Boyhood pets become
Klieberts' livelihood

BY JULIE LOH
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WADESBORO, N.C. (AP) — When Harvey Kliebert and his brother Bob were adventurous boys, there was nothing they liked better than to go fishing and frogging and trapping mice in nearby Marchton Creek.

"Occasionally they came across a baby alligator stuck in a tree and tossed it in the pond behind their house. They liked alligators. They still like alligators. It's a good thing.

Now, about 30 years later, they have 100 alligators. They have dug three more big ponds for them, one of them a 4-acre swamp crawling with the beasts.

They have built big concrete pens for alligators and are building more pens because they don't know what to do with all the alligators they have.

They are up to their hip pockets in alligators.

The government," Harvey Kliebert said ruefully, "closed down the hole business for so long there's not much else you can do with alligators except raise them. It's no longer a good business.

"I don't know what we're going to do. Just keep building more ponds and pens for them. Walking around the Kliebert alligator haven — on the other side of the fence, that is — hopping remarklessly at every strange noise — walking with the Klieberts, listening to Harvey and his son Mike talking kindly about those monstrous creatures, watching them pick up a baby alligator and stroke its belly, you get the impression they really don't want to get rid of any alligators ever after.

Their main business is raising turtles. All the alligators are a sideline anyhow. Turtles are fascinating enough.

"Turtles are laying now. They start in April and will go about three months. We get between 200,000 and 700,000 eggs and hatches about 25 percent of them or more.

"We're working about 10 or 11 hours a day digging turtle eggs. They have to be washed, chemically treated to remove any disease, incubated. There's a lot that goes into producing that little pet you buy at the dime store.

"Digging turtle eggs.

"The turtle digs a hole in the ground with her tail, lays the eggs in the hole and covers it up. You're standing on a turtle nest. There's another. There's another.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing, on the dry bank of the pond indicated a turtle had buried eggs there.

Harvey Kliebert took up a pick and with much sweat in the hot-picked dirt

DAILY STAR
May 26, 1971

BOB Kliebert stacks dry eggs

Kliebert's son, Mike, 17, has made some observations too.

"An alligator will eat any damn thing. I saw one eat a beer can."