

# THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## The Editor's Den

By Grady Calhoun

The February *Forked Tongue* features a "Meet a Member" articles by Polly Whittaker and an article on Shedding Difficulties in the Prehensile Tailed Skink by Grady Calhoun.

## Calendar of Events

2/5 Monthly Meeting in room 420 Speaker Dan Meakin DVM on common Herp Ailments.

## Announcements

Polly Whittaker has agreed to serve as the GCHS secretary. She is a long time member and regular attendee of monthly meetings. You can learn a little about Polly and her collection in the "Meet the Member" article below.

## February Highlights

### Meet a Member

by Polly Whittaker

Well, it's official. I am happy to be the new secretary of the GCHS, even if it is by default. I usually try not to take on anything new in the way of commitments, but this job was billed as having few responsibilities. So, I figured I could handle it.

I decided that I should introduce myself, so you know a little bit more about your new secretary. And by Herp Society standards, I guess that means for one thing telling you what kinds of animals I have. Here it is. I have the usual dogs (2), cats (3), and hamsters (3), birds (4) and bunny rabbits (2). No ponies yet, unfortunately. In terms of herps, I don't have anything too fancy or exotic, but I keep approximately 18 or 20 vivaria, tanks and habitats in and around my house containing my herp collection which at last count consisted of: 4 snakes of 3 species, 9 lizards of 5 species, 10 box turtles - 3 species (several of the box turtles are rescue animals), 13 toads and frogs of

various sorts, 2 different tarantulas, a crawdad who ate all his other tank mates, and some hermit crabs. And there are the snails and fish. Without the fish and snails that's 56 animals. Some of the animals live outdoors. The bunnies live outdoors most of the time as do most of the box turtles and the dogs and cats, who are only invited in by special permission. I have two fishponds, but these are periodically raided by raccoons. Last summer, due to a little negligence and a lot of naivete on my part, the raccoons ate my three aquatic turtles, a snapper, a painted, and a red-eared slider. That was the third time in my lifetime I have had to learn the raccoon lesson the hard way. Hopefully the LAST. A highlight of my summer, to balance the terrible raccoon/aquatic turtle incident, was that my box turtles laid eggs and two hatched successfully. So I am raising these little ones, too. Oh, that's 58!

When designing my tanks, I prefer the biodiverse, horticultural look. I grow live plants in my vivaria and use all natural materials and artifacts to try to create a natural work of science and art, as well as habitats that the animals will blend into and have a lot of what they need. Some of my animals live in more of an ecological community, some are more solitary. I try as many different creatures together as will get along and not eat each other, and as the climate and conditions permit. Out in the real world these species do not necessarily occur together geographically, but when Robin Saunders mentioned that begonias grow where Fire-bellied toads (*Bombina orientalis*) occurs, I went right home and put begonias in their vivarium. In the terrestrial exhibits, I have established subterranean cultures as part of each mini-ecosystem which include sow bugs, earthworms, beetles, and lots of other little things residing under the rocks and in the different substrate materials. This means that I hardly ever clean anything but the water and the glass. Even in the tanks of the solitary animals I try to have at least some natural cycles taking place even if it is just that the plants are taking up one gas and replacing it with another. I have green plants growing even in the water dishes -or at least they're not dying- and I do find that the water

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bowls with the plants in them stay fresher, aerated. These plants also provide a means for crickets to escape drowning when they fall in. Another balance I try to strike has to do with the food web and consumer order, a way to let the animals forage for food naturally because the food is already there. That includes food for the plants, and also includes decomposition and that subterranean life I was talking about earlier, which creates much of the nutrient cycle. I have terrestrial tanks that I haven't emptied out in years. I let the plants, the earthworms and other organisms do the work. I had a particularly complimentary parting remark once with an old boyfriend. He wrote, "and I learned that fish tanks and terrariums do not have to smell!"

A teacher by trade, I have designed my own natural science curriculum and program for classrooms and other groups. The presentation includes my live animals, natural artifacts and other elements of the natural world. I also design and set up vivaria for other people's homes and classrooms, and take people on tours of all of mine. When I homeschooled one of my children, I often had groups of homeschoolers and their parents through my house for hands-on tours of the collection. Teaching with my animals serves to justify how many I have, but also serves my need to talk about preservation, biodiversity, and ecological issues. I find that I am constantly both a student and a teacher at once in perpetual study of the natural world. I have degrees in education and over twenty years of experience teaching in various capacities.

Along with my 62 house and garden plants wintering-over indoors and, of course, the animals, I have also two children and two step children, 14, 12, 9, and 8. Visiting children and our younger friends, of which there are many, think that my children must be the luckiest kids on Earth to have all these "pets" ! (especially when they manage to do so little of the work). I try to explain that most of the critters aren't really pets, although we do enjoy them, but that we are the stewards of many wild, not tame, animals.

Visiting parents and older friends think I'm totally nuts and must be out of my mind and a closet eccentric. I am part of an active extended family. I stay pretty busy running my household and directing everybody, (and making sure all those little mouths get fed!), but when I'm not doing animal care, homework, carpool or laundry, I like to write, make earrings, and play sports. Right now it's ski season(!), and I play competitive

racket sports all year round.

### **Shedding Difficulties of a Prehensile-tailed Skink**

by Grady Calhoun

Now you have got to be saying that this will probably be the worst article ever written. The reason I am writing this however is to share an ongoing experience that I have with one of my Prehensile Tailed Skinks (*Corucia zebrata*). As most regular Forked Tongue readers are painfully aware, I maintain a breeding (although not successfully at this point) pair of Solomon Islands Prehensile-tailed skinks (PTS). I have experienced a phenomenon that may help others recognize an easily treatable condition provided that it is accurately detected in a timely manner. The PTS is a highly arboreal lizard that lives in high humidity forests. Every attempt has been made to simulate this environment for my captive animals. The cage is very large (4' wide x 2' deep x 6' high). It is constructed of wood and glass with a screen top. Approximately 75% of the top is covered with glass to maintain humidity. There are multiple water dishes and a humidifier inside the cage.

The problem I will discuss was observed not long after my PTSs arrived. One female was observed on the bottom of the cage during the day. This is never a good sign. Although the PTS will actively roam all parts of the cage as soon as the lights go out, they are rarely found on the ground during the day. I examined the animal and found that her eyelids were closed and she appeared unable to open them. She still felt relatively strong but I was worried that she would not be able to eat in this condition. I was not sure what to do but thought that applying moisture to her eyes may help her to open them. It didn't. Upon closer examination I found that the skin on her head had not shed. This was not clearly obvious as the line of unshed skin followed the edges of large scales. I carefully peeled away the dead skin. I was especially careful when I got to the area around her eyes. The skin of both eyelids peeled away and she immediately looked like a different animal. Her eyes were bright and alert and when placed back into the cage she immediately scurried to her daytime retreat - a hollow cardboard tube suspended from the top of the cage. This happens probably every second shedding cycle. The strange thing is that it only happens to the one PTS. The other is always clear-eyed and free of unshed skin. They have exactly the same diet and climate. The humidity is maintained above 75% and sometimes even higher. Aside from the curiosity of this happening in one animal

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and not the other, I wanted to share this experience because it is an easily remedied condition. If however it is not recognized as a shedding issue and treated quickly, I believe it could quickly lead to, unnecessary anti-biotic treatment, starvation or infection. I imagine that this could occur in all lizards, especially those with eyelids.

#### **Requirements for Submitting Articles to the Forked Tongue**

1. Articles can be submitted via 3.5" floppy disk or hard copy to Editor, GCHS 11470 Gatch Hill Road, Aurora, IN 4700.
2. Articles may be e-mailed to Grady Calhoun at gcalhoun@seidata.com.
3. 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.
4. All time dependent submissions must be in the editors possession no later than the meeting previous to the desired publication date.

#### **Classified Advertising Policy**

GCHS Members may run a free classified ad of 7 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
1/2 page	\$10 per issue
Full page	\$20 per issue

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

#### **Classifieds**

**For Sale:** Herp books, 2 by Bartlett & Bartlett: Monitors, Tegus, and Related Lizards; Geckos. Both are Barron's soft cover @\$3.00 ea. plus postage if mailed. One by Sprackland: Savannah & Grassland Monitors, AVS soft cover @\$4.00 plus postage if mailed. All in almost new shape (I bought two copies at different times, pretty smart, huh?) Located in N. Hamilton County. Al Winstel 513-729-2563

**For Sale:** Amazon tree boas (*Corallus hortulanus*) born 10/13. Various garden phases from gray to tan with light to moderate pattern. \$40.00 ea. Will probably have some eating by mid November. Al Winstel 513-563-4513. Local sales or could bring to GCHS mtg.

**For Sale:** Feeder rabbits and rats. Call Rod Surber at (812) 637-0305 or e-mail me at [Indianarockshop@aol.com](mailto:Indianarockshop@aol.com).

**For Sale:** Aquariums-all shapes and sizes (5-90 gallons). Boa Constrictor(s) may be available, prices negotiable. Call Chris at (513) 451-1203.

**Discount:** A 10% discount is offered to all card-carrying members of the GCHS at All Creatures Animal Hospital where I examine and treat many different reptiles.  
Dr. Dan Meakin, All Creatures Animal Hospital, 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)

### Currently Held Positions

President	Grady Calhoun	(812) 926-1206	Vice President	Dean Alessandrini	(513) 347-0099
		(513) 564-6041			
Treasurer	Peggy Fille	(513) 528-4452	Editor	Grady Calhoun	(812) 926-1206
					(513) 564-6041
Sargent-at-Arms	Bruce Fille	(513) 528-4452			
			Education Conservation Committee Co-Chairman		
Advisor	Ray Whitson	(859) 342-8842		Matt Fille	(513) 528-4452
				Chris Bauer	(513) 451-1203
Secretary	Polly Whittaker	(513) 321-1884			

### 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  
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