

# Ecology students rescue two trapped snakes from doom

*Teen's sharp eye saves the day during 'Living Clean and Green' classes*

The day seemed ordinary enough: we were conducting outdoor classes at the Turkey Creek Wetland with Debbie Fraser's ecology students from Farragut High School.

I was there as part of Ijams, "Living Clean & Green," a series of urban environmental programs.

It was a guided nature walk; the topic of the day was the role of wetlands in our environment. Part of our mission was to find and identify the various plants and animals that live in wet places.

On a grassy hill that overlooks a retention pond one of the early groups found a snake, a black racer, down in the grass. Instead of being glossy black it was slightly milky, a sign that the reptile was preparing to shed its skin.

Snakes are usually quite lethargic while this is happening because their outer skin is so tight they have trouble moving quickly. We observed it from a distance and moved on.

Roughly 90 minutes later we passed the same spot with another group and the snake was still there. Again, thinking the reptile was immobile, working on separating its old outer skin from its new inner one, I kept the students back so that they could view it from a safe distance. Yet, one of the teenagers, Kirk Ruoff, proved to have a sharper eye than I.

The snake was indeed about to shed its skin but it had also entangled itself in green, fine-meshed plastic landscape netting put down to hold the straw and seeds in place until the grass grew.

The thick grass obscured the old netting hidden underneath. The black racer was completely trapped, not unwilling to move but unable to do so. In the hot afternoon sun, the snake would surely have died. An animal rescue was in order.

While I gently held the snake's head in place (a frightened snake will certainly bite), Angela Danovi of the CAC AmeriCorps Water Team used a car key to saw away the green netting. It took several minutes but, in time, the dehydrated reptile was freed.

Here's the shocker. As we walked away, the students soon discovered a second racer in exactly the same predicament only about 10 feet from the site of the first. We repeated the same delicate operation and freed the second victim.

The netting had cut into the flesh of both snakes. They had open wounds, so I took them to UT's Veterinary Hospital for a closer exam and perhaps some antibiotics.



**Stephen Lyn Bales**

*Neighborhood Naturalist*



Both snakes are doing fine and will recover from their injuries. They'll be released back into the wild somewhere a long way from people and plastic landscape netting.

Now some may ask, "Why waste time saving the life of a snake?" In truth, snakes are not here to hurt people. Their role in the environment is to help keep the mice, mole, vole and shrew population within workable limits. If you have a snake in your yard, it's only working to keep mice out of your house.

And that's a pretty fair trade.

Thanks Debbie and all your ecology students. Special thanks to Kirk.

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**Susan Webb & Krist**  
*A new name with new*