

The Maine Herpetological Society

Newsletter



Volume 18 Number 2

April 2009

Upcoming MHS Meetings and Regional Events Mark Your Calendar!

Saturday May 16	Regular Meeting Waterville Chamber of Commerce
Saturday June 20	Regular Meeting Waterville Chamber of Commerce

New and Renewed Memberships

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to our society

Donald Brickett	Oakland	Individual
Becky Brown	Bangor	Individual
Natalie Gamble	Bangor	Individual
Nanci Grovacchini	Oakland	Individual
Shawna Harriman	Bangor	Individual
Andrew Quinn	Portsmouth, NH	Individual

And we thank the following for renewing their MHS membership:

Steve Key	Pittsfield	Family
Nick Matthews	Brewer	Individual
Robert & Michelle Stano	Wells	Individual

May 16 Regular Meeting - Speaker Andrew Wyatt President of USARK

Andrew Wyatt, President of US Association of Reptile Keepers(USARK) will be speaking at our May 16 meeting. USARK was founded in 2005 with the stated goal of cooperation between government agencies, the scientific community, and the private sector in order to produce policy proposals that will effectively address important husbandry and conservation issues and has been instrumental in fighting the recent proposed legislation HR 669. If anything good has come out of this proposed legislation it has been that it brought our community together as one. Even though HR 669 affects more than just reptile and amphibians keepers it was our community that has rallied to the call and have swamped the committee members with letter and phone calls.

Please plan on attending this important meeting. Mr. Wyatt is taking time out of his busy schedule to come to Maine and speak to us. Although Mr Wyatt will probably be speaking about the reptiles and amphibians, legislation like HR 669 affects just about everyone that keep pets beyond a dog or a cat. Feel free to invite anyone that is interested in attending. We would like to get as many people there as possible.

The Waterville Chamber of Commerce is located at 1 Post Office Square which appears to be at the junction of Main and Haines Streets in downtown Waterville. Unless you know Waterville fairly well it would be better to get off at Main Street or exit 130 on Interstate 95.

Last Meeting

At the March 21 regular meeting our guest speaker was Jonathan Mays, Wildlife Biologist with the Reptile, Amphibian and Invertebrate Group a Division of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Jonathan's specifically is the lead biologist on reptile issues. He spoke about the Maine Amphibian and Reptile Atlas Project (MARAP). MARAP was started in 1986 in cooperation with the Maine Audubon and the University of Maine. They are now working on updating their information on all reptiles and amphibians.

Although they are mostly interested in the less seen reptiles and amphibians they do need information on all of them. There's a couple of herps in particular that they would like more reports on. The brown snake, *Storeria dekayi*, and the ribbon snake, *Thamnophis sauritus*, are both of special concern and more information is needed. Personally I don't think any of the snakes, other than the common garter snake, are seen frequently and we should be sending in reports on all of them. Some of them are not rare of course but since they're not seen very often every report would help.

I know that musk turtles are considered uncommon and I don't believe that's true. I believe they are just secretive. I've found them in all the Range Ponds and in Little Sebago. I am sure most of the lakes in Southwestern Maine have them and probably a lot of the bogs.

In looking at the new MARAP ID card, which is in fillable pdf form, they now would like a little more information than just you're stating that you saw such and such. They would like some information on the habitat, a photo, GPS coordinates, if possible, and how confident are you of it identity.

This information is used to provide cities and towns information on the wildlife in their area that might be affected by a construction project and planning. Also they may print another atlas.

You can find the form here: http://www.bobdubreptiles.com/MHSPages/MARAP_Card.pdf

I looked all over for another spot but had to use Bob's site. Hope he doesn't mind. I'll probably send a copy along with the emailed newsletter.

There were quite a few members and the New England Reptile Expo in Manchester. Reports from several members indicate that the show was quite successful. I know I had a lot of fun. It's good to see other MHS members and catch up on what has happened over the winter.

Clint Smith completed designing and printing the new MHS brochure. It looks great and will be on our table at shows and events.

Send in those herping stories. I know many of you couldn't wait to get out in the field now that spring has arrived. I've been out a few times but haven't really seen much yet. See you at the next meeting.

Hobby or Habit

*It all started with lizards,
Then went to snakes
Where will it end.
For goodness sakes.*

*It started with one.
Then went to two.
Now I'm always looking for
something new.*

*Another cage I will make,
Because I want another lizard
or Snake
I know I caught a strange disease,
I just want one more Burmese.*

*Do I want help, or a cure?
Maybe another reptile
I can't be sure.*

*When I am old,
And my body is withered.
Who will take care of my,
Snake and Lizard?*

*I like my pets,
The ones mellow and snappy
They take all my time!
But, they make me happy.*

Kevin Hanson

The next two articles are from our May 1994 Newsletter. Written by Joseph Rando and Bruce Wild. They were pretty enthusiastic with back to back trips. It's interesting to see what has changed in 15 years. Especially the prices of some of the herps.

Herp Collecting in Florida by Joseph Rando

My roommate Bruce, his son Brian and myself, set out on a journey over spring break, that intrigued and educated us. A trop of impulse, it was planned on a Wednesday and started only two days later. Despite such short notice, we managed to have a wonderful time seeing various wildlife species on our impromptu trip to Florida.

Our first stop was in the National Forest of Apalachicola. We stayed in a campsite in the southern tip of the forest. We were miles from anything, except the croaks of the alligators! I do believe we were disturbing their mating season. Our purpose for stopping in the forest was to look for the famed blotched king snake "*Lampropeltis getulus floridana* "goini". We did so unsuccessfully, and even more unsuccessfully chased around some race runners "*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*" like chickens with our heads cut off! I did have the pleasure of discovering the region's version of the wood tick as it nibbled at my arm.

Later that day, we headed down to Bushnell and stopped in at Crutchfield's. There were thousands of snakes – but we simply couldn't match any specimens to the ever so extensive price list. I guess it just proves what we've known all along; the place is a revolving door for imports. We did get to see their impressive breeding stock however. Believe what they say about their Surinam red tails. I don't know what they are selling but what they are keeping has 50% tails of pure orange madness and an overall ground color that appeared blonde.

The next several days were spent in the sugarcane fields on the southern side of lake Okeechobee. Here was where we hoped to see snakes that were not in cages. A feat we had yet to accomplish. We did not realize (prior to the many hours of searching up and down the rows of cane) that we should have been concentrating on the irrigation ditches. This was unfortunate because it was raining constantly. Poor Brian looked like a drowned rat as he scurried up and down the muddy rows of sugar cane.

We were leaving disappointedly on our first day, drenched, grumpy and squashed into my overstuffed Buick when Bruce hits the brakes. "There's a snake", he yells excitedly. We all jumped out quickly to look. Sure enough, there was a kinked snake on the other side of the canal. At first I thought it was a water moccasin but soon I realized that it was a Florida king. I began to walk around to the other side (which was about a half mile) when I heard them yelling at me to run. My heart dropped as I began to run. What had happened was that the lazy snake had decided to take a swim. I dove down the embankment and grabbed the snake. The specimen was a huge male, and had the predictably calm temperament that you'd expect of a Florida king. Our other specimen was not as calm however, it proceeded to flail its hemi-penes while musking all over Bruce. This snake too was meandering at the water's edge, which illustrated their almost semi-aquatic habits.

Our final days were spent in the Keys and the Everglades. The fish in the canals were enormous. We had a blast collecting some obscure species of crested anoles that are only found in the Keys. At sunset, newly hatched ring necks stretched their bodies out on the paths before us, trying to absorb the day's last heat. I could continue to write on about these beautiful places and what they have to offer, but perhaps I'll save it for a later date. One mentionable memento however, is a picture of Bruce grabbing a six foot gator. Don't worry, Bruce got away. Truly though, the Everglades has deteriorated greatly since I visited it last and it will probably be done as we know it soon. Go check it out as well as the other rich areas that Florida has to offer.

The New York Metro Reptile Expo by Bruce Wild

As if we hadn't had enough of seeing the United States through the windshield of a Buick, the thought of missing one of the only herp expos in the Northeast this year was enough to get Joe and I back in the saddle for another road trip. We had just driven 32 hours straight from our snake collecting expedition in Florida and had to turn around the very next morning and trek off to New York for the New York Metro Reptile Expo in New Rochelle. Oh, the power of obsession.

We got there just after the doors opened and feeling a little groggy but excited we found our way in and downstairs to the exposition. The place was virtually packed and there was an air of fervor in the room much like a

Continued next page

one day sale at Filene's Bargain Basement. Wheeling and dealing was the theme of the day and there sure was a lot going on. There were about forty tables set up and all three metro New York herp societies were represented. The items being peddled ranged from t-shirts to literature to snakes, frogs, and lizards. There was quite an impressive array of breeders and dealers from all over the area with some rather interesting stock. Jamie Quick Reptiles was sporting on of the famed albino ball pythons we've been hearing so much about along side a hetero ball python – a nice little pair to say the least but of course they were for display only. He now claims to have the largest investment of albino and hetero ball pythons in the country. We haven't verified this claim. Some of the other highlights of the show from other dealers were a pair of sub-adult Dumeril's boas for \$1200 and a pair of nice looking Savu rock pythons for only \$600. Had we been in the market for the Savus, this could have been a steal. There were also a number of individuals wandering around carrying snake bags looking to unload. We got some super deals from a couple of these folks including a beautiful trio of striped albino California kings that were cycled, fat and ready to breed. The cost was \$250 and believe me, when they got to Maine they started breeding like there was no tomorrow. We also snagged a lovely sub-adult female Peruvian red-tail for a mere \$300, awesome!

A word of warning to any prospective buyers attending one of these shows - BEWARE! Although there are some very knowledgeable, respectable breeders in attendance, there are also some serious hacks and shy-sters out there. When I asked one guy to sex a king-snake I was interested in, he proceeded to shove the probe the wrong way up into the body cavity of the poor thing and said, "See, it's a male. It goes all the way in." Shocked and disgusted I told him I wasn't interested and fled the scene in horror. Fortunately for him I forgot to get his name. Just remember the old saying "Buyer Beware".

All totaled, we staggered out with seven snakes which we are very happy with and got a chance to meet some great people and make some valuable contact's, some of which are already paying off. We've bought some beautiful adult boas off one guy we met there including a very unusual bright orange-colored Venezuelan red-tail boa. Really, reptile shows and expos are one of the most fun and best ways to buy, and get exposure to the herp trade. See you there next year!

Biological Pollution

The term refers to the possibility of an exotic species being inadvertently introduced into an area either by accident or on purpose. An exotic species refers to any animal not naturally found in a given ecosystem or it may also refer to a local species from distant geographical region. The most damaging aspect of biological pollution is the competition that results if the exotic species is able to develop a viable breeding population. Species compete for food and space. It's possible that the new "exotic" species could displace the native species. Another concern is the possibility that the species could interbreed with native species and disturb the genetic make-up of the native species.

Florida is a prime example of a State with many introduced species and it is causing that State serious problems today. Maine obviously would never have the problem that Florida does, however, this doesn't mean Maine has no concern in this area. The red-eared slider is an example of a animal that could possibly survive in Maine. This adaptable turtle seems to be able to survive almost anywhere. Naturally found throughout the Mississippi valley there are now breeding populations in many States and Countries, even as far north as Massachusetts. The problem with red-eared sliders is even more acute since this was the popular dime-store turtle of the 50-60's and during this period they were sold by the hundreds of thousands. Many thousands of these turtles were released into the wild especially after the ban on selling turtles with a carapace of less than 4 inches.

Although I think they have a greater agenda, the proposed purpose behind HR 669 was to curb the introduction of exotic species. There will be more of this. We all can do our part in stemming the tide of regulation. Make sure your pets are securely caged. I cringe when I read an escaped snake story in the paper. It never is written with any benefit to our hobby. Never release anything in Maine, or anywhere else, because you can't care for it any longer. We have a adoption program now and there are plenty of other places that will take your unwanted pets. Don't pick up a painted turtle in Augusta and let it go in Portland. This may not be the worst thing in the world but it still is not a good practice. Remember your actions affect you and everyone else in our hobby.

Editor

A Maine Herper Lives life in the Fast Lane

Studying Rattlesnakes in the Canyonlands of Utah

By Trevor Persons

Editor Note: This was written in 1993. Recently Trevor has been working with the Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife looking for Timber rattlesnakes. He has yet to find any but it would be interesting if he ever followed up on this article and studied the thermoregulation of Maine's herps.

As a child growing up in central Maine I always felt cursed to live in the only state in the contiguous United States (unless you count Rhode Island) not to have a venomous snakes in its fauna. So a few years ago I headed west to fulfill my destiny as a "Guy Who Studies Dangerous Animals". I worked for two summers as a field technician for the National Park Services at Natural Bridges National Monument in southern Utah, assisting with a study of Western Rattlesnakes *Crotalus viridis*. The study was originally initiated by the Park Service out of fear of potential harmful snake/human interactions (despite the fact that road-killed snakes were fairly common and a human envenomation had never occurred). However, it soon became a basic natural history study focusing on thermoregulation, seasonal migration and daily activity patterns.

I'm not going to bore everyone with all the data on thermoregulation, micro-habitat selection, migration, etc., most of which is consistent with the findings of Dave Duvall, Bill Brown, Howard Reinert and others. Instead I'll mention a couple of interesting aspects of the population that may be relevant to Maine herps.

Dorsal Patterns

One of the most interesting aspects of the study, aside from having to explain that study to Monument visitors, was the aberrant dorsal patterns of most snakes in the population. Almost all snakes had dorsal patterns with some irregularities, usually fused or broken blotches, and a significant percentage had what I would call "very weird" dorsal patterns.

The dorsal patterns were distinct enough that it was relatively easy to use these as individual identification. This method, when feasible, seems to me a good idea as it involves less disturbance to the snake than scale-clipping. I know of no other snake study to utilize this marking technique, however.

The aberrant dorsal patterning is most likely caused by sub-optimal body temperatures during gestation, and this population appears to be at its upper elevation limit in the area. While bizarre dorsal patterns may not be scientifically interesting in themselves, they may be an indication of a population under environmental stress, and other studies of such a population could tell a lot about how herps deal with environmental stresses and what kinds of trade-offs must be made. While I know of no Maine herps at the northern limits of their ranges that exhibit this kind of morphological indication of stress, our herps undoubtedly have valuable information to offer.

Thermoregulation

A related (and corroborating) discovery in this rattlesnake population was that average body temperatures were significantly lower than has been reported for the same species in numerous other studies. These snakes had average body temperatures of 18.4-26.7 C, while other studies have found temperatures of 35.4-31.7. The exception in this study was a gravid female who had an average body temperature of 31.0 C during gestation. She apparently was able to find a suitable site for gestation (she stayed under the same small rock ledge for three months), as evidenced (presumably) by the relatively normal dorsal patterns of her six young.

The implication of all this is that while high body temperatures are essential for certain physiological function such as gestation, these preferred body temperatures must normally be sacrificed in order to meet the day to day needs of feeding, mate-finding, etc. Populations of Maine herps at the northern edges of their ranges (such as Ribbon Snakes and Milk Snakes) certainly have valuable information to offer on the physiological ecology of ectotherms.

Spotted Salamanders

A rainy night last week I went out looking for spotted salamanders. Actually it started when I was walking to my car and accidentally stepped on one. Obviously I felt like crap but it reminded me that I did want to go in search of them. So I started driving around and they were surprisingly easy to see crossing the roads. I



stopped to help a few cross the road kidding myself into believing that I saved a life in place of the one I took. I kept a couple until the next morning so I could take pictures. It was fun driving around and giving them a lift. It was the first time I've done this but it won't be the last.

Driven to mate, frogs on the move to orgy pools

By Terry Karkos , Staff Writer Sun/Journal
Wednesday, April 15, 2009

RUMFORD - After emerging from their cryogenic-like hibernation, wood frogs have one thing on their minds: sex. And it doesn't matter with who or what, because they can't eat until they've mated. This spring, the 2- to 2½-inch frogs that quack like black ducks have a serious dilemma.

"Club Amphibian," their favorite vernal orgy pools, are still iced over in western, central and northern Maine, said Aram Calhoun.

Calhoun is a University of Maine associate professor of wetland ecology and a wetland scientist for Maine Audubon in Orono.

"There's a little, little bit of open water around the edges, so the animals usually hang out around the edges, waiting to get in," Calhoun said.

"Isn't that something? That must be depressing for a cold-blooded animal. You get to the edge of the pool, and the whole bloody thing is frozen and they're probably saying, 'I told you it was too early to go.' There will be a lot of salamander divorces this time of year," she said.

To reproduce, wood frogs and salamanders must breed in water. The annual mating ritual comes during that first warm spring rain that researchers call the "Big Night."

That's when frogs and salamanders move in massive numbers through the woods to participate in breeding frenzies. Big Night's already happened in southern Maine and is expected to happen on Wednesday in the Orono area where Calhoun monitors amphibians. In western Maine, Big Night should arrive during the fourth week in April or with the first warm rain, Calhoun said.

Several squished frogs on a road at night is a Big Night indicator, Calhoun said. Salamanders prefer to move when it's wet, but wood frogs will move even if it's dry. That's because salamanders have many years to be successful with breeding; wood frogs, which are found as far north as the Arctic Circle, don't.

"Wood frogs are explosive breeders, yet they only live 3 to 5 years, so they only have a couple of times, if that, to breed," Calhoun said. "So, they're very anxious. Much more than the salamanders, which live 15 to 20 years."

Salamanders gather congress-style - they all get in the pool together - and do a little courtship dance, and no one gets hurt. With wood frogs, it's not good to be a female.

"It's not uncommon for the females to drown, because she has three or four males on top of her," Calhoun said.

Wood frogs are the only frogs she knows of that attempt to mate with non-frog species. To illustrate just how crazy wood frog sex can be, Calhoun's graduate student, Kevin J. Ryan, who is working on his study site in Canterbury, Conn., photographed a wood frog trying to mate with a salamander. "We've had wood frogs mating with our data loggers," Calhoun said. "The data loggers, they're in little plastic containers and they're mating with the containers. They don't care. It's just something to put your arms around. It's been a long winter, you know?"

Scientists find 200 new frog species in Madagascar

PORT LOUIS (Reuters) – Scientists have found more than 200 new species of frogs in Madagascar but a political crisis is hurting conservation of the Indian Ocean island's unique wildlife, a study shows.

The discovery, which almost doubles the number of known amphibians in Madagascar, illustrates an underestimation of the natural riches that have helped spawn a \$390-million-a-year tourism industry. However, months of instability culminating in a change of government after street protests, have compromised gains in conservation.

"The political instability is allowing the cutting of the forest within national parks, generating a lot of uncertainty about the future of the planned network of protected areas," David Vieites, researcher at the Spanish National Natural Sciences Museum, fourth-largest island, known for

tailed lemur and poisonous mammals in Madagascar are but one of the 217 previously known species of amphibian native. "People think that we species live on this planet," professor at the Technical University of Braunschweig, said in the statement.



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But the centuries of discoveries has only just begun -- the majority of life forms on Earth is still awaiting scientific recognition." Human demands on the land and decades of rampant logging have destroyed 80 percent of Madagascar's rain forest, threatening hundreds of species, he said.

The study, carried out by the Spanish Scientific Research Council (CSIC), and published in the May issue of the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, suggests the find of between 129 and 221 new species of frogs could double the number of amphibians globally if the results are extrapolated worldwide.

Almost a quarter of the new species discovered have not yet been found in unprotected areas, the study stated. Madagascar broke away from Africa almost 160 million years ago, leaving its flora and fauna to develop in isolation.

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Classified Advertisements

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: Central American Banded Geckos; Proven Pair \$60, 4 young from 08, \$20 each, discount if you take all. Call 207-645-2065 or fmaccarrone@midmaine.com

2007 1.0 Copper Rat \$250; **2008 babies** 1.2 T+albino central american boas \$1600/trio; 1.1 blue-eyed leucy ball \$6000/pair; 5.5 A++ argentine boas \$250/pair; 1.0 Mojave het ghost ball \$500. **2009 babies** 0.0.15 albino boas \$250; 0.0.10 albino fat tailed geckos \$40; 0.0.4 enigma leopard geckos \$150; 0.0.4 diablo blanco leopard gecko \$200 Contact Ben Cole bcherps@yahoo.com

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 or 207 723 4108. Will also have them in Manchester on April 11.