

ROATÁN - A RETURN TO MICROSCOPY

February 1, 2023

It started out as a quiet evening. I was at my computer in the soon-to-be home microscopy laboratory and business office and my lovely wife, Bri, was in the bedroom feeding the cats. We had already covered Geronimo and Kikuyu, our Macaw and 30-year-old African Grey respectively, in their cages on the outer deck and our Cockatoo, Baby, was comfortably under cover in the living room. While Bri was tucking in our Dobermans, we both heard it at the same time. A very short quick squawk from one of the bird cages on the deck unlike any we had ever heard, not particularly loud but the sound triggered an urgency in both my wife and me. I sprang for the door as Bri came running and called out, "Did you hear that?". As I grabbed a flashlight, I replied, "Yeah, it came from one of the bird cages" and we hit the deck together.

We immediately lifted the cage covers and saw Kikuyu still on the perch completely enveloped in two coils of a Columbian Red Tail Boa. I was devastated, my heart got heavy and I muttered "Oh no!" as my wife simultaneously delivered a determined "Oh *hell* NO!!!", reached into the cage, snatched the Boa right behind the head, gave an expert twist to unwind the coils and as Kikuyu fell to the bottom of the cage she pulled about a foot and a half of the snake out and used the door to help hold it. Then to my surprise and relief, Kikuyu got up, stumbled once and then casually walked to the corner of the cage to await further developments.

It was a standoff at this point. Bri, with an adrenalin grip and helping to hold it with the door, the rest of the snake in the cage and Kikuyu in the corner. I turned to the professional in the room and asked as pleasantly as I could "Sweetie, waddaya wanna do?". She said "Get a knife!!" (a phrase I am familiar with if you substitute an "L" for the "kn"). I quickly retrieved a very very sharp blade and when I got back, I could see Bri was winning this tug of war. I should mention that both Bri and I have a strict no kill policy except where each other or our pets are threatened and where this situation was definitely the latter, she correctly assessed that it was under control and lethal force was not required. She asked me to get the tail unwound from the perch without letting the bird out. I was able to accomplish that in short order, handed the rest of the Boa to my wife and got a pillow case.

Bri now had the neck/head in her right hand, the tail in her left with her arms spread as far as she could. Bri looked at me and said "She is an absolutely beautiful specimen!" as we placed it in the pillow case and secured it. The Boa was about 5 ½ to 6 ½ ft (It's hard to accurately measure the length of a live snake) and about three inches in diameter at the widest. How it got thru the 1" spacing of the cage bars still amazes me. Kikuyu, (unlike his owners) I am happy to say, appears to be physically and emotionally unscathed, talks and sings as normal and is not plucking feathers.

Other than that, it was an average evening, we brought the birds into the house and left the snake on the deck because it was hissing so loud. We retired to bed and the next morning

relocated the serpent to the next hill over, down by where the crocodiles sun themselves. Welcome to our retirement in Roatán!

Now, let me reintroduce myself and briefly (I hope) put the above into context.

My name is G Joseph Wilhelm. I smoke cigars, I know stuff, have a charming personality and am occasionally wrong. Ten or so years ago, I wrote a series of articles for Microscopy UK about my initial foray into microscopy titled "The Novitiate's Odyssey". The world-wide acclaim these articles received is virtually undetectable. Last year my wife and I retired and moved from the Florida Keys to the island of Roatán, located about 40 miles north off the coast of Honduras. This course of action for someone over seventy is not recommended for any remotely sane individual. But, never having been accused of being in such a mental state, it fit us perfectly.

I stopped writing because of the work pace. Up at 3:30 am, drive thirty miles, home by 5:00 pm and in bed by 9:00. Precious little time left over to spend with my wife and much less to pursue my hobby. In Sept 2017 Hurricane Irma set our departure in motion, but not for a few years. The work pace was crazy. The Keys food prices had always been nearly current inflation prices. Taxes, water, electricity, gas, insurance and now a sewage fee were up. We simply could not afford to retire in the Keys. All of Florida was getting a little nuts economically. The major shift in the economic tide starting two years ago put it over the top for us. The only silver lining was the real estate prices were up - way up, including ours.

We learned of Roatán from a former landscape client of Bri's and spent the next two years looking, purchasing and moving here. So how does all this tie into Microscopy? See #1 below.

We have now been here a year and here is the literary itinerary:

1. Chronicle the setup of our lab not only for hobby microscopy, but to also support our landscaping business, to identify entomological pests and any other garden invasive malady, veterinary observations etc. I have some 42 dry boxes of lab gear including 18 contemporary working and display antique microscopes. Boxes of accessories, glassware and miscellaneous equipment and projects I forgot I even had. I opened one of these the other day and was pleasantly surprised. If this is Alzheimer's it's not so bad. There is a very rich biological environment just outside our front door. Numerous flora and critters I've never seen before to be identified and documented. Lots to do here now that I have the time.
2. I may start a web site to chronicle a lifetime of interesting escapades that led to experience that I got immediately after needing it. Also, since retirement, I have had time to philosophize and I pretty much think I have the universe and human existence figured out and I want to get that out there and discuss it with Mol Smith. The whole Roatán move and associated riveting drama (not kidding here) will be told in living color and surround sound. Bring your own popcorn. I may even write a book.

Let me show you around the place before I close



I daresay, even without a definitive study, if you took a thousand of your female acquaintances, it would be significantly less than one percent whose immediate actionable instinct when confronted by a central American Boa about to feed is to grab it by the neck. This is my less than one percent wife, Bri. She is known as “The snake lady” among the kids from our Keys neighborhood as they came to fetch her upon discovery of any suspected reptile. The picture is a little dated but it is my favorite. There is a story of a pet shop Boa getting attached to her lip but that’s for another episode. Best wife ever!!



This is not the snake from the bird cage but another bigger one about 6 ½ to 7 feet and a conservative 6 inches at the widest. We got this guy about four days later while our helper Juan was cutting brush.



This is the western section of our property as viewed from the bedroom window with Bri looking over one of the Plantain/Banana groves on the property.



This is our security system, Bacall on the left and Legend who is basically a nose with a dog attached. Bri says if we do get intruders in the house we should just shine a laser beam on their face and let the cats take care of it.



And finally, this is our autonomous lawn mower, composter and fertilizer spreader. She runs on bio-fuel and is self-replicating. Her name is Chamaca and she has one in the oven. Gotta run. More to come. Are there any other hobby microscopists on Roatán? If so, anyone may contact me at gwilhelm@metsonmarine.com

Cheers,
Joseph

Published in the February issue of *Micscape* magazine.
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