

VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPECIAL MEETING SATURDAY  
NOVEMBER 14, 1959 at 4:30 P.M. in WASHINGTON  
at the NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK REPTILE HOUSE!

This is your personal invitation to a special meeting of VHS. Our host will be Dr. Theodore H. Reed, Director of the National Zoo and his associate director, J. Lear Grimmer who is a trained herpetologist. We will be guided through the Reptile House by M. Jack DePrato, Senior Keeper and his staff. Both Dr. Grimmer and Mr. DePrato are VHS members. We hope to introduce them to the members present for this meeting and turn it over to them. At the same time, we hope to introduce to our members any honorary members, society officers, etc. who may be on hand. We realize that time, distance, and other duties may prevent some from attending.

Admission will be by society roster (friends and members).

The roster appeared in the July-August bulletin. All those who get a bulletin can assume they are on the roster as up-dated since August. We will meet on the walk between the two front entrances of the Reptile House. We hope Maryland and Virginia members who were not able to get to the statewide meeting (October 10) will be present. Because of some limitations of space we will be unable to accomodate persons not on the roster. Members are cautioned not to invite "guests" to accompany them unless they too are members -or friends receiving the VHS bulletins.

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OVER 40 DIFFERENT SPECIES OF SNAKES, OTHER HERPTILES, EXHIBITED at the Second Annual Statewide Meeting on October 10, 1959, near Richmond, Va. About fifty Richmond-area scouts and their leaders were conducted thru the exhibit pavilion. Many returned for closer inspection during the day. All exhibit space was taken by noontime. Many "exotic" specimens were on view -- perhaps for the first time in the Richmond area. Cages were better-built, carefully sealed and well-labelled this year. We had no escapees! Weather was influenced by the last traces of IRENE - the tropical hurricane which sent most of the local reptiles below. (?)

Discussions were lead by the Society's first president, John T. Wood, MD and VHS Secretary, Franklin Tobey. Also participating were Richmond-area representative Robert J. Gagnon of Ellerson, Va., Lee D. Schmeltz of the National Zoo and others. (Proceedings covered on additional page)

THE SOCIETY WENT ON RECORD WITH A RISING VOTE OF THANKS TO THE R.E.LEE Council, Boy Scouts of America, Richmond, Va. for their permission to use the facilities of Camp Shawondasee, near Chesterfield Court House. Also, to Mr. A. DeChamp, Camp Ranger, who was on hand to see that all were aided. He also led an expedition to a neighboring site which is reputed to have a heavy ophidian population -- but the senior hunting party returned with few specimens. The weather was not good for hunts.

DON'T FORGET - NATIONAL ZOO MEETING - SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1959-4:30.

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SOCIETY OFFICERS FOR 1958-'59 WERE UNANIMOUSLY RE-ELECTED OCT. 10, '59.

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## STATEWIDE MEETING, Continued:

Letters were read from the following persons -- Dr. Roger Conant of the Philadelphia Zoological Garden -- on his, and Mrs. Conant's behalf accepting honorary membership in the Virginia Herpetological Society. \* \* \* \* O.K. Goodwin, Chairman of VHS, expressing regret that he would be unable to attend the meeting. \* \* \* \* Dr. Harry Jopson, Co-chairman also expressing his regrets that he would be unable to attend. Both sent their best wishes to the group and expressed their sorrow at being absent this year. \* \* \* \* Robert H. Giles, Jr., District Game Biologist, for the Commission of Game & Inland Fisheries, at Covington, Virginia, requested by letter that members of VHS provide him with any field note bearing upon the turkey vulture and the black vulture, for inclusion in a study he is making. He is presently investigating vultures of the state -- their distribution, economic importance, habits, reproduction, --i.e., a life history study. Observations with reference to reptiles will be particularly valuable, he states.

WRITE: Robert H. Giles, Jr.  
District Game Biologist  
RFD 1, Box 309-C  
Covington, Virginia

We assume the Ornithological Society of Virginia members are also on watch and some notice may have appeared in their bulletin "The Raven".

Lee D. Schmeltz made some comments at the statewide meeting that are deserving of wider circulation. We submit them here for our members and friends -- must reading for those keeping live snakes at home.

The keeping of poisonous reptiles in the home is not encouraged by the Society. In most cases it is definitely to be discouraged. Students with a specific study underway may be considered an exception -- but alternate housing for such reptiles should be given every consideration and preference. Briefly: Poisonous snakes (including both front-fang and back-fang specimens) belong in the zoo.

Before any herpetologist houses poisonous snakes on his property he should consider the following points:

- 1) Violation of local or general laws -- in most areas the keeping of poisonous reptiles is contrary to infrequently enforced laws which may come into play if any emergency situation develops around home. (Fire, hurricane, transportation accident, or other situation which would tend to make known the presence of the animal or animals.)
- 2) Danger to the herpetologist and his family. Feeding-time accident.
- 3) Danger to the family's visitors -- human failing is curiosity.

While the society officers do not encourage the keeping of poisonous snakes at home, or places other than the local zoo or museum, we do encourage members to be careful if they must handle poisonous snakes.

- 1) Have a secure cage, strong construction, double screen, plate glass, and hasps and locks on the opening covers.
- 2) Be familiar with standard first aid procedures for snake bite.
- 3) Ask your doctor to give you a patch test for sensitivity to horse-serum to save time in event of accident. Check your hospitalizat'n. --any other insurance, including liability insurance. (next page)

Keeping Poisonous Snakes: continued,

- 4) Place warning signs on the cages to protect all, remind yourself.
- 5) Consider again the possible consequences and perhaps conclude that poisonous reptiles are best kept and exhibited by the zoo and other institutions where maximum security and protection can be provided.

While most reptile keepers do not keep poisonous reptiles we all are (or have been) intrigued by them. When they are so kept, it is most commonly for observation or special study.

Lee D. Schmeltz

Editor's Note: The above is the gist of Mr. Schmeltz's contribution to a serious discussion held partly in the proceedings of the recent statewide meeting, and partly via phone and letter. It has been somewhat edited to present the society's point of view. We will be glad to print other views on this subject but strongly suggest you check the local ordinances on keeping of wild animals -or maintaining a "public nuisance" on your property. Also, check your insurance policy to be sure that you are covered in any case of damage or liability.

THE VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP HELD BY YOU DOES NOT PROVIDE A REASON, IN ITSELF, FOR HOUSING POISONOUS SNAKES. IT DOES NOT STAND AS A LICENSE OR PERMIT FOR THE HOUSING OF DANGEROUS SNAKES OR OTHER VENOMOUS ANIMALS. MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO CAPTURE SUCH ANIMALS AS MAY OCCUR LOCALLY AND PRESENT THEM TO THE ZOO, MUSEUMS, or COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY BIOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS -- if the member has had some training and experience in the proper mode of capture and safe handling of venomous snakes. There are certain techniques which must be learned before the risk of capturing and transporting of venomous snakes can be assumed. Also, certain laws regarding transportation of venomous snakes in a vehicle should be studied and observed.

Your comments solicited.

MEMBER OF VHS -- IN PENNSYLVANIA -- SAYS DON'T FORGET CARNEGIE MUSEUM  
Dr. Neil D. Richmond, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles reminds us that while Pittsburgh, Pa. is not in the "Virginia area" Virginia is very much in the area of interest of the Carnegie Museum. Dr. Neil D. Richmond has collected extensively in New Kent County, Va. and elsewhere in the state. The Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh 13, Pa. houses about 2,000 specimens of reptiles and amphibians collected in Virginia -- so let us not neglect this wealth of research material and its use as a depository and source of information.

NEW MEMBER, RICHMOND AREA, UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND, SAYS THERE WILL BE A REPTILE HOUSE, EVENTUALLY, IN THE THALHIMER-VIRGINIA WILDLIFE EXHIBIT

Dr. William S. Woolcott, Associate Professor of Biology, University of Richmond cites remarks of Robert J. Gagnon (as abetted by your editor) in Bulletin No. 12, June, 1959. Our apologies to Dr. Woolcott and to the Thalhimer-Virginia Wildlife Corporation. Had we but re-read the fine article appearing in the April, 1957 VIRGINIA WILDLIFE pages 12-16, we would have been acquainted with the planned reptile exhibits.



## LOGROLLERS' ROUND-UP

Our correspondent in Harbel, Liberia, West Africa writes Dr. John Wood: "I was most pleased to receive the VHS bulletin and to have been quoted. . . . It has indeed turned out, according to my limited experience, that Bitis gabonica is the most common (or one of the most common) serpents hereabouts. I have caught two, one about 3' long, the other 1½'. In addition two young live ones have been brought to me. I saw one, which I believe was at least four feet in length, crossing one of the roads on the Institute grounds\* one night. They crawl surprisingly fast, and the waves of rib-movements are so evident when they move in a straight line that one can clearly see how they "walk", when closely observed. A specimen about four feet in length was killed on a nearby road by one of our M.D.s with repeated passes of a Ford pick-up truck. I have the head preserved and also had a bit of Gaboon Viper steak from it. It is truly succulent and a favorite delicacy to certain local tribes where it is known as "sweet chop". The fangs are truly fearsome --when I opened the mouth of the first one I caught to see the fangs, I definitely felt a wave of shock sweep over me at the sight of them, the feeling being 'My Lord! What am I doing playing with this?' A very quick death of a boy on the nearby Firestone Rubber plantation, from a Cassava Snake bite was reported last week. I have collected a very beautiful Green Tree Viper, here at L.I.T.M.\*, Atheris chlorechis, and got a good colored slide of it. D.O.R.s reported: Mehelya, Boaedon, "KBMs" (Killed-by-man): 1 small Dendraspis viridis, Thelotornis, Dasypeltis, Aparallactus. I have collected 1 Boiga pulverulenta, Calabaria rheinhardtii, and Natrix anoscopus. I just bought a small and very handsome Varanus niloticus, caught near here." \*(Taken from a personal letter to J.T. Wood, M.D., from Harold J. Walter, \*Liberian \*Institute of Tropical Medicine, Harbel, Liberia, West Africa, \*(LITM).

While we're afield from Virginia let's say a word about a letter from Dr. Robert F. Clarke, Department of Biology, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, Emporia, Kansas. Dr. Clarke, an active VHS member (by mail) a long-time (29-years) collector in the Dismal Swamp area and Portsmouth, Va. sent your editor a copy of his latest "Poisonous Snakes of Kansas" Vol. 5, No.3, of the Kansas School Naturalist, a slick pamphlet, with illustrations in both black and white and color. This appeared, in the Kansas area, in February, 1959. Because of the greatly increased cost, due to the color plates, no free copies of this issue will be available. Extra copies may be obtained for 25¢ each. Order through the Kansas School Naturalist, Department of Biology, State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas. The publication, "The Kansas School Naturalist" is published in October, December, February, and April of each year. We thank Dr. Clarke for this fine example of educational effort in the field of herpetology. The back cover inside describes a technique for photographing a copperhead alive "but somewhat anesthetized with ether, by Dr. John Breukelman and the author, using a single lens reflex 35 mm camera, type A Kodachrome film and two photofloods." Dr. Clarke's Turtles of Kansas (13 species) appeared in April, 1956; his "Lizards of Kansas" is under preparation. We in the Virginia Herpetological Society wish him the best and join all good Kansans in congratulating him on this undertaking!

## Statewide Meeting, continued:

Conferences on various topics during the proceedings have added to the joys of the meeting and the knowledge taken back home. Dr. John Wood was in rare form and gave the assemblage an account of snake bite and its proper treatment. Some of the ideas were so logical that one believes they have been overlooked in the common literature. It is hoped that Dr. Wood will publish his views on the proper treatment of snake bite -- covering both non-poisonous and poisonous bites. It is the editor's belief that his views could be widely spread in Va. and elsewhere by VHS members via reprint orders, etc. if he would put his views in the form of a semi-technical paper for the physician and the educated first-aider and herpetologist.

It was voted at the recent statewide meeting to tender the Society's Congratulations to Dr. James A. Oliver, Director of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Dr. Oliver is a well-known herpetologist -- "The North American Amphibians and Reptiles" Natural History -- VanNostrand Co. Princeton, N.J. 1955 -- included in the bibliography published in our mid-summer bulletin. Dr. Oliver went to the American Museum of Natural History from his former post at the New York Zoological Society and "Bronx Zoo."

REPRINTED FROM HOLIDAY MAGAZINE:  
"SUCCESSFUL LEISURE-V"

HOLIDAY/MARCH, 1956

## SNAKE MAN

After a man has spent forty-five years with a big company and has risen from a tenderfoot electrical engineer to president, chairman of the board and chief executive officer, retirement can be a nasty shock. For Californian Laurence M. Klauber, who carved out this career with the San Diego Gas & Electric Company and retired a few years ago at seventy, there was no shock, nasty or otherwise. Mr. Klauber had his rattlesnakes -- had had them since 1921, and was darn glad of it too. "The businessman who expects to adopt a new hobby when he retires -- some previously unexplored activity -- is doomed to disappointment," Klauber says. "The wrench is too violent and sudden. He begins too late, in the lowly and unaccustomed status of a rank amateur, with no foundation for rewarding work." Klauber began with the usual boyish curiosity about snakes, keeping a few in a box. When the San Diego Zoo installed a reptile house in 1921, an official who had heard of Klauber's boyhood interest invited him to become an adviser on the curatorial force. Klauber was soon up to his puttee tops in field trips, immersed in taxonomic lab studies and the literature of herpetology. He got particularly excited about rattlers. Today, though still an amateur, he is recognized by zoologists as an outstanding authority. He has a study collection of 35,000 preserved specimens (including 8500 rattlers), and he has published ninety scientific papers on reptiles, and ... a two-volume, 1450-page work, "Rattlesnakes: Their Habits, Life Histories, and Influence on Mankind."

(continued on last page)

Successful Leisure -V. Reprint from HOLIDAY magazine, ~~March~~, 1956, cont:

Klauber has been interviewed frequently about his hobby, but not happily: "I'm usually made to appear as an aged nut who spends his spare time in fearsome hand-to-hand battles with a lot of dangerous and vindictive snakes." Such sensationalism isn't the attraction of herpetology at all, he maintains, and if he'd ever had any melodramatic encounters -- which he insists he hasn't -- he wouldn't talk about them since, obviously, they would have been the result of carelessness--and that is something a scientist doesn't want to advertise.

Klauber's rattler hunts are no safaris; he simply takes a nighttime spin along a paved road in the Southwest and picks up the rattlers as they cross the headlight beams. This method, of course, goes contrary to the popular fallacies that rattlers are active only in the daytime and won't even rattle at night; actually, in summer rattlers are almost exclusively nocturnal and they'll rattle anytime they're annoyed. Engrossing mites of knowledge like these are what Klauber pursues, not the coarse excitement of facing a lethal animal. His adventure in knowledge has diverted most of his adult life, and now, in his retirement, it gives him a status in his own eyes, and in the world's as well that stacks up favorably with his earlier life as an executive.

Reprinted from HOLIDAY magazine of March, 1956.