

THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Editor's Den

By Grady Calhoun

The November Forked Tongue features an article by Will Bird on discovering Pine Snakes in Kentucky. His enthusiasm is contagious! Visit the following website for great pictures of the Pine Snake.

kyherpsoc.org/kyherps/kyappreciation/kypines.htm

Calendar of Events

11/28 & 29

Educational Program at Museum Center

12/3 Holiday Meeting at Ryan's Steakhouse in Florence

Rescued Animals need Homes

We need volunteers to adopt animals that are given to the society. If you are willing to provide a good home for iguanas, large boas or pythons, tortoises or crocodilians please contact Chris Bauer at (513) 424-5818 or Matt Fille at (513) 528-4452.

December Holiday Meeting

Its that time again. As has become tradition, we will be meeting at Ryan's Family Steakhouse in Florence Kentucky. This meeting takes the place of our regularly scheduled December meeting. Jim Harrison will be our featured speaker presenting a program about a recent trip to St. Lucia. We have a private meeting room. The cost will be \$7.99 per adult plus a 15% gratuity and the cost of a drink. Pay at the door. This has historically been a very well attended event. Don't miss out!

Ryan's is located at 40 Cavalier Ct., Florence KY

Take I-75 South past I-275

Take the KY-236 W exit- exit number 184B- toward ERLANGER.

Turn Right on Commonwealth

Turn Left on Houston Rd

Turn Left on Turfway Rd

Turn Right on KY 18/Burlington Pike

Turn Right on Cavalier Blvd

Turn Right on Cavalier Ct

Possible Change in Meeting Place

We are in the process of evaluating a new meeting place. This is a very big decision that could significantly affect meeting attendance and membership either positively or negatively. We really would like the input of members to help with this decision. We are seriously considering moving the monthly meetings to the Cincinnati Nature center which is near Milford. Please contact Grady Calhoun at (812)926-1206 with any comments that have not already been shared via e-mail..

Kentucky Pines!

By Will Bird

Searching for reptiles and amphibians is not for the faint at heart. It demands a particular type of constitution.

When one takes on the challenge he or she is completely unaware of what really lies ahead. I guess that anything is possible. As my most experienced field partner says, "You never can tell!"

What I would like to do here is tell. Like field herping, this tale is not for the faint at heart. If you are weak, or wish to retain some form of innocence, TURN BACK NOW!!

I first heard about Kentucky Pine Snakes long ago. To say that they are coveted is an understatement. They are the ghosts of the forest!

There are three populations in our Commonwealth. In my feeble mind the central population is the most interesting, but the mere glimpse of ANY pine snake is a gift to say the least. A live Kentucky specimen, especially one from the cave region, is nothing short of an honor to behold.

As Kentucky is a treasure trove of herpetological bounty, it was a very easy decision to make the commitment to search for pines and rejoice in anything found along the way. The fact of the matter is that while I had seen them in Florida, finding a pine snake in

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Kentucky was to me nothing short of a pipe dream! Herpetology is undergoing a sort of renaissance here in Kentucky. There are more and more knowledgeable people getting involved than ever before. I do not deserve to be mentioned among these souls. I say this because there are so many who know so much, and I know so very little.

There is one quality, however, that I do possess. This quality is actually a combination of many and is very hard to describe. Allow me to try. I have good eyes. This is a gift that I can thank my parents and kin for. I also have good ears. I can smell, and taste to some extent. All of these things come into play, but none so much as my ability to both feel and think like an animal.

Fortunately, I have learned enough from those who have come before me to know that all of the senses must be properly employed if one is to find a pine snake.

There are other qualities one must possess as well. A person **MUST** be willing to commit to the hunt. Keep in mind that a hunt could last for years! Failure is guaranteed. I have also noticed that the best and sometimes only finds come long after a rational person would have given up. So, there are naturally occurring senses, desires, and persistence. The combination of these inherent qualities is what it takes to recognize the signs that lead to good finds. Anything less will result in failure. Also, there is the element of luck.

Enter Phil and Will! In the late 90's I began to venture to the cave region in earnest and develop tin sites whose locations I soon forgot! Fortunately Phil was developing an interest of his own and was smart enough to purchase a map and keep records. Keeping accurate records is one of Phil's special strengths. So is making tin sites. It was just a matter of time before we would form a partnership.

We both have strengths and weaknesses, and most importantly are willing to forgive each other for them. There comes a time when differences **MUST** be put aside and the focus **MUST** be shifted to common goals. I have discovered that it is **VERY** difficult for both people and institutions to put their differences aside to work towards achieving common goals. Phil and I are very different. What we have in common is a desire to "break our chains" in order to work together to achieve success. Our success proves that it is possible for individuals and institutions to succeed in these types of endeavors.

We resolved to put forth the effort needed to achieve

our goals. The first thing we agreed upon was that we needed help. In alphabetical order we got it from: James Hust, Jim Harrison, John MacGregor, Louisville Zoo, and Touchstone Energy Corporation. From these sources we received locality data, traps, encouragement, resolve, and more. These things, combined with the before mentioned traits, strengthened and resolved our faith that we would succeed in our endeavor!

And so the hunt began. While the afore-mentioned description took much time to describe and little time to complete thanks to the efficiency of our providers, the hunt itself was tedious and problematic to say the least. We soon found ourselves driving hours on end multiple times a week. We spent thousands of dollars and never batted an eye. Our wives batted many, of course. I would like to publicly apologize to Shelia for all she has been made to endure. I am sure that Phil would do the same for my wife Liz.

The fact of the matter is that the apology is unnecessary. Our wives have been a major part of this effort. They strongly wish to see our desires fulfilled and are willing to do what it takes to ensure success. This is the most important quality that ensured our success.

Fortunately for us, the women were ready to defy convention and commit where others have failed! There in itself lies true power!

With so many factors in place, we hunted. The hunt began in early winter when the leaves were off the trees. Once or even twice a week Phil and I would pile into my truck and drive for 12 hour shifts looking for sites, signs, and other possibilities. We soon had a set table, just as spring arrived.

We searched and searched and searched!

We found many things. Corn snakes were found in abundance. So were Black king snakes, prairie king snakes, racers, ring necks, copperheads, trapjaws, and more!

We met many people and saw many things. Diversity abounded and it proved true that every day a-field provided an experience that was new, unique, and refreshing.

The only problem was that the season moved on. Soon spring turned to summer. The heat would often stop all herp activity. Once the heat passed in the afternoon, a second activity period would present itself. This made long hours a requirement. Phil and I soon found ourselves staying out for days at a time. Often times we found very little, but we persisted.

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We took many trips to all three known pine snake habitats in Kentucky. Every trip failed to yield the find we so strongly desired. As summer began to wane the idea sunk in that we had failed to produce a pine snake. We consoled ourselves with the fact that we had discovered new habitats that looked good. We had met more locals and made many more connections. It seemed to us that the following year would produce a pine snake with a lot of effort and a lot of luck.

Our first annual trip to West Kentucky was an overall failure that almost ended in death! In spite of this failure we decided to make the five hour drive again in mid-September. The night before we were to leave we received a phone call from a friend and supporter who asked us to delay our trip west for one day so that we could partake in a cottonmouth/rattlesnake hunt. We agreed.

The following morning we not only found a gravid cottonmouth, but also 30 timber rattlesnakes!

The first timber seen was a neonate in the process of shedding. We were all quite excited and prepared to photograph the animal. There was a bit of crowding so I decided to look around a bit and photograph later.

Two steps later I saw a mass of six babies. My immediate response was an uttered obscenity followed by a very heavy, sinking feeling. They were beautiful, vulnerable, magnificent, and majestic. It was an honor to behold them. A quick glimpse in a crevasse of a fallen tree revealed their mother. Experience had taught her to stay out of sight.

Moments later a group of over one dozen babies was discovered by our guide! They retreated under a large rock under which lay not only their mothers, but other gravid females as well. Shortly thereafter another gravid female was discovered in the open, and then another! Only a few hundred yards away was the most beautiful male I have ever seen!

As Phil and I departed and made our way west we reflected on what had happened that day. With so many rattlesnakes we had almost forgotten about the cottonmouths! Timber rattlesnakes are very special animals. Witnessing one is an honor. Witnessing thirty is both a blessing and a curse. There comes with such a discovery a burden of responsibility. These snakes are in dire need of protection.

We resolved to protect the location of this most magical site. As we pushed forward we soon recognized that our four day trip had probably climaxed and it was sure to be a down hill decline from then on...we were sorely mistaken!

Once we arrived in west Kentucky we telephoned our friend Dwight Good. He was chomping at the bit to get out and make some finds. We arranged to meet the next morning at one of our favorite gas stations. Gas stations hold a special place in the heart of a true field herper as this is where all sustenance is derived. Time is both valuable and essential when it comes to making finds. These depots offer three square meals a day, or should I say one, in a very rapid manner.

On our way we had to stop and wake our friend Mike O'Brien from deep slumber. He too was ready to make some finds. We arrived at the gas station and ate breakfast while waiting for Dwight. Upon arrival he told us that both James and Katherine would join us at a site where pygmy rattlesnakes are commonly found. With high hopes for pygmies we made our way to the site. We soon found ourselves lost. We eventually found our way, but arrived very later than Phil and I had hoped. This would normally make me very frustrated, but for some reason I was calm and assured that all was proceeding as it should. We made our way down to the site and began the hunt. The time was 9:20 a.m. At 9:55 I made the conscious decision to drastically change my tactics. The hunt began with the flipping of artificial cover. As Phil and I had seen both trapjaws and timbers in their natural state I decided that it may be best to continue my hunt in the same manner.

At 9:57 I began to feel awkward. Dwight had moved towards a large pile of boulders. I knew he had pygmies on his mind and was onto something. I followed him, but space only allowed one person on the rock piles. I paused to look up and saw James and Katherine on their way down to the site. And so our party was six. At that very moment I heard the honking of Canadian geese. I looked up to see at least 75 birds in three V-shaped formations. We were in a low area surrounded by hills, and so their calls were amplified and echoed profusely. At the same time Phil exclaimed, "We've got company." I gazed long and hard at the geese as they honked and flew over.

It was at this point that I became aware that I had been feeling strange. This feeling awakened in me the understanding that a find was going to be made at the site by someone. I looked at Dwight and felt for sure it was going to be him. He was in a prime location and had the right idea. I realized that I had to change tactics again. The time was 10:01.

As he was literally on top of the rock piles searching, I realized that looking along the edge of the piles might be productive as well. I looked ahead and noticed that the

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sun was hitting the rocks just right. I noted the stands of grasses and weeds along the edges of the piles and it dawned on me to search this edge type of transitional micro-habitat. My next thought addressed where I should start. The time was 10:02 when I looked down at my feet and saw a pine snake in excess of five feet long! It took my breath away! For what seemed like a full minute, but was probably less than one second I gazed at the snake. It was in dappled sunlight in a loose and sprawling type of pose. There were weeds hanging over her body. I could not believe what I was looking at! It was a beautiful sight to behold! After that moment I seem to have lost all sense of time and space. Dwight later told me that he turned to look at me and saw me staring with the utmost intent. He said I cast my hook downward and behind myself and then dove to the ground. When I came back up I was holding a pine snake!

I began to yell and jump around like a mad-man! Dwight came over and secured the snake while I continued to freak out for some time. When I came to I saw that Dwight was taking pictures. I got my camera and gave it my best effort, but as you can imagine I was still violently shaking and all my shots came out blurry!

As we were only human, this find was not enough. Everyone resolved to continue the hunt and find the snake's boyfriend, but I could not. I had entered a state of mind that is very hard to describe. I will try. I was dizzy. I felt something I had never felt before. I pretended to hunt, but I was somewhere else. This place...this state of mind...can only be described with a reference to the ancient Greek and Roman cultures as such a state unfortunately has no definition in our modern times.

First of all, Phil and I had spent hours away from wives, children, and homes. Our families were not happy about this, and we carried the burden of knowledge that we were responsible for conditions at home.

Secondly, we had struggled. On so many occasions we had recognized that we failed...and yet we resolved to push on, often joking about the fruitlessness of our efforts.

We drove on, sometimes for hours at a time and other times for days. Our monies were spent. Our time was committed. We failed and failed and failed. When the pine snake materialized among the weeds I realized that the herp Gods were conscious of all of our efforts. When my eyes drew the snake from among the

grasses and dappled sunlight a huge burden was lifted from my countenance. All the efforts and suffering had not been for naught! With the odds against us, we had prevailed!

For over a year all of our thoughts had been directed towards this very moment, and its arrival was so strong that I was transported to the same place that so many Greek and Roman protagonists had found themselves after drinking from the cup or eating the food of the Gods. Indeed, a reward was sent our way. But alas, as the Greeks and Romans promised, there was a cost, for once you taste the food of the Gods, all meals from that point forward are bland beyond recognition.

For sometime after the find I was in a dream-like state. I remember walking with James and trying to focus on making another find, but it was pointless. I had drunk from the cup, and I enjoyed the taste!

Upon returning home I had to share my experience with others. I soon called John Macgregor to report this very special find. The significance of the find was easily heard in John's initial response, and became clear to me when he said, "Well, Will...you will never find your first pine snake again."

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This statement could not have been more accurate. I have tasted the food of the Gods, and must now wander the Earth sustained on the blandest fare! It is as if I have become a zombie.

My only recompense is my recollection of the whole experience. This will fade with time and I will remain in a lost and dream-like state wandering, searching and hoping for another find even more enchanting than this one. It will never come.

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Classified Advertizing 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.

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.

Classifieds

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

For Sale: I will have baby corn snakes available in July, a few albino Okeetee corns and the offspring of a ghost X hypererythristic(red) cross. The latter will probably look normal, depending upon hidden traits, but breeding these offspring together should result in a variety of possibilities, including young with extra red, amelanistics, hypomelanistics, and ghost. Young are \$15 ea. and will be feeding. Al Winstel 513-729-2563. Could probably bring to meeting.

For Sale: Snakes, 2.0 CB ball pythons (*Python regius*), 1 baby (\$20), 1 yearling (\$30), both feeding; 1 baby Amazon tree boa (*Corallus hortulanus*), eating thawed pinks (\$25); 1 aberrant patterned Pueblan Milksnake (*Lampropeltis t. campbelli*) (\$25), 2 years old. eating thawed pinks, fuzzies. Call Al Winstel 513-729-2563.

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
Sargent-at-Arms	Bruce Fille	(513) 528-4452	Education Conservation Committee Co-Chairman		
Advisor	Ray Whitson	(859) 342-8842		Matt 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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