled over one-hundred in the three-day trip. We would try to see them and take photographs but as we drew closer they would always slip under the water and disappear.

On day two we were paddling along a curving trail through lily pads and came around a bend to see a ten-foot gator across the path. As we approached we were somewhat surprised that this one did not descend into the water, but instead, stood its ground, or water in this case.

Then the big reptile started hissing. I said to Chris in the front of the boat, "just keep paddling, it will go down". It didn't, and Chris started to frantically paddle backwards blabbering "it's not, paddle backwards!".

*Continued on next page*

### The Okefenokee Continued

This gator seemed to have a nest nearby or had some reason to stay put and was not congenial to our visit. Seeing this toothy eating-machine laying in our path was disconcerting enough, but for it to make a deep hissing noise from its mouth was cause for concern. We were a great distance from any kind of civilization or telephones, and the gator let us know that we were in his house. Since Chris insisted that we paddle around the gator, we did just that and maneuvered a half circle around the testy hisser.

Night two was on 'Floyd's Island', which had dry soil, something we hadn't seen for a while. It had an old cedar-sided hunting cabin with a big front porch. It had been used decades before as a cabin for sportsmen who hunted the area.

Now it was a campsite for weary canoeists. No need to set up the tent, we spread out our sleeping bags inside the cabin and retired for the evening listening to the cicadas and tree frogs, and hoping the raccoons stayed outside.

The final day of our swamp trip involved lots of paddle strokes as fifteen miles lay between us and our final destination. Though it was April, the temperatures and humidity were rising during the day so we got up early for a morning departure while it was still cool.

We counted more gators and were passed by more motorboats on the last leg. Finally coasting into the park, our journey ended and we packed up for the drive home. We tasted the Georgia wilderness and immersed ourselves in the remoteness of nature. It was a wild and interesting experience and one that enriched our lives and gave us memories and stories to tell.

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### Garter Snake Gardening *continued from page 4*

In my garden pens I keep Eastern garters, *Thamnophis s sirtalis*, red-spotted garters *T.s.concinnus* and Plains garters *T. radix*. I have chosen these species to keep because of their bright colors and winter hardiness but then most garters are winter hardy.

My pens are very simple. One half inch plywood is cut in 2ft. Wide strips, nailed together at the corners and sunk in the ground a few inches to form 8 ft. and 4 ft. square pens. Screening (6" wide) is

stapled in the top edges and hangs inward to lessen the chance of escape by the larger specimens. In the center of each pen is a hole dug 3-4ft. deep. This hole is filled with stones and provides a retreat in both summer and winter. A few scattered pieces of tar paper are appreciated by the snakes as places to warm up under quickly when the sun shines. Food is provided 2 or 3 times a week from May to August in the form of ground whole chicks, fish and earthworms placed in dishes of the ground. Water is available in dishes placed in the pens.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable way to keep a temperate species such as a garter snake. Being a diurnal basking snake, it can be observed in a semi-natural environment throughout its active season. It is a thrill to see the first males emerge in the spring when snow patches are still on the ground. Mating can be observed throughout most of May. May through July is an active time of heavy feeding. August and September bring the birth of young garter. During September "spent" females catch up on their feeding. At this time courtship can also be observed, especially among females which did not give birth in the current season. When the heavy frosts of November come, and no more garters are showing their heads, a good heap of leaves is piled over each rock pile den. The garters remain underground through -20 degree winter temperatures. They emerge above the leaves almost as soon as the frost leaves the ground in late April.

Observations on garters hibernated in leaf-filled aquaria in my basement have led me to conclude that garters "follow the frost line". At 31-32 degrees F. garters remain at the bottom of their leaf-filled aquarium. At a slight rise to 35-40 degrees F. the garters, though stiff and cold, rise to the top of the leaves in their aquarium. If the temperature drops, they go down again. This explains to my satisfaction why garters appear in the spring as soon as the frost has completely left the soil. This also explains why it is difficult to hibernate garter snakes artificially (as in a cool basement). Thirty-five to 40 degrees (or higher) is too warm, and 32 degrees F. is dangerously close to freezing them to death. The solution? Bury them in the ground with access to depths which will remain below the frost line. This I have achieved with my outdoor pens.

## 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 the 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 officer 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.

## 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](mailto:kranich@verizon.net) They can be mailed but shipping will be added to the cost.

MHS Frozen Rodent Supply—Prices are for members only— **Mice:** Peach Fuzzies - .19 ea.; Fuzzies - .20 ea.; Adult Mice - .43 ea.; Large Adult Mice - .48 ea.; **Rats:** Small - .99 each; Extra Large Rats - 1.59 each Contact Kevin Murphy 576-0157

For Sale: 0.0.1 Late 08 California Kingsnake - Aberrant High white. Eats like a champ. \$50 in the Brunswick area. Can travel to deliver. Pics e-mailed on request. Call Ken at 522-4161.

**For Sale: 08 Eastern Kings (S GA locality)** \$50 each; pairs available @ \$90. **08 Okeetee corns** (Love line) outstanding reds, oranges, and bold black rings-\$75 each; pairs available @ \$135. Doug Kranich, [kranich@myfairpoint.net](mailto:kranich@myfairpoint.net) or 207 723 4108. Will also have them in Manchester on April 11.

For Just about everything J & J Reptiles, Check out his web site at: [jnreptiles.com](http://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: 07 Nicaraguan boas \$125.00 ea.; 07 ball pythons males \$25.00 ea. I have 07 females also available - call me. 08 ball pythons het-albino males \$50.00 ea. Contact Kevin Murphy - 207-576-0157 [kmurphy70192@roadrunner.com](mailto:kmurphy70192@roadrunner.com)