



SHE Stopped To Listen

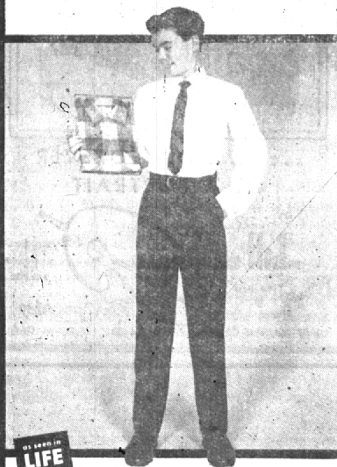
To hear them all buzzing about
the exciting new permanents be-
ing created by

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NATURE NOW

Snakes' Dining Habits Unique

By **LYDIA KING FRESH**
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

This morning I watched a garter snake swallow a frog.
Since this tasty meal was three or four times as large as
the mouth which engulfed it more than an hour elapsed un-
til the victim disappeared completely, only to reappear as a
large bump distending the normal circumference of the
snake.

All snakes live wholly on ani-
mal food which they presumably
locate by sight or smell. They pre-
fer to take animals alive although
there are instances where the gar-
ter snake has eaten carrion or or-
ganisms that have been recently
killed.

The constric-
tor snakes kill their prey just
before eating it and rattlers can
poison their victims in the same
way that they can kill a human
being.

Whereas we
are taught ear-
ly to "chew
our food," a baby snake's slogan
is "swallow it whole." It knows in-
stinctively that its food never
needs to be chewed. It disinte-
grates in the stomach under the
action of powerful digestive acids.
As with all creatures, the struc-
ture of this reptile is perfectly
adapted to meet its feeding needs.
The jaws joined together by
plastic ligaments, can be "unhinged"
at the time of swallowing and the
muscular mouth can be greatly
extended. The teeth slaps back-
ward enabling the snake to grasp
its prey securely.

AS I WATCHED the slow swal-
lowing process I could see the
shifting action of the upper and
lower jaws. They moved in a kind
of walking action—the frog being
engulfed first from one side and
then the other. This action was
repeated over and over.

What happens is that the snake
is actually pulling itself over its
food and as you put a pillow over
a pillow by alternately slipping
it on, working from one side
so the other.

While the swallowing process is
going on the tongue which is not
a "tasting" but a "smelling" or-

gan, is retracted into its sheath
in the floor of the mouth.

During its hour-long meal the
snake had to stop at regular in-
tervals to breathe. This it accom-
plished by pushing the cartilagi-
nous glottis out between the frog
and the floor of the mouth. After
"breathing" it disappeared and
the swallowing was resumed.

As the frog was engulfed the
snake's head lost its usual out-
lines. The skin of the neck
stretched so much that the scales
which usually overlap be-
came widely separated. When the frog
was almost swallowed the muscles
of the neck and body gradually
forced it along until it reached
the stomach.

FINALLY the body resumed its
natural shape except for an ex-
tended "lump" and the snake crawled
back to the swamp to look
for another frog.

Of course no animal eats on a
"regular" schedule. I have seen
many snakes with several "lumps"
showing that they had taken three
or four successive meals. Con-
ditions in the wild must take full
advantage of a food supply when
it is available. Snakes especially
gorge themselves and then if nec-
essary can go without food for
long periods.

Naturally snakes can eat faster
and more efficiently if they choose
prey of moderate dimensions.

However, swallowings have been
reported which have lasted as
much as five hours. On the other
hand if the victim is too small it
may come up again.

THE GARTER snakes (Tham-
nophis) are the most common
snakes in Michigan. We have three
varieties, the common garter, But-
ler's garter and the ribbon snake.

Of these the former is the large-
est, attaining a length of three
feet. Not only are all perfectly
harmless to man, but their fond-
ness for insects makes them gen-
erally beneficial around farms and
gardens. In addition to frogs they
also eat such animals as toads,
salamanders and small mammals.
Garters are related to the wa-
ter snakes. They are generally ter-
restrial in their habits although
they are agile swimmers. Snakes
of this genus are born alive in
contrast to the egg-laying species
and all are able to fend for them-
selves at birth.

With the advent of autumn,
snakes soon become lazy and
their period of activity will be con-
fined to a few hours of hunting and
hacking in the brief warmth of the
noontime sun.

However, the garter is one of
the last to retreat to its hiberna-
tion quarters in rock crevices.

Monticello Beginner

Monticello college in Alton, Ill.,
announces the enrollment of Miss
Marilyn Neff who will begin her
first year of study there this fall.
Known to her friends as "Mimi,"
Miss Neff was graduated from
Birmingham high school this year.
She is the daughter of Mrs. M.
Parsons Neff, 2252 Yorkshire.

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Kirk Is Ready For Third Annual Outdoor Art Show

in burrows in the ground or under
buildings.
His kind will also be the first
to appear in the spring. I have
often seen a garter in late March
curled up on a sunny slope while
snow still lingered in the hollows.

SO MUCH FOR the garter snake
who has just had a satisfying
meal. But what of the hapless
frog?

Naturalist Alan Devos whose
sense of kinship with animals is
particularly keen, writes frequently
of their reaction to pain.
Says he, "A rabbit living in its
rabbit world does not know what
death is; it cannot look forward
to pain. . . . It cannot worry. . . .
Not if in the dying one does not
know it has a self to lose."

This does not say that animals
do not feel pain. It does say that
the frog in his dim amphibian
awareness does not share our hu-
man worries of self-concern, nor
can he know our agony of ap-
prehension.

Described as one of the biggest
artistic events of the area and the
only one of its kind in the country,
the annual outdoor Art Festival
sponsored by the Kirk-in-the-Hills
Presbyterian church is scheduled for
Sept. 8-11 on the church
grounds. The show will be open
daily from 1 to 7:30 p.m.

This is the Kirk's third year
of sponsorship for the event which
attracts artists from the entire
country, Canada and Mexico.

A SPECIAL crafts section is be-
ing introduced this year. Ceramics,
silver work, wrought iron, metal-
work, jewelry, fabrics and furni-
ture will be shown.

The festival will be a non-jury
exhibition, open to amateur and
professional artists. A total of
\$3,000 is offered for outstanding
work.

Speaking for the committee, the
Rev. Harold C. DeWindt, D.D., said
the current show promises to be
the best yet scheduled, and extend-
ed an open invitation to all to at-
tend.

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