

A GOOD WAY TO SPEND A HURRICANE

IIS member and Everglades Herpetological Society President, Joe Wasilewski spent the night of Hurricane Andrew in a Tamiami Airport warehouse with 350 snakes, 1,000 mice, and several dozen iguanas, monitors, toucans and alligators. As sections of the roof ripped off and windows broke, Joe scrambled to protect his companions, helped by his ten year old son, Nicholas. The warehouse survived the storm with several inches of water on the floor.

Immediately after the hurricane, the iguanas engaged in intense breeding activity. The snakes were also extremely active. The snakes "were frisky," said Wasilewski "its the wrong time of the year for breeding, but I honestly believed if I put them together, they would have tried something." Green iguanas normally breed in February, March, and April in South Florida.

Joe believes falling barometric pressure unleashed the reptiles libidos. The air pressure dropped from near 30 inches to well below 28 in a

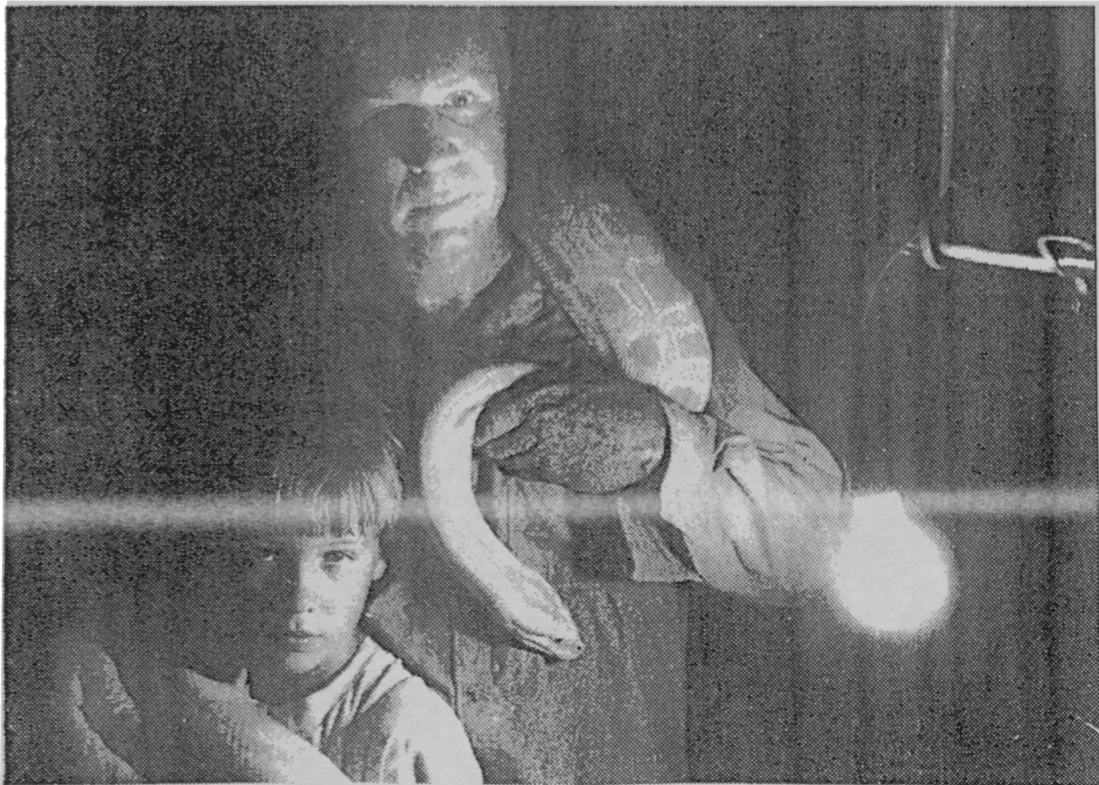
short time. Ray Ashton, author of three field guides on Florida, amphibians and reptiles, agreed with Wasilewski's conclusions.

Ashton said "Activities of some native snakes and lizards increases considerably as barometric pressure drops below 29.9 inches and is falling." An Everglades Herpetological member also reported to Joe that her Savanna monitors also bred after Andrew, four months earlier than usual.

The Galapagos tortoises at the heavily damaged Miami Metrozoo also mated after the storm, perhaps further evidence of storm-induced breeding activity.

Heavily damaged trees and shrubs also produced some out of season flowers in the recently sunny landscapes of southern Dade County. Are these all evolutionary responses to the destructive effects of hurricanes? We hope readers will inform us of other phenomena experienced during tropical storms.

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WILD: Right after the storm, pythons like this one, pictured with Joe Wasilewski and son Nicholas, became uncommonly frisky.