

WHY ?

Perhaps in no other nearby state is there the natural variety of reptiles and amphibians to be found in Virginia. This is due to: the size of the state; its fortunate location; and inclusion within its borders of four life zones--the Canadian, Alleghenian, Carolinian and Louisianian. These factors combine to provide a great variety of habitats supporting an interestingly diversified herpetofauna.

Also, in no other neighboring state has the native herpetology been so little known, and unfortunately, so long neglected. Its many counties, river basins and highlands pose a staggering project for the individual herpetologist or a whole corps of them -- a project that will require the long-term efforts of a sizable group.

This is not to say that the state has not had men of great quality and wide perspectives working on this project. Virginian herpetology has attracted many men. These have been both native and adopted sons. The "greats" now dead who have explored the Old Dominion's waters, meadows, woodlands and highlands, include Raymond Lee Ditmars and E.R.Dunn.

More recently, Virginia has known trained herpetologists of great and sincere dedication. In addition, the significant contributions of men, who may not claim herpetology as their primary interest, must be noted. Several scattered individuals working at different levels have added to the knowledge of Virginian species. But something was needed which would bring together these scientists, able technicians and enthusiastic laymen. Amateurs felt, scientists saw, the need: wider information.

Two laymen, more than casually interested in the state's herpetology, decided to provide that which was lacking -- communication between herpetologists at all levels. They were joined by four herpetologists who represented a cross-section of all: a physician, a college biology instructor, a student and a museum staff curator. In March, 1958, these six were joined by twenty-two others to form the VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY. Our goals have only partially been realized. We know we are not reaching all who are currently interested. We have yet to present a well-rounded, informative account of the Virginia lore to a wide and representative group. Our contributions to a more popular knowledge have been, at best, spotty. Conservation activities are still badly needed. A campaign for better conservation practices and wider respect for lower vertebrates is sadly lacking. We have, as yet, not scratched the surface of improved reporting of herp news. Here, your attention is called to the Society's objectives as stated in the first bulletin March, 1958, and the ninth bulletin, March, 1959.

We are not trying to "sell" herpetology to anyone as the ideal field for professional scientific endeavor or as the best spare-time hobby. PRIMARILY, WE ARE TRYING TO REACH ANYONE CURRENTLY INTERESTED IN THE REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS OF VIRGINIA --or any related phase of this area.

The Society's bulletins are intended to be monthly newsletters carrying data and comment of interest within our common field. All should look to it as a true medium for information exchange ready-at-hand.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT: We hope, above all, to convince those working in this field that membership in the VHS is intended to be all-inclusive rather than exclusive. We are not recruiting or converting. We are aware (as Dr. Roger Conant observes) that "herpetology has acquired a legion of new adherents in recent years." In order to do the job we set for VHS we must reach all now interested and impress them with the importance of active participation.

Our active membership stands at nearly 90. It represents the following

	Founders:	Faculty:	General:	Staff:	Student:	Family:	Institutional:	
Va.	6	13	10	6	24	2	2	63
Md.-DC	2 (Hon.)	1	2	6	2	-	1	14
USA.	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	6
total:	8	16	14	14	26	2	3	83

Among the many friends of the Society are a potential membership equal to our present paid membership. This number, plus, receives the letter

	Faculty:	General:	Staff:	Students:	Family:	Instituti:	Exchange:	
Va.	20	11	22	17	3	22	1	96
Md.DC	1	2	5	5	-	5	-	16
USA.	6	1	2	2	-	-	3	15
total:	27	14	29	24	3	27	4	129

With the active participation of those genuinely interested in herpetology who are presently not active members the Society would be enabled:

- 1) to produce a more informative newsletter, including survey reports;
- 2) organize a newsitem clearing house which would, with members' help, permit expert response where appropriate to answer myths appearing in the local daily and weekly newspapers, or elsewhere
- 3) to publish, at cost, popular guides to Virginian species of Reptiles or amphibs, for public use (summer camps, 4-H, outdoorsmen, etc.)
- 4) to hold more frequent local, county, or inter-county meetings (at present, the only meeting which the society is required to hold is the annual statewide meeting for election of officers, etc.);
- 5) to reach the occupational groups most likely to provide an opportunity to tell and spread our conservation story;
- 6) to give aid to high school science projects and instructors.

YOUR INTEREST SHOULD BE INDICATED BY YOUR PERSONAL PARTICIPATION ----

Fill out and send in the membership blank at the bottom of the first page --- do it today. This will make possible many of the above projects and the distribution of information to a wide group of less informed enthusiasts, educators, and the general public. THE VHS IS NON-PROFIT. The officers and bulletin staff are serving without pay. Dues is applied to duplication of the bulletin and postage. Recent increase in membership, and renewals for 1959 have permitted us to take advantage of economies in both printing and mailing, add more pages too!

THE EDITORS OF VIRGINIA WILDLIFE MAGAZINE have asked your Society to revise the Commission of Game & Inland Fisheries' circular No.6. This revision has been supplied and is based upon the excellent supplement to VHS Bulletin No.4, June, 1958, prepared by W.Leslie Burger, president-elect of VHS, a dedicated scientist and faculty member. The new list will include Virginian Amphibians as well as Reptiles, and credit VHS.

VHS MEMBERS, FRIENDS, PARTICIPATED IN SCOUT-O-RAMA AT STATE FAIR GROUND

The Reptile Booth attracted plenty of attention, member Robert J. (Bob) Gagnon reported. The booth carried a sign "WELCOME VHS MEMBERS". The exhibit was organized in co-operation with one of the Robert E. Lee Council (Richmond, Va. area) scout troops. Bob did a superlative job of gathering specimens. He called on the Berberick brothers, capable outdoorsmen of many talents, who have a large farm in Colonial Heights, Va. They added significantly to the specimens Gagnon was able to muster for the booth: Eastern Cottonmouths; Common Black Snake; Black Rat Snake; Hog-nosed Snake; Northern Water S.; Eastern Garter S.; Northern Copperhead; and a (preserved) Rattlesnake head. The names of possible future members were recorded by the booth managers and are to get this letter.

IT'S A SHAME THE RICHMOND WILDLIFE EXHIBIT (THALHEIMER) DOESN'T INCLUDE AN EXHIBIT OF VIRGINIA REPTILES - was Gagnon's reaction to Scout-O-Rama. The Richmond "zoo" housed in one of the state capital's larger parks, is believed to be limited to mammals indigenous to the Old Dominion. The Keeler family of Falls Church, Va. (three members strong) visited the Reptile Study Booth at the Richmond State Fair Grounds early May 23

(report) - - - - -
VHS HAS TWO ACTIVE STUDENT TEAMS : (report)

Two teams of student members are in operation in northern Virginia. A high school-college-age group is centered at Roslyn, in Arlington, Va. Another, just over the Arlington County line in McLean, Fairfax County is younger but swiftly moving up. Its members are junior high and high school age. We have had a noteworthy report from the latter group and we carry it here in brief form believing that others will be interested in what may well be a new form of herpetological teamwork: FT

Harlan T. Hall, Jr., Mike Williams and Paul Cunningham form the nucleus of the group in southern residential McLean. Their common internal and external problems: finding wintertime shelter for their collections; building adequate caging; finding food for hungry snakes; and fending off raids on outdoor serpentaria;--these were the forces that united. Successive outdoor locations for live snake collections during the late spring and summer of 1958 were raided by pre-schoolers with an uncanny knack for locating well-camouflaged herpetoria and for prying open the cages and releasing the specimens. After several such experiences, the boys banded together and moved indoors. With the approach of winter '59 this was a happy and timely decision. They housed an imposing array of local and out-of-state snakes and lizards in the Hall Sr's basement.

Over the past winter these enthusiasts did some studying on diseases of snakes with the advice of Dr. Doris M. Cochran, Dep't of Amphibians & Reptiles, U.S. National Museum (USNM). The causes and prevention of serpentine ailments -- mouth rot, cage and water blisters -- were well researched. With the aid of Dr. Cochran's files and library, the team compared out-of-state data on certain species with available Va. data. Other active members of the team include Allan Dillon of Arlington, Va. and Joseph Hickman of McLean who is also an able student-entomologist.

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CHORES SHARED BY THE TEAM MEMBERS ARE: scrubbing down cages frequently with borax; obtaining new specimens by hunting, trading, or purchase; collecting food items; and raising money to purchase snakes or bantam eggs to feed to snakes. Pooling their cage-building talents they have amassed a collection which reached a peak total of 33 specimens and now includes: Banded Water S.; Florida Water S.; Fla. Pine Snake; Fla. King S.; Corn Snakes; Yellow Rat S.; Key (Dekert's) Rat S.; Lake Water S.; and Northern Water Snakes. Brown and Common King Snakes; Northern Ring neck; Worm S.; Queen S.; Black Rat S.; Eastern Garter S.; Short-headed Garter; Southern Hog-nosed S.; and Cooke's Tree Boa. Lizards: Fence; Carolina Anole; So. Amer. Chameleon; Iguana; Tegu; Western Whiptails; and seven (assorted ?) Skinks. This is quite a combination of herps!

THE GROUP EXHIBITED A DOZEN VIRGINIAN VARIETIES OF SNAKES AT McLEAN's Franklin-Sherman School. The occasion was one of the last indoor meetings of Cub Pack # 128, under the leadership of Captain Dick Lombardi (USN) of McLean, shortly transferring to Mare Island Naval Base, Calif. The Hall team guided the cubs and parents of cubs past the ten-cage exhibit explaining the specimens in each, their characteristics and gave quite a boost to the cause of conservation during the docenting process.

LOG-ROLLERS' ROUND-UP: M.(Jack) De Prato, senior keeper and associate Lee D. Schmeltz at the National Zoo's Reptile House, report that the Brown Water Snake (Natrix taxispilota), if it will accept any food on a voluntary basis, will take smelts - a small frying fish. A specimen at NZP, captured in No. Carolina in 1957, has grown to 4 ft. on this diet. It accepts raw smelts whether placed at the side of, or in, the water dish. * * * * Harlan Hall, Jr. has sent a 47" Brown King Snake (Lampropeltis calligaster rhombomaculata) to Dr. Roger Conant at the Philadelphia Zoo. The measurement accepted by Dr. Conant exceeds the record of 45" for the species noted in the new Field Guide published in 1958. * * * * The Keelers of Falls Church, Va., after visiting the Reptile exhibit at the Richmond State Fair ground early morning of May 23d went on a family hunt. They saw: Northern Water Snakes; Red-spotted newts; an Eastern King Snake; a Timber Rattlesnake (Crotalus h. horridus); a Northern Black Racer (Coluber c. constrictor); Northern Copperhead DOR, (dead on road) and some Dusky Salamanders. Bill Keeler, after finding the Black Racer slain on his return trip, promised his sons Ronnie and Robbie that he would capture any herps seen on or near the road and if not desired for collection release them further off the road shoulders. This might be a good conservation turn for members to follow where the traffic flow will permit it. ADVISE: "Give ALL wildlife a brake!" (WJK)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Your editor was prepared to write, and have your Society president review, an article on the proper (safe) handling of poisonous snakes. The project was dropped as "unnecessarily duplicative" after we looked over the PETERSON FIELD GUIDE #12, by Dr. Conant; Chapter Two. This bulletin does not attempt to compete with already-published, highly authoritative and widely circulated literature. We have decided, in lieu, to present the long-heralded bibliography. It is hoped that this will provide INTERESTING SUMMER READING -- or, members may file it away for that pleasant period of hibernation between October 31 and March 1.

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