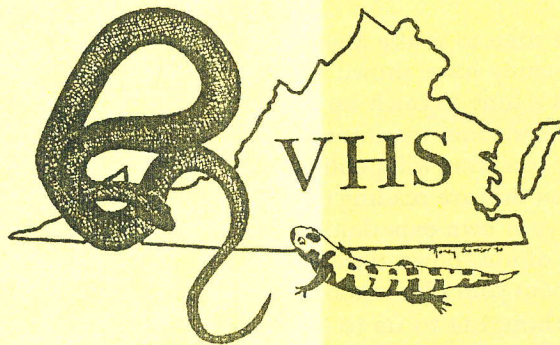


# Virginia Herpetological Society



# Newsletter

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## THE VHS NEWSLETTER

Volume I, No. 3

February 1991

Virginia Herpetological Society  
5608 Parkland Court  
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23464

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## EDITORS COMMENT

As I sat down to begin putting together this issue of the VHS Newsletter, the weather report on the radio was calling for Virginia's first snowfall of the season. I was quickly reminded that Winter was six days old and that the season of field studies and collecting trips were ended for 1991. This thought saddens me a bit, as I enjoy the time spent out in the field.

I find great enjoyment and relaxation in trudging through a swamp in search of frogs or poking around rotting trees and old buildings looking for snakes. The time I spend in the field is more than just in herp hunting though. It's hard for me to totally concentrate on my particular mission, when birds are constantly calling and scolding, insects are swarming and biting and other wild things are moving all around me. I dare to guess that you can relate to these kinds of intrusions and thus understand my thoughts here.

Being in the field means becoming a part of the world of nature around one. The distractions are many and often times more interesting than the subject you have planned to study. Watching a Beaver work on it's lodge, noting the various feeding habits of the birds, spotting a Chipmunk stretched out on a log in the sun or following the spiraling flight of a Red-tailed Hawk as it soars ever skyward to seemingly disappear. These are the types of little annoyances that I'm referring to. Hardly a day goes by when I'm in the field that such things as these capture my attention and draw me from

my planned activity for at least a while.

The Winter offers it's share of natural curiosities as well. Even as I try to get my thoughts together to write this piece, I'm distracted by the House Finches feeding on the sunflower seeds I provide for them. It's nothing to count twenty or more of these eager little birds waiting their turn at my two feeding stations, as they shiver in the cold on the branches of a leaf-bare tree framed by swaying cedars. They share this free lunch with Goldfinches, Cardinals, Purple Finches, and an occasional visit by a Red-bellied Woodpecker. The early morning hours also offer glimpses of the White-tailed Deer and Turkey as they move toward their daytime hiding places.

Even though old man Winter is settling in for a few months, I still can find a reason to enjoy the outdoors. I try to use this time of the year to review my field notes and compile my observations of the captive herps I work with. This is my time for writing down all those marvels of nature that have been shared with me. It's also the time to begin "Wintering" my captive breeding stock in preparation for next seasons projects. The turtles and snakes are moved to my cooler basement to spend a couple of months in a relatively torpid state. I mark the calendar and count the days until I can slowly warm them and introduce the females to the males.

For many people, Winter brings on the feelings of an end to the joys of herping. I look at it as only a



brief interlude that allows me the time to really absorb the many things that the herps I study have shown me during the past three seasons. It's a time to catch up on the reading that I put off during the warmer months and to prepare those pieces that I hope someone will publish.

I'm hoping that some of you that are reading this piece will find some similarities to your own experiences. That you too will take advantage of the "down time" in your herping activities and write about your observations. Then, send the results of your thoughts to us to include in a future issue of the VHS Newsletter. We mail out over 150 copies of this newsletter at this time and if you've been following it through our first three issues, you know that only a few people have contributed to the pages you've read. To those few we give our thanks and to the other 140-some of you, we once again ask that you send in something that we might include.

It's Winter, you've got the time now, there in NO excuse for not sharing your wealth of information with your fellow herper's. I would also like to receive any comments that you may have on the newsletter. Are we meeting your expectations? Is there something you would like to see and haven't yet? Drop me a line and let me know. Send all submissions or remarks to: VHS NEWSLETTER, P.O. Box 727, Brookneal, VA 24528. Thanks and Happy Herping!

#### HERP HAPPENINGS

\*CAPTIVE PROPAGATION AND HUSBANDRY CONFERENCE: 16-18 February, 1991 - Univ. of Cal., Davis. Contact Northern California Herp Society, P.O. Box 1363, Davis, CA 95617. (707)553-9739.

\*REPTILE EXPO: 23 February, 1991 - The Science Museum of Western Virginia and Hopkins Planetarium will host the dinosaurs from Dinamation International and their own Reptile Expo at the museum in Roanoke, VA. The dinosaur exhibit will be from 12 January - 31 March, 1991 and the Expo will be on 23 Feb., 1991. Exhibits and lectures will be available 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. the day of the Expo. The Science Museum is located at: One Market Square, Roanoke, VA 24011. For more information call; (703)342-5710.

\*BIODIVERSITY OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS - A SYMPOSIUM: 12-15 March, 1991 - Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523. This will include an informal workshop on the implementation of a central database for the AMPHIBIAN POPULATION SURVEY proposed by the SSAR.

\*14TH ANNUAL ALL-FLORIDA HERPETOLOGICAL CONFERENCE: 13 April, 1991 - Gainesville, FL. Co-sponsored by the Florida Museum of Natural History and

the Gainesville Herp. Society. Contact: Dr. David Auth at the museum, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611; phone (904)392-1721.

\*VHS SPRING MEETING: The Virginia Herpetological Society will hold their Spring meeting around the middle to end of April 1991. An exact date and location was not available at the time of this printing. More information about the meeting will be announced in the next issue of *Catesbeiana*, which will be sent to members prior to the meeting date.

\*ALL DAY TURTLE AND TORTOISE SEMINAR: 20 April, 1991 - Fordham University, Rose Hill Campus, Bronx, NY. Contact: NYTTS, 163 Amsterdam Ave., Suite 365, New York, NY 10023. (212)459-4803.

\*INTERNATIONAL HERPETOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM: 20-23 June, 1991 - Seattle, Washington. Contact: Brain Backner, M.D., 17 Margaret Rd., Sharon, MA 02067. (617)784-7264.

\*JOINT SSAR-HL MEETING: 7-11 July, 1991 at Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802; Linda Maxson, Chair.

\*1991 NATIONAL REPTILE BREEDER'S EXPO: 16-18 August, 1991 - Sponsored by the Central Florida Herp. Society. To register send \$10.00 to: CFHS, P.O. Box 3277, Winter Haven, FL 33881. For Hotel reservations: Twin Towers Hotel; 1-800-The Towers/or (407)351-1000. \$65.00 single/\$75.00 double. See the last issue of the VHS NEWSLETTER for story on last years EXPO in Orlando.

\*THE HIGHLANDS CONFERENCE ON PLETHODONTID SALAMANDERS: June 1992 - Highlands, NC. Contact Dr. R. Jaeger, Univ. of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, LA 70504. (318)231-5235.

#### THE SOCIETY COLUMN

A newly forming herp society in Northern VA has contacted us to invite you to join them. The NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY will focus on "Breeding, captive husbandry, research, conservation, and related materials concerning herps in Virginia and abroad. Programs and newsletters will be tailored to Amateur and Professionals alike! Membership open to everyone and all ages. Dues: \$10.00 yearly - Contact: Raymond Goushaw III, (703)369-9091".

Liberty High School Biology teacher Mr. David



Eckes formed a REPTILE CLUB which has nearly 50 active student members. The club meets prior to classes beginning and have special programs of interest to the students. For more information or to offer your support, contact: Mr. David Eckes/Biology Dept., Liberty High School, 100 Liberty Minutemen Dr., Bedford, VA 24523.

The BLUE RIDGE HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY held their Holiday meeting on Dec. 5th, at Monte Carlo Italian Restaurant in Lynchburg, VA for a Pizza Buffet dinner. The dinner was preceded by a brief business meeting and the society President provided the desert. The Jan. meeting was scheduled for the 9th due to the holidays and the meeting was held at the societies home, Lynchburg College. The BRHS and its members will participate in the "REPTILE EXPO" at the Science Museum of Western Virginia and Hopkins Planetarium in Roanoke on February 23, 1991. The February 6, 1991 meeting will include the viewing of some of the video taped proceedings from the 1989 IHS, Phoenix, AZ conference. Please try to join us. A BRHS NEWSLETTER is in the works too, now members will get a little more for their annual dues! Dues are: \$15.00 - Regular, \$10.00 - Student (under 16), and \$18.00 - Family. Write: BRHS, P.O. Box 727, Brookneal, VA 24528.

We have some great news for you Amphibian enthusiasts! There is a brand new publication dedicated to information on the amphibians of the world, which will be offered starting in the Spring of '91. Patricia Purdy of Salem, VA began this project as a labor of love and out of desperation. She felt that a lack of focus on amphibians in other publications needed to be remedied. All indications are pointing to a quality publication on various amphibian related subjects. She hopes to get those interested in these fascinating creatures involved in her efforts. If you should have ANY amphibian papers, field notes, stories, cartoons, sketches, etc. available, please contact Patricia about including them in her new publication. For more information, to submit materials, or for a subscription, write: The AMPHIBIAN NEWS QUARTERLY, 303 Elm St., Salem, VA 24153.

#### **CAPTIVE HUSBANDRY OF THE BALL PYTHON (*PYTHON REDIUS*)**

The Ball Python is one of the most common species on the market today. The combination of a timid disposition and relatively inexpensive purchase price, make it a particularly popular choice. Unfortunately, when a species is readily available, dealers and purchasers alike do not take the time to research the natural history of the specimen. The following should shed some light on captive care of the above species.

The Ball python derives its common name from

its habit of tucking its head and coiling tightly into a ball. They occur in Central and Western Africa. Their natural habitats include dry bushlands and cleared forest areas. Average size is 3 - 4 feet with rare specimens over 6 feet. Ball pythons are sexually mature at 2 feet. Clutch sizes range from 2 to 8 large eggs. The size of the eggs rival those of their large cousins the Burmese and Reticulate Pythons. Copulation usually occurs from December thru February. Egg laying has been noted from February thru July. Incubation takes approximately 55 to 62 days with young ranging in size from 12 to 14 inches. The young feed regularly on fuzzie mice or rat pups. However, wild caught specimens can be a herpers' nightmare to acclimate. They often refuse food, sometimes for extended periods of time. This is usually where the problems start. Most imports refuse live mice or rats. If this is the case, try feeding dead rodents. In addition, add a hide box for added security of your specimen. Also, a simple item that is often overlooked is the cage temperature. This should be in the 75 to 85 degree range. Keeping the cage dark and undisturbed helps. Finally try a gerbil. This seems to be a scent they are familiar with. Again, try the gerbil dead if this doesn't work. If all else fails, don't panic! Ball Pythons go for 6 to 8 months without feeding during times of famine or drought. The short stout body emphasizes their fat storing abilities. Also, make sure your specimen is not a gravid female. Pregnant females refuse all food.

Another item are the parasites that frequent imports. These include ticks, and fluke worms. The ticks can be removed with tweezers then the area treated with a topical antibiotic. Mites can be successfully treated with a hanging pest strip. Be careful to ventilate the cage well and do not expose the specimen for more than 8 hours. Over exposure may cause neurological damage. The treatment can be repeated. Flukes and internal parasites have been successfully treated with Panacur or Ivermectin. Worms are often noted in the stool or regurgitated food. Please see your veterinarian for treatment.

This article was not written to discourage keeping Ball Pythons, just to help those with the occasional problem specimen. With this in mind, you should have more success with keeping and propagating Ball Pythons.

by: Raymond Goushaw III

#### **HERPFUL HINTS**

As Ray noted in his piece on the Python regius, this animal is one that enjoys its privacy. All snakes will appreciate some area in their enclosure where they can seek privacy. In last issues HERPFUL HINTS, I suggested using the bottom of a plastic soda bottle to design a hide box. There are many different styles and



sizes of commercially made hide boxes available on the market today. When the need arises for a rather large one, which are hard to find, try one of these inexpensive ideas. Invert a flower pot and either enlarge the drain hole on the bottom or cut an opening along the lip to allow the snake a place to enter. The soft, black plastic pots used with many flowers and shrubs work great and clean up easily. Do keep in mind though, that a snake not only seeks privacy, but also the contact security of being able to feel it's surrounding hiding place. Don't give your snake a hide box it will get lost in! Another easy to clean and prepare large hide box can be made from a soft plastic dish pan. Cut an opening in the lip, invert and then you have a nice sized home-sweet-home for your snake. I purchased 2 dish pans for \$3.00 that fit perfectly in a 20L aquarium and my 5' Red-tail Boa has made it's home in one.

### MISTAKEN IDENTITY

There are no documented sightings of Cottonmouth snakes in Mathews County. Due to many similarities between snakes, however; the Northern Water Snake, a common resident of Mathews, is often mistaken for the venomous Cottonmouth and persecuted on sight.

The Cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*) is a large water snake, often reaching four to five feet long. It has a snout, heavy body and a triangular, broad head with a distinct neck.

Cottonmouths are dark olive, brown, or black; with dark, irregular cross-bands. Older individuals, however, lose their markings and become uniformly dark. The eyes have vertical pupils and are not visible from directly above. There is a distinct, deep pit between the nostril and the eye. Unlike most water snakes, Cottonmouths swim with their head well out of the water.

The Northern Water Snake (*Nerodia sipedon*) can reach three to five feet in length. The eyes have round pupils; and like most harmless water snakes, they are clearly visible from above. Northern Water Snakes are reddish, brown, or grey to brownish-black, with dark crossbands and alternating dark blotches. The pattern darkens with age and becomes uniform black. The belly is white, yellow, or grey, and is marked with reddish-brown or black crescent-shaped spots. These snakes are active day and night. If given the chance, they will flee from any human.

There is little reason for people to fear this harmless Water Snake. Very seldom are there confrontations between snake and human that can not be avoided, and the snake be spared.

Written by: Patti Pies

From Vol. 2, 1990 - Local Science Informer

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

The committee appointed at the Spring '90 meeting to look into advertising for this newsletter, has decided to offer space for commercial and classified ads. A business card sized commercial ad will cost \$10.00 per issue or \$25.00 for an annual run, (4 issues). Classified line ads in this newsletter will be run Free for all VHS members and will cost \$1.00 per line for non-members. We will NOT accept ANY ads for LIVE ANIMAL SALES.

All members are encouraged to sell ads. The monies from ad sales will off-set the costs for printing the newsletter and reserve the funds in our treasury for other projects. The Editor reserves the right to refuse any ad. All ads, along with payments made to the VHS, should be submitted to: Editor - VHS NEWSLETTER, P.O. Box 727, Brookneal, VA 24528.

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It's that time of year again, (like you really need a reminder), TAX time. This year when you're filing out your State Income Tax statement, please remember the Non-Game and Endangered Species of the Commonwealth by donating part of your return, (everyone is getting one this year - right?), to the special fund designated on Line 29A of your State Income Tax form. Besides helping the Commonwealth out during our budget deficit, you will be showing your support for the herps and other non-game animals in Virginia.

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VHS Secretary/Treasurer - Ron Southwick wants to remind all members that the 1991 dues should be sent in NOW. Don't miss out on the Spring issue of *CATESBEIANA* or future issues of this newsletter. Get you 1991 dues in to Ron today. Membership renewal fees: Family \$7.50, Regular \$5.00, Student (under 18) \$3.00. Send your check or money order made to the VHS to: VHS, 5608 Parkland Court, Virginia Beach, VA 23464.

### ODE TO A TERRAPENE

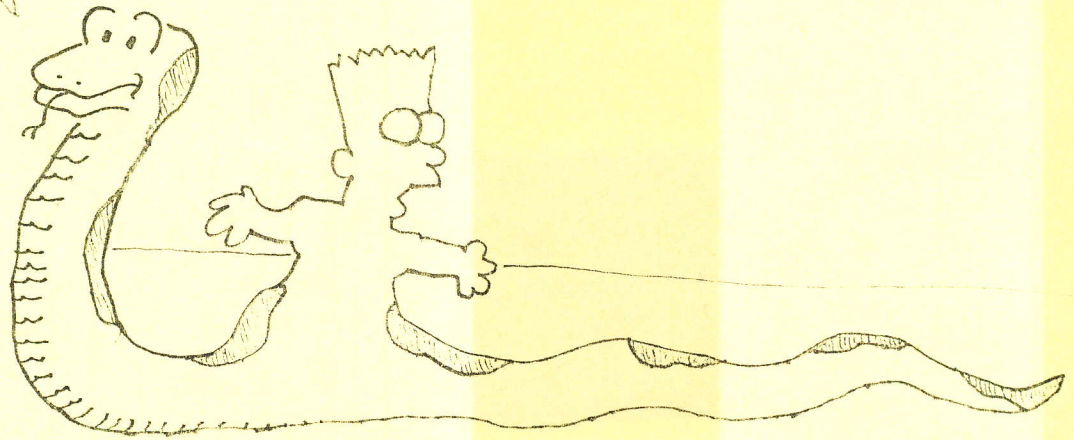
On rainy days - I see you thee, a lump within the road.  
As cars whiz by - I hear your sigh, a hiss of sad repose.  
You amble on across the road, from grassy edge to gravel shoulder.



With each near miss of passing cars, your steps grow ever bolder.  
Some of your kind don't fair so well, their bodies splattered on these trails.  
Ducking inside their boney shells, protection from a car to no avail.  
Within the grasses you trudge along, your destination is unknown.  
You follow your instincts that are strong, to where your favorite foods are grown.  
You enter into a garden of gourmet turtle delights.  
The strawberries, tomatoes and melons, from each you take your bites.  
You eye the ground intently, for insects, grubs and worms.  
Even your protein is found there consequently, as you gobble-up anything that squirms.  
In the Spring you seek a mate, to propetuate your kind.  
The courting is done on that date, when your "special one" you find.  
The eggs are layed and covered deep, within the Earth's warm soil.  
Your babies will clammer from this heap, if protected from the spoil.  
As Fall draws near - you eat your last, a hearty, filling meal.  
For with the Winter you shall fast, until Spring's warmth you feel.  
You find or dig a burrow, a home for colder days.  
To rest in till the 'morrow, of Spring's warm, sunny rays.  
The Spring rains draw you out again, their cycle starts your year.  
To brave the roads you will begin, to forage without fear.

Douglas W. Eggleston - 1990

I found this  
smart-mouthed  
kid a bit hard  
to swallow



dego