

At the 2009 Reptile Super Show in San Diego

By Russ Case

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In the foreground is a minutes-old sulcata tortoise. In the background you can see the hatchling with eggshell still covering its shell.

Do you know the reptile industry person in this photo? If so, come back to ReptileChannel next Friday, 7/10, and take the first quiz and earn reward points. The Reptile Super Show in San Diego was held this past weekend and I have to say it's impressive how busy things were. This reptile show had tons of foot traffic, lots of people checking out the vendors' wares, and plenty of vendors selling everything you could want – animals and supplies of all types.

Before I get to the expo proper, a personal aside: Last Thursday, the day before I was to head down to San Diego, I went to a local eye doctor for a free Lasik exam. If any of you live in the Southern California area you may have heard of Dr. Charles Manger. His radio commercials are ubiquitous. I was there for three hours and was given all kinds of eye tests and spoke to seven different people. The end result was I was told I was a good candidate for Lasik surgery, even though I'd still need to wear glasses for close-up stuff such as reading and using the computer.

I've been wearing glasses for 40 years and have over the past couple considered Lasik on more than one occasion. So when Manger's people dangled a carrot – \$400 off the procedure if I had it done the same day as my exam – I bit. I rested that evening. The next day, despite doctor's orders to rest and relax, I headed down to the Reptile Super Show in San Diego (I took the train down, which was a nice change).

I call the show the Eye Drops Expo because after Lasik surgery it turns out you need to administer approximately a thousand eye drops per day, per eye. At least that's what it seems like. More accurately, I was (and still am as I write this) putting in about 60 drops total, 30 per eye. Some are antibiotic drops to prevent infection of my freshly lasered corneal flaps, others are simple lubricating drops to keep the eye moist (dry eye is a common, hopefully temporary, side effect of Lasik surgery). I'm liberal with the lubricating drops, as that helps a lot to see clearly.

So during the reptile show I could frequently be observed squirting eye drops into my eyes. I'd be on my way to chat with someone when I'd suddenly remember it was time for some more drops. Pretty much one drop or another was going in my eyes every 15 minutes to a half hour. It was a necessary nuisance. And that's why I'm calling the show, in my case, the Eye Drops Expo.

Ramy Guirguis really knows how to stage a reptile expo, and this year's Reptile Super Show in San Diego was no exception. I arrived on Friday, the day before the show, when the vendors are setting up and getting ready for the weekend. This is when Sandy Quinn, my sales manager on REPTILES magazine, and I will typically do a walk-through to say hi to everybody. Among many others, we chatted with Gary Bagnall and the crew from Zoo Med, Mike Monge from FL Chams, Kim Bell from Reptile Industries, and Desiree Wong from International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF).

The weekend of a show is often too busy to have any kind of real chat with someone, and this weekend proved no different. It was busy! But we did get time to head over to Old Town San Diego for some great Mexican food with Exo-Terra's Emmanuel Van Heygen, who was in San Diego to give two talks at Gekkon Day, which was held on Friday. Also joining us for lunch were Ben Weiner, ReptileChannel's associate web editor; Eric Syverson, REPTILES magazine's associate editor; and Michelle Williams, BowTie's Director of Internet Marketing. We had a great lunch and Emmanuel's always great to chat with. Among other duties for Rolf C. Hagen he leads the annual Exo-Terra expeditions; later this year they'll be heading to Honduras. And by the way, if anyone reading this needs a Mexican restaurant recommendation in the San Diego area, you can't go wrong with the Old Town Mexican Café. I love the carnitas, crispy style (and I like their margaritas, too, but due to my eye surgery I was not allowed to during the entire weekend...dagnabbit).

One of Ben's and my primary objectives at the Reptile Super Show was to photograph a number of reptile "industry types." This is for a new weekly contest here on ReptileChannel. It's going to be a "Do You Know Who This Is?" contest, in which we'll post a photo of someone involved in the reptile world. The people pictured may be reptile breeders, either famous in the industry or maybe newer and lesser known. They may be affiliated with a reptile product manufacturer, involved in

conservation efforts, a reptile writer, or connected to the reptile industry in any number of other ways. Along with each photo we'll have three multiple choice questions relating to the person pictured, in regard to his or her involvement in the reptile hobby and/or business.

I think this contest will be a lot of fun. Club Reptile reward points will be given to anyone with a correct answer to any of the multiple choice questions. So even if you guess you've got a chance to win some points toward some great reptile merchandise.

Speaking of the (as yet unnamed) contest, I'm giving you a little preview right now – do you know who that is in the photo that is accompanying this blog? Naturally I'm talking about the guy with the dark hair and not the reptile photo. If you know who he is, be sure to come back next Friday, 7/10, when the contest is up and running, and score some points for knowing.

The aisles of the show were crowded with enthusiasm. One particularly popular stop was a 10-gallon aquarium at Tyler Stewart's Bluebeast Reptile booth, where a number of baby sulcatas were hatching during the show. One of the hatchlings proved very popular with people who were taking photos...it was marching around with a large section of eggshell covering its shell.

Another highlight, which occurred periodically at Jon Alvey's Jon's Jungle booth was when a couple of attractive belly dancers performed, draped with some of Jon's snakes. I'm not sure which was the more photographed subjects: the dancers or the hatchling sulcatas (they were across the aisle from each other). Actually, I think I do know but I'll leave it to your imagination.

If you ever want to meet famous herpetoculturalist Philippe de Vosjoli you have an excellent chance by attending the Reptile Super Show. He had a booth this year featuring, among other items, Budgett's frogs and some very cool crayfish of varying colors. Crayfish are a specialty of Philippe's.

I found out something new about Linda Davison from Sticky Tongue Farms; at least it was new to me. She's a great graphic artist! One of my favorite t-shirts, given to me by Sandy Quinn, features a couple of dancing skeletons and only this weekend did I find out that it was created by Linda. She was selling this shirt and others at her booth, in addition, of course, to Miner-All and other Sticky Tongue products. Linda actually had two booths, one selling the reptile merchandise and another selling masks and other primitive artwork. That morning she dropped one of the masks on her foot, so she was functioning with some fairly bruised toes.

Bob Mailloux, busy as ever, was at the Sandfire Dragon Ranch booth. Bob's a super nice guy if you can find time to say hi. That can be problematic sometimes, though, because the Sandfire booth is always super crowded. That's what happens when you earn a reputation for beautifully colored bearded dragons. The proof could be seen scampering around in the many plastic tubs Sandfire had lining their table.

REPTILES and Zoo Med sponsored a vendor get-together on Saturday night which was fun and well attended; free food always helps! Then the REPTILES and ReptileChannel crew were off to dinner with Paul and Fern Benson from Nature Zone. I had never visited with Paul and Fern before and found them very friendly and a pleasure to dine with. Now that I think of it, talk during dinner didn't touch on reptiles in any huge way – we were having a good time talking about other stuff -- and I regret not talking with Paul about his time working at the Smithsonian and his other early experiences in the reptile world, not to mention the start-up of Terrafauna. We'll have to get together again some other time so I can learn more about Paul's reptile history.

It was a great show and I could go on, but it's time to end this blog. Congratulations to Ramy for putting together a great event. And don't forget to come back Friday to check out our new contest referred to earlier.

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