

## The New Kent County, Virginia Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) Locality is Invalid

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On 18 September 2002, an adult *Crotalus horridus* (Timber Rattlesnake) was discovered dead on St. Rt. 606, 4.3 km ESE Old Church, New Kent County, VA by a local citizen and given to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. I was asked to verify its identification and preserve the specimen for donation to the Smithsonian Institution's Department of Amphibians and Reptiles. This specimen (USNM 559001) putatively confirmed the historical occurrence of *C. horridus* in eastern Virginia. The location was adjacent to a wooded area containing ravines leading to Putney's Mill Creek, a tributary of the Pamunkey River. At the time, there was no evidence to suggest it was not valid. I published the distribution record in *Herpetological Review* (Mitchell, 2003).

In spring 2005, I learned from a local resident who lived within two km of the specimen's location, that its occurrence was part of a prank. He said that he had previously collected the *C. horridus* as a road-kill in eastern North Carolina. He and a friend had placed the partially frozen DOR on the edge of the road to fool a friend who was interested in snakes. Thus, the location information for USNM 559001 is invalid.

Inaccurate information about museum specimens occasionally become imbedded in the scientific literature and remain uncorrected for many years. For example, Mitchell (1989) reviewed the convoluted history in the literature of a "Bog Turtle" specimen (USNM 95195) collected in Fairfax County, VA (date unknown). At the time, it was identified as *Clemmys (Glyptemys) muhlenbergii*. M.K. Brady published the location in *Copeia* (Brady, 1924). Most authors did not question its correct identity, although Music (1972) questioned its occurrence in the Coastal Plain. It was not until 65 years later that its identity was finally established (Mitchell, 1989). The specimen is a juvenile *Glyptemys insculpta*, a species known to occur in Fairfax County (Mitchell and Reay, 1999). Specimens in museum collections such as the two mentioned in this note allow us to verify those with suspect identifications. Although photographs usually allow correct identifications, museum specimens are the only way to obtain uncontested verifications.

### Literature Cited

Brady, M.K. 1924. Muhlenberg's turtle near Washington. *Copeia* (135):92.

Mitchell, J.C. 1989. An historical review of the Fairfax County, Virginia, bog turtle record. *Catesbeiana* 9:3-7.

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