

## HerPET-POURRI

by Ellin Beltz

**Plastics recycling comes to Chicago.** The Chicago Park District requests that you bring empty milk, water or soda pop bottles to any of their field houses or the North Park Village recycling center. Donors should wash the bottles and remove caps and rings. For more information call (312) 294-4550. The plastic will be recycled into plastic play materials for use by the Park District throughout Chicago.

**A \$50,000 fine** was ordered by a judge against a suburban developer for filling in a wetland during construction of luxury housing in Hoffman Estates, IL. This ruling is the first fine in the 6-state Great Lakes region for destroying a wetland, under amendments to the Clean Water Act in 1987.

**Large stretches of Amazonian rain forest** have been chopped down by Peruvian coca growers. At the same time, millions of gallons of toxic chemicals used in the production of coca paste have been dumped into the headwaters of Amazonian rivers. Growers also use large amounts of fertilizers and herbicides, including paraquat and Agent Orange. Coca growers have invaded two national parks and two national forests and have destroyed well over 500,000 acres of natural vegetation. Coca leaf is currently the largest crop under cultivation in the Peruvian Amazon. Marcelow T. Buena-ventura, a forest engineer, wrote recently in *Medio Ambiente* (a Peruvian environmental magazine), "Many species of fish, amphibians, aquatic reptiles and crustaceans have already completely disappeared from the rivers and streams." The area of damage from coca production in Peru alone is roughly twice the area of the state of Rhode Island.

**The Caribbean Conservation Corporation** will receive two grants totaling \$675,000 from the U.S. Agency for International Development in support of its activities at Tortuguero, Costa Rica. \$250,000 will go to developing a visitor center, providing guides to lead tourists on the nesting beaches, and assisting local residents to develop tourist enterprises catering to natural history. \$100,000 will go toward the development of a comprehensive zoning plan, insuring compatibility of future development with the unique natural resources of Tortuguero. The Research Station will also be overhauled. You can join the C.C.C. and help save turtles. Contact them at P. O. Box 2866, Gainesville, FL 32602.

**The Tortoise Survival Project** is currently the only organization exclusively concerned with the conservation and captive breeding of rare and endangered North African tortoises. They report that more than 1 million tortoises were removed from the wild in Morocco alone and exported to Britain between 1967 and 1981. Similar numbers were exported to other European countries. The average survival of wild-caught tortoises in captivity was less than 12 months. Recent research indicates that North African tortoises, rather than constituting a single species, *Testudo graeca*, may actually comprise many closely related but distinct species. The most disturbing finding of the T.S.P. has been that many of these endemic species-groups are already extremely vulnerable and that

some may even now be so depleted as to be in immediate danger. They have published a booklet "Terrestrial Chelonia: Incubation of Eggs and Care of Hatchlings," available from T.S.P. for \$12 U.S. To receive more information about this valuable effort, send an international reply coupon (from your local post office) to The Tortoise Trust, BM Tortoise, London, WC1N 3XX.

**The Reptile Breeding Foundation** in Picton, Ontario, Canada is in severe financial difficulty. Those who have followed Thomas Huff's work with various herptiles may wish to contact the Foundation now in its time of need. They sell many reptile related products (t-shirts, cards, etc.), the proceeds of which benefit the Foundation; in addition, they gratefully accept any and all cash donations. Some of their breeding successes include: Bengal monitors, Round Island day geckos, frog-eyed geckos, and Jamaican boas. Overall, they work with 500 reptiles and amphibians from 85 species and are one of the few institutions dealing solely with the management and breeding of herpetofauna. The R.B.F. needs your help now. Please send what you can to Reptile Breeding Foundation, P. O. Box 1450, Picton, Ontario, Canada, K0K 2T0. Our exchange member, the Ontario Herpetological Society, actively supports the work of the R.B.F. and has requested our help.

**Articles and artwork** concerning herpetofauna are being sought by both the Louisiana Herpetological Society, 5025 Tulane Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70808, and the Gopher Tortoise Council, c/o Patricia Ashton, Editor, Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville, FL 32611. Incidentally, the C.H.S. is always interested in receiving articles from members for publication in the *Bulletin*.

**A southern Florida newspaper** reports "Big bass go for live salamanders. The newest bait to hit the ... market is the live salamander or "water dog." The article goes on to say that Charlie Rhodes and Carl Lowrance, owners of A & R Distributors, P. O. Box 2405, Pensacola, FL 32513, (904) 479-7281, are importing huge numbers of animals native to North Dakota into Florida for use as live bait.

**This Christmas** it seemed that every store had a display of "Grow-a-Frog kits." The tadpoles in these kits will grow to be our old buddy, *Xenopus*, and the distributors claim that all their stock is laboratory raised. I would hope these kits might awaken an interest in natural history for many youngsters otherwise divorced from nature, but I fear that they will also make it more likely that *Xenopus* individuals will be released in North American habitats. The clawed frog is a voracious feeder and should not under any circumstances be released from captivity. Also I received a copy of *Cane Toads: An Unnatural History* in my stocking last week. This slim but thoroughly illustrated book documents the release and spread of *Bufo marinus* in Australia. In 1935, the toads were captured from a Hawaiian population and released in sugar cane fields in Australia in a misguided effort to reduce cane

beetles. Unfortunately, nobody noticed that the beetles flew and the toads could not. The toads are now widespread in Queensland and if little else, should serve to remind us not to introduce animals where they do not belong.

**Increasing demand for health potions** has spurred a jump in frog and snake imports to South Korea. Some Korean men believe snake soup and frog meat build stamina.

**New York City Department of Parks** has a "Beast of the Month Club." In November, snakes were featured in a program titled "really reptiles" led by herpetologist Jim Rogers. Commissioner Henry Stern played a tune on a flute in an attempt to charm a 12-foot long python out of her sack. The python reportedly cooperated. The *New York Times* recently wrote warmly about Commissioner Stern saying, "You've led 7 million New Yorkers on one fine nature hike...Who can forget that you coined the word 'arboricide' for tree murderers...You are truly a commissioner for all species." Mr. Stern also named Kermit the Frog as official parks spokes-frog.

**TEDs continued...** The Sport Fishing Institute recently published an article in their *Bulletin* titled "Wanton Waste: Must It Continue?" from which the following quotes are taken. "The relatively recent development of dumping carcasses [of pollock and cod] in the Bering Sea is obscene, but it pales when compared to the waste that has been going on for years in the shrimp trawling industry, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic...During the past 10 years, finfish bycatch by shrimp trawlers in Texas waters alone ranged from a low of 328 million pounds to a high of 977 million pounds each year...The commercial fishing and shrimping industries must be held accountable for wasted bycatch...A bright ray of hope for the conservation of fishery resources is the Bush Administration's choice to head the National Marine Fisheries Service...Dr. William W. Fox, Jr. has the training and experience to bring conservation to the forefront." For more information on the S.F.I. work toward the conservation of sport fish, contact them at 1010 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20001. Also the most recent newsletter of the Marine Mammal Stranding Center in Brigantine, New Jersey reports on sea turtles found, dead and alive, along a short section of coast in that state. From June to September, 18 leatherback and loggerhead sea turtles washed up on these beaches. The causes of their deaths include: perforated intestines, hits by boat propellers, and entanglement by fishing line. Seven Kemp's ridley turtles were recovered, six from the Salem Nuclear Power Station. Three of the six were alive and were tagged and released. The others suffocated in the intake valve before MMSC could rescue them. The seventh ridley was found dead and partially decomposed at Sandy Hook, New Jersey. As always, donations to the MMSC will help continue their work with sea mammals and sea turtles. Contact them at: (609) 266-0538, or P. O. Box 773, Brigantine, NJ 08203.

**U.S. Representative Gene Taylor of Texas** introduced legislation to create a hatchery for endangered sea turtles. He said "this would up the number of turtles out there and when the population is increased, they will no longer be an endangered

species. And when they are no longer an endangered species, the TEDs will no longer be needed." His bill would authorize up to \$4 million for building facilities and more than \$2 million for a three-year implementation, research and monitoring program. He said a likely place for the hatchery would be Ship Island. Suzanne Lewis, a management assistant for the Gulf Islands National Seashore system, which includes Ship Island, said she had not heard of the legislation and would need to check the National Park Service's regulations as to how and if it could be done. Charles Oravetz, chief of the Protected Species Branch of the National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Region said, "I don't think it will work," and pointed out that the only other hatchery in the U.S., located near Galveston, Texas, has been in operation for about 12 years and has not proven to increase the population of the Kemp's ridley. Taylor said, "this is something that we feel will please environmentalists and free the shrimpers from the requirement of using the costly, dangerous, ineffective devices [TEDs]." Taylor said he would prefer having legislation requiring TEDs repealed but that past congressional efforts to do that "have all failed." Taylor's bill is being considered by the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee in January 1990.

**Biologist James Perran Ross, PhD**, senior author of the publication *The Status of Kemp's Ridley*, reports that drowning in shrimp trawls is the largest identifiable cause of death for this species. You can get a copy of this report from the Center for Marine Conservation, 1725 DeSales Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036 for \$5.00 postpaid.

**Plans by Consolidated Rail Corporation of Philadelphia**, Pennsylvania, to expand its rail terminal near Westboro, Massachusetts, have been stalled by the 4-inch spotted turtle. Conrail needs a zoning variance as well as permission from the Westboro Conservation Commission to pave portions of a wetland. Conrail has hired two zoologists to study the turtle and its habits. Conrail plans to "mitigate" this wetland by building a new wet habitat and moving the turtles there before proceeding with the \$20 million expansion. Permits will also be required from the State Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers.

**The state of Florida** Department of Environmental Regulation is working on a proposal for a research project to determine the amount of mercury gas, possibly from incinerators or power plants, in the air over that state. Mercury has been found in Florida wildlife, including fish, at levels exceeding the federal health limit of one part per million. The discovery of mercury in alligators pushed state officials to ban hunting in western Dade and Broward counties during the 1989 gator season. Incinerators burn trash, often including car and flashlight batteries, which contain mercury, along with regular household garbage which can include all kinds of paints, chemicals and other toxics. Six waste-to-energy incinerators are now in operation in Florida and three are under construction.

**Gopher tortoises** in the way of a new school site are being moved even though finding new homes for tortoises in south-east Florida is becoming nearly impossible. Game official

Mark Robinson said, "Gopher tortoises are very adaptable animals, but there are so few large tracts of undeveloped land left here." Florida legislation barring the capture or possession of gophers without a permit went into effect on July 1, 1988. About 100 permits were issued to people who had kept gopher tortoises as pets before the rules went into effect.

**The turtle egg poacher** who was caught with 1,088 eggs from Riviera Beach, Florida in May 1988 was sentenced to 2 years in prison. It is believed to be the longest prison sentence imposed under the Endangered Species Act, according to a press release from U.S. Attorney, Dexter Lehtinen. The defendant, James Bivins, 37, of West Palm Beach also pleaded guilty to taking 818 green and loggerhead sea turtle eggs from 17 nests on Jupiter Island Beach in August 1988. He also had a 1973 turtle egg theft case on his record. After Bivins' second arrest, he agreed to cooperate with Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission officers as an informant and cease his nest raids. Upon his third arrest, state game officers abandoned him as an informant and requested the U.S. attorney to prosecute. Bivins filed an appeal to the concurrent fine of \$109,300. His attorney wrote in the appeal brief, "An egg, according to the facts of nature that an egg becomes a life when it is hatched is not a turtle...Hence the universal question: which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Prosecutors and wildlife officials say the argument is a new one to them, but ridiculous nonetheless. The appeal to the three-judge Circuit Court is set for oral arguments on January 18th.

**Less than half of the alligator eggs** taken by Florida state workers for hatching in captivity produced live young, but University of Florida researchers were unable to explain the low rate. Franklin Percival, associate professor of wildlife sciences said, "over the last eight years, we've documented a population crash at Lake Apopka...only...9 percent [hatched] ...it's bad, and we don't know why."

**Congratulations to Charles Beck** and his staff at the reptile house at Memphis Zoo on their successful hatching of Gila monsters in October. The two scaly bundles of joy measure about 4 inches each and will grow to about 20 inches.

**The Nature Conservancy** has agreed to buy land for a 15,000 to 60,000 acre preserve near Searchlight, Nevada for the endangered desert tortoise. Such a facility could ease tensions between developers and environmentalists.

**A new activity guide** from the National Wildlife Federation, "Tropical Treasures," helps educators teach children about tropical rain forests. To order one, send \$9.25 U.S. to National Wildlife Federation, 1400-16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-2266. Please specify item #75044.

**The sixth grade class** of Caldwell Elementary School, Caldwell, Kansas 67022 requested that the C.H.S. ask its members for help. It seems some grown-ups in Caldwell have been putting down the class for a project which became a state initiative to have the ornate box turtle named their state's official reptile. However, some latecoming adult "boosters" in Caldwell are saying that they want their community to be known for more than box turtles. Some sickies are letting it be known to the students how they like to "pop" turtles they find sunning on roadways with their car tires. One insensitive lout took to wearing a t-shirt with the kids' box turtle on it, but with a red slash drawn through the turtle. A support group, "Friends of the Ornate Box Turtle," which includes parents of the class, the teacher, Larry Miller, and other adults, is demanding that the troublemakers stop harassing the children. Perhaps Caldwell shouldn't be known as the "Ornate Box Turtle Capital of the World." Perhaps it should be known as the adult bully capital instead. Please send letters of support to the class at the above address. They will be turned over, en masse, to the local paper - so be polite, please.

**Weird snake stories...** A baby Burmese python was snake-napped from a Valparaiso, Indiana pet shop. It is valued at \$150 by the shop's owner who would like it back. Anybody with information about this theft can contact Matt Morris, Valparaiso Pet and Hobby, 18 North Washington Street, Valparaiso, IN. ... A man in Nashville, TN is being forced to sell his 6½ foot python and his 3½ foot baby reticulated python by his fiancée. He said, "She can't stand them. They give her the creeps." ... A 5-foot rattlesnake was photographed wrapped around the steering wheel of a car in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Apparently, the car (and snake) owner leaves his pet in the vehicle to deter car thieves. ... Chicago Police say it should no longer be necessary to continue searching for the 7-foot python which escaped on the south side this fall. Police Lt. Frank Trigg said that the python probably couldn't survive the below freezing temperatures presently being suffered by Chicago residents. He did note that stranger things have happened and that his officers are still aware that the snake may be coiled up in some warm basement or other area.

**A big thank you** to all who contributed articles and clippings this month. Again, it is very important to have the date and the publication in which each and every single clipping appeared. I have had to not use some interesting items since I had no way of knowing when or where they first appeared. Without the contributions of so many of our members, this column wouldn't be possible. You can join the ranks of these wonderful folks. Merely send herpetologically related items to: Ellin Beltz, c/o the Chicago Herpetological Society, 2001 N. Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60614. Thanks again.