

# The vulnerable milk snake

April is perhaps the best time of the year to encounter snakes. After five months of torpidity, they advance from their winter shelter to bask in the warmth of the spring sun. As cold blooded creatures, the body temperature of snakes is regulated by the temperature of the

## Backyard Naturalist

By DON SCALLEN  
Herald Special



environment. Unlike mammals, they have no internal mechanism for maintaining body heat - thus they sun themselves to increase their temperature. A warm snake is much more vigorous than a cold one, and therefore, better able to capture prey and evade predators. This sunning behaviour and the lack of concealing vegetation in early spring, allows snakes to be more readily observed than at other times of the year.

Halton Hills and area is home to at least six varieties of snakes: The Eastern Garter Snake, the Eastern Ribbon Snake, the Redbelly Snake, the Brown Snake, The Milk Snake and the Northern Water Snake. The Smooth Green Snake is prohibitive as well although I have not observed any in north Halton, in all my years in the field.

It is important to note that no rattlesnakes are found in this area of Ontario and it is questionable whether they ever had a foothold here. I am reminded of articles that appeared in local newspapers several years ago, reporting the alleged discovery of Massasauga rattlesnakes in Limehouse. Concerned citizens found one of these "rattlesnakes" in a backyard and quickly dispatched it. A subsequent search of the area turned up three or four more, that unfortunately met the same fate as the first. After the snakes were killed, it was found that they were actually specimens of the harmless Milk Snake. The Milk Snake's coloration consisting of dark brown blotches on a light grey or tan background gives it a superficial resemblance to a rattlesnake.

This is often enough to condemn the Milk Snake in human eyes. But this snake further implicates itself by vibrating the end of its tail an

striking at prospective enemies when alarmed. These actions mimic rattlesnake behaviour and probably have real survival value in the wild. Displayed in front of nervous people, however, they invite destruction.

Milk Snakes dwelling in populated areas then, are a very vulnerable species. They are still reasonably common in north Halton but may become increasingly rare as human populations increase. And that would indeed be unfortunate. Milk Snakes are efficient predators. They help keep rodent populations in check and unlike other "mousters" such as the Red Fox, the Great Horned Owl and the Red Tailed Hawk, they can pursue mice in their sub-surface hiding places.

The Milk Snake's value as a predator is of course not the only reason it should be allowed to exist. Too often we attempt to justify the continued existence of an animal on purely economic grounds - an appeal that stresses how a particular creature benefits mankind. Like any other animal however, the Milk Snake has an intrinsic right to live - we should not appoint ourselves the arbiters of its existence.

Knowing more about these interesting creatures can engender a sense of wonder and help dispel the myths that jeopardize its existence.

The Milk Snake is our only constrictor, subduing prey in the same manner as tropical boas and pythons. Contrary to popular belief, a constrictor does not crush its victims. Rather it wraps its body around a prey animal and tightens its grip with each exhaled breath of the animal, eventually suffocating it. Milk Snakes frequent wooded and agricultural areas and sometimes search in barns for mice. It is this presence in barns that led to the absurd belief that they actually milked cows - hence their common name. Of interest as well is the apparent immunity of Milk Snakes to the venom of rattlesnakes. In parts of its range, where rattlers are found, they are included in its diet.

Lets hope that we will allow this interesting reptile to continue to share north Halton with us.

## Rights for AIDS victim



### Against the odds

PAT WOODS

On Saturday, April 4, CBC, on the radio show Quirks and Quarks, ran an up-date on AIDS. It outlined just how fast this virus is spreading. In February of this year, it was estimated that one out of over 158 people in the USA was a carrier. Conservative estimates now put it at one in 118. In Manhattan it is one in 15. At least 80 per cent of those who have it now are expected to die in the next 10 years. Some condoms offer no protection from the infection. The most effective condom in combination with a spermicide will protect you 77 per cent of the time over a 5 year period.

It is obvious from the data presented that it is a physical impossibility to test and isolate

### Go Cold Turkey

Halton Lung Association will hold a free Cold Turkey Smoking Cessation Clinic at Harrison Public School, 59 Rexway Drive, Georgetown, 7:30 - 9:30 each evening 4-8 May 1987. Pre-registration required - call 532-8499.

everyone who carries AIDS. They are now part of our community.

AIDS has been declared a disability in Ontario. As such, those who have it, cannot legally be discriminated against. While physicians must report it, it does not present a hazard in the workplace. Under the Human Rights Code an employee may sue if he/she were fired because he had AIDS, was infected with AIDS or was suspected of having AIDS. Internal company policies of how matters relating to AIDS may state as part of the working conditions that employees do not have the right to refuse to work with someone who has the virus.

Anyone who carries the AIDS virus cannot be refused health care or personal service. Complaints can be filed with the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

An employer can only request medical information from an employee that is relevant to his or her job. An employer can only confirm this information with a physician with the employee's expressed consent. Employers do not have the right to insist on mandatory blood testing. Voluntary testing may be considered for health care workers who, through an injury in the workplace, have been exposed to infected blood or body fluids.

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## Photo Tips

by Peter Moss

As the last of the great river rafts drift over the horizon, we can once again turn our attention back to portraits.

We left off waiting to attempt portraits with our subjects standing, rather than seated. So without further delay, here we go.

The first consideration in standing shots is to remember that a majority of your camera work will be done in the vertical plane rather than in the horizontal. You will find that single and/or two person shots will appear much more balanced this way and that you will have virtually no wasted space in your frame. Also, as you need to create a feeling of height in your finished work, this is the most practical way to achieve this effect. If you are going to shoot a large standing group of people on the other hand, the horizontal view takes precedence.

One of the most challenging problems you will encounter is the situation of two subjects of very different heights. As a rule, the safest way to remedy this dilemma is to seat the taller party and then bring the shorter of the two in close to the seated subject. It is most important to create a feeling of togetherness and by keeping your subjects tight together you achieve this desired effect.

Because you have your subjects standing you by no means must make your shot a full view; in other words, you can still make your shot a head and shoulders viewpoint although your subjects are standing. Another technique that always makes a big difference in your portraits is to have your subjects look at each other rather than at the camera, this technique gives the resulting photograph a feeling of implied action that does not normally exist if the subjects face the camera.

If you are forced to shoot indoors, please remember to avoid corner areas in rooms, to look for chandeliers that might appear above heads and most important do not place your subject too close to nearby walls. That convenient wall, that serves as your backdrop will also be responsible for casting those horrible shadows that creep up in your photo and give you two extra "shadow people" that you did not "see" when you composed your shot. Your new found shadow friends are brought to you courtesy of your flash and your subjects closeness to that wall. Try and keep your subjects 5 to 6 feet from the wall or any similar surface.

With standing shots, you must always be on the lookout for some persistent gremlins that continually pop up; these include:

- hands in the pockets - a definite no
- fig leaves - these are for statues only
- standing on one foot - for flamingos only.

Get the idea? - If at this early stage of doing portraits you do NOT know what to do with hands, there is an old rule - "Keep them out of the shot!" You will be able, later on, to work into including hands in your photo, but for now worry or rather concentrate on faces. A standing subject requires a solid foundation, therefore, both feet on the ground!

Fig leaves occur as a direct result of not knowing what to do with hands and they are easily avoided by simply having your subject keep their arms down at their sides.

There is no hard and fast rule on getting people to smile and look and feel relaxed when being photographed. It usually comes down to your (the photographer's) technique.

For example, if a subject does not like to show their teeth when they smile, YOU must work around it! Get them to smile without showing their teeth. But above all, make them feel relaxed and comfortable about being photographed, it will most certainly show in the finished photo.

As you have by now noticed, each week we have added just a little bit more technique for you to build on; next week I will add one or two more ideas then summarize for you to give you a basic portrait guideline.



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