



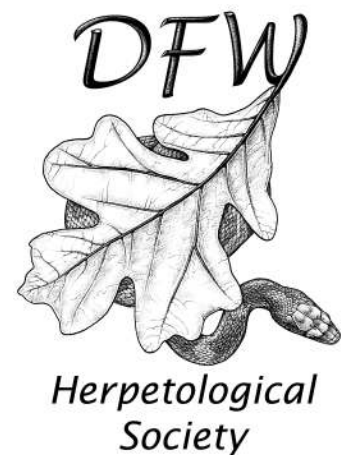
Cross Timbers Herpetologist

NEWSLETTER OF THE DALLAS-FORT WORTH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Volume 13, No. 3

March, 2010



Inside this issue:

This month's profile:

Western Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis proximus proximus*)

Article by Michael Smith

If you wanted to see the most graceful reptile in Texas, you would do well to walk the edges of creeks and ponds in search of the ribbon snake. This long and graceful serpent slips effortlessly through vegetation at the water's edge and swims on the water's surface in smooth undulations. In some localities it is common, so that more than one might be seen during a walk along the creek or through a wetland. Its orange or yellow-orange mid-dorsal stripe may catch your eye, but as you watch one curve

of the snake's body, it narrows and disappears. As the stripes hold your attention, seemingly motionless, the snake is actually slipping away very quickly.

Classification

A ribbon snake is a sort of streamlined, semi-aquatic garter snake, grouped into the same genus (*Thamnophis*, a combination of Greek words for "bush" and "snake") and bearing three stripes on a dark background,

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Next meeting: March 20

Tim Tristan—Varieties of Herp Veterinary Cases (see page 8)

Western Ribbon Snake (*continued*)

as do most garter snakes. An eastern species is *Thamnophis sauritus*, but west of the Mississippi River, the ribbon snakes are all *T. proximus*. Of the six subspecies found from the U.S. down into Central America, four are found in Texas. In the northern part of the state, we have the western ribbon snake. Over the Edwards Plateau, the red-striped ribbon snakes have a deeper red dorsal stripe. Along the coast, the subspecies is the Gulf Coast ribbon snake. Finally, in west Texas the subspecies becomes the arid land ribbon snake.

Description

These snakes are generally 20 to 30 inches long as adults, with a record length cited in Werler & Dixon as 42 inches. Their tails, at about a third of the entire length, are relatively longer than those of garter snakes. The dorsal scales are keeled.

The dorsal ground color is generally charcoal to a dark greenish-brown, with scattered flecks of light blue in the skin between scales. In many garter snakes, there is a sort of checkerboard pattern between the stripes, but in ribbon snakes generally no pattern can be discerned. The stripes are clean and straight, with the mid-dorsal stripe usually yellow-orange to orange. The lateral stripes, on scale rows 3 and 4, are light yellow, sometimes with a greenish tinge. The lip scales are very pale, often with a greenish or bluish color. These labial scales do not have

black edges, which is one way to distinguish them from garter snakes which do have some degree of black along the edges of the lip scales. Ribbon snakes also have a pale whitish bar on the scale immediately in front of the eye.

In parts of northeast Texas, these ribbon snakes have a blue wash overall, so that the mid-dorsal stripe is a dull green and the lateral stripes and belly scales are pale blue to greenish-blue.

On the top of the head, a pair of light spots can be seen, very close or almost fused. In some specimens, these parietal spots can be a little oddly shaped, as can be seen in the photograph.

Habitat & Range

Western ribbon snakes make use of a wide variety of wetland habitats, from rivers and lake edges to roadside ditches. Most of my observations have taken place over the years at a prairie creek in western Tarrant County, where these snakes could be found in grasses or brush at the water's edge or swimming in pools. This particular habitat provides lots of broken limestone rocks that can provide temporary shelter, plenty of opportunity for sunning, and a great many cricket frogs. Ribbon snakes also make use of marshes, small ponds, and can be found wandering a little distance from open water. However, they are vulnerable to desiccation and largely dependent on amphibian prey, and so they are never far from moisture.

As noted above, the western ribbon snake is one of four subspecies found in Texas. This form is found in north Texas from Clay County down through Tarrant and then Limestone Counties and south to the Big Thicket, where (according to Dixon) the ribbon snakes of Polk and Tyler Counties would be westerns, but below that they would transition into the Gulf Coast subspecies. Again according to Dixon, the ribbon snakes west of Clay County would be intergrades with either red-stripe or arid land ribbon snakes. Werler & Dixon, on the other hand, show the western ribbon snake extending from the metroplex northwestward up to the upper panhandle of Texas.



Diet

Rossman, et al. cite a couple of studies showing that amphibians constituted from 82 to 92% of the stomach contents of western ribbon snakes. Frogs and salamanders are taken, and surprisingly, fish make only a minor contribution to their diet (though in captivity they readily eat fish). One study showed that a couple of specimens had eaten ground skinks (*Scincella lateralis*). Ribbon snakes seem to have keen eyesight for movement and can chase and catch small frogs.



Behavior

Ribbon snakes are primarily diurnal, seen most often in the morning through afternoon. As the season gets hotter, midday temperatures are avoided and the snakes may be found moving about at night. We have seen them on the road at night in the Big Thicket, and I have seen a few crossing the road after dark in Wise County.

When foraging, these snakes explore places where frogs may be found, and when prey is flushed, they chase it with quick, agile movements. Ribbon snakes may bask in low branches above the water, and quickly slip in if spotted. An escaping ribbon snake is hard to keep track of in vegetation; the observer may catch a glimpse of the stripe, only to have it disappear amid grasses and brush, and if a section of the body is spotted again, it too disappears. The pattern gives no clue of the speed of its movement, and

undoubtedly this serves it well in escaping predators.

If restrained, the western ribbon snake may twitch its tail in an agitated way, distracting attention away from its head. A number of ribbon snakes are stub-tailed, perhaps from distracting a predator to bite the tail, or from the tactic of spinning on its long axis if grabbed by the tail. The snake's tail may be broken off by the vigorous twisting of the snake. Ribbon snakes are often not hesitant to bite if restrained or picked up, though their small teeth can do little damage. Finally, there is the habit of expelling musk as the body thrashes and twists around. This is not pleasant-smelling stuff, though many of us (especially those who love garter and ribbon snakes) do not find it as unpleasant as that of some snakes.

Reproduction

A female attains sexual maturity at two to three years of age, at which point she will be about 30 inches in total length. Male ribbon snakes may reach maturity in one to two years, at which point he will be a little over 20 inches in total length. Female ribbon snakes give birth to about 8 to 12 or more live babies. Young are most often born in mid- to late summer.

Abundance

Ribbon snakes are fairly abundant snakes, although I recall finding many more of them in the 1960s-1970s on the creeks west of Fort Worth than I do now. It may be that the drought conditions that have prevailed in recent years have decimated some populations.

Rossman, et al. show that the western ribbon snake is endangered in New Mexico and threatened or endangered in some other states at the edges of its range.

Additional Note

Because in some places they can be fairly easily collected, ribbon snakes are not too uncommon in pet stores or price lists. Hopefully, anyone wanting a ribbon snake will think twice before buying these snakes, as they tend to fill the niche of cheap, throwaway pets. These beautiful and agile creatures deserve better than this.

They are more active and often more nervous than the average garter snake, and need close attention to clean wa-

Western Ribbon Snake (*continued*)

ter and fairly frequent feeding. They should be kept only by those with a real appreciation for them and with the time to care for them properly.

References

Dixon, J.R. (2000) *Amphibians and Reptiles of Texas* (2nd Edition). College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Rossman, D.A., N.B. Ford, & R.A. Seigel (1996) *The garter snakes: Evolution and ecology*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Werler, J.E., & J.R. Dixon (2000) *Texas snakes: Identification, distribution, and natural history*. Austin: University of Texas Press.



President's Notes



After the last several days, it's hard not to think about the coming of spring. The sunlight feels a little different, more in line with warmth and growth than that nearby bright star that has been in our daytime sky for the past few months.

Clint King and I recently drove up near the Oklahoma border and got the first snakes of the year, for the both of us I believe. A roadside jumble of boulders provided crevices and pockets for hibernating snakes, and three western diamondback rattlesnakes were near the



surface where we could bring one or two out for photographs (and send them back to shelter).

Each spring is a gift, and I guess I take it less for granted with the passing years. The days stretch out and get longer, as if awakening to the new season. New green shoots appear everywhere. The frogs and toads begin to call. Field herpers everywhere emerge from their hibernacula and sit in the sun, revving up their metabolism in preparation for going herping.

Where will we go this year? One good destination is the Trinity River Audubon Center, where we are providing a herp survey (see page 13). Under Mark Pyle's leadership, the society has set up the tools to monitor reptiles and amphibians in this Dallas location. It would be a great place to go for a quick herp outing—but please keep in mind that wildlife must not be removed from the Audubon site. Photos only, please!

Another great place is the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge, where lake shore and marsh habitats, bottom-land forest, prairie, and cross timbers forest can be found. We have helped identify a range of species there, but please remember that this is also a place for looking, photographing, and leaving animals where we find them.

We're all set to team up again with the Austin Herpetological Society and go to the Big Thicket for a weekend of walking, wading, and photographing. The designated day of the trip is May 1st, though most of us will get there early enough on Friday, April 30 to do some looking around. Most will also stay awhile on Sunday the 2nd until time to head home.

The Big Thicket is home to many wonderful, harmless species, and a few that are venomous. If you are new to this, be aware that copperheads and cottonmouths are numerous, and coral snakes are common, too. On the other hand, staying on the trail and using common sense should make for a safe trip even for inexperienced field herpers. If you want to come, contact Clint King or me.

Michael Smith, President

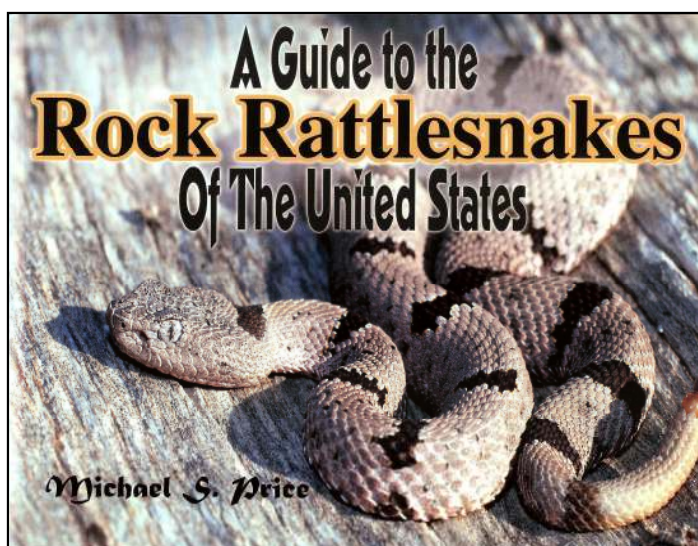
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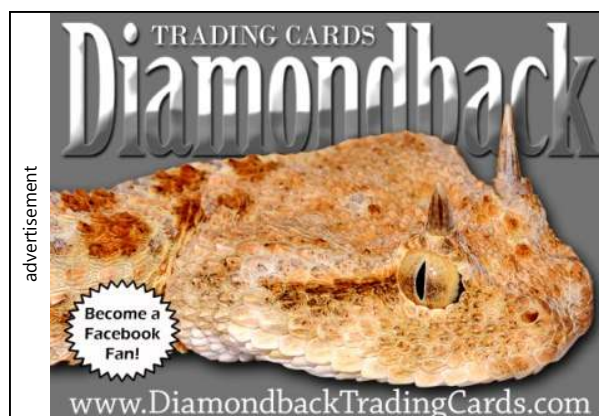
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Dallas-Fort Worth Herpetological Society

Minutes of the February 20, 2010 Meeting

Submitted by Michael Smith

The meeting started with several announcements, including the confirmation of May 1 as the date for the trip to the Big Thicket. Mark Pyle talked about upcoming education events, including the North American Reptile Breeder's Conference on March 13 & 14, as well as the Snakes of Tarrant County event at Fort Worth Nature Center in May.

The program was presented by ... well ... me, and was titled, "Abuse of Land, Wildlife, & the Public: Rattlesnake Roundups." The roundup in Sweetwater, Texas was emphasized, based on a visit Carl Franklin and I made in 2001, and there were photos and video documenting the concerns we have with these events.

Rattlesnake roundups are held in various small Texas towns, and a few in New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Kansas. A few persist in the deep south. The events are significant money-makers for the local communities, as hunters bring in rattlesnakes for exploitation and slaughter.

The problems with roundups start right at the beginning, with the collection of snakes. A significant way that many of the snakes are collected is by spraying gasoline into crevices in the ground, forcing the snakes out. Gasoline is, of course, a dangerous and highly toxic pollutant when used this way. Any wildlife using these deep crevices as refuges will be harmed. A study published in the *Texas Journal of Science* showed that reptiles suffer ill effects and amphibians and invertebrates are killed by gasoline vapors. Those reptiles that survive have their ability to avoid predators or chase down prey impaired.

The snakes are brought in, dumped in large holding pens where, in the case of Sweetwater, Jaycees walk around and disperse piles of snakes by kicking them with

boot heels. Snake handlers talk with the crowd in what may be billed as "safety talks." An article in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* showed that attendees who listen to these talks emerge with no better information than when they entered. The *real* message of the snake handlers is that daredevil stunts are cool. Jaycees wave balloons at the snakes to get them to strike, wiggle their behinds at the snakes, and harass them to the point where they hide their heads and stop defending themselves—and then the handler carries the snake around like a waiter delivering some sort of reptilian dish. (The person doing this crowed that "in all the books about snakes, none of them says that this is possible," as if right there in Jaycee-land was the heart of rattlesnake knowledge). This same person guided the local girl who had won "Miss Snake-Charmer" to pick up a western diamondback. She grasped the snake way too far back on the neck, and only the terrible condition of the snake prevented her from being bitten.

Roundups often portray the collection of venom as one of the good works that they do, and the Sweetwater folks showed me, on-camera, how they collect it, centrifuge it (using a banged-up centrifuge probably made in the 50's) and freeze it "real cold." Supposedly it is used in research and pharmaceutical production, but several companies have gone on record saying they would never use it, as the snakes come from variable localities and the collection technique is not up to lab standards.

Finally, the snakes are butchered in front of cheering adults and children. They are decapitated over an old stump, using a machete. Because of the slow metabolism, the heads take some time to die, and so the method of slaughter is quite cruel.

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GROUPS

We have a free email group for members of DFWHS. Members can stay in touch, discuss their latest herp trip, ask about a husbandry issue, or talk about other herp stuff. Yahoo also provides a website for the group, where you can post files or photos, check a group calendar, chat, etc.

To take advantage of all this, go to - www.groups.yahoo.com - and type "dfwherp" in the search box. This takes you to more information about the group and walks you through the steps to join. Remember - this is a **free** benefit of membership, and a valuable tool for staying in touch. We hope you'll join!



Beginning balance		\$5,195.81
<i>Income</i>		
	Memberships	40.00
	T-shirt donations	10.00
	Drawing	20.00
	Total income	+70.00
<i>Expenses</i>		
	Print January newsletter	58.54
	Online bank details fee	3.00
	Monthly service fee	5.00
	Total expenses	-66.54
Ending balance		\$5,199.27
	Petty cash for meetings	20.00
	Total DFWHS Funds	\$5,219.27

COMING EVENTS

March

3/20/10 DFWHS meeting

Tim Tristan, DVM, presenting about herp veterinary cases (see below).

Every Saturday, 10am to noon, Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge.

Naturalist-led Nature Hikes: Stop in and join a naturalist for a leisurely hike on the trails of the FWNC&R. \$5 (with paid admission), members are free.

April

TRINITY TREKS—at Trinity River Audubon Center. Every Friday, 8-9:30 am **April 10, 17, 24**; \$10/session

Hike all four miles of trails through prairie, wetland and forest habitat and we'll bird a little, too. (These events are put on by TRAC staff and are not the same as the herp survey activities—though you certainly may see herps!)

4/17/10 DFWHS meeting

4/22-4/24/10 SW Association of Naturalists

Llano River Field Station, Junction, TX. See: <http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/swan/>

May

5/1/10 Annual Big Thicket trip

Joint field trip for DFWHS and Austin Herp Society members

5/15/10 DFWHS meeting

Including the annual DFWHS elections!

March, 2010						
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21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

The DFWHS March Meeting, 3/20/10:

Tim Tristan—Veterinary Care for Herps

Tim Tristan is an exotic animal veterinarian who will provide the presentation for the March meeting. He graduated from Texas A&M University in 1999. He then worked in the Florida Keys for two years before returning to Texas to do an exotic animal internship at Gulf Coast Avian and Exotics.

Tim currently works in Corpus Christi, Texas, where 80% of his patients are exotic animals. In addition, he vol-

unteers for local rehabilitation centers that care for injured sea turtles, birds, and dolphins.

He will be covering a variety of reptile cases that he has seen, from the usual to the unusual, including sea turtles, snakes, amphibians, and various other reptiles

Herp Sightings

- February, 2010 -

4/10/09 - 7:30pm - heard *Pseudacris clarkii* calling at roadside pond. Frogs spotted among grasses at water's edge. Also saw approx. 5 ft. male *Pantherophis* species at roadside. Temp 75°F and rel. humidity 78%. Then at 8:05pm - *Anaxyrus* on the road. 8:25pm - a subadult *Pantherophis emoryi* AOR. Photographed as it moved off the road. Temp 72°F and rel.

If you have spotted a reptile or amphibian while out in the field, send us the information (including date and county) and we'll list at least a sampling of them here.

Contributors this month: *Clint King (ck), Michael Smith (ms)*

North Central Texas

Red eared slider (ck)
Green anole (ck)
Texas spiny lizard
Mediterranean gecko (ck)
W. diamondback rattlesnake (ck, ms)
Rough earth snake (ck)
Texas rat snake (ck)

...and an important sighting overlooked from 2009:

This past Saturday, Aug 15, 2009 I was herping in the Trans Pecos and happened upon a Rough Green Snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*) in an unusual locality. It was spotted at 11:15 PM along a rock cut 16 miles north of Sanderson, Pecos County, in a bush about 4 feet off the ground. I was only able to get one quick photograph before it slithered off the bush into the darkness. I was able to get a better photograph of the first one I found in the same



locality last year. It was found 12:16 AM, July 4th, 2008 along the same rock cut. It was also about 4 feet off the ground in the same type of bush. I have hunted this area for years and these are the only 2 Rough Green Snakes I have seen in Pecos County. I have talked to numerous herpers who frequent the same area and the closest locality anyone has seen Rough Green Snakes is Terrell County.

— Stuart Tennyson



Dallas-Fort Worth Herpetological Society Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, 2/20/10 Submitted by Steve Campbell

Attending: M. Smith, M. Pyle, D. Dorman, A. Pritchard, C. King, S. Campbell, and T. Bischoff

NARBC:

The North American Reptile Breeders Conference will be held March 13th – 14th at the Arlington Convention Center. DFWHS has been offered a free table as has been the case since the first NARBC show. However, the show once provided us with an extremely limited number of passes for volunteers. Some volunteers had to pay in order to help.

Perhaps due to the economy, their generosity has been

further challenged. This year the Society had been offered only one pass. We must purchase additional passes. A second pass is somewhat discounted and more passes will be at the normal rate beyond that. Admission to NARNC is \$15.00/day for adults and \$8.00/day for youth under 13; those younger than 5 will be admitted free. For more information go to: http://www.reptileconference.com/htm2006/dfw_show_info.htm

Another sign of the times has been an increase for parking at the Convention Center. The cost rose from \$5.00/day to \$10.00/day.

DFWHS Board Meeting Minutes (*continued*)

The Education wing represents DFWHS at these sorts of venues. The Board unanimously voted to provide a budget of up to \$200 to pay for passes parking for volunteers to work the booth. Due to the increased cost of admission parking the numbers of volunteers for this event *must* be limited to those with an intimate knowledge of how DFWHS operates and strongly versed in the nongame and exotic species laws of Texas. Contact Mark Pyle if you qualify and wish to make your services available.

Web Emails:

An officer can be contacted via contact@dfwherp.org; the emails are routed to those that the question or issue may concern. Emails may be distributed to more than one person.

It was decided should an officer reply to one these emails, that officer should use the Reply to All button. This will allow someone seeing an email later in the day to avoid multiple responses as well as assure other officers that the matter has been handled.

The Board voted in favor of this action.

DFWHS Social Media:

Michael Smith has established a "min-webpage" for DFWHS on Facebook. This replaces the current My Space site. Members are highly encouraged to join to get updates on DFWHS activities, such as meetings cancelled at the last minute due to weather, impending field trips, and guest speakers, etc.

Field Trips:

A few times a year DFWHS holds sanctioned field trips. Among our favorite places to visit is the Big Thicket National Preserve in southeastern Texas and this will be the target of our first trip of the season. That excursion is set for May 1st.

Since this trip will take place on public lands there will be *no* collecting. This will be a strictly photographic safari.

The Super 8 in Kountze (HWY 287) will serve as base camp. Kountze is ringed by units of the Big Thicket Na-

tional Preserve and is approximately 28 miles northeast of Beaumont. For those of a stouter constitution or just want something cheaper, camping is available Village Creek State Park. For information regarding the park visit: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/village_creek/

Those herpers of a masochistic nature may elect to stay at the Willis Motel in Woodville. We understand that the roaches, drug dealers, and serial killers living there give it a five star rating.

Contact Michael Smith or Clint King for more details

Texas Herpetological Society's Annual Fall Meeting

THS meets twice a year. They hold a field trip in the spring and a more formal meeting in the fall. This fall the meeting will be at the University of Texas at Arlington October 16th. DFWHS Advisor Carl Franklin, of UTA, has suggested that the event be a joint meeting of both societies (and we agreed, in a previous board meeting).

Although the Board is very interested in participating, it is unclear at this time what that level of financial commitment should be. The matter was tabled.

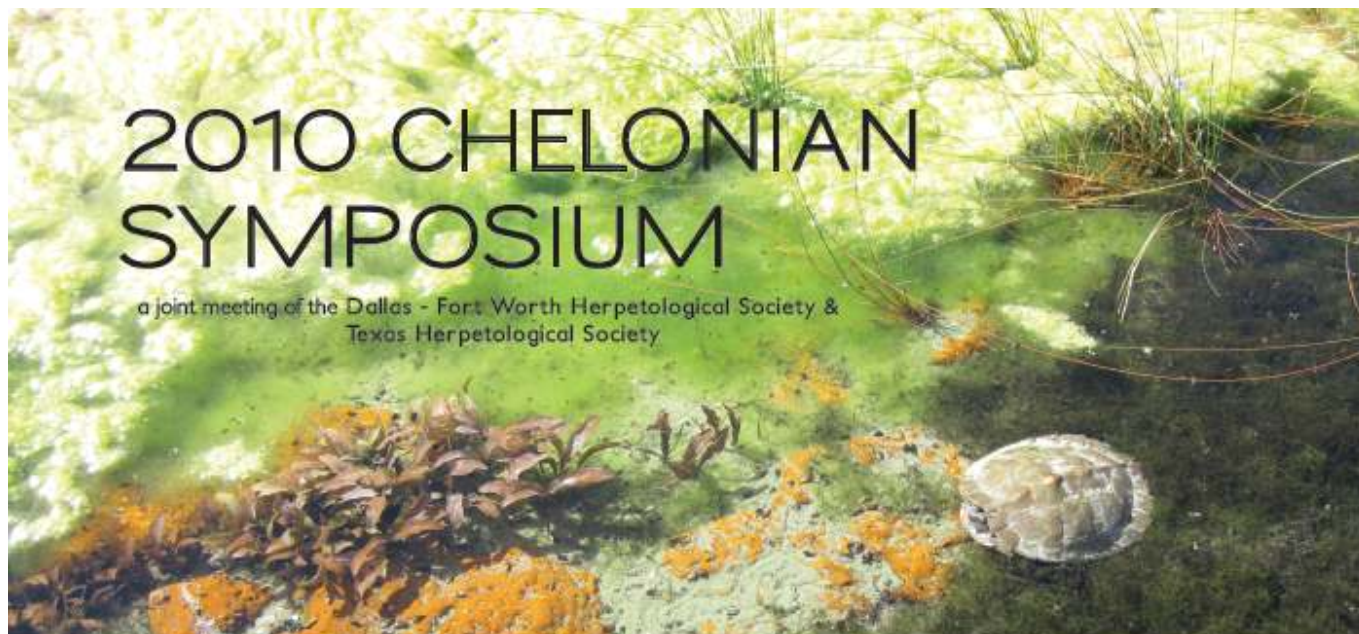
DFWHS First Grant!

DFWHS was approached by Dr. James Cain of Texas A&M University at Commerce for a \$500 grant to cover a small portion of the cost to study American alligators.

Due to over harvesting and habitat destruction Texas alligator populations were reduced significantly. They received state and federal protection in the 1960s. Since then, due to legal protection and the establishment of protected areas, American alligators have made a successful comeback. The bounce back has even resulted in regulated harvest seasons of adult alligators.

However, most studies have been conducted on coastal populations. The stability of inland populations is not known at this time. This nominal grant, the first in DFWHS history, will be used to cover fuel costs.

The Board approved this unanimously.



Please join us on **October 15th** (evening icebreaker) & **16th** (9 AM - 5 PM)

Lone Star Auditorium in the Maverick Activities Center
at the University of Texas at Arlington - 500 W. Nedderman Dr.

Keynote Speaker:

Peter C.H. Pritchard, Ph D. Director of the Chelonian Research Institute

Scheduled Speakers:

- Rick Hudson. Conservation Biologist at the Fort Worth Zoo & President of the Turtle Survival Alliance
- Dwight P. Lawson Ph D. Senior Vice President Collections, Education and Conservation Zoo Atlanta
- Scott Davis, Ph D. Executive Director of the Turtle Survival Alliance
- Carl J. Franklin. Biological Curator & Collections Manager. UT Arlington Amphibian and Reptile Diversity Research Center
- Michael Forstner, Ph D. Professor of Biology Texas State University
- Jim Koukl, Ph D. Professor of Biology University of Texas at Tyler



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Coyote Song

Clint King

It snowed today. Not your typical Texas snow, where you can pick out a few brief flurries in the air amidst the sleet it is always mixed with, but a real honest winter snowstorm; the kind that blankets the whole world in the purest white imaginable.

It had snowed three inches when I woke up at six thirty this morning, and the forecast was calling for continued snow throughout the day and on until midnight. While a day like this is the last day any sane herper would choose to venture out into the field, I'm probably not the poster child of human sanity. And seeing as to how I already had four snakes under my belt for the month of February, I figured why not, and set out into the woods for a brief romp with Mother Nature.

I had been out only a few minutes, immersed in the serenity of the bare skeletal trees painted with shades of white, the crunch of frozen dead leaves beneath my feet, and the constant drifts of snowflakes falling down around me, when I came to a break in the trees that opened up into a small meadow. On the other side, where the field melted back into the density of trees, there sat a coyote, watching me with curiosity. For a brief moment our eyes met, and then she turned and fled back into the impenetrable thicket of brown and white with a flash of her bushy tail.

The encounter couldn't have lasted more than ten or fifteen seconds, but it seemed to be enough. I was content in having lived during this brief moment, and headed back through the woods on my way to the house. While I didn't find any herps, the realization hit me that they hadn't

really been the driving force behind my little expedition into the woods today at all. Rather, it was more founded in the hopes of setting off into a wild place in search of some magical moment I could turn into another memory, and I felt I had accomplished that with the help of a wild coyote.

True, one can go almost anywhere in the United States during any given season and observe coyotes in their natural habitat, which happens to cover every habitat we have, from deserts to forests to open suburban lots, but there was something about seeing one today in the woods during a gently falling snow, sitting there like a statue at the edge of that little clearing, that really made the encounter unforgettable.

She sat there as her kind had done since long before any of my ancestors ever set foot in this country, and with any luck I hope her and her future generations will continue to. And I must admit, she looked every bit like she belonged there. But was I the one who was really out of place? Were either of us? I would like to think not. And this lone coyote reminded me in the space of fifteen seconds why it is that I really enjoy packing up the gear and loading up the truck and heading off on what many would call mindless excursions into our state and national parks year after year. Yes, it is for the snakes and lizards and frogs and turtles and salamanders, but these are all just added bonuses, because the real lure and enticement of going out into the field is the possibility of capturing moments like the one I had today with the coyote...brief encounters with nature that will last me a lifetime.

we hope you'll join

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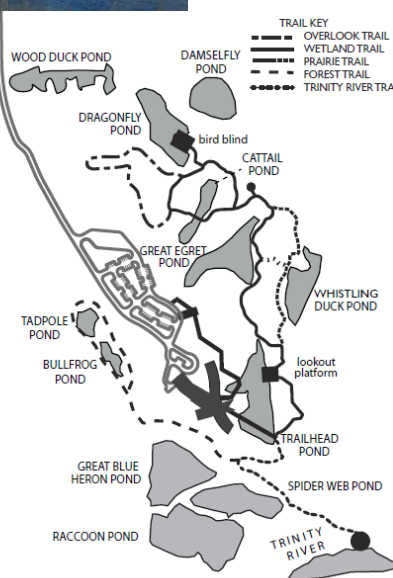
Join Us at TRAC in 2010

Tim Bischoff

Last year DFWHS was contacted by Trinity River Audubon Center to conduct a herpetological survey. This survey will continue on a monthly basis this year starting in March. If you are interested in participating during one of the survey days, please contact Mark Pyle (ratsnake@charter.net). If you can't make one of the survey dates, we have found that this location is herp friendly and have sighted several species of lizards, snakes, frogs and turtles. The following link has several albums showing photos from last year's survey: <http://photobucket.com/Trac>.



TRAC is located southeast of Dallas off of Loop 12 about 8 miles from downtown. You can get there by taking Loop 12 exit off of I-45 and heading east about 2 miles. The facility is located on 120 acres in the Great Trinity Forest and is situated on a bend of the Trinity River. TRAC occupies land that was formerly an illegal dump site but was reclaimed by the City of Dallas. The Nature Center has several hands-on exhibits and site has four miles of trails that take you through ponds, marshes, fields and to an overlook of the Trinity.



Last January, a group of DFWHS members met at Mark Pyle's home to construct 3 types of traps that would be used during the survey: pit fall traps, basking traps and funnel traps. DFWHS board of directors approved the purchase of the building supplies. Unlike this year, we were fortunate to have a Sunday where temperatures were in the 50s and 60s. Mike Urbanski, Scott Robinson, Chris Williams, Melina Lopez, Tim and Luke Sellers, Tim and Stephen Bischoff and the Pyle family set to work on the construction project.



The funnel traps were constructed from aluminum screen fabric. 30 X 36 inch pieces were cut and joined together using a 32-inch zipper, staples and duct tape. Once the cylinder was fashioned an engineering break was needed by Mark and Chris to determine how to construct the funnels. Their solution was to cut 4 triangular pieces and join them together and then fit them in column. Duct tape was stapled around the seams to protect the animals and seal the trap. As darkness fell, Mark tested the funnel traps with his Great Plains rat snake. The snake had no problem entering the trap but could not easily exit.

The pit fall traps were constructed from 5 gallon buckets. Pieces of 2X4 were cut and screwed into the lid to create a cover when the trap was open. Small holes were drilled in the bottom of the bucket to facilitate drainage. The trap could

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The Metamorphosis of Pyle

Clint King

I was reading last month's issue of the *Cross Timbers Herpetologist*, particularly Tim Sellers' wonderful article on 'Snakin' 09' and enjoying it on a personal level, looking back on my own memories of last years' herping forays, when I came across a paragraph that made me chuckle ... ("...unless we were out with Mark Pyle, who of course, is a snake magnet...") haha! Good ol' Mark, the snakey-magnet!

This consequently reminded me of a Bible verse... who, when their child asks for bread, will give them a serpent instead? Well, Mark Pyle again comes to mind. Ah, but I am drifting.

Believe it or not, Tim, there once was a time when the great snake-wrangler and rescuer of reptiles himself came down from the salamander-infested North and couldn't find in Texas so much as a blotched water snake in a recently drained swamp. On our first trips to west Texas he was nothing short of an omen - or a walking, talking bottle of Snake-Away. The equivalent to Steve's Whataburger-less field outing or listening to a tape recorder where Ben Stein names off every single species native to the state while en route on a road trip. No one would dare ride with him for fear of being terminally skunked for the rest of the season. A cold rain-cloud seemed to hang over his vehicle, and wherever there was Pyle it was like Ireland. Of course, all of us lucky herpers, those alterna addicts and snake-whisperers and those who had sold their souls to Kauffeld, made quite a sport of Mark, deeming him the single unluckiest field herper ever born, unless, of course, one was in search of Pennsylvania-native anurans, which none of us ever were. Back then I wouldn't have even bet he could have found a stuffed Western Diamondback in the Sweetwater city limits in March.

But then one day all of our fun-poking and light-hearted ridicule came back to fang us in the name of bad



karma, and the worm snake finally turned for Mark "the Skunk" Pyle, and seemingly over the winter he died during brumation and was somehow reborn, and the following spring Mark "the Magnet" emerged from his subterranean burrow, looked at his shadow, and proclaimed, "there's a snake!"

And from then on, wherever there was Mark Pyle, there the snakes could be found also. He tooled around from county to county, checking off the lifelist with the greatest of ease and laughing in our faces as that great dark shadow moved over to our own vehicles and then there were no more alterna, no more patch nose, no more hog-nose ... they were answering a call to the Pyle vehicle now, following a trail as thick as pheromone.

So the sightings came flooding in, and CK, MS, etc. became MP, MP, MP. It started in February and it knew no end. It didn't recognize winter, nor drought, nor fullness of moon. It seemed Mark could find a snake in a box of stale Frosted Flakes. And not only that, but he seemed to be a rabbit's foot in a rat snake's mouth for all of us as well. When the tables turned I found myself in your same position, calling Mark on those long, snakeless nights down Bear Creek Road or on the LBJ Grasslands, asking for a little luck via even his lucky cell phone. This was soon followed by a second phone call that went something like, "thanks, Mark ... yeah, I'm photographing it right now at

road-side.”

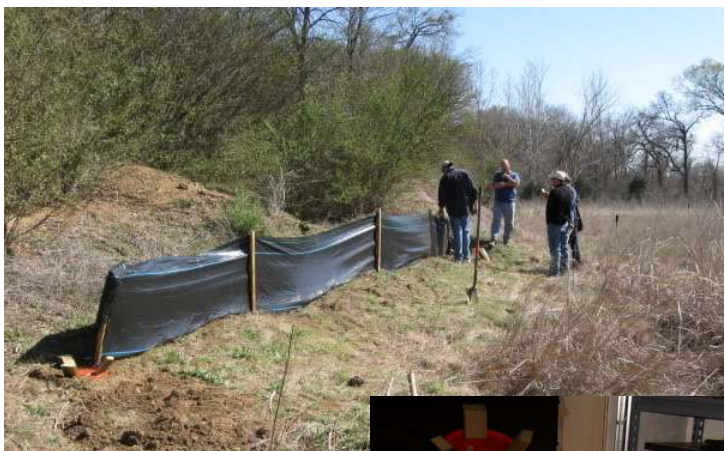
And since then little has changed. He keeps the digital camera card companies in business, and every spring around April, all of their employees reportedly receive unexplained bonuses, as do the gas companies and proprietors of otherwise little-visited hotels and motels from the Big Thicket to the Big Bend. And not only this, but his two young daughters seem to have contracted his contagious luck and are probably destined to taking it to levels previously achieved only by the Hibbits’s.

Everyone else said he had just gotten enough Texas herping under his belt to gain field experience and thus reap better rewards, but some of the more superstitious of

us herpers knew we were witnessing the hand of a higher power. The possibility that his soul may well have been squabbled over by the ghosts of Kauffeld and Klauber is none of my business, but a man is entitled to draw his own conclusions, is he not?

And while many old herpers with blank spaces still on their lifelists may be bitter, I for one wish Mark “the Magnet” the best of luck. For another snake season will soon be upon us with the greening of the leaves and the warming of the rocks, and I wish Mark all the kudos and king snakes the field has to offer. After all, you’ve come a long way, baby!

Join Us at TRAC in 2010 (*continued*)



be closed by fitting the lid on the bucket. In March, three sites were selected to for the pit fall traps. Site selection was based on looking for a transition zone – woods to field, pond to field, woods to pond. The pit fall traps were positioned at the end of a 30 foot run of drift fence that was dug and anchored into the ground.



Basking traps were fashion by creating a square from PVC drain pipe and elbows. Joints were sealed so that the trap would float. Plastic netting was tie wrapped to the PVC piping and fitted so that it formed a basket. Seams in the plastic netting were held together by tie wraps too. A wooden ramp was fixed on the basket. Turtles walking up the ramp and dropping into the water would have difficulty escaping from the floating basket.



Cross Timbers Herpetologist

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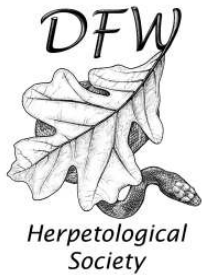
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 snakes lizards turtles crocodilians frogs & toads salamanders, caecilians
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Please return this form, with your dues, to: **Dallas-Fort Worth Herpetological Society**
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Cross Timbers Herpetologist

Dallas-Fort Worth Herpetological Society

P.O. Box 540892

Grand Prairie, Texas 75054-0892

Information About Meetings

Meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 7pm (if the date falls on or near a holiday, the meeting date may be changed). We meet at the University of Texas at Arlington, Life Sciences building, ground floor. UTA is in central Arlington, south of I-30 and north of I-20. From Cooper Street, at the south end of the university, turn east on Mitchell, and then north on West Street and enter the parking lot on your left. Life Sciences is across Nedderman Dr. from the parking lot.

Visitors are welcome. A reminder for visitors and members: any animal brought to the meeting **must be in a secure container** (you cannot walk around with your animal on your shoulder). **No** venomous snakes and **no** large boas/pythons, please.

At the end the meeting, members may sell captive-bred herps if they wish. **Only** members, please, and **only** captive-bred herps.

Map to Our Meeting Location at the University of Texas at Arlington

