

# NEW MEXICO HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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## SANDIA PUEBLO HERP SURVEY 2014



Members of the New Mexico Herpetological Society headed out on May 3 to set up pitfall traps for the 2014 herp survey for Sandia Pueblo. This year we only had to open the traps that were already in the ground. A lot of fun was had by all. Some lizards were spotted and captured and a gopher snake was found. Afterward, several members met up at El Pinto for some good eats.



Clockwise from upper left: Sonoran Gopher Snake found crossing the road; Alyssa marking flags while Chloe Supervises; Collared Lizard; members handling the Gopher Snake; members opening a trap; everyone who came to help except Zane Dohner; Alyssa marking flags so we can find the traps and remember the numbers.





# WEST TEXAS ATROX HUNT

## BY KELLEY HILL



Over spring break I went back home to the West Texas to see my Mom and spend the week on my family's land and the two neighboring ranches looking for western diamondbacks. My intent was to catch quite a few as Jim Harrison at Kentucky Reptile Zoo had agreed to take them and let them live out their lives on his venom line. While some would argue they'd be better off left in the wild, when your land is 30 miles from Sweetwater, Texas a western diamondback in the wild is more than likely living on borrowed time and I figured at least the ones I caught and sent to KRZ could live for many more years, be taken care of, and provide venom for medical research. Which if you're a snake, that beats the likely alternative of getting gassed out of your den in late winter and held with hundreds of others in big drums for a few months with no food or water, then taken to Sweetwater to be sold and dumped into pits simply for people to look at...and after all of this your consolation prize is being grabbed with tongs, placed on a tree stump, decapitated alive with a machete, having your head paraded around

so people can see your tongue still flicking, your skin and tail made into trinkets and sold, and then having your body chopped into 5 inch long segments to be deep fried and eaten with ketchup. Sadly that is exactly what happens to a few thousand WDB's every year in Sweetwater alone, and it's happened every year since 1956.

I spent the week hunting with a friend who knows this country as well as I do. People in that area LOVE to talk about these legendary rattlesnake dens they've "heard" were on these ranches over the years...I love talking about them too but the difference is that I KNOW these dens and exactly where they are and how to get to every one of them. (not an easy task if you're familiar with how rugged that country actually is.) At the request of the owners I won't give the names of our two neighboring ranches but I will tell you they are very large and very well known ranches that cover parts of

3 different counties in West Texas and the old stories of needing horse trailers to haul out the number of snakes caught in the 1950's - 1970's are true. The "big numbers stories" seem to end around the late 1970's but one spring in the late 80's on this exact land I personally found 297 WDB's (didn't take a single one) with two buddies over a 5 day span. I was really looking forward to spending a week doing nothing but hunting snakes with my buddy in the endless canyons and ravines I used to call home. Although a couple of days of high winds hurt, we were still able to get 3 good days and 1 decent day of hunting in. I'm attaching a few pictures we took to give some idea of the terrain we were hunting and as you may or may not know, if a place doesn't have an official name, Texans have to give it a name...I've attached pictures of Lefty's Lip Den and Honeycomb Den (we named them as kids) as well as a picture from atop a 400 ft tall peak I can't name because it has an "official" name and again, the land owners requested that I not. It's been many years since I last hiked and hunted this land but I

remembered it like it was yesterday and every den or rock formation we'd come up to would flood my mind with memories I wouldn't trade for the world. During those 4 days we hunted from early morning though late afternoon in temperatures ranging from the high



50s into the low 80s and I spent 3 nights (probably 6 hours total) road cruising mile after mile of farm to market roads, stopping at every bridge that crossed a river bed and getting out with my flashlight to look around in the rocks underneath them. Over these 4 days of hunting (HARD hunting) the country we both know so well, my buddy and I found a grand total of ONE western diamondback rattlesnake. The anticipation that built and the expectations I had as we would be coming up to a familiar old place would be dampened time after time as I waited to hear the area start "buzzing" as it once did, only to hear...silence. My hopes stayed high as I would crawl up to the mouth of the dens thinking maybe there would be a snake still hiding out but the buzzing I kept wanting to hear never happened. The only sound was the scurrying of pack rats through the sticks they've used to turn what once could have been considered 5 star snake hotels into nothing more than huge rat infested holes. The days of hearing the area around Lefty's Lip and

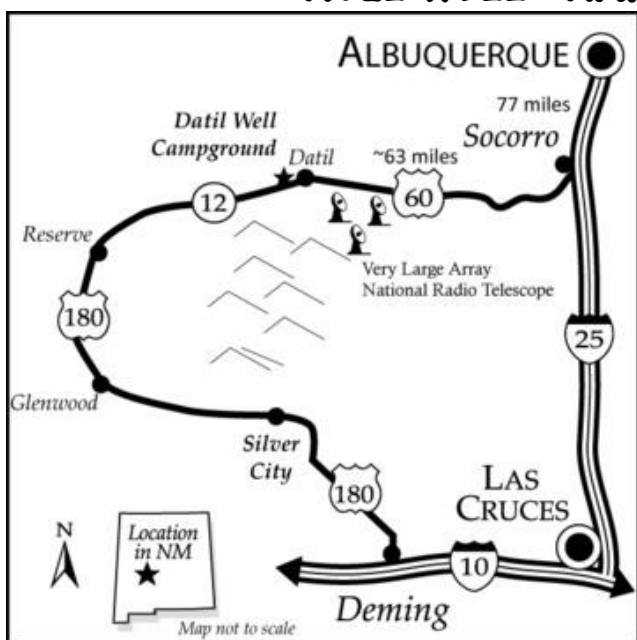




Honeycomb "light up" EVERY time you'd go near it have come and gone. There were many times two of us together would crawl completely into the mouth of both dens and shine flashlights all the way to the back to see the snakes. The time of year obviously dictated how many snakes we'd see in there but I don't ever remember going to either den at any time of the year and there not even being a single snake and when we'd go at the end of winter and early spring there was no way to even count them as the entire back wall would be lined with snakes. Today you can't even shine a light into the mouth of either as they're both completely filled with small limbs and sticks and inhabited only by pack rats. The ONE snake we found was on the very top of the 400 ft peak I previously mentioned and it's hard not to think that "possibly" that's because the last 50 feet are nearly vertical and it took every trick we knew to even get up there and I'd bet we're the only "humans" that have been on the very top in 20 years or more. I'm certain the more accessible areas have been found by others even though it's private property and I'm sure they've provided their fair share of animals to these fundraising circus sideshows they call rattlesnake round ups. I'll end this with what will no doubt be a lifelong memory that came from that week. The last day I talked to the 86 year old owner of another neighboring ranch who told me to meet him at his barn at 7:00 am and he'd drive me to a couple of places I could come back to later in the day once the weather warmed up. He showed me how to get to Waterfall Den which I never knew existed and in his Texas rancher accent he told me that over the years "we've prob'ly killed 25 hunnerd rattlers in that den." I did come back later and after some of the hardest hiking I've ever done I saw the brush line he said I'd have to somehow get through to see it. As I finally busted completely through I almost lost my breath as I saw exactly what the old man told me I'd see...a hole in a neck of that canyon that 4 grown men could walk into standing side by side for the first 20 feet and then they could crawl back another 25-30 feet then it narrows down to about 10-12 inches high and with a strong flashlight you can barely see the very back wall. It was literally an awesome sight. Before he dropped me back at my truck that morning he said something I'll never forget. He said "There were years we'd pull so many snakes outta here we'd have to throw the sacks in horse trailers to haul 'em off. It's just not that way any more. I hope you find what you're looking for, but I have to tell you my money says you don't. I'll admit I stay in my pickup and don't get out in it much any more but I've only seen two rattlers in the last three years on this ranch. They're just not here like they were. I'm afraid all those years we thought we were thinning 'em out we were actually wiping 'em out." It will be those words from an 86 year old man and the tone of regret in his voice that will stay with me forever. There are several factors at play including a long drought that have caused this to happen. But the only one we have full control of is the unregulated capturing of these animals by den gassing for the sole purpose of killing them and making trinkets to sell to the thousands of people who show up for the "show" because they've been sold a pack of lies about snakes their whole lives...and all this is done in the name of charity because they donate a lot of the proceeds to local organizations. It HAS to be stopped, and stopped soon. After what I experienced a few weeks back, I'm really wondering if it's not already too late.



## DATIL WELL CAMPGROUND SPRING 2014, MAY 23-26



Datil Well Recreation Area Campground includes one of 15 water wells along the old Magdalena Livestock Driveway. The old cattle trail was established in the 1800s and stretched 120 miles from Springerville, Arizona, to Magdalena, New Mexico. The area includes 3 miles of hiking trails in piñon-juniper and ponderosa pine woodlands, with scenic views of the San Augustin Plains. The trail and vistas also offer an occasional glimpse of wildlife in a setting of quiet and solitude. You can close your eyes and almost hear the cattle lowing as they settle in for the night.



Please leave a clean camp and respect the facilities and natural surroundings.

Pack it in. Pack it out.

There are 22 individual campsites, all with picnic tables, barbeque grills and fire pits. The 12 individual and group sites have shelters for shade. Restrooms and drinking water are available.

The Datil Well Recreation Area Campground is off of US 60. Go 1 mile west of Datil on US 60 or south on NM 12.

We have the group shelter reserved for Friday night through Monday morning. The society will pay the \$30.00 fee for camping.

### HERPS OF THE DATIL AREA, CATRON CO., NM

The Datil area lies at the NW edge of the Plains of San Agustin, a large lake bed in eastern Catron and western Socorro counties in west-central New Mexico. The surrounding mountains are volcanic in origin, with many exposures of basalt and ash flows at elevations of 7000-10,000 ft. The Plains are almost treeless and covered with grasses, saltbush, rabbitbrush and yuccas. The mountains and hills have open forests of piñon-juniper, ponderosa pine and spruce-fir associations on the higher peaks. Datil Well National Recreation Site is just 1.1 mi. NW of Datil off US 60 at an elevation of 7400 ft. and has a group site where we'll camp. Much of the forested mountains are within Cibola National Forest and many forest roads enter these areas. Streams and lakes are rare, but cattle tanks provide breeding sites for local amphibians. Two paved roads (US 60 and St. Rd. 12) are not too heavily traveled, but caution is always urged when cruising. NOTE: ? means possible, not yet recorded here.

Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*)

Plains Spadefoot (*Spea bombifrons*) ?

NM Spadefoot (*Spea multiplicata*)

Red-spotted toad (*Bufo punctatus*) ?

Woodhouse Toad (*Bufo woodhousii*) ?

Canyon Treefrog (*Hyla arenicolor*) ?

Boreal Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris maculata*) ?



Chiricahua Leopard Frog (*Rana chiricahuensis*) ?

Northern Leopard Frog (*Rana pipiens*) ?

Collared Lizard (*Crotaphytus collaris*) ?

Lesser Earless Lizard (*Holbrookia maculata*)

Short-horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma hernandesi*)

Round-tailed Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma modestum*) ?

Crevice Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus poinsetti*)

Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus tristichus/cowlesi*)



Tree Lizard (*Urosaurus ornatus*)

Chihuahuan Spotted Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis exsanguis*) ?

Plateau Striped Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis velox*) ?

Many-lined Skink (*Eumeces multivirgatus*) ?

\*\*Arizona Alligator Lizard (*Elgaria kingii*) ? \*\*\*DREAMERS' SPECIAL #1\*\*\*

Ring-necked Snake (*Diadophis punctatus*) ?

W. Hog-nosed Snake (*Heterodon nasicus*) ?

Night Snake (*Hypsiglena torquata*) ?

\*\*Sonoran Mountain King Snake (*Lampropeltis pyromelana*) ? \*\*\* DREAMERS' SPECIAL #2 \*\*\*

Striped Whipsnake (*Masticophis taeniatus*) ?

Bullsnake (*Pituophis catenifer*)

Mountain Patch-nosed Snake (*Salvadora grahamiae*) ?

Black-necked Garter Snake (*Thamnophis cyrtopsis*) ?

Wandering Garter Snake (*Thamnophis elegans*)

\*\*Banded Rock Rattlesnake (*Crotalus lepidus klauberi*) ? \*\*\* DREAMERS' SPECIAL #3\*\*\*

Black-tailed Rattlesnake (*Crotalus molossus*) ?

Prairie Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*)



----- Ted L. Brown

9 May 2014



## MEETING & ACTIVITY NOTES



**May 23-26 – Spring Field Trip** to Datil Well campground. See above article.

**May 30-June 1 – Snake Days, Sanderson, TX** In addition to some fabulous, once-in-a-lifetime herping opportunities, participants will be treated to world-class lectures, benefit dinner fundraiser, raffles, a highway clean-up, silent auctions, trade show, photo contest and of course, a fake snake contest! Don't miss Dr. Harry Greene, who will be giving his famous lecture "Half a century after Klauber: What's it like to be a rattlesnake?"

<http://www.snakedays.com/>

**June 21 – Wildlife Festival at Wildlife West** We have been asked to do a reptile exhibition/ education session for the festival on June 21st from 10-6- Free [Chuckwagon show and dinner](#) for our group that evening. Contact Jerry Tuttle if you have any questions at: [heiyou50@msn.com](mailto:heiyou50@msn.com)

**July 12 – Annual Summer Potluck** will be at 6:00pm at Jaci's house. Her address is 217 Tornasol. Bring your favorite dish!



## NEWS IN THE WORLD OF HERPS



### Research splits alligator snapping turtle, 'dinosaur of the turtle world,' into three species

The alligator snapping turtle is the largest river turtle in North America, weighing in at up to 200 pounds and living almost a century. Now researchers from Florida and the University of Vermont have discovered that it is not one species—but three.

Examining museum specimens and wild turtles, the scientists uncovered deep evolutionary divisions in this ancient reptile.

Read more at: <http://phys.org/news/2014-04-alligator-snapping-turtle-dinosaur-world.html#jCp>

# Last Supper: Centipede Dies Eating Way Out of Snake Belly

A Serbian herpetologist was out snake-tagging in Macedonia when she came across a bizarre find: A young viper, with a centipede's head poking out of its abdomen.

It took Ljiljana Tomovic 10 seconds to figure out what it was: The snake had swallowed the centipede, which had then tried to cut a path to freedom ... by eating its way out.

Some time during its violent dash, the centipede died. Perhaps the snake's venom kicked in — that's Tomovic's best guess. The island of Golem Grad in Macedonia's Lake Prespa, where the pair were found, is also known as "Snake Island" and for good reason: it's crawling with snakes, lizards and tortoises. Adult vipers chow down on small rodents, leaving the younger crowd to snack on centipedes.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/science/weird-science/last-supper-centipede-dies-eating-way-out-snake-belly-n80071>



## Flight delayed when pilot brakes for snake on runway



A JFK-bound flight was delayed at the San Francisco airport Friday by a pilot who refused to squish a six-inch garter snake on the runway, officials said.

The Delta Air Lines pilot had announced a delay in takeoff to waiting passengers, explaining that a worker had been dispatched to snatch a wayward reptile off the runway, according to fliers tweeting from the plane.

A spokesman for San Francisco International Airport later said the snake was caught and set free in a "grassy area." Federal law requires airports to keep wildlife off runways and prevented the pilot from running over the snake.

"In this case, it's out of an abundance of caution, but it is a federal mandate," the spokesman said.

"You don't want wildlife or debris on the runway. It's not agreeable to the safe operation of the aircraft."

<http://nypost.com/2014/05/16/pilot-refuses-to-run-over-tiny-garter-snake/>

**The Only Good Snake...  
Is a LIVE Snake!**



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