

# THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## The Editor's Den

By Grady Calhoun

The June *Forked Tongue* features an a compilation of notes regarding breeding attempts of Indigo Snakes by Dean Alessandrini.

## Calendar of Events

6/4 Monthly Meeting at NKU featuring Richard Schroeder speaking on captive maintenance and breeding of Gila Monsters.

## May Highlights

The May meeting was held at the Newport Aquarium. Thanks to Robin Saunders and others of the aquarium staff we received a private tour of the new turtle exhibit. We had a record 52 in attendance. I wish you all would come to the other 11 meetings! We had the run of the aquarium which was closed to the public at that time. Thanks go out to Robin and all of the staff that showed us this great new exhibit.

## Indigo Snake Breeding Woes in 2003

by Dean Alessandrini

The following is a compilation of information regarding this year's breeding efforts with my Eastern Indigo Snakes. I'm going to "name" each of the snakes and give a little history on them for background.

I brought 2 of the 3 eastern indigos that are currently in my collection and of breeding age and size (the third one does not even appear gravid) and one of my yellowtail cribo females to the vet's office. They all appear gravid, as they have for several months. In my experience at least they, "should" have laid eggs in March or April.

Here's a little background on each of the snakes:

"Becky" Approx. 6'-6" female couperi, 6.5 lbs. approx. 7 years old. This snake laid a clutch of 16 eggs for me in 2002, (15 were fertile) and a clutch of 10 eggs for me in 2001, ( only 5 of which were fertile.) All the fertile eggs hatched into perfect babies. In 2000 with a previous owner, she produced a clutch of infertile eggs. She has had no history of any health or breeding problems

"Crystal" Approx. 6'8" female couperi, 8 lbs. approx. 11 yrs old. This snake laid a clutch of 15 eggs for me in 2002, (14 were fertile) and a clutch of 12 eggs for me in 2001, all of which were fertile. All the fertile eggs hatched into perfect babies. In previous years with a previous owner she was bred, but with little success (1998, bred, no eggs, 1999 bred no eggs, 2000, bred, 8 eggs, four fertile) The lack of a proper cool down period from an inexperienced keeper was the likely cause of the lack of success in her earlier breeding years. She has had no history of any health or breeding problems.

"Cleopatra" Approx. 8'4", female corais 12 lbs, 8 years old. (Captive born) I acquired this animal about a year and a half ago from a private breeder in Miami FL, along with a 5 yr old c.b. male. The breeder had claimed to witness copulation during several breeding seasons, but no eggs were produced He felt as if lack of proper cool down period led to the non-production of eggs.

My regular vet, Dr. Dan Meakin (who sees quit a few reptiles) referred me to another vet, Dr. Ann Manhearth who now works in his office several days a week. Dr. Ann, I found out last night, has been a "zoo vet" for at least 3 different zoos, and actually specializes in reptiles, in particular snakes (what a find!)

She has a great deal of experience performing x-rays and ultrasound examinations on gravid snakes and lizards. I spent over 2 hours with Dr. Ann examining the snakes very closely last night.

**The June Meeting is Wednesday, June 4<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 at the NKU**

Dr. Ann greeted me and proceeded to “interview” me for some time. She wanted to find out if there were any changes in environmental elements or husbandry of the animals that could lead to the problems. This of course made sense, since it seems awfully coincidental that I’d have THREE snakes in the same condition.

I explained that I have done things exactly the same (or at least as close to the same as possible) for the past three years, and any changes would have been too subtle for me to recognize...but there certainly could have been factors like changes in humidity that I may not have detected.

Not knowing me until last night...she seemed impressed with the way I keep my animals (She mentioned that I did a better job creating natural cycles with indigos than the zoos she’s worked with) The Dr, could see no obvious connection from environmental factors or husbandry to the conditions the females are in.

“Becky” appeared very healthy. There was obvious swelling in the lower half of the body, however there were “crinkles” in the skin close to the vent. Dr. Ann immediately noticed this and said it is usually caused by a sudden loss of weight. She asked if the snake was feeding...and I responded she was, and recently rather aggressively, which is unusual for her in a heavily gravid state. I added that because of her perceived condition, I had been feeding her only every other week, and only small meals. The Dr. asked if she was passing feces, and I responded that yes, she had, and as recently as the prior day.

We then did a thorough ultrasound exam. We found ONE, and only ONE egg, and although of perfect shape, looked rather small. It was HIGH in the snake. The areas closer to the vent contained NO EGGS. After the ultrasound, an x-ray was taken. The single egg was noticeable on the x-ray as well, as well as some feces...that was behind the egg. This was obviously a concern. The feces, however, did not appear to be hardened, and it DID appear as if it could probably pass the egg. The question here is if the egg could be fertile...if it’s going to grow and cause further feces blockage, or if it will be re-absorbed. It is our conclusion that this snake likely ovulated, produced eggs that never calcified, and then slowly re-absorbed them. It may take some time after re-absorbing eggs before the body loses it’s swollen state...therefore at

this time the snake still “looks” gravid...but that one egg is ALL that is in her.

As for what to do...we took a blood sample to test her white-blood cell count. If her white count is very high (indicating an internal infection) surgery will need to be performed to remove the egg. We do not feel comfortable “draining” the egg and trying to remove it, because it is so “high” in the body.

If the white count is normal, then we wait a bit, bring her back in a couple weeks and see what the egg is up to. If the egg is the same, and more blockage is noticed, then we operate. If it has grown and dropped at all...it’s probably fertile and developing. If it is getting smaller...she’s likely re-absorbing it and surgery will not be necessary. We will of course check her white count again and factor that into our decision.

Simple huh?

“Crystal” looked very healthy; mouth clean. She too showed the obvious lower body swelling. The ultrasound was performed and...again...and...again ...NO EGGS. Period. NOTHING.

The swelling would indicate the same thing happened to her as to Becky...she ovulated, produced eggs, and before they calcified, re-absorbed. She is feeding and passing well and not “acting” gravid. She too still “looks” gravid. The reason for this re-absorption is completely unknown.

“Cleopatra” was basically a mirror of Crystal. Healthy, looks gravid, no eggs, likely re-absorption. No blockage or problems internally. We saw what appeared to be a partially digested rat skull in her ...which was pretty cool, but since she just ate a large rat 4 days prior, this was nothing to be concerned about.

The re-absorption phenomenon is a real mystery. Dr. Ann said that in her zoo experience, this is not uncommon. But 3 (possibly 4...my smaller female that does not look gravid any longer) snakes in one season in the same collection seems awfully strange to me. Remember that I did have 2 Drymarchon (one erebennus and one corais) who bred under the same conditions and at the same time as these females and laid perfect clutches way back in February. Conditions, ie temp, light cycles, feeding regiment, type of food...are the same as previous successful years.

Is it possible that:

A: The male eastern indigos were for some

**The June Meeting is Wednesday, June 4<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 at the NKU**

reason not fertile this year and the eggs were never fertilized and therefore re-absorbed?

B: Natural elements within the female's body "tell" them that they should not be laying eggs and lead to re-absorption...to save the snakes life? Possibilities would be:

- Lack of necessary body weight (which could NOT have been a factor in MY snakes...they had good weight)
- In older age they cannot breed every year...or at ALL after a certain age. (Crystal's getting up there)
- Possibly they really aren't meant to produce offspring EVERY year...and if they produce 2-3 years in a row...and don't get a break...well, maybe their bodies went into reverse mode to PREVENT a horrible egg-bound disaster death.

#### **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 advertized. The Society also reserves the right to refuse any ad considered inappropriate.**

#### **Requirements for Submitting Articles to the Forked Tongue**

1. Articles can be submitted via 3.5" floppy disk or hard copy to Editor, GCHS 11470 Gatch Hill Road, Aurora, IN 4700.
2. Articles may be e-mailed to Grady Calhoun at [gcalhoun@seidata.com](mailto:gcalhoun@seidata.com).
3. 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.
4. All time dependent submissions must be in the editors possession no later than the meeting previous to the desired publication date.

#### **Classifieds**

**For Sale:** Feeder rabbits and rats. Call Rod Surber at (812) 637-0305 or e-mail me at [Indianarockshop@aol.com](mailto:Indianarockshop@aol.com).

**For Sale:** Aquariums-all shapes and sizes (5-90 gallons). Boa Constrictor(s) may be available, prices negotiable. Call Chris at (513) 451-1203.

**Discount:** A 10% discount is offered to all card-carrying members of the GCHS at All Creatures Animal Hospital where I examine and treat many different reptiles.

Dr. Dan Meakin, All Creatures Animal Hospital, 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)

**Currently Held Positions**

President	Grady Calhoun (812) 926-1206 (513) 564-6041	Vice President	Dean Alessandrini (513) 347-0099
Treasurer	Peggy Fille (513) 528-4452	Editor	Grady Calhoun (812) 926-1206 (513) 564-6041
Sargent-at-Arms	Bruce Fille (513) 528-4452	Education Conservation Committee Co-Chairman	
Advisor	Ray Whitson (859) 342-8842		Matt Fille (513) 528-4452 Chris Bauer (513) 451-1203
Secretary	Polly Whittaker (513) 321-1884		

**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	\$12.00	Sustaining	\$25.00
Family	\$18.00	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 Veterinary Clinic	(513) 576-0131

**P.O. Box 14783  
Cincinnati, OH 45250**