

KANSAS HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER NO. 90

NOVEMBER 1992

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLYDE AND ZEDA MILLER MEMORIAL ESTABLISHED

A memorial for Clyde G. and Zeda C. Miller, both longtime KHS members, has been established with the Topeka Collegiate School Summer Program. The family of Mr. and Mrs. Miller has requested that contributions to the memorial by KHS members be used to help fund the summer herpetology program at Topeka Collegiate School.

Mr. and Mrs. Miller grew up in the South Haven, Kansas and Braman, Oklahoma area and farmed near South Haven for more than 30 years. They moved to Wellington, Kansas after their retirement in 1978.

The Millers were members of several nature and environmental organizations and supported educational and environmental programs in Kansas and Oklahoma schools.

Clyde Miller passed away in October 1990 and Zeda Miller passed on in August of this year. Their son, Larry (former president and secretary-treasurer of KHS) teaches science at Topeka Collegiate and their daughter, Glenda Ryan, works for the Oklahoma Highway Department and lives in Braman.

Contributions can be made to the Topeka Collegiate School Summer Herpetology Camp in memory of Clyde and Zeda Miller by making checks payable to Topeka Collegiate School and mailing them to the school, which is located at 201 SE 59th Street, Topeka, Kansas 66619. Please indicate on checks that the contribution is for the Clyde and Zeda Miller Summer Program Memorial and that the funds must be used for the summer herpetology camp.

Topeka Collegiate School, founded in 1982, is a private independent school committed to academic excellence and humanitarian ideals. All contributions are tax deductible.

NEW RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AT THE TOPEKA ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Dr. Hugh Quinn, KHS member and director of the Topeka Zoo, announces that his institution has established a Scientific Studies Program and invites scientifically competent studies that contribute to: 1) conserving and/or preserving threatened or endangered plants or animals; 2) maintaining or improving husbandry of plants and animals in a zoological park; 3) understanding the biology, behav-

ior, medical care, or other scientific disciplines dealing with plants and animals; and 4) understanding the functional dynamics of a modern zoological park.

Proposals will be reviewed by the zoo's Scientific Studies Committee. For more information or to submit proposals, contact Dr. Hugh Quinn, Director, Topeka Zoological Park, 635 Southwest Gage Boulevard, Topeka, Kansas 66606-2066 or call (913)272-5821.

1993 INTERNATIONAL HERPETOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM

The 1993 IHS will be held 17-20 June 1993 at Miami Beach, Florida. IHS presents papers on herpetoculture, natural history, veterinary medicine, and other herpetologically-related topics. Those interested in presenting a paper at this year's IHS should contact Dr. Richard Ross, Institute for Herpetological Research, P.O. Box 2227, Stanford, California 94309.

TURTLE AND TORTOISE CONSERVATION SYMPOSIUM

The American Museum of Natural History's Turtle Recovery Program and the New York Turtle and Tortoise Society will co-sponsor an international symposium entitled *Conservation, Restoration, and Management of Tortoises and Turtles - An International Conference*. The symposium will be held 11-17 July 1993 on the campus of the State University of New York, SUNY Purchase. Those interested in more information on this important conference should contact Craig Vitamenti, c/o The New York Turtle and Tortoise Society, 163 Amsterdam Avenue, Suite 365, New York, New York 10023 or call (212)459-4803.

KHS BUSINESS

COMMENTS ON THIS ISSUE

As no doubt many of you have heard, Kansas suffered its first official "rattlesnake roundup" this past September at Sharon Springs in Wallace County. Efforts were made by the KHS Executive Council to try to prevent this event from occurring but were unsuccessful. Although the actual take of snakes was minimal, we are extremely concerned and saddened by the fact that this event did manage to take place and will continue our efforts to ensure that the event does not happen again in its current format.

Consequently, most of this issue of the KHS Newsletter is devoted to articles concerning the "roundup". A special section has been designated for various newspaper articles, first-hand observations, letters, and the like.

At this time, the Executive Council is not recommending that any individual KHS members take any action concerning this event. We are still trying to determine exactly what transpired and what particular course of action the Society should take. We will inform you on what you can do in the next issue of the Newsletter.

On a personal note, I want to thank all the dedicated Conservation Officers and Supervisors of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks who did such a wonderful job of making sure that no violations of state wildlife law occurred at this event and protected, to the best of their ability and within the strictures of the law, these creatures that make up such an important part of the fauna of the state. You all have my gratitude.

— EMR

COUNCIL CONDOLENCES

As you noticed in the Announcements section of this Newsletter, longtime KHS member, Zeda Miller, passed away this August. Cleda was the mother of former KHS president Larry Miller. The KHS Executive Council extends its sincere condolences to Larry and his sister, Glenda Ryan, for their loss and urges all KHS members to contribute to the Clyde and Zeda Miller Collegiate School Summer Program Memorial Fund.

1992 ANNUAL MEETING RESULTS

As always, the Annual Meeting of KHS was a resounding success. With members coming from as far as New Mexico and Nebraska, 62 hardy souls gathered at the Fine Arts Center on the beautiful campus of Bethel College

in North Newton. The festivities officially kicked off at 9:30 A.M. on 7 November and the attendees were treated to the usual eclectic mix of papers and speakers on topics ranging from suburban garter snakes to videotapes of the regrettable rattlesnake roundup in Sharon Springs this September. The highlight of the presentations was the talk given by Dr. David Chiszar of the University of Colorado on predatory behaviors and their meanings in rattlesnakes. Dr. Chiszar lived up to his well-deserved reputation as a dynamic and entertaining speaker and those attending agreed that he revealed aspects of snake behavior that most had never considered before.

A number of topics were discussed at the afternoon business session and Alan Volkmann of Wichita was elected President-elect of the Society for 1993. Karen Toepfer was reelected Society Secretary/Treasurer.

The annual auction, led by the peerless Joe Collins, was held at the Old Mill Restaurant in downtown Newton and, as always, was entertaining for the members and lucrative for the Society. A total of \$839.00 was added to the coffers of the Society. When included with registration fees and memberships for 1993, \$1,877 was deposited in the Society's account.

The Sunday morning session began at 9:15 a.m. and ended at approximately 11:30. After the official end of the meeting, a group gathered informally to discuss the Sharon Springs roundup and explored possible approaches and actions to take. Although no decisions were made at this session, the comments and suggestions of those present were carefully noted and considered by the Executive Council. Further information of the Society's actions will be presented in the February 1993 Newsletter.

RESULTS OF THE KHS ANNUAL FIELD TRIP TO SHERIDAN COUNTY STATE LAKE

Thirty-three participants took part during the first weekend of June 1992 and recorded 236 specimens of reptiles and amphibians representing 27 species and including ten county records, all within northwest Kansas.

Suzanne and Joe Collins were the first to arrive on Friday afternoon, 5 June 1992, and finding the muddy road to the campsite not worth the hassle, they decided to wait at the exit off Highway 24 until the next KHS members came along. John Lokke of Omaha, Nebraska, a group from Hays escorted by Karen Toepfer, and Robert Ball, from Brewster, soon arrived to engage in discussion of the weekend's plans and to admire Mr. Lokke's latest artistic

renderings of the Great Plains herpetofauna.

The Moriarity's from Lawrence and I arrived soon after and by then the roads were dry enough to drive on and to allow us to reach the lake. A walking excursion around the lake yielded thirteen different species, including three county records: a Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra s. serpentina*) taken by Joe Collins, a Northern Water Snake (*Nerodia s. sipedon*) by Karen Toepfer, and a Coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum testaceus*) by John Lokke, Robert Ball and myself. Joe Collins happened to capture a very attractively colored adult Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum gentilis*) as he walked through shortgrass pasture, unusual habitat for this species.

On Friday evening, a light rain produced excellent conditions to road cruise for Devonian derivatives, the recent amphibia. Three parties formed at dusk and headed out of Hoxie in different directions. One was led by Emily Moriarity and the rest of her family, Carolyn, Andrew, Pat, Michael, and Ann; another consisted of Karen Toepfer and John Lokke; and the third comprised Mark VanDoren, Russell Toepfer, and myself. The three groups succeeded in finding Woodhouse's Toads (*Bufo w. woodhousii*) and a Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum mavortium*). Great Plains Toads (*Bufo cognatus*) and Plains Spadefoots (*Spea bombifrons*) were also taken by all three parties and were county records.

On Saturday, 6 June, we split up and a small group consisting of Olin and Caleb Karch, and David Nuessen all of Emporia, accompanied by John Lokke, Karen Toepfer, Russell Toepfer, Mark VanDoren and myself and headed southwest to Wallace County to try to locate Green Toads (*Bufo d. debilis*). Caleb Karch found an adult male under a piece of tin and Russell Toepfer found a juvenile in the open on a rocky grassy hillside. Forty-four other herp specimens were also found (see table) during the three hours spent collecting at this location.

Meanwhile, back in Sheridan County more people arrived. These included Chris Mammoliti and his son Kirk from Pratt, Eric Rundquist and Ann Bradley of Wichita, and a party from Topeka composed of Tim Wray and Jim Gubanyi who were accompanied by Keith Coleman of Lawrence. The major find Saturday was a Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi texana*), discovered near the lake campsite by Kevin Toal and Lori McElroy of Lawrence.

Dan Carpenter, Gary Cumro, Lance Good and Greg Mills of the Wichita area spent part of Saturday in the southeastern portion of Sheridan County at Sheridan County Wildlife Area before heading up to the lake. They collected 25 specimens of eight species including nine Ringneck Snakes (*Diadophis punctatus arnyi*), which is a rare snake this far northwest.

Friday and Saturday evening Dr. John Rand Neuenschwander, jr. and his family of Hoxie graciously extended an open invitation for anyone interested in taking

a break from the ever changing weather to come see the collection of common western Kansas snakes and large boids that he keeps to educate local school children on the value of snakes and dispel any fears they might have. His collection was impressive and the Neuenschwander's hospitality was very much appreciated by all those attending.

Sunday morning, the participants began to head out towards home. Many decided to visit Castle Rock, an area of eroded Cretaceous chalk deposits in Gove county. On the way to Castle Rock, I stopped by the wildlife area and recorded another thirteen specimens from Sheridan County and two additional county records, the Great Plains Skink (*Eumeces o. obsoletus*) and Great Plains Rat Snake (*Elaphe guttata emoryi*).

After leaving Castle Rock I went west along the Smoky Hill River to another rugged looking locality ca. five miles east of Russell Springs in Logan county to search for new *Bufo debilis* sites. One *B. debilis* was found as well as fifteen other herp species, which included a county record of *Lampropeltis triangulum*.

I take this space to congratulate my very good friend Kelly J. Irwin on recently earning a degree from Kansas State University. I could tell Kelly was missed during this field trip, if not by the many remarks I heard on his behalf, then by the amazingly low number of lost campers.

— Travis W. Taggart, chairman
KHS Field Trip Committee

**Herpetofauna Recorded During the KHS
1992 Annual Spring Field Trip**

	Sheridan	Wallace	Logan	Total
SALAMANDERS				
<i>Ambystoma tigrinum</i>	1	—	—	1
	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
ANURANS				
<i>Bufo cognatus</i>	8*	0	1	9
<i>Bufo debilis</i>	0	2	1	3
<i>Bufo woodhousii</i>	25	5	1	31
<i>Pseudacris triseriata</i>	choruses	2	0	>2
<i>Rana blairi</i>	9	2	1	13
<i>Rana catesbiana</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>Spea bombifrons</i>	18*	0	0	18
	<u>61</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	
TURTLES				
<i>Chelydra serpentina</i>	1*	0	0	1
<i>Chrysemys picta</i>	17	1	6	24
<i>Kinosternon flavescens</i>	5	1	1	7
<i>Terrapene ornata</i>	9	3	2	14
	<u>32</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>46</u>
LIZARDS				
<i>Cnemidophorus sexlineatus</i>	18	3	11	32
<i>Eumeces obsoletus</i>	2*	0	0	2

<i>Holbrookia maculata</i>	1*	0	2	3
<i>Sceloporus undulatus</i>	2	21	5	28
	<u>22</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>65</u>
SNAKES				
<i>Coluber constrictor</i>	0	2	1	3
<i>Crotalus viridis</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>Diadophis punctatus</i>	9	0	0	9
<i>Elaphe guttata</i>	1*	0	0	1
<i>Lampropeltis triangulum</i>	6	0	2*	8
<i>Masticophis flagellum</i>	1*	1	0	2
<i>Nerodia sipedon</i>	2*	0	0	2
<i>Pituophis catenifer</i>	7	2	3	12
<i>Storeria dekayi</i>	1*	0	0	1
<i>Tantilla nigriceps</i>	1	0	5	6
<i>Thamnophis radix</i>	0	1	2	3
	<u>28</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>48</u>
Total Specimens	143	46	44	236

* county record

RESULTS OF THE KHS 1992 FALL FIELD TRIP

Twenty-three participants from around the state took part in the 1992 Fall Field Trip which was held on 19-20 September at the scenic Alexander Ranch in western Barber County south of Sun City. Although conditions had been unusually dry for the past three weeks, 17 species and 70 specimens were found after diligent efforts. The highlight herp was a fine specimen of the Texas Night Snake (*Hypsiglena torquata jani*) found by Dan Carpenter of Belle Plaine. The Alexander Ranch is one of the few places in Kansas where this snake can be found. In addition, a Western Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis p. proximus*) was observed by Ann Bradley. This is a very rare animal in this area. See the table below for a complete accounting of the weekend's finds.

A particular highlight of the weekend, at least for me, was the opportunity to partake of Gyp Hills hospitality at Hathaway's in Sun City on Saturday afternoon. A select group of KHS'ers was regaled with tales of the area's fauna by Buster Hathaway, who is one of the state's best kept secrets and represents the finer sensibilities of the area's residents. After nearly a 23-year absence, Buster and his stories brought back some very cherished memories for me and those present also agreed that it was a special afternoon. Should you ever be in the area, make a point of stopping in at Buster and Alma's, enjoy a schooner or two (21 and over only) and a bowl of chili, and have Buster fill you in on the area's history. It will be worth every minute.

As usual, after releasing their finds, most folks started wending their various ways home in the late morning on Sunday, although a few dedicated herpers remained to

check out a few more of the Alexander Ranch's 14,000 acres. KHS and the weekend's participants wish to extend their sincere thanks and gratitude to Ted Alexander for graciously opening his property to our examinations and for making camping space available. We will be sure to take him up on his offer to return.

Participants for the weekend included: Travis Taggart, Ann Bradley, Jim Gubanyi, Tim Wray, Keith Coleman, Eddie and Sivella Stegall, Olin Karch, Eric Rundquist, Dan Carpenter, Gary Cumro, Ken Brunson and family, and Stan Roth and the Lawrence High School biology student assistants.

— EMR

Amphibians and Reptiles Found During KHS 1992 Fall Field Trip

Species	Specimens
Cricket frog	
<i>Acris crepitans</i>	5
Plains Leopard Frog	
<i>Rana blairi</i>	33
Ornate Box Turtle	
<i>Terrapene o. ornata</i>	4
Collared Lizard	
<i>Crotaphytus collaris</i>	4
Northern Prairie Lizard	
<i>Sceloporus undulatus garmani</i>	2
Texas Horned Lizard	
<i>Phrynosoma cornutum</i>	1
Ground Skink	
<i>Scincella laterale</i>	1
Great Plains Skink	
<i>Eumeces obsoletus</i>	2
Prairie Racerunner	
<i>Cnemidophorus sexlineatus viridis</i>	1
Prairie Ringneck Snake	
<i>Diadophis punctatus arnyi</i>	4
Texas Night Snake	
<i>Hypsiglena torquata jani</i>	1
Yellowbelly Racer	
<i>Coluber constrictor flaviventris</i>	3
Ground Snake	
<i>Sonora semiannulata</i>	2
Western Ribbon Snake	
<i>Thamnophis p. proximus</i>	1
Red-sided Garter Snake	
<i>Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis</i>	1
Texas Brown Snake	
<i>Storeria dekayi texana</i>	1
Blotched Water Snake	
<i>Nerodia erythrogaster transversa</i>	1
TOTAL	70

KHS BRINGS YOU GREAT NEWS OF THE WORLD

KNOWLEDGE SLITHERS INTO CLASSROOM

Munjor, Catherine, and Schoenchen elementary school students braved some of their "wildest" fears at a fall field day Wednesday.

They looked and held or touched live snakes.

"They are easily handled if they are used to being handled," said Karen Toepfer, a member of the Kansas Herpetological Society.

Toepfer, a Hays mother who serves as secretary and treasurer of the statewide group, said the seven species of non-venomous snakes, two toads, a salamander, and a turtle which she brought to the National Guard Armory had all been captured in Ellis County and are mostly kept at Hays High School.

Avry Werth, Schoenchen third-grader, first leaned away from the Milk Snake being passed in her group, then tentatively reached out to touch it.

"It's slimy. No — slick," Werth said.

She said she didn't like snakes, but had made up her mind to touch "because they're kind of neat."

"Can I hold it again?" she asked.

Brandon Mai, Munjor fifth-grader, held a large Bullsnake coiled up his arm.

"He's just kind of strong in my hands. He wrapped around my hands," Mai said.

Toepfer said the Bullsnake is "the farmer's best friend. This one is 20 to 25 years old. He's blind in one eye. He has a permanent home at Hays High."

Toepfer showed slides of snakes found in the area and told some of the different ways they protect themselves by hissing, playing dead, or hiding.

"Never pick up a snake unless you know what kind it is," Toepfer said.

Only two species of local rattlesnakes are [venomous].

A Western Hognose Snake had been captured in the basement of the Fort Hays State University greenhouse.

Aaron Kruse, Munjor third-grader, said the Hognose Snake "looks like a dinosaur kind of. He's rough."

Philip Rome, Munjor second-grader, said he has seen snakes out in the country where he lives.

"I ran away," he said.

Jennifer Haddock, Munjor fifth-grader, didn't want to touch one.

"Nope, I just don't really like snakes," Haddock said.

— Hays Daily News, 8 October 1992
(submitted by Travis Taggart, Hays)

CHILDREN FIND UNUSUAL SNAKE

Perry and Marsha Evenson had a bit of a surprise last Friday afternoon when their children showed the couple the snake they had found. Seth, age 8, Kristin, age 5, and Brienne, age 2, were playing outside of their home 9 miles south of Eureka when they found the two-headed snake on the walk.

Marsha believed one of the children may have run over the snake with a tricycle. She stated the skin was split a little bit on the underside of the snake and, under the skin, it looks like two separate snakes sharing one skin.

Marsha says one head is dominant, but both function. She also said the snake doesn't move very quickly as it tries to follow both heads in different directions.

Sam Wine, science teacher at Eureka Junior/Senior High, identified it as a juvenile [Black] Rat Snake [*Elaphe o. obsoleta*].

The snake will have a new home at Emporia State University, according to Evenson.

— The Eureka Herald, 15 October 1992
(submitted by Park W. Carter, Eureka)

COBRA BITE DEATH

Brian West, vice president of the Western Maryland Herpetological Society, died this May from the bite of a six-foot Indian Cobra [*Naja naja*]. The snake had been having trouble laying its eggs, and Mr. West had injected it with a medicine supposed to help it deliver the eggs (probably oxytocin, a treatment of questionable effectiveness for [egg-bound] snakes).

"About an hour later, the snake which had been lying still, suddenly bit Brian on a toe of his left foot," his father said. How and why it was able to do so is not clear.

Fortunately, Mr. West was able to get the snake back into its cage before emergency medical personnel arrived, averting what could have been an even more unfortunate incident. The snake, one of about fifty kept by Mr. West, was being kept illegally. The collection included specimens from around the world. Maryland requires people to have permits to keep non-native snakes. Mr. West had no permits. Why?

— New England Herpetological Society Newsletter
(submitted by John Simmons, Lawrence)

Editor's note: Recent research by British herpetologists has shown that many of the currently available antiv-

enins for Asian cobras are ineffective against most of the now recognized eight species from that area. This fact, coupled with the above tragedy, once again underscore how incredibly stupid it is for people to keep venomous snakes in private homes.

CALIFORNIA ANGLER DIES FROM RATTLE-SNAKE BITE ON HIS LIP

A 20-year-old Lake County man died after being bitten on the lip while examining the baby rattlesnake he had caught while fishing.

According to an account in *The Californian*, the Sonoma County coroner's office attributed David Pearl's death to the bite, remarking that it was the area's only known snakebite fatality in memory.

Susan Kim, a clinical pharmacist at the San Francisco Poison Control Center, said baby rattlesnakes can be more deadly than adults because they don't control the amount of venom released in a bite, the newspaper reported.

Officials warned outdoorsmen that rattlers will remain active during warm fall weather.

— Western Outdoors, Vol. 39, No. 7, 1992
(submitted by Jeffrey H. Black, Ada, Oklahoma)

Editor's note: There is no evidence that young rattlesnakes have any less control of the amount of venom they deliver in a bite than do adults.

ARRESTS RESULT FROM REPTILE INVESTIGATION

U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of California, George L. O'Connell, announced the completion of a long-term investigation of illegal importation of rare and protected species of reptiles into the United States from México, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.

As of 31 January, 11 defendants have pled guilty to violations of the Lacey Act. David Philip Muth, a biologist and member of the Northern California Herpetological Society, was charged with the most counts, and admitted to smuggling live vipers, Neotropical Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus durissus*), Boa Constrictors (*Boa constrictor*), Basilisks (*Basiliscus* sp.), and Iguanas into the country in suitcases on commercial airlines and in the door panels of cars. Mr. Muth was fined \$5,000, received 5 years supervised probation, and was ordered to perform 200 hours of community service. The other defendants received fines ranging from \$500-\$5,000, and a twelfth person paid a civil fine of \$5,000 in lieu of criminal prosecution.

Among the reptiles were five Todos Santos Island Mountain Kingsnakes (*Lampropeltis herrerae*), a species

found only on one tiny island off the coast of México, and thought to be extinct until this investigation.

— Traffic USA, August 1992
(submitted by Ruth Gennrich, Lawrence)

MAJOR REPTILE TRAFFICKER CONVICTED IN FLORIDA

Tom Crutchfield and his wife, Penny, were convicted on 17 June 1992 in Tampa, Florida, of various felony offenses involving illegal importation and exploitation of endangered reptiles. The case, which was investigated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and prosecuted by Michael L. Rubinstein of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida, involved violation of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the Lacey Act.

The Crutchfield's owned and operated the largest and most successful import/export and wholesale live reptiles business in the United States and possibly the world. Their business, formerly known as Herpetofauna, Inc., supplied exotic species of reptiles not only to many zoos and private collectors in the United States, but also to zoos in Japan and Europe.

Among other offenses, Crutchfield was convicted of conspiracy to smuggle four Fiji Island Banded Iguanas (*Brachylophus fasciatus*) into the United States through a co-conspirator, Anson Wong, currently a fugitive, who operated out of Penang, Malaysia. The Fiji Island Banded Iguana (native to the islands of Fiji, Tonga, and possibly Vanuatu) is listed as endangered under the ESA and as Appendix 1 of CITES. Only 40 specimens are legally held in the United States, and are being held in trust by the San Diego Zoo for the benefit of the Fiji Islands government. San Diego is the only U.S. institution that has successfully bred the species.

The Crutchfields were also cited for illegally importing endangered and CITES-protected species indigenous to India and Pakistan. Tom Crutchfield faces maximum penalties of up to 20 years in prison and fines of up to \$250,000. Mrs. Crutchfield could receive a maximum sentence of 10 years.

— Traffic USA, August 1992
(submitted by Ruth Gennrich, Lawrence)

Editor's note: The Crutchfields have appealed their conviction on the basis that the prosecuting attorney had a business relationship with them.

SPECIAL "ROUNDUP" SECTION

SNAKES ALIVE

Sharon Springs, in far western Kansas, would like to become the "Rattlesnake Capital of Kansas." The town's leaders are planning the state's first-ever rattlesnake roundup over the Labor Day weekend in September.

"We have quite a few rattlesnakes in our county," said Judy Withers, a leader in the effort. She sees a surplus of the reptiles not as a danger so much as an untapped resource.

"We're primarily a farming and ranching community, and this year we've been hit hard by freeze and hail and drought, so we're just looking for another way to bring some money into our county," Withers said.

The idea is capture the snakes alive, using special poles with hooks on the end, and bring them back to a central snake pit.

Planners are organizing the rattlesnake hunt along the lines of successful hunts held each spring in Texas and Oklahoma, hoping to draw veteran snake-seekers to one last rattler roundup in the fall.

They'll also be able to sample cooked rattlesnake and see professional (sic) snake handlers perform such feats as climbing inside a sleeping bag filled with rattlers at the event.

But Withers said Kansas law prevents anyone from actually buying or selling Kansas rattlesnakes, whether alive and wriggling or reduced to fangs, skins, meat, and rattles. That may limit participation from out-of-staters, who are used to being able to sell their squirming catch for so much a pound.

Withers hopes hunters will donate their snakes to cooks who will clean and prepare the snake meat. Rattler gourmets will be charged for the buns their snake meat is served on, not for the meat itself, to stay within the law, she said.

Anyone who takes part in the roundup has to have the appropriate Kansas or non-resident hunting license, and there is a five-snake bag limit, said Bob Mathews, a spokesman for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks in Pratt.

There's little danger of depopulating the rattlesnake community in Wallace County, said Jerry Bump, a Wildlife and Parks enforcement supervisor for the northwest corner of the state.

Withers anticipates there may be some resistance from animal-rights advocates. But she hopes the first year's rattlesnake roundup will be successful enough to persuade the Wildlife and Parks Commission to change the rules on

rattlesnake hunting so Kansas can compete with its southern neighbors.

— Wichita Eagle
(submitted by P. Owed, Wichita)

LAW BITES RATTLESNAKE HUNTER

Organizers of the state's first-ever rattlesnake hunt are calling the event a success—in spite of what they consider laws that are overly restrictive.

Nearly 30 people actually hunted snakes, bringing in anywhere from one to five, the legal limit prescribed by state hunting laws (sic), according to Judy Withers, one of the organizers of the hunt.

At least one person was cited for hunting without a license, she said, although the Missouri man had tried to take a quick hunter safety course so he could purchase the license.

That person, she said, never caught a snake, but he did have a snake-catching device in his hand.

Wither considers the need for the hunter safety course ironic, because a large part of the course concerns firearms. Snake hunting does not involve guns.

"I felt that was a little unjustified," Withers said of the citation. "Maybe a warning might have been better."

The rattlesnake roundup, conducted Saturday and Sunday, did provide an opportunity to talk with area legislators, including state Sen. Sheila Frahm, R-Colby, and Rep. Gayle Mollenkamp, R-Russell Springs.

"It looks like it merits time from the Legislature to at least examine the laws," she said.

Hunt organizers plan to meet Wednesday to discuss changes they would like to see in state laws.

Except for the legal glitches, the hunt is being considered a success—and a second hunt is on schedule, although the timing might be changed to the spring.

Nearly 2,000 people turned out for the various events, with as many as 80 people registered to hunt. Only about 30 actually brought in snakes, which were placed in the snake pit.

The smaller number of hunters resulted in a shortage of snakes, something that Withers hopes will be corrected next year with additional hunters.

But there were some exciting moments, she said, including a snake that looks like it will break the old state record in terms of length (sic).

Herpetologists from the University of Kansas measured one Prairie Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) at 52.5

inches, 4.5 inches longer than the previous record holder.

Becky Vincent, she said, caught a snake that had the typical head [pattern] of a Prairie Rattlesnake but the color was significantly different.

The KU herpetologist said the snake was likely some kind of mutant (sic), Wither said, "very rare and possibly one of a kind."

Vincent named the snake and likely will keep it.

"They have an unusual snake and they want to keep it," Wither said.

Hunters also captured one snake and her 18 babies, just days-old.

"They had it in a display box," she said. "It made a very nice display. If a rattlesnake can be cute, that would come as close as it could come."

— Hays Daily News
(submitted by Karen Toepfer, Hays)

Ms. Judie Withers
Sharon Springs, Kansas

Dear Ms. Withers:

I am writing to express my concern and the concern of the Kansas Herpetological Society over the proposed rattlesnake roundup you are planning to hold over the Labor Day holiday this year.

The Kansas Herpetological Society is a state conservation group whose primary interests are the amphibian and reptile resources of Kansas. We have been on record since 1974 as opposing the rattlesnake roundups that occur in this country and are very alarmed that a Texas/Oklahoma-style roundup may occur here. Our reasons for opposition to these events are as follows: 1. **They are dangerous.** These events promote a careless attitude towards the proper methods by which to treat these dangerous snakes. Bites occur every year at the Oklahoma and Texas events and the consequences are frequently painful, life-threatening, and extremely expensive to treat. The Prairie Rattlesnake that you propose to hunt is the most dangerous snake in Kansas and its venom is more toxic than the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake hunted to the south. I doubt that you would want to promote an event that would be prone to litigation for the above outlined reasons. 2. **They are cruel.** Members of our Society spend a great deal of time educating folks to the fact that amphibians and reptiles, particularly snakes, are real animals and are just as capable of suffering as any other creature. Snakes at these events are rarely provided with even the most basic needs such as drinking water, shade, uncrowded enclosures, and freedom from physical abuse. In fact, slapping, kicking, beating, and other forms of torture are the norm for the way these animals are treated at roundups. These actions are

prosecutable under state cruelty to animals laws. 3. **They are environmentally destructive.** Snakes, particularly common snakes such as Prairie Rattlesnakes, have long been proven to be the most effective environmental control on destructive rodent populations. Reducing the numbers of snake predators only serves to increase mouse, rat, and rabbit populations, with an attendant loss of salable crops. As you are a member of a farming community, especially in a state which has been hit so hard by the current recession and effects of the latest drought, it is hard for me to understand why you would want to promote the destruction of a creature whose presence is actually working in your favor to reduce to crop losses.

Additionally, the favored method for collecting snakes at the typical roundup is called gassing. This means that anywhere between one ounce and one quart of gasoline is poured into a hole in the hope that this will cause whatever snakes are there to emerge. This method usually kills all the mammal residents of these holes and frequently kills the snake. That gasoline will also enter ground water sources and has been shown to even end up in aquifers. I, for one, would not be thrilled to find out that my water had been polluted with gasoline.

At this point, I would like to point out some other considerations about your proposed roundup. Rattlesnake roundups to the south are notorious for attracting a, let's say, less than savory human element. The Okeene roundup in Oklahoma was shut down for several years because of the motorcycle gangs that attended and who proceeded to cause all kinds of trouble. Drug dealers and drug users are also frequently attracted to these sorts of events. I can virtually guarantee that your event will attract the same sort of people.

Rattlesnakes in this state are regarded as non-game species under state law. That means that their take is controlled in an entirely different manner than game species and we intend to make sure that those laws are enforced. If we are made aware of violations of state non-game wildlife law, we have made and we will make these violations known to the appropriate state and federal authorities.

Now, having said all that, I want you to understand that we are sympathetic to the plight of smaller towns in this state. We also live here and recognize the vital contribution that communities such as yours make to the overall welfare of all our residents. These are tough times and we want to make a positive contribution from our end. What I and we propose is this: we would like to get together with you and the other organizers of this event and explore the possibilities of conducting an event that is non-consumptive and non-destructive and which promotes a healthy attitude towards natural Kansas and which will also make money for you. We believe that we have the personnel, expertise, and ideas to help make such an event succeed. In fact, a

number of people in our group are eager to assist in such a project.

Finally, please understand that we are not an animal rights outfit. We believe in the wise use of our natural resources and actively promote that attitude. We also believe that confrontation is counterproductive and look for solutions that are mutually acceptable. Although we do not agree with the approach you currently appear to be taking, I hope you will at least contact me about our proposal and would be willing to begin discussion on same. I can be reached at (316)283-2500 during the day or (316)283-6708 in the evening. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

Dwight Platt
President, Kansas Herpetological Society

Editor's note: The following letter is reprinted verbatim, exactly as written and received.

September 1, 1992

Dr. Dwight Platt
Dept. of Biology
Bethel College
North Newton, KS 67117

Dr. Platt,

We have received a letter from your activist group, Kansas Herpetological Society, and understand your comments are from the liberalist side of the Democratic Party.

We as citizens of Wallace County have seen your comments on our annual rattlesnake hunt. It's nice of you all to try to help us on our activity, but since you weren't asked to help coordinate this event we don't aim to please your requests.

Our organization is working closely with the Kansas Wildlife Reserve and have changed many activities as they should be according to the Wildlife Reserve. We all of a sudden hear from a group like yourselves when we are going to supposedly arm the environment. So why aren't you people out here when a local friend gets struck by one of these snakes and almost dies.

We learn from your letter that these rattlesnakes help our rodent problems. How do you people know what are rodent problem is? We also have many hawks and a few bald eagles that do a much better job of rodent control than do these rattlesnakes. We know, we live here. We also would like to tell you that the rattlesnake is the only kind

of snake killed in this area. All bullsnakes, whipsnakes and other kinds are left as they aren't harmful to the human race.

We as landowners in this area put up with wildlife that are a nuisance, we have an abundance of antelope and deer which destroy our fences, windbreaks, and etc. every year. Plus many of our local ranchers and farmers are almost struck by these poisonous snakes while fixing fence or just walking across the lawn.

Many livestock, especially horses and cattle, are struck by these snakes every year. That forces local ranchers to loose money that could have been used to further their operation future. How would you guys like to loose anywhere from \$500 dollars to \$4,000 dollars (values of these livestock) from one of your paychecks?

Our activity will lead local hunters to where many snakes have been seen and killed. The hunters will catch the snakes humanly and not cruelly.

You guys state that this could be a very dangerous activity. We understand this, and so do all the hunters. But the great thing about America is we have freedom and we can do as we please if we abide by all the laws of the United States. We are abiding by all laws and regulations. If you would like to tell people how to go about their business, move to Cuba and take your snakes with you!

This event will also help our local economy. We don't ask for your sympathetic plight for small town, since we have done alright without you guys all of our lives.

We hope you can see our points now and can put these points in a new perspective.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Jerry Grund
Local Rancher

P.S. Make sure all your buddies get a copy of this letter. If you can't send them I sure will.

25 September 1992

Judy Withers
Sharon Springs, Kansas

Dear Ms. Withers,

Enclosed you will find a copy of a letter that the president of our society received in response to the letter he sent you earlier regarding your rattlesnake roundup. I am contemplating printing it in the next issue of the *Kansas Herpetological Society Newsletter* and need some information from you if possible. First, is Mr. Grund officially involved with the organization and running of your roundup?

If not, what is his interest in the roundup? Are the views he stated in his letter those of the rest of your group?

In trying to be fair, I would be more than happy to receive from you and publish any comments you might wish to have communicated to the other members of our society. Thank you for your time and am looking forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Eric M Rundquist, editor

P.S. I can't speak for the other members of our group, but you might pass on Mr. Grund that I am a registered independent voter and usually vote Libertarian.

September 29, 1992
Sharon Springs, Ks.

Eric M. Rundquist, Editor
5555 Zoo Boulevard
Wichita, Ks. 67212

Dear Mr. Rundquist:

I did not respond to the letter from Dr. Platt regarding the issues he felt were a concern in our 1992 Rattlesnake Roundup because the reasons he gave were so uninformed for this area and had no bearing on our event. When we received objections for the Rattlesnake Roundup, they were all from residents of cities who had never had to deal on a daily basis with the pesky rattlesnake. I would like for you to consider the following comparison: What if someone were to turn five prairie rattlesnakes loose in your place of business. You did not know where they were but you were aware that they were free to roam to any area day or night. A rattlesnake averages 15 to 20 young so over a period of time this could become a definite hazard. As Dr. Platt himself admits the prairie rattlesnake is an extremely dangerous snake with venom more toxic than the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake. Now imagine sitting at a desk, walking into a dark room, reaching behind something, and so on. The Prairie Rattlesnake is small and can wriggle into the smallest crevice. Now how would you feel? This is how it is to carry on day to day chores on a ranch or farm in Wallace county of Kansas. My children have had to walk with their eyes to the ground, warned to avoid tall weeds or grass, have asked "why?" when their dogs have been paralyzed from snake bites, and generally lived in fear of the Prairie Rattlesnake. We don't empty trash at night on the ranch, gather clothes off of the clothesline, or wander off the path of light for any reason. Prairie Rattlesnakes have been killed in the towns of the county, and just last

week a rather large Prairie Rattlesnake was killed on the Weskan Grade School playground.

I feel that the objections of the Kansas Herpetological society are uniformed, illogical, and cruel to the residents. If the members had taken the time to really become informed as did Dr. Henry Fitch from K.U., they would have reaped much information from the Roundup. I feel that your members are more concerned about protesting than they are researching the protest. I suppose the glory of the protest supersedes logic.

For the record, we had a successful, safe, organized, non-violent, and educational Rattlesnake Roundup. It was attended by State Senators, Legislators, and representatives, and researchers. It became a festival with a purpose and drew visitors from many other parts of Kansas and other states.

As for the letter you received from Mr. Jerry Grund, this is the typical opinion of the local ranchers and farmers of this area. Mr. Grund is also an executive at our local bank and has enough interest in this county to have read Dr. Platt's uninformed request and taken the time to write a response.

As I stated earlier, I did not feel that my time taken to respond to Dr. Platt's request would have been beneficial, and I still feel that your organization is not interested in our opinion, but I am taking this time to give you a chance to reconsider. Perhaps you are interested in protesting the event but not interested in researching the basis for our concerns.

I will not expend the money to call you or Dr. Platt on the phone, or to travel to your location to inform you. If you are as interested in this project as your protests claim, maybe you should make an effort to see what it is you are talking about.

Sincerely,

(signed) Judie Withers, Co-Chairman
Wallace County Rattlesnake Roundup Committee

cc: Dr. Dwight Platt

OBSERVATIONS ON THE 1992 SHARON SPRINGS RATTLESNAKE ROUNDUP

By

David Edds
Division of Biological Sciences
Emporia State University
Emporia, Kansas 66801

I arrived at Wallace County fairgrounds just before 0900 Saturday morning, 5 September, the time the hunt was advertised to start. Not many people were around — some organizers, spectators, some Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks conservation officers, but few hunters. A call for hunters to register and assemble came over the loudspeaker, and one hunter, and landowner and his son gathered around a loudspeaker. The people of Sharon Springs were very friendly and hospitable. I asked if I could go along with the three of them to take some pictures, and they said "sure".

I drove to the landowner's land in northern Wallace and southern Sherman Counties, and these three hunters, armed with snake "tongs" began to poke around in the rocky canyons and yucca plants of the beautiful shortgrass prairie. If this crew was representative of all involved, in terms of numbers, methods, and intensity of the hunt, western Kansas rattlesnakes are in no danger. We found one small Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*) under a rock in one of these canyons (a county record for Sherman County), three Plains Leopard Frogs (*Rana blairi*) and one Woodhouse's Toad (*Bufo woodhousii*) around a small pond, and two Ornate Box Turtles (*Terrapene ornata*) in the prairie.

Local merchants sponsored a free ham and bean lunch downtown, and food was available at concession stands at the fairgrounds. After lunch, I visited the "snake pit". It had about 40 snakes, which included Prairie Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus v. viridis*), an Eastern Yellowbelly Racer (*Coluber constrictor flaviventris*), a couple of Bullsnares (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*), and a half dozen Western Diamondback Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus atrox*).

Earlier in the week, a man from Sharon Springs told me that they had captured and saved about 30 Prairie Rattlesnakes. Some locals were fearful that the weather would turn bad and hamper the hunt, thus limiting the number of snakes for "the pit". He asked if I had any I could bring and contribute. I did not.

The pit was predictably repulsive. "Professional" snake handlers from Texas (Fangs and Rattlers") were assisted by a few local handlers in showing the snakes. Snakes were

repeatedly prodded in an attempt to get them in striking position. Handlers picked up snakes, strung Bullsnares around their necks, held Diamondbacks enticingly close to their faces, and carried Prairie Rattlers around for spectators to touch. One handler walked in the middle of a row of four Rattlers. A local Jaycee got into a sleeping bag and handlers put a dozen snakes in with him. An announcer repeatedly cajoled the crowd on the failings of rattlesnakes. He proclaimed that the purpose of the rattlesnake roundup was the extermination of these vermin, as he warned of the danger to humans and livestock in western Kansas. We were reminded that these were the biblical serpents, cursed throughout the ages.

A smaller pit gave children the opportunity to dangle a balloon on a string in front of rattlesnakes, with the hope that one would strike it. T-shirts were sold, and vendors displayed their wares, including rattlesnake belts, wallets, and jewelry.

A skinning demonstration by a skin buyer from Texas was the lowlight of the event. Heads were ceremoniously chopped from 17 Prairie Rattlesnakes. The buyer informed the audience of the commercial value of Rattlesnakes, including decorative skins and rattles. A cook stood nearby to prepare the butchered meat into rattlesnake burgers and chili. The skinner stated that many people believe in the healing powers of powdered rattlesnake meat, including as "arthritis, bursitis, and rheumatism medicine", and that the gall bladder is highly prized as an aphrodisiac.

He also stated that rattlesnakes would never become endangered. He said that there were tens of millions of them in Texas alone, and that they will be around long after we are gone. He also encouraged locals to contact their representatives in an attempt to get the ve-snake possession limit rescinded.

Dr. Henry Fitch and Travis Taggart collected internal organs from these snakes after they were butchered, for later analysis. Results of this analysis and a videotape of these activities were presented at the 1992 KHS Annual Meeting in November. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks is to be commended for sending Dr. Fitch to this event to collect biological information. They should also be applauded for its five-snake possession limit and other non-game wildlife protection laws and regulations, as well as its law enforcement efforts. A number of conservation officers were present at the roundup, and at least one person was cited for hunting without a license.

As of 1700 hrs Saturday, 17 snakes had been collected, turned in, and butchered. Due to a previous commitment, I had to leave at that time; thus I did not witness the events of Saturday night or Sunday. However, Dr. Fitch later told me that a total of 75 Prairie Rattlesnakes had been captured, of which 18 were neonates born to a female taken prior to the roundup.

COMMENTS ON THE WALLACE COUNTY RATTLESNAKE ROUNDUP

By

Randall S. Reiserer and David L. Reber
Lawrence, Kansas

The "First Annual Rattlesnake Roundup" in Wallace County, Kansas, provoked concern from environmentalists as far away as England. It demanded the attention of twenty Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks Conservation Officers for two days in September, and raised the eyebrows of more than a few Kansans. A great deal of concern was expressed by environmentalists whose fear of such activities stems from the insensitive nature of such functions in neighboring states. Unfortunately, the majority of those who opposed the event for such reasons failed to attend the roundup even for the purpose of confirming their suspicions. Instead, many people expressed their displeasure either through pointed letters or through bitter confrontations. These hostile engagements have served only to infuriate the people of Sharon Springs. Such attempts to strong-arm the supposed adversary into absolute compliance with environmentalist agenda almost forecloses any possibility of constructive compromise or of working together to promote shared interests. Much of the disagreement between the two factions derives from mutual confusion concerning one another's desires and intent and from a misunderstanding of the degree to which each is willing to compromise under favorable and friendly circumstances.

Our report is intended to present, in as unbiased a manner as possible, both some appealing and some appalling features that we observed at this year's "Rattlesnake Roundup", and to provide suggestions for those interested in molding this event into something positive. We do not intend to attack either party in the dispute, nor do we intend to take a firm stance on environmental impact or ethics, as the former is undetermined and the latter is relative.

As herpetologists we attended this year's roundup with watchful suspicion, but instead of having our preconceptions confirmed about the event and the people involved in it, we were impressed both by the responsibility with which the festival was organized and by the open-mindedness of many of the residents of Sharon Springs. Far from being adamant about rattlesnake killing, many of the people we spoke to are fond of and respect their venomous neighbors, and many others operate with an "I leave them alone and they leave me alone" attitude. Nearly everyone from Kansas that we spoke to expressed a genuine interest in the natural history of rattlesnakes, and it was our impression that information provided by experts such as Dr. Henry Fitch was welcomed unanimously. The people

of Wallace County are farmers and ranchers who live close to the land and who understand much more about it than some people credit them with; even so they are willing to learn more about their environment and are open to constructive suggestions concerning its management.

The organization and handling of this year's roundup revealed the responsible attitude of the residents of Sharon Springs who assembled the event. Their respect for the law was evident in the materials provided to each registered hunter. The "1992-93 Kansas Hunting and Fur Harvesting Regulations Summary" and a synopsis of regulations pertaining specifically to reptile hunting and collecting were furnished in the registration packet, as well as a map of Wallace County which indicated areas where landowners had granted permission to hunt. An ambulance crew was stationed at the fairgrounds and the local hospitals were notified. Hunters were supplied with a list of emergency phone numbers and nearby hospitals and an accurate list of first aid procedures.

Likewise, activities planned for the public were designed with regard for safety. Reckless activities such as sacking contests were not permitted, and the organizers were careful to place snake handling areas behind barriers. In addition to the care taken to protect participants, the snakes themselves were protected against illegal collecting techniques. On our several excursions as unmarked monitors, for example, we did not witness anyone using gasoline to force snakes into the open.

The seriousness and thoughtfulness of the festival's organizers was apparent in their treatment of herpetologists who attended the event. For example, Dr. Fitch was shown kindness and respect by both the organizers and the participants. His research was fascinating for many who attended, and the organizers were proud to have Dr. Fitch involved.

It is clear to us that the people of Wallace County organized their roundup with a good deal more sense and responsibility than is found at roundups held in other states. Despite the competence of its organizers, however, this year's roundup was not without problems. Perhaps the most disturbing feature of the roundup was that the people who assumed the role of educators were themselves largely ignorant of the very subject about which they claimed expertise — the habits and natural history of rattlesnakes. Most of the "information" they provided their audience was based more on myth than on fact.

The source of most of this misinformation was John Shaddix, an exotic skins salesman from Texas. Shaddix was not simply ignorant of the subjects he discussed, but rather deliberately fraudulent. In fact, he reminded us of an old-fashioned snake-oil salesman, out to squeeze the pocketbooks of a gullible audience. As he butchered snakes for cooking he amused the audience with all kinds of fantastic information, such as the claim that dried and powdered

snake meat "will cure arthritis, bursitis and rheumatism". He addressed almost any question asked with replies that could best be described as off-the-wall. Shaddix was a virtual potpourri of nonsense and error. The volume and frequency of his fictitious statements defies any attempt at listing or enumeration. On several occasions he represented snakes as having a malicious nature. For example, he claimed that Cottonmouths would crawl right into a boat and attack its occupants. Shaddix also sold stuffed diamondbacks that were positioned in an upright s-curve, nearly three feet tall, supported by the lower quarter of the body.

The mouths of these fancifully posed animals sported two rows of four unsheathed fangs. And every fang had a drop of clear, hardened resin hanging from it, as though rattlesnakes constantly drip venom. Obviously, the viewer was intended to believe that rattlesnakes are vicious, drooling monsters. Shaddix shamelessly defended these outrageous mounts as being "absolutely realistic".

Shaddix also misrepresented his products. He sold belts that he claimed were made from the hides of "eastern rattlesnakes", but were actually made of bullsnake skins. One particularly bold example of his outright fraudulence was a product he offered as "snake milk". Shaddix claimed to an audience that this substance was actually produced by mother snakes to feed their young (he later admitted, privately, that the product was ordinary cow's milk).

The people who were hired from out-of-state to provide entertainment at the roundup were less overt about spreading misinformation. However, "The Fangs and Rattlers Show", in particular, supplied the public with erroneous information through their reckless tricks and antics. Their advertised "safety talks" consisted of walking barefoot among rattlesnakes, displaying snakes' fangs, allowing children to pet Prairie Rattlers that were coiled and pressed between two hands, and admonishing people that those sorts of activities were not to be tried by ordinary people. The most foolhardy of their antics was a demonstration of "what not to do if your friend has a rattlesnake in his sleeping bag". This show consisted of placing a person and about twenty rattlers in a sleeping bag and then kicking, stomping and shaking the sleeping bag while cracking well-rehearsed jokes. The person in the sleeping bag was protected only by tying his or her pantlegs closed. The people who got into the sleeping bags with the rattlers were not always performers — they were often Wallace County Jaycees, who had been assured by the snake handlers that the snakes could not bite them because they did not have enough room to open their mouths. Several times the announcer for "The Fangs and Rattlers Show" gave erroneous or inaccurate information, asserting, for instance, that "rattlesnakes cost farmers thousands and thousands of dollars each year in [lost] calves". Quite simply, the "Fangs and Rattlers" people were sensational-

ists, focused only on thrilling the audience rather than on educating them.

These snake handlers demonstrated a complete disregard for the welfare of the rattlesnakes. Care and caution were ignored in a display of machismo, resulting in unnecessarily rough treatment of the animals.

The rattlesnakes were subjected to prolonged and extreme stress (had they been dogs or cats the audience would have been horrified). The balloon fishing pit was especially stressful for the animals, and not particularly successful as entertainment, as the snakes were too stressed even to strike at the balloons. In order to persuade the snakes to be more aggressive, the attendant stomped directly and repeatedly at the animals, although this tactic never elicited a strike. Instead the snakes sat coiled in corners sounding a continuous rattle.

If roundups like this one are to be made acceptable to a wider range of people, it is essential that such gratuitous stress to the animals be minimized. Although it should be understood that some stress will result from handling any wild animal, serious thought should be given to reducing stress to captives as much as possible. For this reason, we believe that the balloon fishing should be eliminated.

We also recommend that the rattlesnake handlers from Granbury, Texas, be replaced by competent herpetologists (or at least knowledgeable educators), not only because of their treatment of the animals but also in the interest of public education. While these showmen pose no threat to the herpetologically knowledgeable, the fact remains that many of those who attended did so out of a genuine interest in the animals. Some of these people brought with them no preconceived ideas, prejudices or fears, and some of them perhaps had never seen a rattlesnake prior to this event. They brought with them only curiosity and a desire to learn. It is for the sake of these people that we must direct our efforts toward a quality program in the future, but we should not overlook the possibility of enlightening those who are already prejudiced.

Public perception of a species is primary to responsibly managing that species. Promoting the conservation of a potentially dangerous species is not an easy task and can only be successful if the public is provided with facts rather than myths. Members of the herpetological community, in concert with the sponsors of the Wallace County rattlesnake roundups, should direct their efforts toward shaping a realistic and appropriate public perception of rattlesnakes.

However, to accomplish this goal, education must without exception be carried out in a manner which respects every person's legal right to participate in the regulated harvest of a species, provided the harvest does not threaten the future of that species. Specifically, educators should not use their position to protest against the roundup. Such an approach would create distance between

educators and roundup supporters, undermining the goal of quality education. No educational program would be taken seriously by roundup participants when coupled with statements that criticize their actions. It is inevitable that differences of opinion will arise between educators and roundup supporters, but it is important that such differences be settled not through protest directed at participants, but through constructive compromise with the roundup organizers.

The sponsors of the Wallace County rattlesnake roundup would agree that maintaining a sustainable harvest is in their best interest. The long-term effects of harvesting on rattlesnake populations have not been determined, and it is possible that any amount of disturbance would be devastating to Wallace County Prairie Rattlesnakes. If the sponsors feel that they must kill rattlesnakes, perhaps they would voluntarily impose a minimum size limit and even a mandatory release of gravid females. This sort of regulation would have a negligible effect on the success of the roundup, while assuring that snakes with high reproductive potential remain in the wild population. Steps should be taken early to determine what effect collecting will have on Wallace County Prairie Rattlesnakes. Kansas does not recognize this species as a game animal and out laws are not designed to account for large-scale, localized harvesting. Perhaps it is time to consider amending current regulations to reflect what is happening in western Kansas. Funding could be provided by the state to support research aimed at determining the effects of harvesting and, if appropriate, to establish proper guidelines for seasonal harvests.

It might be possible to convince the people of Sharon Springs not to kill rattlesnakes; after all, their major concern is economic growth. Sharon Springs is a small town which is not connected to other cities by a major highway. It does not enjoy the economic benefits of some of its sister communities and is faced with the prospect of remaining economically stagnant. The people of Sharon Springs would like to boost their economy and at the same time give some character to their county. These aspirations do not seem unreasonable, and we should try to identify with their circumstances before criticizing their methods.

It is important to realize that these folks lack experience in operating a roundup, so they were bound to make mistakes. However, it is clear that they are evaluating this past roundup in an effort to improve future ones. For example, a spokesperson for the organizers agreed that the "Fangs and Rattlers" troupe are sensationalists and should not be included in future roundups. Nor will John Shaddix be invited back to run his con.

However, the organizers have requested of the legislature that certain regulations be loosened to better serve their needs. They are seeking three main concessions. First, they would like to have the licensing requirements for

collectors changed to better reflect the nature of their hunt. As it stands, collectors must have a hunting license, which means that they must first take a hunter-safety course, with emphasis on gun safety. Also, out-of-state collectors must pay an exorbitant \$50 fee for an annual hunting license. The roundup's organizers feel that these regulations are tight ligatures restricting the success of their festival and we are inclined to support their position on licensing. We suggest that a small fee could be administered (to residents and non-residents alike) by a Department of Wildlife and Parks Conservation Officer stationed at the fairground registration booth. Because snake collectors have no need for firearms, the hunting license and hunter-safety course seem unnecessary and burdensome. Furthermore, assessing a reasonable fee for a two-day permit (similar to a temporary fishing license) for both in- and out-of-state participants would also address the problem of the excessive fee for a non-resident hunting license — an expense that makes it more difficult to attract out-of-state participants.

Second, they would like for the bag limit to be eliminated, or for the term "possession", with regard to snakes, to be more narrowly defined so that motivated individuals would be able to collect more animals after depositing their snakes at the fairgrounds. We do not believe it is necessary to alter present regulations, for two reasons. First, we believe that five snakes is a reasonable limit — one that allows hunters to enjoy participating while not encouraging overexploitation. Second, we are concerned that such leniency would promote the establishment of a prize for the most snakes collected, and that some individuals would take advantage of this concession, collecting snakes in other places prior to the roundup, in order to win the prize.

Finally, they want to see established a specific season for the vending of snake products. We are opposed to this idea as presented because it would encourage commercial interests outside of Wallace County, but we suggest that a specific concession (or license) could be granted that allows the people of Sharon Springs to process and sell their own products at the fairgrounds. This approach would eliminate the wasting skins and would provide the roundup with an extra source of revenue.

It is essential that measures be taken to protect the Prairie Rattlesnake population of western Kansas. It is sometimes difficult for conservationists to explain briefly their reasons for wanting to protect every species in an ecosystem, but if people of different backgrounds converge under friendly circumstances, they sometimes depart with a bit of one another's understanding. Similarly, conservationists should become informed about the reasons for having an annual rattlesnake roundup. If each party understands the other's motivations, it is likely that a compromise that serves both objectives could be reached.

If it is true that the roundup organizers are primarily

concerned with the economic growth of their community and at the same time are aware of the need to conserve wildlife, then the steps toward compromise are few. Many members of the herpetological community are willing to assist in the planning and execution of a program that celebrates rather than slaughters rattlesnakes. It is likely that a "Rattlesnake Festival" could be successful without killing a single animal. But this decision is ultimately up to the people of Sharon Springs. Even if the decision is made to spare the lives of the animals, this event must remain a production of the residents of Wallace County. They alone retain the authority to make decisions about their roundup and to choose whom they invite as entertainers and educators. Our role is to provide guidance and constructive criticism where it is needed.

Such combined activity by herpetologists and environmentalists on the one hand and the organizers of the roundup on the other is not a far-fetched notion. In fact, one meeting has already occurred between an influential member of the K.H.S. and a liaison for the organizers of the roundup. One of the main purposes of these meetings is to discover the common ground where compromise is possible, and to clarify where compromise is not acceptable, and why.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Eric Rundquist for his encouragement and suggestions, to Judy Withers for important discussions on our topic, to Tina Blue for editing and commentary on the manuscript, and to Troy Smith for helpful suggestions and for typing the manuscript.

FEATURE ARTICLES

THE LONGEST ROAD COUNT: A CLADISTIC ANALYSIS OR HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION

by

Rufus T. Firefly
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Wau, New Guinea

INTRODUCTION

On 31 July 1992, Ann Bradley and I departed Wichita, Kansas for the environs of El Paso, Texas to attend the annual Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles meeting. At the outset, we decided to keep a running count of all the herps we spotted along the road during the entirety of the trip, *a la* the annual KHS Spring Herp Counts. Also, at the outset, given the magnitude of this task, we decided that the data gathered would have to be subjected to some sort of scientific analysis to give our observations meaning. I figured that a cladistic approach would give the best results for our information. Consequently, as you all know (or maybe you don't. Who cares?), cladistic analysis requires that the researcher choose a comparison data set, usually called an outgroup. We chose the common nine-banded armadillo (*Dasybus novemcinctus mexicanus*) for our outgroup. Our reasons are as follows: 1. They are common. b. They are always dead. Capital C. They have scales. These criteria, in our view, more than qualify the armadillo as an outgroup comparison for an analysis of herp road kill.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study vehicle was a 1989 Acura four-door sedan with AC, power steering, power brakes, power windows, cruise control, low mileage, available today for only ... sorry, got a little carried away. Been watching too many Tom Parks commercials. Observations were recorded on standard notebook paper with a No. 2 lead pencil.

Roads traveled were either two-lane or four-lane macadam highways. Observations were suspended in major metropolitan areas, as the observers were none too keen on ending up as road kill themselves in, say, Fort Worth at rush

hour. Average traveling/observation speed was 71.234567890 miles per hour, but the actual speed depended on a variety of factors such as location (notably faster in the Staked Plains of west Texas where the only traveling objective is to get through that godforsaken territory as quickly as possible; notably slower in Big Bend, where there were actually a number of herps worth observing), number of drunks on the road (a significant factor in parts of Texas, we discovered), whether or not the driver had remembered to turn on the cruise control (early morning factor), observed police presence (not a significant factor), and pee breaks. The actual routes traveled and on which observations were made are as follows: I-35 to Fort Worth; I-20 to El Paso; I-10 to Las Cruces, New Mexico; U.S. rt. 70 to White Sands National Monument; U.S. rt. 90 to Alpine, Texas; Texas rt. 118 to Big Bend National Park and back through the Davis Mountains to I-20.

Traveling times varied but began as early as 0800 hrs and ended as late as 0025 hrs. Observations were made continuously during these periods, except for the above-noted exceptions.

The observation method used was a combination of the Left-Eyed Scan and the Right-Eyed Scan wherein the road was scanned from edge-to-edge and starting at a distance as far as approximately 100 yards in front of the observation vehicle. An interesting effect noted by the observer was that a combination of these two scanning methods usually led to the Cross-Eyed Scan if the observation period lasted more than five hours. This may have had an effect on the actual numbers observed and recorded, but it is not considered significant at this late date and we are not about to repeat the observations just for the sake of scientific accuracy. Remember, we're talking *cladistics*

here, which has very little to do with real science.

All identifiable herp or armadillo remains were recorded. Observations made in the Big Bend region included live animals but the vast majority of records were DTDOR (Deader Than a Doornail On Road). Observations not identified to genus were not recorded (although it was tempting). Suspicious grease spots were also not recorded. Observations were generally made at one pass, as the combination of high speed, tailgating, and four-lane interstate highways precluded high survival opportunities for the observers should a U-turn attempt be made.

RESULTS

Results of our observations are noted on Table 1 and Figure 1 but because standard scientific writing protocol demands that this section be included in any paper (for reasons that to this day escape me and is the part of the paper, along with materials and methods, that I usually skip), here goes.

The Observation Vehicle Team (Ann and I) traveled 2,987 miles between 31 July-10 August 1992. Total hours in observation mode were 52.25. Total observations of recordable taxa were 113. These taxa break down as follows: armadillos - 56, total herps - 56, Toads - 1, Turtles - 30, Snakes - 25, total live armadillos - 0, total live herps - 6.

All data were tortured by multibarreled cannon analysis, single cannonball analysis, standard deviates (Pisani & Collins), and the POOP program. We attempted to calculate the We Are The Men Who Say Nee! distance for all groups, but failed miserably. Results of these high-powered and highly touted analytic methods revealed, as usual, absolutely no meaningful or usable information for anyone who is actually trying to pay the bills and put bread on the table, as it were.

However, by using the little calculator that comes with this word processing program, we did obtain the following numbers: Total Bodies/Mile - 0.03783059926, Total Armadillos/Mile - 0.01908269166, Total Herps/Mile - 0.0187479076, Total Toads/Mile - infinitesimal, Total Turtles/Mile - 0.01004352193, Total Snakes/Mile - 0.08369601E-3. The last figure makes absolutely no sense to us, but that's all the little calculator would give us. You figure it out.

Analysis by Observer (combined) Hours revealed the following data: Total Bodies/Hour - 2.1626794258, Total Armadillos/Hour - 1.090909090 (I did not make that up), Total Herps/Hour - 1.0717703349, Total Toads/Hour - 0.01913875598, Total Turtles/Hour - 0.57416267943, Total Snakes/Hour - 0.47846889952. In English this means: 2 bodies per hour, 1 armadillo per hour, about 1 herp per hour, 2 one-hundredths toads per hour, a little over half a turtle per hour, and a little less than half a snake per hour. In other

words, if you want substantial figures that you can actually relate to, go by the hour, folks.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious from the data set presented, that an entirely new cladistic terminology must be invented to properly confuse and distract the reader. We present, for your inspection, the following and their various explanations. To gauge character states, we erect a new class of terms, the O'Murphys. These terms are presented in honor of the notorious herpetological character who resides south of the Red River, none other than James B. Murphy of the Dallas Zoo. We take great pleasure in casting aspersions in his general direction. To describe the most primitive character state, we erect the category of plesiosaur O'Murphy. For the next most primitive state, a simple plesiosaur O'Murphy must be used. For the occasional evolutionary deadend, an autops O'Murphy will suffice. If the taxon is clearly in the present and twitching, then a synaps O'Murphy can be applied.

However, to arrive at an objective point by which to apply the most correct character state, a series of individual states must be evaluated. In the past, the phrase used to describe these characters has been the Operational Taxonomic Unit (OTU). For an analysis of sun-baked, fly-blown road pizza, we believe that an OPU more accurately reflects the true state of the character. Pronounce it slowly, people.

Finally, a number of totally subjective judgements must be made in an attempt to put the "Big Picture" together. Again, past terminology is fond of the phrase "most parsimonious". Besides being a pain in the butt to spell, the term has little relevance and we have discovered that the original phrase should have been "mostly parsley", having been incorrectly transcribed from a recent cookbook. Therefore we can gleefully and totally ignore it. Not so easy to discard are a number of remaining terms. Previous attempts at roadkill analysis failed to take into consideration the multiple sources of the origins of said roadkill. They were obviously pollywannacrackerphlyetic. In addition, most previous attempts failed to recognize the proper relationship of taxa to each other. By extension, we consider that the roadkill we observed was found, for the most part, south of the Mason-Dixon line and therefore must be considered cousin taxa, at best. This applies, however, only to southern species. What remains, therefore, is an assemblage of pale, constantly tired, and anemic taxa. The only proper descriptive term for this state of relationship is mononucleophlyetic.

We are now able to assemble all this data and come to a proper description of the relationships of all these various factors and states to each other. In the process, we have generated a number of fancy diagrams, some of which are

prettier than the others. We have chosen a particular uncladogram as that one which best represents our interpretation of cladistic relationships of roadkill. Unfortunately, due to the highly pornographic nature of this graphic, we are unable to print it in this publication. Those readers wishing a copy of the uncladogram should send a self-addressed, stamped plain brown envelope to us at the above address, along with a check or money order for \$24.95 plus \$3.00 shipping. Kansas residents add 5% tax.

So, what conclusions can we come to at the end of this long and tedious piece? Well, it is obvious to us that one and only one conclusion can be reached: **There is no such thing as a live armadillo.** Thank you for your patience.

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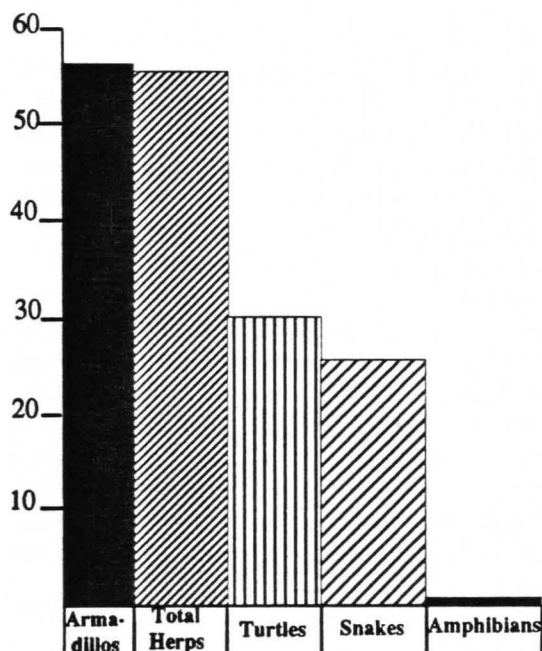
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TABLE 1.
Roadkill Observations 31 July-10 August 1992

Ornate Box Turtle (<i>Terrapene o. ornata</i>)	13
Desert Box Turtle (<i>Terrapene o. luteola</i>)	2
Red-eared Slider (<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>)	7
Common Snapping Turtle (<i>Chelydra s. serpentina</i>)	7
Yellow Mud Turtle (<i>Kinosternon f. flavescens</i>)	1
Blind Snake (<i>Leptotyphlops</i> sp.)	1
Black Rat Snake (<i>Elaphe o. obsoleta</i>)	2
Texas Rat Snake (<i>Elaphe o. lindheimeri</i>)	1
Bullsnake (<i>Pituophis catenifer sayi</i>)	2
Sonora Gopher Snake (<i>Pituophis c. affinis</i>)	2
Yellowbelly Racer (<i>Coluber constrictor flaviventris</i>)	3
Desert Striped Whipsnake	

(<i>Masticophis t. taeniatus</i>)	2
Desert Kingsnake	
(<i>Lampropeltis getula splendida</i>)	1
Eastern Hognose Snake (<i>Heterodon platirhinos</i>)	1
Garter Snake (<i>Thamnophis</i> sp.)	1
Water Snake (<i>Nerodia</i> sp.)	1
Western Diamondback Rattlesnake (<i>Crotalus atrox</i>)	6
Northern Blacktail Rattlesnake (<i>Crotalus m. molossus</i>)	2
Red-spotted Toad (<i>Bufo punctatus</i>)	1
Nine-banded Armadillo (<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>)	57
Total Herps	56
Total Amphibians	1
Total Turtles	28
Total Snakes	26

GRAPH 1.
Roadkill Analysis 31 July-10 August 1992



Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles

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