



Jessie Poole/Index

Oreo, a California Kingsnake in the Truman State herpetology lab, coils around junior Alex Dalecki's arm. Dalecki is a co-manager of the herpetology lab.

Beneath the scales

Herpetology Lab workers help people understand reptiles and overcome fear

BY BETHANY COURY
Staff Reporter

Lining the back halls of Magruder Hall are cages housing what seem like fierce, scaly and venomous creatures. But some Truman State community members are trying to change their reputations.

Truman's herpetology lab gives undergraduates an experience with exotic animals while educating students about amphibians and reptiles in hopes of allowing them to confront their fear of snakes as a step to prevent the next mass extinction, said biology professor Chad Montgomery, the herpetologist and faculty lab manager. Every year, the herpetology lab workers host about 30 to 40 outreach events, which include information about and hands-on experiences with the herpetology lab animals, both at local schools and in the lab itself.

There's a variety of factors leading to the extinction of amphibians, including pollution, habitat laws and a global threat called chytrid, a fungus found in northeastern Missouri that could wipe out 80 percent of the amphibian mass within two to three months, Montgomery said.

"It's actually resulting in the next mass extinction on the scale of the last dinosaur extinction," Montgomery said. "A whole class of vertebrate animals, amphibians, is going extinct."

Montgomery said it's important to familiarize the general public with what's going on, so they can make informed decisions that impact their environment. He said approaching the fear people have concerning reptiles such as snakes is an important step of the education process.

"In the Garden of Eden, the devil was a snake, right?" Montgomery said. "That's pretty much where [the fear] comes from. But if you look at the symbol for medicine — [it's] two snakes around a scepter. So it's very strange that on one hand, it signifies the devil and that's what people focus on, but on the other hand, it signifies healing."

Outreach manager junior Alex Dalecki said the lab workers hope people who've been educated about these animals will change their perception. He said he coordinates free events in local schools of all grades, as well as events in Magruder.

He said many parents who bring their children to outreach events don't want to be up close and personal with the animals during the "meet and greet" portion, but want their children to not grow up with the fear they did. Dalecki said people's fear of snakes is understandable. They're weird animals because they have no legs and no fur, he said.

He said fear isn't the only reason education is important. Many people buy snakes with-

out doing the research first, he said. They don't know what they get themselves into until the snakes grow too big to be ideal, and are let loose. He said they often survive the wild, and could wreck havoc on the ecosystem.

Montgomery said a current example of this is the finding of Burmese Pythons in Florida, who've been reported to have eaten alligators and dwarfed white-tailed deer, disrupting the ecosystem. The pythons might spread all the way to California if they're not controlled, Montgomery said.

Senior Brandon Gordon, a student worker at the herpetology lab, said he plans to go to Florida after graduation to aid in the capture of the snakes, as well as to educate current and potential python-owners about the responsibilities of owning this pet, and the dangers of letting them loose in the wild.

Gordon, a Kirksville resident, said he grew up working in the lab and its animals, having first been involved through 4-H, a youth development organization, when he was 8 years old. Gordon said his work at the lab influenced his decision to go to Florida.

"I've always wanted to work with reptiles and amphibians in some way, shape or form, but I never knew what I wanted to do beyond that," Gordon said. "My work here has helped me get directed toward that."



Lindsey Borgna/Index

Junior Sam Kost repairs bikes at the Bike Co-op. Kost said he discovered the importance of repairs when he had to take his bike to the Co-op twice during his freshman year.

Mastering the moving parts

BY MIKEY KARTJE
Staff Reporter

Bicycle maintenance, a task overlooked by many Truman State students, makes up for the amount of time it consumes by preventing costly damage and providing a wider understanding of bikes through hands-on activity.

Weather it comes from a professional repairman, a student at the Kirksville Bike Co-op or a professor with a passion for cycling, simple bike maintenance can be rewarding for both the owner and the bike.

Geography professor Wolfgang Hoeschele, who has been cycling since he was a child, said routine maintenance, like changing tires, keeping the bicycle lubricated and changing parts, have taught him about the general mechanics of his bicycle.

"I do the degree of mechanics that I need in order to keep the bicycle in good shape," he said.

This basic knowledge is essential for serious cyclists such as Hoeschele, who has toured across Washington and other parts of the United States, as well as parts of India and Germany. Hoeschele said that even though he possessed basic repair skills, there have been times when damages to his bicycle were beyond his maintenance ability.

After a downhill accident in India, his front wheel was badly damaged, and Hoeschele said he had to walk his bike to a nearby village, where he found a street vendor who fixed his wheel for free. While these large damages can occur, smaller problems are much more common, Hoeschele said, and even novice cyclists are capable of taking measures toward preventing mechanical glitches.

Assembling bicycles piece by piece has become second nature to Walmart employee Andrew

Cottrill, who has been working in the store's bicycle department for nearly five months. The only experience he had prior to his job working in Walmart's bicycle department was tinkering with his bike when he was younger. It is possible for anybody to learn the inner workings of a bicycle, he said.

Junior Sam Kost discovered firsthand the importance of bicycle maintenance during his freshman year, when he had to bring his bike to the Bike Co-op twice for repairs.

He said he learned some of the problems with his bicycle could have been prevented by simple maintenance. Inspired by what he learned from individuals working at the Co-op, he joined the organization during his sophomore year, he said. Kost said he enjoys being able to repair bicycles, but seeing cyclists learn from their mishaps is more rewarding.

Kost said most of the damages brought into the Co-op are preventable through routine maintenance. It is common for students to leave their bikes outside throughout the winter, he said, which usually results in rust forming on moving parts, such as shifters and brake cables, preventing the effectiveness of such parts.

He said learning about routine maintenance also gives riders of all levels a greater understanding of their bike, allowing them to travel and exercise more efficiently. Kost said that through working at the Co-op, he has become him significantly more involved with cycling. It has morphed from an occasional hobby to a frequent pastime, he said. He said a deeper understanding of how his bicycle works has turned him into a better cyclist.

"The whole experience is more rewarding if you can take care of it yourself," he said.

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