

SEPTEMBER, 1985

ANNOUNCEMENTS

\*\*\*12th Annual KHS Meeting\*\*\*

16-17 November 1985

Henderson Learning Resources Center, Room 112  
Washburn University  
Topeka, Kansas

The 12th annual meeting of the Kansas Herpetological Society will be held at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, in room 112 of the Henderson Learning Resources Center. The meeting will be Saturday and Sunday, the 16th and 17th of November 1985. The Program Chairperson is Kelly Irwin.

SATURDAY MORNING, 16 November

- 9:00 REGISTRATION
- 9:30 Welcome, by KHS President MARTIN CAPRON (Oxford, Kansas)
- 9:40 The Kaw Valley Herpetological Society: Programs and Goals. JEFF WHIPPLE (Eudora, Kansas)
- 10:00 Milk Snake Collecting in Kansas. AL KAMB (Lawrence, Kansas)
- 10:15 BREAK, and GROUP PHOTOGRAPH (by Larry Miller)
- 10:45 A Southeastern U.S. Herp Odyssey. LARRY MILLER (Caldwell, Kansas)
- 11:45 BREAK for lunch

SATURDAY AFTERNOON, 16 November

- 1:00 Problems in Kansas Herpetology. JOSEPH T. COLLINS (Lawrence, Kansas)
- 1:30 Common Ailments and Treatments of Captive Reptiles. NANCY SCHWARTING (Lawrence, Kansas)
- 2:00 Habitat Assessment and Population Trends of Snakes in South-central Kansas. DWIGHT PLATT (North Newton, Kansas)
- 2:30 BREAK
- 3:00 KHS Business Meeting and Election of Officers, KHS President MARTIN CAPRON presiding.
- 3:45 Member's 10 best slide show--bring your 10 best, worst, or most interesting color slides of reptiles, amphibians, and fellow KHS members, and tell us about them.
- 5:00 BREAK for dinner

SATURDAY EVENING, 16 November

7:30 KHS Auction--site will be announced at the meeting.  
Bring goodies we can auction to the highest bidder.

SUNDAY MORNING, 17 November

9:00 REGISTRATION  
9:30 An effective Educational Program Concerning Snakes.  
ROBERT POWELL (Kansas City, Missouri)  
10:15 Selected Diseases and Treatments of Amphibians and  
Reptiles. DONALD D. SMITH (Kansas City, Kansas)  
10:45 BREAK  
11:15 The Height of Folly, or, How to Swell Yourself Up.  
MARTIN CAPRON (Oxford, Kansas)  
11:45 Have a good trip home.

A map of the Washburn University campus showing the KHS meeting site is on page three of this issue.

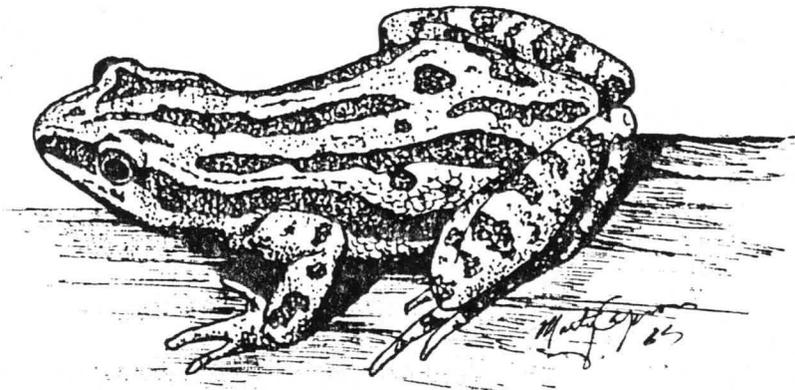
If you need additional information about the KHS Annual Meeting, contact KHS Program Chairperson Kelly J. Irwin at (913)761-2457 or (913)354-1195.

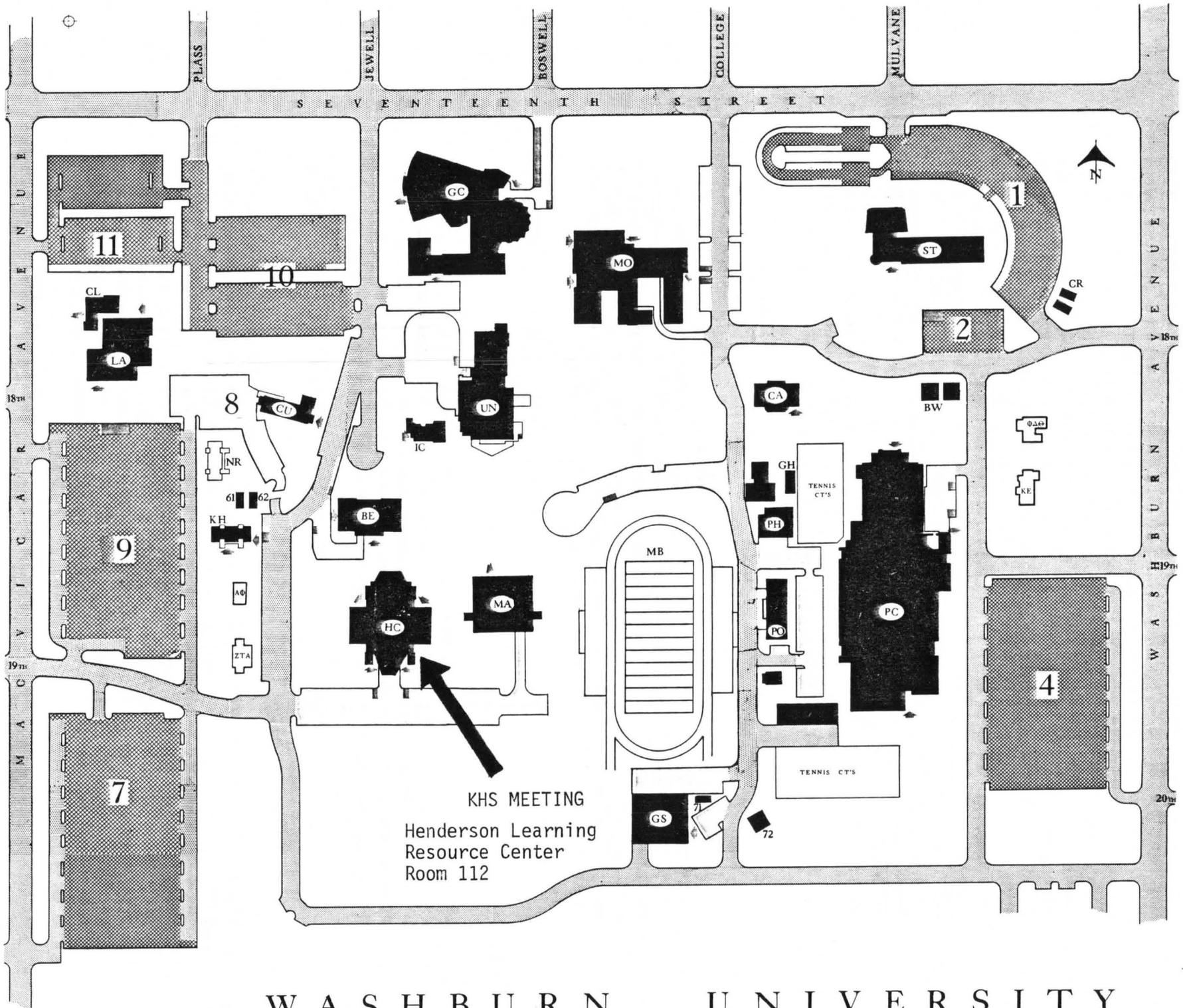
Nominations for KHS Officers for 1986

The candidates for office for 1986, to be voted on at the annual KHS business meeting, are:

President-elect: Olin Karch  
Cris Stammler

Secretary/Treasurer: Larry Miller





WASHBURN UNIVERSITY

### Herpetological Seminar

The Midwestern Herpetological Seminar, sponsored by The Minnesota Herpetological Society, will be held on 5 October 1985 in Minneapolis at The Bell Museum of Natural History, from 9:00 until 3:30. Speakers will include Peter Pritchard, Rusty Grimpy of the Tulsa Zoo, Richard Cary Paull of the Turtle Trust, and Ray Pawley of the Brookfield Zoo. There will be an evening banquet and tour of the Minnesota Zoological Gardens. Registration is just \$15. For more information, contact The Minnesota Herpetological Society, The Bell Museum of Natural History, 10 Church Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

### Snakes Stolen in Lawrence

On the weekend of 20 July 1985, a Ball Python (ca. 4 feet long) and a common Boa constrictor (ca. 6 feet long) were stolen from George Pisani's animal room at The University of Kansas (KU). Anyone with a clue to the whereabouts of these animals should contact the KU Police at (913)864-5572, or George Pisani at (913)864-4301 (work) or (913)842-7419. A reward is offered.

### Oklahoma Distribution Maps on Sale

The Oklahoma Herpetological Society is offering a limited number of its special publication, Distribution Maps of Oklahoma Reptiles for \$3.00 for the first copy, \$2.00 each additional copy. This 57-page publication contains up-to-date distribution maps for all 81 species of reptiles known to inhabit Oklahoma, and was prepared by Stephen M. Secor and Charles C. Carpenter. Make checks payable to Jeff Black, Oklahoma Baptist University, 500 West University, Shawnee, Oklahoma 74801.

### More Stolen Snakes

On the night of 3 June, 19 snakes were stolen from the reptile collection of the Abilene Zoological Society. The animals stolen are: 3 female Madagascan Tree Boas, Sanzinia madagascariensis, a threatened species; 2 male and 1 female San Francisco Garter Snakes, Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia, an endangered species; 3 female albino and 2 male heterozygous Checkered Garter Snakes, Thamnophis marcianus, a rare species; 1 female (gravid) Gray-banded Kingsnake, Lampropeltis mexicana alterna, Light Blair's phase, protected in Texas; 1 female Greer's Kingsnake, Lampropeltis mexicana greeri, 1 male California Mountain Kingsnake, Lampropeltis zonata zonata, protected in California; 1 male and 1 female Utah Milksnakes, Lampropeltis triangulum taylori, protected in Utah; 1 male Desert Rosy Boa, Lichanura trivirgata gracia; and 1 male and 1 female Dusty Hognose Snake, Heterodon nasicus gloydi. These snakes are all highly prized in collections and most are very rare both in captivity and in the wild. The Abilene Zoo was attempting to breed these animals. This information is being disseminated in the hope that these animals (or their offspring) will show up while being offered for sale, during shipment, or surface in private or public reptile collections. If you become aware of any possible leads, it would be greatly

appreciated if you would contact the Abilene Zoological Gardens, Box 60, Abilene Texas 79604, telephone (915)672-9771; the Abilene Police Department, P.O. Box 174, Abilene, Texas 79604, telephone (915)676-6353; or your nearest agent of the U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service.

#### Herpetological Review Now Available Cheap

At the 1985 Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, the Society approved the addition of a separate subscription to the popular Herpetological Review, previously only available with full membership in the society. Recognizing that some members of the herpetological community do not find subscription to all of the SSAR publications equally useful, the SSAR Board established this category at a cost of only \$10 per year. Individuals selecting this option will not be members of the Society nor will they receive the Journal of Herpetology or other publications offered with membership. However, subscribers are encouraged to register for and attend the annual meeting of the SSAR and may join the Society as regular members at any time. To subscribe to Herpetological Review, which is issued four times per year, send a check or money order to SSAR c/o Dr. Henri Seibert, Department of Zoology, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, 45701.

#### Field Guide to Herps of Spain

A new 320 page field guide to reptiles and amphibians of Spain and the Balears and Canary Islands is now available. The Guia de Campo de los Anfibios y Reptiles de la Peninsula Iberica, Islas Baleares y Canarias contains 128 color photos of all species included, keys to identification, 200 line drawings, and complete species accounts and maps. You can order for the current U.S. dollar value of 3,000 Pesetas (call a bank for the latest exchange rate information) from Alfredo Salvador, P.O. Box 1.062, 24080 Leon(Leon), ESPANA.

#### Go Take A Hike

The Sedgwick County Zoo announces the opening of a self-guiding nature trail on weekends from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Labor Day through October, weekdays by appointment. It includes marsh, lake shore, and prairie habitat, a bird blind, etc. Contact the Sedgwick County Zoo, 5555 Zoo Blvd, Wichita, Kansas 67212 for more information.

#### So You Want to be a Herpetologist?

The all-new Herpetology as a Career pamphlet is now available from the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles. In 3 pages, it briefly describes the various career options available in herpetology. Single copies are free, additional copies at \$0.25 each from Douglas H. Taylor, Department of Zoology, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056.

### Two New Publications from Washington

The Smithsonian Herpetological Information Service has issued two more interesting and useful items, No. 63, Annotated Checklist and Bibliography of Arkansas Reptiles by Thomas Vance (45 pp); and No. 64, A Controversy Surrounding an Endangered Species Listing: The Case of the Illinois Mud Turtle. Another Perspective by Benny Gallaway, John Bickman, and Marlin Springer (17 pp). Address all requests for copies and inquiries to George Zug, Division of Amphibians and Reptiles, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560. Include a self-addressed mailing label with requests.

### Kansas Nongame Wildlife Program Priority Recommendations

Following the 2 March 1985 meeting of the Kansas Nongame Wildlife Advisory Council/Committee Conference at Emporia State University, the salient points of discussion with recommendations for future action have been published by the Kansas Fish and Game Commission as Recommended Priorities for the Kansas Nongame Wildlife Program. Regarding reptiles and amphibians (unfortunately referred to in the report as "herptiles"), the following concerns were identified:

1. Critical habitat areas are in need of preservation (Eastern border forest, Red Hills, Cherokee Plains, and in the Ozarkian Region, Shermerhorn Park, Sand Sage Prairie, and the sand prairies of Harper County).
2. Critical species of Kansas amphibians and reptiles are in need of study to better understand their biology in Kansas.
3. Populations of Kansas amphibians and reptiles are declining due to human habitat alteration.
4. A large segment of the public has a negative attitude towards amphibians and reptiles.
5. There is a lack of knowledge of the effects of "wildlife management" on amphibians and reptiles.
6. Introduction of alien species (non-native) into Kansas via human agency is a threat to native populations.
7. Commercial exploitation of selected species of amphibians and reptiles may endanger populations or habitats.

The report discusses each of these concerns at some length, and lists the specific solutions proposed by the committee for addressing these issues. The report states that of the 91 species of amphibians and reptiles in Kansas, four are endangered, two threatened, 13 in need of conservation, and the remaining 71 relatively stable.

### Recent Articles of Interest

KHS member Mobe Rucker of Lawrence, Kansas, found an excellent article in the May/June issue of Arkansas Game & Fish [16(3):13-20] titled "Arkansas Turtles." Written by KHS member Michael Plummer of Searcy, Arkansas, it features 17 color photographs and descriptions of 12 species plus other information.

KHS member Scott Hillard of Pratt, Kansas, has written that the September, 1985 issue of Science Digest has an article with a photograph of the Australian thorny devil, Moloch horridus. This is a fascinating lizard, and an article worth checking out.

KHS BRINGS YOU WAY BEYOND NEWS OF THE WORLD...

Family Unearths Nearly 200 Snakes

Snakes alive!

When the Richard Guimond Jr. family moved into a home, southeast of the business district, in White City, Kansas, last fall, they had no idea what mid-April would bring.

On April 13, they and several neighbors caught and killed 196 blue racer snakes in the yard of the Guimond residence.

Guimond told The Times that for several days prior to that time, at least two snakes a day were found in the yard.

After pouring gasoline into holes in the yard and not getting rid of the creatures, Guimond began digging up the yard by hand.

Chunks of concrete from a buried foundation hampered the effort and he switched to a backhoe from his place of employment.

Before the day was over, close to 200 slithering snakes had been found.

No other White City residents have reported similar incidents.

--The Herington Times, 25 April 1985

(submitted by Joyce Smith, Caldwell, Kansas)

Wichita Men Accused of Stealing Reptiles

Two Wichita men have been charged with burglary and theft in the taking of some rare and endangered reptiles from the Sedgewick County Zoo's reptile section, authorities said Wednesday.

Kelly Reida, 18, was charged Tuesday. Lawrence Brown, 24, was charged about two weeks ago. They are accused of stealing several reptiles--including a python, a boa constrictor and iguanas--and allegedly selling some to a pet store in Arlington, Texas, where authorities found several of the Wichita reptiles, said David Breedlove, a sheriff's detective.

A keeper at the zoo estimated the reptile's value at \$1,000.

Detective Breedlove said the two were being investigated in a burglary in which 19 reptiles valued at \$10,000 were taken from the Abilene, Texas, Zoological Gardens. They included the endangered Madagascar tree boa and a San Francisco garter snake, also endangered, he said. About five Abilene zoo snakes were recovered from Wichita pet stores.

Detective Breedlove said some of the Abilene reptiles were very rare and normally would not be found in a pet store.

Experts were able to verify that the reptiles were from the Wichita and Abilene zoos because of distinctive markings and because some of the

snakes were so rare, Detective Breedlove said. Herpetologists said the markings are similar to fingerprints in that no two are alike, he said.

--Kansas City Star

#### Snake, Believed Stolen, Is Found Near Wichita

A summer intern at the Sedgwick County Zoo Thursday found an exotic snake authorities believe was stolen in June from a zoo in Abilene, Texas.

Wichita authorities had been searching for the snakes near the Minisa Island area on the banks of the Little Arkansas River since last week, when they were tipped that eight non-poisonous snakes from the Texas zoo had been released on the island. The area is thick with greenery and broken tree limbs.

Robb Kirkman, a 17-year-old zoo intern, found a Madagascan tree boa, protected under federal law and valued at about \$1,500, just as searchers were preparing to give up for the day.

In a preliminary search last week, searchers found a California mountain snake. That led to Thursday's more thorough hunt for the snakes.

--Lawrence Journal-World, 9 August 1985

#### Asian Water Monitors Hatched

Seven Asian water monitors (Varanus salvator) were hatched at the Fort Worth Zoological Park between 18-31 May 1985, from a clutch of 12 eggs laid on 27 September 1984. The eggs were incubated in a media of damp vermiculite at 84 F and began pipping in slightly less than eight months. The progeny represent one-half second generation offspring as the breeding male was one of three hatched at the San Antonio Zoo in 1980. The female was wild caught and obtained from the St. Louis Zoo in 1984. The Fort Worth Zoo is the third U.S. facility to hatch this large varanid, along with the San Antonio and Philadelphia Zoos.

--AAZPA Newsletter, 1985  
(submitted by Ruth Gennrich, Lawrence)

#### Sheriff Bitten by Snake at Service

CANTON, N.C. A sheriff bitten by a poisonous snake as he broke up a religious service was listed in stable condition in a hospital, a spokeswoman said.

Sheriff Jack Arrington, appearing weak and pale, was admitted to Haywood County Hospital Sunday, said Joan Mackey.

Authorities said Arrington was bitten on the thumb when he and deputies confiscated snakes used in a service in which a man held up 10 of the reptiles, including four rattlesnakes, as a display of his faith, authorities said.

Charles Prince was charged with two counts of handling reptiles of

a poisonous nature and one count of resisting and delaying officers, said chief Deputy Kyle Grasty.

--Winfield Courier, 5 August 1985

### Cobras Kept City on its Toes

SPRINGFIELD, MO--There've been a couple of things in the news lately--law officers vainly looking for a lion allegedly loose up in Cass County and a rattlesnake exhibit farther north in Platte County that got some people a little nervous.

That people would get the willies about such things is understandable. After all, lions have big teeth, and snakes, in any shape or size, drive some people a little batty.

Which leads to something that happened here back in the summer of 1953 that made people very nervous--hooded cobras were loose in the streets for several weeks just north of downtown Springfield.

When it was all over these things had happened:

-A sound truck hired by the city Health Department roamed the streets playing snake-charmer music, the kind that Indian fakirs play with a flute to show tourists how they can tranquilize cobras. The music eventually was deemed ineffectual.

-Springfield residents had killed most of the cobras, using stones, firearms, trucks, cars, hoes, shovels and large pieces of lumber. The snakes, once residents spotted them, were goners.

-At times a state of siege seemed to have overtaken the town. Trapping one of the snakes in the basement of a house, police placed one of their number near a crack in the foundation where they were sure the reptile would emerge after tear gas was thrown into the building. Sure enough the snake came out at the planned point. As it did, the officer found his shotgun jammed. So he emptied his revolver at the snake. Naturally he missed.

-A tavern here, capitalizing on a mentality that bordered on panic at times, offered a drink guaranteed as a sure cure for "cobra venom"; on a more serious note, antidote serum for cobra bites arrived from Florida but was never used because the snakes never bit anybody, and for a year after the scare, a cobra head graced the traditional snake on the official seal of the city of Springfield.

-And finally, at another home, police threw in tear gas to drive out a snake. The owner of the house, viewing the less-than-satisfactory results, allowed he wasn't going to have any snakes lurking around in there so the police might just as well burn the darn place down.

The cobra scare got started in mid-August 1953, when a dozen or so snakes apparently escaped from a wild-animal dealer in the 1400 block of St. Louis Avenue. The dealer, one Reo Mowrer, steadfastly maintained that the snakes that escaped were not his snakes. Investigation by the Springfield newspapers revealed that Mr. Mowrer, described as a man who "talked as if he were meditating out loud," sold his goods wholesale to carnivals and wild-animal acts.

In his few public statements on the situation, Mr. Mowrer discounted cobras as really dangerous, saying his understanding was that rattlesnakes were the real bad apples in India. Indeed, he added, probably what people were seeing were merely harmless hog-nosed bull snakes. Even if they were cobras, Mr. Mowrer expounded, light summer clothing

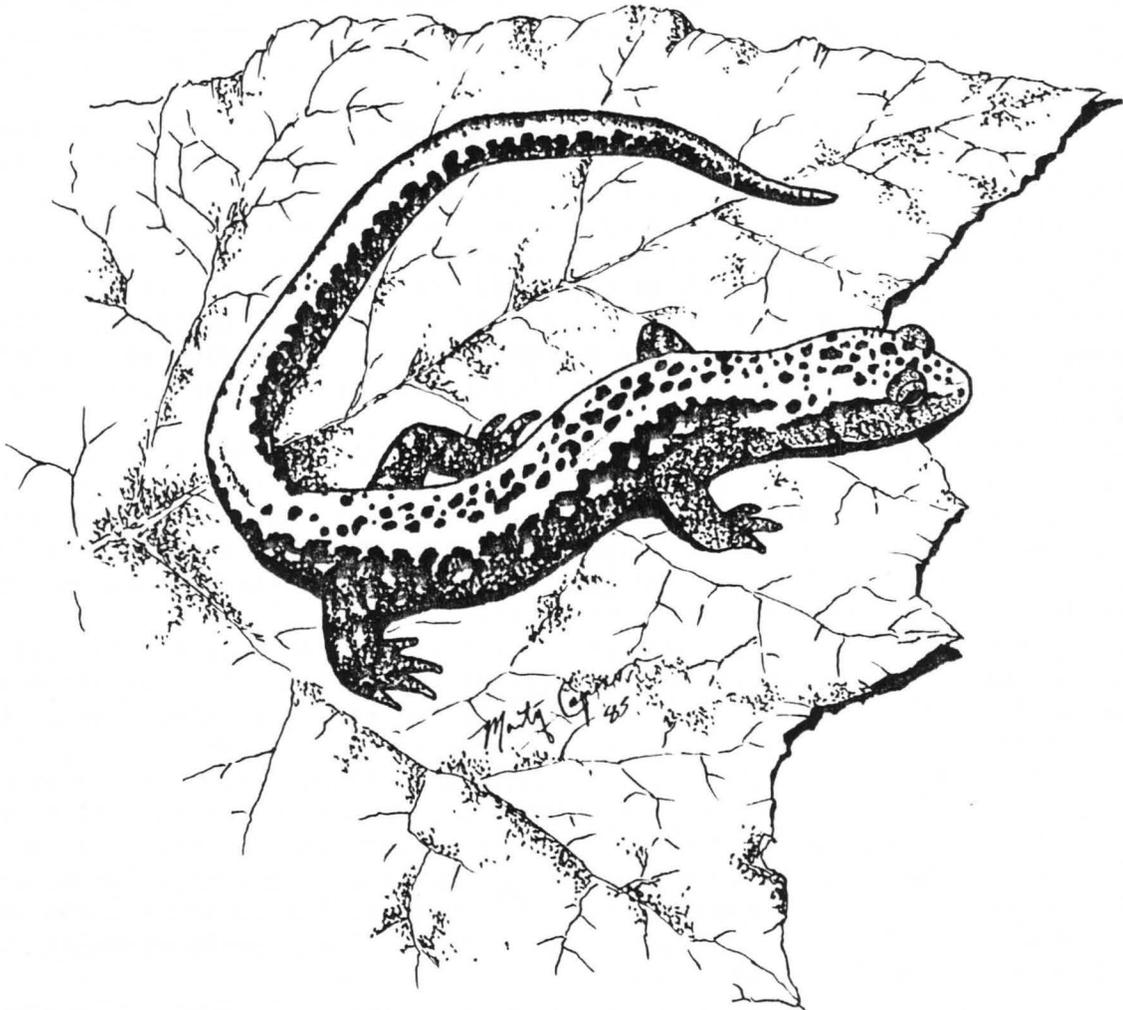
surely was sufficient to ward off any bite.

Some found Mr. Mowrer's statements wanting, especially after seeing snakes rise up out of the grass, hoods flaring. People here had been to the movies. They knew what cobras looked like. And the remains of the dead snakes--or what was left of them after Springfield residents dispatched them--showed that they were cobras.

The "cobra threat" went on into the fall. Eventually 11 snakes were tracked down. Hoes flashed, shovels thwacked, guns fired and tires crunched. The last snake was caught alive and sent out to the Dickerson Zoo. There it died two months later, probably of residual fright brought on by living briefly in Springfield.

And Mr. Mowrer? He moved to north Missouri and went into the antique business.

--Kansas City Times



KHS 1985 Field Trip to Kirwin Reservoir

The spring KHS Field Trip was held in the northwestern part of the state this year from 17-19 May 1985. The base camp was set up at the primitive (very much so) Kiln Camping Area at Kirwin Reservoir in Phillips County, Kansas. Those attending then travelled to several other areas in Norton, Phillips, and Smith counties in search of critters.

The field trip was attended by a rather small number of KHS members this year. However, they were a very hardy and dedicated group with lots of enthusiasm! They represented such major Kansas towns as Lawrence, Wichita, Eudora, Emporia, and Caldwell. It took many hours of driving to reach Kirwin from these areas, but when they all arrived they knew it was going to be a great weekend.

A total of 19 species of amphibians and reptiles were either collected or observed by those attending. Collecting by the group was also done for fish in the North Fork of the Solomon River in Norton County. Several species of fish were collected during this adventure including a number of colorful orangethroat darters. Mule deer, white-tailed deer, turkey, and many other birds and mammals of interest were among the other life forms observed.

The list of amphibians and reptiles discovered during the spring field trip, as well as those collected or observed by various participants while en route to or from Kirwin included the following species:

Plains leopard frog, Rana blairi  
Woodhouse's toad, Bufo woodhouseii  
Plains narrowmouth toad, Gastrophryne olivacea  
Blanchard's cricket frog, Acris crepitans blanchardi  
Western chorus frog, Pseudacris triseriata triseriata

Western painted turtle, Chrysemys picta belli  
Yellow mud turtle, Kinosternon flavescens flavescens  
Ornate box turtle, Terrapene ornata ornata

Prairie-lined racerunner, Cnemidophorus sexlineatus viridis  
Texas horned lizard, Phrynosoma cornutum  
Eastern fence lizard, Sceloporus undulatus  
Great Plains skink, Eumeces obsoletus  
Eastern collared lizard, Crotaphytus collaris collaris

Prairie ringneck snake, Diadophis punctatus arnyi  
Plains blackhead snake, Tantilla nigriceps nigriceps  
Eastern yellowbelly racer, Coluber constrictor flaviventris  
Bullsnake, Pituophis melanoleucus sayi  
Great Plains rat snake, Elaphe guttata emoryi  
Central plains milk snake, Lampropeltis triangulum

Several of the animals collected proved to be new county records. One of the blackhead snakes was not only a county record, but a new maximum size record for the state.

Time was also spent photographing some of the critters. Many frames of Kodachrome were shot as the group fired away at such subjects as a bullsnake, an ornate box turtle, and a very colorful central plains milk snake. A number of photos were also taken of the unique High Plains habitat.

Those attending the May field trip departed for their long trip home knowing that few people ever really take the time as they had to enjoy the flora and fauna of northwestern Kansas. They experienced a beautiful weekend, and their only regret was that more KHS members had not attended and shared the field trip with them.

--Larry Miller  
524 North Osage Street  
Caldwell, Kansas 67022

Population Status of the Northern Spring Peeper (*Hyla crucifer crucifer*)  
in Cherokee County, Kansas

INTRODUCTION

The northern spring peeper (*Hyla crucifer crucifer*) has been recorded from Miami, Linn and Cherokee counties in Kansas. Gloyd, in 1932, found numerous specimens near an open marsh in Miami County from 21 April to 23 September. A single specimen from Linn County was taken near the Miami County line in 1936 (Collins, 1982a). Since those reports, no specimens have been collected from either of the counties and Collins (1982b) believes that these records came from populations no longer extant due to habitat destruction. Spring peepers have been consistently recorded from Cherokee County since 1977 (Rundquist and Collins, 1977; Collins, 1982a, 1982b; Ptacek, 1984). This study was conducted to determine the present status of the spring peeper in Cherokee County.

METHODS

Calling male spring peepers were censused during the chorusing seasons of 1984 and 1985 in Cherokee County, Kansas. Three surveys were made 30 March, 13 April, and 23 April 1984 and one survey was conducted on 23 March 1985. Ponds censused were chosen based upon the presence of calling spring peepers in 1982 recorded by Collins (1982b). The number of chorusing males was determined by voice count. Roads between ponds were driven slowly listening for calling males in an attempt to locate new sites. The call of the spring peeper can be heard up to 0.4 km away which facilitates their location by this method.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In 1984, the 30 March census recorded 34 calling male spring peepers from five ponds, the 13 April census recorded 28 calling males from three ponds, and the 23 April census recorded seven calling males from five ponds. No females were observed. Air temperatures were 8 C (30 March), 11 C (13 April), and 10 C (23 April) during the surveys. One new chorusing site was located.

The 23 March survey in 1985 recorded 143 calling male spring peepers from 10 ponds, two of these being previously undescribed localities. No females were observed. Air temperature was 13 C during this census.

Several factors may account for the low number of chorusing males in 1984. Temperature has been shown to be an important factor affecting nightly chorusing activity (Delzell, 1958; Gerhardt, 1973; Collins, 1975). Delzell found that temperatures below 13 C severely curtailed spring peeper choruses, and the number of calling males varied on different nights throughout the breeding season. The spring of 1984 was characteristically cool with temperatures not reaching 13 C at night until the end of the peeper chorusing season. Males were observed to sit silently at calling stations when the temperature dropped and many may have failed to call. Temperatures during the 1985 spring were higher and allowed maximum numbers of calling males to be recorded. Although voice count is not an accurate measure of population size, since it does not record females or silent males, it is the most feasible method and does give an index of population numbers. Also a higher number of calling males may indicate more breeding males (silent males will not attract mates) and possibly a more successful year in terms of offspring produced.

Results of the two year census show that the spring peeper is well-established in Cherokee County. While the population is not large, the presence of calling males from year to year indicates a breeding population. With preservation of suitable habitat in Cherokee County, it is likely that the spring peeper will remain a permanent member of the Kansas herpetofauna.

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--Margaret Schulenberg Ptacek  
Lincoln University  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

### Wagon Train East

What you are about to read is a true story. It will recount how two previously sane people moved thirty-four assorted snakes (and one turtle), and an undetermined number of mice and rats, from California to Texas, in December, and lived to tell about it!

On the night of departure, 1 December 1984, the reptiles and rodents were the last to be loaded. Gary drove half a dozen temperate climate snakes, and all of the rodents, in the van. I drove the car, with the remaining snakes, since they required heat, which I could control better in the car.

All of the snakes were in bags and/or aquaria. Normally, they are caged individually, but that was impractical for the trip, so most were sharing space with one or more of the same species. This was quite interesting, since they weren't used to the close proximity of other snakes, and since it was the start of breeding season for boas and pythons (the bulk of the collection)! Normally quiescent specimens became quite active, and there was a great deal of agitation at first. Absolutely no very small snakes were put in with much larger ones, and species were not mixed.

I might note, at this point, that long before we moved I checked with James B. Murphy of the Dallas Zoo, about state laws. We also checked on local (Amarillo) ordinances before we made any plans to take any of our snakes with us. You may think us crazy for taking mice and rats, but we had good reason: Gary had checked, and most of the pet stores in Amarillo didn't carry them at all, and one that did was selling them at \$4.99 per mouse and \$6.99 per rat!!! You don't have to be a financial analyst to figure out that we needed to take our own breeding stock and feeders.

We stopped for the first night near Bakersfield, to visit family and friends. Immediately, the snakes (all of 'em) were taken inside to warmer climes (a real thrill for my mother-in-law). We set up an electric space heater to insure needed warmth for the boids, and turned in.

The next morning, all rodents were given feed and water, and all animals were put back in the vehicles. We made a couple more farewell

stops during the day, and then began our serious journey eastward. We had a total of 1,300 miles to travel, and a specific time of arrival to meet, so we wasted no time.

Because of the rather unusual baggage we were carrying, and the reaction of most people to it, we chose a rather surreptitious game plan. We pulled into the motel very late (so as to have darkness on our side) and asked for a remote room at ground level (no stairs, please!). Then, we'd park as close as possible to our room, and do the world's fastest unloading job! The snakes and heater were brought in and set up. The rodents remained in the van, and water bottles were placed in the cages for over night. Then we'd crash for a few hours of sweltering sleep (85 F may be great for snakes, but not so comfortable for their keepers!).

We were up before daylight so that we could reload before most people were out and about, and curious. We grabbed some breakfast, and were off again. The van has no side windows, so it's cargo was protected from gawkers at gas stations and such. My car wasn't nearly so well protected, so all of the cages were covered with blankets, towels and jackets, thrown in a haphazard manner to resemble "heaps" and not "covered up somethings." I guess it worked.

Our third night was spent in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Again, we brought in the snakes, and fed and watered the rodents. Not knowing how long it would take to get into Amarillo (maps only allow you an educated guess), we got up extra early on the 4th day. Good thing, too! It had started to snow, and wanting no part of bad weather, we made a beeline right out of there. The next seven hours were a race against the weather, which we barely won. We arrived in Amarillo at 12:30 PM on 4 December, just as it was starting to snow.

Fortunately, we were able to take possession of our new house right away. By 2:30 PM we, and all of the critters, were in and settled. Phew! I wondered if the animals felt as relieved as we did that they didn't have to be moved any more.

We watched all of the snakes carefully for the first couple of weeks. We never saw any unusual behavior which we could attribute to stress. Two and a half months later, all the snakes were feeding and shedding with their normal regularity.

So, I guess the moral of the story is this: If you don't mind riding in a very warm car, and sleeping in a very warm room, you can safely move tropical snakes in winter weather, without the use of hot water bottles and thermal food chests. Try to maintain temperatures as even as possible, and keep jostling to a minimum. After the move, return the snakes to their pre-move cage status, and keep a close watch for signs of illness.

We made it, so anyone can!

--Karen Schroeder  
Amarillo, Texas

## The Quest for Kansas Snappers

After Kelly Irwin's monumental attempt to secure more voucher specimens of the alligator snapping turtle (Macroclemys temminckii) from Kansas last summer, an effort that I was fortunate enough to be a part of, the dust may appear to have settled on the case once and for all. No grant-funded expeditions ply the rivers of the southeastern portion of Kansas, checking traps and limb lines, searching gravel shoals and scrutinizing the surface of placid streams from bridges overhead. The great turtles, if in fact, they are still there, stalk their prey and surface for air unmolested. Time, immeasurably slow, rolls on like the river in their lives.

Yet, a few of us still watch and listen for the clues that may give us a break in the case. Work has prevented me from spending much time on the rivers this summer, but each time I chance across a bridge on the Arkansas or Walnut or Neosho, I stop and look below, hoping... I stop in at bait shops and look through the photos of recent catches and talk to the catfishermen--the ones most likely to succeed at hooking a Macroclemys if anyone will. It is a search that requires unbearable patience.

I will not attempt to cover the ground that Kelly has done so well in his report to the Kansas Fish and Game Commission, particularly the literature search and all of the previous accounts of this species from our state, most of which date back to the turn of the century. Instead, I will try to explain some of the difficulties in securing such a creature.

I am inclined to believe that alligator snappers were never particularly common within our state in historic times. However, they did and probably do still exist here in small numbers that represent individuals traveling upstream from deeper in Macroclemys country during the course of their long lives. In conjunction with this, dams built along the major water courses of southeast Kansas may have seriously impeded this movement. Kaw dam, on the Arkansas River, just south of the Kansas-Oklahoma border is a prime example. Also, due to various agricultural and political exploits, the Arkansas River is dying. Irrigation in western Kansas, withholding of water along this stream in Colorado, and other factors have caused the average depth of this river to drop by several feet in the past twenty years. During the early 1970's when I observed several of these turtles in the river at Oxford, the river still ran four to six feet deep in many places and the Kaw dam was not yet there to stop an upstream migration from Oklahoma. Observations of this species in captivity have shown that they are extremely susceptible to desiccation and that even relatively short periods out of the water may prove fatal to them. With average summer depths along the lower Arkansas River running at one to three feet in most places, it is little wonder we have seen so few of the turtles recently.

Harder to explain is the absence of recent specimens from along the Neosho or Verdigris rivers in southeast Kansas. In Louisiana and Arkansas, these creatures are not infrequently caught on trotlines and limb lines set for catfish. These catches make local news if the turtles are large, as in a 1983 newspaper article I obtained from a lake in eastern Texas. Two snappers are pictured in the photos, and they weigh 56 pounds and 90 pounds. The rivers of eastern Kansas, particularly the Neosho, are as heavily fished as any by experienced, hard-core catfishermen. Why have they not snagged at least one Macroclemys?

I have talked with veteran anglers along the Neosho who have fished this stream day in and day out for nearly sixty years, anglers who have taken record sized catfish and yet they have taken nary a single alligator snapping turtle. These people seem capable of distinguishing the massive "loggerheads" from other species, but they just haven't seen them in Kansas. The collective experience of a life time spent running trotlines on the Neosho stacks up pretty high against a four-week search spread out over several different waterways.

Finally, there is the problem presented by the turtles themselves. Adults are massive, tremendous animals that few people not personally acquainted with them can visualize. A 200-pound example in the collection of Max Nickerson at Eldon, Missouri, comes to mind. I visited this specimen recently and attempted to move the creature so that photos could be taken of it. It was like moving a small car, without wheels. It's head is over ten inches wide and it is fantastically strong. If I spotted one in the wild, in six feet of water say, what could I do? Drown trying to lift it ashore? Or maybe get maimed in the process? Even a fifty-pounder is a difficult animal to handle under prime conditions! Try it on a slippery river bank, in six feet of water, with submerged logs! It is a task for the reckless, the adventuresome, and/or the foolhardy.

I believe that further, serious attempts to secure alligator snapping turtles from our state should be undertaken, including scuba diving efforts. That may be asking for trouble, searching for one hundred-pound, foul-tempered reptiles on their own turf, but I feel it may be a sound approach. Divers in Arkansas sometimes see these turtles, why not in Kansas? Also, efforts to trap them should be concentrated below old dams where these animals may have ended up on their upstream journeys...as Irwin suggested. I firmly believe that someone will find further examples of this rare creature from Kansas waters, sooner or later, but how or where or when, I cannot say.

I will close this idle speculation with a hitherto unpublished account of an alligator snapper captured in Kansas. It occurred in 1968 in Sumner County Kansas along the Arkansas River. Two low-water dams were constructed on the river just north of Oxford in the 1870's to provide enough water to fill a mill-race (a narrow, swift canal) that powered a grist mill just north of the town. The mill and the dams are still there, though in considerable disrepair. All were operational until 1974 when water levels fell too low to continue running the turbines in the mill. Periodically, gates were opened on the dams so that the mill race, two miles long and eight feet deep, could be totally drained for cleaning and repairing of the mill works. This occurred two or three times a year and was always greeted by local youths, myself included, as a time to follow the course and literally pick up hundreds of pounds of stranded fish.

Well, in the summer of 1968, the Lock brothers of rural Oxford were following the mill race, gathering up fish, when they found a huge snapping turtle. It took the four of them, ages 8 through 19, to get it into the wagon they had dragged along to put fish in. Tony Lock still recalls that it had a crack in the carapace as if someone had recently tried to kill it, or perhaps it had been caught in the mill works. In any case, they pulled the reptile home to their farm to show their parents and to weigh it.

It tipped a grain scale at 98 pounds and died by evening, whereupon the Lock's parents returned and ordered them to return the dreadful

thing to the river, which they did. And yes, what would seem to be another alligator snapping turtle slipped out of the grasp of science and into oblivion.

So, now I sit and wait and answer a hundred calls each summer from people with huge alligator snappers they have caught that turn out to be only medium sized common snappers. The mill race is dry now, constantly, and so perhaps the most ideal way of ever seeing a Macrolemys is gone now. Yet, somewhere in the murky green waters of some southeastern Kansas stream, I know a pair of those beady little eyes stare up toward the surface and a cloud of mud and debris roils the water with each ponderous movement and one of the world's largest freshwater turtles passes another day...alive and well.

--Marty Capron  
Box 542  
Oxford, Kansas 67119

Summertime in Emporia--A Short Melodrama in 10 Acts

Prologue

Some years ago a neighbor proudly announced that he had saved the lives of our children by killing a rattlesnake on our driveway. We found the mutilated corpse of the 9" lined snake in the garbage. More recently, I answered a knock on the door one Saturday morning, still wearing my jammies, to be informed by the police officer that someone had complained that we were raising snakes and releasing them in the yard. Later we learned that that neighbor, for fear of snakes, would not leave her house unless she could run directly from the house to a waiting car. Perhaps her peace of mind had not been helped by the picture on the front page of the Emporia Gazette earlier that week showing someone in his front yard exercising his boa, and the second page having an identified photo of my daughter with a 5-foot black rat snake peacefully perched on her head.

This spring, Emporia's excitement between murder trials was provided by another snake story. The Gazette carried a front page photo of three beaming boys proudly displaying a boa constrictor they had found and dutifully killed on the banks of the Cottonwood River. In the furor that followed, so high were the emotions about why the snake was loose on the Cottonwood, that on one seemed to wonder why three children were loose on the Cottonwood.

The incident brought out a wonderful variety of reactions, as can be seen in the following articles and letters to the editors. Perhaps it has given our neighbors the realization that things could be worse. In our own yard each year our kids catch an average of 20 snakes which are whisked off to the safety of the country, but so far we have found no boa constrictors. Maybe there is hope though.

--Olin Karch  
Emporia, Kansas

The Gazette, 26 June 1985

Youths Kill Boa Constrictor in Skirmish on Riverbank

A headline splashed across the cover of a tabloid might read: "Giant Snake Attacks Emporia Youths." In reality, it was a boa constrictor in the Cottonwood River.

The adventure started Tuesday afternoon when three boys--Jamie Elliot, 13, Ronald Swartz, 14, and Jason Preeo, 12--decided to go rafting on the Cottonwood River. As the boys were preparing to enter the water near Peter Pan Park, the snake apparently started swimming towards them.

Jamie saw it first, Ronald said. And the snake kept coming towards Jamie and "chased" him up the bank.

"He (Ronnie) said, 'Neato, look at the snake,'" Jamie said, "and I was screaming my head off."

According to the boys, the snake started to go into a hole in the bank and they began hitting its body with their home-made paddles. The snake then turned around and the boys killed it by beating its head.

The boys said a local game warden identified the snake, which measured just over six feet long, as a boa constrictor.

The boa constrictor traditionally is found in Central and South America, said David Traylor, community services director for Emporia. "It is a snake commonly kept by hobbyists or people keeping one as a pet. it is generally easy to care for."

He said the snake had either escaped from its owner or had been left to fend for itself. He said that his office had not had any calls about a missing pet snake.

The boa constrictor apparently is not the one taken from the Sedgwick County Zoo earlier this year. Mr. Traylor said that on two occasions several reptiles, including a boa constrictor, were taken. He said the zoo is looking for any leads and anyone with any information should call the zoo.

A snake of this type could survive "until cold weather," said Mr. Traylor. "They don't hibernate like the snakes in this (climate) zone do." Even some summer nights or hail storms can be pretty hard on these snakes.

Rodents and small birds in the area would have provided enough "suitable food" for the boa.

[Photo with the article shows the three boys holding the deceased reptile. Photo measures 7x8 inches.]

The Gazette, 27 June 1985

Not Funny...Dead Snake's Owner Says Article Too Light-Hearted

An article in The Gazette Wednesday about a six-foot boa constrictor killed near the Cottonwood River was a little light-hearted, the snake's owner said Thursday. Christopher Hanshew, Rt. 4, said that he doubted any other dead pet would have gotten its picture in The Gazette.

Mr. Hanshew said that he had had the snake for 10 years--since he

was seven years old--and that the snake had never hurt anyone. Mr. Hanshew said that apparently the snake escaped Sunday afternoon when he left it outside for about ten minutes.

"We don't think that the automatic thing to do was to kill the snake," said Paul Hanshew, Christopher's father. "Unfortunately, they never thought about it. It really was no threat to them."

The article "made heroes out of the people who killed an animal," Paul Hanshew said. "If it had been any other animal, the humane society would have been called."

Gordon Arb, whose son owns a six-foot boa constrictor like the one killed Monday, said that he thought that the story encouraged people to kill snakes.

"It didn't mention the tragedy of the snake being killed," he said. "The snake was probably going toward the children because he was familiar with them."

Mr. Arb said that his son purchased their boa constrictor in January and that it had never caused a problem.

"I want readers to see the other side of the story," Mr. Arb said. He said that there are a variety of snakes in the area that make good pets but advised caution when approaching them.

He said the snakes, especially boa constrictors, are easy to take care of and eat one rat each week.

[Photo with the article shows Mr. Arb holding a pet boa constrictor. Photo measures 8x8 inches.]

### THREE

The Gazette, 29-30 June 1985

#### Snakes Not Enemies

Editor of The Gazette, Sir: Of course you are bound to report the news of our area. But I really question whether the killing of a relatively harmless snake, a boa, is news. But if animals are news, then you have enough news on our county roads to keep all your reporters busy.

The great injustice that your story may cause is the fostering of the opinion that people like these three children are "great hunters" just because they can kill a snake. Will these children then be encouraged to go on to the other game like puppies, cats, sheep...people?

Hey, folks, it's time to put a stop to the killing of snakes just because they are there. This world is their home too. We can co-exist.

Respectfully, James W. Hill, 1107 Washington St.

### FOUR

The Gazette, 1 July 1985

#### Snake Was Harmless

Editor of The Gazette, Sir: I was honestly stunned when I glanced at page three of Wednesday's Gazette. There I saw a grizzly rendition

of my childhood friend, proudly displayed and followed by a description of his death. My pet boa constrictor had been beaten to death by three frightened youths.

I received "Brutus" when I was seven years old, and I have had him for most of my life. When he escaped, due to my carelessness, I never imagined that this would happen to him. I have no one to blame except myself.

The only qualm I possess is the way the account was portrayed. I know for a fact that Brutus would never hurt anyone--he was that harmless. Although I understand that many people have an inherent fear of snakes, I resent the light-hearted, hero-style coverage that the story was given. I really loved him and I doubt if the killing of a large dog or any other pet would bring such a reaction from the press.

Respectfully, Chris Hanshew, Rt. 4.

#### FIVE

The Gazette, 8 July 1985

#### Snake Not "Harmless"

Editor of The Gazette, Sir: In regards to the snake that my son and two other boys killed on the river Tuesday--I am wondering if Mr. Arb and Mr. Hanshew think that when a person has a six-foot snake slithering through the water at them, they should perhaps stop and open its mouth to see it's been defanged or maybe ask it if it's friendly or not.

This snake was not familiar with these boys. And I guess they just didn't see it wagging its tail at them in a friendly manner. And when it opened its big mouth that could swallow a whole rat, they thought it might strike, not recognizing it as the big grin it really was.

Mr. Hanshew has compared his snake to a harmless family dog. I don't know of any breed of dog whose nature it is to bite anyone who steps within its distance. There are many breeds of snakes not only dangerous but deadly.

We do have a leash law here in Emporia that requires any domestic animal to be under the owner's control and now allowed to roam at large within the city limits. This did happen within the city limits so it looks like this owner is lucky he hasn't as yet been charged. This snake had been missing for two days yet it wasn't reported. I wonder what the reaction of the community would have been to know a six-foot boa was running around loose somewhere. Yet he never came forward till after it had been reported. I wonder if he would have been so quick to claim ownership if someone had gotten hurt or drowned trying to get away from that thing?

The Bible tells us what a low vile thing the snake is and as far as my husband and I are concerned the safest snake is a dead one. We have cautioned our son many times as he fished and swims up and down the river to beware of snakes...

Respectfully, Mr. and Mrs. Ron Swartz, 627 Lawrence St.

#### SIX

The Gazette, 11 July 1985

## Objects to Snake Story

Editor of The Gazette, Sir: I feel an obligation to file my reaction to Wednesday's coverage of the "Dragon" slaying in Peter Pan Park. Although I'm sure the young men involved know that it was a necessary or fair "fight," kids will be kids, and they will react as they have been taught by the adults around them.

I have known the owner and the snake since they were both very young. Brutus was not a vicious serpent and Chris has never been an irresponsible or negligent owner. I have a 8-year-old 6 1/2 foot boa and will be the first to say that he is about as responsive and intelligent as a Styrofoam cup. Even so, he is a fascinating pet and sometimes I think he actually enjoys my company. Those of you who would question my sanity please realize I can't stand or understand poodles and I have my own doubts about their owners. Live and let live.

I am highly disappointed with The Gazette. I know that there was no malice intended by anyone concerned. However, in the past I have made numerous visits to grade schools with my boa and a Burmese python I once maintained in an attempt to improve their bad image. Now all of those kids have seen that killing someone's expensive pet is a socially acceptable (and quick) way to get media coverage. Thanks so much.

Snakes are not bright enough to play an attack. They will defend themselves if cornered but will flee if give the chance. More people die from bee and wasp stings in the U.S. than from snake bites. So please, stock up on wasp spray and leave the snakes alone. Nobody's asking anyone to like snakes--just recognize their right to exist (in one piece).

As for The Emporia Gazette, what's next? Pictures of kittens in burlap bags and road-killed puppies on the front page? Sensitivity seems to be almost as much a forgotten artform as the "editorial insult."

Respectfully, Geoff Creswell, 702 State St.

SEVEN

The Gazette, July 1985

### The Real Danger

The killing of a boa constrictor last month near the Cottonwood River continues to generate a trickle of telephone calls and letters to the editor. Some defended the boys who killed the snake, but most of those who called or wrote wanted to protest both the killing and the article and photograph published in The Gazette the next day.

The reader's reactions are not surprising; there seems to be no zone of emotional neutrality where snakes are concerned.

It is, nevertheless, futile to debate whether the boys' actions were right or wrong. There probably cannot be mutual understanding between people who hate or fear snakes and those of us who think the slinky creatures are charming. Our respective reactions were almost predictable.

What could not be predicted, however, was the distressing lack of concern for the safety of the youngsters. A nearly-fatal accident should have been fresh in the minds of protestors on both sides.

Just one week before the boa incident, two waterworks employees rescued an 18-year-old boy from drowning when his home-made raft capsized near the Neosho River dam in northwest Emporia. The rescue delighted townspeople, and the waterworks employees will be nominated for a water-safety award. They deserve one.

But--was anyone concerned that three boys, ranging in age from 11 to 13 years, were swimming and floating in the rain-swollen Cottonwood River when they found the boa and killed it with a homemade oar?

The snake was not the only danger the boys faced that day.--R.B.

#### EIGHT

The Gazette, 17 July 1985

#### Fed Up

Editor of The Gazette, Sir: I sincerely hope the snake had a fine funeral.

Now it is time for us old folks to get together and do a little hell-raising about our livelihood. The politicians do not hesitate to pass foreign aid. They give away enough money to foreign aid to support S.S.A., and Medicare three or four times, when it comes time to give themselves a big raise, they don't kick that question around very long. There isn't one of them that does not own a farm, ranch or oil well, or will when they leave office.

When budget-cutting time comes, the first place seems to stand out and they ask each other "What are we going to do with the old ones?" They are living too long, heaven forbid. Look what cost-of-living is going to cost the people. They are all enrolled in Medicare, let us cut that down.

We are not living too long, but we have let those there stay too long. We will have to get up, dig out our canes and our wheelchairs and vote. In the meantime, write to the ones you elected. If you can not write, call. If you cannot do either, have some help... They are going to eventually strip us from everything, and do not care. I believe this [letter to the editor] is much more important than the snake story. Respectfully, Homer D. Cole, Broadview Towers.

#### NINE

The Gazette, 18 July 1985

Editor of The Gazette, Sir: I am in agreement with many other people since the so-called "Dragon" slaying. The only good...snake is a dead one!

As for this expensive pet, why didn't the owner report the snake to the lost and found?

Poodles are expensive pets also, and the owners would want everyone to be on the lookout for their beloved pet. (Not like some pet owners we've heard of lately!)

I think all of the pet snakes can have a right to exist if the owners just use their own brains, and not those of the snakes, and keep them where they belong!

The Gazette was letting the public know (that) people with those

kinds of pets don't know how to report them missing!

Don't put The Gazette or the boys down. It wasn't the snake's fault it got killed, it was the owner's!

Respectfully, Becky Sill, Allen.

TEN

The Gazette, 18 July 1985

Enough!

Wednesday morning, four letters came to The Gazette. They were in identical envelopes and written on identical paper but were from four different people. All the letters were about the dead snake.

So, now people are forming clubs to write dead-snake letters!

We're sorry, but we just can't take any more of this. The stupid snake was killed three weeks ago and has been mourned more than most people. Stories, as well as snakes, can be beaten to death.

We have a new rule: No more letters about this particular dead snake will be printed in The Gazette (except for those letters that had already been set in type before Wednesday morning).

People who feel compelled to write odes to dead snakes or to libel dead snakes are welcome to buy ads. The business would be welcome.

More letters are not welcome!

In fairness to Wednesday's four correspondents, we will give them a little space here:

William Howard of Rt. 2, Reading, thought that the owner should have watched his snake better and that snakes should be outlawed as pets.

Connie Montgomery of Rt. 4 wrote that she thought the boys who killed the snake reacted normally to a frightening situation. She also thought The Gazette was right to run the story because "It was unusual and interesting..."

Anthony Ortiz of Topeka said that he would have killed the snake if he had been there.

The last word goes to Rose Zorn, Rt. 1, Olpe. She thought that the boys who killed the snake were probably enjoying their notoriety and suggested that someone make them even more famous by writing a song titled "Snake Busters".

Subject closed.--P.K.

#### A FINAL WORD FROM THE EDITOR

The KHS treasury needs you. Some of you have not even paid your 1985 dues (shame, shame). As for everybody else, we hope to see you in Topeka for the 12th annual meeting and auction, which will feature all sorts of stuff you really want and need.

Thanks for help with assembly, labeling, stamping, and mailing of the last issue go to Sofia Ana Simmons and Ligia Simmons.