

# THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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May 2004

## The Editor's Den

By Grady Calhoun

The May Forked Tongue features an article on bringing your new baby back home by Al Winstel.

## Calendar of Events

**7/7/04** Monthly Meeting at the Cincinnati Nature Center; Wendy Lymm, DVM, will be speaking on reptile parasites.

**8/4/04** Monthly Meeting at the Cincinnati Nature Center; Steve Franz. Topic TBD

## Martin Memorial Fund Proposal

The GCHS agreed unanimously to award Kristen Wiley \$600 to purchase a global position sensor to assist in studies she is completing with Timber Rattlesnakes. The membership felt that this was a worth while endeavor that would positively affect herpetological studies.

## Bringin' Your Baby Back Home

by Al Winstel

If you read the March article on setting up for baby colubrids, you are now ready to acquire and acclimate your baby king, rat, gopher, or other colubrid snake. You may acquire it in several ways:

### Acquisition

1)**local pet shop**-Probably the easiest way. Little travel, you get to see the animal and judge its health, and they'll be there if you return with questions or problems. Some of them give you a certificate for a vet check, which may cover the office visit, but not worming, fecal tests, or other work. Down sides are that pet shops need to make a profit so the price may be relatively high and the staff may or may not know what they are talking about.

It's good to read a little first and then ask a few questions to test the staff. Also check the condition of the other cages and herps for sale. Are the animals sluggish/skinny, feces in cage, old pieces of shed skin evident? Then don't buy there. Also there is a possibility that the herps may have parasitic mites, often brought in by new shipments as reptiles pass through the shop. Check water bowls for tiny black dots in the water and check your hands after handling the snake. It's also good to put your snake in a basic set up when

you get home away from other herps for a couple weeks at least until you are sure it is mite free.

2)**Regional herp show**- These are great places to see a variety of animals, get good prices, and talk with breeders. Down sides are you may have to transport your animal quite a distance, your seller may not be reachable for refunds/advice in the future, you will probably have to find a food and supplies source closer to home, and, while you can see the caging at the show, you can't see the "home" caging. Also some private breeders may not be aware of permit laws and requirements. Pet shops, since they are more open to inspection, are more likely to be aware of regulations and not sell you an animal that is illegal in your area (although sometimes an animal can be legal for a shop to sell, but not for you to keep where you live, many times due to misdirected "safety" laws based on public misconceptions about snakes and escapes of snakes from folks who do not keep them correctly.)

3)**Magazine ad/internet**-This is a bit riskier, since you don't get to hold the animal before you buy and it can be impossible to recover losses if the animal isn't as advertised. If you are buying from a big name breeder or commercial dealer, you can usually expect them to stand behind their sales. If you buy from a private individual, sometimes you can check references they give you or find someone on a forum such as kingsnake.com that has done business with the person. Another downside is you may have to be home to receive the shipment or have to pick it up at the airport. Shipment may be limited to certain weather conditions and loss of the animal may not be recoverable. Decide in advance who pays the loss if the shipper won't. On the other hand, sometimes internet or magazine ordering is the only way that you can get a certain color phase or variety. Also be aware that you can't legally ship snakes through the U.S. Postal Service.

Other methods may be OK, depending on which regional office of the shipping agency you check. Hopefully your dealer has experience with this and will work it out.

4)**Local Breeder**-This has combined advantages of #1 and 2 above, but it may be tough to find the animal you want when you want it. I have advertised animals for sale for several months, then sold them to a wholesaler. A month or 2 later, I then received several private inquiries on the snakes I just got rid of.

### Transport

Now you have your really neat, healthy hatchling ghost corn, Applegate albino gopher snake, etc. and need

The June meeting will be held on Wednesday June 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:30 pm at the Cincinnati Nature Center

to transport it home. Temperate colubrids can handle quite a temperature range, but wide temp variation will stress them, which may result in problems later. I usually transport them in a small snake bag (check for holes along the seams) or deli cup in a Styrofoam cooler.

If temps are above 75 or below 70 degrees F., you may wish to add a bottle or double thick ziplok bag of warm or cool water. Just make sure the water container can't roll and squash the snake in the bag. Also don't leave the container in the passenger area of the car on a sunny day. The trunk usually works better if you have to leave the car for a rest stop. You probably won't be able to keep from taking out the deli cup to stare at the snake, but excessive handling is not a good idea.

#### *Introduction into new enclosure*

You should have the new enclosure set up with filled and clean water bowl, stabilized temperature, and escape proof lid. If you are not 100% sure the cage is escape proof, place it inside something else like a tall garbage can without lid. Then if your snake escapes its cage, it may still be retained by the outer container. Once it has failed to escape your cage for several days, you can remove the cage from the outer container. Do not handle the snake any more than necessary at this time or expose it to frequent bright lights in its face. It may feed right away, but if it is healthy, it will be able to go a few weeks without food. Best suggestion is to wait for 3 or 4 days before trying to feed, as the animal may be too distracted to feed the first night and exposure to a live food animal especially may make it more difficult to get the hatchling to feed later. Hopefully the dealer or supplier has already fed your snake and told you what type of food to use. If not, you need to contact them to find out if there are suggested tricks to start your snake feeding.

#### *Feeding*

The colubrids mentioned above are mainly rodent feeders. Water, garter, or green snakes or small terrestrial species eat other things, from crickets to fish, frogs, and earthworms. We'll just concern ourselves with rodent feeders. Generally colubrid hatchlings can eat newborn baby mice called "pinkies." If possible, feed pinkies that are dead. The easiest way to do this is to order frozen pinkies from mail order suppliers. Some pet shops also handle them. This allows you to buy in quantity to get a price break, prevents your snake from being frightened by too much motion, and avoids the situation of being stuck with a live pinky that your snake refuses to eat. Place the thawed pinky (I just thaw by leaving out for an hour or so at room temperature) in the snake's cage and leave it over night. You may try moving the pink with forceps slowly in front of the snake first, in case motion is required. If neither approach works, toss the pinky, wait a few days, and try a live pinky overnight. By the way, some hatchlings will not feed until their first skin shed. If your source says that the snake hasn't shed yet, wait until it sheds to

try feeding. If this doesn't work, other approaches are:

- A) Live pinky overnight in deli cup with snake
- B) Thawed pinky with tip of nose nipped off or slit in skull to expose brain tissue left overnight.
- C) Either of the above in motion.

In some cases, your snake won't eat because it is getting ready to shed or you are not providing proper temps or a hide spot. In the majority of cases, your snake will eat the thawed pinky the first time you try it. Extremely tiny hatchlings like eastern milks and some of the tricolor milks may have to be assist fed mouse tails or parts first until they are big enough to swallow newborn pinkies. Also be aware that pinkies are available in different sizes. You want the smallest ones! Assist feeding will not be covered here, as it can damage the snake. Check with a more experienced herper on how to do it. Other approaches to try before giving up completely are to try other foods like tiny lizards or tree frogs or rub lizard or frog scent on a thawed pink washed with plain water. Some snakes will refuse to eat for several weeks and then eat the thawed pink right away on your next attempt.

#### *Cage Cleaning and Care*

If it is possible, change the water daily and the cage substrate when the snake defecates. Disinfect the water bowl and cage interior with a 5% bleach and water solution (1 part bleach to 20 parts water) or a reptile cage disinfectant from the pet shop. Lysol may be injurious to the snake. Wash out all disinfectant and dry the cage before putting substrate and snake back in. Regarding the water, even though it looks OK, snakes may immediately go to the bowl and drink when you refill it. "Stale" water seems to be avoided. If you have a problem with your snakes defecating in their water, providing 2 small water bowls may assure that at least one is drinkable at all times.

Next time we'll look at health care and raising your baby colubrid.

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

For Sale: 7.0 '03 Tiger Rat Snakes (*Spilote pullatus*) Very well started, nice black and yellow coloration. Approximately 30 inches or more. Feeding voraciously on live hoppers. \$60 each or two or more for \$50 each. Call Marc (859) 344-9626

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 (513) 564-6041	Grady Calhoun (812) 926-1206 Editor Grady Calhoun	Vice President (812) 926-1206	Dean Alessandrini (513) 347-0099
Treasurer	Peggy Fille (513) 528-4452		(513) 564-6041
Sargent-at-Arms	Bruce Fille (513) 528-4452	Education Committee Co-Chairman	
Advisor	Ray Whitson (859) 342-8842	Peggy 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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