



New Mexico Herpetological Society

October – December 2002 Newsletter

Volume 39 (3)

Annual CHRISTMAS BANQUET



6 December 2002

Dinner 7:30 - 10:00 p.m. at
La Placita Restaurant in Old Town, Albuquerque

(choice of a chile relleno plate, Mexican fiesta (combination) plate, or grilled chicken breast)

Speaker – Eric Brand on *Herping in Nepal*

Cocktail Hour at 6:30 p. m. at the American International Rattlesnake
Museum

*Cost is \$15 per Person payable before 30 November to Jaci Fischer at

217 Tornasol NE
Albuquerque, NM 87113
344-2957

BRanch217@aol.com



*We need to give the restaurant a head count by 30 November, so please let Jaci know as soon as possible if you plan on attending this year's banquet. You can either pay Jaci in advance (preferred), or bring the money with you that night. In any case, please let Jaci know if you are going to be there. Last minute stragglers will be accommodated but the restaurant always appreciates a half-decent head count. If you change your mind at the last minute you are still more than welcome – we can always make room for stragglers! Bob Myers has graciously agreed to once again host us with drinks and chips before the banquet. As before this will take place at the American International Rattlesnake Museum at 6:30 p. m. Don't miss this chance to see what Bob has added in the last year and maybe pick up something for that herper on your Christmas list.

A HERPETOLOGICAL SURVEY CONDUCTED IN MILLS CANYON

by Ted Brown

HARDING & MORA COUNTIES, NEW MEXICO

30 AUGUST – 2 SEPTEMBER 2002

New Mexico Herpetological Society

8 October 2002

INTRODUCTION

The New Mexico Herpetological Society conducts an annual spring field trip to a selected location in the state to sample the local amphibian and reptile populations and to gather natural history data on those populations. The field trips are usually scheduled for the Memorial Day weekend in late May. But because of the extreme drought conditions prevailing statewide in the spring of 2002, the decision was made to postpone the Mills Canyon trip until the Labor Day weekend of early September in hopes that recent rains would lessen drought conditions and improve the chances of encountering amphibians and reptiles. Although the normal rainfall had not been received in the area, as witnessed by the Canadian River being limited to a few larger pools instead of its usually flowing condition, enough rain had fallen during the summer to result in a good growth of grama grasses (*Bouteloua* sp.) and wildflowers around the campground and elsewhere in the canyon. When visited in May this year, the campground area was almost devoid of grass and flowers, the lilacs and locust trees had yet to leaf out and the river was reduced to a few small pools.

This year's field trip was the third planned for Mills Canyon on the Canadian River by the NMHS. We conducted two very successful field trips to the canyon in May 1989 and May 1993, establishing new county records for several species. Attending the field trip on 30 August – 2 September were the following nine NMHS members:

Ted & Sue Brown
Gregg & Stacey Sekscienski
Scott & Rebecca Bulgrin

Dave & Jean Burt
William G. Degenhardt

RESULTS

A total of 48 specimens of 12 species were observed or collected on this field trip, as listed below. None of these were additions to the list of species found in Mills Canyon on the 1989 and 1993 trips.

SPECIES	NUMBER
Woodhouse Toad (<i>Bufo woodhousii</i>)	3
Plains leopard frog (<i>Rana blairi</i>)	6
Snapping turtle (<i>Chelydra serpentina</i>)	3
Spiny softshell (<i>Trionyx spiniferus</i>)	2
Chihuahuan whiptail (<i>Cnemidophorus exsanguis</i>)	5
Plateau whiptail (<i>Cnemidophorus velox</i>)	8
Collared lizard (<i>Crotaphytus collaris</i>)	1
Eastern fence lizard (<i>Sceloporus undulatus</i>)	12
Ringneck snake (<i>Diadophis punctatus</i>)	3
Coachwhip (<i>Masticophis flagellum</i>)	3
Bullsnake (<i>Pituophis catenifer</i>)	1
Prairie rattlesnake (<i>Crotalus viridis</i>)	1
Total: 12 species	48

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Woodhouse toad (*Bufo woodhousii*): Three of these toads were observed on this trip. One small toad (ca. 35 mm SVL [snout-vent length]) was caught on 30 August by Dave and Jean Burt and kept briefly for observations and photographs, and the other two were photographed but not collected. Ted Brown photographed a very large Woodhouse toad on 1 September hopping in the dense salt cedars along the

Canadian River on the north side of the large rock formation locally known as Battleship Rock at the north end of Mills Canyon on the Mora County side of the river.

Plains leopard frog (*Rana blairi*): Scott Bulgrin, assisted by his wife Rebecca and Dave and Jean Burt, caught six small recently metamorphosed froglets of this species in a grassy pond at the top of the canyon along Mills Canyon Road in Harding Co. on 2 September. Only one was taken from the area for rearing. No additional frogs were seen at other ponds in the area.

Snapping turtle

(*Chelydra serpentina*):

One large and one small snapping turtle were taken in turtle traps on 1



September in the Canadian River on the north side of Battleship Rock. The traps were set by Dr. William G. Degenhardt and the Browns at 10 AM and retrieved at 1 PM. Another snapping turtle was trapped in the afternoon (2-5 PM) at a pond in the river about ¼ mile downstream. The two larger turtles were released after being photographed; the smallest one was deposited in the Museum of Southwestern Biology at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. This is the farthest north this species has been taken in Mills Canyon.

Spiny softshell

(*Trionyx spiniferus*):

Two small softshells were trapped in the Canadian



River on 1 September. The first was taken in the traps with the snapping turtles on the north side of Battleship Rock and is the farthest north in Mills Canyon this species has been collected. It has been added to the collection at the Museum of Southwestern Biology. The second was trapped about ¼ mile downstream and was released later that day. These softshells belong to the subspecies *T. s. hartwegi*, the Western spiny softshell.

Chihuahuan whiptail (*Cnemidophorus exsanguis*): Five juveniles of this swift lizard were seen during this survey. Ted Brown saw one in the campground on the afternoon of 31 August and the other four on the south side of Battleship Rock on the morning of 1 September. None was collected,

but one was photographed. Faint lateral spots were barely visible on these lizards.

Plateau striped whiptail (*Cnemidophorus velox*): Eight juveniles of this unspotted lizard were seen near Battleship Rock and the nearby Canadian River on the morning of 1 September by Ted Brown. One was photographed; none was collected.

Eastern fence lizard (*Sceloporus undulatus*): Twelve of these brown lizards were observed on this survey. The first, an adult male, was captured on 31 August by Dave and Jean Burt on the wall of the latrine at the campground and kept overnight for photographing the next day; it was later released. Ted Brown observed nine others (3 males, 4 females and 2 juveniles) on the rocky slopes of Battleship Rock at 10:30 – 11:45 AM on 1 September; none was caught. He also saw a large male on the walls of the old house at the mouth of Mesteñito Canyon across the Canadian River from Battleship Rock at 2:30 PM. Brown photographed a young fence lizard at the ruins of the stage station near Mills' house in 31 August. The subspecies in the canyon is *S. u. tristichus*, the Southern Plateau lizard.

Ringneck snake (*Diadophis punctatus*): Three of these little gray snakes with an orange neck ring and bright orange underside were seen on this trip; two were collected. Dave and Jean Burt caught a large female (ca. 12-14" total length) in the open among grasses and wildflowers near the campground late in the afternoon of 30 August. Scott Bulgrin saw a smaller ringneck the next day under a rock, but it escaped into a hole in the ground. He also caught another small one under a board in the ruins of a building near the intersection of the Mills Canyon Road and St. Rd. 39 at 10:30 AM on 2 September. The ringnecks in this area belong to the subspecies *D. p. arnyi*, the prairie ringneck snake.

Coachwhip

(*Masticophis flagellum*):

Three large coachwhips were observed on this trip in Mills Canyon. Scott Bulgrin caught a large male about 5-5-1/2 ft. long near the Canadian River just NW of the campground on 1 September and saw another nearby. The first



snake was released after being photographed. Dr. Bill Degenhardt and Ted Brown saw the third coachwhip on the west or Mora County bank of the river about ¼ mile south of Battleship Rock at 2 PM on 1 September. It dashed into a small inlet of the river and swam across about 10 ft. of water to the near bank, disappearing into the cattails and willows.

All of these coachwhips were bright pinkish in color with wide, darker red-brown crossbands, typical of this phase of the western coachwhip, *M. f. testaceus*, found in many parts of northern New Mexico.

Bullsnake

(*Pituophis catenifer*):

Only one bullsnake was observed on this trip: a large female was pointed out



by one of the ATV riders from Dalhart as it crawled across the road in the campground at 4PM on 1 September. Scott Bulgrin is keeping this snake as part of a captive breeding program. Bullsnakes here belong to the subspecies *P. c. sayi*, a form ranging from Canada to Mexico on the Great Plains.

Prairie rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*): Just one prairie rattlesnake was observed on this trip. Gregg and Stacey Sekscienski saw one adult dead on St. Rd 39 about 1 mile south of the Mills Canyon Road intersection on the morning of 2 September. It was not collected.

In general, collecting amphibians and reptiles in New Mexico in the fall is not as rewarding (in terms of numbers

of species and individuals) as spring collecting. This, and the long and severe drought in the area, may have had some impact on the numbers of animals seen and collected on this trip. Perhaps another visit to Mills Canyon during wetter conditions would reveal a greater variety of species, especially those more dependent on subsurface moisture.

The New Mexico Herpetological Society would like to express its appreciation for the assistance and helpful suggestions provided by Ms. Nancy Walls, Superintendent of Kiowa National Grassland in Clayton, New Mexico.



The upper Canadian River in Mills Canyon.



The Mills Canyon crew - from left to right: Dr Bill Degenhardt, Rebecca Bulgrin, Sue Brown, Greg Sekscienski, Ted Brown, Scott Bulgrin, Stacey Sekscienski, Dave Burt, and Jean Burt.

Upcoming Events

23-24 November - Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge. By the time you are reading this it will be time to once again head south and share our knowledge of and interest in herps with the visitors at this annual event. The NMHS has participated in this event since its inception and everyone always has a great time. We provide displays of reptiles and amphibians (most native to the state, but any are welcome) and discuss herps with the thousands of visitors to the park. Doors open at 10:00 a.m. and close at 4:00 p.m. on both days – plan on setting up about 9:00AM. Aside from the NMHS display there are arts and crafts, food booths, live raptors, and other New Mexican wildlife. This year we have the entire room to ourselves as the zoo folks will not be there. So plan on attending.



6 December - Annual Banquet at La Placita restaurant in Old Town, Albuquerque. As in past years we will start off with drinks and hors d'oeuvres at the **American International Rattlesnake Museum**, courtesy of Bob Myers. Plan on meeting at the museum at 6:30pm. This will give you an hour to look around, find out what Bob has added in the last year, and maybe do a bit of Christmas shopping. We will walk over to La Placita just before 7:30pm. At the restaurant we will have a quick business meeting (to include election of officers for 2003). By the time the business meeting is over it will be time to eat. Our speaker this year is NMHS member Eric Brand. Those who went on the fieldtrip to the Florida Mountains last year will remember him as the rock climber. His presentation will be on Herping in Nepal.

ERIC BRAND – OUR BANQUET SPEAKER

Eric Brand gained an interest in herpetology like most of us at an early age. He brought his first live rattlesnake home when he was six. His parents were supportive and Eric's interest continued until by the time he was in his teens he had a snake room with several species of venomous snakes. These included 12 species and subspecies of rattlesnakes (*Crotalus*), numerous cobras (*Naja*), a few Asian vipers (*Trimeresurus*) and several old world vipers (*Bitis*). Among others, he credits Charles E. Shaw (San Diego Zoological Society) and Carl F. Caulfield (Staten Island Zoo) for supporting his interest in venomous snakes and for teaching him how to stay alive. During his twenties and thirties, Eric traveled extensively, including seven expeditions to Nepal. He spent months exploring varied climes from thick jungle to Himalayan Mountains.

His talk and slide show on Friday night will first take us to the World Health Organization's Queen Sabovida Hospital Memorial Institute, then to the foothills and mountains of the Himalayas, and finally to Nepal's Royal Chitwan National Park – accredited as a World Heritage site. This park has the greatest remaining level of biological diversity in Asia.

Eric and his wife Carol live in Grant County, New Mexico where he keeps, breeds and raises several species of venomous snakes, including: vipers of the genera *Bitis*, *Crotalus*, *Lachesis*, and *Bothrops*; and cobras of the genus *Naja*.

MEETING NOTICE!!!!

9 January 2003 – Our first meeting of the New Year will be the second Thursday of January instead of the usual first Thursday. The members at the last meeting decided that the 2nd of January was just too close to the holidays to have a meeting. So mark your calendar, make a note, or do whatever you need to remind yourself to show on the 9th of January.

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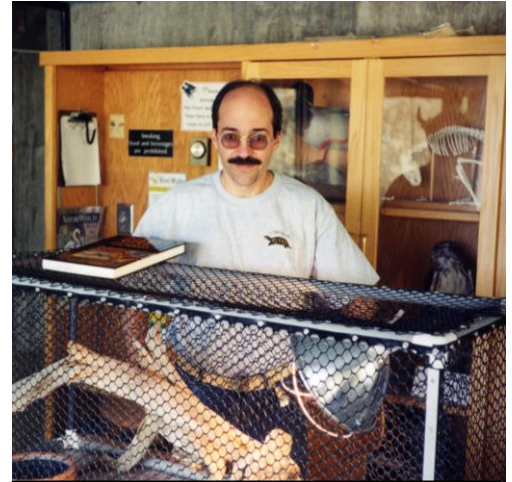


Rattlesnake Museum

Herp Day at the Rio Grande Nature Center



Smiles greeted visitors at the door as Donnie Eichhorst (left) and Jean Burk (right) sold raffle tickets.



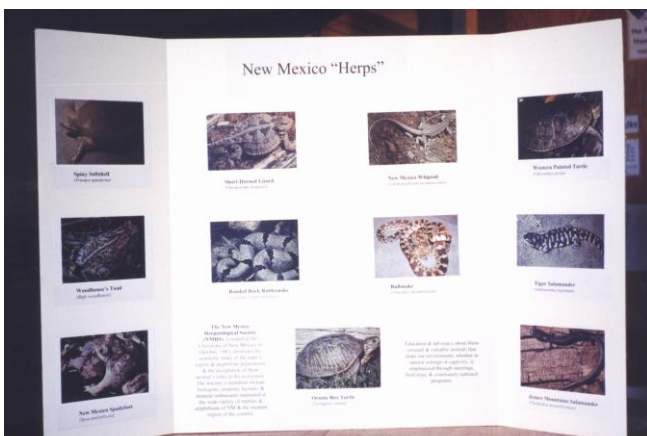
Dave Burk and his monitor that pretty much ignored the day's festivities.



Tom Eichhorst and his apartment house kingsnake set up.



Sue and Ted Brown brought along lots of New Mexican native lizards and snakes. Ted also gave a talk on black and white colored snakes.



Display done by Scott & Rebecca to get public input on a proposed state herp.

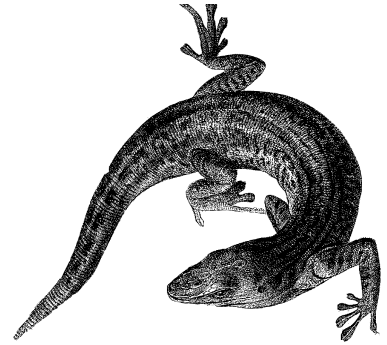


Scott and Rebecca Bulgrin brought lots of critters and Scott gave a talk on rat snakes of the world.

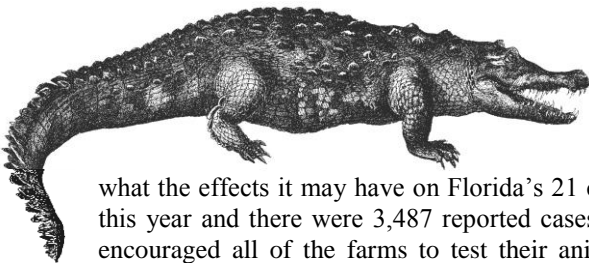
Herps in the News

Darwin Award Candidate (almost) – As reported in the Wednesday, 20 Nov 2002 Albuquerque Journal, a Yacolt, Washington man recently tried his best to join the less than exalted ranks of Darwin Award winners (people who cause their own demise doing something so stupid they are noted with gratitude for helping the human gene pool by eliminating their potential contributions). This young man, Matt George (age 21) apparently caught a small, two-foot rattlesnake on a recent visit to Arizona. Back home in Yacolt (rhymes with dolt) he was showing off for friends by kissing his new and potentially dangerous, acquisition. On the second kiss (even snakes can have too much) the beleaguered reptile gave the man a bite on the lip. The snake (only doing what snakes do) was thrown to the floor and killed. Matt was rushed to the local hospital in critical condition – soon downgraded to serious condition. The moral: if the first kiss is not well received, then a second attempt may not be the best idea.

Geckos in Hawaii – from an article by Karen Iawamoto in *West Hawaii Today* as reported in HerpDigest, Friday, 15 Novemehr 2002, Publisher/Editor Allen Salzberg, Volume # 3 Issue # 12. Apparently Kona, Hawaii is now home to eight species of geckos – only one of which is native to the Big Island. The others have all been introduced and are seemingly thriving. The most recent addition of concern is the Madagascar gold-dust day gecko (*Phelsuma laticauda laticauda*). This beautiful little lizard is seldom over four or five inches total length and is easily recognized by its bright green coloration with small gold spots sprinkled around the shoulder and neck area and three purple to red finger-shaped marking on its lower back. The Madagascar gold-dust day gecko probably arrived in the early 1970s and has been established for quite some time on Oahu, Maui, and the Kona area of the Big Island. Most blame pet trade imports and subsequent escapes or captive freeings for the influx of these alien species. Although none of the transplanted geckos is venomous or harmful to people or crops, scientists are concerned over potential environmental impacts. The Department of Land and Natural Resource's Division of Forestry and Wildlife has listed the day gecko as a threat to native wildlife and it is illegal to transport them from island to island. However, others have noted that most of these newly arrived geckos are actually fairly benign and thrive around urban areas where they cause far less damage than human development. On the other hand, the newly imported coqui frog with its loud and shrill shrieks has upset authorities to the point they are attempting control and eradication measures. The eight gecko species found in Hawaii are: mourning gecko, house gecko, tokay gecko, tree gecko, stump - toed gecko, gold dust day gecko, Indo - Pacific gecko, and orange - spotted gecko. The mourning gecko is thought to be the only “native” gecko species, arriving with early Polynesian settlers. It is all a question of who arrives first.



Florida Alligators with West Nile Virus – from an article by Jane Sutton, MIAMI (Reuters) as reported in HerpDigest, Friday, 15 Novemehr 2002, Publisher/Editor Allen Salzberg, Volume # 3 Issue # 12. After a series of unexplained deaths at a Florida alligator farm, epidemiologists tested the animals and found the West Nile Virus in three alligators. Previously found in humans, birds, squirrels, and horses; this is the first incidence of this potentially deadly disease in a reptile in the United States. Authorities are unsure of the extent of the infection or



what the effects it may have on Florida's 21 commercial alligator farms. The flu-like illness killed 211 people in the US this year and there were 3,487 reported cases of human infection. Lisa Conti, the state's public health veterinarian has encouraged all of the farms to test their animals. When asked if a human could contract the disease if bitten by an alligator, she wisely replied, “I think they'd probably be much worse off from the general trauma.”

Closing Notes

Due to ever rising costs of producing this newsletter, we have decided to try an use electronic distribution as much as possible. The downside is the lack of hard copy to hold in your hand (or put in the bottom of the bird cage) – unless you are able to print it out at home. The up side is the electronic version will be in color. It has not yet been determined whether the distrobution will be in Word format or as an Adobe Acrobat file – maybe both. If I have your email on file I will attempt sending you the electronic version. If you would rather have the hard copy, then just let me know. Of course, those without email and exchange publications will continue to receive hard copy unless they request otherwise.

Dues for 2003 will be \$10 for adult or family and \$5 for juvenile. This is the first increase since 1968 and most members feel it is overdue.



