

Fun Times in Toronto

The Canadian Reptile Breeders Expo is a keeper!

September 25, 2009

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This is one of the scaleless bearded dragons from the A&A Dragons booth.

Brian Barczyk oversees the crowd at the BHB Reptiles booth.

Me with Darren Boyd, a REPTILES author who was selling herps at The Reptiles Rainforest booth.

The Canadian crowd was eager to check out vendors' wares. As mentioned previously, last weekend was the first Canadian Reptile Breeders Expo, which I had the pleasure of attending. This was the first two-day Canadian reptile expo – historically they've been one day, and on a Sunday at that – and by all accounts it won't be the last.

Grant Crossman did a commendable job of pulling the event together. There were more than 100 vendors with booths packed with an impressive variety of reptiles and reptile merchandise. And, also important, there was plenty of foot traffic. The REPTILES booth was right at the front entrance, and I was impressed by the near-constant line of people who were waiting in line to buy tickets.

My booth was right next door to Craig Stewart's The Urban Reptile booth. So picture this: You enter a bustling show floor and immediately ahead of you is a table with me sitting behind it, with a bunch of flyers spread across the tabletop. No sign of any animals whatsoever. But then, only a few feet further, you see an impressive display crammed with all manner of beautiful snakes and lizards, manned by several helpful, friendly and knowledgeable reptile people, including the gregarious Craig Stewart himself, along with his wife Lori and several booth staffers. And the booth itself...well, you know the scene: container upon container, each one occupied by a reptile more eye-catching than the one previous.

A low-key booth with me and REPTILES subscription flyers, or a booth such as described above: Which booth would you make a beeline for? Suffice it to say I got used to watching people cast a casual glance my way as they headed directly for Craig's bustling booth. I snagged a few interested parties, but magazine flyers simply cannot compete with flesh-and-blood reptiles right next door.

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Brian Barczyk delivers his speech at the REPTILES-sponsored cocktail party.

A motley group if ever there was one, at the REPTILES party. From left to right: Craig Stewart, Brian Barczyk, Sandy Quinn, Grant Crossman and me.

These hatching Honduran milksnakes were at the sharpdressedsnakes booth.

Maple-leaf-shaped ball python containers... a perfect touch at the Ball Python Addiction booth.

Back issues of REPTILES are snatched up by expo attendees, as Sandy Quinn mans (figuratively speaking) the booth. This is not to say, however, that the REPTILES booth was a deserted dead spot on the expo floor -- it wasn't. Sandy Quinn and I met many friendly Canadians and handed out bunches of flyers. We were not set up to actually sell subscriptions, but we used the flyers to point people to a show special that was being run online, where you could subscribe to the magazine for two years for the price of one (a special we often offer at reptile expos). At one point we had a bunch of back issues we were giving away, and that always attracts a big crowd. We brought some that got snapped up immediately, and Grant was kind enough to provide some more. It's always interesting for me to page through issues from REPTILES' early days...we've really come a long way in the past 16 years, especially design-wise.

Of course, there were plenty of reptiles on view in addition to those at The Urban Reptile booth. Arnold at A&A Dragons had some really impressive scaleless bearded dragons. There were elephant trunk snakes occupying an aquarium, a translucent veiled chameleon at the Treetop Lions booth, and, of course, snakes galore at the BHB Enterprises booth. Brian Barczyk was like a celebrity at this show; it seemed whenever I walked by his booth people were asking to have their photos taken with him (let it be known that I, too, was asked to pose for a photo – hopefully not for a dart board). Catering to the Canadian theme, I have to mention the containers that Angelo Barlas and Stephan Daigle from Ball Python Addiction were using to house some of their ball pythons: they were in the shape of maple leaves. Can you think of a better way to get a Canadian reptile fan to take a glance inside?

Everyone at the show was very friendly. Because REPTILES is not as widely distributed in Canada as it is here in the

U.S., a number of people were hearing of it for the first time. It's actually unusual for me to man the subscription booth, and it was great to be able to talk about the magazine with people who had never heard of it. I hope that at least some of them were curious enough to buy a subscription.

On Saturday night REPTILES hosted a cocktail party for the vendors that was well attended. The room was beautiful, on the top floor of the Holiday Inn Select, where many of us were staying (right down the street from the International Centre, where the expo was held). Many city lights could be seen twinkling, and the airport was not far so the coming and going of planes added interest. After brief welcome speeches from Grant Crossman and yours truly, Brian Barczyk took the mike to give a talk about how important it is for the reptile community to come together to nurture the hobby -- a talk that met with much applause. When Sandy and I left, the party was still going strong. Suffice it to say there were several bleary-eyed participants at the show the next day.

I chatted with Darren Boyd, a past REPTILES author, who was there selling herps. Bry Loyst, the curator at the mentioned-in-previous-blogs Indian River Reptile Zoo, was also there, and he caught me up with the latest goings on at the zoo. The Zoo Med guys are always great to visit with, when they aren't busy helping people at their booth, that is, as was Cameron Jackson and others from the gang at Big Al's. I met Marty Krol from Mist King for the first time and like everyone else the show was keeping him busy, too. Steve Featherstone told me about the Reptile Store Summer Camp in Hamilton, Ontario; they're doing good things and perhaps you'll read about their camp in an upcoming issue of REPTILES.

All in all, it was a show well worth attending, and...wait...I just realized, I never got a chance to visit the Scary Guys booth, which I mentioned in my September 21 blog. Darn it, I wanted to check that booth out. I guess I'll have to wait until next time, as I suspect I may be at the second Canadian Reptile Breeders Expo next year. Grant has reserved the space for the next three years, I believe, and I for one think this great new show has a bright future ahead of it.

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