

THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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December 2007

The Editor's Den

Thanks to Al Winstel for proving the articles for this month's Forked Tongue.

Calendar of Events

December 5, 2007 – Holiday Meeting Golden Corral

January 2, 2008 – Annual meeting featuring an presentation of the reptile and amphibian survey performed at the Cincinnati Nature Center.

More Fun with Corns

By Al Winstel

After hatching this year's first corn snake clutch of 13 eggs, I had high hopes for clutch #2 (from a different female) consisting of 10 eggs. About half of these were rounder and smaller than the other half. Would these hatch successfully? Seventy one days later my question was answered, when 9 of the eggs hatched. I discarded the last egg after it began to deflate a couple of weeks after the others hatched. There were 2 snow (white), 2 albino (pink/red), and 5 normally colored babies. The normal looking parents were each the result of a cross between a ghost animal (no red, diluted black) and an albino (no black).

Once again, I tried the Punnett Square method of predicting the appearance of the offspring. My prediction suggested that I should have 4 normal, 2 albino, 1 snow, 1 hypomelanistic (low on black color), 1 anerythristic (black on gray), and a fraction of a ghost baby. Pretty close!

Like the results of the first clutch, this clutch illustrated that unusual color phases can result from normal looking parents. Since I knew the genetic background of the parents, I expected to get snows and albinos. However, corns have been crossed and recrossed so much over the years that

normally appearing babies you buy at shows or in a pet store could very easily have hidden characteristics such as albinism that might show up in their offspring. Depending on what you're looking for, this could be either a pleasant surprise or an unpleasant one.

Unfortunately, while my first clutch this year was made up of a bunch of ready feeders on thawed pinks, none of the babies in this second clutch fed immediately after shedding. Eventually (as of today- September 6), 8 of the nine have fed on pinks, either live, thawed with the nose nipped off, thawed with a slit made in the head (called split brain, somewhat gross but it works), in small deli cups, in larger cages, or some combination of these strategies. I still intend to try the remaining youngster on thawed pinks rubbed with lizard skin and, as a last resort, assist feeding with mouse tails or thawed pinks

This illustrates a typical problem with clutches of most snakes. Some young feed easily, some feed by using "tricks," others don't seem interested in feeding at all. This can be really frustrating if you acquire a single baby and you get the one that won't feed. It's always a good idea to make sure when you purchase an animal that you determine that it is feeding, what it is feeding on, how often, and how the food is being presented. On occasion, rarely, an animal will refuse to feed just because you have it in a different kind of environment. Once a baby is feeding under particular circumstances, it's usually pretty easy to get the baby to feed on simple thawed pinks.

Although getting babies to eat can seem frustrating, it's also kind of a neat challenge. I have pretty well gotten rid of all this year's babies, but I still have the breeders and hope for a good variety of colors and patterns in the young next year, along with the usual feeding challenges. It would really be great to get some of the other available corn snake mutations into my colony.

The January Meeting will be Wednesday, January 2nd at 7:00 pm at the Cincinnati Nature Center

Striped, butter, pewter, motley, banded, frosted, caramel, motley, zigzag, and many others are possible. The only limit is space for the animals and time to take care of them and raise young to breeding age!

An Ophisaurus Shed

By Al Winstel

Earlier this year, I wrote about my experiences with a European legless lizard (*Ophisaurus apodus*). Since then, things have gone pretty much as previously described. I have had some more problems with the lizards rubbing its snout on the mesh cage sides, despite putting brown paper around the cage sides and adding a large Rubbermaid container of mulch for burrowing. My latest trick has been to attach some of the 4" plastic "toe strip" material that can be used as a border around the floor of a room. Hopefully this will help with the snout rubbing. I have also tried the lizard on some canned monitor food that contains small land snails, but its interest seems minimal.

The legless lizard is still eating canned caterpillars and thawed pinky or fuzzy mice. Although I acquired her/him in spring, late September brought the lizard's first shed. I didn't know what to expect. Based on the animal's stiff, jerky movements, I figured that the skin would probably come off in pieces, like I have had happen with some of the small skinks or with a savannah monitor. Surprisingly enough, the shed skin took the form of a fairly narrow ring, much like sheds I have seen from ball pythons (which I estimate to be a result of the snakes' heavy bodies or perhaps their using their own body as a shedding aid, when the cage furniture isn't heavy enough to push against). I have included a photo of the shed. There is also a small strip which was found separately. As far as I can tell, the shed is complete, since the "new" skin is much paler, almost whitish tan, than the old.

The odd shed brings to mind some of the characteristic sheds I have observed on various herps. American toads and spotted salamanders have shed in the water. The skin seems thicker and slightly darker on the toe tips. Usually the

first thing I noticed was a clear glove shaped object in the water bowl. I've already mentioned the ball python sheds, although sometimes my corn snakes also produce a ring shaped shed. But where they have more objects to push against, the shed skin seems more likely to be in one long inside out piece. Geckos have tended to shed in large pieces, but this is often hard to see unless you witness the shedding, since leopard geckos, crested geckos, and probably others often pull the skin off with their mouths and eat it. Anoles have likewise shed in pieces, although I don't recall if they ate them. My savannah monitor seems to continually shed in pieces, although this could be the result of a dry cage. Otherwise, he has done well over the years. I have recently read that they tend to find moist spots, even during the dry seasons in nature, so perhaps he needs more wet mulch.

Keeping a shed skin collection can be a way to visualize the growth of your snake, but the sheds are usually longer than the animal, so they're not an exact record. If the skin is in a ring shape, dampening it will allow you to unfold the skin. Also be aware that shed skins have been found to host salmonella bacteria, at least on occasion, so you may wish to disinfect it if you plan to save it. And make certain that both eye covers are with the shed. A number of times, I have found one to be missing and confirmed this by checking the snake's eyes for a slight cloudiness, thus allowing me to remove the stuck cap before it became a problem.

It's also possible to ID snake species by the shed skin and I believe I heard somewhere in the last few years that someone had written or was working on a snake skin field guide. In fact, some subspecies are determined by scale rows and some species can even be sexed by the scalation. Often it is easier to count scales on a stationary skin than a live specimen. I usually mark each counted scale with a magic marker (Sharpie type), to avoid recounting or losing my place in case of interruption.

These scale musings have kind of taken on a life of their own, but shed skins can really be neat things to study.

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Classified Advertising Policy

GCHS Members may run a free classified ad of 7 lines or less at no charge for an unlimited time; however, the ad will be canceled after one month unless the editor is informed to continue it. Please include scientific names for the animals with your ad as well as your phone number and area code.

Ads of up to 7 lines for non-member are \$2 per issue; ad charges for items more than 7 lines long are as follows:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Business card size | \$3 per issue |
| 1/4 page | \$6 per issue |
| 1/2 page | \$10 per issue |
| Full page | \$20 per issue |

The GCHS is not liable for the quality of the merchandise advertised. The Society also reserves the right to refuse any ad considered inappropriate.

Requirements for Submitting Articles to the Forked Tongue

Articles can be submitted via CD or hard copy to Editor, GCHS 11470 Gatch Hill Road, Aurora, IN 47001.

Articles may be e-mailed to Grady Calhoun at gradycalhoun@embarqmail.com.

Black and white photographs can be included with articles. Photo submissions should include your name, phone number, and description of photo on the back. Photos can be returned.

All time dependent submissions must be in the editor's possession no later than the meeting previous to the publication.

Classifieds

Discount: A 10% discount is offered to all card-carrying members of the GCHS at *All Creatures Animal Hospital*. Dr. Dan Meakin, All Creatures, 1894 Ohio Pike, Amelia, OH 45102, 513-797-7387.

Discount: A 10% discount is offered to all card carrying members of the GCHS at Dr. Dahlhausen's Veterinary Clinic, 5989 Meijer Dr., Suite 2, Milford, Ohio 513-576-0131

(Number to left of decimal indicates males; number to right of decimal indicates females; number to right of second decimal indicates number of unknown sex. For example, 3.2.1=3 males, 2 females, and 1 unsexed specimen)

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Currently Held Positions

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| President | Grady Calhoun | (812) 926-1206 | Vice President | Dean Alessandrini | (513) 347-0099 |
| | | (513) 564-6041 | Editor | Grady Calhoun | (812) 926-1206 |
| Treasurer | Peggy Fille | (513) 528-4452 | | | (513) 564-6041 |
| Sergeant-at-Arms | Bruce Fille | (513) 528-4452 | Education Committee Chairman | | |
| Advisor | Vacant | | Peggy Fille | | (513) 528-4452 |
| Secretary | Kyle Becker | (513) 831-4898 | | | |

About the GCHS

The Greater Cincinnati Herpetological Society holds monthly meetings which typically consist of a short business section, a refreshment intermission, and a program related to herpetology. Both members and nonmembers are invited to attend. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in reptiles and amphibians. New members may sign up by mail or at the monthly meetings. Members receive monthly issues of *The Forked Tongue* and free classified advertising. Annual dues should be directed to the secretary at the society's mailing address, according to the rates below:

| | | | |
|--------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| Student | \$10.00 | Corresponding | |
| | \$10.00 | | |
| Individual | \$15.00 | Sustaining | \$25.00 |
| Family | \$20.00 | Institutional | \$30.00 |
| Contributing | \$50.00 | | |

Why Be a Member?

Receive monthly issues of *The Forked Tongue*

- Meet individuals knowledgeable about herpetoculture
- Have access to captive-bred herps and feeder animals
- Participate in society-sponsored field trips, and outings.
- Receive a 10 percent discount on herp-related items and services when you show a valid membership card at the following establishments:

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Delhi Pet Center | (513) 451-4015 |
| Kentucky Reptile Zoo | (606) 663-9160 |
| Harrison Pet Center | (513) 367-1115 |
| All Creatures Animal Hospital | (513) 797-7387 |
| Dr. Dahlhausen's | (513) 326-2368 |

P.O. Box 14783
Cincinnati, OH 45250

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