

New Mexico Herpetological Society

June - Dec 2007 Newsletter

Volume 41 (2)

New Mexico Herpetological Society



Annual Christmas Banquet



**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8th, Villa di Capo,
Central and 8th St., downtown Albuquerque**

6:00 pm – Refreshments and gab at the **American International Rattlesnake Museum** in Old Town. Bob Myers is once again hosting our pre-dinner gathering and providing beer, wine, chips & salsa. Thanks to Bob who has graciously hosted this event for over a decade.

7:00 pm – Dinner and a short business meeting (election of NMHS officials for 2008) at **Villa di Capo** on the corner of Central and 8th St., downtown (plenty of parking). This is always a fun event and culminates the NMHS yearly activities. Plan to attend!

9:00 pm – Matt Goode, Research Scientist with the School of Natural Resources at the University of Arizona in Tucson will talk about his recent long-term work on tiger rattlesnakes in the US and Mexico, as well as research in New Mexico. As past Senior Co-chair of the Southwest Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC), he'll also give us a special insight into that group's activities and how NMHS members can help promote interest in these animals in our state.

Cost: \$20, payable (as are 2008 dues) that evening.

Contact TED or SUE BROWN no later than Monday, Dec. 3rd, if you plan to attend!!! Call him at 471-1230 in Santa Fe or e-mail him at: Brownlizard2279@msn.com

NMHS RETURNS TO THE BLACK RANGE IN 2007 THE FIELD TRIP OF 25-28 MAY

Ted L. Brown

Seven years ago, NMHS members made the long journey from their comfortable homes to the wilds of Gallinas Canyon on the west slopes of the Black Range near Silver City in hopes of catching a few interesting herps of the kind not seen in the Albuquerque area -- Arizona alligator lizards, canyon tree frogs, banded rock rattlers and the like. The dry weather certainly put an end to those silly thoughts -- we saw only Chihuahuan spotted whiptails, a few fence lizards and some gravid crevice spiny lizards. Oh, I almost forgot the two rock rattlers that did show themselves on that trip so long ago. We blamed our poor results on the very dry weather. Why not? It works for cattle ranchers, farmers, and tourist industry representatives.

In 2007, with the memory of several inches of good old-fashioned snow over the Christmas-New Year's holiday period and some good spring rains between then and our proposed annual Memorial Day field trip fresh in their minds, the NMHS members again voted to travel that long open stretch of I-25 south and west to the Black Range for a return to Gallinas Canyon and the promise of untold herp riches. Visions of king snakes, alligator lizards and rock rattlers again danced in our heads.

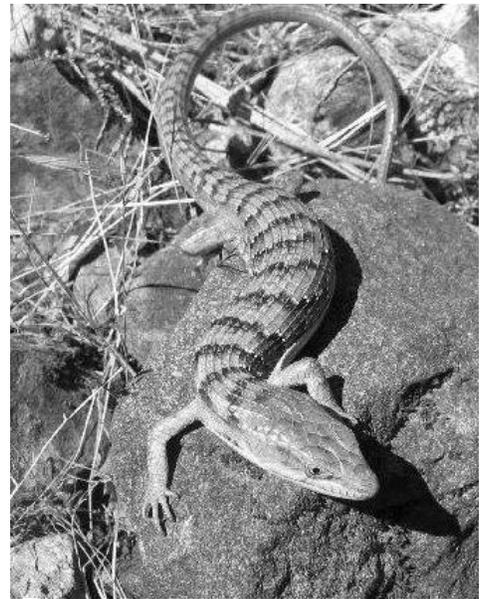
Garth Tietjen and his family were the first to arrive, having zipped down the road from Los Alamos on Thursday, May 24th. Garth reported seeing some fence lizards and crevice spiny lizards around camp. Most of the rest of us arrived the next day. The rest of us included: Sue Brown, Richard and Pat Beery, the three Bulgrins (Scott, Rebecca and Logan), Bill Degenhardt, Del Jones from Ruidoso, the three Karmmanns (Dave, Esther and Samantha), and Patrick and Lilia Maher. Jaci Fischer and Fred Yost joined us Sunday afternoon following their art show in Silver City.

Storm clouds threatened from the southwest that Friday. About 5:30 PM the rain started, accompanied by some pretty large hailstones. It lasted an hour and canceled herping activities for the evening. Two smaller storms drenched us later in the evening.

Saturday's weather was bright and sunny in the morning, but storm clouds overhead by 2 PM brought more rain and hail down on the campers. By then, we'd had some modest success in collecting a few goodies. I found a very small (55mm SVL) Arizona alligator lizard under a rock in a shady spot still covered with melting hailstones from Friday eve's storm. Rebecca found a canyon tree frog on a rock in the stream and Scott caught a nice male fence lizard. Following the afternoon's hailstorm, the clear weather brought us out to hunt along the steep rock faces along the highway east of camp. We saw a crevice spiny lizard and a large alligator lizard, both of whom escaped into talus slopes and brush.

Sunday was again bright and sunny with only a small rain shower after lunch -- no hail. We spent the morning hunting along Gallinas Canyon and managed to catch or at least see a few more canyon tree frogs, tree lizards, fence lizards, and a single Chihuahuan spotted whiptail.

Two young fellows who had been camping north of the town of Mimbres, northwest of our camp, happened to drop by to see what they could find in our canyon. Max McGlasson and Eric McCormick of Carlsbad were quite surprised to discover us there and could hardly contain their excitement at meeting Dr. Bill Degenhardt. They persuaded him to sign their copies of his NM herp book before they showed us their catch, THREE Sonoran Mountain



Even a young alligator lizard is more than willing to bite down on the hand that captures him. Fish & Game Photo.

king snakes!!! They then went up the rocky slopes across the stream from camp and caught a very small banded rock rattler. All we had to show for our efforts were a few tree frogs, fence lizards, and a large alligator lizard.

Following a show of critters, we got busy and made a fine charcoal fire, put on the steaks we brought (Jaci and Fred added some more delicious steaks and bell peppers to the grill) and our steak bake was on its way to making more pleasant memories of the trip. The next day was spent in packing up, photographing each other's critters, making fabulous Yankee trader deals (Ted traded his large alligator lizard for a female fence lizard that Logan caught in his fishnet (!), which pleased father Scott. Son Logan's opinion of the alligator lizard was that "it was the ugliest lizard I've ever seen!"). Bill Degenhardt saw a small banded rock rattler that escaped under a large boulder. Del Jones was rather lucky at this turn of events, 'cause his car's battery had just died and he was able to get a boost from Bill's Subaru; everyone else had left camp for home.

For a complete report on the total catch and locations for this trip, contact Ted Brown in Santa Fe at 505-471-1230 and a copy will soon be yours.

2007 EVENTS

5 May - Earth Festival 2007 in Rio Rancho was a windy cold affair this year. NMHS bailed at the last minute due to lack of participation. We will have to see if we can get more folks with critters to show next year.

25 – 28 May – NMHS Memorial Weekend field trip to the Black Range. See article on page 2.

May to September - Sandia Pueblo Herp Survey in the bosque on the Sandia Reservation. Like the last two years, NMHS once again performed this survey of the herps on specified lands on the Sandia Reservation. Contact is Scott Bulgrin.

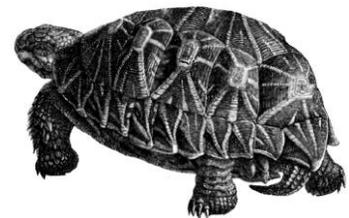
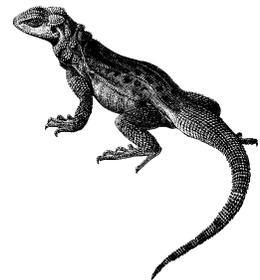
30 May – 1 June Partners in Reptile and Amphibian Conservation (PARC) meeting at the university. More on this organization and the June meeting will be available at the December banquet.

21 July - Annual Potluck was at Jaci Fischer's home this year (217 Tornasol NE, Albuquerque, NM 87113). We had a great evening with wonderful food and great company. We were able to all gather in Jaci and Fred's new studio for the evening's presentations. Ted and Scott presented slide shows on the Black Range trip and Jaci's son Max gave a presentation on the efforts to reintroduce the endangered Bolson tortoise to New Mexico. This is the largest tortoise in North America (up to 18 inches long) and was once found from Texas and Oklahoma to New Mexico, Arizona, and Mexico. The only living wild population is a small group found in the Chihuahuan Desert in Mexico. There were also 37 Bolson tortoises in captivity in Arizona. The reintroduction efforts involve 26 of these on Ted Turner's Armandaris Ranch near Elephant Butte. Max worked on this program over the summer. Interestingly, while these critters may usually move as slowly as expected, we saw video proof that they can disappear into their dens in the blink of an eye.

September – Labor Day Weekend NMHS field trip No. 2 to the Sevietta National Wildlife Refuge. See the report on page 7.

October: Herp Expo? There is normally a herp expo about this time of year, but to with the recent activity of the New Mexico Game and Fish declaring that every herp crossing state lines needs a permit and the new restrictions passed by the Albuquerque City Council, future herp expos are in question.

17 – 18 November – Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge. The New Mexico Herpetological Society does well at this event and we always need member participation. The refuge center had been nicely remodeled and is worth the visit even if you do not bring herps to display. Last year our display filled six tables and included numerous species of snakes



and lizards, as well as a couple of toads and a musk turtle. Young and old alike enjoy seeing and talking about herps. We had several thousand visitors over the two days and listened to many herp tales.

December - Annual Banquet. Saturday, December 8th at Villa di Capo, see page one. We will announce next year's officers at this gathering (ballot form included with this newsletter).

HERPS IN THE NEWS

Snakes in a tub: In an ever on-going process of ensuring the public views all herpers as certifiably nuts, we have the most recent Guinness World Record by Jackie Bibby, "the Texas Snake Man." He recently beat his old record of 12 rattlesnakes in a tub by sitting for 45 minutes in a bathtub with 87 rattlers. The tub was a special clear bathtub made several years ago by the Guinness organization to better view his record setting activity. Bibby is the same individual who holds the record for holding 10 rattlesnakes suspended by their tails from his mouth. He has also crawled into a sleeping bag with over 100 rattlers. Putting aside the question as to why anyone would want to do this, we are left with asking if there is any good side to such "happenings." Does it present a better view of the natural place for rattlesnakes in the environment? One thinks not.



Jackie Bibby in his special bathtub, 5 Nov 2007 in Dublin, Texas. Picture released by Guinness.

Large stone snake: In a remote cave in the hills of the Kalahari Desert in Botswana, archeologists discovered what they believe to be a 70,000 year-old carving of a large snake. The rock snake, approximately 5 feet high and 20 feet long, is believed by the scientists to have been some sort of mystical or ceremonial carving. It has what looks like a mouth, eyes, and scales. Numerous stone points, made of material not found in the area, were found buried around the rock statue and some were burned as if in a ceremonial destruction of the weapons. There was a small room in the cave where a shaman could have hidden and spoken as if the words came from the snake. The current local population believe man descended from this stone python and call the hills the "Mountains of the Gods," and the cave area as the "Rock that Whispers." Our intrepid explorers stated that the sunlight dappled on the statue giving it the appearance of having scales and that it was quite eerie at night in the firelight, looking as if it were moving. Story and image from: http://www.livescience.com/history/061130_oldest_ritual.html



Pythons in the Everglades: There have been several stories over the last few years about large snakes in the Florida Everglades. Hundreds of assorted pythons and several boas have been collected by Florida State Game & Fish over the last decade. In the last few years they have also found young Burmese pythons, indicating at least some of these large snakes are well enough established in the U.S. to breed and raise young. It is unknown exactly what effect these large herps will have on the local eco-



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NMHS AT SEVILLETA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Ted L. Brown

Casting about for a Labor Day weekend field trip site, we remembered that John DeWitt, director for the University of New Mexico's Long-term Ecological Research Station (LTER) near Bernardo in northern Socorro County, had expressed an interest in having NMHS conduct a survey around the station located within the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. To make a long story short, phone calls were made, a site visit was taken, a collecting permit from the refuge was obtained, and we were all set for the Labor Day weekend of 1-2 September. A total of 13 intrepid NMHS souls braved the heat and thunderstorms to seek a few critters and enjoy a field trip close to home at the end of the summer: Ted and Sue Brown, the Bulgrins (Scott, Rebecca and Logan), Dave and Jean Burt, Garth Graves, Del Jones, Los Tres Mahers (Patrick, Christine and Lilia), and Lynn Schuler all put up with the living conditions provided at LTER.

Unlike our other field trips, the accommodations at the LTER were really the RITZ for us: air-conditioned casitas with three separate bedrooms, two bathrooms, a full kitchen with stove, microwave and refrigerator, and comfortable davenport and chairs in which to rest and spin tales of critters here and there. Did I mention the hot showers? And the dining room table and comfy chairs? And the TV and DVD player? Oh my oh my! How we suffered! It'll be like pulling teeth to get those herpers back into tents and picnic tables again!

Our happy little group separated into two of the casitas at the west end of LTER and soon had stored our gear and readied for exploring the arroyos and hills nearby. A good rain had fallen the night before, so the ground was still rather wet and muddy in spots. It didn't take long for us to find lizards: a few side-blotched lizards scampered around the sidewalks and a small desert spiny lizard chased about on a wooden fence near a rock-lined irrigation pond as we dodged hatchling whiptails all over the place. At first I thought these were of the desert grassland species, but a closer look at my slides the next week showed them to be New Mexico whiptails by their wavy vertebral stripes. We encountered and counted a total of 120 of those things. Just one New Mexico whiptail was an adult, not really surprising, as most adult whiptails in central and northern New Mexico go into hibernation by this time of year. The other two whiptail species seen were also hatchlings.

Some of us hiked to the south of the casitas and were rewarded with a fine view of a building thunderstorm over the mountains near Socorro a few miles south of us. Others hiked to the west to the edge of the mesas forming a natural barrier to the landscape of LTER and yet others in our group managed to chase lizards in arroyos to the north of the casitas. All returned about lunchtime, shucked their muddy shoes and joined in a fine lunch around the dining room table, proving this recorder with plenty of notes on



species and numbers to jot down about fence lizards, greater earless lizards, a beautiful baby leopard lizard, and the cutest li'l baby round-tailed horned lizard ever seen. Most critters were only seen and counted, but Dave and Jean caught a fine desert spiny lizard on film (or is it electrons if you're using a digital camera?), by hand (watch your

fingers, Dave! Those monsters can rip off a finger before you know it!), and noosed some smaller earless lizards with Dave's new dental floss-loaded noose. Scott caught a fine 4-1/2 ft. desert striped whipsnake near the casitas.

The thunderstorm to the south joined up with its buddies to the north and east and west and created a pretty sizable rainstorm about 5 PM. Boy, did it come down over our heads! Rained so hard, in fact, the irrigation pond was filled to overflowing, the water formed small rivers between the casitas and we all just stayed indoors and looked out doorways and windows to catch some of the event on film. It was all over after an hour, but the herpers didn't suffer though their forced incarceration indoors. Logan and Lilia enjoyed the DVD's Rebecca brought along, tall tales were told by Patrick and Del, and Sue and Rebecca made a huge chocolate diamondback out of cupcakes (complete with icing, sprinkles in a diamond pattern and a threatening red tongue!) for Lilia's 3rd birthday. We celebrated hers and Sue's special days with a fine after-dinner treat.

After dinner and engorging on chocolate cupcakes, four of us (Garth, Del, Lynn, and driver/tour leader Ted) piled into the Brown's van and took off for cruising down the paved St. Rd. 304 along the east side of the Rio Grande towards La Joya, a small farming community near the wildlife refuge of the same name. Seven Couch's spadefoots, a New Mexico spadefoot and 2 prairie rattlers showed up on that road between 9 and 10 PM. The larger rattler startled Del as it struck full length off the pavement towards Del and his camera. Sorta makes you think about telephoto zoom lenses, eh, Del? We also discovered a rather dried out and flattened DOR bullsnake near the US 60 bridge over the river before we returned to the hardships of soft beds at the casitas.

The Bulgrins and Mahers left after dinner for Socorro and rooms in a motel and later cruised the road south of San Antonio. They returned the next morning with five large and beautiful Great Plains toads and four nice Couch's spadefoots they'd collected on their cruising expedition. After passing out toads to those who promised to love and care for them forever, we divided up to hit the sands for more morning collecting. Brown's Bunch headed for the Ladron Peak area at the northwest tip of the Sevilleta Refuge and the others remained near the LTER for herping. The Ladron Peak trip was quite scenic and Del and Lynn found two small collared lizards near the west base of the peak. It did take us a while to get to that side of the mountain, even though the road was dry, a bit unexpected given the severity of the Saturday afternoon rainstorm at LTER. Not much rain had fallen in the north part of the refuge. We managed to reach an old ranch house near the 1991 campsite of NMHS on the west side of Ladron Peak. Del saw 2 more collared lizards, Lynn saw a pair of fence lizards and Garth and Ted took photos and tried to leave an old apricot tree near the house alone. We zoomed back to LTER for lunch and more photos of critters, more notes on who saw just what and how many, and then we all managed to pack up and leave the place by about 5 PM and head home.



Prairie rattlesnake indicating it means business. Photographers cautioned to not get too close. Photo Tom Wyant.

Additionally, Del Jones collected a small western hog-nosed snake four miles north of Claunch on his way to Sevilleta and found a bullsnake near the Rio Grande and two more north of Carrizozo on his return trip to Ruidoso. Those who missed this trip certainly missed a fine time. Perhaps we could return again some other time. This has to be one of our most successful trips yet, certainly in terms of the numbers of critters encountered. I tallied the following for our two-day stay, with a total of 236 herps for the trip:

Great Plains toad -- 5
Couch's spadefoot -- 12
New Mexico spadefoot -- 1
Chihuahuan spotted whiptail -- 1
Little striped whiptail -- 1
New Mexico whiptail -- 120
Checkered whiptail -- 1
Greater earless lizard -- 23
Lesser earless lizard -- 3

Collared lizard -- 4
Leopard lizard -- 4
Desert spiny lizard -- 15
Fence (Plateau) lizard -- 11
Side-blotched lizard -- 18
Round-tailed horned lizard -- 9
Desert striped whipsnake -- 1
Western diamond-backed rattlesnake -- 1 (shed skin)
Prairie rattlesnake -- 2

Closing images

We close this issue with two interesting images. On the left is a common kingsnake doing what comes naturally. In this case, it appears to be swallowing a rattler that will never get to be part of a world record setting event. Image by the Arizona BLM.

On the right is RV, the *sulcata* tortoise that resides with Jaci Fischer. Her son Max bought RV years ago as a 3.5 inch cute and very easy to care for baby. Of course, he quickly out grew his aquarium and for the last several years has spent the summers wandering the back yard. While RV enjoys the backyard with the thick grass and fallen peaches, he likes to come in at night and sleep under Jaci's bed. This last is now impossible as RV's shell height makes crawling under most things all but impossible. When winter sets in the tortoise must come inside, which is fine by RV. On sunny days throughout the winter Jaci often sits him outside in the closed in front porch where the sun keeps the area quite warm. RV does fine crawling around on the flagstones and investing pots with winter dead plants, but he soon becomes bored and wants to come back in the house. This normally means he will come to the front door and scratch at the door until let in. On this particular day, however, Jaci ignored the door scratching. When she heard someone tapping at her front window she went to see who it was and found RV who had crawled up the bags of wood pellets and was tap, tap, tapping at the window. When she came out he was content to climb down and come back inside where he belonged.

