

## INTRODUCTION

**The World Congress of Herpetology and *Animal Conservation*: excerpts from the 6th World Congress**T. W. J. Garner<sup>1</sup>, J.-M. Hero<sup>2</sup>, R. Jehle<sup>3</sup>, F. Kraus<sup>4</sup>, E. Muths<sup>5</sup>, R. N. Reed<sup>5</sup>, R. C. Vogt<sup>6</sup> & W. Hödl<sup>7</sup>

1 Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London, London, NW1 4RY, UK

2 Environmental Futures Centre, School of Environment, Griffith University, Qld, Australia

3 School of Environment and Life Sciences, Centre for Environmental Systems and Wildlife Research, University of Salford, Salford, UK

4 Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI, USA

5 US Geological Survey, Fort Collins Science Center, Fort Collins, CO, USA

6 CPBA/INPA, Petropolis, Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil

7 Department of Evolutionary Biology, Universität Wien, Wien, Austria

**Correspondence**

T. W. J. Garner.

Email: trent.garner@ioz.ac.uk

doi:10.1111/j.1469-1795.2010.00408.x

The World Congress of Herpetology (WCH, <http://www.worldcongressofherpetology.org/>) is a relatively young organization as far as august herpetological societies go. It was formed in 1982, the year of the 25th meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (founded in 1958), which itself is a relative youngster when compared to organizations such as the American Society for Ichthyology and Herpetology (founded in 1913) or Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Herpetologie und Terrarienkunde e. V. (originally founded in 1918 under a different name). Despite its youth, the WCH has accomplished much during its relatively short existence. Arguably the greatest accomplishment of the WCH was to provide the venue at the first meeting of the Congress, held in 1989 at Canterbury, UK, where numerous amphibian biologists shared tales of enigmatic declines and disappearances of amphibian study species. Undoubtedly these exchanges sparked the formation of the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force, providing impetus for the establishment of IUCN's Global Amphibian Assessment. This assessment, along with other research, in turn confirmed that amphibians are declining at a global scale and are more threatened than any other vertebrate class comprehensively assessed to date (Houlahan *et al.*, 2000; Stuart *et al.*, 2004).

The WCH has adopted a non-confrontational role as a global representative of the science of herpetology. The organization takes in no membership fees, is only associated with a herpetological publication (*Herpetological Conservation* and *Biology*, an open access journal) rather than publishing one directly and seeks to avoid any form of competition with national or supranational herpetological societies. As such, the WCH exists to 'promote international interest, collaboration and co-operation in herpetology'. To date the WCH has held six international congresses (1989, Canterbury, UK; 1993, Adelaide, Australia; 1997, Prague, Czech Republic; 2001, Bentota, Sri Lanka; 2005, Stellen-

bosch, Republic of South Africa; 2008, Manaus, Brazil) and the next WCH, scheduled for 2012, will be held at Vancouver, Canada. This meeting will be held concurrently with the joint meetings of North America's three largest herpetological societies, ensuring the largest aggregation of herpetologists the world has ever seen.

The stated mission of the WCH is to 'promote herpetological research, education and conservation, by facilitating communication between individuals, societies and other organizations engaged in the study of amphibians and reptiles.' To do this, international congresses are held every 3–5 years, and these have consistently hosted a large number of symposia addressing various aspects of herpetological conservation. For example, one of six rooms of the 6-day, 5th World Congress was allocated to amphibian conservation, reptile conservation or a workshop on applying the principles of CITES. The numbers of sessions devoted to herpetological conservation are on the rise: 36% of the sessions at the 2008 meeting in Manaus dealt directly with the conservation of reptiles and amphibians and numerous talks in other sessions also dealt with conservation topics.

Due to the decision not to publish a societal journal, conveying the consistent academic contribution to herpetological conservation made by the WCH to the interested public has not been done. As a step to rectifying this, *Animal Conservation* is publishing in this special issue a selection of papers representing three of the conservation symposia: *Invasive reptiles and amphibians: Global perspectives and local solutions*, *Amphibian disease: where do we go from here?* and *Herpetology and conservation genetics*. All of these symposia have things in common: the primarily quantitative nature of the topics (making them suitable for publication in *Animal Conservation*), the current relevance of the topics for conservation and the use of general principles applied with an understanding of the biology and conservation needs of

amphibians and reptiles. Perhaps the most important issue highlighted by this supplement is the urgent need for conservation science to continue to assess where the issues lie in the world of herpetology and how to mitigate threats. A search of Web of Science (Science Citation Index Expanded) using the key words conservation and the primary vertebrate taxon, returned the following publication counts: amphibians 274, reptiles 157, birds 1367, mammals 680 and fish 549. These results suggest amphibians and reptiles are significantly under-researched in this respect. Encouragingly, there is evidence of a recent pulse of activity in herpetological conservation research: almost 90% of the amphibian research and over 80% of the reptile research revealed by our straw poll of Web

of Science was done in the past decade. Here's hoping the numbers continue to rise over the course of this decade.

## References

- Houlahan, J.E., Findlay, C.S., Schmidt, B.R., Meyer, A.H. & Kuzmin, S.L. (2000). Quantitative evidence for global amphibian declines. *Nature* **404**, 752–755.
- Stuart, S.N., Chanson, J.S., Cox, N.A., Young, B.E., Rodrigues, A.S.L., Fischman, D.L. & Waller, R.W. (2004). Status and trends of amphibian declines and extinctions worldwide. *Science* **306**, 1783–1786.