

Friends of Fort Macon Summer Concerts Return

Free concerts have returned to Fort Macon. Doors open early for picnickers and others to enjoy the park before the concerts begin at 6:30 p.m. Bring a chair, but please note that pets and alcohol are prohibited. The remaining concerts for this season include:

- **June 3:** Tanglewood, Heartfelt Americana-style music
- **June 17:** Unknown Tongues, Cajun Zydeco
- **July 1:** Dino, Scarce and Stover, Pirate Rock
- **July 15:** The Southern Hellcats, '50s and '60s Rockabilly
- **July 29:** Gary Dudley and Maxxtones, Rock and Blues

The concerts are just a part of what Fort Macon State Park has to offer for visitors. There are over 425 acres with great beaches, a maritime forest with a walking/jogging path, scenic dunes, fishing and swimming. Please see the Events Calendar in this issue for more free events that may be of interest.

The summer concerts are free due to the sponsorship of Parker GMC, Buick and Honda in Morehead City.

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The Beautiful Coastal Cornsnake

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eye, the dazzling mosaic-like patterns of yellow, black and orange along the sides are even more evocative of maize. Another theory is that cornsnakes are often found near stores of corn, as in barns or corn cribs, and for good reason. For as long as humans have practiced agriculture (a fairly lengthy expanse of time), we have been laying up large stores of grain, a favorite staple not only for ourselves but also for rodents. For that reason, human habitations have been historically accompanied by rodent infestations. This fact has not been lost on snakes that prey on rodents. Such snakes, including the cornsnake, are in essence smart, self-propelled and self-guided hunter-killer mouse traps that not only seek out and capture mice and rats wherever they may live but also dispose of them—completely.



A frightened cornsnake rears up to expose its boldly marked black-and-white belly in a defensive pose known as bridging. The sharp edges of the belly which enable ratsnakes to climb so well are clearly visible.

Their state-of-the-art sensory tracking equipment includes the constantly flicking forked tongue that retrieves micro particles and chemical traces from the air and transfers them to a cluster of cells in the roof of the mouth known as the Jacobson's organ. This structure lends the snake an exceptional olfactory ability, estimated to be seven times as sensitive as the nose of a bloodhound. The forks of the tongue function as direction finders: more mouse scent on the right fork indicates that the prey is located in that direction. Next to snakes, cats are wasteful amateurs that play with their food and often leave entrails if not entire, uneaten corpses lying around. Snakes digest the entire animal, bones and all, except for a bit of hair, and deposit the rest as compost.

Unlike cats, snakes are built to pursue rodents right down into the tunnels and burrows or between the walls of houses and other human structures where they live and nest. Given the prevalence of over 30 virulent and deadly diseases that are routinely spread by rodents to people, including hantavirus, Lyme disease and even the bubonic plague, to name a few, the long-established but ignorant practice of killing these attractive, perfectly harmless and gentle guardians of our homes, health and food supply on sight strikes me as insane. Remember, the vast majority of snakes are not copperheads, nor are they venomous. A long and slender snake lying stretched out in the sun that gives off a strong impression of orange, red and yellow is a friend. Leave it be.

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