

2009: The Year of Snake Persecution

Will snakes fare any better in 2010?

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What does 2010 hold for the Burmese python?

Any reptile enthusiast looking back on 2009 will surely consider it a stressful year for the reptile industry. For me, because of the various bills that seemed to pop up like weeds – most recently, S. 373 – 2009 will be remembered as the Year of Snake Persecution. Burmese pythons are at the forefront of the persecution efforts, with boa constrictors, reticulated pythons, anacondas and others taking hits, too. The goal of the bills is to get these snakes listed as injurious species under the Lacey Act, which would make it illegal to import or export them, or to take them across U.S. state lines. Whether they would be illegal to own depends on the laws of the state in which you live.

I've seen postings on the REPTILES Facebook Wall (become a Facebook Fan at Facebook.com/ReptilesMagazine) asking what the latest is with S. 373, wondering if it was dead or not. It is not dead! Now that the bill has passed committee it next needs to be voted on by the full Senate and the House of Representatives. It can't become a law until after that, and there is no set date for this to occur. Andrew Wyatt, President of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK), stated in his most recent blog that this could occur in mid-January.

There is a "Kill S. 373" letter-writing campaign underway right now, and if you want to preserve your and others' freedom to keep some popular pet snakes, you should join it. It's not hard and doesn't have to take more than several minutes of your time. Go to www.Kill-S373.com for details.

A new reptile expo cropped up due in large part to S. 373. Bob Ashley and Brian Potter, the guys behind the exemplary NARBC reptile shows (which are held in Anaheim, Calif., Tinley Park, Ill., and Arlington, Texas), are holding a special show in Tinley Park on February 13 and 14 to raise money for PIJAC (Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council) and USARK. Both organizations have done much to keep reptile people informed of the various political efforts that could affect our hobby and industry, and they have spearheaded efforts on battling unjust bills such as S. 373. A summit of industry professionals will be held concurrently with the show, to discuss the matters I'm touching on in this blog.

It was a tough financial year for the entire country, and those in the reptile business felt it. Sadly, some people closed up shop. The good news is that the 2009 shows I attended (including those in Daytona, San Diego and Toronto) appeared to be crowded with potential customers and vendors. Hopefully the vendors were benefitting from all the foot traffic, and were selling plenty of animals and merchandise. Most of the ones I spoke with told me they did pretty well at the shows. This Saturday I'll be attending the Reptile Super Show in Pomona, Calif. I'm curious to see if it will be crowded with people itching to kick off their 2010 reptile-buying activities. I hope so! It will be the first show of the year for me, and hopefully many attendees.

Do what you can to help the reptile industry. Send letters to senators when called upon to do so (the deadline for the above-mentioned letter-writing campaign is January 12). Buy new reptiles, but still be sure to do your research beforehand so you know how to care for them. Never release unwanted captives into the wild. Patronize pet shops and reptile expos. The admission fee to a reptile expo is never much, and there are not only tons of cool herps for sale at expos, but you also get access to reptile breeders who are the experts. Attending a show gives you a chance to pick their brains.

I'm trying to be cautiously optimistic about 2010 in regard to the reptile industry. Luckily, reptile people are willing to fight for their hobby. They've done it before and are being called upon to do it again with this latest letter-writing campaign. Together we can ensure that this great hobby remains viable for many generations to come, despite the efforts of the anti-reptilekeeping contingent.

Now, if you haven't already, it's time to write those letters!

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