

# THE FORKED TONGUE

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Vol. XXX, No. X

[www.cincyherps.com](http://www.cincyherps.com)

October 2005

## **The Editor's Den**

We need articles! The featured article is on Eastern Hognose snakes in Iowa. This article was found on the web at [http://www.herpnet.net/Iowa-Herpetology/reptiles/snakes/e.hognose\\_snake.html](http://www.herpnet.net/Iowa-Herpetology/reptiles/snakes/e.hognose_snake.html)

## **Calendar of Events**

11/05/05 Monthly meeting featuring our own Polly Whittaker speaking on Alternative Habitat Design.

11/25&26/05 GCHS Reptile show at the Cincinnati Museum Center.

12/07/05 Holiday Meeting at Ryan's Steakhouse in Erlanger KY.

## **Annual Holiday Meeting**

This also has become a tradition. We will have our meeting at the Ryan's Steakhouse in Erlanger, KY on our regularly scheduled meeting night. We will have a private room in the back of the restaurant. The cost is \$8.59 per adult (defined as 13 and over) plus drink (\$1.39) plus 15% gratuity. This adds up to \$11.50 per adult. Kids under 3 are free. Kids 4-12 are 50 cents per year of age. Each person pays as they walk in. It is an all-you-can-eat buffet with a wide variety of foods, salad and desserts. You can arrive at 6:30 and get your food. The program, featuring Paul Krusling, will focus on our efforts to study reptile and amphibian populations in Hamilton County.

## **Eastern Hognose Snake**

by Jeff LeClere

This is a medium to large Iowa snake that may be 24 to 46 inches long and has a very stout body. It is not considered venomous. They are rather variable in pattern and color; two phases may be found: spotted and solid. Spotted specimens have a brown or yellow ground color with darker brown or black blotches. These alternate with smaller dark spots on the sides. The blotches may turn into rings on the tail. There may be red or orange pigment in the skin between the scales, and this pigment may occasionally infringe

upon the scales themselves. In some populations, adults are a solid color that may or may not have remnants of blotches. The ground color on solid individuals may be black, gray, or olive. Olive is the most common solid color phase in Iowa.

The labials are light colored on all the variations. Regardless of dorsal coloration or pattern, the belly is yellow, gray, or pinkish, sometimes with gray or greenish mottling. The underside of the tail is always lighter colored than the belly. Eastern hognose snakes always have a dark longitudinal blotch behind each eye extending some distance onto the neck. These blotches are black in eastern hogs, not brown as in its cousin, the western hognose. The western hognose also has a light anal plate and the underside of the tail is black; the same color as the belly. The eastern hognose snakes underside of the tail is lighter than the belly. The rostral scale is enlarged, pointed, and keeled, just as in the western hognose, but it is not as upturned. The scales are keeled, and the anal plate is divided. There are no recognized subspecies of the eastern hognose snake, *Heterodon platyrhinos*.

In Iowa, eastern hognose snakes are found statewide, except for the north central region.

Eastern hognose snakes are not as choosy about their habitats as their western cousins. Heavily wooded areas, prairies, and grasslands are common habitats. They are even found on bluff prairies on occasion. Like western hognose snakes, however, these snakes prefer sandy or loamy soil in which to burrow. Eastern hognose snakes can be found with western hognoses where their ranges overlap in Iowa (Berberich, Dodge, and Folk, 1971; Christiansen, 1983). Easterns also adapt to many other habitat types than westerns and therefore are more widespread and common in Iowa. Eastern hognose snakes are found in more damp situations as they feed heavily upon amphibians. They are also found under flippable cover (as that afforded by rocky hillsides or logs) more often than the western hognose, although still rarely.

The December meeting will be held on Wednesday December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at Ryan's Steakhouse

Heterodon platyrhinos will fan its head and neck much like a cobra when alarmed. Loud and prolonged hissing is accompanied by short jabs with the head as often away from the attacker as toward it. The snake will not open its mouth to bite, and hognose snake bites originating from defense are rare. Even a large 43 inch specimen I found in Johnson County would not bite, but it acted as though it would.

If the attacker continues to press upon the hognose, it will open its mouth, writhe as if in pain and finally roll onto its back with its mouth open and tongue hanging out. It cannot be induced to move. Because the snake keeps its mouth open during the entire death scene, lining at the back of the mouth closes off the opening to the esophagus to prevent the swallowing of dirt. This is also aided by an increase in saliva production, which may run out of the mouth (readily seen when the snake is picked up), taking much of the dirt with it. If it is righted, it immediately rolls onto its back again. Not until the snake feels safe will it right itself and continue on with its normal activities. Eastern hognose snakes are more elaborate with their act than the western hognose, and even though they will perform the act in captivity for a longer period of time, they soon quit acting in captivity.

Eastern hognose snakes are diurnal and actively hunt for food. They may be observed basking in early morning and again at dusk. They are one of the few snakes that dig their own burrows, although they do not live in them for prolonged periods of time. Logs, rocks, boards, and other cover are used-especially just before shedding.

These snakes breed in the spring. They are oviparous and lay 10 - 30 eggs in a sandy area. The eggs hatch in about two months and the young are 5 - 12 inches at hatching. They are much brighter colored than the adults. H. platyrhinos hibernate from October to late April in mammal or self constructed burrows.

Eastern hognose snakes consume amphibians, mainly toads, and use their snout to dig them up as toads spend much time in self made burrows. They also consume small mammals, birds, birds eggs (ground nesters), insects, lizards, snakes, reptile eggs, and carrion. They are immune to the toxic secretions that toads produce via the parotid glands. Eastern hognose snakes are not constrictors and swallow their prey alive.

Hognose snakes are opisthoglyphous (having fangs at the back of the mouth) and they use this feature to deflate toads which may puff themselves up with air to unswallowable proportions. I mentioned previously these snakes were nonvenomous, but there is some evidence that they may be mildly venomous (LeClere, 1996). Although there have been many cases of Heterodon envenomation, its toxicity is controversial. McAlister (1963) took extract from the salivary glands of H. platyrhinos and injected white mice, spring peepers, Pseudacris crucifer, Fowlers toads, Bufo woodhousei fowleri, and chorus frogs, Pseudacris triseriata, in the thighs. The mice were unaffected. Fifteen of the seventeen amphibians died within two days. Subcutaneous hemorrhage, edema, and inflammation led McAlister to conclude that the venom is hemotoxic. Other authors have concurred that this genera of snakes is venomous; others discount it. Anderson tried several times to induce a H. platyrhinos to envenomate him. He even made an extract and administered it to himself. It produced nothing more than slight burning.

More studies must be done to give a more concrete answer. Even so, it may be concluded that individual sensitivity plays the most important role in producing a malevolent affect. Bacteria cannot be discounted in these cases. With as many people that have had toxic symptoms from hognose snakes, there are many who have not. I have had a H. nasicus chew and embed one fang into my thumb without producing any ill effects, but I have a friend that did get a reaction from one. I have also experienced some of the swelling and itching described for some of the Heterodon accounts, to a lesser degree, from a yellow rat snake, Elaphe obsoleta quadrivittata, and got a bad reaction from a bite from a Madagascar giant hognose snake, Leioheterodon modestus. This could possibly be individual sensitivity to a particular saliva. A study conducted on a greater number of humans and different species of amphibians, reptiles, and mammals may provide better answers.

### 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 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](mailto: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 demaled publication.

### Classifieds

Lost a Beloved Reptile? Any Species: We can find it! Guaranteed results. Call Wolf 513-659-9616.

For Sale: 0.0.6 captive bred and born **Northern** Blue Tongue skinks. Born 7/2/05. All eating great! Come from dynamite parents. \$100 each, \$175/2. Call Grady at (812) 926 1206.

For Sale: 0.2 Captive bred and hatched grey-banded king snakes, Blair's phase. \$75 each. Hatched 7/19/05. Eating live pinkies. Call Grady at (812) 926-1206.

Rats and Mice for sale. Reasonable price. Call Jesse or Tom (513) 876-0579.

For Sale: 3.3 Normal Adult Okeetee Corn Snakes \$50 each. 2.1 Banana California Kingsnakes, adult proven breeders, \$100 each. 0.0.10 Cornsnake hatchlings of last year, \$30 for amelanistic, \$25 for normals. Call Mike Matthews at (513) 734-1336.

For Sale: 3.3 South Carolina Corn Snakes (*elaphe guttata guttata*). These were bred by me, and are approx. 1.5 years old. All are nice looking, but a few have exceptional orange and red coloring, and all are feeding very aggressively on f/t mice. I am asking between \$40-\$50 each. Very healthy snakes. Feel free to call me at 228-0293 or e-mail at [kdobrien76@aol.com](mailto:kdobrien76@aol.com) with any questions. Ask for Kevin.

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)

The December meeting will be held on Wednesday December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at Ryan's Steakhouse

### 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 Chairman		
Advisor	Vacant		Peggy Fille		(513) 528-4452
Secretary	Kyle Becker	(513) 831-4898			

### 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	\$15.00	Sustaining	\$25.00
Family	\$20.00	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

The December meeting will be held on Wednesday December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at Ryan's Steakhouse