

January-March, 1966

EXOTIC REPTILES

by E. R. GOETZ, VHS
Hampton, Virginia

On Saturday, June 6, 1964, about fifty VHS members and their guests met in the National Zoo's Reptile House to hear a talk on the "Reptiles of Taiwan" by Captain Robert E. Kuntz, USN, who had served with a U.S. Naval Medical Research team in Taipei, Taiwan (Formosa).

On completing his slide lecture, Captain Kuntz provided a number of copies of reprints of his article on the "Snakes of Taiwan" published in the Quarterly Journal of the Taiwan Museum, Vol. XVI, Nos. 1 & 2, June, 1963, to the VHS Secretary for adult VHS members who were unable to be present at the meeting.

One of these reprints, so richly illustrated with color photographs was presented to me during the '64 VHS Statewide Meeting at Camp Monocan, Nellysford, Virginia.

I became fascinated by the many varieties of snakes, their color and sizes, and the important place they hold in the economy of Asian countries. I decided to try getting some of them, if I could.

The Minister of our church had just returned from a trip to the Far East. A phone call got me the name and address of a church worker on Taiwan. I made a list of a few highly desired species and I asked this man if he could get my request to someone who could help.

A couple of months passed before I finally received a reply from a Taiwanese man who stated that he had collected for Dr. Robert Kuntz. He said he was familiar with the island's snakes and would be able

to ship me whatever I wished to order. It was better than I expected!

Several letters and many months later, all of the details concerning the size and quality of specimens, packing, shipping route, payment, customs declaration, etc. had been worked out. On July 2, 1965, my order was readied to leave the island. The large aluminum box, nicely packed with twenty-two Taiwan snakes and four turtles, took off from Taipei for Hampton, Va., via Tokyo, Seattle, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.

On the afternoon of July 5, I received a phone call from the D.C. It was the National Airport asking me to come and pick up a shipment of snakes addressed to me. They said a very strong odor was emanating from the box and that none of the airlines would carry it to its destination -- Hampton, Virginia.

As I drove to Washington (about 190 miles) I tried to guess just how many of the snakes had died. It was even hot for that time of year and I knew one of the shippers along the 10,000 miles could have left the box out in the sun!

I went directly to the Northwest Orient hanger and saw my box sitting by itself way out in the middle of that great space. Knowing that the snakes were in bags, I proceeded to open the box. Hanger personnel stood at a distrustful distance and watched with something less than enthusiasm. As I opened bag after bag I was relieved to find the snakes alive and healthy. It was in the last bag that I found

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the dead one that was responsible for the odor.

Only one snake had failed to survive the trip. The other species were as follows:

TAIWAN BEAUTY SNAKE (Elaphe taeniurus) eight, ranging in size from 4½ to 6 feet. This beautiful snake is called the meat or dish snake in Taiwan because it is used in the snake soup which is common in the Far East. All were gentle.

TAIWAN GREEN SNAKE (Opheodrys major). These three are just like the Eastern Smooth Green Snake (O. vernalis) only much larger. Their appetite for earthworms is way out!

DELICATE DESIGN SNAKE (Ptyas korros). These medium-sized snakes were very attractive, but a little nervous. This species grows much larger on the Asian mainland where it is known as INDIAN RAT SNAKE.

BANDED RED SNAKE (Dinodon rufozonatum). These three snakes are harmless but resemble the poisonous krait except that they have red bands instead of the white or gray of the krait. These snakes preferred smaller snakes to other food they were offered.

TAIWAN COBRA (Naja naja). This one refused all food and died.

ONE-HUNDRED PACER (Agkistrodon acutus). This medium-sized snake in the same genus as the copper-head is the most deadly reptile on the island of Taiwan. He attracted a great deal of attention while on exhibit at Jim Martin's Serpentarium at Ocean View Park, Norfolk.

TAIWAN HABU (Trimeresurus mucrosquamatus). Twice the size of a BAMBOO VIPER (Trimeresurus stejnegeri) placed in the same cage. The next morning the HABU was dead; fang punctures were clearly visible near the tail. This lesson was learned the hard way!

SOFT SHELL TURTLES (Amyda sinensis) These were the four turtles -- almost forgot to mention them! They were juveniles but just as mean as they could be!

Exotic reptiles can present a big challenge. It is balanced by the pleasure of having something different. The time and trouble, the many letters, the trip to D.C., and the expense (the air express charge was \$46.35) was certainly worth it. I am presently corresponding with individuals in Thailand, West- and East Africa, the Philippines, and Dr. Kuntz' man on Taiwan. I hope to import some more snakes, lizards, and turtles later this year. If any readers would like to write me I will answer all inquiries as soon as possible. Let's hear from you!

(Mr.) Richard E. Goetz
March 22, 1966, 1813 Andrews Blvd.
Hampton, Va. 23363

"Ed" Goetz is to be congratulated on his successes in obtaining, and caring for several exotic reptile species. For the benefit of non-adult (student) members of VHS, it should be noted that it is no easy feat to come off with such a task!

FJTobey

JOINT MEETING OF EASTERN SEA-
BOARD HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETIES

On Saturday, January 8, 1966, over one-hundred twenty-five people attended a joint meeting of eastern seaboard herpetological societies. It was held at the new offices of the Division of Reptiles and Amphibians, U.S. National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The presidents of the four area herpetological societies addressed the assemblage at an afternoon session in the auditorium of the new Museum of History and Technology. They are: G. Leonard Knapp, Philadelphia Herpetological Society; A. P. Loeffler, N.Y. Herpetological Society; Richard A. Hahn, Maryland Herpetological Society; and, Dr. James L. Chamberlain, Virginia Herpetological Society. There was an "open house" in the Reptile Division offices, located in a new wing of the museum. It afforded an opportunity to talk to the Curator, Dr. Doris M. Cochran, and Associate Curator, Dr. James A. Peters.

Interesting semi-technical talks were presented at the afternoon session. Among those who spoke were: Commander John F. Kurfess, USN; Thomas Lewis, National Institutes of Health; Herbert Harris, Baltimore, Md.; and Professor Richard Highton, University of Maryland. Franklin Tobey, Secretary, VHS, introduced the speakers. Dr. Jim Peters expressed his delight at the turn-out. There were some indications that this could well become an annual event; alternating with the National Zoological Park as a meeting site. A message from Roger Conant, author of the "Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians" was read by the chairman;

Roger Conant's message to the four societies:

I deeply regret that I cannot be with you today at your joint meeting which must stand as some sort of landmark. Only a few decades ago such a meeting would have been impossible, and even the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH), drawing from its nationwide membership, could not muster so many delegates as you probably have assembled in Washington today.

Your interest and your enthusiasm represent a phenomenon that is a boon to professional herpetologists -- at least to those of us who are associated with zoological gardens and public museums where amateur naturalists eagerly seek information about the wild life around them. It is you, by your fieldwork, who supply the detailed information necessary to answer in depth the many questions that are hurled at us. Through your several journals you keep us apprised of progress in the herpetology of your respective areas, and we thank you for it.

There are two points of importance, however, that I would like to mention. The first of these is the necessity for depositing unique or critical material in a permanent museum collection where it will be available for the work of the specialist. It is not sufficient merely to preserve a specimen and place it on the shelf of your own curio cabinet. Make sure it has a permanent home. I know of several private collections that were lost to science because the owners went off to war, married spouses who were not sympa-

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Message from Roger Conant, continued:

thetic toward snakes and "other critters," or who were forced to neglect their collections for other reasons. The rarer or more unusual the specimen the more urgency for getting it into a large museum collection -- and quickly.

My second point concerns conservation. Unless you are collecting for a special project or to aid a scientist who needs material for a study, take only small samples of the animal populations you find. Reptiles and amphibians must face many unnatural enemies these days, such as pollution, bulldozers, the real estate promoters, poisonous spray campaigns, and other byproducts of our so-called civilization. Unfortunately, all too often, one of their most deadly enemies is the thoughtless amateur herpetologist who grabs everything he sees, tears

habitats to pieces, and behaves like an idiot in the field. I urge you to be conservative in your collecting and to replace stones and logs after you turn them so that a habitat will recover as quickly as possible.

It is to non-professionals like yourselves to whom we must look constantly for help. Many of you have contributed much to our science, and I wish I could be on hand to meet those of you whose names are so familiar, but whom I have not yet had the privilege of greeting in person. Best wishes for a fine and inspiring meeting.

Roger Conant
Philadelphia, Pa.

January, 1966

Mr. Conant is an Honorary VHS member.

NATIONAL ZOO MEETING AND VHS

People get around to seeing more of the world these days than ever before. (See "Letters to the editor"). VHS members aren't excluded.

The need for familiarity with foreign or exotic reptiles and amphibians is fairly obvious.

Each year the Society holds a meeting at the National Zoological Park, in Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C. A notice concerning the current year's meeting appears on the front page of this Bulletin.

One of the finest presentations we have had at an NZP meeting was the illustrated slide talk on the "REPTILES OF TAIWAN" by Dr. Robert E. Kuntz, as noted by Mr. Richard E. Goetz of Hampton, Va., in the leading feature article of this issue. The editor regrets that a shortening of the manuscript was

The NZP-VHS meeting is held each year to familiarize the membership with the best collection of exotic reptiles and amphibians in the region. For most members it is less than a one-day trip away.

Time, vigilance, and money are required to house, maintain and feed a large collection of any kind. A foreign collection requires more attention and expense than other, more routine domestic collections -- although both are a challenge. For most of us, the zoo's reptile house and professional staff must do the job.

Housing and caring for poisonous snakes at home is discouraged by Virginia Herpetological Society policy. In most communities possession of venomous snakes is against the law.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OF VHSB

I have just gotten to my permanent station and I wanted to let you know so I can receive the VHS Bulletins. I am quite lucky here in that I can have specimens in my quarters. A Sergeant in the Desert Survival School is a herpetologist and keeps a live collection at the school. Others here collect, also. We now have some chuckawallas and desert tortoises. I've only been here two days and I'm sure I will like it.

Just back from a 12-day sojourn through the Southwest. Most of my collecting was in the vicinity of Phoenix, Arizona. At the zoo there I became friends with Carl Simmons a former Va. collector. He knew Dr. John Thornton Wood (first president of VHS), Roger Rageot, and Jim Martin, quite well. Looking forward to a very interesting collecting season and will keep you posted on all developments. Keep the work moving in Virginia and I want to hear from the Society occasionally. Say "Hello" to all for me! (The detached but faithful member!)

Rick Sanderson, A3C
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I regret the fact that I have not been able to participate in any of the functions of VHS in the past year or more. I am in the service now -- flying a jet for the Marines and due to go to Viet Nam shortly. I've missed the field trips, etc. which I participated in several years ago when the Society was born (1958). The last time I saw many of the members was at the first statewide at Camp Shawondasee, Chesterfield,

Va., when Professor Les Burger and I used to collect together. . . . Best of luck to you and the VHS!

Bob O'Kennon
108 Williams Street
Hopewell, Virginia

In connection with the VHS plans for a Va. snake survey in 1966, I and several friends here at the University of Richmond, plan to do some collecting. Everything that we catch is going to be brought back to Mr. Gerald C. Schaefer, Instructor in Biology at University of Richmond. Anything of value will be preserved and (a record data slip) forwarded to the VHS for recording. John O. Bradshaw, Jr., and I have a possible record for the Queen Snake (Natrix septemvittata) We caught it in the Fredericksburg, Va., area. VHSB #38 indicates no record of it for that area.

John S. Hathaway
3/26/'66 Box 789, U. of R.
Richmond, Va. 23173

Some VHS members who are familiar with Cornell University Press' excellent series of books on American herpetology, including Wright and Wright "Handbook of Frogs and Toads," Carr's "Handbook of Turtles", Wright and Wright "Handbook of Snakes," and Smith's "Handbook of Lizards", may have noticed that Bishop's Handbook of Salamanders is no longer available from Ithaca. I have recently discovered, however, that this book has been reprinted by Hafner Publishing Co., New York, in a 1962 edition. It is also available from Mr. Eric Lundberg, Ashton, Md. for \$8 a copy.

Kent Wells
Springfield, Va.

NOTES ON THE UPLAND CHORUS FROG

by: Kent Wells, VHS
Springfield, Va.

Over the past several years, I have made many observations of the breeding habits of the Upland Chorus Frog (Pseudacris triseriata feriarum), a small species seldom seen outside its breeding season. I observe them in the Annandale-Springfield area of Fairfax County, Virginia. I have two principal observation and collecting areas. One is Backlick Run, a small stream that runs behind my home. The other is a marshy area in a narrow strip of land between the Capital Beltway (Rt. 495) and Accotink Creek, between Annandale and Backlick Road exits.

The latter area is a herpetologist's delight, abounding in all kinds of herpetofauna, including eleven species of frogs and toads. For some reason, it is usually a little warmer in this marshy area than in the surrounding area, and the frogs generally call day and night. The following notes were taken on March 14, 1965 on a collecting trip with a friend.

Weather fairly sunny as we started out, but got cloudier as we worked. (Temperature 51°F.) We entered the marshy area just west of Rt. 495 and heard numerous Upland Chorus Frogs calling. Calls sounded like "cre-e-e-k, cre-e-ek" or the sound of running ones fingers over the teeth of a comb. Calls proved to be coming from small temporary pools in high grass. The frogs were difficult to locate, but we did catch one mated pair and one other female. Water temperature here was 50°F. Continued on to other temporary pools. One pool (58°F) contained

four Wood Frog (Rana sylvatica) egg masses and one Spotted Salamander (Ambystoma maculatum) egg mass. I found six more Wood Frog egg masses in another pool (56°F). In one permanent pool we found 20 Spotted Salamander egg masses. (Water 49°F)

Proceeded on to the swampy area. Hundreds of Chorus Frogs calling among the cattails, but we could see none. We caught a few Marbled Salamander (Ambystoma opacum) larvae in a permanent pool, and in the same pool, a mated pair of Red-spotted Newts (Diemictylus v. viridescens). We took these home to observe and photograph. Other pools contained dozens of chorus frog egg masses, all of which were partially submerged and attached to plant stems. Jelly was very loose around these eggs. These chorus frogs certainly are hard to see. Hundreds around us and we've only captured three.

Another trip on March 28, 1965, yielded better results. When we entered the marshy area, we could hear the chorus frogs everywhere. We explored many small pools and found frogs and eggs everywhere. Headed south to some permanent pools where the Spring Peepers (Hyla c. crucifer) and Chorus Frogs were almost deafening. We collected several of each species, as well as Marbled Salamander larvae Spotted Salamander eggs, and five Red-spotted Newts, two of them females full of eggs. This area is teeming with life, especially chorus frogs. In one pool found two male chorus frogs grasping each other. I had to force them apart. When I put them in a jar with a female spring peeper, one

Upland Chorus Frog Notes, continued:

of them grabbed her and held on. No eggs were deposited, however.

Upland chorus frog eggs are deposited in small masses (12 X 18mm or a little larger) attached to bits of plants underwater. The loose jelly masses may be completely covered with water or only partially submerged (i.e., floating on top). They are usually laid in very shallow water (2 to 6"). The water is always plentifully supplied with plant life which serves as anchorage for eggs, and as food for tadpoles. Eggs hatch in two weeks, or less. Eggs laid April 3, 1965 hatched on April 16, 1965.

The peak of the chorus frog breeding season usually comes in early April, and most activity has ceased by early May. There may be a maximum temperature for chorus frog calling. On June 3, 1965, I heard chorus frogs when it was 60°. They had been silent since May 20, when the temperature was about 59°. This would be an interesting area for further study.

On February 19, 1966, I found Upland Chorus Frogs breeding in the marshy area near Accotink Creek. This is the earliest I have ever found these frogs. I also saw two Spotted Turtles (Clemmys guttata). This seemed fairly early for these turtles, but the 60°F daytime temperatures probably accounted for this. On March 4, 1966, I went back to the area near Backlick Run. The temperature was 56° and the humidity was 100%. I hit the jackpot on amphibians! I found Spotted Salamanders, breeding and I got two big males but missed a half-dozen more. The chorus frogs and

spring peepers were calling, though not many were out. Other amphibians seen were the Pickerel Frog (Rana palustris), American toad (Bufo t. americanus), Northern Green Frog (Rana clamitans melanota), and the Northern Bullfrog (Rana catesbeiana) Red-backed Salamander (Plethodon c. cinereus). One Woodfrog (Rana sylvatica) was heard at night-time.

Incidentally, my earliest record for an amphibian is January 21, 1964, when I found a large Pickerel Frog while snow was still on the ground! The temperature was 56°F.

March, 1966
Kent Wells,
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Springfield, Va.
22150

A five-legged frog was discovered by Pennsylvania State University life scientists in a shipment of frogs intended for study by zoology students. The female, Northern Leopard Frog (Rana p. pipiens) had developed an extra appendage next to, and behind the normal front leg. All five legs appeared to have some movement and ability to function.

MARYLAND MEMBERS OF VHS: VHS has appreciated your support. VHS will not cover Maryland herpetology. There is a MARYLAND HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY. It deserves your support!

The MdHS will meet jointly with VHS at the NZP meeting, May 14, 1966, Reptile House, National Zoo, 3:30 p.m.--a Saturday afternoon.

cover page

Virginia Herpetological Society Bulletin No. 47 (January-March 1966)

NEED FOR YOUR ZIP CODE,
AND DUES!

VHS mailing lists and roster of VHS members will require accurate ZIP code numbers for each member. This is required by law by January, 1967 for bulk mailers (mailing permit).

PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS ON THE COVER (BELOW) and make certain it is CORRECT. Let us know if not. All members will benefit by the new VHS roster -- VHS Bulletin #46.

DUES for 1966 -- if you have not yet paid they are collectable; \$1. When you fill out the renewal form at the bottom of the preceding page be certain to include your ZIP code so that the Post Office Department will accept our Bulletins for mailing purposes throughout 1966-1967. The bulk mailing privilege held by VHS is a privilege; not a right. We manage to hold it by compliance.

DON'T FORGET THE MAY 14th NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK MEETING !
