

Virginia Herpetological Society



Newsletter

THE VHS NEWSLETTER

Volume I, No. 4

April 1991

Virginia Herpetological Society
5608 Parkland Court
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23464

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EDITORS COMMENT

Ah, Spring is here! The true herping season has begun and I know you folks are busy at it.

Finally, many of our members have responded with articles for publication in the newsletter. So many, in fact, that I now have a small backlog. Please be patient about seeing your piece in print. I will publish all submitted material that is found suitable, as soon as possible and as space permits.

In order to keep the costs of printing and mailing our newsletter at the present low level, I can not increase its size. We do hope that we can offer many different articles and information that you will enjoy. We are trying to print a little something in each issue of interest to all our members.

Keep your articles, etc. coming in. The backlog of material won't last forever. If you don't feel that you can write an article or offer a sketch, there's another way you can help out. Sell advertisements for the newsletter. The rates are \$10.00 per issue or \$25.00 for a full year run, (4 issues). This is for a business card size ad. Each ad sold helps cover the printing and mailing costs of our newsletter. This may enable us to increase the length and/or quality of the newsletter in the future. Most importantly, it will keep the V.H.S. from raising the membership dues to cover these costs.

Hope you enjoy this issue. Send your comments to VHS NEWSLETTER, P.O. Box 727, Brookneal, VA 24528. Now get back to those herping

activities and keep us informed on what you're doing.

HERP HAPPENINGS

*6th ANNUAL MEETING of the SOCIETY for the PRESERVATION OF NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS, 6-11 May, 1991. Ottawa, Canada. Contact: G.R. Fitzgerald, Canadian Museum of Nature, P.O. Box 3443, Station D, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1P6P4.

*CONFERENCE on REPTILIAN CHEMICAL SENSES combined with CHEMICAL SIGNALS in VERTEBRATES meeting. 15-22 June, 1991. Penn Towers Hotel, Philadelphia. For more information, contact: Dr. Mimi Halpern, Dept. of Anatomy and Cell Biology, Box 5, SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn, NY 11203; (718) 270-2958, FAX (718) 270-3378.

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

*JOINT SSAR-HL MEETING, SYMPOSIUM to Honor Roger Conant: 6-10 August, 1991 at Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802; Linda Maxson,

Chair.

**This symposium was incorrectly listed 25 July in our last issue, sorry!

*1991 NATIONAL REPTILE BREEDER'S EXPO: 16-18 August, 1991 - Sponsored by the Central Florida Herp. Society. To register sent \$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.

*SOCIETAS EUROPAEA HERPETOLOGICA MEETING: 19-23 August, 1991, Budapest. Contact Dr. Z. Korsos, Hungarian Natural History Museum, H-1088, Budapest, Barossu. 13, Hungary.

*EASTERN HERP SWAP MEET & FLEA MARKET: 31 August 1991. Write to G. Leonard Knapp, 215 Lawn Ave., Sellersville, PA 18960.

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

*SECOND WORLD CONGRESS of HERPETOLOGY: 29 Dec., 1993 - 5 Jan., 1994. Hosted by the University of Adelaide. Contact: Dr. M.J. Tyler, University of Adelaide, Dept. of Zoology, Box 498, GPO, Adelaide, South Australia 5001, Australia.

THE SOCIETY COLUMN

Scott Kenney, the Vice President, (and Treasurer, newsletter editor, and program chairman), of the NORTHERN SHENANDOAH VALLEY HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY recently wrote to say his group was alive and well. Scott reports that the NSVHS is a little over a year and a half old now and has as their goals: Education, assisting hobbyists with maintaining their herps and studying the native R&A of the Shenandoah Valley. The group meets monthly at the Handley Library in Winchester, VA. A variety of programs are offered at these meetings. *The Wood Turtle* is the NSVHS Newsletter. Annual dues are \$5.00. For more information or to join, contact Scott: 1302 Whittier Ave., Winchester, VA 22601.

For those of you that like 'em "Hot", The VENOMOUS SNAKE SOCIETY might be for you. The VSS is devoted to the study, conservation, captive propagation and understanding of venomous reptiles. It is an international organization that welcomes both professionals and amateurs. Regular individual memberships are \$15.00 per year, but as a special offer to members of this association, you can join now for only \$10.00! As a member of the VSS, you will receive the quarterly newsletter, "THE HOT SHEET"; a special membership card; updates on conservation and legal issues; articles by world renowned authorities; captive-care information; and special merchandise and equipment offers. Please include the name of your society and send a check or money-order for \$10.00 to: The Venomous Snake Society, P.O. Box 691454, West Hollywood, CA 90069. ** Please note that the VSS does not endorse the keeping of venomous reptiles by untrained or inexperienced individuals!

The BLUE RIDGE HERP. SOCIETY is now proud to announce that they are one year old and growing! A newsletter, the "REPTILE REPORT", is now being published and sent to all members. This will be a Bi-monthly newsletter to begin. Members are remaining active at meetings, in community programs and herp surveys. The group voted to again have an exhibit at Lynchburg's "Day-In-The-Park" in Sept., 1991 and to sponsor an educational program to coincide with the VHS Fall meeting. For more information or to join, write to the B.R.H.S., P.O. Box 727, Brookneal, VA 24528.

The Herper's Marketplace:

- The BJ Pinkie Pump •
- 5 sizes-surgical stainless steel- sexing probes •
- 3 sizes-black, ABS plastic-hide boxes •
- 2 sizes-The BJ "Hot Feeders" •
- Telescopic snake hook w/pocket clip •
- Herp ID/INFO cards •
- Books, collectibles, novelties & MORE. •

Send S.A.S.E. (45c postage) for list to: BACK COUNTRY HERPS
P.O. Box 727
Brookneal, Va. 24528

TEGU TALES

(Part 1) by: John Rivera

South America is home to one of the new world's largest lizards. Only the green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) exceeds it in length, and the caiman lizard (*Dracaena guianensis*) may rival "this squamate" in size. "They" are called the tegus: lizards of tropical jungles which (for lizards) possess intelligence, individual personalities, interesting behavior, and the great "saurian classic"; running, using it's hind legs only.

Tegus belong to the teiidae lizard family. They belong to a family restricted to the new world composed of both small and moderately large animals, numbering about 200 species in 50 genera (Wynne, p. 25). Teiids vary in their appearance (Wynne, p. 35). Some are legless and are found beneath the ground's surface in which they burrow. Others are aquatic and have flattened tails used to propel themselves through water. Still others are land-dwelling, as are the tegus, and have that universal lizard-like appearance comprised of 4 strong legs and a long tail.

Of the two species belonging to this genus, the black or common tegu (*Tupinambis teguixin*) is the largest. It may attain a length of about 4 and 1/2 feet and such an animal is stocky and "heavily jowled". The smaller red tegu (*T. rufescens*) may reach 4 feet but averages around 3 to 3 1/2 feet.

Actually there are two subspecies of common tegu; the golden tegu (*T. teguixin nigropunctulatus*) is the smaller of the two subspecies in question. This animal may reach a length of 4 feet but like the red tegu averages around 3 to 3 1/2 feet.

Tegus do not share with some of it's saurian relatives the ability to change colors but nevertheless they are attractive animals. The common tegu is black, clad with whitish-yellow crossbands (Obst, et. al., p. 772). The red tegu is much as it's name implies - being reddish or reddish-brown with indistinct wide dark crossbands. The golden tegu is much like the common tegu but instead of having whitish yellow spots it usually has golden or golden-yellow spots.

These lizards are diurnal animals that return to their burrows at night for shelter (Jes., p. 80). They like open areas where plenty of sunlight can be utilized to bask in and can also be found around forests that border rivers (Wynne, p. 36). Nightly shelters may be in the form of old logs, stumps, brush piles, as well as animal or self-dug burrows (Obst., et. al, p. 772).

Tegus are very active and openly pursue prey using both optical (eyes) and olfactory (tongue) senses in doing so. Smaller vertebrates, invertebrates, and, surprisingly, fruits and blossoms are readily eaten. They will also eat the eggs of birds and reptiles, and are

reported to eat carrion as well.

I have not been able to find much literature on potential predatory enemies of tegus in the wild. Using baited traps South American Indians capture tegus and eat their flesh or use the fat for medicinal purposes (Halliday, et al, p.100). Apart from man, I can only guess that certain South American cats such as jaguars, ocelots (others); reptiles including caimans, crocodiles, anacondas, boa constrictors (others), and birds of prey may occasionally include tegu in their diet. I would also consider the possibility of young tegus falling prey to large insects, arachnids (tarantulas), and predatory fish, as well as being victim to larger tegus.

These lizards also face the mortal dangers of habitat destruction as their rain forest home is cut down. Many are also sold in the trade each year, with possibly high mortality rates.

However, if you do decide to purchase a tegu and are wondering how to maintain one in captivity; then be here next time for part 2 of Tegu Tails.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1) Halliday, T., and Adler, K., (1986) *The Encyclopedia of Reptiles and Amphibians*, Facts on File Inc., New York.
- 2) Jes, H.(1987) *Lizards in the Terrarium*, Barrons Educational Series, New York.
- 3) Obst. F.J., Richter, K. and Jacob V. (1988) *The completely Illustrated Atlas of Reptiles and Amphibians for the Terrarium*, T.F.H. Publications, New Jersey, WPC.
- 4) Wynne, R.H., (1981) *Lizards In Captivity*, T.F.H. Publications, New Jersey.

HERPFUL HINTS

*If your Tegu or other rodent-feeding herp is a little finicky about taking that hairy morsel that you offer them, here's a little tip you might try. Make a small slit through the hair and skin of the rodent, just at the base of the skull on the neck. Grasp the hair on either side of the slit and gently separate the skin to expose the raw flesh inside. I know, this sounds really gross, but it works. As always, you should feed only dead rodents. Please don't try this technique on a live rodent!

*If you have some brief tips on the care and feeding of captive herps, please send them to the newsletter for publication. We can all benefit from your knowledge or "McGyverisms".

HOOKED on HERP REHABILITATION

John T. Shafer was one of those folks who responded to our pleas for articles to print in the newsletter. He wrote to tell us about the fate of an aquatic turtle that had been brought to him this past summer with a fishing hook in it's mouth. Ouch!!

John turned the turtle over to Dr. Wendy Behm at the Old Dominion Animal Hospital for treatment. He said each time he called to check on the progress of the turtle, he got responses like, "the turtle is in x-ray," or "in consultation with the doctor" or "in recovery". According to John, the turtle "probably received more attention at the vet's, than I would at the doctor's."

The x-rays found that the female turtle had ingested not one, but two fishing hooks. The one stuck in her mouth was surgically removed by Dr. Behm, while the second hook, lodged deeper in the throat was left to be absorbed or expelled by the turtle. Some research has shown that aquatic turtles will do this. The second hook would have required a "plate-ectomy" and this was not deemed as a wise choice by Dr. Behm. The x-rays also revealed that the turtle was in that "Motherly way", containing around a dozen eggs!

The turtle was returned to John, seemingly no worse for the wear, and he released her in the same lake from which she originally came. According to John, "she swam away very strongly to find a place to deposit her eggs, most likely." We can all hope so.

John has attended a Reptile First Aid course conducted by Dr. Behm recently. Anyone working with herp rehab, should look into taking similar courses offered near them.

Congratulations to Dr. Wendy Behm for her fine work and to John Shafer for his concern and fast action.

*Editor's note: The exact species of the turtle was not known at the time of this printing. The x-ray taken was photocopied and sent to us, but would not reproduce clearly for these pages. Thanks to John for sending us this story!

Mark R. Finkler, D.V.M.

ROANOKE ANIMAL HOSPITAL



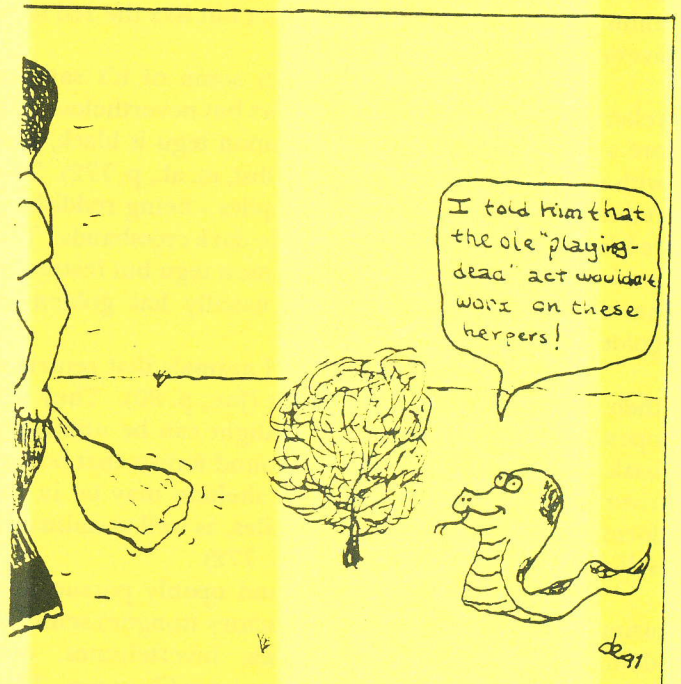
2814 Franklin Rd. S.W.
Roanoke, Va. 24014
(703) 343-8021

ANNOUNCEMENTS & CORRECTIONS

*In Volume I, No. 3 the latin name for the Ball python was incorrectly spelled. It should have read, *Python regius*. This was a typo that slipped past us and not the fault of the author of the piece.

*Deleted from the past two issues was some information that we must apologize for. Patti Pies article, "Enemy or Ally" printed in Volume I, No. 2 should have mentioned the *Local Science Informer*, a monthly newsletter published by the Science class of Mathews High School in Mathews, VA. Their teacher is Mr. Steve Griffith. We thank them for allowing us to reprint Patti's article in the *VHS Newsletter*. Patti is a VHS Student member. Credit should be given where credit is due. Sorry folks!

*The SSAR is currently trying to compile a database of a survey of amphibian populations around the U.S. They have a monitoring form that will aid them in keeping all data consistent with submissions. If you would be interested in participating in this survey, you can obtain a copy of the *Amphibian Population Survey* form by writing to the VHS NEWSLETTER, P.O. Box 727, Brookneal, VA 24528. PLEASE include a business size S.A.S.E. to help defray costs.



1991 NATIONAL REPTILE BREEDERS' EXPO

16-18
AUGUST
1991

TO REGISTER SEND \$10 to:
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P.O. BOX 3277
WINTER HAVEN, FL.
33881

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