

HerPET-POURRI

by Ellin Beltz

Most disgusting behavior by a corporation in 1999 award

"KLM Royal Dutch Airlines will never again ship rodents, reptiles and endangered animals following an outcry over its destruction of hundreds of squirrels in a shredding machine, the company said. . . . [They already had] suspended shipments of rodents, amphibians and reptiles earlier this year after admitting that [they] dumped 440 illegally imported squirrels into an industrial meat processing machine on April 12 after failing to find them a home," according to the *News-Star*, October 30, 1999, from Martha Ann Messinger.

Just not his day

A 30-year-old licensed gator trapper in Florida is in the red after being attacked by an alligator that he tried to remove from the middle of a golf center road. Turns out the man, who has been a trapper for five years, has no health insurance to cover the treatment of having "big chunks of meat the size of half dollars [ripped] out of [his] calf," according to the *Reading Eagle/Times*. [October 2, 1999, from Walt Loose]

Snakes, apples; how fin de siecle

A *London Observer* story warns Britons who plan to visit the big Apple that the latest fad in Manhattan, New York, is colorful, live snakes in ladies' purses. Somehow I fail to see why one would have to warn tourists about anything done by native New Yorkers (like myself) as one usually expects the worst anyway on the Island. And why would the author have been looking in ladies' purses anyway? [*News of the Weird, Chicago Reader*, October 1, 1999, from Ray Boldt] This reminds me of the time one of my sisters-in-law went in my herp pack (it really wasn't a purse) and found the tin of maggots I had just bought to feed a lizard. You could hear the screams all the way out in the yard. She did promise never to "go in your purse again" and no one had the heart to ask her what she'd been in there for in the first place!

Another New Jersey reptile fire

I had to read the date on this one several times before I was sure I'd never used it before. The story reads, "A fire sparked by two explosions gutted an aquarium in [Ocean City, NJ]. . . killing at least three dozen animals. A few survived, including a turtle, an 18-foot African rock python and three alligators. . . . Investigators had not determined the cause of the explosions. . . . At least 12 iguanas and 24 snakes were killed. Firefighters spotted the python slithering through the building as they were putting out the last of the flames." [Little Rock, Arkansas, *Democrat-Gazette*, November 1, 1999, from Bill Burnett]

The Pennsylvania Perspective

Walt Loose sent in a whole bunch of stories from the *Reading Eagle/Times*, of which the next two tales really stuck out. I'm so accustomed to "Eek, a horrible snake!" articles that it's refreshing to hear about the discovery of a two-headed queen snake by a 13-year-old Latrobe resident. The picture shows both heads alert and snaking around the finder's fingers. [October 2, 1999] Another was headlined "Actually, there's

a lot to like about turtles and snakes," and advises, "If you encounter a reptile in your back yard, in most cases, it's not just a good idea to refrain from using your Louisville Slugger; it's the law." Anyone discovering a snake on the property is advised to call the police or animal control. The article points out "Unfortunately for most reptiles, human imagination creates a venomous copperhead or timber rattlesnake out of every slithering reptile that trips a surprise button." Believe it or not, Pennsylvania still permits rattlesnake hunting with a bag limit of one in a two-week season—and you must have a paper permit from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission <<http://www.fish.state.pa.us>>. [August 1]

Only in the U.K.

David Blatchford sent this lively piece from the *Daily Mail*: "As a judge presiding over eviction proceedings, Lord Johnston was well used to hearing tales of woe, heartache and suffering." So he stopped a repossession effort by a bank against a family based on the argument that the 10-year-old child's seven-inch pet water dragon has a right not to be turned out in the cold, which would endanger its life. The judge asked the bank's lawyers, "Will you give me an undertaking not to do anything for 24 hours at least in the interests of the lizard?" And the counsel for the bank "promised that the animal would not be disturbed and suggested that animal welfare experts become involved." This all started when Sheriff's officers "began the eviction process, but came across the lizard. They tried to find it an alternative home but were concerned that it might die if they took it away from its environment." The owner of the house said, "Everything I own is at stake here. I can't believe the fuss about the lizard." [March 30, 1999]

Another cool website

I really enjoyed the eighth edition of the *Box Turtle Research and Conservation Newsletter* sent to me by Heather Kalb. You can visit their website at <<http://www.bio.tamu.edu/users/heather/boxturt.htm>> or write her at the Department of Biology, T.A.M.U., College Station, TX 77843. I found fascinating an article about how poorly translocated captive turtles do when released, fed and monitored in a nature education center property. Apparently some long-term captives do not learn to pull their heads in at night—leaving them easy prey for feral cats and other predators. Other articles include the whole scoop on the Kansas sting operation which busted oodles of people for selling ornates and an update on the Louisiana box turtle legislation. Anyone interested in turtles needs to subscribe to this publication—it gets better with every issue.

A more primitive disaster averted

An animal control officer in Mount Dora, Florida, saw an alligator swimming toward a small child playing in the shallows at a duck-feeding area in a local park while the child's minder was on a bench about 20 feet away. He ran and jumped feet first between the gator which was just opening its mouth and the toddler. He then grabbed the child and passed it to the

grandmother who had been on the bench. The gator swam away, but was later destroyed. [*Orlando Sentinel*, October 19, 1999, from Bill Burnett]

Cutest Y2K bugeater

Some unknown sculptor came up with a lovely stylized raniid which is bright green and shaped so that he perches on the corner of a computer monitor with one large webbed foot hanging over the edge. The text says it will eat Y2K bugs and do regular debugging of all your files and they claim its tongue is so lightning fast that you'll never even see it move. [*Toscano Galleries Catalog*, Winter]

OK, 60 feet long is HUGE!

Quite a few CHS members saw *Jobaria* for the first time the other night. And for all of us, it was the first time we had seen both individuals' casts fully articulated and mounted as they will be for the Navy Pier exhibition which starts January 14, 2000. Because I had late lab that night at NEIU, Ken Mierzwa, Kevin Goldman and I got to the dinner after cocktails were over. So we enjoyed walking through the cocktail area actually being able to see all the displays and the tables—the excavation pits, the photo stations and the tents—without a whole bunch of people there, too. We went down the stairs and into the Grand Ballroom of Navy Pier just as Bill Kurtis was putting on his mike as the Mesozoic Master of Ceremonies, in charge of introducing both *Jobaria* individuals to the assembled multitude of about 450 people. He hopped into a jumping jack—one of those lift scaffolds used most probably to assemble the dinosaurs—the stage lights came on, and for the next two-and-a-half hours we were entertained by a series of videos, slides, music, African drummers, and rousing speeches by Paul Sereno, Gabrielle Lyon, the chairman of the event, and Bill Kurtis. Meanwhile a whole bunch of money was raised for the next expedition; including one lady who bid \$40,000 to go on it as a guest! But even with all this, I was most amazed by the creatures themselves. They're Cretaceous sauropods, but odd sauropods. They're primitive: they have remarkably short necks and very odd forefeet and claws. But I found myself fascinated by a series of spines on the underside of the few neck vertebrae and how they move on the specimen that is mounted rearing up with its head curved forwards. The more juvenile animal (teenager) is mounted with the neck out flat and these spines all line up and protect the throat in this configuration. It was the juvie which had the *Afrovenator* bite marks, but whether the carnivore killed it or merely scavenged it after the flood event which buried both individuals is unknown. What is known is that there's another new dinosaur still buried over there. And that Paul and Gabe are going back for it in the summer/fall 2000 season. And that one extremely lucky lady (and the friend of her choice) is going too. Don't miss the "Dinosaur Giants" on Navy Pier, January 14 through March 19 next year. *Afrovenator* will be with them in the Crystal Garden. And it's free—because these are your dinosaurs for helping with *Dinorun* and all the other fundraising events. Hats off to Lori King-Nava, Gary Fogel and all the other CHS members who helped make the *Dino Dinner* such a fun event. Big waves to the Junior Paleontologists, especially Marco Mendez who told the multitudes what it means to be a J.P.

And to the chair of the event who looks so good in a predatory dinosaur mask and who must have worked like a slave to pull it all off! Bravo to the grad students who would be staying after the party ended at 10 to disassemble and pack both mounts because the next worthy cause to use the Grand Ballroom was beginning their set-up at 4:00 A.M. the next day. And thanks to the 450 who came, saw, ate and gave generously to support Project Exploration and Paul Sereno's efforts.

Thanks to everyone who contributed this month. Don't hesitate to send stuff—including your cutest herp holiday cards to: Ellin Beltz, 1647 N. Clybourn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614-5507. Send whole pages of newspapers or publications. Be sure your name is on each piece. Have a happy and safe holidays and let's all hope Y2K is just a tiny bug—not the grasshopper that ate Wrigley Field. See you again in the new year!

Visit the CHS Website at <http://www.chicagoherp.org>

It's where to find:

- Herpetological headlines
- Herps of Illinois, with photos
- Calendar of events
- Society information (membership, bylaws, back issues of the *Bulletin*)
- Contact information for board members and committees
- Book reviews
- Photos
- Grant awards
- Links to other herp sites