



BEHIND BAARS

A publication of
The Bay Area Amphibian and Reptile Society
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(408) 450-0759 (BAARS Voice-mail phone)

Yr Editor ran across this surprisingly fair and factual, well-written article, in a recent San Francisco paper of all places, on herpetology. BAARS should sign this lady up!

The Surprising Beauty of Snakes

By Christie Keith, Special to SF Gate, Tuesday, July 8, 2008

When you were young, did you ever lie on your belly in a field, watching a bug crawling up a blade of grass? Did you stand perfectly still in a creek, hoping to catch a frog? Did a garter snake ever slither across your bare foot in the backyard, only to be caught in your curious hands?

For many of us, our childhoods were filled with wonder at the world of nature, and free of prejudice against things that slither or crawl. But as we grew up, we frequently got the message that while puppies, kittens, and baby bunnies are adorable, cold-blooded critters are something else entirely. I know that happened to me.

But all that changed eight years ago. I started doing some editorial work for kingsnake.com, the oldest and largest reptile and amphibian Web site in the world, and had my eyes opened to the beauty of snakes and the motivations of the people who keep them as pets.

Many of the people I met never lost that childhood wonder at the natural world. They would devote endless hours to creating habitats for animals that evolved in environments ranging from the driest deserts to tropical rainforests, sometimes having to learn by trial and error what even the experts didn't know about their snakes. They became obsessive observers of their animals, noting the slightest deviation in activity levels or appetites, their interest and their patience apparently endless.

I also became aware of how much prejudice exists against snakes and the people who keep them. Snakes in our culture have often been relegated to roles as scary monsters in horror flicks and the "ewww gross" segment on nature shows.

I wanted to challenge that view, so I asked some of the Bay Area users of kingsnake.com if they'd be willing to talk to me for a column. One of the first to volunteer was Rolf, who keeps a wide variety of pythons and boas and maintains a Web site about their care at <www.serpentespacific.com>

While there's a stereotype of snake owners as anti-social and a little strange, Rolf defies it. When he showed up at San Francisco's Java Beach to meet with me, he was open, friendly, and happy to talk about his animals, even though he asked me to keep his last name and the city where he lives private (San Francisco still has its irrational ban on all boas and pythons regardless of size- Ed)

Rolf told me that he grew up all over the Northern California coast, mostly in rural areas, where, from the time he was four or five years old, he remembers always being in the middle of a forest, field, or a stream or a creek. "All children look and see things that are interesting, and I always had been involved with these little

Cont'd on pg 4)

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BAARS CALENDAR- Middle of year 2008

- July 1 BAARs Board Meeting- @ TBD
- July 25 Regular BAARs meeting at Cubberley Community Center, Palo Alto
Speaker: Al Wolf on Venemous Snake Recognition
- Aug 1 BAARs Board Meeting- @ TBD
- Aug 22 BAARs Board Meeting- @ TBD
Regular BAARs meeting at Cubberley Community Center, Palo Alto
Speaker: TBA
- Sept 5 BAARs Board Meeting- @ TBD
- Sept 19 BAARs Board Meeting- @ TBD
Regular BAARs meeting at Cubberley Community Center, Palo Alto
Speaker: TBA

Adoptions Placed This Month

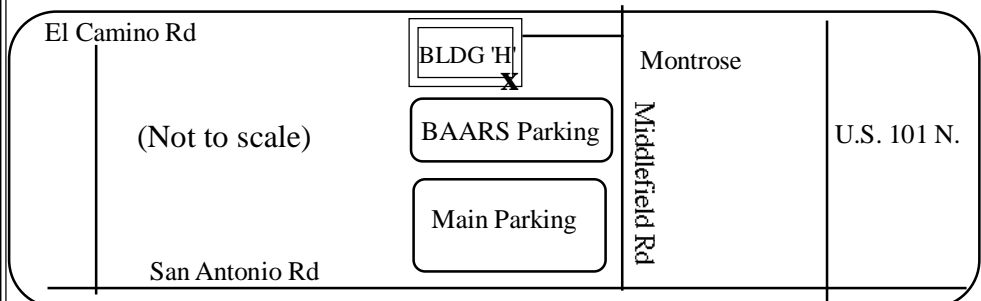
- 1- Leopard Gecko
- 1- Corn Snake
- 1- Red Tail Boa
- 2- Ball Pytons
- 1- African Bull Frog
- 6- Red Eared Sliders
- 1- Sulcata Tortoise

General Meeting Information

Meetings are held at Cubberley Community Center
4000 Middlefield Rd, Bldg H-1, Palo Alto CA
Meetings are on the 4th Friday of each month, except for Nov and Dec.
Meeting starts promptly at 8PM; doors open @ 7:30 PM
Annual Meeting & Holiday Party is held on the 2nd Friday of December

Meeting Guidelines

All people attending meetings must be quietly seated except for the social break in the middle. This is to ensure the speedy completion of the business portion of the meeting, as well as in consideration of our speaker(s). ALL animals brought to the meeting must be in suitable containers, including a source of heat if req'd
All animals must be kept in their containers during the business portion of the meeting. Aggressive animals, sick or in-shed animals or delicate animals, should not be brought to the meeting, both for their sake and that of the humans attending.



animals,” he said, “You see them. They see you. They go and hide. I can see the rocks and the trees and the water, but I can’t see these little bits of life that I know are there. Where are they going? What are they doing?”

Rolf’s parents tolerated his obsession with snakes and even let him keep a captured garter snake in an aquarium for a while. When the snake failed to thrive in his care, however, the boy let it go. Today, he’s gotten a lot better at figuring out what his snakes need to be happy and healthy, but he’s no less passionate about them.

“I think they’re beautiful. I really love just seeing them. But there’s also kind of this science-y observation,” he said. “I feel like I have a living, breathing part of the rainforest in my apartment. This world that I don’t get to see and that most people don’t get to see, and it’s in my living room.”

Marin County’s Natalie McNear fits the snake-owner stereotype a bit more. In a phone interview, she described herself as a loner, happiest when by herself in the fields and forests. But simply by being a woman who loves snakes she challenges stereotypes, too.

“I’ve been going outside and looking for snakes ever since I was a little kid,” said the twenty-year-old, who worked at a North Bay reptile store during high school. “I would catch bugs and snakes and everything else that other girls thought were gross.”

Her snakes are mostly small natives, including a California kingsnake and a sand boa that she collected herself in the hills around Marin.

Although McNear was at first shy and not given to lengthy responses, that changed when she mentioned something that happened the week before. “I picked up one of my rubber boas, and I thought she had a respiratory infection,” she told me. “She sounded almost foamy in her lungs.”

Her veterinarian examined the snake and said the symptoms were caused by irritation from smoke

from the forest fires that broke out all over Northern California this summer. The snake has since fully recovered, but McNear detailed hours spent simply observing the animal. “A snake that’s healthy will look around and flick its tongue really often, whereas a snake that’s not doing so well will tend not to do that,” she said. “They won’t look around. If you hold them, they’ll be limp and weak.”

McNear’s quiet observations haven’t just been of her snakes; she’s noticed a thing or two about how people feel about the animals as well. “(Snakes are) probably one of the most misunderstood animals that people keep as pets,” she said “A lot of people are afraid of them.”

Fear is behind a lot of the prejudice against both snakes and their owners. “People have a slight biological predisposition to be afraid of animals,” Rolf said. “I mean, if you step on the wrong one, it can bite and kill you. So that’s in a way a very reasonable fear to have, even though I’ve never had it.

But over the years through media, entertainment, and whatnot, there’s this kind of mythology built up around these animals, that there are monstrous constrictors that will kill you and eat you, or get on the school bus and eat your kids.”

“Humans have always regarded snakes with a mixture of inquisitiveness and fear, of awe and revulsion,” wrote Harry W. Greene, a Cornell University professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, in “Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature.” They “represented healing to the ancient Greeks and knowledge to the Incas; a serpent tempted Eve in the biblical garden of Eden, and a giant cobra shaded Buddha.

“Snakes run the metaphorical gamut in aboriginal and modern lore, and in the past two decades these limbless creatures have even come into their own as subjects of scientific study.”

It’s in that last mention that we find the answer to the question of just why we might want to try a little harder not to judge snake lovers, nor

discourage our children from an interest in them. Snakes are a vital part of ecosystems on land and in water. They are predator and prey, and have an ancient and still largely unexplored genetic heritage that far predates human history.

Much of what we know about snakes and other small and elusive species comes from the hard work of field biologists like Kate Jackson, the author of “Mean and Lowly Things: Snakes, Science, and Survival in the Congo.” Jackson, just like Natalie McNear, was once a little girl lying on her belly in the grass, looking for snakes. Today, she’s a biology professor and one of the first herpetologists to slog through the swampy forests of the Northern Congo, studying and cataloguing the reptiles and amphibians she found there.

In her book, a memoir of a year spent running afoul of local African customs, language, government and weather in the service of science, Jackson recalls the day she first wondered just why herpetology mattered.

“To a girl mad about reptiles,” she wrote, “a herpetology collection needed no more purpose to justify its existence than, say, an art gallery.” But why did a large institution like the Smithsonian, where she interned, spend so much time and money on its herpetological collection?

The answer her fellow scientists gave her was that they did it to document and protect biodiversity. The importance of that goal seemed obvious to them, and to Jackson. “We loved amphibians and reptiles, and all other animals and plants,” she wrote. “We delighted in the thousands of species of each, and agreed that the world would be a sadder place of any were driven to extinction.

But that explanation alone made me uneasy. It made species sound like luxury items, to be protected only for aesthetic reasons. I wanted an explanation that would convince a non-scientist - even someone who did not consider snakes irresistibly attractive.”

That explanation isn’t simple, but it’s at the heart of the allure of snake keeping even for people who

have never set foot in the jungle or a biology lab - people like Rolf, with his piece of the rainforest. Nature isn’t a simple system, nor is it a *single* system. It’s a universe of interlocking relationships occupied by so many different species that we humans have described only around 1% of them. Remove too many species, or remove a keystone species, and the entire system might collapse, or suffer irreparable harm.

How can we know which those key species are, or where the critical mass might be reached, or how those collapsing systems might affect our species? Without the careful, obsessive study of the natural world, we can’t. Without encouraging herpetology-crazy little boys and girls who might grow up to be the next Kate Jackson, we never will.

That’s because every year, pressured by pollution, development, and other social and political forces, thousands of species cross the threshold of extinction, many without ever having been identified or described at all. Unless we’re motivated by a passion to preserve and save them, how can we ever turn that process around, or even slow it?

Harry Greene opens the final section of “Snakes” with this quotation from Senegalese conservationist Baba Dioum: ‘In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.’

My purpose here is not to convince you to love snakes. I still don’t, and even Rolf and McNear say what they feel for their snakes is more respect and fascination than ‘love’. But I think Dioum is right, that we only save what we care about, and we only care about what we learn to understand.

Every day, hundreds of parents, older sisters and babysitters respond with a shudder and “get that thing out of this house!” when a child shows up with a harmless garden snake in his or her hands. What if instead we taught ourselves to understand and respect people’s interest in snakes and those other “mean and lowly” creatures?

Wouldn’t doing that not only help kids to retain,

but us to reclaim, some of that sense of wonder at the natural world and the desire to preserve it for the future?

[Christie Keith is a contributing editor for Universal Press Syndicate's Pet Connection and past director of the Pet Care Forum on America Online. She lives in San Francisco.]

President's Report....

Hello All –

I'm going to keep this report short this month, since I'm still settling into the new house and still trying to get all of the critters (and myself) properly setup.

Our guest speaker this month will be Al Wolf from the Sonoma County Reptile Rescue. Al Wolf is experienced with venomous snakes and will be bringing rattlesnakes to our July Meeting. Please check our website and calendar for any further updates.

Sincerely,

Scott Alexander



VIOLENCE AT AN L.A. FLEA MARKET

We've all seen ill-treated pets sold at local flea markets, but before you let your indignation get the better of you, note that on Monday, June 16, Lejla Hadzimuratovic, an actress and volunteer for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), went to gather videos and photographs of a vendor selling birds near 12th and Maple streets in the Los Angeles garment district.

Known for occasionally employing confrontational, attention-grabbing tactics, PETA frequently uses cameras, sometimes hidden, to expose animal abuse or mistreatment.

Twenty-year-old Crystal Avarez and a 17-year-old girl, who asked her name not be revealed because she feared retribution, was with Hadzimuratovic. The two said they are not affiliated with PETA.

After the two began snapping photos, Hadzimuratovic and Avarez said, the two vendors- a man and a woman, confronted them. They argued; minutes later, two vehicles pulled up and a group of women jumped out. The two activists were battered and chased away by the group.

"They started asking for identification and pushing and slapping us." said Avarez. "We ran for our car, but they [would not] let us get in. It was a mob."

Police officers from the Newton Division, which patrols the district south of Ninth Street, quickly arrived on the scene. Detective Alex Aridando who is handling the case, could not reveal details of Hadzimuratovic and Avarez's account because the incident is still under investigation. He did, however, confirm that an attack took place.

"There was battery involved," he said. "The Department of Animal Regulations, the Animal Cruelty Task Force, and Animal Control and the senior lead police officers from Central and Newton divisions are all aware of this incident.

This is by all accounts an ongoing problem in the L.A. garment district. It's perhaps better to call the police rather than to try 'doing it yourself'.

I DON'T NORMALLY GET INVOLVED IN SAVE-THE-ANIMALS campaigns, since I don't know the people behind the organizations, nor their agendas or budgets. But in this case, I think it might be legitimate, and is certainly a novel way of reaching the reptile-loving public.

I have a liking for Thai noodle soups, as do many others. My favorite brand is a dry package made by 'Taste Of Thai' which is offered under many labels with several flavors, and all are (so far) spicy without being incandescent.

Inside the last few boxes was the flyer below:

Help Thailand's Endangered Turtles

Buy a cool Turtle T-shirt!

All profits help turtle conservation work throughout Southeast Asia.

Available in two colors:

- Purple with turquoise logo
- Black with red logo

Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL.

Just \$20.00, shipping included.

See all the colors and order online at

www.ThaiTurtles.org

or call 800-243-0897, 9-5 E.T. weekdays.



This Mangrove Terrapin is just one of the critically endangered turtles of Thailand. Find out more at www.ThaiTurtles.org

INS #30



I suggest you give it a try- there's a web site, or a toll-free number to call. I guarantee you won't find many tee shirts with this picture on them, and it may do the wildlife some good. And the soup is delicious!

J DeRyke

BAARS NOTES

Classified ads

Classified ads are free for members (\$5/mo for non-members)

Display ad rates:

\$7.00 Business card size

\$11.50 1/6 page

\$22.50 1/3 page

\$35.00 1/2 page insert

\$70.00 full pg insert

All display ads should be camera-ready. Electronic submissions should be saved as postscript format (.pdf) for best image quality.

Live Food Items

Feeder animals may be available at the regular meetings. It's recommended that you bring your own containers for transport home.

Frozen Rodents are sometimes available through BAARS as a Group Buy. Details will be available at the meetings.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual/Family \$25/yr | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributing \$50/yr |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining \$35/yr | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$100/yr |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional (schools, libraries, non-profit org, service org) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NEW MEMBER | <input type="checkbox"/> RENEWAL/CHANGE OF ADDRESS |

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER/AREA CODE: (_____) _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP CODE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

HERPETOLOGICAL INTERESTS _____

For more info, visit our website: <http://www.baars.org/index.html>



ADOPTIONS & FOR-SALE

[REF # 80703], Male **Leopard Gecko**, 6" long, 3yrs, Healthy. Current Diet: Roach Nymphs, Meal and Phoenix Worms. No Vet visits. (Cage, Food): If Needed
Owners Moved Out of State. Urgency: Moderate-in foster home, San Jose, CA

[REF # 80702], **Reticulated Tiger Python**, Female, 10' long, 3 yrs old, very healthy. Disposition: can be aggressive when hungry. Current Diet: 2 large rats weekly. Vet visits? none. Have fully set up custom cage for sale if needed. Special Needs: lots of attention/ good humidity. No longer able to keep (I'm moving). Urgency: soon, in a few months. In Martinez.

Add'l Information: This is a snake for the experienced snake owner; she needs lots of attention.

[REF #80701]- **Bearded Dragon**, Male, 5 yrs old, about 2 lbs (full grown). He just had a vet visit in June and is in good health. The reason was to get his nails trimmed. He is very docile and has never shown any signs of aggression. Current Diet: Feeding on 75% veggies and 25% superworms. The owner is moving to a residence where pets are not allowed. Fairly Urgent- Being Fostered in San Jose

[REF # 80609], **Special Needs Red Tail Boa**, Female, 7'1, 5+ys old. Recovering From A U.R.I. Disposition: Sweet. Current Diet: Not Yet Eating; was on live mice Vet visits? Yes- successfully treated for Mouth Rot/URI
Cage, Food avail if needed. Owner moved out of State. Fairly Urgent-Being Fostered in San Jose; call Dianne Flagg if you can help.
Add'l Info: until the infection is completely cleared up, this should be the only snake in a household.

[REF #RES]-Numerous **Red-Eared Slider Water Turtles**, both male and female, various sizes (typically 4-7"). Were all taken into foster care; some are rescues from the local humane societies; others were received from

owners who could no longer care for them. All appear healthy- active, eating well on reptomin turtle sticks & trout chow supplemented w/ romaine lettuce, worms, snails, crickets & various water plants. No apparent health issues. Not urgent- now being fostered in San Jose

[REF #80503]-**Ball Python**, male, 3 ft long, 5 yr old. Beautiful, Mellow Snake, Very Healthy, Very Sweet. Eating F & Th. mice Had regular checkups with Dr. Chris Sanders, Comes w/ cage, food, lamps. Lack of time; cage requirements. Urgency: medium high; in San Mateo

Red-Ear Slider water turtle, male adult, 7-8" long, very healthy & eating well. Comes w/ 'full tank setup'- circulating pump, two filters, etc. Couple are expecting and their doctor has warned them against having a newborn human baby in the same house as a turtle which may carry Salmonella. Urgency- in a few months. Located in Carson City, NV. Contact Jack or Judy DeRyke if interested.

The animal adoptions listed herein are for the prospective benefit of BAARS club members as adoptees.

No guarantees as to the health, suitability or legality of the adopted animals as pets, is either expressed nor implied.



Are your reptile-pets costing you too much?

One way to save a few bucks in this day of sky-high costs and inconvenience is fixing stuff that breaks, at home instead of constantly replacing it. For instance, do you have a cracked or broken glass aquarium or terrarium laying in the garage? Every year at the annual BAARS auction, there are a few that show up with such glass panels, and sell for practically nothing. These are easily and cheaply fixable on a Saturday afternoon by the average homeowner.

The glass must first be carefully measured for size, then cut or pried out (wear gloves); the adhesive used is often silicone and cuts easily with a jackknife. Once it's out, clean up the frame of bits of old adhesive or glass chips. Then go to TAP Plastics and buy a piece of clear acrylic or polycarbonate (its stronger) either cut to the same size as the old glass panel by TAP, or you do the trimming. Both types of plastic cut with hand hacksaws or fine-tooth hand wood saws, but it's much easier using a wood-cutting electric band saw.

Once cut to size, use either acrylic aquarium cement if the tank must hold water, or silicone sealant if its for a dry terrarium. Note that most home-repair-store silicones cure by exhuding acetaldehyde, which instantly combines with moisture in the air to form acetic acid, giving a vinegary odor. If the odor bothers you, put the tank outside in the shade to cure until the odor is not apparent. If you can smell it, your rep-pets can too, and it may badly affect them since they'll be in it! Full cure will occur in 18-24 hrs.

Just be careful to choose a plastic thickness appropriate to the animal occupying the repaired tank. I fixed a very nice dual-top-hinged 150 gallon tank with a sheet of acrylic somewhat thinner than the original cracked glass top. Glass is of course much stiffer than sheet plastic. The tops were each retained by a simple swiveling latch. An active adult boa found that he could push up at the corners and bend the acrylic enough to slip out. The hinged tops remained latched and intact, confusing me no end when I noticed him on the floor at 4 AM on a trip to the bathroom.... Back to the drawing board!

J DeRyke

THE BAY AREA AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE SOCIETY

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