

THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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September 2002

The Editor's Den

By Grady Calhoun

The September *Forked Tongue* features an article on captive reproduction of the Northern Blue-Tongue Skink (*Tiliqua scincoides intermedia*).

The September meeting will be held at Northern Kentucky University at 7:30 Wednesday, September 4th. We meet in room 421 of the Natural Science Building.

Calendar of Events

- 9/4 Monthly Meeting. Program: Winston Card on Herpetological Exhibitions in the Philippines
- 9/14 Behind the Scenes trip to Louisville Zoo
- 9/21 GCHS Picnic at Marty Hay's Place

Announcements

Ray Whitson agreed to head up the nominating committee at the August meeting. This committee will select individuals to run for offices in the next election.

At the September meeting we will be taking nominations for officers from the floor. If you are interested in running for office make sure you attend.

The canoe trip was cancelled due to reports of dangerous levels of Salmonella in the Licking River.

Iguana Homes Needed!

We are getting quite a few calls from people who want to get rid of their green iguanas. In most cases the animals are three feet long or longer. If you can provide a good home for one of these animals please call Grady Calhoun at (513) 564-6041.

Upcoming Events

We are ending summer with a plethora of activity.

Zoo Trip - Dean has arranged for us to tour the Louisville Zoo reptile facilities on September 14th. This will be a great opportunity to see the animals "Behind the Scenes". This is also available only to GCHS members and their families. The cost is \$4 per person. Parking is probably extra. Sign up by the September meeting. Contact Dean Alessandrini at (513) 347-0099 for details.

Louisville Zoo Trip Saturday, September 14.

Those who want to stay, we will be staying the night of Friday, September 13.

Zoo date is Saturday, September 14. You will need to call in your reservation by the first of September, but the sooner the better. Be sure to mention you are with the GCHS group to get the \$69 rate. The hotel is a holidome and is only a few miles from the zoo.

Admittance to the zoo for the day and for the behind the scenes tour will be \$4 per person. You can enter the zoo anytime you like, just mention you are with the GCHS for the \$4 admittance. We will meet at the Herpaquarium at 1:50, tour starts at 2:00 PM.

Directions to Louisville Southeast Holiday Inn: (3255 Bardstown Rd. (502-454-0451)

Take the I-71S to I-264/WATTERSON EXPRESSWAY exit- exit number 5

Take the US-31E/BARDSTOWN RD/US-150 exit- exit number 16.

Keep LEFT at the fork in the ramp.

Turn LEFT onto BARDSTOWN RD/US-150/US-31E. 0.18 miles

The September Meeting is Wednesday, September 4th at 7:30 at NKU

(Please note that there is an I-265 that will intersect I-71 before you get to I-264. DO NOT TAKE I-265)

Directions to Louisville Zoo:

The Louisville Zoo is easy to find and just 15 minutes from downtown Louisville, KY, easily accessible from I-64 and I-65.

Take I-264 (Watterson Expressway) to Poplar Level Road exit #14 and travel north. Follow the black and white zoo signs to 1100 Trevilian Way. (From I-71 S take I-264 West to the Poplar Level Rd. exit and then follow the directions above. Please note that there is an I-265 that will intersect I-71 before you get to I-264. DO NOT TAKE I-265)

GCHS Picnic - Marty Hay has been gracious enough to offer her place as a site for the GCHS summer picnic. This is tentatively scheduled for September 21. More details will follow.

August Highlights

The August Meeting featured Will Bird of the Louisville Zoo. Will began the program discussing his troubled teen years. When he was younger, Will was constantly getting in trouble and seemed to be headed down the wrong path. With no real interests in life, Will felt his future was destined to be grim.

One day Will entered a pet store and saw a ribbon snake. He was fascinated with the snake, and purchased it. This endeavor quickly grew into a large collection of snakes. The interest that Will developed snowballed...and finally, he had his interest, his reason to do something productive with his life.

The rest is history.

Will proceeded to discuss the herp collection at the Louisville zoo. The zoo has an impeccable safety system, and as a result, can boast that they have NEVER had an employee bitten by a venomous snake. Will demonstrated the "double lock system" used to keep venomous snakes contained. The system is an added security measure and allows for the element of human error.

Venomous snakes are typically handled using 2 hooks, and the snakes are almost never touched by human hands. The only instances that the snakes are touched are when they need to be sexed or if blood needs to be taken, etc. In those circumstances, the snakes are put into tubes, so that the bite risk is at an absolute minimum.

During the course of the program, Will also mentioned his concerns surrounding venomous snakes being kept by the "private sector".

Currently, there is a world-wide shortage of anti-serum. In the past, Wyeth Laboratories has been the supplier of anti-serum in the United States.

They are a domestic source, located in New Jersey. Recently, Wyeth got out of this business. The new supplier is Cro-Fab, an Australian company. There was a lag-time between the switch, and many facilities are running out.

Additionally, there have been delays in production by Cro-Fab. Many people think the Cro-Fab product will be superior to the Wyeth, however that is debatable and yet to be proven.

The Cro-Fab product is also much more expensive and typically requires more vials to be administered than the Wyeth product. Cro-Fab anti-serum can cost more than \$1,000 per vial, and a typical bite may require 20 vials or more. People keeping venomous snakes in the private sector have several things to ponder:

1. If they are bitten, do they have their own anti-serum? Can they afford it or even know where to buy it?
2. If they do not have it, where will it come from if they are bitten? Zoos and hospitals are in short supply, and if zoos are forced to give it up to treat a private hobbyist, then their own people may be without the serum if bitten.
3. If they are bitten and it is publicized, they are harming the reputation of the herp community at large, and risk creating a situation that will encourage the creation of new anti-herp keeping legislation.

Will did not say that private keepers should never keep venomous snakes, but they need to be encouraged to do it responsibly.

At the close of the program, Will again mentioned his how his love of snakes saved him from a life

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on “the wrong path”. Today, he enjoys being involved in educational programs. Through education, he hopes he may lead young people to the same love he has of these animals, and lead them away from troubled, unfulfilling lives. This program was recorded on videotape and is available to borrow from the GCHS.

Captive Reproduction of the Northern Blue Tongue Skink - By Accident!

By Grady Calhoun

This is the last time (I hope!) I am going to relate a story that involves my poor reptile keeping techniques. This spring my son had acquired an unrelated pair of captive-bred Northern Blue-Tongue Skinks (BTS). The male was a full grown robust animal reportedly two years in age. The female was quite obviously not full grown and reportedly less than one year old. I believed that the female was a too small to breed so I kept the animals apart planning on trying next year. They were both temporarily housed in 20 gallon long aquariums. About 1 month after we had them, my son questioned me about putting the male in with the female. Of course I stated that I didn't but it quickly became obvious that they were, in fact, together. The reptile room is entered multiple times every day and it is impossible that they were together more than 24 hours. Actually its much more likely that they were together less than 8 hours. It is quite obvious that such a robust lizard with such disproportionately small legs can't climb out of a 20 gallon tank- Right? WRONG! The male climbed out of his cage and rather than seeking freedom he sought, and evidently found, love.

I removed the male right away and upon examination, the female had obvious bite marks on her neck. I added a lid and designed and built more permanent facilities. I really dismissed the fact that the female may be gravid as all of the literature says that the animals should be two or even three years old before successful breeding can occur. The animals were not together, even for a second, after this event. Before I describe the blessed event I will discuss the maintenance of the animals.

Housing

The skinks were maintained in a room that was kept at approximately 82 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and allowed to cool to no less than 75 degrees Fahrenheit at night. The skinks are housed separately in melamine cages that I built. Each cage is 36 inches long by 18 inches deep and 12 inches high. Each has a basking spot that reached approximately 100 degrees during the day. I use newspaper as a substrate. Each cage has a hide box that the skinks occupy most of the time. They typically come out and bask as soon as the light comes on and to eat but beside that they are rarely seen outside of the hide box. Water is available at all times and I have seen them drink frequently.

Feeding

I've read much of the literature on feeding BTS and found that the eating habits of these two animals varied slightly. The female, even before the apparent mating, relished small mice. Although she would eat low-protein canned dog food, she preferred pinkies. The male was just the opposite. In fact, he would often not eat mice when offered but would always eat the dog food. The one thing they have in common is that neither will eat vegetation without being “tricked” into it. Since they were acquired, I have offered chopped collard greens, kale, melon, and squash. They lick it and forget it. I tried mixing the chopped vegetation with dog food and they would eat some of it. It was obvious however that they eat around the vegetation whenever possible. The food is sprinkled with multi-vitamins and calcium supplements at least weekly.

Gestation

The midnight rendezvous occurred in mid-May. Although I was not specifically looking for signs or behaviors of pregnancy, I noticed nothing out of the ordinary. The female remained very handleable. She typically lets out a brief hiss when first picked up but shows no signs of aggression. She continued to eat her normal food with no apparent increase in appetite. There was no apparent weight gain. The babies were born August 8 which was 11 to 13 weeks after mating.

Birth

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As mentioned previously, the reptile room is visited multiple times each day so I am fairly confident I found them within 24 hours of their birth. I was in the process of changing the newspaper when I saw the first baby. I was completely surprised! There were seven live neonates and two unfertilized slugs. The literature that I have read indicates that the first thing a baby BTS does is eat the membranes with which it is born. This appears to be accurate. There were very few signs of birth except for the babies themselves and the two slugs. There were no blood stains and no birth membranes. I found this quite unusual given the typical mess that other live-bearers such as Boas leave. The female had a SVL of 10.5 inches and a total length of 17.5 inches at the time of birth.

Neonatal Care

The neonates were immediately removed and placed together in a separate aquarium. They were measured two days after they were born. They ranged in total length 4 3/4 to 5 1/8 inches long. Six of the seven babies appeared to be quite healthy and full of attitude. One of them looked wet when first discovered and was more fragile. Its rear legs were somewhat thinner than the others and his scales appeared to be somewhat malformed. Anytime the cage was approached they would puff themselves up, open their mouths, hiss, and expose their tongue, which at this point were closer to black than the bright blue of their parents. The six healthy babies were housed in a 40 gallon aquarium with incandescent lighting providing a basking spot of approximately 105 degrees Fahrenheit. The less healthy animal was placed in a small cage by himself and cared for individually. Food was offered daily from the day they were born. The items offered included wax worms, mealworms, dog food and chopped vegetables and fruits. All of them accepted food within three days of birth. The sickly one was actually one of the first to eat. The babies appeared to prefer the insect larvae over anything offered originally. I think the movement attracted them. They gradually accepted most items offered, even a finely chopped mixture of collard greens, kale, carrots and apples.

The sickly lizard was a much less aggressive eater than the others and actually quit eating about 5 days after birth. In an attempt to save it, I provided daily feedings of strained baby food (a mixture of meat and sweet potatoes or squash and vitamin/mineral supplements) from a syringe. It readily lapped up the mixture directly from the syringe but wasn't interested in eating any other way. After about a week of this, it finally started eating this mixture when placed on a plate in front of it. Needless to say I have become a bit attached to this one and plan on seeing it to adulthood.

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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.
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.

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 | |
| 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.

Classifieds

Available: Venomous snake video available: This video has extractions from king cobras, gaboon vipers, and several others, plus graphic snakebite slides. Kentucky Reptile Zoo is a non-profit educational exhibit and venom extraction laboratory. \$10.00 donation plus \$5.00 postage and handling will bring this video to you! Please note everything is filmed as it happens and is not professionally edited. Send a check or money order to Kentucky Reptile Zoo, 200 L&E Railroad, Slade, Kentucky 40376. Visit our website at www.geocities.com/kentuckyreptilezoo for more information, or call 606-663-9160.

For Sale: 0.0.4 CB Northern Blue-tongue skinks (*Tiliqua scincoides intermedia*). They were born 8/4/02 and are eating well - \$75. Justin or Grady Calhoun 513-564-6041 (SE Indiana).

For Sale: CB ball pythons (*Python regius*) and CB Pueblan milksnakes (*Lampropeltis t. campbelli*) \$30 each. Will be feeding on pink or fuzzy mice before sale. Pueblans are both white band and apricot tinted band. Al Winstel 513-729-2563 (Northern Cincinnati).

Discount: A 10% discount is offered to all card carrying members of the GCHS at my veterinary clinic that treats a lot of reptiles. All Creatures Animal Hospital, 1894 Ohio Pike, Amelia, Ohio 45102, Dr. Dan Meakin 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 | Secretary | Diane Bauer | (513) 451-1203 |
| Seargent-at-Arms | Bruce Fille | (513) 528-4452 | Editor | Grady Calhoun | (812) 926-1206 (513) 564-6041 |
| Advisor | Ray Whitson | (859) 342-8842 | Education Conservation Committee Chairman | Fred Fannin | (513) 734-6906 |

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 |
| Norwood Pet Center | (513) 351-7230 |
| All Creatures Animal Hospital | (513) 797-7387 |
| Dr. Dahlhausen's Veterinary Clinic | (513) 576-0131 |

**P.O. Box 14783
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