

# The Herp Gazette

## HOUSE OF REPTILES

11507 S.W. Pacific Highway  
Tigard, Oregon

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## Enjoying our Natural Resources

When was the last time you left the confines of the city to spend a few hours checking out the critters that abound here in Oregon? Well, now's the time to go to it. As we move through the spring, more and more herps (reptiles and amphibians) are getting active, breeding and making themselves available for observation and enjoyment. Many species of frogs, toads and salamanders are laying eggs from February to May. Frogs that lay their eggs in slow-moving streams, ponds and lakes will also provide opportunities to watch those eggs turn into tadpoles, and

those tadpoles will metamorphose into adults. Snakes will be emerging from hibernation and sunning themselves in preparation for their first meals of the new year. Lizards will also be emerging from hibernation in February or March and beginning their sometimes elaborate territorial displays in preparation for breeding. Turtles are emerging from hibernation in March and April, and baby turtles that hatched last fall and over-wintered in their nests are popping up to take their first look at

the world. All in all, it's a great time of the year to get out and go herping.

Some of our favorite local places include Bryant Woods Nature Park (Lake Oswego), Fanno Creek (Beaverton), Tualatin Hills Nature Park (Beaverton), Oxbow Park (Gresham), the Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary (Portland), and of course, Forest Park (Portland).

Now that you know what to look for and some ideas about where to go - get out there and get herping!

## Staff Updates:

Since our last newsletter, the staff at **House of Reptiles** continue to be busy...

Tim celebrated yet another birthday. On January 13<sup>th</sup> he turned..... 39..... again!

Store friend, Chris Rombough, came by one Sunday evening to perform a turtle autopsy on a deceased turtle he had been given. Although we are always sad to see an animal die, we appreciated the opportunity to learn more about turtle anatomy.

We are co-sponsors of and participants in the Portland Metro Reptile Expo held in Wilsonville, Oregon twice a

year. This year's first show was January 26<sup>th</sup> - it was Ashley's first show and she reports having had a good time. The Unique Animal Expo and Pet Fair in Hillsboro followed soon after. February 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> found us once again displaying some of our animals and products at this show, also held twice each year. The Hillsboro show is the oldest show in the Pacific Northwest and we've been vendors there for a number of years.

In March, Terry had a scheduling conflict arise with his other job that

prevented his continued employment with us. We'll miss him and we wish him well.

Paul Hoffman, our newest employee, started on Saturday, March 22nd. Paul brings with him many years of reptile keeping experience.

Current and former volunteers include Robbie Brink, Kayley Broyles, Alison Burros, Ben Chase, Ricky Dunitz, Seth Ellison, Tawnya Fulton, Konner Krikava, Kelsey Lissman, Nick Lund, Will Lund, Hadley Rentz, Jessica Sampson and Kenton.

## Quarterly Care Sheet: Tomato Frog

**SPECIES: TOMATO FROG** (*Dyscophus sp.*)

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION:** In the wild Tomato Frogs are found only in Madagascar and they are limited to the northwestern part of the island. Although the forested areas in which they live are being destroyed at a rapid pace, these nocturnal frogs are apparently adapting well to living in cultivated areas and can now be found in gardens and eucalyptus plantations. The females, slightly larger than the males, reach an SVL (snout to vent length) of up to 4 inches. Their coloration may vary but most females range from reddish-orange to a bright, brick red. Males tend not to be as brightly colored as females, having a duller-orange or brownish-orange appearance. Their bellies are usually a yellow color, and sometimes there are black spots on the throat. Juveniles are dull in coloration and develop the brighter adult colors as they age. These are hardy, adaptive frogs that thrive in captivity if well cared for.

**CAPTIVE CARE:** The Tomato Frog is one of the amphibian species that is easiest to maintain in captivity and it is considered an excellent “starter” animal. Aquariums with tight-fitting screen lids make good enclosures not only because they are easy to clean, but because they also make for good visibility inside. These frogs are burrowers and should be provided with two to three inches of substrate into which they can dig. The substrate for their habitat can be a commercially made soil mixture, coconut fiber, orchid bark, a premium potting soil (lacking perlite), or some combination of these. The substrate should be kept moist but not wet. Daily misting of the enclosure will help keep the moisture level adequate. Daytime temperatures of 75 to 85F, and nighttime lows to 65F are optimal. If necessary, the daytime temperatures can be achieved by using a low-wattage incandescent bulb. The heat should be provided by incandescent lights that are blue bulbs, red bulbs or ceramic fixtures - not white lights - since these frogs prefer subdued lighting. Pieces of cork bark or other similar structures will provide them with places to hide if they desire. Pieces of moss can provide additional hiding places and will also help maintain desirable moisture levels. These frogs will also require a water dish deep enough to allow them a daily soak as they stay hydrated by absorbing water through their skin. Since they may defecate in their water dish, it will require daily cleaning. Fake or live plants that are sturdy can be used to decorate the enclosure, however live plants are more difficult to take care of and will require lighting that suits their needs. Their dietary requirements may be met with any (or all) of the following: crickets (the length of the cricket should be no larger than the width of the frog’s head), mealworms, pinky mice, grasshoppers, waxworms and earthworms. As with other animals, a varied diet is always the healthiest. Adult frogs can be fed twice per week; younger frogs should be fed three times per week or every other day. In order to avoid metabolic bone disease, all foods should be dusted with a good vitamin D3/calcium powder as directed by the manufacturer (we use and recommend Miner-All).

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*“Their bright colors likely serve as a warning mechanism to would-be predators.”*



**ADDITIONAL NOTES:** All Tomato Frogs living in the same habitat should be the same relative size or the smaller ones may be eaten by their larger cage-mates. Their bright colors likely serve as a warning mechanism to would-be predators. Although they are not toxic, they can give off a sticky white substance that is irritating to the mucous membranes of predators. Because this substance is irritating to human mouths and eyes, hands should be washed after handling this frog. When frightened, they can inflate their bodies to make them look bigger than they really are. Their lifespan in captivity is not known.

## Native Herp Spotlight: Western Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*)

This is the only true venomous snake found in Oregon. It is predominantly found in the eastern part of the state, just about anywhere east of the Cascades up to elevations of around 7,500 feet. These rattlesnakes are typically found in the drier regions of the state with sparse vegetation, but they are also still occasionally found in the Coast Range and Cascade foothills in the Willamette Valley south of Salem.

The basic body color varies from greenish to gray or tan with a series of dark dorsal blotches down its body. Of course, rattlesnakes can also be distinguished from other snakes by the presence of rattles at the end of their

tails (except for newborn snakes). This is a relatively small rattlesnake, reaching an adult length of 30 to 40 inches.

Rattlesnakes can typically first be seen in March or April when they begin to emerge from their den sites. As the summer progresses and the days get warmer they are usually only seen in the mornings and evenings, preferring to stay in shady areas during the heat of the day.

These are predominantly ambush predators that prey on rodents, although they have been known to also eat birds, lizards and amphibians.

There are two subspecies of Western Rattlesnake

found in Oregon: the Northern Pacific Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis oregonus*), found throughout most of the range, and the Great Basin Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis lutosus*), found in the far southeastern part of the state.

These rattlesnakes are generally born in late August or September, with three to 12 in each litter. Although the venom of this rattlesnake is considered quite dangerous, deaths are rarely attributed to it. Of course, all rattlesnakes should be avoided if encountered in the wild.

## “Pet” Peeves: One Snake per Cage is Better!

Over the years, we’ve been asked many times our opinion about keeping more than one snake in the same cage. Generally speaking, we **DON’T** think it’s a good idea. Here is a list of some of the reasons why:

1. You can’t feed two or more snakes in the same enclosure at the same time. Otherwise you run the risk of the snakes fighting over the food and possibly injuring or even killing and eating each other.
2. If one snake has a health issue occurring, that snake is much more likely to give it to another if they are housed together.
3. It may be more difficult

to track which snake shed when more than one are kept together, and shedding is useful information to track.

4. Smaller animals almost always experience some amount of stress in the presence of larger ones. That can manifest itself in the stressed snake refusing to eat. Prolonged stress also negatively affects immune system function, which can lead to a host of other problems.
5. Although it is not a common event in captivity, snakes that are kept in the same enclosure do occasionally eat their cage mates. Kingsnakes eat other snakes in the wild and young Dumeril’s boas

are known for being cannibalistic – neither of those examples would necessarily be too surprising. But there are also instances of boas eating ball pythons, ball pythons eating other ball pythons, and corn snakes eating other corn snakes. Usually, those instances are the result of overcrowding and/or starvation, but there are also instances where there are no obvious explanations for the behavior. In any event, we believe that subjecting a snake to the risk of being eaten by a cage mate is an unnecessary risk to take with one’s pet.

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*“Smaller animals almost always experience some amount of stress in the presence of larger ones.”*

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*“The chytrid fungus has already caused amphibian extinctions in South America and Australia.”*

## International Herp News

After thriving for over 360 million years, one third to one half of the world’s approximately 6,000 known amphibian species could go extinct in our lifetime. Earth is facing the single largest mass extinction since the disappearance of dinosaurs. Amphibians are considered canaries in the coal mine: they are among the first species to be affected by

environmental stressors. When amphibians show declines in the wild, it is a warning to other species, including humans.

More than a ton of snakes was found aboard a Vietnam Airlines flight from Bangkok, the second time in a month that a large amount of snakes was found en route to Vietnam. It was suspected that they were

being transported there for food.

## National/Pacific Northwest Herp News

A team of scientists at the University of California has recently discovered that California ground squirrels and rock squirrels chew up rattlesnake skin and smear it on their fur to mask their scent. This helps to protect them from predation by rattlesnakes, especially when the squirrels are asleep in their burrows.

arrested in Missouri and accused of possession of a Colorado River toad (*Bufo alvarius*) with the intent to lick it to get high! Along with the Colorado River toad, the marine toad (*Bufo marinus*) also produces a mind-altering poison, according to scientific sources. We think a martini would be a lot easier!

The US Fish & Wildlife Service is working with the

pharmaceutical industry in a campaign called “SMARxT DISPOSAL”. To help reduce the environmental threat caused by flushing medications down the toilet, the program advises people to dispose of meds using the following procedure: crush the meds in a plastic baggie; add coffee grounds, sawdust or kitty litter; seal the bag and then put it in the trash.

A man was recently

## House of Reptiles Store News

Through customer and staff donations (\$176.55) and the contribution of the store (\$717), we were able to donate a whopping \$893.55 to the International Reptile Conservation Foundation for 2007. That’s pretty impressive, if we do say so ourselves. Those of you who helped make that a reality by dropping your coins and bills into the donation bin should give yourselves a big pat on the back! Thank you.

Contest had lots of good suggestions - 44 in all! The winning entry came from Whitney Balfe and Troy Harvey who suggested the name “Pago” - short for “relampago”, which means “lightning” in Spanish. We liked the name and thought it was fitting, so henceforth the tegus name shall be “Pago”. Three other names were in the final running: Mojo, Leroy and Oreo. Thanks to everyone who participated!

Our gator will be leaving soon – when they outgrow our big tub we send them to a park in Florida to live out their days. Come and say your “goodbyes” soon, cause he won’t be here much longer!

Our big Common Boa Constrictor at the store is due to have her litter of babies on or around June 5<sup>th</sup>. We’ll send out an email notice the moment we see it happening so that those who wish to, can come watch.

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*“We liked the name and thought it was fitting, so henceforth the tegus name shall be “Pago”.*

Our “Name the Tegu”

## Customer & Pet Profile – Whitney Balfe and Troy Harvey

Whitney and Troy have been customers of the store for the past year or so, having heard about us from a friend who happened into the store one day and said “you’ve got to go check this place out!” Whitney was the first to own a herp, that being her hognose snake named “Marley”. After Whitney and Troy became a couple, they added two new additions to the family – a veiled chameleon named “Romeo” and a leopard gecko named “Cressida”. Whitney reports having always loved herps, being especially fascinated by salamanders and frogs when she was young. Troy found himself initially attracted to herps through his attraction to Whitney,

although lately he’s become a real reptile lover himself. In fact, he’s been known to call the store on a near daily basis with a question du jour. The future holds marriage for Whitney and Troy – they set a date for November 29<sup>th</sup>. The future also holds a reptile room for the new couple in their new house. Animals they wish to someday add to their menagerie include a couple of uromastix, a bearded dragon, an albino hognose, and a piebald ball python.

If you or your child would like to be featured in our “Customer & Pet Profile” in future editions of *The Herp Gazette*, bring or send in a photo of that person with their pet(s), as well as a little biographical

information about them. If you’d prefer, you can let one of the **House of Reptiles** staff interview you and we’ll put the bio together for you and then let you review it before it goes to print.



Whitney, Troy and their leopard gecko “Cressida”

## Know Your Herp Laws

We are often asked about the laws in our area that affect reptile and amphibian ownership. There are different federal, state, county and city laws that may apply. Federal laws prohibit keeping any animals that are protected by the Endangered Species Act. Those laws and related topics can be found at:

<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

It is also a violation of federal law to sell any turtle that is less than four inches long, unless it is sold for scientific or educational purposes only.

The list of animals that are prohibited, non-controlled, controlled, and protected at the state level in Oregon can be found at:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/OARs/56.pdf>.

Each county and city can also have its own regulations and statutes. For instance, Multnomah County’s rules are in their “Dangerous or Exotic Animal” section and those rules prohibit any venomous or poisonous reptile, as well as any reptile of the order Crocodylia (crocodiles, alligators and caimans), or any snake of the family Pythonidae or Boinae capable of obtaining eight

feet or more in length..

Those rules can be found at:

<http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/dbcs/pets/guide.shtml>.

Portland’s rules mirror Multnomah County’s rules and Beaverton’s rules prohibit the keeping of crocodylians.

There were two laws being proposed during the 2007 legislative session regarding reptiles. One would have restricted the keeping of any crocodylian and the other would have regulated pet stores and how they manage their animals. Neither proposed law made it to a vote.

## House of Reptiles

### **Purpose Statement:**

To offer healthy animals, quality products, accurate information and on-going customer support in a friendly, clean environment.

We strive to be the Best in the Northwest!

### **ADDRESS:**

11507 S.W. Pacific Highway  
Tigard, OR 97223

### **PHONE:**

(503) 722-1992

### **STORE HOURS:**

Monday thru Friday:

10am to 7pm

Saturday:

10am to 6pm

Sunday:

Noon to 5pm

### **E-MAIL:**

[info@house-of-reptiles.com](mailto:info@house-of-reptiles.com)

**The Herp Gazette** is published on a quarterly basis, each January, April, July, and October.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

[www.house-of-reptiles.com](http://www.house-of-reptiles.com)

## New Product Spotlight: Ceramic Heat Emitters

Although they are not new to herpetoculture, we find ourselves recommending them more and more to customers, many of whom are unfamiliar with them. Basically, a ceramic heat emitter (CHE) is a metal alloy heating element encapsulated in a ceramic sleeve for protection against corrosion and deterioration. CHEs commonly last for YEARS,

as opposed to heat bulbs which last only months. Since they emit heat and not light, they are also a good choice in an area where the light from a bulb would be distracting. These devices emit infrared heat that tends to heat objects and not air, similar to how heat from the sun works. One cautionary note is that CHEs get extremely

hot to the touch - care must be exercised to prevent direct animal or human contact with them. They also must only be used in fixtures that are rated to handle the amount of wattage of the CHE. Next time you're replacing your heat bulb, ask us if we think a ceramic heat emitter would work for you. You just might be better off with a CHE!

## Herp Hunt – Saturday, May 17th

We thought it would be fun to lead at least one herp hunt each year for store customers so that they can get a taste of what reptiles and amphibians are found around our great state. Our first attempt at that will be Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup>. We will be leaving from the store at 7am and will be traveling to a couple of

locations north of Corvallis where we will likely find many different herps. We don't expect to return until 6 or 7pm, although those of you with kids who bring your own cars and need to leave earlier can, of course, do that. We will have a sign-up sheet in the store for anyone who wants a reminder from us the week before we go.

Otherwise, just show up at the store in time that morning and we'll all head out together. Bring a sack lunch, munchies and plenty of drinks and water...lots of water! And boots, extra dry clothes, nets, buckets, field guides, etc. Just remember that we are going to look at, not collect the animals. Should be a great time!

### ***About Our Organization...***

**House of Reptiles** is owned and operated by Tim Criswell, who has over 20 years of experience in keeping and breeding reptiles and

amphibians. Assisting Tim are his wife, Shawn, employees Marshall Brooks, Isaac Miller, Ashley Sorenson and Paul Hoffman, and a host of

volunteers, most of whom are mentioned above in the "Meet The Staff" section.

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