

Leapin' Lizards! It's Kids Night!



Burmese python Casper and Lancaster Herpetological Society board members (from left) Kelsey Frey, Jesse Rothacker, Adam Mattel, Jeff Chiyka, and Caleb Hulse invite children to explore the world of reptiles and amphibians (some of which are pictured below) through a short presentation, hands-on exhibits, and live animals.

By Donna Hurley

LHS Hosts First Kids Night on June 21

Have you pulled up a fallen log lately to see if you could spot a salamander, or walked stealthily beside a quiet stream in hope of catching a glimpse of a bullfrog, water snake, or box turtle? Well, the folks of the Lancaster Herpetological Society (LHS) encourage this kind of interaction with nature, so much so that they have created a new evening event where children and their parents can meet, touch, hold, and learn about reptiles and amphibians.

Kids Night with the Herpetological Society will take place on Friday, June 21, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Manheim Township Public Library, 595 Granite Run Drive, Lancaster. Preregistration is required, and space is limited.

"The purpose of the event is to introduce children and their families to the curious life of reptiles and amphibians and show that they are a valuable part of the environment," said environmental educator Kelsey Frey, media director for LHS and organizer of the event. There will be live animals to touch and hold, she explained, though none will be venomous. LHS president Jeff Chiyka added, "Our members are experienced handlers who know their animals and proper procedures." Most of the reptiles, according to Chiyka, are accustomed to taking part in public programs and being handled by the public.



Kids Night is designed for elementary students age 5 and older, and children must be accompanied by an adult. The program will begin with a seated introduction to reptiles and amphibians, a.k.a. "herps," during which Frey will aim to "dispel fears while inspiring wonder and curiosity about these beautiful creatures." Families will then be free to meet reptiles and amphibians face to face or watch them from a distance during a time of exploration. "It's so neat to connect kids to critters they can touch," enthused Frey.

Activities will include "Draw a Turtle," "Draw a Snake," "Guess a Python's Length," "Find a Camouflaged Reptile," and "Reptile Jeopardy."

The LHS team is excited about the event. Jesse Rothacker, a founding member and board member of LHS, will run one or two of the Kids Night activities. "There will be stations and activities all over the room for kids to enjoy," he explained. "This is a great opportunity to experience interactive reptile exhibits of many kinds and meet a whole team of passionate reptile experts who would love to see your kids catch a contagious love for nature." Best of all, Rothacker continued, "It's all free!"

Donations will be accepted and will be used for community outreach, conservation, and the purchase of new animal books for the library. Readers may register for the event at www.mtpl.info (calendar/June) or call 560-6441. The program is handicapped-accessible. If Kids Night registration fills up, Rothacker invites readers to visit www.forgottenfriend.org/events for more free reptile programs in the area.

"We hope to inspire the next generation with our passion for conservation and animal appreciation," Rothacker said, explaining that Pennsylvania alone is home to at least 75 reptile and amphibian species.

Readers who would like more information about Kids Night or LHS may visit www.lancasterherp.com. Meetings are held each third Friday of the month at the Manheim Township Public Library from 7 to 9 p.m.

Chiyka invites everyone to come to a meeting: "You may end up loving these cool creatures as much as we do!"

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