

KANSAS HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER NO. 86

NOVEMBER 1991

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SSAR REGIONAL SOCIETY LIAISON COMMITTEE 1992 REGIONAL SOCIETIES CONFERENCE AND CALL FOR PAPERS

At the 1992 annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles at El Paso, Texas, the Regional Society Liaison Committee will be sponsoring a one-day conference on "Federal and State Wildlife Laws and Regulations and How They Affect Regional Herpetological Societies". At this time, the committee is issuing a call for papers for anyone wishing to speak on this topic. Topics addressed can be on any subject pertaining to the conference title and can be as formal or informal as the speaker desires. Papers will be limited to twenty (20) minutes in length. Complete audiovisual services will be available. Those wishing to present a paper should send title and a *brief* abstract no later than 15 December 1991 to: Eric M Rundquist, Department of Herpetology, Sedgwick County Zoo, 5555 Zoo Boulevard, Wichita, Kansas, 67212; FAX (316)942-3781. Please let him know if you have any audiovisual needs and detail same. He will contact you after the conference schedule is established to notify you of the date, place, and time for your paper.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

The University Press of Kansas announces the publication of a book entitled *Kansas Wildlife* by Joseph T. Collins, Suzanne L. Collins, Bob Gress, and Gerald L. Wiens. The book is clothbound, 8 1/2 by 11 inches, 128 pages in length, and contains 130 full-color photographs which cover a sampling of a number of the state's wildlife species. Cost is \$19.95 plus \$5.50 postage and handling for the first book, 50¢ each additional book. Kansas residents add 5.25% sales tax. Order from: University Press of Kansas, 2501 West 15th Street, Lawrence, Kansas, 66049-3904.

The Greater Cincinnati Herpetological Society announces the publication entitled *Contributions in Herpetology*, dedicated to Hobart M. Smith and Roger Conant in honor of their life-long contributions to the herpetological profession. Papers by a variety of authors cover such subjects as captive husbandry, behavior, reptile zoonoses, venom studies, and distributional studies. The volume is approximately 125 pages long and includes color and black-and-white photos, tables, and an index of scientific names. Cost is \$22.00. Make checks payable to: Greater

Cincinnati Herpetological Society (GCHS) and send orders to: Greater Cincinnati Herpetological Society, c/o Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, 1720 Gilbert Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45202.

NEW GRANTS IN HERPETOLOGY

The Chicago Herpetological Society (CHS) announces the establishment of a new program to provide financial aid for herpetological research, education, and conservation. Grants not to exceed \$500 will be awarded in the following categories: Herpetology in Illinois, Graduate Student Research, Undergraduate (including high school) Research, Field Studies, Conservation, Captive Management, Husbandry, and Propagation, and a miscellaneous category for proposals that do not fit the foregoing categories. Applicants must be dues paying member of CHS. Recipients of SSAR grants will be ineligible in the same calendar year. Grant recipients will be required to submit results of their subsidized work. For further information on this program contact: Stephen L. Barten, D.V.M., CHS Herpetological Grants, Vernon Hills Animal Hospital, 1260 Butterfield Road, Mundelein, Illinois, 60060, phone (708)367-4070, FAX (708)367-0374.

TIMBER RATTLESNAKE SYMPOSIUM

The Massachusetts Audubon Society is planning a one-day symposium on the **Status and Conservation of the Timber Rattlesnake in the Northeast** on 7 December 1991 at a location to be announced. The symposium will feature status reports on populations, snake/human interaction discussion, practical methods for conserving rattlesnakes, and other aspects of timber rattlesnake biology. Cost will be around \$15/person. Those wishing further information on this symposium should contact Thomas F. Tynning, Massachusetts Audubon Society, 350 Williams Street, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 01201; phone (413)443-9201.

TURTLE SYMPOSIUM

The New York Turtle and Tortoise Society announces that it will be holding its second **International Symposium on Turtles & Tortoises** during August 1992. The topic will be Conservation and Management. The three-day event will include lectures and workshops by turtle

scientists, conservationists, zoo personnel, and veterinarians. For further information on this symposium contact The New York Turtle and Tortoise Society, 163 Amsterdam Avenue, Suite 503, New York, New York, 10023 or call (212)459-4803.

1992 ASIAN HERPETOLOGICAL MEETING

The Asiatic Herpetological Society, Chinese Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, China Amphibian, Reptile Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the Third Sino-Japanese Herpetological Symposium will hold a joint meeting at Huangshan City (formerly Tunxi), Anhui Province, China from 15-20 July 1992. Topics to be covered include the biology and conservation of Asian turtles and tortoises, biology and conservation of giant salamanders (*Andrias*), biology and conservation of the Chinese Alligator, herpetological studies of the Himalayas and adjacent regions, herpetological studies of arid central Asia, herpetological studies of Asian islands, tropical Asian herpetological studies, biology and conservation of Asian amphibians and reptiles in general, and venomous snakes and snakebite treatment in Asia. Those interested in considerably expanding their herpetological horizons should contact Dr. Theodore J. Papenfuss, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, California, 94720 for additional information and registration forms.

IUCN SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION ESTABLISHES DECLINING AMPHIBIAN POPULATIONS PROGRAMS

During the past several years, there has been increasing public concern for the habitat destruction and species extinctions being measured on a global scale. One facet of these universal phenomena is exemplified by reports of biologists of a widespread decline in amphibian populations. Although the amphibian declines are not consistently noted at all locations, nor among all species, their magnitude is undeniable. The significance of these reports is accentuated by certain characteristics of amphibians (e.g. biphasic life cycle, permeable skin, etc.) that provoke a sensitivity of response to varying environmental conditions. Consequently, many species are considered to be early indicators of potentially drastic changes in ecosystems.

Following an international symposium convened by Dr. John W. Wright (Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History) at the annual joint meetings of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles and the Herpetologist's League, a clear consensus emerged as to the world-wide character of the problem and the need for immediate action. In response to this demand, the World

Conservation Union (IUCN), Species Survival Commission, has activated the Declining Amphibians Populations Task force with David B. Wake (University of California, Berkeley) as Chair. The focus of this program is to provide a global coordinating center for investigators and agencies concerned with documentation and determination of causes of the these declines. It will also identify priorities for research on indicator species, as well as to the status of species in critical habitats. An inherent component of these objectives will be the prescription of uniform protocols by which studies of different species and habitats can be compared.

Overseeing the activities of the Task Force will be a Board of Directors, having international representation, that will act within the fabric of the IUCN/SSC. This directorate is responsible for establishing policies, determining priorities, and raising funds necessary for the Task Force endeavors. A Coordinating Council will serve as the operational unit for the program. Participants on the Coordinating Council will include researchers, liaison officers of societies and agencies, and others, all of whom serve as communicators for the Task Force. Among its functions will be the collation of all available information, establishing a computerized data base, and setting up a global monitoring program with electronic input and access (these collectively represent what is popularly referred to as the "FROGLOG"). A newsletter will be issued at frequent intervals and distributed to all interested parties. Managed by a Coordinator with staff support, it is anticipated the Council will be situated in its new headquarters by mid-June, the location of which has not been finalized. James L. Vial, who will be departing the University of Tulsa, has been appointed as Coordinator.

The Coordinator will also work with the directorate to establish regional Working Groups of independent scientists and technical personnel. As one example, the Working Group for Costa Rica/Panama, recently convened by Dr. Jay M. Savage (University of Miami), has been organized with a scientific advisory committee, composed of consultants for the project and chaired by the principal investigator. A project coordinator will oversee the gathering, standardization and management of all data and is responsible for logistical operations among the several included study sites, each of which is in the charge of a site coordinator. This model should, of course, be modified as suited to the needs of a particular group or project. In addition to field activities, other Working Groups will formulate protocols and facilitate symposia or work shops.

The IUCN/SSC invites persons and organizations interested in the DAP program to correspond with the Task Force Coordinator. In the near future we hope to provide a full-time, full-service operation to all those involved with species conservation and biodiversity. We are immediately concerned with the establishment of a universal communi-

cations network and would appreciate any expression of interest on the part of persons who might volunteer service as a communicator. The interim address and telecommunications numbers are: James L. Vial, Coordinator; DAP Task Force; Species Survival Commission, IUCN; c/o Environmental Research Laboratory, Center for Analysis of Environmental Change, 200 Southwest 35th Street, Corvallis, Oregon, 97333.

MISSING GATOR

Geoff Davis, of the Pacific Northwest Herpetological Society, requests help in recovering a stolen American Alligator. The gator was taken from an exhibit at Seattle's Pacific Science Center on 22 September 1991. The animal is 2-3 years old and approximately three feet in total length. There is a reward of \$400 for the gator's safe return, no questions asked. If anyone has any information on the whereabouts of this animal they should contact Mr. Davis at (206)641-7231, the Pacific Science Center at (206)443-2001, or the Seattle Police Department at (206)684-5730.



KHS BUSINESS

CONDOLENCES

It is with great sadness that we learned of the untimely death in August of John Tollefson, sr., father of former KHS president John Tollefson. Those who knew John, sr. will miss his wit, charm, and zest for life and the KHS Executive Council expresses their sincere condolences to John and his family. Those wishing to do so may make a contribution to the John O. Tollefson Doctoral Student Teaching Fund. The address for the fund is School of Business, University of Kansas, Lawrence, 66045.

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING A SUCCESS

In spite of miserable weather (January in November) and a consequent low turnout of members, the eighteenth annual meeting of KHS was quite successful. Although the keynote speaker was unable to attend, nearly 50 hardy souls enjoyed the Saturday and Sunday paper sessions which included such topics as population assessments of southeast Kansas aquatic turtles, a tracking study of the only known Alligator Snapping Turtle in the state, confirmation of the Western Cottonmouth in Kansas, an update on Kansas wildlife regulations and how they affect herps and herpers, etc. Dr. David Edds of Emporia State University was elected KHS President-elect at the annual election of officers. Karen Toepfer of Hays will be assuming the duties of KHS Secretary-Treasurer beginning in 1991.

The highlight of the meeting, as usual, was the KHS Auction, conducted by Joe Collins. Altogether about \$560 was raised at the auction, an amazing figure given the few attendees. The KHS Executive council extends their sincere gratitude to all those who gave so generously, particularly to Tom Dillenbeck of Wichita who purchased the personalized copy of the new Conant and Collins Field Guide. This volume was signed by all three authors specifically for the Kansas Herpetological Society.

Once again, thanks to all those who attended, and for all those wienies who decided that it was just too nasty to drive (it wasn't), well, you missed a helluva good time.

—EMR

SEPTEMBER KHS TRIP TO LINN COUNTY ENJOYABLE AND SUCCESSFUL

Most of the dedicated KHS members who registered during the 27-29 September 1991 field trip to Linn County, Kansas agreed that finding fellow members was more

difficult than finding herps during the three-day event. However, with the aid of CB radio and much generous help from the people working at the lake marina, fifteen of those attempting to locate the KHS meeting were able to unite for a most successful herpetological adventure.

Two camps were set up Friday evening. One had a beautiful lake view, but was without modern restrooms and electricity. The other was in a more populated area of the campground, but it was only a few meters from excellent restrooms with hot and cold running water. It also provided electrical hookups for campers' use. The two camps were about a mile apart, and the campers kept in contact by CB radio.

Members formed a convoy Saturday and started exploring the area. During their explorations, they collected and/or observed a total of 20 herp species. They also saw a number of birds, mammals, insects, and spiders. The weather was perfect, and, as members watched turtles sunning on logs along a river's edge, it was an excellent time for telling stories of past adventures and just socializing.

Much of Saturday evening was spent around the campfire telling more stories and planning future excursions. A few people did some late evening collecting, but cool weather limited any major finds after sundown.

Sunday morning found most people around the more modern campsite. Sunday morning was also when some of the critters found the day before were photographed, and, when the herpetologists brought out the snakes, several other campers came closer to see what was going on. Most did not stay long after learning that the large snake being photographed was a Timber Rattlesnake.

Those attending this successful fall meeting were: Mark Van Doren, Curtis Schmidt, Karen Toepfer, and Russ Toepfer of Hays; Larry Miller and Jim Gubanyi of Topeka; John Trowbridge and Daniel Murrow of Kansas City, Shelley Skie, David Reber, Brian Hayward, and Keith Coleman of Lawrence; Barry Carpenter of Wellsville; Gary Cumro of Wichita; and Dan Carpenter of Belle Plaine.

Amphibians and reptiles observed or collected include the following species (total number of individuals following species):

American Toad	1
Blanchard's Cricket Frog	31
Leopard Frog (unk. sp.)	11
Bullfrog	3
Three-toed Box Turtle	3
Ornate Box Turtle	1

Western Painted Turtle	9
Red-eared Slider	6
Southern Coal Skink	1
Five-lined Skink	3
Western Worm Snake	5
Prairie Ringneck Snake	11
Eastern Yellowbelly Racer	1
Black Rat Snake	1
Prairie Kingsnake	1
Western Ribbon Snake	1
Red-sided Garter Snake	1
Northern Water Snake	1
Osage Copperhead	2
Timber Rattlesnake	1

—Larry Miller
 Science Department
 Topeka Collegiate School
 201 SE 59th Street
 Topeka, Kansas 66619

LETTER TO EDITOR

While visiting a friend here in Kansas, I read stories in your Newsletter in regard to your state reptile and the controversy in the town of Caldwell. It horrifies me that there are people in a small Kansas town who, for the fun of it, run over turtles or any form of God's living creature.

I am not a snake or turtle lover, but I do believe that there is a place for all animals and these animals should not be destroyed just because some people do not like them or because people think killing is fun. There must be some sick people in the town of Caldwell.

I really hope all members of the Kansas Herpetological Society let those sick people in Caldwell know just how nauseating their acts are to other people. I know that I plan to write them to let them know my feelings on the matter.

— Tara Trent
 Palo Alto, California

AMPHIBIAN CENSUS UPDATE

Although I wouldn't exactly call response to the Amphibian Census Form issued to KHS members earlier this year as being overwhelming, I have been pleased with the return so far. As you will note in this issue of the Newsletter, there are a number of articles relating to the problem of declining amphibian populations and there will be more in time. At this time, I want to remind all KHS members to please try to use these forms when you are out in the field and to return them to me. Disappearing amphibian populations is a very real problem and regional socie-

ties such as KHS can have an enormous impact in gathering the baseline and continuing information that is so critically needed. Jim Vial of the IUCN Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force has told me that he is very interested in the information we are gathering and the database that we are generating. This is the type of information that they do not have and desperately need and we will be working closely with him in sending that information when he gets settled in at Corvallis. In addition, this information will be available to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks for their use in making threatened and endangered species assessments, environmental impact assessments, mitigation judgements, and a number of other environmental quality assays. A number of other regional herpetological societies have expressed interest in this database and we have sent them copies of the program and information on how the information is gathered and collated. Once again, KHS is proving itself to be a trendsetter in the world of regional herp societies. Keep up the good work.

On that note, I want to personally thank those individuals who have taken the time and made the effort to get this program off on the right foot. In particular, thanks go to Jim Gubanyi, Alan Volkmann, Keith Coleman, and Kirk Mullen. You all have made significant contributions to a significant program and I look forward to your continued involvement.

A note of caution: please make sure to fill out these forms as completely as possible. There has been a problem with some sheets being turned in without any sort of record of the numbers of species involved. Although I can enter that information without numbers of individuals, such information has little long-term value other than being an historical record of some amphibian being found at a certain place. **Please** make note of the numbers of animals you are finding, even if it is only a guesstimate. Species are nice but numbers are *vital*.

— EMR

ANNUAL EDITOR'S THANKYOU

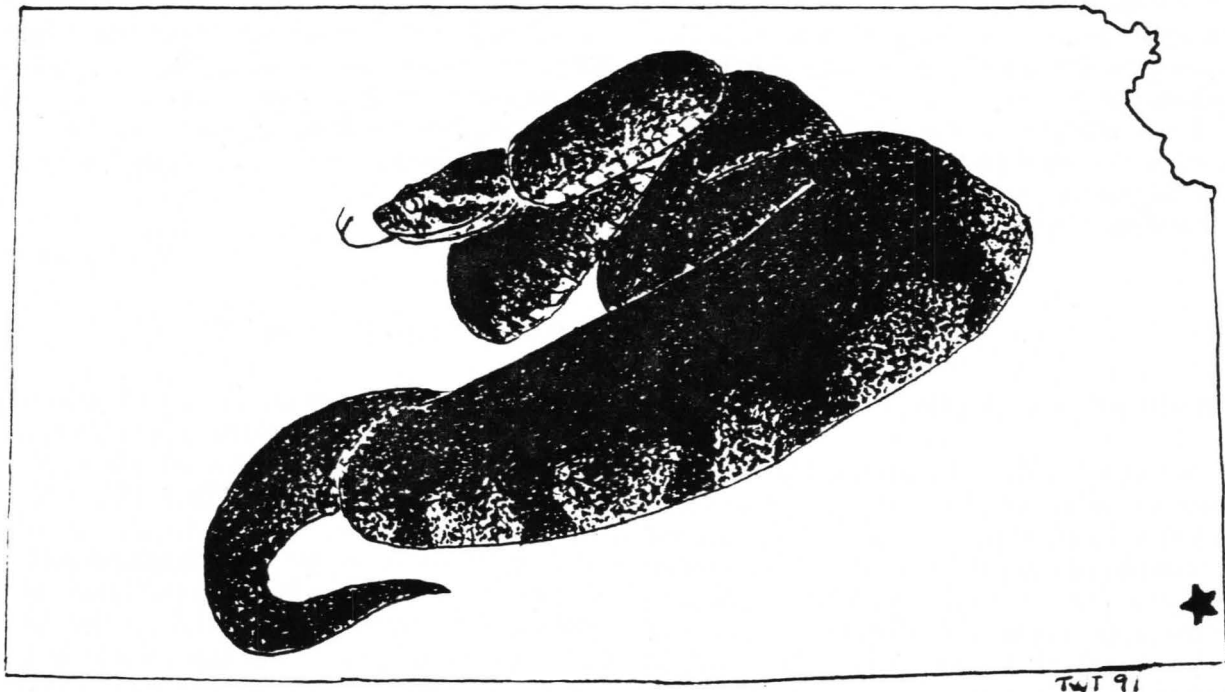
As always, there are number of people who deserve a large measure of credit for the production and success of this Newsletter and other Society publications. At the front of the line stand the KHS Newsletter Editorial Staff: Marty Capron, Joe Collins, and Jeff Whipple. Without these people, this Newsletter would not exist. In addition, all you sharp-eyed readers out there who have sent articles have my thanks. *News of the World* is an important feature of this publication and only the membership can provide the number and quality of articles submitted. Regular contributors include Suzanne Collins, Joe Collins, Jack Shumard, Dan Schupp, Larry Miller, Karen Toepfer, and Ralph

Black. I also wish to thank all those who have submitted original articles for publication. These papers have all been of consistent high quality and I look forward to your continued contributions.

Finally, we will be making a major step forward in publishing next year when Edward H. Taylor's Masters thesis, *The Lizards of Kansas*, is published by the Society. Thanks in particular go to Dr. Hobart M. Smith, who has been a source of inspiration and guidance to me and who has made a major contribution toward the success of this work. I also would like to thank Dr. Philip S. Humphrey of the Museum of Natural History at the University of Kansas and Dr. Kraig Adler of Cornell University for their contributions and advice.

I have one personal note of thanks to Steve Harper, Outdoor Editor for the *Wichita Eagle*. Although Steve has not submitted any articles as such to the Newsletter, many of the articles dealing with Kansas herps and the Society in *News of the World* have been penned by him and submitted by others. Steve deserves a thankyou from the Society for his efforts in promoting the interests of the Society and an understanding of the important role of amphibians and reptiles as a part of natural Kansas.

— EMR



KHS BRINGS YOU GREAT NEWS OF THE WORLD

COTTONMOUTH REARS ITS HEAD IN CHEROKEE COUNTY

Herpetologists call it *Agkistrodon piscivorus leucostoma*.

But to most folks in Missouri or Oklahoma, the Western Cottonmouth is just a bad case of the heebie-jeebies waiting to happen.

Kansans, on the other hand, have rested easy in the knowledge that water snakes are just that, water snakes. That is until September 14, when Shane Eckhardt of rural Cherokee County stepped out of his pickup truck near the Spring River and came face-to-face with Mr. Moccasin himself.

"We hunt and fish up and down that river all the time, have since we were kids," said Eckhardt, 32. "I pulled down there to go look at some possibilities for a deer stand.

"I stepped out of the truck, and he found me. I had parked right beside him. When I shut the truck door, he reared up about three feet away. I eased my gun out of the window and we had a chat about it, and I won."

Eckhardt said that most of the snakes he sees take off when a human approaches, but the Cottonmouth stood his ground.

"I threw him in the truck and headed down to my folks' house where we was having a birthday supper for my dad," he said. "We got to looking him over and then the stories started flying."

The dead snake appeared to confirm everyone's suspicions about Cottonmouths in Kansas. Old-timers began to recount tales of the encounters, and the word spread quickly about the snake.

Eckhardt called Harley McDaniel a Conservation Officer with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

"He was a little skeptical that I did have a Cottonmouth," Eckhardt said.

Eckhardt froze the snake, and McDaniel took it to Jim Triplett, a biology professor at Pittsburg State. Triplett verified it was a Cottonmouth and sent it to [KHS member] Joe Collins.

Collins ... is the editor of publications for the Museum of Natural History at the University of Kansas. He and two fellow herpetologists, [KHS members] Kelly Irwin of Kansas State and Travis Taggart from Fort Hays State, hustled to Cherokee County.

"We worked our buns off up and down the river trying to find another one," Collins said. "We found Copperheads and all kinds of other things, but we didn't find Cottonmouths."

Before Collins will confirm a species in his editions of *Amphibians and Reptiles [in] Kansas*, there must be two

specimens taken at two different times at two different places by two different people. Collins said the first Cottonmouth was taken from the Neosho River near Chetopa in 1937.

The Cottonmouth becomes the fifth species of venomous snake found in Kansas. It joins the Prairie, Timber, and Massasauga Rattlesnakes, as well as the Copperhead, which is commonly found in southeast Kansas.

Collins believes that Cottonmouths have always existed in southeast Kansas in low numbers, but he and other scientists were unable to be in the right spot at the right time to collect a specimen.

As for Eckhardt, not exactly a snake lover when the whole thing started, he plans to join the herpetologists on their quest.

"We're scrapbooking everything on this," Eckhardt said, still pumped from his historic find. "It's a good one to sit down with the kids and grandkids and say, 'Here's grandpa's snake.'"

— Wichita Eagle, 1 October 1991

(submitted by A. C. D. C. Dumerit, Wichita)

Editor's note: A second specimen of Western Cottonmouth from Cherokee County has also been collected this year.

WETLANDS AT RISK UNDER U.S. PLAN

Nearly half the wetlands in the nation could be plowed up, paved over, or built upon under a federal proposal to change the way wetlands are defined, two national environmental groups charged Tuesday.

The National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation estimated that 50 million acres of wetlands in the nation could be lost. In earlier estimates, the conservation groups had estimated that only 10 percent of the nation's wetlands would be removed from federal protection under the administration's proposal to redefine wetlands.

In Kansas, nearly 30 percent of the state's 435,000 acres of wetlands would no longer be federally protected, according to estimates by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

The state's two largest marshes — Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge — would remain wetlands. They are owned by the state and federal agencies charged with protecting wildlife.

Farm groups and developers have for the most part applauded the change, saying it would allow them to

develop their own land. Most wetlands are on private property.

But the Kansas wildlife agency fears the change could push dozens of already rare species even closer to extinction.

In Kansas' dry years — such as this one, when only 15 acres out of 12,000 acres at Cheyenne Bottoms are wet — migrating birds must turn to smaller wetlands on private property.

The state agency has joined environmental groups in criticizing the manual, drafted by the Bush administration, that would change the way wetlands are defined.

"I have been told I am not a rocket scientist for this statement, but the overall objective of the new manual is to eliminate wetlands," said Matt Monda, who coordinates wetlands for the state wildlife agency.

The new definition of a wetland has a three-part test: the presence of plants that thrive in water; soil, such as clay, that can hold water; and standing water for 15 consecutive days.

Most of the 435,000 acres of wetlands in Kansas are near rivers, where the soil is sandy. Because sandy soil does not hold water, most of Kansas' wetlands would not qualify under the new definition, said Larry Zuckerman, an aquatic ecologist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

Lost would be at least 30 percent of the Playa Lakes in southwest Kansas and 80 percent of the floodplains in eastern Kansas. That would be bad news for the Northern Crawfish Frog (*Rana areolata circulosa*) that lives in southeast Kansas.

The frog burrows into wet soil, which under the new rules could be planted.

The frog "is going to get rototilled, it is going to get plowed, it is going to get cultivated," Zuckerman said. "That critter in particular might take it bad."

Kansas has lost about half its wetlands since the state was settled.

"We are losing what is left and what is left is kind of critical," said Monda of the state wildlife agency. "We've already lost half. It is not like we are working with a full deck here. All the aces and kings and queens have been removed."

On Tuesday, a panel of national environmental scientists in Washington called on President Bush to submit his wetlands proposal to the National Academy of Sciences for review.

Mark Brinson, a former president of the Society of Wetlands Scientists, said Bush's proposal was a scientifically unsound, politically motivated attempt to open up millions of acres to development.

"These revised rules are nothing but a complete hoax," Brinson said. "I know of no research that backs up the shift in standards."

Michael Deland, chairman of the president's Council on Environmental Quality, said that analysis of the rules is still under way, and that "it's far too early to put any credibility on the 50 percent number or any other number."

Deland said the rules would end protection for some marginal areas classified as wetlands that provide little environmental benefit.

Bush, who has promised "no net loss" of wetlands, has been under attack by environmentalists since offering the new wetlands rules for public comment in August. He said the rules were an attempt to cut red tape and provide a common sense definition that still could protect the nation's 100 million acres of swamps, marshes, prairie potholes, and other wetlands.

To further protect wetlands, Bush has announced a plan to purchase 1 million acres of wetlands to protect them from development.

Also on Tuesday, the House approved legislation providing \$46.4 million in fiscal 1992 for the new Wetlands Reserve Program, which will pay farmers to put wetlands under federal protection for at least 30 years, instead of draining it or farming it. Fiscal 1992 began October 1.

— Wichita Eagle, 9 October 1991
(submitted by F. W. Craggy, Wichita)

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

On Kansas Wildlife Heritage Day last March 12, I represented the Kansas Herpetological Society at our reptile and amphibian display table in the Capitol Rotunda. Among other things, our display included live snakes and salamanders. Reaction to our display was predictably mixed. Younger visitors seemed less fearful than their teachers and parents, clearly demonstrating that the fear of snakes is learned rather than instinctive.

As everyone eagerly awaited the proclamation of Kansas Wildlife Heritage Day, I was invited upstairs to meet the Governor and present her with a copy of the new *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Cimarron National Grasslands* by [KHS members] Joe and Suzanne Collins. I was also asked to bring an Ornate Box Turtle [*Terrapene o. ornata*]. Unfortunately, we had no turtles. After further discussion, we decided to bring Snake, a 6 ½ foot long Bullsnake [*Pituophis catenifer sayi*], to meet the governor. Snake had been handled by hundreds of people without an incident.

When I reached the governor's office, I took Snake out of his cooler, and we posed for several photos with the Governor. (She wanted some guarantees before holding Snake.) The Governor's staff and other visitors crowded in the doorway to watch this historic moment. Two classes of Kansas students crowded into an anteroom, trying to see

what the commotion was about. Then with a grin, Governor Finney became the first woman governor of Kansas to be photographed holding a large, live snake. She grabbed Snake from me, and the shutter clicked several times. Then she walked into the crowd of students and shouted, "Your Governor isn't afraid!"

Thus, the real reason for Kansas Wildlife Heritage Day was shared with the Governor, her staff, and a group of eager students.

Later Capitol Security evicted us and our display before the celebration's finale, supposedly at the behest of an outraged and frightened senator. If only they had known about Snake's high-placed friend ...

— Larry Zuckerman, KHS President
(reprinted from Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine, September/October 1991)

THIEVES SLIP OFF WITH SNAKES, LIZARD

The burglars crept into the room when all was quiet and slithered away with — snakes and lizards?

Sometime Monday or Tuesday someone took 10 reptiles, including a 7-foot python from a laboratory at Shawnee Mission South High School in Overland Park.

The animals are not poisonous or dangerous, said Dean Jernigan, director of the Shawnee Mission Environment Science Lab. But the reptiles, valued at \$1,200 to \$1,600, are an important part of the district's Summer Enrichment Program and regular school studies, said Jernigan, who also directs the summer program.

Burglars broke into the school's nature room and took the menagerie between 5 p.m. Monday and 8 a.m. Tuesday, Overland Park police Sgt. Mike Imber said. Among the missing: the python, a boa constrictor, a California King Snake, a gecko, and a Mangrove Monitor, a type of lizard, Imber said.

"My thought is, it was some adolescent boys who probably were watching us move reptiles on Monday," Jernigan said.

Persons with information can call the TIPS hot line, (913)474-TIPS, or Overland Park police at (913)381-5252.

South alumni will be glad to know the thieves didn't touch Bud the Python, Jernigan said.

— Kansas City Star, 6 June 1991
(submitted by Suzanne L. Collins, Lawrence)

MISSING: PET SNAKE 7 FEET LONG

Marc Linton decided Thursday to offer a \$20 reward for information leading to the return of his pet snake, which was stolen from his classroom at Logan Junior High

School.

This isn't just your ordinary Kansas snake. Missing is a 7-foot-long Boa Constrictor named Contuse.

Linton, a science teacher at the North Topeka school, when it was a 13-inch-long baby.

"I bought it as a high school senior," he said. "This is my oldest son. I view it as more of a kidnapping than a theft."

Boa Constrictors can bite, but Contuse usually is docile, Linton said.

"It has been handled by thousands of grade school kids."

The snake, which has brown diamond markings on its tan back, also has a dark scar on its back.

Linton is worried about his pet's health, because tropical snakes such as Boa Constrictors need to be kept warm.

Contuse also is probably hungry.

The snake was removed from a large cage that has a sliding lid. Linton discovered his pet missing Wednesday morning.

Anybody with information can call Linton at (913)357-1691.

— Topeka Capitol Journal, 24 May 1991
(submitted by Jeff Whipple, Lawrence)

RATTLED POACHER

On April 5 [1991], conservation officer B. J. Thurman, Elkhart, received a phone call about a Moscow man who had several live rattlesnakes stored two houses from a daycare center. Stevens County officers accompanied Thurman to the house of the suspect, a man who was on probation for illegally killing a deer in January.

The suspect's pickup was in the drive when Thurman arrived, but no one answered the door. A cage in the back of the pickup held seven live Prairie Rattlesnakes [*Crotalus v. viridis*], so Thurman made a second trip to the man's house. This time he answered the door, and Thurman asked if he had any rattlesnakes. The man said that he had 20 or 30 or so and led Thurman to the same garage from which officials had confiscated the illegal deer in January. In the garage, 53 Prairie Rattlers buzzed in an old refrigerator tipped on its side. Thurman found another 26 in an ice chest. In all, the suspect had 86 rattlesnakes.

He told Thurman that he planned to take the snakes to Oklahoma to sell during the annual "rattlesnake roundup."

The man was fined \$100 for being over limit, plus \$32 court costs. The hunting license charge was dismissed, and the man spent three days in jail.

— Kansas Wildlife, July/August 1991
(submitted by Joe Renfro, Wichita)

Editor's note: Only 37 of these snakes survived by the time they were delivered to the Sedgwick County Zoo shortly after their confiscation.

CAPTURED ALLIGATORS TO BE RETURNED

Five Alligators [*Alligator mississippiensis*] captured recently in southeastern Kansas will be returned to Louisiana, where they were taken illegally from the wild, authorities said Monday.

Criminal charges might be filed against the person who brought the animals into Kansas, said Doug Sonntag, assistant area law enforcement supervisor for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the state parks department were investigating, he said.

The animals were captured September 14 in Bourbon County and are being held at Pittsburg State University.

— Kansas City Star, 25 November 1990
(submitted by Frank B. Cross, Lawrence)

OF SKINKS AND WORM SNAKES

For some it would have been a nightmare come true. The forest was crowded with trees and brush on a day that hung heavy with dark, ominous clouds, suffocating humidity, and an eerie calm that's all but unheard of in a state named after the south wind. Except for the occasional soothing whistle of a bobwhite quail, the woods seemed devoid of natural noises.

Yet there were plenty of unnatural sounds being made by the two men who preceded me along a rock-strewn ridgetop. The ring of metal against stone and the clack of stone against stone left no doubt of their determination as the pair used small picks and gloved hands to lift and overturn tire-sized rocks. [KHS member] Errol Hooper was the first to strike pay dirt. Happy with his find, Hooper placed it in [KHS member] Joe Collins' waiting hands — a treasure of scales, wriggling tail, and flicking tongue.

Though the small, brown-striped lizard was gently resting in a single hand, it was as though it was being held by two different people. On the one hand, Collins spoke as a nationally-respected zoologist when he said, "five-lined skink [*Eumeces fasciatus*], you can tell by the head that it's a female and she's obviously carrying an abdomen full of eggs that are about ready to be laid. She has a regenerated tail. You can tell by the color that her original broke off."

Yet the excited eagerness and the gleam in his eyes as Collins examined the five-inch reptile were that of a boy who's deep into an activity that he dearly loves.

Collins' affair with herpetology ... is one that has spanned most of his half-century of life. It began, he said,

with the capture and domestication (sic) of a Queen Snake [*Regina septemvittata*] from the Ohio hardwoods. It intensified quickly when he tried to learn more about reptiles.

"It was a really fun time when I was growing up, because there really wasn't a lot known about these kinds of animals. We were still in the discovery stage of a lot of things," said Collins, now a herpetologist and editor for the Museum of Natural History at the University of Kansas. "Since there was no real monetary use for reptiles, very little time had been spent studying and writing about them. We spent a lot of time with new and not yet discovered things. It wasn't until 1958 that Roger Conant came out with the first handbook for Peterson Field Guides."

Yet it was still dozens of years before America began to drop its "the only good snake is a dead snake" mentality. Though keeping lizards and snake for pets has long been fashionable in Europe, Collins credits America's growing environmental and natural awareness with a skyrocketing interest in herpetology.

"People are really figuring it out that reptiles offer a wealth of recreational value," said Collins. "We're not up there with the bird people yet, but we're growing. We have an increasing number of herpetological societies. Back in the late 70s I estimated their memberships at 10,000. That's got to be 50,000 now ... and there are many, many more who don't belong to an organization."

Minutes after he'd released the skink, Hooper lifted a Western Worm Snake [*Carphophis vermis*] from its lair. With a coal-black back and a vivid, carnation-pink belly, the docile snake's beauty rivaled the plumage of a cock pheasant or a drake wood duck. And you could touch it, too.

Unlike most wildlife observation, herping can provide a hands-on, as well as an eyes-on, experience. "When was the last time you heard of someone holding and stroking a cardinal or a sandhill crane? We've sure got that aspect over birding," joked Collins. "You get a whole new appreciation for living things when you can hold them and get a feel for what they're like." And if you like them, you can often take them home.

"The concept of keeping reptiles is really catching on in this country," said Collins. "In fact, some states are really encouraging youngsters to get a lizard, snake, or salamander for a pet. Here in Kansas you can keep up to five of any one species as long as it's not on the threatened and endangered list. Some reptiles really adapt well to [captivity]. That's something that's simply not true with wild mammals and birds."

Unquestionably the best introduction to all this is a field guide that Collins recently co-authored with a friend he calls "the grand old man of herpetology" — Roger Conant. *Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern/Central North America* gives a detailed description of 595 species and subspecies. The book, part of the prestigious Peterson

Field Guide series, contains more than a thousand full-color plate illustrations and drawings, and more than 300 detailed distribution maps.

Just as importantly, this definitive guide offers solid information on the tools and techniques for searching for, handling, and keeping reptiles and amphibians. There's also a chapter on [venomous] snakebites, an aspect of the field that Collins claims adds spice to the life of an herpetologist: "There's always been a mystique around animals that can hurt you — grizzly bears, mountain lions, gray wolves ... rattlesnakes. The danger of dying from a snakebite is greatly exaggerated, but it keeps things interesting."

Our herping trip got "interesting" when we left the rocky ridge Collins named "hernia heaven" and headed for the car. Hooper spotted a yard-plus Timber Rattlesnake [*Crotalus horridus*] stretched beside a wood rat nest. He closed to within a few feet of the snake and watched as it lazily crawled beneath a table-sized slab of limestone near where we stood. When its dangerous head was well under the rock, Collins stomped the ground to draw the rattle. The sound brought a grin to his face that lasted for hours.

"I've seen lots of them but there's always something special about seeing a Timber Rattler," Collins later said. "It can make a good morning even more memorable. That's the kind of experience we dream about."

— The Wall Street Journal, 26 August 1991
(submitted by Suzanne L. Collins, Lawrence)

NEW TASK FORCE ON DECLINING AMPHIBIANS

In places as far apart as Brazil, the Rocky Mountains, Australia, and Europe, populations of frogs, toads, and other amphibians seem to be declining. But why? One proposed explanation is global change: increased ultraviolet radiation penetrating our thinning ozone layer harms fragile amphibian eggs. But not all investigators blame global environmental problems. They see the work of predators, natural population fluctuations, pollution, or acid rain.

Unfortunately, there isn't much good world data on amphibian populations to help researchers choose among these different possible causes. And even if there were such data, there isn't a single clearinghouse to compile and analyze it. As a first step toward remedying these shortcomings, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has recently set up a "Task Force on Declining Amphibian Populations," located in Corvallis, Oregon.

"We are trying to set up a worldwide communication network and establish a database for all scientists involved in amphibian research," says task force coordinator James Vial, a retired ecologist from the University of Tulsa and

expert on amphibians.

Because the problem seems to be global in scale, much of the task force's work will go on far from Corvallis. Most of the field studies and research will be carried out by independent working groups, some of which have already been established in various corners of the world.

But even before the task force really gets down to work, a group at Oregon State University that will participate just added another disturbing report to the growing body of data on amphibian decline.

When studying Western Toads [*Bufo boreas*] at Lost Lake in central Oregon, they found that for two consecutive years nearly 100% of the toad eggs died in early stages of development. Adult toads were normal, and eggs brought into the laboratory developed normally, suggesting that those in the wild were succumbing to unknown environmental factors. It will be up to the task force to determine these factors.

— Science, 2 August 1991
(submitted by Daniel L. Schupp, Wichita)

FIRST, KILLER BEES; NOW, MAN-EATING CROCODILES

Three decades ago, Brazil unleashed African killer bees on the Americas. Now ecologists are up in arms about what they say is more environmental recklessness: the introduction to South America of African killer crocodiles.

At issue: 110 Nile Crocodiles [*Crocodylus niloticus*] flown in quietly from Zimbabwe to a high-security compound near Porto Alegre in southern Brazil where a private company plans to breed them and export their prized skins.

Environmentalists warn that some of the crocodiles will surely escape. Then, the scientists predict, they will reproduce, migrate, and, because of their size and ferocity — they eat more human beings each year than any other predator in the world (sic) — eventually overwhelm dozens (sic) of rival South American species.

"They're going to kill a lot of people," said William Magnusson, a crocodile specialist interviewed at the Institute for Amazon Studies in Manaus, Brazil. "The Nile Crocodile is a giant predator, used to eating big things. They're going to get out, and they're going to change the whole way people relate to water."

An 18-month battle by local ecologists to force the company to send the crocodiles back — supported by a virtually unanimous scientific community — faltered last month when a lame-duck governor in Porto Alegre signed a last-minute decree legalizing the crocodile farm. But now environmental lawyers are preparing to sue the breeders.

Members of the family that founded the crocodile-breeding farm in 1989 said they were frustrated by the

controversy and bemused about the environmental panic their project has aroused.

Andreia Fillippi, a veterinarian who studied crocodile farming in Zimbabwe, manages the farm. Fillippi's mother, Rejane Fillippi, a former state justice minister who is an influential lawyer, has represented the farm in negotiations with local officials. Fillippi's stepfather, Nilo Schunke, is a cattle rancher whose business machine company, Contargeis, Equipesy Controles, S.A., owns the crocodile farm in the town of Osorio, 68 miles north of Porto Alegre.

During a recent tour of the crocodile farm, Schunke said his family had met every government requirement to import the crocodiles legally. As dozens of 6-foot crocodiles sunned themselves in a breeding patio, occasionally grunting and lumbering over a sand hill to slip into an artificial lagoon, Schunke said the farm's double-walled enclosures and other security features made escape impossible.

"There aren't any environmental risks in this project," he said.

But environmentalists disagree. Ludwig Buckup, an ecology professor at the Federal University in Rio Grande do Sul state, noted that there were similar guarantees when a Brazilian beekeeper first brought African bees to São Paulo in 1956.

"They said every security precaution had been taken," Buckup said. Yet the bees swarmed and, during a 33-year migration northward — they first crossed into Texas from México last fall — have killed an estimated 700 to 1,000 people.

Rio Grande do Sul, the state that is home to Porto Alegre, has hundreds of lakes and swamps and offers a perfect environment for escaped Nile Crocodiles to survive and to migrate into South America's vast interior wetlands, including the Pantanal swamp and eventually throughout the Amazon Basin, Buckup said.

Although at least one South American zoo already owns a few Nile Crocodile specimens, Buckup said the risks of escape were far higher on a private breeding farm planning to hatch out 3,300 crocodiles a year.

International scientists who met in an emergency congress in Porto Alegre in October signed a document concluding that even though the Osorio farm might be secure now, sooner or later some crocodiles would likely escape or be released. The document noted that the tight security precautions might relax years from now if the farm were sold or if the world price for Nile Crocodile skins — now about \$300 — dropped.

"The probability that these animals will eventually escape is high," said Phil Hall, a crocodile specialist at the University of Florida in Gainesville. "We've criticized the Brazilians for bringing these animals in. Just about every crocodile specialist in the world has strong feelings about this."

The president of Paraguay and the governments of Peru and Colómbia have criticized the importation of the crocodiles to Brasil. So have the Crocodile Specialist Group of the Geneva-based [International] Union for the Conservation of Nature; the Washington-based environmental groups Traffic, U.S.A., and the World Wildlife Fund; the Cambridge, England-based World Conservation Monitoring Center; and other groups.

Scientists doubt that any of the seven species of [crocodilians] native to South America could survive in competition with the Nile Crocodile, which can grow to 21 feet in length, weigh as much as a ton, and be far more aggressive than either the caiman or the American Alligator.

Nile Crocodiles actively stalk and kill dozens of humans in Africa each year. A. C. Pooley, a South African writer who investigated 43 Nile Crocodile attacks on humans for a 1989 book, found several cases in which crocodiles stalked entire crowds of Africans — often women washing clothes along a river bank — then charged forward to seize their human victims in their powerful jaws.

Often the crocodiles held their victims above the water and literally thrashed them to pieces with a violent shaking of the head and neck, Pooley wrote.

In contrast, Florida's Alligators and South America's caimans "are pussycats," Magnusson said.

Top officials at Brasil's environmental agency, known as IBAMA, have conceded privately that the agency erred when a third-level functionary licensed the project with no public debate in 1989.

Jordan Wallauer, IBAMA's wildlife director, said scores of Brazilian and international scientists had written and telexed IBAMA to protest the license. However, Wallauer said the process had been "perfectly legal," and it would now be illegal to revoke the license.

— Wichita Eagle, 14 April 1991
(submitted by Dan Schupp, Wichita)

READ ALL ABOUT IT: SPACE ALIENS ARE STEALING OUR FROGS

There's been more than the usual amount of frog news lately, and I'm not sure what to make of it.

For instance, there was that big to-do (or possibly toad-do is the correct form) about whether African Goliath Frogs [*Conraua goliath*] would be allowed to enter the recent the recent annual Calaveras County Frog Jumping Jubilee. They were, sort of, but didn't do very well.

That story played out over several weeks before wire service reporters assigned to the highly coveted frog beat finally got a rest. (Newspaper makeup editors, in keeping with their lofty inability to create or appreciate irony, usually kept the story from, uh, jumping to another page, of

course.)

However, that wasn't the most engaging of the recent frog news. That honor went to the revelation that space aliens are stealing our frogs. I call this a revelation, though I admit it appeared in one of those sensational national tabloids.

News that frogs are disappearing around the world has been reported by some of the more reputable news services. What's different about the tabloid story is that it attributed the disappearance not to pollution and the resulting destruction of natural frog habitat but to space creatures.

The paper even trotted out a "UFO researcher" named Walter Caine, who was able to say of the space creature theory: "It's the only explanation that makes any sense."

To which he added these reassuring words: "There isn't a doubt in my mind that space aliens are eating our tadpoles as a delicacy and experimenting with our frogs. This is a very serious situation."

I love frog stories. They remind me of my dynamite high school biology class, in which we dissected frogs. My lab partner, Marilyn, and I discovered that our own frog, when it croaked, had been very pregnant. It was full of frog eggs which, by the way, aren't as easy to color for Easter as chicken eggs. (I throw in that household hint in case there's no other information in here you can actually use.)

"Why couldn't we have saved this poor momma frog and dissected space aliens instead?" I asked my teacher.

"Because space aliens cost three times as much as frogs," he explained.

Which is when I learned that everything comes down to money. You can discover a lot about economics in a biology class.

I suppose space aliens already know that. They probably also know what I didn't learn in biology class but had to look up 30 years later, which is that True Frogs belong to the Ranidae family. My encyclopedia doesn't say what family False Frogs belong to. Shamphibian, probably.

And frog-gigging aliens probably also know why tadpoles are such a delicacy, which is that they remain tadpoles for only a couple of months before they grow limbs and metamorphose into frogs. And aliens, as is well known, dislike frog legs because they taste so much like chicken. What isn't known is why aliens dislike chicken, though some theorists say it may have to do with the fact that they haven't learned to defeather the birds before eating them.

And they're unlikely to spend a lot of time learning proper chicken cuisine practices while they're so busy with tadpoles and frogs.

If Walter Caine is right about aliens experimenting with frogs, the natural question is what sort of experiments they're doing.

My guess is they're comparing the brain capacity of

frogs to that of the Mississippi fishermen and Idaho potato farmers they kidnap, and they probably need finely calibrated instruments to draw such fine distinctions.

Either that or they're confused and think that instead of frog gigging they're supposed to gag them, which doesn't mean to choke them, but, rather, to do comedy for them.

So these aliens, with a laughtrack playing in the background, may be saying to their captured frogs, "Take me to your leaper" or "Did you hear the one about the traveling frogman?" Or they're singing "Leapy Time Gal" and "Hoppy Days Are Here Again."

But, as I say, these are just theories. I don't claim to be as knowledgeable and logical about this as Walter Caine, who says the theory about [frog-stealing aliens] is the only one that makes sense.

I will, however, tell you that I have great confidence in my theory about Caine: He used to be an Idaho fisherman, but was kidnaped by tadpole-sucking aliens, who forced him to become a Mississippi potato farmer.

It's the only explanation that makes sense.

— Bill Tammeus

Kansas City Star, 4 June 1990

(submitted by Frank B. Cross, Lawrence)

JAPAN PROMISES TO STOP SELLING SHELLS OF THREATENED SEA TURTLE

Averting an imminent showdown with the United States, the Japanese government bowed to pressure from Washington and announced that it planned to end its trade in endangered Hawksbill Sea Turtles [*Eretmochelys imbricata*], whose shells are used to make jewelry and eyeglass frames.

The action came after months of negotiations and just hours before the Bush administration planned to slap a ban on the import of all animal products from Japan. Administration sources said that the eleventh-hour decision was evidently prompted by Japan's concern about the loss of lucrative pearl imports to the United States.

While environmentalists cheered the action, announced in Tokyo, administration officials noted that the Japanese government did not specify when the turtle imports would cease — stating only that trade would be halted by a "date certain". Environmentalists who have been in contact with Japanese officials said that date probably would be about 1994.

After officially receiving the Japanese statement Friday, President Bush advised Congress that he would now take no action "pending an assessment within 30 days of the adequacy of Japan's actions."

Administration officials said, however, that the United States would insist upon an end of the trade no later than

next March.

Department of the Interior spokesman Steven Goldstein said that the administration would give Tokyo 30 days to announce the date for ending the trade and to provide information on how many of the turtles it expected to import between now and the termination date.

Considered the most beautiful of the threatened and endangered sea turtles, Hawksbills are believed by some biologists to be within several years of extinction unless they cease to be slaughtered for their exquisite shells.

"The Hawksbill Turtle, like the African elephant, has been pushed to the brink of extinction by ruthless overexploitation for its products", said Michael Bean, an attorney for the Environmental Defense Fund, an advocacy group. "When Japan's promised action takes effect, the Hawksbill will face a more hopeful future."

— Wichita Eagle, May, 1991
(submitted by Jack Shumard, Wichita)

IF YOU SEE ANTS, CHECK (SOMETHING) WITH WIRES

Recently I had to pay several hundred dollars to get my car started, and do you want to know why? Nature, that's why. It's getting out of control.

Now before I get a lot of angry mail on recycled paper, let me stress that, generally, I'm in favor of nature. I'm even in favor of scary nature such as snakes, because I know that snakes play a vital role in the ecosystem (specifically, the role of Boonga the Demon Creature).

But nature should stay in its proper context. For example, the proper context for snakes is Asia. A snake should not be in your yard unless it has your written permission. A snake should definitely not be climbing your trees, although this is exactly what one was doing outside my window a few days ago. I looked out and there it was, going straight up the trunk, looking casual. Mr. Cool-Blooded. It was impressive. I'm always amazed that snakes can move on the ground, without arms or legs. You try lying on your stomach and moving forward merely by writhing. My friend Buzz Burger did this for an hour at the MacPherson's 1977 New Year's party and never got out of the kitchen.

Nevertheless, I was alarmed to see the snake, because according to top snake scientists, there's only one scientific reason why a snake would go up a tree, namely, so it can leap onto your head and strangle you.

This particular snake had been watching me for several days. I'd seen it on the lawn earlier when I was out with my two dogs, Earnest and Zippy, who were trotting in front, looking alert and vigilant, providing protection. The snake was holding very still, which is ploy that a snake will use to fool the observer into thinking that it's a harmless garden

hose, or a snake made out of rubber. This ploy is effective only if the observer has the IQ of a breath mint, so it worked perfectly on my dogs, who vigilantly trotted right past the snake. Earnest actually stepped over part of the snake.

Of course, if the snake had been something harmless, the dogs would have spotted it instantly. Zippy, for example, goes into a violent barking rage whenever he notices the swimming pool chlorine dispenser. This is a small, benign plastic object that floats in the pool and has never made a hostile move in its life. But Zippy is convinced that that it's a malignant entity, just waiting for the right moment to lunge out of the water, "Jaws"-like, and dispense lethal doses of chlorine all over its helpless victims.

I tried to notify the dogs about the snake. "Look!" I said, pointing. "A snake!" This caused the dogs to alertly trot over and sniff my finger in case there was peanut butter on it. The snake, continuing to hold still, was watching all this, thinking, "This person will be easy to strangle."

So now I find myself glancing up nervously whenever I walk across my yard. I'm thinking maybe I should carry an open umbrella at all times, as a snake deflector. But that is not my point. By now you have forgotten my point, which involves my car. One day it wouldn't start, and it had to be towed to our garage, which has two main characters: Bill, who is responsible for working on the car; and Sal, who is responsible for giving a dramatic account of what was wrong.

"At first we thought it was the (something)," Sal told me, when it was all over. "But when we tried to (something) the (something), all we got was (something)! Can you believe it?"

"No," I assured him.

"So then," said Sal, starting to gesture, "we tested the (something) but..."

He continued for ten minutes, attracting a small but appreciative audience. Finally, he reached the crucial dramatic moment, where Bill narrowed the problem down to a key car part, called the "something". Carefully, Bill removed this part. Slowly, he opened it up. And there, inside, he found ants.

Yes. An ant squadron was living in my car part and eating the wires. I am not making this up.

"Oh yes," said Sal. "Ants will eat your wires."

This gave me a terrible feeling of what the French call *deja vu*, meaning "big insect trouble." Because just a month earlier, the water in our house stopped running, and a paid professional plumber came out and informed us that — I am still not making this up — there were ants in our pump switch.

This is what I mean by nature getting out of hand. It's not natural for ants to eat car and pump parts. Ants should eat the foods provided by the ecosystem, such as dropped Milk Duds. Something is wrong.

And here's another scary but absolutely true fact: Lately, I've noticed ants going into the paper slot of my computer's laser printer. Ask yourself: What natural business would ants have with a laser? You can bet that whatever they're up to, it's not going to benefit mankind, not after all that stuff we've sprayed on them.

So I'm worried. I'm worried in my car; I'm worried in my house; and above all I'm worried when I cross my yard. I'm afraid that one day I'll disappear, and the police will search my property, and all they'll find will be a snake who obviously just ate a large meal and is pretending to be a really fat garden hose; and maybe some glowing ants munching on, say, the microwave oven; and of course Zippy, Mr. Vigilant, barking at the chlorine dispenser.

— Dave Berry
Wichita Eagle, 2 September 1991
(submitted by Jack Shumard, Wichita)

NOTABLE RATTLESNAKE BIRTHS OCCUR AT KNOXVILLE ZOO

Several significant rattlesnake births were recorded during 1991 at the Knoxville Zoological Gardens (KZG). These included the Baja Speckled [Rattlesnake] (*Crotalus m. mitchelli*), the Mexican Lancehead [Rattlesnake] (*Crotalus polystictus*), and the Arizona Ridgenose [Rattlesnake] (*Crotalus w. willardi*). Though all are Mexican species, *C. w. willardi* enters the United States in extreme southeastern Arizona. The parent *C. m. mitchelli* were captive bred in the early 1980s at the Dallas Zoo and received by KZG in 1985. Copulations were observed primarily in fall and occasionally in spring beginning in 1988, and those producing this brood were 19 October 1990 and/or 3 April 1991. Six young were born on 8 August 1991. A wild-caught pair of *C. polystictus* was received at KZG in November 1989, but had been in captivity elsewhere since the mid-1980s. Copulation was seen on 27 June 1990, with birth occurring on 10 June 1991. A total of five neonates were produced, but one died during the birthing process. A pair of *C. w. willardi*, collected in Arizona as adults in 1983, was received in November 1989. Though actual copulation was not observed, courtship and attempted copulation was seen during late summer and fall of 1990.

The birth of five young occurred on 21 July 1991. This reproductive seasonality corresponds to that seen in all other known successful breedings of this species, with copulation in summer or fall and birth occurring the following year.

Of particular importance for these breedings are thought to be frequent separation-reintroduction; the availability of both daily and seasonal temperature fluctuations, including a winter cooling or hibernation period; and the provi-

sion of thermal gradients for females through use of heat plates, basking lights, and natural sunlight filtered through glass or plexiglass at appropriate times of the year.

— AAZPA Communiqué, October 1991
(submitted by Thomas the Barber, Wichita)

WHITE GATORS DRAW CROWDS

Priceless, pretty and so rare they are precious, white Alligators occupying the Louisiana Swamp exhibit at this city's Audubon Zoo seldom move as they laze suspended in their pools.

Blue eyes and white noses regularly poke above the swamp exhibit's murky waters, seemingly oblivious to the crowds they are attracting and the oohs and aahs they elicit from their visitors.

Like China's giant panda, the white Alligators have become hometown celebrities.

"There is no way to put a price on them," said Curt Barnett, general curator at Audubon Zoo. "They are the only ones in the world. When something is the only one, it's priceless."

They are not true albinos, because they have blue eyes rather than pink, Barnett said.

There are 18 of them, found in a south Louisiana swamp four years ago. Zoos around the world are clamoring for them to visit.

As far as can be determined, no other white Alligators have ever been found, Barnett said.

"There isn't even any folklore about them," he said. "I have to assume if any had ever been found before, there would be stories about them at least, but I couldn't find any."

Their small numbers aren't surprising, Barnett said, because without their normal protective coloration, baby Alligators normally don't last very long in the wild.

The 18 gators are all males, but that doesn't mean they are the end of the line, said Barnett. Louisiana Land and Exploration Co., which all but four of the gators, hopes to breed them with regular female Alligators.

"They'll breed them to regular Alligators and then breed the offspring to see if they produce white ones," he said.

In the meantime, and estimated 1 million people a year are visiting the Alligators at Audubon Zoo.

— Ponca City News, 22 May 1991
(submitted by John Simmons, Lawrence)

MAN CHASES N.M.'S CREEPIEST CRAWLERS THROUGH BOOTHEEL

This squirming, greenish specimen is among the dead-

liest rattlesnakes in America, and Barney Tomberlin has turned it loose on his desk. He tells two visitors backed up against the wall there's nothing to worry about. Across the room are four tiers of snake cages, where a much disturbed Puff Adder [*Bitis arietans*] has begun hissing like a bicycle tire going flat.

Some 20 New Mexico rattlesnakes, coiled behind glass, have set the building abuzz.

Using long-handled tongs, Tomberlin captures the slithering snake again. As it writhes about on the floor, he pins the head down with a metal rod, grasps it behind the jaws with thumb and middle finger, places his index finger atop its head and tucks the tail under his arm.

"It's not a good idea to do this if you're nervous or upset," he says. "You could hurt the snake."

He rubs its bottom jaw against the edge of a glass beaker. The mouth snaps enormously agape, and two fangs glisten. Tomberlin massages the glands. In a few seconds, there is dribble of liquid, then, suddenly, a spurt of venom the color of orange juice.

"Hey, that's good," Tomberlin says. "You don't always get this much."

It's barely enough to fill half a thimble.

The venom is from a Mojave rattler [*Crotalus scutulatus*]. It's a snake from the grasslands of far southwestern New Mexico, and its venom has been found to be more lethal than its Mojave brethren in southern Arizona and California.

No one knows why.

Tomberlin's unscientific guess is that the snake's New Mexico prey is very fast or very large, or both, and the more lethal venom ensures a quick and certain death.

What is known about the New Mexico Mojave is that its venom poisons the nervous system. Venom from most other rattlesnakes, less lethal by comparison, attacks the bloodstream.

Not many people are bitten by this potent Mojave, because not many people venture south of the ramshackle town of Rodeo, N.M.

The isolated southwestern corner of the New Mexico is not just a zoological grab bag, it is habitat for a collection of really strange creatures. Some of them do not exist anywhere else.

With liberties in terminology, they range from a howling mouse to a carnivorous centipede to a species of all-female lizards.

Many are poisonous enough to cause death "or at least knock a man down."

Tomberlin, 48, has encountered all of them.

He says he's never been bitten.

There is a limited demand for Mojave venom from New Mexico, but enough of a market for Tomberlin to keep 20 of the snakes at his place in Portal, Arizona, just west of the New Mexico border.

Tomberlin can provide about a gram of venom by "milking" the snakes every two weeks. The substance is vacuum-dried to a crystal, placed in tiny vials, and stored in the butter tray of his kitchen refrigerator.

Tomberlin is no hot-dogging wildlife missionary, but he is the man to call when a university, institute or laboratory wants a person who'll go into the field and, say, find some deadly snakes. Or poisonous centipedes. Or a colony of fierce, carnivorous mice.

It is Tomberlin who leads lonely safaris into southern New Mexico, looking not for big game, but for an odd collection of creepy-crawlies that seem to abound and proliferate deep in the Bootheel.

That's one reason Tomberlin ended up selling Mojave venom.

He also keeps some of the snakes as a favor to F. E. Russell, an expert on venom and its effects on humans. Russell, a professor of pharmacy at the University of Arizona at Tucson, uses some of the snakes when he gives talks to various groups.

It is rumor, say researchers from New York to California, that the potent Mojave venom is being used for research in treatment of Alzheimer's disease, AIDS, and multiple sclerosis.

"There's a man down in Mexico who actually uses snake venom for treatment," says Arizona toxicologist David Hardy. "But he's a quack."

An expert in snake venom says proteins from Mojave venom do provide a good testing tool when you want to learn more about blood clotting.

The expert, Jim Glenn of the venom research laboratory at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Salt Lake City, acknowledges that the New Mexico Mojave is "among the most lethal of rattlesnakes."

The Mojave toxin, he says, attacks every part of the nervous system except the brain and the spinal cord. It usually first interferes with respiration.

Bites from rattlesnakes like the diamondback cause internal bleeding by breaking down the blood vessels. "But with the Mojave, there is very little hemorrhage and local tissue damage," Glenn says.

This relationship with blood may have influenced a California pharmaceutical firm, Athena Neurosciences of San Francisco, to use the 25 to 30 components of Mojave venom for tests on leaking blood vessels.

"The results were not really surprising," says Paulette Setler, the firm's vice president for development. "The experiment has concluded, and we aren't using the venom for more tests at this time."

She said the experiment showed that Mojave venom had little effect on the permeability of blood vessels.

The company purchased several vials of the venom from Tomberlin, at the going rate of \$300 a gram.

A peculiar lizard with absolutely no sex life has

occupied much of Tomberlin's attention since 1987, when the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish hired him to scour the flats for the odd reptile.

Known as the Grey Checkered Whiptail [*Cnemidophorus dixonii*], the lizard comes in only one gender — female. It lays unfertilized eggs under the soil to be hatched by the sun, producing yet more female whiptails. Scientists say it actually clones itself — one of only a few lizard species to do so.

The lizard is on the state endangered species list. It was accidentally discovered about 25 years ago, but just as suddenly vanished. For 15 years, authorities thought it had become extinct. But the strange lizard reappeared and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish wanted to find out more about it.

After the state signed a contract with Tomberlin and later added a young assistant, Tony Snell, now 19, the lizards were tracked to a colony.

The two men trapped the lizards in five-gallon paint buckets buried flush with the soil, shaded by a plywood square elevated by rocks. They installed 450 of the traps and checked them every other day from April 1 to October 15.

Other things blundered into the traps: snakes, mice, centipedes, scorpions, tarantulas, Gila monsters, toads, beetles, bugs, and baby rattlesnakes.

Keeping track of 450 traps was a logistical nightmare for Tomberlin and Snell. The lizards were marked by clipping one joint off a toe and scrupulously recording where they were captured.

Within 24 hours, after being weighed, measured, and identified, the lizard had to be returned to its precise spot and any new ones picked up.

People around southwestern New Mexico couldn't believe Tomberlin was traipsing around the countryside in the 115-degree heat, peering into pits that contained lizards but likely something that other people would prefer to stomp on if given the chance. Yet they were tolerant, Tomberlin says.

It's been a different relationship with a myriad of law enforcement agencies on the lookout for drug smugglers from nearby México.

"A lot of nights we go out on the highways looking for specimens that crawl out on the pavement to get warm," Tomberlin says. "We'll be driving up and down the road when all of sudden we're jumped by the cops. We'll say 'We work for the state', and they'll say 'Sure you do. Get your hands up.' After it gets straightened out, they can't believe we're out there in the dark, picking up snakes."

Money to pay for the Tomberlin-Snell contract — about \$14,000 total this summer — comes from the Share with Wildlife donations and matching money from the Bureau of Land Management.

This summer, perhaps, the department may hire Tomberlin to survey the elusive [New Mexico] Ridgenose Rattlesnake [*Crotalus willardi amabilis*], residing in no

other place but southwestern New Mexico. Little is known of the snake; it's also an endangered species.

Tomberlin has a ridgenose — a mild-mannered youngster about a year old, some 7 or 8 inches long with just a button where the rattles will form.

"Tony found this up on the side of a hill," Tomberlin says. "These snakes are so quiet and so well-camouflaged, I don't know how he ever saw it."

As he brought the snake down, Tomberlin says, "two guys drove up and started talking to us about it. They had long hair and earrings — just a couple of good old boys. They asked us what we were going to do with it, sounded almost as if they wanted to buy it. When we said we were going to keep it, they whipped out their badges; one was undercover for the game department in California, the other was undercover for the game department in Arizona. They planned to arrest us for violating the federal endangered species law. They almost fell over when we showed them our Arizona and New Mexico scientific collecting permits."

If Tomberlin is signed up to study them, it will be a tough task: the snakes are masters at blending with the surroundings, and sometimes they don't rattle. One goal of the survey will be to find out if the species has spread into Arizona.

Down in the grasslands of the Bootheel there is a mouse, Tomberlin says, that stands up at night and "screams." He doesn't know why.

"Gonna take him to Santa Fe, have him replace the howling coyote sculptures," he jokes.

His interest in the mouse is more serious: a researcher from the American Museum of Natural History called him last week and "wants us to collect 24 of the little buggers."

They're called grasshopper mice, and Tomberlin hasn't figured out a way to capture two dozen of them.

"They're the tigers of the mouse family," he says. "They have long teeth and won't hesitate to bite you. After they learn what happens when they attack a stinkbug from the rear, they approach it frontally, pick it up and jam the tail in the sand, then they eat the head off."

One of the residents of the area is a centipede that attacks and eats mice. "Those things give me the heebie-jeebies," Tomberlin says.

He and Snell operate a small business that supplies venoms, specimens, wildlife surveys, radio telemetry, and herpetology. It is called Hatari Invertebrates, and most of the customers are insect zoos and laboratory researchers.

Tomberlin says he got the name from an old John Wayne movie, and that hatari means "dangerous" in Swahili.

Tomberlin admits there is a danger to tramping around among the creatures that inhabit this territory.

"But we feel our eyes are the best weapons," he says. "You get used to looking out for these things."

— Albuquerque Journal, 3 February 1991
(submitted by Jack Shumard, Wichita)

THE TURTLE

by
Russel H. Fowler

Out of the dust and past, in searing heat;
ponderous and patient, slow scaly legs
in powerful lunging rhythms, he heaves
his crusted carapace onto the slab.
His ancient stubborn head thrusts only forward,
reptilian but earnest, no fear or challenge
in his obsidian eyes, but only will
to reach a paradise of shade and muck,
that is beyond the road, or used to be.
A car swerves wide to run him down,
and with a raucous whoop crushes his legs
beneath his shell. Bewildered but determined,
he pulls himself along as best he can.
What can have happened to his world, and why?
I don't know what to say. That's just the way
some of us are, old threatened friend.

— Missouri Conservationist, May 1991
(submitted by Dan Schupp, Wichita, in the memory an act not taken and
and a life perhaps lost as a consequence)