

THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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March 2004

The Editor-s Den

By Grady Calhoun

The March Forked Tongue features an article on housing baby colubrids, just in time for baby season.

Calendar of Events

4/7/04 Monthly Meeting at Cincinnati Nature Center; Winston Card of the Cincinnati Zoo will be speaking on Philippines Biodiversity Conservation Program.

5/5/04 Monthly Meeting at the Cincinnati Nature Center; Neil Brae will be Speaking on the History of Herps in Mythology and Folk Lore.

Rescued Animals need Homes

We need volunteers to adopt animals that are given to the society. If you are willing to provide a good home for iguanas, large boas or pythons, tortoises or crocodilians please contact Chris Bauer at (513) 424-5818 or Peggy Fille at (513) 528-4452.

Change in Meeting Place

The monthly meetings of the GCHS will be held at the Cincinnati Nature Center beginning with the **April 7th** meeting. The dates and times for the meetings remain the same, the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 pm. A map and directions are included.

Cage Set Up for Baby Colubrids (corns, kings, milks)

By Al Winstel

OK, so you've just received a baby snake or maybe you're planning to purchase one at a shop or from a breeder. Probably the most stress free plan is to have the animal's cage ready and waiting when the animal comes home, or at least plan on purchasing the cage and associated supplies when the juvenile snake is purchased. Luckily, snakes are generally less time consuming to care for than a dog, cat, hamster, parakeet, or many other captive animals. The catch is that it takes more knowledge about the animal to care for the snake since it's not as adaptable to environmental change as many of the commonly kept warm blooded animals.

Ordinarily, one would think the bigger the cage, the better. However, in the case of smaller critters, sometimes there are advantages to smaller enclosures. You will need to be concerned about the snake being able to find its food, having a range of temperatures available to it, and having an opportunity to hide in a relatively tight space. Cage materials can include wire meshes (good for lids because you can place a light fixture on it without risk of fire), plastic (light, but shows scratches), glass (clear for viewing but breakable), and wood (heavy, hard to clean and waterproof).

Probably the easiest route to take is to purchase a clears plastic critter keeper with snap on vented lid. Make certain the hatchling snake is unable to get through the vents. Milksnakes, especially, are burrowers and tend to test corners and crevices with their snouts. If you aren't certain the vents are escape proof, you can place a piece of fiberglass window screen on the cage top before snapping on the lid. A disadvantage of the critter keepers is that it's difficult to heat them without risk of melting. Also they tend to be so small that heating with an incandescent bulb results in the whole cage being heated, not giving the snake a choice of temperatures. If you do use a plastic critter keeper or other plastic Rubbermaid type container, I suggest you forget additional heat and keep the cage in a room where the temperature ranges from 70-80 degrees F. Incidentally, you might also check the house wares section of your local discount or grocery store, since there is a wide variety of plastic storage containers available that might be used as a cage. Major considerations are ventilation (you'll probably have to drill holes in the sides) and ways to lock the top and make the container escape proof. Some varieties have lids complete with flip down locks. These work OK, but small snakes are able to climb between the underside of the lid and top edges of the cage, so you have to be very careful when opening or closing these cages. Proper size would be about the dimensions of a shoebox. Occasionally you might find plastic canisters with screw on lids that are extremely escape proof, but need to be drilled for ventilation. Often these have limited floor space, but they'll work for awhile, especially if you provide a deep floor covering that

The March Meeting is Wednesday, March 3rd at 7:30 at NKU

allows the snake to burrow.

Shoobox sized cages will need to be replaced as your snake grows. If you invest in a 5 or 10 gallon aquarium tank or a 10 gallon tank with sliding screen lid designed for herps, it will be longer before the cage needs to be replaced. These tanks also allow for better temperature control, as you can place flat plate heaters under one edge of the tank or a small incandescent light fixture on the screen top, to allow the snake a range of temperatures to choose from. This is an especially good idea if your household background temperature is less than 75 degrees F. If you get a standard aquarium tank, escape proofing the lid may be a problem. Screen tops are available with metal clips to hold them in place, but the clips may still leave narrow cracks between the cage top and frame.

This is OK with a 3 or 4 foot snake, but hatchlings may escape. Even the tanks with sliding screen lids may have a little forward/backward play in them. Don't get smug because the cage is taller than your snake is long. A small snake can wedge itself into cage corners and climb to the top.

By now you realize that you may be able to get a hatchling snake for \$15 or \$20, but by the time you purchase needed supplies, you will have a much bigger investment. Also be aware that if you leave the snake alone outside its cage for even a few minutes, it's very capable of crawling off and never being found again.

Heating is an area where you can use a lot of creativity, but it may also be expensive and safety must be a prime goal. You don't want to burn down your house in the process of heating your snake. Make sure you pay attention to limits on the equipment, keeping light bulbs within the allowable wattage for the fixtures.

Likewise temperature controllers have wattage limits. If you use containers not designed for reptile keeping, be very careful about exposing them to heat. They should be able to take typical ambient temperatures (up to 90 degrees or so), or else they would melt just sitting around the house in the summer. You'll need to check cage temperatures with a dependable thermometer. Very inexpensive liquid crystal types are available for aquarium use, but they may not have sufficient temperature range. Probably the best investment is a digital thermometer with remote probe. Get one of these at a local discount store, or perhaps a Radio Shack. They're usually available in the \$15-\$35 dollar range, last for years, and even have a memory that allows you to check max. and min. temperatures overnight. The thermometer will allow you to check the temperatures that your caging materials are being exposed to and also monitor cage temps once you are set up.

You can get whole room heaters with proportional temperature controllers and night temperature drop capability if you have a large collection. For just one cage, you can use incandescent bulbs in simple fixtures (vary the bulb wattage to get the desired temperature) or commercially available hot rocks or heating pads. Unless the heater gives you just the right temperature, you'll also need a rheostat controller or thermostat, which could run you \$15-\$40. At one time, hot rocks caused some problems because they put out too much heat and animals were getting burned. You'll find that flat plate heaters are more expensive than you planned.

If you use one, make sure it is only under a portion of the cage so the snake can get away from the heat. Some types stick to the cage. If you stick them on, don't plan on ever removing them. A compromise is to stick the heater to a piece of metal roof flashing or other sheet metal and then slide the metal under the cage edge. Remember, use of these heaters with plastic caging may cause problems.

Generally snakes do fine without special lighting, something usually not true with other reptiles. If you do wish to provide lighting, the main purpose would be for you to see the snake. Either fluorescent or incandescent lighting is fine, but be aware that incandescent will add heat.

Substrate is the material on the cage bottom. We want it to be affordable, easy to clean or replace, and non-toxic. Newspaper, butcher paper, or paper towels will work and are easily replaced. Paper towels tend to flop into the water dish or be moved around by the snake, since they are so flimsy. Indoor carpeting is available for cage substrate. You will need two pieces, one to take the place of the other when it is being washed and disinfected with soap and water or a safe disinfectant solution. Avoid phenolic compounds. I have heard that they can be toxic. Also make certain the carpeting is completely rinsed and dried before being put back into the cage. If you are keeping a milk snake or a snake that tends to be very active, a substrate that allows burrowing like aspen may be good. Avoid cedar. Pine may be OK, but I avoid it since it's rather stiff and may cause digestive problems if accidentally swallowed. Soil tends to get messy when damp. It also holds moisture which is bad. If you have a species that needs higher humidity (some rainforest types), finer cypress mulch substrate may help you keep the humidity elevated.

Water may be provided in any small, tip proof, nontoxic, waterproof container. Baby food jars with a half inch or so of water work. Just make certain that the water level is low enough that your snake won't drown if it gets stuck in there. You can also use small hamster

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food dishes, or glass containers found in the house wares section of a discount store. Glass containers work well. Plastic will also work if it's not so light as to be tippable. The weight of the water container is important. It needs to be heavy enough to be untipable, but light enough that it won't crush the snake if it accidentally shifts when you move the cage.

Also a heavy container should be placed directly on the cage bottom rather than on the top of aspen or mulch where your snake might be able to burrow under the water dish and be crushed.

I remember the time that I observed a captive group of alligator lizards for many, many hours as part of a college animal behavior course. As I recall they spent 90 some percent of their time pretty much just sitting around. Reptiles tend to be inactive and also usually appear to desire a cramped small space to use as a hide, sometimes the smaller the better. An easily found disposable hide for a juvenile snake is an empty toilet paper roll crimped shut and folded at one end. As the snake grows, you can move up to various sized cardboard boxes that can also be disposed of when dirty. If this idea offends your sense of aesthetics, cork bark is a washable hiding place, and there are many commercially made hide spots that mimic nature.

Just make certain that if you pick a model that is heavy ceramic or artificial stone that it cannot tip onto your snake. You also need to be careful when replacing the hide into the cage if the snake is under a newspaper substrate. Find out where the animal is before you drop that artificial stone on top of it! Climbing limbs are also fine, although milk snakes and some other colubrids may not use them. Remember it is best to use cage furnishings that are disposable or that can be cleaned easily. Deep cracks in the item can retain bacteria. Some artificial rocks and limbs have holes underneath formed as part of the manufacturing process. These holes can be great places for your snake to disappear into or get wedged into.

Remember to use common sense when housing your juvenile snake, especially regarding the use of electricity for lighting or heating. If in doubt about safety for the animal, your household, or household members, find another safer set up. Watch for a future article on how to acclimate your snake to its new home.

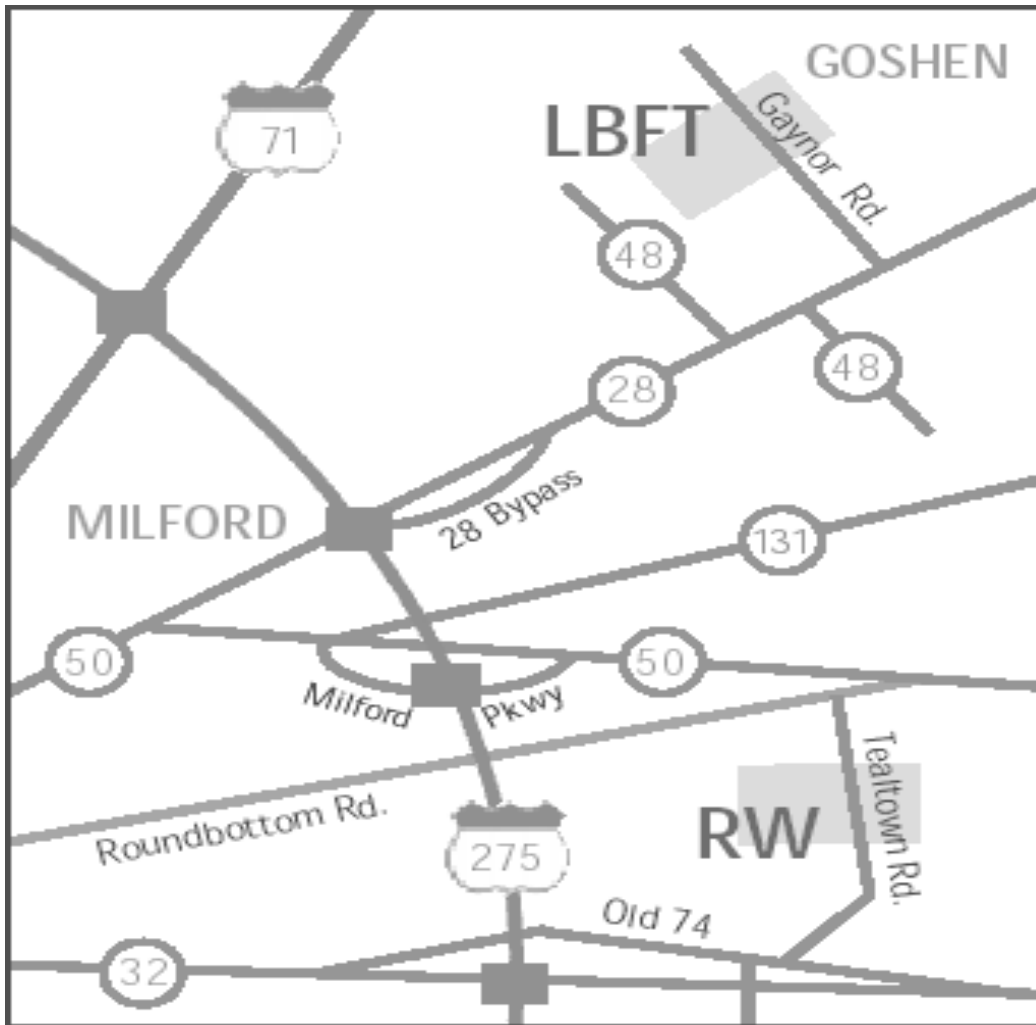
Only a "Herper" Would Understand

by Grady Calhoun

If you have been a member of the society for more than a year you undoubtedly look forward to my annual stories of the amphibians heralding in the spring.

Here's yet another installment. Every spring I make it a point to carefully listen to the sounds coming from my pond and surrounding areas. Typically the peepers from up the street are the first frogs calling. This is usually followed by Bullfrogs, toads, and green frogs. Saturday night I was sitting on my deck and I heard a frog call from my pond that was one I hadn't heard before from my pond. I had to go find the frog. I caught it and thought it was a leopard frog. If that wasn't nerdy enough, I couldn't determine subspecies when I went to my guide AFTER I released it. I spent two evenings walking around my pond with frogs mocking me from every side except the one I was on at the time. Tuesday night I caught another one. I was a little disappointed in myself when I realized that I had missed the species altogether. They are pickerel frogs. I wanted them to be leopard frogs so bad that I must have fooled myself at first. Although not as exciting as leopard frogs, this is the first time in eight springs they have been at my pond. Pretty Cool huh?

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From 275...

- **Exit 59**, Hillsboro
- Turn **Right** onto **US 50 East** for 2 miles
- Turn **Right** onto **Roundbottom Road** for .5 miles
- Turn **Left** onto **Tealtown Road** for .5 miles

The entrance to Rowe Woods is at the crest of a hill on the right side of Tealtown Road.

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Classified Advertizing 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
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

Articles can be submitted via 3.5" floppy disk or hard copy to Editor, GCHS 11470 Gatch Hill Road, Aurora, IN 47001.

Articles may be e-mailed to Grady Calhoun at gcalhoun@seidata.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 editors possession no later than the meeting previous to the desired publication.

Classifieds

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

For Sale: Juvenile Amazon tree boas (*Corallus hortulanus*), brown phases, will be feeding when sold \$15 each. Call Al Winstel at 513-729-2563

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. Dahlhausens 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
Sargent-at-Arms	Bruce Fille	(513) 528-4452	Education Conservation Committee Co-Chairman	
Advisor	Ray Whitson	(859) 342-8842	Matt Fille	(513) 528-4452
Secretary	Vacant		Chris Bauer	(513) 424-5818

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

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