

THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Editor's Den

By Grady Calhoun

The October *Forked Tongue* features an article on Pink-Tongue Skinks (*Hemisphaeriodon gerrardi*). This article consists of information taken off the pink-tongue skink website, www.pinktongue-skink-information-centre.co.uk, hosted by Mark Bond.

The October meeting will be held at Northern Kentucky University at 7:30 Wednesday, October 2nd. We meet in room 421 of the Natural Science Building.

Calendar of Events

10/2 Monthly Meeting featuring Kristen Wiley from the Kentucky Reptile Zoo. She will be speaking on a recent trip to the Western United States.

Announcements

It appears that there has been yet another issue regarding keeping reptiles. This time it occurred in Kenton County. Although the details are sketchy, it appears that a report of animal cruelty was made. When the animal cruelty officer arrived at the residence he found reptiles, among other animals, and made a determination that they were being kept in poor condition and confiscated them. Rumors of a Kenton County reptile ban and widespread confiscation have been determined to be unsubstantiated. Regardless, we must all exercise extreme responsibility in keeping the critters we adore. In these cases, it's the perception and not the reality of the situation which can lead to unfounded bans and unrealistic legislation.

A slate of officers was presented by the Nominating committee to run for office in the upcoming elections. They are President - Grady Calhoun; Vice-president - Dean Allesandrini; Treasurer - Peggy Fille; Sargent-at-Arms - Bruce Fille. There were no nominations for secretary. No nominations were made from the floor. Since the September meeting was the last meeting to accept nominations, additional nominations will not be accepted. Per the requirements of the GCHS constitution, an election will not be held as no offices are being contested. The new officers will take effect at the November meeting.

September Highlights

The September Meeting featured Winston Card, Reptile Amphibian and Aquatics Conservation Program Manager, of the Cincinnati Zoo. Mr. Card is new to the Cincinnati Zoo and came from the Dallas Zoo. Mr Card participated in the Southern Luzon Faunal Survey in the Philippine Islands. The Philippines consist of 50 very small islands. Only about 2 percent of original forest exists. Some south American trees were placed after deforestation because they grow fast. The trees survive but animals do not return to those areas.

One of the animals studied was the Gray's Monitor (*Varanus olivaceous*). Grays monitors are found nowhere else in the world. They are arboreal monitors. It is relatively easy to determine which trees they live in due to the claw marks on the trunks. About 80% of their diet consists of fruit. This has made them difficult to care for in captivity because they refused to eat any fruit available in the US.

Other herps of interest in the Philippines include the Philippine crocodiles. There are many of these in captivity in various zoos throughout the islands but they are thought to be extinct in the wild. The problem is that different subspecies are mixed in captivity.

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Previously undescribed birds, reptiles, and amphibians are being found in the Philippines. Some of the islands are completely denuded and untold numbers of species are becoming extinct prior to being discovered. Conservation efforts are underway using a couple of "flag ship" species to make money for and promote conservation. Some of the money raised goes to patrolman to guard forests.

Thanks to Mr. Card for a great presentation and welcome to Cincinnati! We look forward to a long relationship.

Pink Tongue Skink

By Mark Bond

The Pink Tongue Skink (*Hemisphaeriodon gerrardi*, formerly known as *Tiliqua gerrardi*) could be considered the ideal pet lizard, great for beginners and advanced keepers alike. They remain an easy size to handle, have a very tame and docile temperament, and are very hardy and manageable in captivity. Their care and maintenance should not be underestimated. It is very important to keep them at their most suitable environmental conditions. Care and attention should be taken to provide this. The Pink Tongue Skink is proportionally more advanced than the Blue Tongue, having more developed legs and a longer tail that comprises two thirds of the total body length, which is up to 40 centimeters TL (total length) when adult. The Pink Tongue Skink is a slow moving crepuscular lizard. In captivity seasonal differences are difficult to observe. However, in the wild they are nocturnal during the colder months and diurnal during the warmer months. They are a largely arboreal species, and if given correct enclosure conditions they will show this. Their tails are only semi-prehensile but will be seen to be used to balance and grip when climbing. They are native to semi-tropical and tropical forest areas of South Eastern and Northern Australia.

The Pink Tongue Skink species has two main colour variants, as far as I know neither is a subspecies. The colour variants are the brown banded and the black-banded, however there are varying degrees of black-patterning to each of these variants making recognition difficult. In the pet trade, mixtures of these two variants are occurring. Coloration of the brown-banded can best be described as varying tones that run from a whitish pinkish gray on the underside, through

to pale brown with a silver sheen. Outlined with black and white lined patterning on the back head and tail. Colouration of the black-banded is bluish white on the underside to a grey/tan colour, with uneven dark to the back, head and tail. The stripes on the black-banded are much darker more wide spread and uneven. Both colour strains of the Pink Tongue Skink are born with a very characteristic heavy banding to the face and body, however in the black-banded these stripes are darker. In the brown banded these bands fade with maturity leaving only the remnants, and even later on a totally plain tan colour. The black-banded retain much of its body colour though it spreads and becomes less well defined as stripes. The young in both colour strains have a dark blue purplish tongue that changes with maturity to a pale, name giving pink. The major colour changes can usually be seen within a year. The black-banded colour variants care is much the same as the brown-banded, although there are some temperature variations recommended. It occurs around Sydney, Southern Australia. The colour variants within Pink Tongue skinks may differ from animal to animal and therefore colour oddities can occur, with varying degrees of stripe retention into adult hood. On very rare occasions albinism has been seen. The colour variant I keep are brown-banded. The black banded seemed at one time more available in The Netherlands, Germany, this may have something to do with the imports to the UK in the past being only brown-banded and few subsequent imports taking place, as they would have in the rest of Europe. However more recently more black-banded have appeared in the UK, and also the mixtures of the two variants.

Diet is probably the most controversial aspect of keeping Pink Tongue Skinks in captivity, although in my opinion it needn't be. Its not difficult to provide a good well balanced diet for your pink tongue skinks. A significant part of this skink's diet must be made up of snails and slugs.

Snail Gathering must be done from an area that is free from pesticides and pellets that gardeners put down to kill slugs and snails. In their natural environment the Pink Tongue Skink eats snails slugs earthworms and grubs. It has strong jaw muscles designed for disposing of snail shell. Snail shell should be included in the diet being a natural form of calcium. The collecting and killing of snails can be done during the summer months. The best method of killing them is

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to freeze them for two months, to kill any potential harmful bacteria and parasites, of which slugs and snails can have high occurrences. Putting live snails in your vivarium will soon produce those hard to clean snail trails and probably egg laying in your substrate. You may want to try keeping and breeding Giant African Land Snails. I did try this but demand soon outgrew supply. The plus side of breeding your own foodstuff is that you know the nutritional value of food items. Chinese food stores sometimes sell frozen Apple Snails that are more usually sold live in the pet trade for aquariums. If you have a garden pond there are various species of snails that grow to a suitable size and thrive and breed in abundance. It is important to remember that these need freezing for two months also, to kill any potential parasites that they may have growing in them.

Other food items Beef/Cow heart scraped and mixed with 50/50 % slugs and snails can be tried. Chop and mix slugs and snails with chopped pinkie rats and mice; again a 50/ 50 % mix should sufficiently flavour the rodent meat to encourage feeding. They may not eat rodent meat. Prepared foods such as “Monitor Munch” can be bought in frozen portions from herp specialists or some pet shops. Earthworms may also be taken, all with a 50/50 % mix with snails and slugs. Shop bought food items include Oysters and Clams As you can see, there are no hard and fast rules to your Pink Tongue Skink diet and the best advice I can give is to include snails and slugs in their diet as much as possible. The diet for Pink Tongue Skinks will be a continued avenue for exploration by my self and other keepers. Feeding should be done every other day, and food should be mixed with a good reptile multi-vitamin powder. Calcium supplements should not be necessary, as snail shell will provide this. The most important factor in their diet is variety to ensure a good balance of nutrients. It is advisable to follow all aspects of the diet as discussed here. Experiment and allow your skinks to show you what foods they like.

A terrarium that will house two adult Pink Tongue Skinks should be no smaller than 36"x 18"x 12"/ 91.5 x 46 x 30 cm (this is the recommended absolute minimum). This is a commonly available all glass aquarium size. It is important to remember that in the

wild these lizards will have a large territory that they cover in their search for food. Consideration should be given to the fact that these animals are arboreal. Given the correct terrarium conditions they will prove this. The initial set-up can be as complicated or as simple as the keeper likes. It is advised to go for a glass type aquarium/vivarium as the damp substrates and humidity resting on the floor space in the compost and bark will soon cause problems with timber built terrarium. This terrarium can be topped with a specially purchased metal type terrarium lid, or a simple piece thick plywood. The cutting to size has to be accurate, as to allow no means of escape. This plywood can then be seated on the interior lip of the terrarium.

Substrate material can vary depending on the herpers preferences. Care must be taken to research the content of non-specialist substrates. Ensure that there are no chemical constituents that may harm the skinks. When considering a substrate the Pink Tongue Skinks' natural environment should be considered. The skink lives in damp, humid environments such as are found in forest areas. The most suitable substrate recommended is compost. Mixers that can be used with compost can be Sphagnum Moss, Reptile bark chippings and Vermiculite. Substrate should be deep enough for the Skink to bury themselves in, at least 2 inches – 5 cm.

Ultraviolet lighting is a choice of the keeper and not considered to be essential for Pink Tongue Skinks. They are forest dwelling animals diurnal and crepuscular and spend much of their time buried in substrate. The addition of UV lighting cannot do them any harm, adds to the terrarium set-up in so far as the herper can include plants and add to humidity levels and visual attractiveness of the terrarium.

Heating the vivarium can be achieved very simply by the means of an electric incandescent bulb. This can be attached to a simple dimmer switch and an on-off timer. Ensure it is wired correctly, or get a qualified electrician. Many a herper has cooked his favourite reptile when an expensive thermostat has broken. The advice here is keeping it as simple as possible, but ensuring that the temperatures are monitored. To achieve a temperature gradient it is best to off set the bulb to one side of the terrarium, allowing the Skinks to thermoregulate to their own preference.

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The Summertime daytime temperature range for the brown-banded variety ranges between a maximum of 29°C - 20°C and minimum of 21°C- 9° C. The Summertime daytime temperature range for the black-banded variety ranges between a maximum of 26°C - 16°C and minimum of 18°C- 9° C. The Night time drop for both colour variants should be 15°C.

If breeding these skinks is your aim the only sure way to sex them is from careful observation. The following methods can be used on adult skinks of at least 15"/38cm. The method is a combination of the following observances: head size, males have a larger skull. Body shape: females tend to be fuller bodied than the male, who is wider at the shoulder. Hemipenic bulges will be apparent on the underside of the tail base of the male adult. Sexing of the young skink is more difficult and can only be done with any confidence by experienced breeders. The methods suggested include comparison of tail base thickness and body length. A good sure way of making sure that you have a male and female pair is to purchase a group of juvenile skinks and grow them on to find what sex they are from the observation methods suggested. It may be easier to sex a group of these skinks together where you can observe the physical differences.

Breeding antics may start early spring (UK Spring) include the following of the female by the male: stroking and biting of the female shoulder and back by the male, possibly causing some scarring. Pink Tongue Skinks are live bearers, giving birth to any number of young from 8 - 30 during the later summer months August to September, with a record of as many as 67 at one time, though this is not common.

Brumation is a process developed by reptiles to cope with the winter drop in temperature and unavailability of food during this time. During wintertime in their natural habitats in Australia, the Pink Tongue skink would brumate. An acceptable brumation temperature is 10°C. There are now many cases of Pink Tongues breeding successfully in captivity without any Brumation, therefore it is not a necessary requirement for breeding Pink Tongue Skinks, this makes life a lot easier as the Brumation is always something to be considered with caution and strict control. Breeding times will be timed with spring and summer.

Feeding the young

It is best in my opinion to get your young litter of pink tongues onto an food that is abundant. Snails may not always be abundant therefore you may want to try weaning the young skinks onto minced beef as described on the diet page of this website. The vitamin powders and minerals can be mixed as required and the meat scented with live snail if required to encourage them to eat. The young skinks will usually take willingly to the minced meat. It is possible to raise very small pink tongues successfully on this minced beef and snail when available

Disease

There have been a few cases of MBD (metabolic bone disease), unproven in my opinion. Lumps and bumps can appear at breeding time through the males biting the shoulders and backs of the females. Veterinary advice should be sought if for any reason you suspect health problems. There have been cases of eye infections in Pink Tongue Skinks and this is thought to be due to lack of humidity in the vivarium. A daily misting with water should cure any humidity problems, and hopefully prevent eye infections.

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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

Available: Venomous snake video available: This video has extractions from king cobras, gaboon vipers, and several others, plus graphic snakebite slides. Kentucky Reptile Zoo is a non-profit educational exhibit and venom extraction laboratory. \$10.00 donation plus \$5.00 postage and handling will bring this video to you! Please note everything is filmed as it happens and is not professionally edited. Send a check or money order to Kentucky Reptile Zoo, 200 L&E Railroad, Slade, Kentucky 40376. Visit our website at www.geocities.com/kentuckyreptilezoo for more information, or call 606-663-9160.

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: 40 gallon tank and accessories. Accessories include 2 lights, 2 power head under gravel filters, 1 side filter, 2 heaters and large decorative rock. Paid almost \$600 about 6 months ago, asking \$375, or best offer. Call Erin at (513) 481-0018

For Sale: Feeder rabbits and rats. Call Rod Surber at (812) 637-0303 or e-mail me at Indianarockshop@aol.com.

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	Secretary	Diane Bauer	(513) 451-1203
Sargent-at-Arms	Bruce Fille	(513) 528-4452	Editor	Grady Calhoun	(812) 926-1206
					(513) 564-6041
Advisor	Ray Whitson	(859) 342-8842	Education Conservation Committee Chairman		
			Fred Fannin		(513) 734-6906

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**