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“Albie” 1994-2011

I’ve never written a eulogy for a snake before. In fact, the thought had never crossed my mind until the recent passing of the snake we’ve had longer than any other. We’re talking both, longer in time, and longer in length, by the way. Many people reading this newsletter knew Albie, our albino black rat snake, very well. So, like us, though he was “just a reptile,” the thought of his no longer being with us can’t help but tug on the heart strings a little bit.

Albie died overnight between May 23 and 24 after about a six-week stretch of deterioration. When the snake failed to respond to treatment, our reptile vet, Dr. Derek Nolan, at Cedar Creek Animal Clinic in Williamston, stated that, at about 17 years of age (getting up there for a rat snake), one or more of his vital organs may have just shut down.

Albie, previously known as “Snickers,” was given to me by a Montessori student’s family in 1997. At the time, he was just over three feet long. The family bought him from a pet store a few years earlier as a hatchling “corn snake.” Corn snakes typically max-out at around four feet in length. Over the next few years, Albie kept growing, until he measured just an inch shy of six feet. One day, MSU herpetologist, Jim Harding, brought a visiting herpetologist from Florida to see our Michigan herp zoo. When I showed Albie to them, I commented, “Isn’t this the biggest corn snake you’ve ever seen?” Both replied in unison that there was no way a corn snake would get that large, and that it was surely a black rat snake. After that, I’d often introduce Albie as my oxymoron of a snake - the white black rat snake.

Albie was a loyal, working snake for all fourteen years of our lives together. He was touched and handled by multiple thousands of people every year. We can’t help but wonder, having been in contact with many tens of thousands of people, all told, how close had he come to 100,000 human contacts? You’d be hard pressed to find any zoo outreach program that features any live snake with such an intensive “contact” record.

For anyone less familiar with snakes, the “bite” question automatically comes to mind. So, through all the handling (and mishandling!) how many times has Albie bitten? Zero. His gentle demeanor helped nervous people across generations to feel better about snakes. He was the perfect snake ambassador to the human race!

Albie mated with our female Texas rat snake several times. Many of their offspring have found homes, mostly in various educational venues. Two of note include Binder Park's petting zoo, in Battle Creek, and Stepping Stones Montessori in East Lansing where a four-foot, three-year-old is the classroom pet and mascot. No child in this classroom dislikes snakes! We currently have two three-year-old and two two-year-old offspring which we regularly use in presentations and programs. He mated again this spring. Some of the eggs have shriveled and molded, but five seem to be viable, so far. They are due to hatch later this month.

-Jim McGrath



Summer Volunteers Needed

Do you know a high school student (or any adult) who would be willing to volunteer time to work outside at Nature Discovery? We especially need help with the grounds-keeping. Our spring and summer programs along with constant maintenance of our on-site zoo, uses up so much of our time, there is little left for mowing, trimming, trail maintenance, and, most daunting of all,

alien invasive-clearing on our six acres. If your high school student does not have a job lined up, send him or her over. Volunteers can help over almost any hours or amount of time that fits your schedule. Stay all day, if you'd like. No need to pack food or drink. While our small business can't afford to pay staff, we'd at least be happy to feed you while you are here! Please contact us if you or someone you know, high school to adult, would like to lend a hand. Thank you!

Area Field Birding Opportunities for Adults & Kids Coming Up



There is still time for adults to make reservations to attend LOWER MICHIGAN FIELD BIRDING.

This is four-days of intensive guided birding, June 11-14, within an hour of the Lansing area, and a perfect "stay-cation" for anyone who would like opportunities to see a huge variety of birds, including rare and otherwise, hard to find species. Can't make all four days? Sign up for just one or two days, too. Check the May newsletter or contact us for more details.

Does your student exhibit a special interest in birds? Enroll him or her (10 & older) in our MICHIGAN FIELD BIRDING CAMP. This four-day camp, June 18-21, will expose participating students to the huge diversity of birds found in our area. For more details, see the summer camp link on our website, or contact us.

Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths

SUNDAY, JUNE 12

*Our home-based nature center is open from
1 to 5pm. \$5/person.*



Polyphemus Moth.

Photo by Mary Lou Turnbull.

At 2pm, we will present **Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths**. The largest, most impressive moths on the continent can be found right here in Michigan, yet, their numbers have declined dramatically over the past few decades. Beautiful photographs enhance this Powerpoint presentation featuring the life cycle and ecology of Cecropia, Polyphemus, Prometheus and Luna Moths. Over the winter, we managed to obtain viable cocoons of all four species. Over the past couple of warm weeks, females have emerged, attracted mates, and laid eggs. All paying participants are welcome to take home a couple of newly-hatched larvae (or fertile eggs) of their choice. An information sheet offers detailed instructions on how to rear them successfully. Come and take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for enthusiasts of any age. This is an AWESOME summer project.



Mating Prometheus Moths.

Come early or stay late to walk our trail or to interact with the largest collection of live Michigan reptiles and amphibians in the state, including two unprecedented “grand slams” – all 10 turtles and all 13 frogs found in Michigan!

Our staff is always on hand to help you make the most of your visit.

This pair of 4th-instar Polyphemus larvae are poised, ready to molt into their fifth and final larval instar.



Enroll for Summer Day Camps Now!



All of our wild and totally unique camps still have openings. As of June 6, here are the weeks followed by the number of available spaces in parentheses. Check our website for details.

June 20-23 Michigan Field Birding, 10 yrs & up (3)

June 27-30 Nature Discovery, 7-9 yrs (3)

July 5 Yankee Springs Trip, MS/HS (8)

July 6-7 Mini Budding Naturalists, 5-6 yrs (6)

July 8 Hoffmaster Trip, MS/HS (8)

July 11-14 Nature Discovery, 7-9 yrs (8)

July 18-21 Wetland Exploration, 10 yrs & up (3)

July 25-28 Budding Naturalists, 5-6 yrs (5)

August 1-4 Lepidoptera Week, 8 yrs & up (5)

August 8-11 Reptiles/Amphibians, 8-10 yrs (2)

August 29-Sept 1 Entomology, 10 yrs & up (5)

Ask us about before and after care arrangements.

Around the State in June

- ❖ *Tuesday, June 21: 2pm. Wetland Sights & Sounds presentation, West Bloomfield Library. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Saturday, June 25: 10am to 2pm. Birding by Ear, Michigan Wildlife Sampler and Guided Birding Walk. Mitchell State Park, Cadillac. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Saturday, June 25: 11am. Live Garden Critters presentation, Leila Arboretum, Battle Creek. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Sunday, June 26: 2pm. Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths, Ypsilanti District Library. Public is welcome*

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