

Blue-eyed Snakes

(Continued from page 16)

moveable eyelids, and the eye being covered by a transparent scale called the brille or spectacle, this fluid is most noticeable in the eyes. Snakes that are pre-ecdysis, or getting ready to shed, will often have conspicuously blue-clouded eyes (probably the basis for the old fable that snakes are blind during the dog-days of summer).

As with crabs or most any other animal that undergoes molting, snakes are highly vulnerable during this period, a time when they are said to be "opaque." Opaque snakes are rarely seen in the wild as they usually find a quiet, secure refuge to squeeze themselves into for the entire time, emerging only when they are at last ready to crawl out of their old skin.

The time and frequency of the shedding, as well as the duration of the shed cycle, varies considerably with the species. Typical shed cycles last from 10 to 14 days, but some, especially in the larger and more sedentary snakes such as vipers, may take much longer. The blue eyes clear up a day or two before the actual shedding takes place. Not surprisingly, such heavily built snakes also shed less frequently (and less rapidly) than their more active and agile cousins. Rattlesnakes gain a new segment at the base of their rattles each time they shed, making the rattles progressively longer. Since they do shed more than once a year, there is no direct correlation between the number of segments in a rattlesnake's rattle and its age in years, another age-old misconception.

Healthy snakes will normally shed in one complete piece, crawling from the old skin head-first, having begun by rubbing the chin and lips on a hard surface such as rock or bark. Once started, the snake slowly works its way out of the old skin, turning it inside out, much as one would roll off a long sock. The actual shedding can take as little as 10 or 20 minutes, or as long as an hour, again depending on species and circumstances.

The cast-off skin is semi-translucent and soon dries to a crinkly texture. With nonvenomous snakes, skin patterns on the shed skins are only faintly visible if at all, but with some venomous snakes, such as timber rattlesnakes, the pattern can be boldly apparent (see photo on page 16).

With the exception of tiny blindsnakes and some sea snakes, all snakes have a single row of large flat scales down their undersides which resemble a bulldozer tread. In our venomous pit vipers, such as the rattlesnakes and copperheads, the single row continues all the way down the tail, while nonvenomous snakes will have a double row of large scales under the tail. This formula can easily be checked on a sloughed skin, but bear in mind that it only works in our part of the world and does not hold with the venomous coral snake (which is not found in our area, anyway, and is so rare in NC as to hardly be a concern anywhere in the state). Interestingly, snakes have one vertebra for each of the large plates on the underside and tail.

A just-shed snake has a shiny, "brand new" look, its colors and patterns being at their most vivid, as if freshly painted. Small dings, dents or blemishes have disappeared completely, earning snakes the envy of queens of old. Indeed, this remarkable ability of the snake to practically renew itself has been widely admired down the ages, and was even worshipped in some cultures.

Frederick Boyce is the staff herpetologist at the NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores.

Puzzle Solutions

A	S	P	S		C	H	A	S	E		O	P	A	L
T	E	A	K		H	A	U	T	E		B	I	N	E
O	R	N	A	M	E	N	T	A	L		L	O	A	N
L	V	I		A	R	S	O	N		W	O	U	L	D
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			I	V	Y		M	A	L	I	G	N	E	D
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M	O	V	E		P	R	I	D	E		A	S	I	A
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		T	O	F	F	S		W	O	R	S	T	E	D
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P	E	R		S	U	R	R	E	A	L	I	S	M	
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E	D	D	Y		B	E	A	S	T		B	A	S	S

8	7	9	4	6	1	2	3	5
2	6	1	8	5	3	7	9	4
3	4	5	7	9	2	6	8	1
7	8	4	6	3	9	1	5	2
5	1	3	2	7	4	8	6	9
9	2	6	5	1	8	4	7	3
4	3	7	1	8	5	9	2	6
1	9	8	3	2	6	5	4	7
6	5	2	9	4	7	3	1	8

American Music Festival

By Linda Seale

American Music Festival will present Israeli American cellist Amit Peled on January 28 at 8 p.m. at the History Museum of Carteret County in Morehead City. This is an opportunity to enjoy classical chamber music with big city names at small town prices in an intimate space, up close and personal.

Mr. Peled is praised as one of the most exciting performers on the international stage today, and will present "Hommage à Pablo Casals." The widow of Maestro Pablo Casals, Marta Casals Istomin, was so moved by Peled's playing that she personally presented him with the 1733 Gofriller cello that belonged to her husband. Peled will play the exact concert Casals played 100 years ago on the same cello. Bach, Fauré, Beethoven and a few Hungarian Rhapsodies will be played. This is a program not to be missed.

Tickets are available at the door, online at americanmusicfestival.eventbrite.com or by calling 728-6152.

PKS History Exhibit Ending Soon

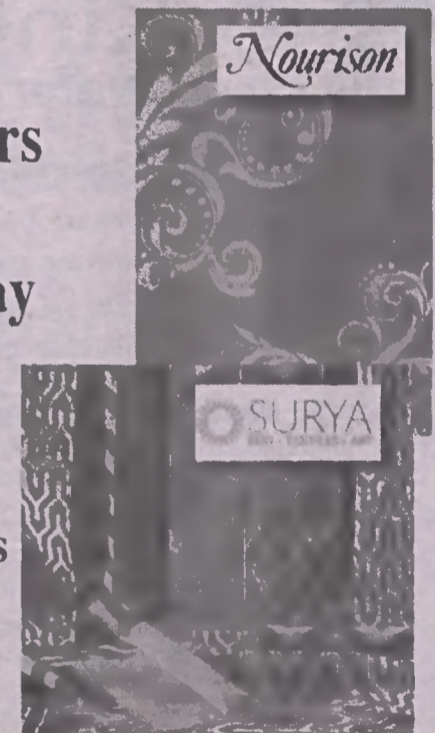
The Pine Knoll Shores exhibit at the History Museum of Carteret County in Morehead City will close at the end of March. Be sure to bring family and friends to the museum to see "Beach Town in a Forest: The Story of Pine Knoll Shores" while there is still time. Free passes for Pine Knoll Shores residents are available at town hall.

Current museum hours are:
Tuesday-Friday and 1st Saturday of the month
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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