

the newsletter of the



# minnesota herpetological society

## WEB VERSION

Information edited/removed to respect privacy concerns.

November's Speaker: Melinda Knutson  
Program: Farm ponds as critical habitats  
for native amphibians



NOVEMBER 2006

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# The Minnesota Herpetological Society

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November 2006

Volume 26

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The Purpose of the Minnesota Herpetological Society is to:

- Further the education of the membership and the general public in care and captive propagation of reptiles and amphibians;
- Educate the members and the general public in the ecological role of reptiles and amphibians;
- Promote the study and conservation of reptiles and amphibians.

The Minnesota Herpetological Society is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. Membership is open to all individuals with an interest in amphibians and reptiles. The Minnesota Herpetological Society Newsletter is published monthly to provide its members with information concerning the society's activities and a media for exchanging information, opinions and resources.

General Meetings are held at Borlaug Hall, Room 335 on the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota, on the first Friday of each month (unless there is a holiday conflict). The meeting starts at 7:00pm and lasts about three hours. Please check the MHS Voice mail for changes in schedules or cancellations.

Submissions to the Newsletter

Ads or Notices must be submitted no later than the night of the General Meeting to be included in the next issue. Longer articles will be printed as time and space allows and should be in electronic file format if possible. See inside back cover for ad rates.

Submissions may be sent to:

The Minnesota Herpetological Society  
Attn: Newsletter Editor  
Bell Museum of Natural History  
10 Church St. SE.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455.0104

## SNAKE BITE EMERGENCY



HENNEPIN REGIONAL POISON CENTER 800.764.7661



## November's Speaker: Melinda Knutson

### Program: Farm ponds as critical habitats for native amphibians

Melinda Knutson has a B.S.N. in Nursing (1977) and a M.P.H. in Public Health (1984) from the University of Minnesota, a M.S. in Environmental and Forest Biology (1991) from SUNY College of Environmental Sciences and Forestry, and a Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (1995) from Iowa State University.

Dr. Knutson was a farmer in southeastern Minnesota and worked in public health agencies and medical clinics from 1977 to 1988. Beginning in 1991, her federal research focused on the ecology of the Driftless Area Ecoregion of the Midwestern USA, including the bird communities of

upland and large floodplain forests along the Upper Mississippi River and amphibians living in agricultural landscapes. She also led the development of models to predict and map bird abundances across large regions and management tools to support regional conservation planning. She was a scientist for the USGS Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center for 10 years and she currently works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). She is helping FWS refuges in Regions 3 and 5 improve their biological monitoring programs and archive biological data collected from refuges. The goal of the Biological Monitoring Team is to help refuges maximize the use of their biological data to improve management of fish, wildlife, and habitat.

*Bio from <http://www.umesc.usgs.gov/staff/bios/mgk0.html>*

## Some Lizard Facts from the 2005-2006 APPMA National Pet Owners Survey

As of this survey (done every 2 years), 4.4 million households in the US own a pet herp – 15% of the mown iguanas and 20% presumably own other types of lizards. The survey estimates there are over 11 million pet herps in the US. The trend in households that have pet iguanas is going down: in 1996 and 1998, the percentage of households with lizards which keep iguanas was 26%, in 2000 (18%), in 2002 (17%), and in 2005 (15%). Lizards in general also went down in reptile-keeping households from 20% in 1996, to 18% in 1998, 17% in 2000, and 15% in 2002—but then suddenly spiked up 5% to 20% in 2004.

On average, each reptile-keeping household owns 2.5 herps, but lizard owners own 4.7 per house.

The average iguana owner has cared for iguanas for 3 years,

while other lizard owners cared for their pets an average of 2.5 years.

In 1998, 44% of the iguana owners got their iguanas from a pet shop; 43% in 2000, 40% in 2002 and 29% in 2004. But those who got them from a pet superstore/chain went from 5%, 6%, 6%, to 10% over that same time period.

In 2004, for the first time, the Humane Society came up as a place where people got their iguana (4%). 27% acquired their iguana from friends or relatives.

In 2004, \$151 million was spent in total on lizard care (food, housing, medicine, etc.); while on iguanas: \$139 million was spent on non-surgical vet care, \$124 million on food, \$51 million on toys and \$35 million on medicine.

*From The Desert Monitor, August 2006, reprinted from the Northern Ohio Association of Herpetologists, vol. 32, no. 12.*



# News, Notes, & Announcements

## October Adoption Report

by Sarah Richard, Adoption Chair

Another great month. The following animals went up for adoption:

- 3 Red Eared Sliders
- 1 Eastern(?) Box
- 1 Smallish (5lb) Sulcata
- 2 Snappers (1 large, 1 small)
- 3 Boas
- 1 Iguana
- 1 Savannah Monitor
- 2 Leopard Geckos

I did end up taking the 3 Red Eared Sliders and the Iguana home. I have to admit I wasn't all that upset about the Iguana. I've named her Lucky.

The Red Eared Sliders may be going out mid month. The Large Florida Snapper is also in need of a permanent home. Jamie was gracious enough to take it back but says it needs a better home.

The rest of the animals found permanent homes including several brand new members getting their first reptile.

The Vet school program is coming along nicely as well. We had 4 students attend the Thursday evening overview. They got the opportunity to do some toe nail clipping and health assessments.

If anyone has plastic bins or snake bags that you have gotten from me, PLEASE return them. Also, if you have clear plastic containers with secure lids that you would like to donate, please bring them to the meeting.

Thanks for all the help.

## CORRECTION!

The Holiday Banquet is on  
Saturday, December 2,  
2006, NOT Friday the first.  
Make sure you have the  
right date on your  
calendar! See you there!

## Wildlife Festival Hands-On

by Nancy Haig

It was a beautiful but blustery day at the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Saturday Oct 9, 2006. Over 1500 people attended the annual event and helped celebrate the Refuge's 41st birthday. The festival was designed to show off the many facets of the refuge with walking and bus tours of the area and lots of family activities geared to learning about nature. Sherburne Wildlife refuge consists of 30,700 of federal land dedicated to conservation management and restoration of wetlands, oak savanna, and big woods. It is a transition zone between tallgrass prairie and forest and represents a diverse biological community.

MHS was well represented by Bruce and Nancy Haig and Pete Kazeck. We managed to display 9 of the 28 species of herps that call Sherburne County home. Stars of the show were the four turtles, Blanding's turtle, wood turtle, painted turtle and a mid-sized snapping turtle. Also appearing were a bullsnake, fox snake, Western hognose and a red-bellied snake. A tiger salamander, a blue-spotted salamander, and a plastic model of a Prairie skink rounded out the display.

Thanks to John Moriarty for supplying the turtles, Jan Larson for the fox snake and hognose snake, and to my neighbors the Boetlers for catching the salamanders and red-bellied snake. If you want to learn more about the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, check out their site at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/sherburne>.



## Minnesota teen sentenced in turtle burning incident

MOORHEAD (AP) – An 18-year-old was sentenced to jail and community service for his part in setting a snapping turtle on fire, an incident he and his friends videotaped and posted on the Internet.

Under the sentence handed down Monday, Joel Charles Ross of Hawley will have to serve at least five days in jail, perform at least 50 hours of community service, and pay a \$500 fine that he can reduce by \$400 with more community service. He would face more jail time and fines if he fails to comply with the terms of his probation.

Ross pleaded guilty last month to a misdemeanor charge of animal cruelty for an incident that captured the attention of online viewers and animal rights activists worldwide.

In late May, Ross and two juveniles videotaped themselves dousing the large snapping turtle with gasoline, lighting it on fire twice, and dancing around it. They were discovered after someone sent police an e-mail with a link to the video.

The two juveniles involved received community service earlier.

“This was something that just got way out of control,” said Dennis Fisher, Ross’s attorney. He asked Clay County District Judge Michael Kirk to impose fines and community service but not jail time, saying Ross and his family had suffered enough.

*From Minnesota Daily, Wednesday, September 20, 2006.  
Submitted by D.K. Compton*

## September Critter of the Month



Jeff LeClere  
*American Toad with 5 limbs  
Lined Snake DOR (“Dead on Road”)  
from Rock Co., MN (shown)*



John Moriarty  
*baby wood turtles*



Sarah Richard  
*iguana with removed kidney stones (bottom photo)*





## October Speaker Review

by *Carmelita Knudson*

The October speaker was Madeleine Linck, on Blanding's turtles. Madeleine shared the highlights of her team's studies done on Blanding's Turtles during 2005-2006 in the Three Rivers Park District.

The Three Rivers Park District (referring to the Crow, Minnesota & Mississippi Rivers) covers about 30,000 acres, and her research was done in three of the park's reserves: Crow-Hassan, Elm Creek, and Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserves. These are three of the Minnesota DNR's designated Blanding's turtle priority areas.

The Blanding's turtle is listed as a threatened species in Minnesota. Some identifying characteristics include a long neck, a dome-shaped carapace, and a yellow throat.

Both radio transmitters and telemetry equipment were used for the study. With the use of this equipment, Madeleine was able to follow the travels of several different turtles, both male and female, adults and hatchlings. One turtle in particular, Head Start #1320, traveled 695 meters in eight days. This was of particular interest because the turtle ended up in about the same spot as where it started. If the turtle had not been tracked on a daily basis, one would have assumed it would have stayed in the same area the entire time, which was not the case. Other turtles that had transmitters demonstrated just how far they travel during the year, and they pretty much follow the same route year after year. Many of the turtles actually leave the boundaries of the Park reserve at some point, suggesting that some of these park reserves are not big enough for these turtles.

Park District volunteers were also a huge part of conducting this study, as one person could not possibly watch so many turtles.

One goal is to find nesting turtles. They typically nest in the evening, but this is not always the case. Many of the nests found were protected with mesh, and many nests were relocated. Some common nesting areas the turtles choose include the shoulders of roads, trails, under power lines, mulch piles, and manure piles. They prefer open areas, where digging will be easy. For the most part, the turtle will return to the same nesting area each year. Clutch size averages about seventeen or eighteen eggs, with older turtles laying bigger clutches. One particular female, "Old Lady" averages about 24 eggs in a clutch.

During a translocation experiment an "Orchard Lake Turtle" that was nesting in a mulch pile near a road was moved to the Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve, only to discover she returned to the same place within a few days. She was moved to Murphy again, and returned to her preferred site, but this time, next door. On the other hand, there was "Survivor Sam" who liked to hang around busy roads (and has the scars to prove it) was relocated to Murphy and is believed to still be there.

It is very labor intensive to locate Blanding's turtles, especially young ones. They can see you coming long before you know they are there. Depleted batteries and malfunctioning equipment add to the difficulties of this type of research.

Between 1994-2005, 725 hatchlings were released into the park reserves. This is a significant number, especially when you take into consideration that 90% of nests are typically predated.

Anyone interested in volunteering for next year can contact Madeleine Linck.



## FDA Tussle Over Tiniest of Turtles - Rallying Against Ban, Breeders -Say 'Sliders' Are Kid-Safe; New Study on Salmonella

By Anna Wilde Mathews, October 4, 2006; Page A1

When Andrew von Eschenbach, the acting head of the Food and Drug Administration, paid a courtesy visit to Sen. David Vitter last spring, the Louisiana Republican zeroed in on a key issue: What is the agency doing about little turtles?

The FDA, which regulates about one-quarter of the U.S. economy, is used to being barraged by the heavyweight companies that make pharmaceuticals, medical devices and food. But these days it is the target of a lobbying campaign that, ounce for ounce, ranks among the most intense of recent years: efforts by a handful of farmers to reverse a three-decade U.S. ban on baby turtles.

The agency prohibited sales of small turtles in 1975, after the then-popular pets were blamed for causing as many as 280,000 salmonella infections a year, mostly in children. The FDA edict almost completely barred U.S. commerce in "animals commonly known as turtles, tortoises [or] terrapins," with shells less than four inches long. The size was selected largely because bigger turtles couldn't easily be popped into children's mouths.

American turtle growers survived by selling the reptiles abroad. But pressure from the farmers' biggest market, China, sent wholesale turtle prices plunging by more than half two years ago, and farmers have been desperate to reopen the domestic market. So like other American industries in a regulatory bind, the growers are mounting a full-fledged

Washington campaign — soliciting endorsements from state officials, lining up research on turtle-borne bacteria and pleading to President Bush for intervention.

Their efforts center around the red-eared slider, or *Trachemys scripta elegans*, a species native to areas including the Mississippi delta and watery central and southern Louisiana. As long ago as the late 1950s, growers began stocking man-made breeding ponds with adult turtles, which laid their eggs on the ponds' sandy banks. Farmers collected the eggs,

hatched them and, by the 1970s, were selling millions of quarter-size, green and yellow babies each year. The turtles, which can grow to a foot long and live for more than three

decades, were typically sold in the U.S. as pets.

"They've got a personality. They're very, very friendly," says George F. "Sonny" White, Jr., 49, a former oil-industry worker who raises 400,000 red-eared sliders each year on his farm near Jonesville, La. "They swim, and you can take them out and play with them."

That's the problem, the FDA says. Turtles often carry salmonella in their digestive tracts. Infected turtles can convey the bacteria to their eggs. (The FDA also restricts the sale of turtle eggs in the U.S.)

Though bacteria-carrying turtles may not show symptoms of illness, they can spread salmonella to their handlers. Ingesting it — typically, after failing to wash hands after playing with a turtle — can lead to vomiting, fever and cramps, even death in vulnerable patients. After the 1975 restriction, turtle-related infections appeared to nearly vanish.

Eddie Jolly, a bearded 52-year-old Louisianan who raises about 300,000 turtles a year on a farm he inherited from his grandfather, says he and his seven children haven't been infected by turtles. "I've been bit by them, scratched by them. I've drunk the water out of the breeding pond," he said. "You can eat them in a salad."

After the ban, Louisiana sued the FDA to overturn its tiny-turtle restrictions and lost. In 1998, a breeder petitioned the agency to allow baby turtles to be sold to adults; his request was rejected in 2003. The agency allows eggs and small turtles to be sold for some non-pet uses, including educational and scientific purposes.

Breeders say it wouldn't be profitable to raise turtles until their shells measure four inches. Most keep the small sliders at temperatures of 40 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit after they hatch so the reptiles hibernate, without eating, for as long as eight months until they're sold. Turtles undergo hibernations in the wild, growers say.

George F. White Jr. C&D Farms, a turtle farm near Jonesville, La., washes off harvested turtle eggs, above, and treats them with a chemical cleaner in an attempt to eliminate salmonella bacteria.

Over the years, the breeders rebuilt their business by selling baby turtles in markets from Mexico to Asia. There are now more than 100 growers in Mississippi and Louisiana, where the industry is centered, state regulators say. The growers'



rebound was so successful, in fact, that a group of them pleaded guilty in 1995 to forming a cartel to fix prices, a sort of OPEC for baby turtles.

Breeders pin their industry's 2004 crash on the Chinese market, where turtles serve as pets, food, even medicine. The Chinese were not only raising their own turtles, but they also held out on purchases of U.S. turtles, say breeders and shippers, forcing the American growers to sell low. Red-eared sliders, which breeders once sold wholesale for more than \$1 apiece, plunged below 30 cents each, which farmers say is about their break-even point. Mr. White estimates his gross sales in 2006 will be about \$80,000. In the years before prices crashed, he says he typically grossed \$200,000.

Turtle growers ramped up a campaign to end the FDA's ban. Mr. Jolly, Mr. White and a partner, Mississippi businessman Walter Davis, staked out congressional campaign events and town-hall meetings, sometimes bringing crowds armed with pink fans bearing slogans like "Open U.S. Market for Turtle Farmers." They collected statements of support from Sen. Vitter, Louisiana Republican Rep. Rodney Alexander and Louisiana Democrat Sen. Mary Landrieu, as well as from the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Officially, political pressure isn't supposed to influence the FDA's scientific decision-making, but the turtle-rights advocates say they have no other option. Messrs. Jolly, White and Davis, who founded a company two years ago to sell turtles and accessories if the ban ends, say they haven't made donations to individual politicians.

Mr. White also begged the president to get involved. "Mr. President, the turtle farmers of the state of Louisiana need your help desperately," he wrote in a November 2004 letter. He asked Mr. Bush to "contact me as soon as you have reviewed this information." Five months later, he got a letter from an FDA official reiterating the case for the ban.

By then, the turtle lobby had garnered additional support. Mark Mitchell, an associate professor of zoological medicine at Louisiana State University, demonstrated in a study that salmonella rates could be driven down — to as low as 1% of turtle eggs and hatchlings, in one test — by disinfecting eggs with dilutions of Clorox bleach and a pool cleaner. (Low concentrations aren't believed to harm the eggs.)

Dr. Mitchell's research was funded by the state of Louisiana, and part of the money came from a board funded by a tax on the turtle industry, and farmers paid his way to Washington recently to lobby the FDA. Dr. Mitchell says the ban is unfair because cleaned-up turtles, though not completely risk-free, are at least as safe as a number of other pets and foods.

The FDA countered that the studies didn't prove the salmonella could be fully eliminated or that the turtles wouldn't be re-infected. Stephen Sundlof, head of the FDA veterinary medicine center, says turtles pose a particular risk because children handle them often. "The kids are exposed constantly," he says. Compared with bigger animals, such as iguanas, he adds, they "seem to fit in the mouth better."

—Tang Hanting in Shanghai contributed to this article.

*From HerpDigest, Volume #1 Issue #4, Friday, October 6, 2006*





## MRI donated for paralyzed monitor lizard

SAN DIEGO, Oct. 5 (UPI) -- A 5-foot monitor lizard in Southern California is believed to be one of the first members of its species to get an MRI.

The Veterinary Specialty Hospital in Sorrento Valley near San Diego donated the cost of the procedure for Argie, who lost the use of its front legs last week, NBC San Diego reported. Argie, about 10 years old, belongs to a company that provides animals for educational programs.

Veterinarian Thomas Beyer said the procedure was an educational one for the clinic staff.

"This type of technology is just starting to be used in reptiles," he told the TV station. "It has been done in, maybe, a handful of cases around the world, but there's not really a better way to visualize the spinal cord in reptiles."

The MRI was inconclusive, showing no reason for Argie's paralysis. Veterinarians said they plan to try medication and may perform surgery if that does not work.

MRIs have become fairly common for household pets like dogs and cats. The charge for Argie's procedure would have been about \$2,000.

<http://www.dailyindia.com/show/66478.php/MRI-donated-for-paralyzed-monitor-lizard>

## MHS Treasurer's Report

*Prepared by Nancy Haig, Treasurer*

### For September 2006

**Beginning Checkbook Balance:** ..... 15,316.75

#### Income:

Membership .....	445.00
Library Fines .....	0.00
Raffle .....	84.00
Adoption .....	230.00
Rodent Sales .....	209.00
Hands Ons .....	400.00
Sales .....	44.00
Other* .....	400.00
Renfest .....	1250.00
Renfest* .....	1543.46

**Total Income:** ..... **4,605.46**

#### Expense:

Newsletter .....	309.00
Misc. Printing and Postage .....	0.00
Program .....	0.00
Library .....	0.00
Supplies .....	0.00
Hands-On .....	0.00
Refreshments .....	0.00
Rodent Cost .....	0.00
Adoption Cost .....	0.00
Midwest costs .....	0.00
Donations .....	0.00
Other* .....	(725.00)
Other* .....	97.38

**Total Expense:** ..... **(318.62)**

**Cash Increase/(Decrease):** ..... **4,924.08**

**Ending Checkbook Balance:** ..... **20,240.83**

#### Placement of Cash Holdings

Checking Account ..... 20,240.83

Cash on Hand ..... 155.00

**Total** ..... **20,395.83**

#### Treasurer's Notes:

**Income:** DNR reimbursement \$400.00 field survey

**Expense:** return of \$725.00 from grant award

Renfest supplies - \$79.39, check printing - \$17.99

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**MHS Ad Policy:** The MHS assumes NO RESPONSIBILITY regarding the health or legality of any animal, or the quality or legality of any product or service advertised in the MHS Newsletter. Any ad may be rejected at the discretion of the Newsletter Editor. Due to space limitations, unpaid and complimentary advertisements are subject to occasional omission.

**Classified Ads:** All active members are allowed a classified ad, run free of charge as space permits. Ads may be run three consecutive months, after which time they may be resubmitted. Corresponding members are allowed a complimentary business card advertisement monthly as space permits. Due to federal restrictions on non-profit mailing permits, we are not allowed to run ads for travel, credit, or insurance agencies.

**Submissions:** All advertisements should be submitted to the MHS Editor, Bell Museum of Natural History, 10 Church St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Deadline is the night of the General Meeting for inclusion in the next newsletter. Make checks payable to: Minnesota Herpetological Society.

**MHS AD RATES**

Business card	\$5/Month	\$55/Year*
1/4 Page	\$10/Month	\$110/Year*
1/2 Page	\$20/Month	\$220/Year*
Full Page	\$40/Month	\$440/Year*

\* Note: 12th month is free on a one year commitment

**Minnesota Herpetological Society Membership Application**

New	Name		
Renewal	Address		
Membership#	City, State, Zip,		
Type	Phone	Email	List in MHS Directory? Yes No
Check #	Herp related interests		

Active Memberships: Sustaining (\$60/year) Contributing (\$40/year) Basic (\$20/year)

Corresponding Memberships: Commercial (\$25/year; 2 business card ads/year)

Required check info. Drivers Lic # State DOB

Please enclose the proper payment with your application. Make Checks Payable To: **Minnesota Herpetological Society**. Membership is for 12 months from the date of approval, a receipt will be sent only upon request. Mail to: **Minnesota Herpetological Society, Bell Museum of Natural History, 10 Church St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455**. Please allow 6-8 weeks for processing.

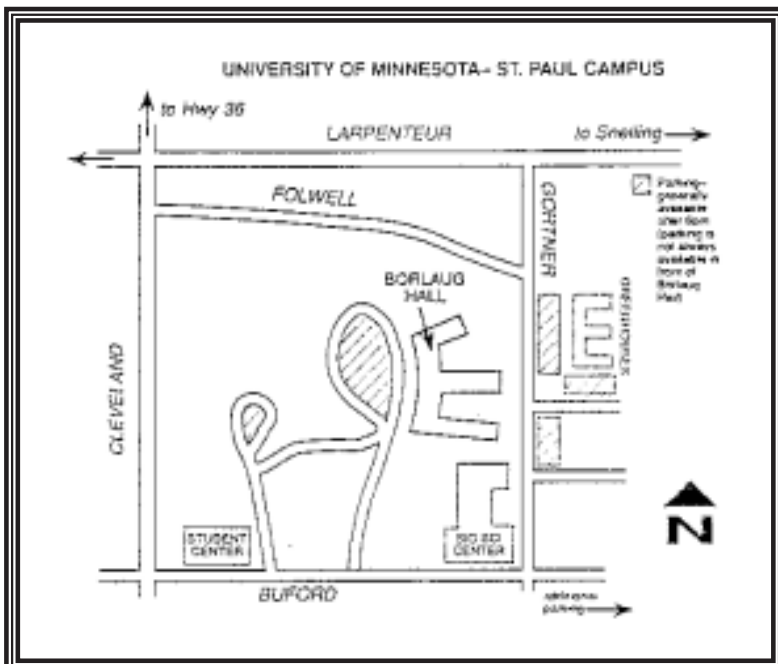


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