

THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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August 2004

The Editor-s Den By Grady Calhoun

The August Forked Tongue features a book review by Grady Calhoun and an article on Axlotyls from www.caudata.org/axototl/.

REMEMBER THAT WE WILL MEET AT 7:00 WEDNESDAY RATHER THAN 7:30!!!

This was done as a suggestion to get our younger members and those of us who have to get up early out a little earlier.

Calendar of Events

10/6/04 Monthly Meeting at the Cincinnati Nature Center.

August Highlights

The August meeting featured our own Matt Fille speaking about collecting in the southwest United States. His trip was one that most of wish we could have taken.

Election Update!

Elections will take place at the October meeting. There were no additional nominations from the floor at the September meeting so the candidates are as:

President	Grady Calhoun
Vice President	Dean Alessandrini
Treasurer	Peggy Fille
Sergeant at Arms	Bruce Fille

Elections will take place in October and the new officers will take over in November.

Book Review

by Grady Calhoun

I recently had the pleasure of reviewing a wonderful set of books.

The two volume set of *Venomous Reptiles of the*

Western Hemisphere is by far the most comprehensive compilation of information about venomous reptiles that I have had the pleasure of discovering. The authors, Jonathon Campbell and William Lamar have gone to great lengths to include virtually every aspect of the natural history, morphology, taxonomy and lore regarding all of the venomous reptiles in the Western Hemisphere. As with most herpetology references, there are the obligatory descriptions and range maps. This set goes far beyond that by including country-by-country distributions by physiographic regions and vegetation types; species keys; descriptions of scalation variations; local names; common names and etymology.

The discussion of envenomation identification, grading and treatment are fascinating and clinically valuable. I was very impressed with the organization and readability of the text. I nearly forgot to mention the wonderful color photographs. (Are there really that many *Micrurus*?!) The amount of information packed into these two volumes is truly mind boggling. This is a "must have" reference for anyone interested in these creatures.

This two-volume set is available at Amazon.com for 149.95

Axlotyls

Printed from www.caudata.org/axototl/ with the permission of John Clare

The Axolotl is an amphibian, a salamander, part of the order Caudata/Urodela. Because its a salamander, its part of one of the three branches of class Amphibia, which also include the frogs and toads (the Anurans), and the mainly eel-like order Gymnophiona which are also known as the Caecilians. One common misconception is that axolotls and other salamanders are lizards or reptiles - in actual fact, amphibians are a completely separate group of animals, as are mammals like us.

Axolotls come in many colour varieties. Grey, tan,

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brown, white, golden albino, white albino, as well as other varieties, such as the black melanoid are available. The normally coloured or "wild type" can come in anything from near-black to chocolate brown to almost cream in colour and anything in between. There are even "piebald" axolotls known as "harlequins". You can learn more about how colour comes about and is passed on by taking a look at the Genetics Page.

The name "Axolotl" comes from the Aztec language "Nahuatl". One of the most popular translations of the name connects the Axolotl to the god of deformations and death, Xolotl, while the most commonly accepted one is "water-dog" (from "atl" for water and "xolotl" which can also mean dog). Prior to the growth of Mexico city in the basin of Mexico, the Axolotl was native to both Lake Xochimilco, and Lake Chalco. Of these two high altitude freshwater lakes, only the remnants of Xochimilco as canals can be seen today. The Axolotl is now on the CITES endangered species list, although there have been recent efforts to breed and release the animal in order to re-establish its numbers. Fortunately, due to the importance of the Axolotl in scientific research, it is unheard of for them to be taken from the wild because of the huge numbers bred in captivity each year.

The fact that the animal is on the endangered species list may, surprisingly, go some way to offsetting its use as a laboratory animal. It has long been known that the Axolotl is a worthy study due to its amazing healing abilities. Normal wound-healing in animals occurs through the growth of scar tissue, and this also means that most animals won't re-grow a lost limb. However, the axolotl is fully capable of complete limb re-growth. The animal has the added attraction of having especially large embryos, making it easier to deal with under laboratory conditions. Its embryo is also very robust, and can be spliced and combined with different parts of other embryos with a high degree of success.

The Axolotl is a fascinating creature for a number of reasons, including its grotesque appearance, its ability to regenerate, and primarily the fact that it exhibits the phenomenon known as *neoteny*. Ordinarily, amphibians undergo metamorphosis from egg to larva, and finally to adult form. The axolotl, along with a number of other amphibians, remains in its larval form; meaning that it retains its gills and fins, and

doesn't develop the protruding eyes, eyelids and characteristics of other adult salamanders. It grows much larger than a normal larval salamander, and reaches sexual maturity in this larval stage. Another term to describe this state is "perennibranchiate". It is completely aquatic, and although it does possess rudimentary lungs, it breathes primarily through its gills and to a lesser extent, its skin.

It is generally accepted that neoteny is a "backward" step in evolution, because the axolotl is descended from what were once terrestrial salamanders like the closely related species, the Tiger salamander, *Ambystoma tigrinum/Ambystoma mavortium spp.* (in fact, one theory suggests that the Axolotl is in fact a Tiger salamander off-shoot, as it can interbreed with that species quite successfully). Through some quirk of nature, a neotenus form developed and, probably due to environmental conditions, prospered. Neoteny is sometimes found in other amphibians, but tends to be caused by low levels of iodine (an essential element in the making of thyroxine hormones, essential to growth and development), or random genetic mutation. In the axolotl the condition is totally genetic (click for more information on the Axolotl's genetics). When treated with hormones, the axolotl will usually begin to metamorphose, but in very rare cases it will metamorphose spontaneously.

Classified Advertising Policy

GCHS Members may run a free classified ad of 7

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lines or less at no charge for an unlimited time; however, the ad will be canceled after one month unless the editor is informed to continue it.

Please include scientific names for the animals with your ad as well as your phone number and area code. Ads of up to 7 lines for non-member are \$2 per issue; ad charges for items more than 7 lines long are as follows:

Business card size	\$3 per issue
1/4 page	\$6 per issue
2 page	\$10 per issue
Full page	\$20 per issue

The GCHS is not liable for the quality of the merchandise advertised. The Society also reserves the right to refuse any ad considered inappropriate.

Requirements for Submitting Articles to the Forked Tongue

Articles can be submitted via 3.5" floppy disk or hard copy to Editor, GCHS 11470 Gatch Hill Road, Aurora, IN 47001.

Articles may be e-mailed to Grady Calhoun at gradycalhoun@earthlink.net.

Black and white photographs can be included with articles. Photo submissions should include your name, phone number, and description of photo on the back. Photos can be returned. All time dependent submissions must be in the editors possession no later than the meeting previous to the desired publication.

Classifieds

For Sale: Captive Bred albino boa constrictors, (Peter Kahl strain). These are 2004 babies, all feeding and looking great! \$1000.00 each. Partial stripes available for \$1600.00. Call Scott Kass at 513-779-8124

For Sale: Albino (gold) axlotyls. 3"- 4" long. \$10 each. Call Harrison Pet Center 513-367-1115.

For Sale: Captive bred Northern Blue-tongue skinks. Three months old. \$75.00 each. Call Grady Calhoun at 513-564-6041

For Sale: Captive bred Grey banded kingsnake. Two months old. Eating live pinkies. \$50.00 each. Call Grady Calhoun at 513-564-6041

For Sale: Juvenile Amazon tree boas (*Corallus hortulanus*), brown phases, will be feeding when sold \$15 each. Call Al Winstel at 513-729-2563

For Sale: 7.0 '03 Tiger Rat Snakes (*Spilote pullatus*) Very well started, nice black and yellow coloration. Approximately 30 inches or more. Feeding voraciously on live hoppers. \$60 each or two or more for \$50 each. Call Marc (859) 344-9626

Discount: A 10% discount is offered to all card-carrying members of the GCHS at *All Creatures Animal Hospital*. Dr. Dan Meakin, All Creatures, 1894 Ohio Pike, Amelia, OH 45102, 513-797-7387.

Discount: A 10% discount is offered to all card carrying members of the GCHS at Dr. Dahlhausen's Veterinary Clinic, 5989 Meijer Dr., Suite 2, Milford, Ohio 513-576-0131

(Number to left of decimal indicates males; number to right of decimal indicates females; number to right of second decimal indicates number of unknown sex. For example, 3.2.1=3 males, 2 females, and 1 unsexed specimen)

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Currently Held Positions

President	Grady Calhoun	(812) 926-1206	Vice President	Dean Alessandrini	(513) 347-0099
		(513) 564-6041	Editor	Grady Calhoun	(812) 926-1206
Treasurer	Peggy Fille	(513) 528-4452			(513) 564-6041
Sergeant-at-Arms	Bruce Fille	(513) 528-4452	Education Committee Co-Chairman		
Advisor	Ray Whitson	(859) 342-8842		Peggy Fille	(513) 528-4452
Secretary	Vacant			Chris Bauer	(513) 424-5818

About the GCHS

The Greater Cincinnati Herpetological Society holds monthly meetings which typically consist of a short business section, a refreshment intermission, and a program related to herpetology. Both members and nonmembers are invited to attend. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in reptiles and amphibians. New members may sign up by mail or at the monthly meetings. Members receive monthly issues of *The Forked Tongue* and free classified advertising. Annual dues should be directed to the secretary at the society's mailing address, according to the rates below:

Student	\$10.00	Corresponding	\$10.00
Individual	\$12.00	Sustaining	\$25.00
Family	\$18.00	Institutional	\$30.00
Contributing	\$50.00		

Why Be a Member?

Receive monthly issues of *The Forked Tongue*

\$Meet individuals knowledgeable about herpetoculture

\$Have access to captive-bred herps and feeder animals

\$Participate in society-sponsored field trips, and outings.

\$Receive a 10 percent discount on herp-related items and services when you show a valid membership card at the following establishments:

Delhi Pet Center (513) 451-4015

Kentucky Reptile Zoo (606) 663-9160

Harrison Pet Center (513) 367-1115

All Creatures Animal Hospital (513) 797-7387

Dr. Dahlhausen's Veterinary Clinic (513) 576-0131.

P.O. Box 14783
Cincinnati, OH 45250

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