

The Herp Gazette

HOUSE OF REPTILES

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Renewing Our Commitment....

As we start a new year, we reflect on the things that matter most.... family, friends, health, jobs that bring us satisfaction, and the opportunity to contribute to something bigger than ourselves. It is in that vein that we dedicate our primary 2008 donation efforts to the Amphibian Ark (AArk). The AArk is a joint effort of three principal partners, including the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The mission of AArk is to work in partnerships to ensure the

global survival of amphibians – focusing on those that cannot be safeguarded in nature. Their 2008 efforts will be focused on generating public awareness and understanding of the amphibian extinction crisis, which represents the greatest species conservation challenge in the history of humanity.

Other donation recipients will include the Oregon chapter of The Wildlife Society and Doernbecher

Children’s Hospital.

In April, we will report the total dollar amount of our 2007 donations and store contribution efforts on behalf of the International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF). Previous donations have included \$781.90 in requested supplies to the Cozumel Marine Turtle Salvation Project in Cozumel, Mexico (2005) and \$884.08 to The Turtle Hospital in Marathon, Florida (2006).

Staff Updates:

Since our last newsletter, the staff at **House of Reptiles** have been busy...

On October 20th, after the “Meet With The Experts” Day, most of the **House of Reptiles** staff went on a herp hunt in the Columbia Gorge with store friend Chris Rombough. We found Dunn’s Salamanders, Cascade Torrent Salamanders, Giant Pacific Salamanders, an Ensatina, and a Red-legged Frog. A great time was had by all.

Terry went on his annual elk hunt with friends and came back with a “spike” elk from the Hell’s Canyon area of eastern Oregon. We LOVE

elk jerky!

Isaac got married on October 30th and went on a honeymoon in Washington state. He and his bride, Jewel, did lots of sight-seeing and ate lots of yummy food!

Isaac had a birthday on October 29th, moving into yet another decade of life – he turned 30! Ashley turned 19 on October 31st (yes, she was born on Halloween), and Marshall achieved the ripe old age of 17 on December 10th.

Terry had his first ever litter of Brazilian rainbow boas. They were

gorgeous!

Ashley continues to date her way through the Portland area. So far, she’s gone through eight boys in six months!

Tim got two days off work – Thanksgiving and Christmas! They were both a much-needed rest.

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

Quarterly Care Sheet: Russian Tortoise

SPECIES: RUSSIAN TORTOISE (*Agrionemys horsfieldii*). Other names include: Steppe Tortoise, Afghanistan Tortoise, Four-toed Tortoise, Horsfield's Tortoise and Russian Box Turtle.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: The Russian Tortoise is native to an area that includes Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, northern and eastern Iran, northwestern China and parts of Russia. They inhabit dry, open landscapes, especially sand and clay deserts with sparse grasses and bushes. These are relatively small tortoises with the females reaching a carapace length of eight to 10 inches and males six to eight inches. Male Russian Tortoises tend to have a concave plastron (bottom shell) and a longer tail than females. While they reach sexual maturity at around 10 years of age, they aren't considered full grown until they are 20 to 30 years old. If maintained at proper temperatures and fed a healthy and varied diet, Russian Tortoises may live to be over 100 years old.

CAPTIVE CARE: Indoor enclosures should be at least 48 inches by 24 inches, or about the size of a 75-gallon aquarium. Large Rubbermaid containers and homemade melamine enclosures are sometimes the best options for providing adequate space and ventilation. Glass enclosures can be problematic for some tortoises as they can persistently ram the glass in an attempt to get out. Create the land area in the enclosure by using three to four inches of a premium quality plain, sterile potting soil (that does not contain perlite or vermiculite) - that much substrate allows the tortoises to burrow, which is something they frequently do in the wild. Although they should get their moisture needs met by being provided a proper diet, another option for making sure that the tortoise is adequately hydrated is to soak it in lukewarm, chin-deep water once a week for 10 to 30 minutes. The basking temperatures need to be 85 to 90F on the warm end of the turtle enclosure and 70 to 75F (room temperature) on the cool end. This can be accomplished using some type of overhead heat source. (Under tank heaters should generally be avoided in tortoise enclosures.) Overhead heat sources include ceramic heaters, and red or blue bulbs. The heat source(s) should be left on 24 hours per day. Additionally, Russian Tortoises require ultraviolet lighting that helps them metabolize vitamin D3. Bulbs which emit ultraviolet-B (UV-B) light come in incandescent and fluorescent options and they should be left on for 12 to 14 hours per day. (NOTE: UV-B bulbs should be replaced every six months to one year.) Some keepers prefer to combine heat and UV-B light in the same bulb by using one of the commercially available mercury vapor bulbs. Young tortoises should be fed daily and adults can be fed every other day. Their diet should be high in fiber, low in protein and calcium rich. Appropriate plant matter for Russian Tortoises includes edible grasses and clovers, hibiscus leaves and flowers, alfalfa and other grass hays, watercress, dandelion leaves and flowers, rose leaves and petals, sow thistle, romaine lettuce, red leaf lettuce, endive, escarole, kale, and cactus pods. Fruits are recommended only infrequently for Russian Tortoises. If feeding lawn clippings or plants from the garden it is important to make sure that the surrounding area is not chemically treated. There are also commercially produced foods that can be used to supplement feedings, though it should not be the sole source of food. Dust all foods with a good vitamin/mineral supplement as directed by the manufacturer (we use and recommend Miner-All).

"It is believed that in its native habitat, the Russian Tortoise hibernates for as much as nine months out of every year."



ADDITIONAL NOTES: It is believed that in its native habitat, the Russian Tortoise hibernates for as much as nine months out of every year. Due to health concerns (they are known to be common carriers of viral infections) and potential behavioral problems (males can be quite aggressive to other tortoises), we recommend that Russian Tortoises not be kept with other species of tortoise.

Native Herp Spotlight: Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*)

This native reptile is found throughout much of the Pacific Northwest, and almost anywhere in Oregon and Washington except coastal rainforests and arid deserts. Their ability to survive in a variety of habitats keeps them abundant, although they are not often found unless one knows where to look. Their habitat typically consists of rotting stumps or logs, leaf litter, boards or pieces of tin, in grassy openings among trees and often near a stream or creek. This snake is typically most active at dusk and at night.

This is a small snake, averaging around two feet in length, which is predominantly brown with a rubbery appearance. The belly is usually cream

colored. This animal is sometimes also referred to as the “two-headed snake” because of its short, blunt tail that resembles its small head. Its eyes are very small with vertical pupils. As in most other species of boas, the Rubber Boa has a dark spur on each side of the cloaca.

Being a shy and slow-moving snake, the Rubber Boa does not bite in self-defense. Rather, it coils itself into a ball and will occasionally waive its blunt tail to distract its attacker. Sometimes it will even “strike” with the tail in an attempt to fool an attacker into thinking that the expendable tail is really the head. Although they do not seem to use it much, they are also armed

with the ability to produce a foul-smelling musk to help repel a would-be attacker.

Rubber Boas eat a variety of small animals including lizards, snakes, salamanders and occasionally even lizard and snake eggs, although its preferred food is young mice and shrews. As with other boas, the Rubber Boa’s prey is subdued by constriction.

Young are born live, from August to November, and usually number from one to eight per litter.

We have a Rubber Boa at the store that was rescued from the wild following an injury. If you’d like to see what they look like, just ask!



“Pet” Peeves: You Have To Know The Temperature!

A common occurrence for us is having a customer report a problem with their pet reptile or amphibian, but when we inquire about their husbandry the human keepers don’t know the temperature in the animal’s cage. It is especially important to know the temperature of the basking area. A related problem is when keepers attach their thermometer to the SIDE of the cage to measure a basking temperature that occurs on the floor of the cage.

Successful husbandry of most all herps requires fairly precise knowledge about cage temperatures and how they can be

affected by seasonal room temperature fluctuations. For most of these kinds of animals, being too cool is a signal to them to slow down and stop eating. But if they are not in a true brumation (hibernation), they can suffer weight loss, compromised immune system functioning and the development of a disease process. On the other hand, temperatures that are too high can cause stress, extreme behavioral changes like lethargy or aggression, dehydration and even thermal burns. The only way to know for certain what the temperature is in any portion of an animal’s

cage is to measure the temperature with a reliable thermometer. The ambient air temperature usually doesn’t need to be measured because it will be the same temperature as the room the cage is in (if that is known). Basking area temperatures have to be measured with a thermometer that is placed in the part of the cage where the animal will be basking (e.g., ground, perch, etc.). Once the desired temperature is achieved the thermometer can be removed, if desired, until and unless there is a reason to recheck the temperature (e.g., seasonal room temperature changes).

“Successful husbandry of most all herps requires fairly precise knowledge about cage temperatures and how they can be affected by seasonal room temperature fluctuations.”

International Herp News

Japanese researchers have succeeded in producing a see-through frog, allowing them the opportunity to observe organs, blood vessels and eggs under the skin without having to perform dissections. This will allow researchers to watch organs of the same frog as it grows over its entire life, and to observe how genes, like cancer genes, grow and develop.

According to the World Conservation Union's recent Global Amphibian Assessment, amphibians are facing severe threats worldwide from a fungal disease called chytridiomycosis or "chytrid". The chytrid fungus has already caused amphibian extinctions in South America and Australia. Because of the chytrid fungus and other factors

like habitat loss and pollution, it is believed that over 1/3 of the world's frog and salamander species are presently at risk of extinction and as many as 168 species may already be extinct. Furthermore, at least 43% of all species are declining worldwide, with only 1% showing a population increase.

"The chytrid fungus has already caused amphibian extinctions in South America and Australia."

National/Pacific Northwest Herp News

There are many animal venoms and poisons that are being investigated for their potential benefits to humans. For instance, Gila Monster (*Heloderma suspectum ssp.*) venom may hold promise for people who suffer from Type 2 diabetes. It seems that a component in Gila Monster venom, called Exendin-4, may actually increase insulin production in the presence of elevated blood glucose

levels. It may also play a role in weight loss. This is reason enough and just one example of many, in our opinion, to go to great lengths to protect our venomous friends.

Recent research suggests that the growing number of deformed frogs in recent years is due, at least in part, to runoff from farming and ranching. Apparently, nitrogen and phosphorus in the runoff

fuel a cycle that results in the parasitic infection of tadpoles, resulting in loss of legs, extra legs or other deformities according to researchers at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Researchers now believe that the oral secretions of the Northwestern Ring-necked Snake, *Diadophis punctatus ssp.*, (native to Oregon) are venomous to their prey.



Most of the **House of Reptiles** gang during our October herp hunt in the Columbia gorge.

House of Reptiles Store News

Let's see...we measured Daisy recently and she's now just under 14' long!

Raja, the king cobra, is still eating "scented" rats, but he's putting on some weight and getting a little spunkier.

Now that we have several staff who are experienced animal presenters, we are actively promoting the fact that we make live animal presentations at parties, schools, libraries, church groups, scout meetings,

etc. We have a wide range of animals that we can bring and we tailor each presentation to the needs of each specific group. A flyer is available in the store that discusses pricing and there's also a page on our website that goes into more detail.

We recently decided to let kids have the opportunity to help us feed our aquatic turtles and alligator. So we found a bulk food vending machine and placed it next to the 300-

gallon tub. For a mere \$.25, customers can now get a handful of chow and feed it to the tub residents through the screen. Everyone in the tub is ALWAYS ready to eat another meal! Current residents of the tub include: one American alligator, a yellow-bellied slider, a Chinese pond turtle, a giant Asian pond turtle (this one's new), a Mississippi map turtle, five red-eared sliders, and a common snapping turtle.

"We recently decided to let kids have the opportunity to help us feed our aquatic turtles and alligator."

Customer & Pet Profile – Nicole Wester

Nicole Wester has been a customer of the store for the past year, having originally heard about us from someone that she worked with. Nicole has been a herp owner for the past four years and has had a fascination with these kinds of animals since she was “itty bitty”. Nicole attributes her interest in animals to her Dad, who was also an animal lover. Mom was also supportive of her interest in animals and didn’t object when, at six years of age, Nicole brought home her first reptile – a garter snake she named “Green Racer”. Growing up she also cared for a couple of iguanas she rescued. Her current collection includes

a bearded dragon named “Bruno”, a Chilean rose tarantula named “Xena”, a Taiwanese beauty snake named “Athena” and a California kingsnake named “Ozlin”. One of Nicole’s dreams is to someday own and operate a reptile museum with a friend of hers somewhere in the southwestern United States. We’d go visit!

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.



Nicole Wester and her bearded dragon Bruno.

Know Your Herp Laws

Why does the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife care if you have a red-eared slider turtle or an African clawed frog as a pet? Primarily, ODFW cares because some people don’t keep their “pets” at home.

“If everyone could guarantee that their pets would never escape or be released into the wild, we wouldn’t care what kind of pets they had,” says Jim Gores, the ODFW Invasive Species and Wildlife Integrity coordinator. “Unfortunately, this just isn’t the case.”

Over the last decade, ODFW staff have seen a rise in the general availability of exotic animals and, as a result,

more exotics in people’s homes—and, unfortunately, in the wild. As a result, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission enacted the Wildlife Integrity Rules in 1996. These rules spell out if an animal is “exempt” (not regulated by the rules and legal to possess); non-controlled (legal to possess); controlled (legal to possess under certain conditions) or prohibited (illegal to possess in Oregon). If an animal does not appear on any of these lists, then it is still considered prohibited or illegal to possess in Oregon.

When determining if an animal should be prohibited or not in Oregon, a Wildlife Integrity Panel of six animal experts from around the state consider a variety of

factors including: Could the animal survive in Oregon? Would this animal prey on native wildlife? Does the animal have the potential to degrade habitat for native species? What is the potential that this animal could pass diseases or parasites on to native wildlife?

Ironically, the safety of the owner and the general public are not part of the evaluation process. Therefore, alligators, crocodiles and numerous venomous snakes appear on the non-controlled list.

Within the past year or so, ODFW staff have been helping the Oregon State Police make sure that the Wildlife Integrity Rules are followed. Pet and pond

shops are frequently checked to make sure they are only selling legal pets. Internet sites - especially Craig’s List - are frequently monitored to look for people trying to sell or give away prohibited species.

Although violations of these rules can result in police visits and/or fines, ODFW does not desire to go to that extent. “Our goal is to keep people from releasing their pets into the wild,” said Jim. “Also, we know that the Wildlife Integrity Rules are not exactly user-friendly - there is no way a set of rules meant to regulate possibly a million species can be. So, we know that mistakes are made and we try our best to deal with them reasonably.”

House of Reptiles

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10am to 6pm

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Noon to 5pm

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The Herp Gazette is published on a quarterly basis, each January 1st, April 1st, July 1st, and October 1st.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.house-of-reptiles.com

New Product Spotlight: Non-Contact Infrared Temperature Gun

The Pro Exotics PE-1 Tempgun is a hand-held, non-contact thermometer that uses an infrared laser to measure surface temperatures from -27°F to 428°F . This handiest of gadgets is an accurate (to within $\pm 2^{\circ}$) and immediate (takes a reading in less than one second) method for taking temperatures in your herp cages. The more cages and/or circumstances you

have in which you need to measure temperatures, the more important this time-saver is!

In using this device, it's important to remember that it does not take temperatures through glass or screen (it will read the temperature of the glass or screen, and not what's on the other side of it), and it does not take core body temperatures.

This device has been used extensively in the herp hobby and in animal care, but has also found its way into the automotive industry, cooking and food services, and in horticulture and gardening.



January is "Name the Tegu" Month

During the month of **January**, we will be having a contest to see who can submit a fitting name for our Argentine Black and White Tegu who is a full-time resident of the store. The winning entry will be chosen from those submitted during the month and the winner will

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

receive a \$25 gift certificate. Entry forms will be available at the front counter.

In our next newsletter (April 2008) we will be announcing the Saturday in May when we will go on a guided herp hunt. There should be lots of critters

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

out then. Stay tuned for that very fun day!

House of Reptiles is centrally located with easy access from both I-5 and Hwy 217. We are open 10am to 7pm Monday through Friday, 10am to 6pm on Saturday, and Sunday from noon to 5pm.

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

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