

## HerPET-POURRI

by Ellin Beltz

**Happy New Year!** To all readers from your loyal scrivener. This column marks the 12th year of columnification on news of interest to herpetologists from around the world. It functions as a reader-supported column by using only those items received from readers. You can contribute, too. Merely send whole pages of newspaper/magazines/etc. or clip the article being sure to attach the date/publication slug and your name to each page. Mail to: Ellin Beltz, 1647 N. Clybourn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614-5507. All contributors are acknowledged either with their story or at the end of each column.

### Lost and found in Wisconsin

- A 4-foot iguana known as "Sweet Pea" disappeared from a third-story balcony in September and was found 10 miles away in a tree. "We got her in the nick of time, especially with the weather getting cold," said the lady in whose care the animal was when it disappeared. *The Wisconsin State Journal* reports: "It is unknown how a lizard could travel that far from a busy downtown location. . . . A big lizard is not the sort of animal to which a motorist would offer a ride. . . ." [October 18, 1997, from Dreux Watermoelen]
- A 3-foot ball python vanished in a University of Wisconsin-Madison dormitory. Authorities are not amused and have instituted a search even though residents seem undismayed. Some speculate that Merlin did not slither away solo, but was taken from its cage in a female student's room in Sallery Hall. One resident said that officials were "acting like it's some kind of national emergency." [*Wisconsin State Journal*, October 7, 1997, from Dreux Watermoelen]

### At least they're consistent

- "Two Japanese men headed to a reptile breeders' show in Orlando are in the Seminole County Jail this weekend after their arrests on animal-smuggling charges . . . at Orlando International Airport by agents from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with help from the U.S. Customs Service and Orlando police. Agents found eight snakes thought to be from Southeast Asia in [one man's] suitcase. Two turtles were in [the other man's] suitcase, . . . thought to be worth up to \$70,000." wrote *The Orlando Sentinel* [August 17, 1997, from Alan Rigerman]. The story added that one of the men arrested in this incident had been charged by an Orlando grand jury only ten days previously for the smuggling of 64 Fly River turtles and 113 snake-neck turtles in April of 1996. A spokesperson for the Orlando Reptile Breeders' Expo said that the group requires all live merchandise to be captive bred and does not condone smuggling.
- Regular readers will recall news stories from 1995 when a man in Prince William County, Virginia, was envenomated by a pet cobra. At that time, authorities seized 22 venomous snakes and seven tarantulas from his apartment. He said he would buy no more cobras while he lived in the county and avoided punishment for violating the law of possessing wild or exotic animals in the county. The December 5, 1997, *Roanoke*

*Times* reports: "A man who was bitten as he milked venom from his pet cobra required a double dose of lifesaving anti-venin to save his life doctors said . . . [it] was the second time in two years he had been attacked by one of the deadly snakes he kept in his Prince William County apartment. After he was bitten, police removed 10 poisonous [sic] vipers, including Indian cobras and a water moccasin, said Prince William County police spokeswoman. . . . In 1995 [the same man] was bitten on the hand as he reached for a cobra that had started to leave its cage. . . . No charges had been filed . . . relative to the snakes seized this week. . . ." [from Mark T. Witwer]

### Wander Indiana safely

The Indiana State Department of Natural Resources issued an emergency regulation prohibiting the sale of any native or dangerous snake, frog, crocodile, turtle or other reptile or amphibian in direct response to the numbers of sales of native reptiles and amphibians. The director of the Department said that overcollection of native animals would upset the ecological balance. In addition he said that the regulation protects the public by prohibiting the sale of dangerous reptiles and amphibians. Possession of the animals remains legal. "Dangerous" is defined as including any venomous or poisonous snake, frog, toad, lizard or other species that can seriously injure a person or animal. Crocodiles over 5 feet and lizards over 6 feet are not permitted to be sold and no portion of the animal, eggs or offspring of a dangerous animal can be sold. To receive the full text or to comment on their intention to enact permanent rules on this subject, contact: DNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife, 402 W. Washington Street, Room W273, Indianapolis, IN 46204. [*The Chesterton Tribune*, December 9, 1997, from Chuck Keating and *The Courier-Journal*, December 17, from E. A. Zorn]

### Your traffic hot spots

- Over a thousand animals about to be smuggled into the U.S. were found by Peruvian authorities. Anacondas, water snakes, black crocodiles, iguanas and rare species of frogs, lizards and turtles from Peru's Amazon jungle, were packed in crates marked "ornamental fish" bound for Los Angeles, California. Nearly a third of the animals were dead when discovered, apparently killed by sedatives given them by the herpetotraf-ficantes. [*Albuquerque Journal*, August 26, 1997, from J. N. Stuart] The story continues in the Little Rock, Arkansas, *Democrat-Gazette* [August 28, 1997, from Bill Burnett], "While the exact number of exotic animals captured and sold in Peru is unknown, they can be easily purchased in downtown Lima. Until city authorities swept through Ayacucho Street last month, the animal market resembled a sidewalk zoo. . . . The World Wildlife Foundation estimates global trade in illegal animal trafficking at more than \$5 billion a year." One wonders how much the legal trade is worth.
- A Kansan and a Louisianan were indicted in Topeka, Kansas, on charges of illegally buying and selling more than 1,000 box turtles. "Kansans view [the turtles] as cute curiosities,

with their small dark shells marked with yellow and orange-yellow lines. But to those who engage in the illegal business of capturing and shipping them abroad, they look more like four-legged dollar signs,” according to the Houma, Louisiana, *Courier* [October 26, 1997, from Ernie Liner]. The story adds a quote from Joe Collins, herpetologist emeritus of the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History, that while American collectors get about \$5 to \$10 for each turtle, Japanese collectors pay \$300. Most of the animals are put in ornamental gardens and cared for carefully; however mortality rates between capture and final sale are “inordinate,” he commented. If convicted, the two men face sentences of up to 11 years in jail.

- “Brazilian authorities have saved about 8,000 freshwater turtles and other wild animals that were destined to be served up as illegal delicacies in the Amazon region, an environmental official said. . . . Police arrested four people aboard a boat carrying the animals on . . . one of the Amazon River’s main tributaries. . . . Traditional Amazonian dishes include grilled turtle steak, a stew of turtle innards and brains and a turtle roast served with manioc flour piled in the animal’s shell,” according to the *Chicago Tribune* [August 13, 1997, from Scott Keator and Ray Boldt].

#### **UV-B determined cause of salamander decline**

“Biologists have shown for the first time that excess ultraviolet rays from natural sunlight kill amphibians, an ominous sign of the dangers of solar radiation leaking through a thinning ozone layer. . . . Natural sunlight contains enough ultraviolet-B radiation to kill most embryos of the long-toed salamander in mountain lakes of the Cascade Mountain Range. . . . [One scientist] cautioned that the result applies to only one animal species and does not prove that UVB is the cause for all of the declines of frogs, toads and salamanders [worldwide],” as reported in the *Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 1997, from Claus Sutor and Ray Boldt]

#### **Farm bites state**

A judge has ruled that the state of Louisiana must pay more than \$4.6 million in damages to an alligator farm raided by the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in 1991. Agents had seized 358 alligator skins and issued summonses to the company and one employee for alleged violations of alligator tagging and skinning laws. Charges were dropped in 1992, and the company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The judge ruled that the company “proved that the outrageous actions of the defendant (DWF) caused serious damages,” and the state plans to appeal, noting that Louisiana does not maintain insurance for this type of situation and would be forced to spend tax funds to fulfill the court order. [*The Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, LA, July 4, 1997, from Ernie Liner]

#### **The following not suitable for more sensitive readers**

From Clifton, New Jersey comes the story of a man “attacked by his pet 8-foot python . . . [and] rescued by his sister, who heard his screams and cut off the snake’s head with a butcher knife. The snake sprang up and bit [the 28-year-old man] on the cheek after he opened the top of its tank to give it a drink

Monday. It curled around his neck as it hung onto [his face] . . . . Police said . . . [his sister] cut off the python’s head. When the snake would still not let go, she cut off another chunk of its body, which fell to the floor and slithered under a bed, police said. She then pulled the head off her brother’s face. . . . He was treated at a hospital and released. [CNN, September 2, 1997, and UPI September 3, 1997, both from Wes von Papineau and Kimberley Heaphy, and Orlando *Sentinel*, from Bill Burnett]

#### **Adam Smith at work in the bayou**

Prices for the skins of Louisiana alligators have fluctuated over the last 25 years. For those who like this sort of thing, the raw numbers are: 1972, \$8.10; 1982, \$13.50; 1992, \$23.00; 1993, \$23.00; 1994, \$37.00; 1995, \$41.00; 1996, \$25.00; 1997, \$18.00. Wildlife officials speculate that the large catch in the last few years may have driven skin prices down, but also point to world market conditions and farm-raised alligators as factors in the price changes. [*The Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, LA, September 10, 1997, from Ernie Liner]

#### **More numbers**

Another interesting factoid is U.S. state spending on endangered species by type and in percent: Birds, 37; Mammals, 33; Fishes, 13; Plants, 8; Invertebrates, 5; Reptiles and Amphibians, 4. [*Endangered Species Survey*, 1996, from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, reprinted in *Audubon*, September-October 1997, from J. N. Stuart]

#### **An ode to amplexus and a plea for the horny toad**

From the *Sonoran Herpetologist* [10(8) 1997] comes the following with apologies to Paul Simon and to the tune of “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover.”

The problem is all inside your head, she croaked to he.  
It’s been ten long months; the answer’s plain to me.  
So let me feel your thunder while it’s raining, see,  
You got fifty days to breed your lover.  
She croaked, `It’s really not my habit to be bold.  
But your song’s so nice and your colors green and gold,  
(sigh) have me wanting you; love has taken hold.  
You got fifty days to breed your lover.  
[chorus]  
Just slip on the back, Jack.  
Amplexus’ the plan, Stan.  
Don’t need to be coy, Roy—  
Sing your night songs to me! . . .

There’s more (probably from the inimitable pen of Roger Repp), but as the CHS has always been a “family” herpetological society, I leave you to search the THS herp society page for the rest and their update on conservation of the flat-tailed horned lizard lawsuit <<http://www.azstarnet.com/~bsavary/announce.html>> .

#### **Not limited to North America**

From Rod Douglas of the National Museum at Bloemfontein, South Africa, come two clippings of advertisements not beneficial to reptiles. The first shows a rock python and is cap-

tioned "It's 53 degrees in the shade, and you haven't eaten for seven days. You have three choices, Braise it. Fry it. Grill it (on our advertised gas grill). . . . Rumour has it that when cooked on the global range, a choice cut of rock python will melt in the mouth. But even we find that a little bit hard to swallow." Please remember that the temperature is in Celsius. The second ad shows a cooler being held by an alligator skeleton. The caption reads: "The Nile crocodile's tenacity is legendary. So is its stupidity." Both appeared in *Getaway* magazine, September 1997. Rod wrote the manufacturer and received a reply: "I can assure you that these advertisements are not intended to encourage any harm. . . . We understand and appreciate your discomfort; however, in our pretesting of the advertisement, we confirmed that most people fear snakes especially larges (sic) ones and would do their level best to avoid any close contact with a snake. . . . We have nevertheless passed on your letter to our advertising agency for their comments and a response. . . ."

#### Florida environmentalist dies

Marjorie Carr, the widow of Archie Carr, and a passionate environmentalist in her home state, died at the age of 82. She served on numerous committees, testified, wrote letters and lobbied legislators and was instrumental in the preservation of Florida habitats. Expressions of sympathy may be made by donations to Florida Defenders of the Environment, 4424 NW 13 Street, Suite C-8, Gainesville, FL 32609, according to a family spokesperson. [*The Gainesville Sun*, October 11, 1997, from Kenneth C. Dodd, Jr.]

#### Quote of the month

From the *Arizona Tribune*: "An East Valley lawmaker wants colleagues to honor something with a small brain. And no, it isn't a politician. . . . [He] introduced legislation to make the

*Dilophosaurus* the official state dinosaur. . . . It is the only known dinosaur unique to Arizona." [December 12, 1997, from Tom Taylor]

#### Letters:

- "Your snippets of information are always most interesting and HerPet-Pourri is most popular. As Chairman of the, unfortunately, now-defunct Free State Herpetological Association, I reprinted many items from your column in our Newsletter. I know that sometimes you most probably feel the task is rather thankless, but remember that there are people all over the world, like myself, who read your column and appreciate it, but perhaps never have reason to write and tell you so-keep up the good work. Rod Douglas" Bloemfontein, South Africa. *Thank you for writing. I sometimes wonder if there's anybody out there, but then along comes a letter like this to remind me that we really do have over 1,000 members around the world!*
- "Sorry to hear about your misfortune. Hope you are able to get your household back to normal—as is possible—after such a disaster. Ray Boldt" Chicago, Illinois. *We're getting there. December was the month of living out of the half-bath and the kitchen sink while the regular bathroom was getting new walls and floor. The tub is lying on its back in the living room with its four little feet pointing straight up. It looks like it died or something. We hope to finish everything by about May this year.*
- "Hope your e-mail situation is resolved soon. . . . E. A. Zorn" *Yup. New address <ebeltz@ripco.com>.*
- "Best wishes for the holidays, like 'Have a toadally herpy New Year'. Claus Sutor." *We did have a very merry hiss-mus and a hoppy New Year. Thanks for thinking of ussss.*

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## News and Announcements

### 1998 NYTTS TURTLE POSTER CONTEST

The New York Turtle and Tortoise Society has announced its 1998 Turtle Poster Contest. The poster should depict threats facing turtles in general, or may focus on one particular species. Some examples might include, but are not limited to, overhunting for food and pets, pollution, road kills, loss of habitat and boat hits. Ninja Turtles are not allowed as subject matter. Posters should be submitted on heavyweight posterboard and can measure either 12 × 18" or 18 × 24" in size. Entries will be grouped according to age and grade level. Mediums suggested are paint, magic marker, inks or collage. Name, address, phone number, age, grade and name of school, if applicable, should be clearly printed on the back of the poster. All entries will be judged by a panel of conservationists, artists and teachers on the basis of content, originality and artistic merit. Prizes will include official Turtle Society T-shirts, books, and a one-year membership to the New York Turtle and Tortoise Society. Winning posters will be exhibited at the 24th Annual Turtle and Tortoise Show in New York City during June 1998. All entries must be postmarked by May 31, 1998. No entry will be accepted before Feb 15, 1998. Mail entries to Poster Contest, New York Turtle and Tortoise Society, c/o Lorri Cramer, 750 Columbus Avenue, New York NY 10025. All posters become the property of the Turtle Society and cannot be returned. If you have any questions on appropriate subject matter and rules, contact Ms. Cramer at (212) 459-4803.