



Phry'•no'•so'•ma•tics

noun, 1. people enthusiastically dedicated to reversing the decline and supporting the conservation of horned lizards. From the genus *Phrynosoma* – the horned lizards.

October 1991

The Newsletter of the Horned Lizard Conservation Society

Bart's Notes –

So much has happened since last I wrote I hardly know where to start. We've had a couple of meetings. The August meeting featured Andy Price and had the poorest turnout of any of our meetings so far. I suppose it was due to the hot weather and so many people being on vacation.

At any rate, that August meeting may have been our most important meeting so far, in terms of setting out the direction our organization needs to take for the near future. For those of you new to our group, let me briefly introduce Andrew H. Price, Ph.D., zoologist with the Resource Protection Division of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, as the most important person in Texas when it comes to horny toads and their future.

Andy's presentation to our group was direct and, in my opinion, extremely candid. When I began this group, what I had in mind was raising horny toads (in my back yard, say), protecting the young from predators until they were big enough to consume lots of ants, and then releasing them at sites where they would be appreciated and protected. To do this I (or anybody in Texas) would need the approval of Andy Price, and that approval is not forthcoming at this time for reasons that I have come to believe are quite sound. Nothing is easy.

Which is not to say that Andy Price is less than supportive of our goals.

Andy loves horny toads as much as the rest of us and he will cooperate with us and, as long as I have anything to do with the leadership of this group, we will cooperate with him. Well, if I can't raise horny toads in my back yard, what can I do?

RAISE MONEY! Before we can take any significant steps toward our primary goal (restoring Texas populations to something like their numbers in the '40s and '50s) we need to raise fourteen thousand dollars, and we really need to do this before spring.

If you read our last newsletter, Wendy Donaldson's article on page four (under the heading "Money Doesn't Grow on Trees") outlined the survey project I'm talking about. It seems that a couple of years ago Andy Price got approval from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with his agency, to contract with a research group (probably A&M University) to conduct a one year, state-wide survey to assess the historical and current distribution and abundance (or lack thereof) of horny toads in Texas. If possible, this survey was also to investigate potential causative factors implicated in their decline.

When I asked him why this project never got off the ground, Andy was very forthcoming: "I blew it on the financial end. I didn't have any real idea what a project like this would cost, so I underestimated the necessary financing by a couple of hundred percent."

There's no chance that this project can be refinanced with government funds any time soon; on the other hand, it is still a very doable and vitally important project as it is currently specified and partially funded (there's seven thousand dollars presently available) and we (the mighty HLCS) can, and will come to the rescue.

I have begun sending letters and arranging appointments to solicit grants and donations toward this survey. If you know of anyone who might be a good prospect for such efforts, please call me and give me as much information as possible. I'm also close to

Toad Picnics and Other Tasty Morsels

by Lee Stone

James Munger spent a lot of his lunches and suppers with the horny toads in southeastern Arizona. He followed 12 Texas Horny Toads, each for a full day. Jim watched them from about 6 to 60 feet away, sometimes with binoculars, sometimes from behind a "blind" made from a single sheet of 2' x 3'6" plywood with a viewing hole in it.

He recorded on a cassette tape recorder his observations about the time they spent near harvester ant nests or near ant foraging trails, and about how many ants they ate.

Some of the lizards had little radio-transmitters on them. Some were found during the late afternoon of the day before, and followed until they "bedded down" for the night. Then Jim would meet them the next morning before they started their day. He would continue with each lizard until Mr. or Ms. Horny Toad would move to the shade in hottest part of the day, then start again when it became cooler or cloudy. He would watch until the lizard retired for the night.

Mostly they ate harvester ants. Mostly they eat the ants at the colony entrances. They also eat them along the little highways the ants make for themselves.

Jim Munger watched his 12 horny toad buddies for one day each. During that time, he watched them eat 1,200 harvester ants, about 100-200 each day per toad! They also ate about 600 other ants, along with a few bugs and stuff. Horny toads ate from 9 to 171 ants at each colony, averaging 45 ants per visit. The average stay at each colony was about 16 minutes.

Jim says the harvester ants notice when their workers don't arrive back at the nest like they ought to. Those smart harvesters send out fewer surface workers, so the toads have to move on.

Lizards also leave the ant colonies to go into the shade to cool off. They also

Upcoming Events

GENERAL MEETING—
Tuesday, October 8th, 7 p.m.
Austin Nature Center

**RESEARCH AND
RECOVERY COMMITTEE—**
meets next on Wednesday,
November 6th at 7 p.m.
Call Wendy Donaldson at
499-0158 for meeting place.

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Horny Toad Christmas Cards

by Steve Austin

My father asked me one day, "Why don't you have horned toad Christmas cards?" I thought, "why don't we?" I proposed the idea at the August general meeting. It was enthusiastically approved and I was put in charge of the project. I decided to approach this project as an art director and get other Austin artists involved rather than executing all the artwork myself.

I saw Tom and Susan Curry at the Austin Graphic Arts Society meeting, and mentioned my dilemma. Susan in-

troduced me to Edd Patton at the meeting, and yes he was interested in the project. I met with him at the Curry's Prickly Pear studio on September 25th. Edd is a great illustrator with Texas Monthly assignments among his credits. He is prepared to do an original scratch board illustration for us in exchange for 200-300 cards for him to keep. I talked with Susan Curry, Bart Cox, and Bill Davis, and finally arranged for an initial print run of 1000 cards and envelopes, with 200 going to Edd. Thanks, Edd!

I'll have at least a sketch for the October general meeting. I plan to have the cards printed and available at the next exhibition days: The Live Oak Festival and the Democratic Party

fundraiser at Waterloo Park, both on October 12. If you want your "Seasons Greetings" HLCS cards, plan to drop by.

The cards will be 4 1/4" x 5 1/2", printed in brown ink on 80# tan or ivory recycled card stock with matching envelopes. Cost will be \$9.00 plus tax for 20 cards.

I NEED HELP! I will be out of town from the evening of October 12 through November 12. The art will be at the printer ready to reprint, and boxes will be in stock. I'll need someone to contact the printer, pick up cards, fold them and box them when I'm gone as well as get checks from Bart or Bill Davis to pay for the printing. Somebody please help! Call me at Grey Matter Design at 467-0018, or at home at 371-7066. ▲

BART'S NOTES . . . from page 1

mailing in our 501(c)(3) application, but that should not hinder fund raising efforts for this project at all. There's a way that every penny donated toward the survey project can receive **guaranteed** tax deductible status. Austin has an umbrella group called the Austin Community Fund and I have sent our proposed survey project to them for their board's approval (which will soon be forthcoming) and with such approval tax deductibility will be assured for all donors to the project.

As for the details of the survey, it is a cooperative agreement (between Parks and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) pursuant to Section 6 of the Federal Endangered Species Act. The short job title is: "To assess the historical and current status of the Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma cornutum*)". The amount we need to raise is \$14,000, and the project needs to get started by this spring, when they come out of hibernation. I'll be happy to provide a complete abstract of the survey proposal upon request.

Well, so much for the August meeting. The weekend before that meeting we were hosted by Tom and Susan Curry to an outstanding party in Austin's lake hills. I particularly enjoyed seeing Tom's art hanging on the walls of their fine home. Many thanks to Tom and Susan!

Two weekends after the August meeting we held our first fundraiser at La Zona Rosa, and raised a little over a thousand dollars. Joyce Snodgrass is to be thanked for putting together that wonderful project. Way to go Joyce! Three hundred dollars of the money raised was given to Wendy Donaldson for a trip out to California to check out

the research being done there by attaching tiny transmitters to horny toads and then checking out their activities.

Meanwhile, we had our September meeting, which was better attended than the August meeting even though there was no program and no publicity. I brought some guacamole and chips and Linda Curry dropped off some punch. We voted on our official logo and it is fantastic (see page 3). We also got a report from Wendy on her trip, which was really fascinating. I plan to have her report again at the October meeting. I know I won't get bored hearing about it again.

I don't know if you've noticed it or not, but we've been getting quite a lot of publicity lately. We were mentioned along with about a half a dozen "Green Organizations" in the *American Statesman*, Sunday edition, and we got half a page in the *Chronicle*. This in addition to the terrific radio publicity we got prior to the La Zona Rosa bash.

Coming up we've got our regular meeting at 7:00 p.m. on October 8th at the Nature Center and we're going to be doing our thing at both the Live Oak Festival in Stacy Park and the Funfest in Waterloo Park, sponsored by the Travis County Democratic Party, on October 12th. By the way, if any of you know of a Republican Party gathering where we can publicize our group and sell T-shirts, let me know.

About the only negative news I have is the difficulty I've been encountering in setting up new chapters outside the Austin area. I thought I had some ducks in a row in Dallas, but they seem to have flown the coop. If you know of anyone in any city in the southwest who might be interested in being a

scout (person doing the legwork necessary to get a chapter going: find a place, pick a time that won't conflict with other major environmental groups, arrange for some publicity, etc.) for the HLCS by *all means* put me in touch with them. We need scouts!

There's lots more going on, but if I don't shut up Marcia will refuse to print it, or worse, Bill Davis will skewer me with his barbed wit for my verbosity. See you at the October 8th meeting.

— Bart Cox

TOAD PICNIC . . . from page 1

left when another horned lizard would come by. Sometimes they just seem to have just gotten all the ants they needed.

In Munger's area there were 50 to 500 harvester colonies of per acre!! They were small colonies with only 200-400 members per colony. Horny toad food — ants — are small, so the toads have to eat a lot of them. *They visited several ant colonies per day. This fact is very important.* Have we been losing harvester ant colonies to pesticides for the last three decades? **Have we been forcing horny toads to travel farther and farther between meals? Are they going hungry?**

The above information was summarized from two James C. Munger research publications: "Optimal Foraging? Patch Use by Horned Lizards" *The American Naturalist*, May 1984, and "Long-term Yield from Harvester Ant Colonies: Implications for Horned Lizard Foraging Strategy", *Ecology* 65(4), 1984, pp. 1077-1086. ▲

Logo Design Chosen



Post Office Box 122, Austin, Texas 78767

This is the logo chosen by the membership at the last meeting. It will be used in the future for our letterhead, envelopes, brochures, newsletter, and all other official correspondence.

Bill's Notes —

At our first Horny Toad party I met Wally Chariton who, in addition to wanting to start a chapter in Dallas, happens to have authored the book *Unexplained Texas Mysteries*. I don't remember who brought up the Old Rip story, but it so happens that one of the well researched stories in his book is about old Rip. I couldn't wait to get a copy. I love history, I love Texas, and I love Horny Toads! Who could ask for anything more? I read the Old Rip story first (right out of the middle of the book). Interesting. Interesting *and*, with pictures! The other stories were great too. Everything from political underhandedness to stolen stuff. It was by far the best book I've read in a long time. Any real Texan must get a copy.

For those of you who missed our August meeting, we opened with speaker Andy Price. Dr. Price is one of the Big Honcho's at Parks and Wildlife and has done a lot of research in the horny toad field. There was a lot of discussion about the pilot program his department has set aside money for if someone could come up with their own bucks to get it off the ground. (For more details see Wendy's article in the last newsletter.) Without this pilot program Andy would not back a propagation program by any other entity.

When it came to saving horny toads I was as clear as mud as to what Andy's position was. This of course is my interpretation. He was not concerned with saving individuals but interested in protecting the species. I would think saving even one horny toad would be worthwhile and am not sure why Parks and Wildlife would not embrace any organization concerned with protecting and saving critters. I did notice how easy it is to shoot down ideas on saving horny toads instead of supporting ideas on improving the population.

Some miscellaneous info that came out. Horny Toads probably live 7 to 10 years. Land use has had a large impact on their demise. Few populations east of the I.H. 35 corridor. Probably need at least 15 acres for propagation effort.

As a final note: I talked to a doctor who grew up in El Paso and swore they fed Horny Toads roaches in captivity.

When we start a new chapter, we can change our local name if we want to. Food for thought.

We know have 5 T-shirt designs to choose from. I should have gold plated jewelry, gimme caps, and postcards in by October. If you want to help sell or buy stuff, let me know. ▲

A Search for Horned Toads

by Steve Austin



Since I joined the HLCS, I've been educating my 4 ½ year old son, Julian about Horned Toads. Julian knows that I'm part of a group that is trying to save them. We've discussed the problems of fire ants, pesticides, and road kills. Julian thinks fire ants are mean and wants to kill them all.

I haven't seen a horned toad since the mid-60's in Stamford, Jones county. I took Julian to the Broken Spoke to see the stuffed horned toad in one of their glass cases in the exhibition room. But Julian was disturbed that he was dead and wanted to see a live one. Big, big problem. I mentioned the situation to Wendy Donaldson, and she told me that there was an unconfirmed report of horned toads at Stewart Farms, east of Austin.

So, on August 3rd, Julian and I set off for Stewart Farms in blue jeans, boots, and horned toad t-shirts to have a look-see. We got there at about 9 a.m., walked over to the house and waited

for the lady who runs the farm. She asked the other blokes if they had seen any that morning. Sorry, but no. We were welcome to look for ourselves in the fields — it was a good time of day to find them. So, off we went — up and down the rows of vegetables.

Julian was very patient, and learned about cucumbers growing, and how they get made into pickles. We looked carefully at the ant mounds, finding both fire ants and harvester ants — often within 4 feet of one another. We took a few breaks for mints and to sit, and after an hour, we found ourselves back close to the road near an old greenhouse. After investigating the greenhouse, we kept searching for horned toads. I was getting worried that we wouldn't find any.

All of a sudden, I saw one dart through some scrub. "I found one Julian, let me catch him." I held the horned toad gently and stroked his head. I pointed out all his horns to Julian and how gentle he was. We saw how he closed his eyes when I stroked his head horns gently. Julian wanted to hold him. I said, "OK, if you hold him on your palms and don't squeeze him." Julian held the horned toad excitedly. After a while, it was time to go have breakfast and put the horned toad back. Julian found a harvester ant mound and told me to put the horned toad there "so he can eat." It was a male, sandy in color about 3 ½" long.

We went back to the farm stand, told them of our find and bought some vegetables before going for breakfast. Julian kept talking about the search and finding the horned toad and holding him. "I love horned toads — you're going to save them aren't you, Daddy?" We're going to try real hard, pal!" ▲

Research and Recovery Field Trip to Smithville

by Lynn Virta

Last Saturday, the 28th of September, dawned cool and bright. What a super day for a horny toad outing!!! Wendy and a merry troupe of horny toaders, Melanie T. and her son Phillip, Lynn Virta and her high school classmate/friend who drove up from Houston for the photographic safari, and Joyce Snodgrass, with her hu-mon-gous lens'd camera, were in for a good time. Our intrepid leader, Bart Cox, had a previous family engagement in Galveston and had to miss this one.

Mollie DuBois is a charming, fairly newly widowed, wonderful woman with a quick smile, and has one neighbor to a side — Lindsey Ann Ellis and her precocious daughter, Virginia Ann, interested in the environment. Virginia was participating that day in a Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) "field trip". Students take water samples with others of her Smithville sixth grade class, to check for water purity and quality.

This water quality effort is an offshoot of an initiative funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Teachers across Texas are taught techniques to make science fun and interesting to our young scientists.

Back to the field trip: First sighting, by Wendy Donaldson, had a red flag from the Friday PM before, also attended by Jack Morse, and Dick Davis. Dick pulled out 3 bags worth of poison ivy Friday which Lynn put in the back of Rick's car's trunk Saturday to be composted in the BOTTOM of her compost heap. (Time for more fresh manure!!) That adult male, approximately palm-sized not including tail, was spotted

again Saturday but was pretty sure he wanted to stay where he was for the time being. One or two of us monitored him for 2 or so hours and there was no activity on his part. In Wendy-ese, scientifically speaking, adult male1 was total length 11.2 cm, SVL (Snout to Vent Length — without tail) 8.1 cm. He was well-camouflaged into the sandy soil and shadows cast by the low grass. AND he knew he was surrounded by meals-on-legs, so to speak, with two harvester ant hills and their busy trails nearby.

Melanie T. found another adult in an adjacent vacant back lot. Rick Smith of Houston located the second baby toad, verified "different baby toad" by Wendy Donaldson, a senior at UT. Baby toad1, discovered near the house foundation in sandy soil, was TL 4.1 cm. and SVL 2.7 cm. Rick Smith located baby toad2, also in sandy soil near the foundation but in the front of Mollie's home. Baby toad2 was TL 4.1 cm. and SVL 3.0, slightly larger and "puffed up".

Melanie's son was very helpful at assisting. Phillip could keep up with the fastest lizard on the lot.

It appears that Mollie could use some help with land use management, both on her lot and the adjacent abandoned lot. Her neighbor on one side is inclined to use herbicides to kill over-run weeds. Mollie's land is becoming encrusted with harvester ant mounds and burr grass, and she wants bluebonnets again in the spring. A Texas Horned Lizard colony is definitely there alive and fairly well in Smithville, but...

Do we have any volunteers to cut grass? Sow native prairie grass? Save the Wilkes Road neighborhood from pesticides and herbicides so near the Colorado River?? Any feedback on any of this, please call Lynn Christine Virta at 928-4442, or Wendy Donaldson at 499-0158. Lee Stone, Dick Davis, any comments? Here is a situation 1.25 hours away on Highway 71 where our organization could possibly do something to affect the outcome. ▲

Newsletter Input

Please help build this newsletter! We need articles, graphics, maps etc. Send to: Marcia Jenkins, c/o The Reference Press, 6448 Hwy. 290 East, Suite E-104, Austin, Texas 78723. Articles of more than 100 words must be: (1) typed originals, or (2) provided on a Mac or PC disk. Deadline for articles is first day of the month. Questions? Call Marcia Jenkins at 454-7778 weekdays or 512-321-7579 eves.

Please Join Us NOW!

- Students - \$10 • Subscribing - \$10 (newsletter only)
- Regular - \$25 • Contributing - \$50

Mail fees along with Name, Address, Phone Number and comments to: Horned Lizard Conservation Society, P.O. Box 122, Austin, Texas 78767

Change in membership duly noted! Thanks for the proposed help! Smithville was fun!

Horned Lizard Conservation Society

P.O. Box 122
Austin, Texas 78767



Dedicated to Conserving Horned Lizards Throughout North America

