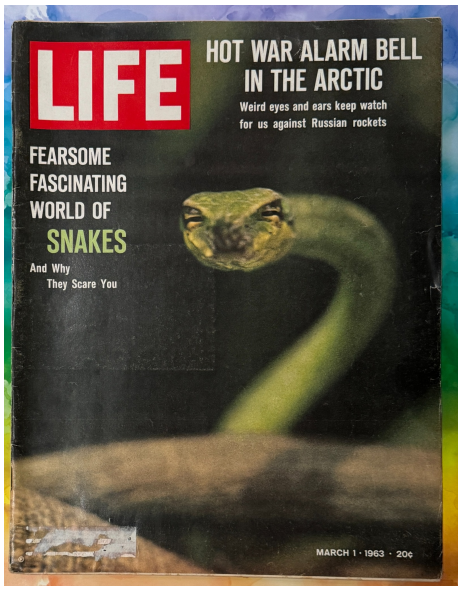
LIFE

Magazine Research Record



Volume 54, Number 9, March 1, 1963. Snake feature photographed by Nina Leen.

Publication Identification

Field	Information
Country	United States
Publisher	Time Inc.
Publisher address	Pending research update
Magazine title	LIFE
Publication status	Historical weekly print edition; ceased in its original weekly form (final issue date not established by the supplied materials)
Publication run	The issue represented is Vol. 54, No. 9, March 1, 1963. Complete historical run is not established by this record
Editor	George P. Hunt, Managing Editor, credited in the supplied Editors' Note
Printer	Pending research update
ISSN	Pending research update
Language	English
Publication type	General interest news, photography, culture, and current affairs magazine
Frequency	Weekly
Collection coverage	Volume 54, Number 9, March 1, 1963
Earliest issue represented	Volume 54, Number 9, March 1, 1963
Latest issue represented	Volume 54, Number 9, March 1, 1963
Year represented in the collection	1963
Issue	Vol. 54, No. 9, March 1, 1963
Cover price	20¢

Preservation Significance

The March 1, 1963 issue of LIFE has preservation significance because it documents how one of the most influential American picture magazines combined serious nature photography with a deliberately fear oriented presentation of snakes. The cover language, "FEARSOME FASCINATING WORLD OF SNAKES: And Why They Scare You," openly uses fear as part of the appeal, while the interior material reveals a more nuanced mixture of admiration, scientific interest, danger, and spectacle. Preserving the complete issue allows those two messages to be studied together. It provides physical evidence of how snakes have long been used to attract and unsettle readers, helping explain how popular media can feed persistent, often unjustified fear even when the underlying animals are not necessarily being factually misrepresented.

The additional interior evidence makes the contrast especially valuable. Although the cover emphasizes why snakes frighten people, the Editors' Note records Nina Leen's admiration for their beauty and grace, and the opening feature acknowledges both the hostility snakes encounter from humans and their ability to live near people without attracting notice. Taken together, the cover, editorial commentary, and natural history feature document a tension between the fear used to attract readers and the more sympathetic information presented within the same issue.

Publication Metadata and Masthead Documentation

Field	Information
Masthead identification	LIFE, Volume 54, Number 9, March 1, 1963
Publisher	Time Inc.
Managing Editor	George P. Hunt
Interior article	Strange World of Snakes, beginning on page 37
Photographer	Nina Leen
Editors' Note	A Snake Charmer with a Camera
Cover price	20¢
Publication frequency	Weekly, as printed in the supplied contents and masthead image

International Distribution

The supplied contents and masthead page includes United States and Canadian subscription information. No comprehensive international distributor list has been established from the supplied materials.

Issues Represented in the Collection

Field	Information
Volume 54, Number 9	March 1, 1963. Cover feature: "FEARSOME FASCINATING WORLD OF SNAKES: And Why They Scare You." Interior feature: "Strange World of Snakes," photographed by Nina Leen.

Issue Metadata

Field	Information
Cover feature	"FEARSOME FASCINATING WORLD OF SNAKES: And Why They Scare You"
Interior feature	"Strange World of Snakes," photographed for LIFE by Nina Leen
Editors' Note	"A Snake Charmer with a Camera"
Photographer	Nina Leen
Visual treatment	The cover isolates a snake against a dark background with its head raised toward the viewer. The opening feature uses an extreme close view of a snake's face beneath the heading "SNAKES."
Editors' Note location	Page 3
Editors' Note signed by	George P. Hunt, Managing Editor
Interior feature begins	Page 37
Issue designation in interior	Volume 54, Number 9, March 1, 1963

How Snakes Are Presented

LIFE makes the fear element explicit. The cover calls snakes "fearsome" as well as "fascinating" and promises to explain "why they scare you." The photography is striking and the article contains genuine natural history, but the editorial presentation deliberately draws upon fear. The cover snake is isolated in darkness and aimed toward the reader, while the opening spread uses an extreme close view of a snake's face. The article itself begins by referring to the "mystery, fascination and horror" of the snake's face. At the same time, the editors' note shows that photographer Nina Leen admired snakes and described one as beautiful and graceful. The issue therefore contains both fascination and fear, rather than being simply anti snake.

The opening feature identifies humans as a major enemy of snakes and describes efforts to eliminate them. It also reports a Chicago study in which approximately 400 snakes representing three species were found on an area of about three acres without drawing public attention. These figures are preserved as claims made in LIFE's 1963 reporting, not as independently verified research findings. They introduce an important counterpoint to the cover: snakes can live alongside people without the conspicuous danger suggested by dramatic imagery.

Purposeful Fear and Public Perception

This issue is a strong example of how snakes can be accurately photographed and seriously discussed while still being purposefully framed as frightening. LIFE did not need to invent a monster. Editorial wording, image selection, cropping, lighting, and the snake's orientation toward the viewer were enough to turn a natural history subject into a dramatic and threatening cover. Repeated portrayals of this kind can contribute to unjustified fear of snakes because the emotional message reaches the reader before the more nuanced information inside the magazine does.

The interior evidence also reveals the distinction between photographic observation and editorial presentation. The Editors' Note describes Nina Leen's extended work photographing snakes, her preference for photographing them outside their cages, and the precautions surrounding a spitting cobra photograph. Her expressed appreciation of snakes as beautiful and graceful suggests a more admiring photographic perspective than the cover's fear-centered wording. The contrast helps explain how selection, captions, and page design can shape the public meaning of otherwise authentic wildlife photography.

Collection / Bibliographic Notes

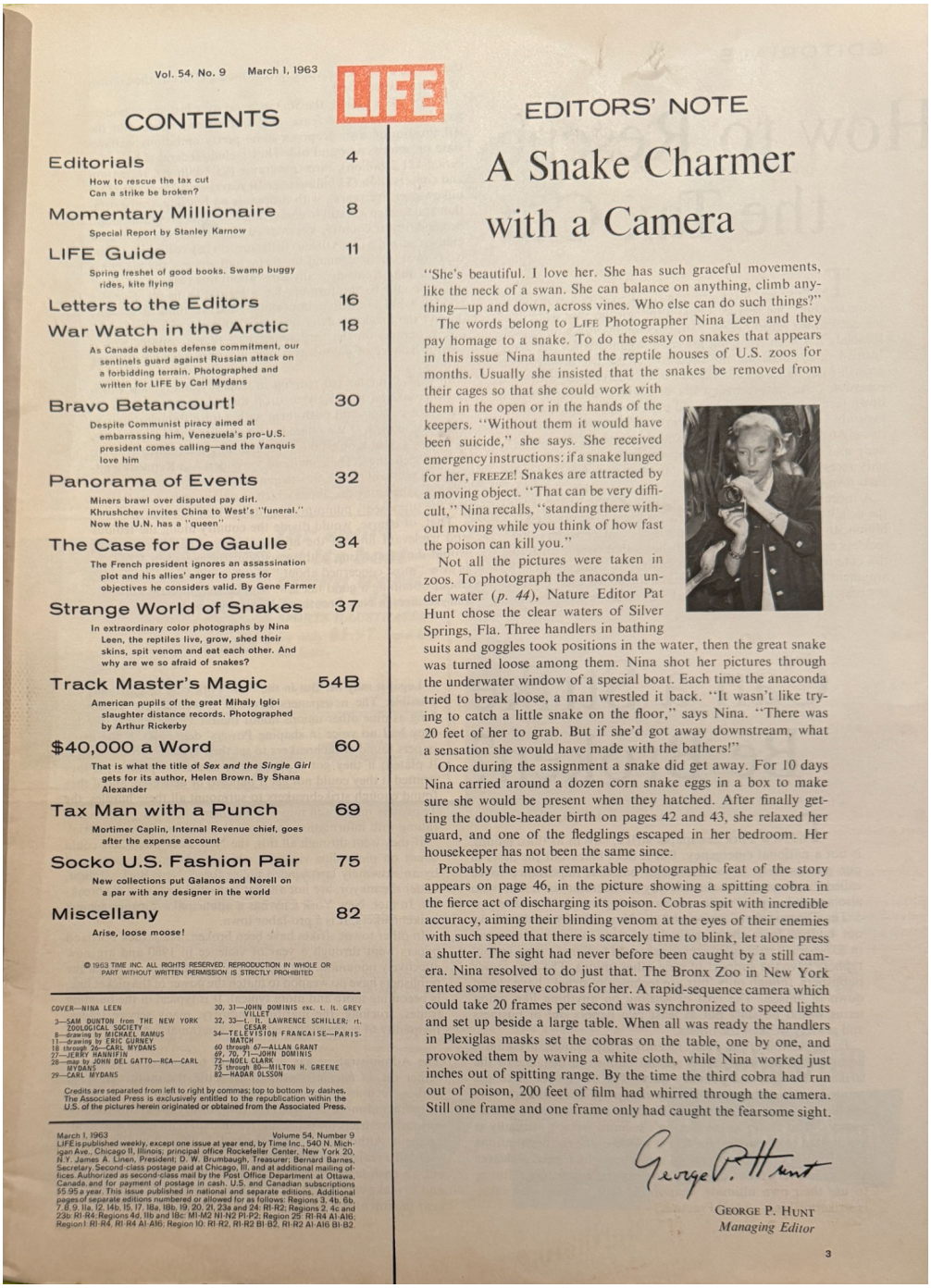
The photographed contents page identifies "Strange World of Snakes" beginning on page 37 and credits Nina Leen. The editors' note, "A Snake Charmer with a Camera," discusses the circumstances under which Leen photographed snakes in zoos and describes the difficulty of photographing a spitting cobra. These interior pages are particularly valuable because they allow the cover's fear based presentation to be compared with the more complicated attitude toward snakes expressed inside the issue.

The Editors' Note, "A Snake Charmer with a Camera," appears on page 3 and is signed by Managing Editor George P. Hunt. It records Leen's months of snake photography, work in zoo settings, her preference for photographing snakes outside cages, and the special difficulties of photographing a spitting cobra. The opening feature begins on page 37. The issue is identified in its contents and publishing information as LIFE, Volume 54, Number 9, March 1, 1963.

Verification Notes

The date, volume and issue number, cover price, cover language, contents information, editors' note, and interior presentation described here are taken directly from the photographed physical copy.

Visual Evidence



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LIFE

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COVER—NINA LEEN
3—SAM DUNTON from THE NEW YORK ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY
8—drawing by MICHAEL RAMUS
11—drawing by ERIC GURNEY
18 through 26—CARL MYDANS
27—JERRY HANNIFIN
28—map by JOHN DEL GATTO—RCA—CARL MYDANS
29—CARL MYDANS
30, 31—JOHN DOMINIS exc. t. lt. GREY VILLET
32, 33—t. lt. LAWRENCE SCHILLER; rt. CESAR
34—TELEVISION FRANCAISE—PARIS-MATCH
60 through 67—ALLAN GRANT
69, 70, 71—JOHN DOMINIS
72—NOEL CLARK
75 through 80—MILTON H. GREENE
82—HAAR OLSSON

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March 1, 1963 Volume 54, Number 9
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EDITORS' NOTE

A Snake Charmer with a Camera

"She's beautiful. I love her. She has such graceful movements, like the neck of a swan. She can balance on anything, climb anything—up and down, across vines. Who else can do such things?"

The words belong to LIFE Photographer Nina Leen and they pay homage to a snake. To do the essay on snakes that appears in this issue Nina haunted the reptile houses of U.S. zoos for months. Usually she insisted that the snakes be removed from their cages so that she could work with them in the open or in the hands of the keepers. "Without them it would have been suicide," she says. She received emergency instructions: if a snake lunged for her, FREEZE! Snakes are attracted by a moving object. "That can be very difficult," Nina recalls, "standing there without moving while you think of how fast the poison can kill you."

Not all the pictures were taken in zoos. To photograph the anaconda under water (*p. 44*), Nature Editor Pat Hunt chose the clear waters of Silver Springs, Fla. Three handlers in bathing suits and goggles took positions in the water, then the great snake was turned loose among them. Nina shot her pictures through the underwater window of a special boat. Each time the anaconda tried to break loose, a man wrestled it back. "It wasn't like trying to catch a little snake on the floor," says Nina. "There was 20 feet of her to grab. But if she'd got away downstream, what a sensation she would have made with the bathers!"

Once during the assignment a snake did get away. For 10 days Nina carried around a dozen corn snake eggs in a box to make sure she would be present when they hatched. After finally getting the double-header birth on pages 42 and 43, she relaxed her guard, and one of the fledglings escaped in her bedroom. Her housekeeper has not been the same since.

Probably the most remarkable photographic feat of the story appears on page 46, in the picture showing a spitting cobra in the fierce act of discharging its poison. Cobras spit with incredible accuracy, aiming their blinding venom at the eyes of their enemies with such speed that there is scarcely time to blink, let alone press a shutter. The sight had never before been caught by a still camera. Nina resolved to do just that. The Bronx Zoo in New York rented some reserve cobras for her. A rapid-sequence camera which could take 20 frames per second was synchronized to speed lights and set up beside a large table. When all was ready the handlers in Plexiglas masks set the cobras on the table, one by one, and provoked them by waving a white cloth, while Nina worked just inches out of spitting range. By the time the third cobra had run out of poison, 200 feet of film had whirred through the camera. Still one frame and one frame only had caught the fearsome sight.

George P. Hunt

GEORGE P. HUNT
Managing Editor

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LIFE presents an extraordinary nature story



SNAKES

The mystery, fascination and horror of the snake's fearsome face—the hypnotic eyes and implacable mouth—have inspired myths, religions, literature and legend. In the 100 million years since it evolved from the lizard, the snake has been credited with bizarre powers: the ability to heal, to bewitch, to suck milk from cows, to flail enemies with its tail, to roll into a hoop and pursue prey at the speed of a cheetah, to swallow its young and disgorge them when danger passes.

The snake can do none of these things. But among its 3,000 species—a few of which are shown here in unique and striking photographs—are some amazing and dissimilar cousins: the bamboo viper of Formosa (*above*) whose huge red eyes protrude from its head like almonds, the Siamese swamp snake which lives continually under water, the African spitting cobra which shoots venom at its molester's eyes.

Man is the snake's major enemy. But despite determined attempts to eradicate it, the snake keeps a stubborn hold on its old terrain. In one recent study 400 snakes of three species were found living in peaceful anonymity on three acres within Chicago's city limits.

Photographed for LIFE by NINA LEEN

CONTINUED

Opening page of "Strange World of Snakes," photographed for LIFE by Nina Leen.