

A day devoted to reptiles! Reptiday comes to Asheville on Jan. 23.



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ReptiDay, a one-day reptile expo coming to Asheville on Jan. 23, will showcase snakes, spiders, amphibians and other small exotic animals at the Western North Carolina Agricultural Center.

"Western North Carolina doesn't have really high snake diversity, but they have some endangered snakes here," said Landon Ward, a herpetology professor at UNC Asheville. "They have pine snakes. They have timber rattlesnakes, which are becoming less and less common every year. Those species are important to the environment."

Students who attend his traveling field herpetology class during the summer always say snakes are a lot easier to handle and less scary than they thought, Ward said.

"People think everything's ven-

omous. I think a lot of snakes get killed a year," Ward said.

Bonnie Miller, promotions team leader of Repticon, said attendees of Reptiday will have the chance to purchase reptiles from vendors hosted on the premises.

"I'm not a real big fan of capturing and importing lots of species," Ward said. "Sometimes you see people selling animals they caught, and that's not really good for the environment."

According to the ReptiDay's website, no restrictions on selling wild-caught animals are imposed on vendors at their conventions, but they must disclose whether the animals fall into the category of wild-caught or captive-bred.

"Well, I think most of them are captive bred. I don't think you can import reptiles," said Jeff Sansouci, a public relations officer for Exo Terra USA, a sponsor of ReptiDay.

Exo Terra builds and sells terrariums and accessories that replicate the natural environment of the animals they house, Sansouci said.

"We don't just build things we think they need. We actually go out and study their natural environment," Sansouci said. "We have the exact same moss, the exact same plants, the exact same lighting. We're actually recreating the animals' environment."

ReptiDay formed as a one-day version of the larger Repticon conventions held across the U.S., Miller said.

"We are in a lot of areas that simply will not support a two-day show," Miller said.

According to Reptiday's website, all animals must be healthy and legal within the state.

A veterinarian provides assistance and checks out the animals in many of Repticon's larger

events, Miller said.

"For the most part, we have well-established vendors. They are trustworthy. They know what they're allowed to bring in the show and what they're not," Miller said.

"I totally support captive breeding of reptiles," said Ward, who is a snake-breeder.

According to Reptiles Magazine, wild-caught reptiles are more likely to be highly stressed and to harbor parasites and/or disease than captive-bred reptiles.

The organizers of ReptiDay sell their merchandise independent of the event's participating vendors.

"We are the host," said Miller. "We don't sell anything other than T-shirts. It's just a great time for everybody and you get to see a whole lot of things you'll never see in the wild."