

EDITORIALS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

NON-PEER REVIEW SECTION

TWENTY-YEAR MILEPOST FOR HERPETOLOGICAL CONSERVATION AND BIOLOGY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, HCB

“Inception of a new journal in herpetology is a rare event. The first discussion of developing a journal with an emphasis on natural history and conservation occurred among a subset of us (McCallum, others), while at the 2005 joint annual meeting of the SSAR/HL/ASIH ...” (Bury et al. 2006)

This issue starts our 20th year of producing *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* (HCB). The journal has exceeded our initial goals and developed into a major international herpetological journal with strong conservation representation that is free of charge to both authors and readers. Here, we provide a brief review of this online journal. We recap some historical events and our level of productivity, and glance into the future.

Some of the initial questions for a new herpetological journal included: is there a need?; is there an audience?; and can we find support? We are happy to report there were positive responses for an outlet serving natural history, field ecology, and conservation studies, especially descriptive investigations and management case studies that appeared to lack a home or emphasis in other journals. During early planning, Richard Wassersug suggested that we consider an electronic platform, and we decided to attempt an online outlet, especially with no fees.

Our first issue (2006) was modest in size (67 pages in 10 articles, plus we reprinted two classics in herpetology). The issue included invited submissions from two icons of herpetology: Henry Fitch and Hobart Smith (Fitch 2006; Smith and Chiszar 2006). Production increased subsequently over several years to 40–80 articles/year (about 450–1,000 pages/year), a level where it remains today (Fig. 1). All told, in 19 y HCB has published 1,014 articles in 10,879 pages. These comprise almost entirely research articles, but we also released six monographs on diverse subjects: invasive species in Florida (2011), herpetofauna of south Florida (2015), bibliographies of anurans

(2013, 2018), and biology of monitor lizards (2013) and iguanas (2016).

Topics represented in the journal have been wide ranging, with the niche of HCB differing somewhat from other major herpetological journals because conservation is the focus of a large fraction of our articles (e.g., 51% in 2017–2018) and HCB does not publish articles on systematics or phylogeny (Bradford 2019). Research study locations have included numerous countries, with the U.S. most frequently represented (approximately 50%), followed by Canada, Argentina, and Mexico (Bradford 2019). More recently, we have published many articles of species in Brazil.

The impact factor for HCB was 0.8 in 2023 with a 5-year rank of 1.1 (Web of Science), which falls in the middle of the pack of herpetological journals of the world (Bradford 2019). The journal editors, however, have not sought a high impact factor because one of the intents in creating HCB was to provide an outlet for some material that lacks a home or emphasis in other journals (Bury et al. 2006). *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* publishes approximately 50% of the manuscripts it receives.

We are entirely a volunteer operation including handling the receipt of manuscripts, directing anonymous peer reviews, handling revisions, copy editing, and formatting papers into PDFs. We currently have a Section Leader or Co-Leaders for each major taxon, who rely on a relatively large body of Associate Editors and a few Assistant Editors. Service for the latter is usually 2–3 y but may extend longer. We view HCB as a community effort (e.g., over 260 peer reviews were done in 2024 alone). We

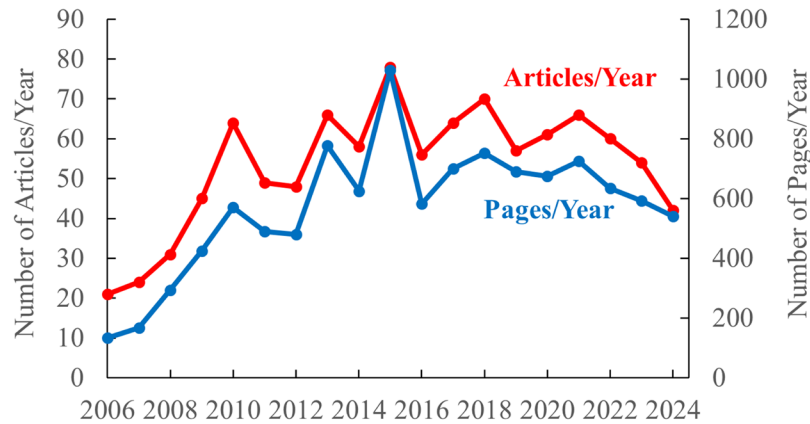


FIGURE 1. Production volumes of *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* over two decades.

continue to have peer reviews determining acceptance of manuscripts. In the last few years, we have blinded reviewers to author names and affiliations to minimize possible bias in reviews.

MILESTONES

Herpetological Conservation and Biology has many unique features and a varied history (e.g., compared to many other journals). Some highlights are below.

Structure.—Initially, *HCB* was created to be a guild and this pool served as most of our editors and copy editors (Appendix). We are not a professional society like the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, Herpetologists' League, or American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists that hold annual meetings, often at the Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (JMIH). Instead, *HCB* mostly operates online with communication via email plus occasional video conferences of the Board of Directors. *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* is run as a non-profit organization with the Board of Directors serving as officers to run the operation of the journal.

Albeit not planned, most of the Board were founders of *HCB*: Six of the current Board were earlier Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Special Section Editor, and Technical/Copy Editor; two were Associate Editors. The 2006 Steering Committee had 11 members with five now serving on the Board. In 2006, there were 13 Associate Editors. Three of these remain at *HCB*, all of which are on the Board. Many Associate or Assistant editors have been added over the years, and generally there has been low turnover

among them. We do, however, continue to look for Associate and Assistant editors to fill specific topic, geographic, or taxon needs.

Meetings.—The *HCB* Board holds meetings primarily online but has had several meetings in person. In 2006, it met in Henderson, Nevada, to explore options for the venture. In 2009 during the JMIH in Portland, Oregon, the Board met one evening and also hosted a social event at a local pub for *HCB* supporters. In 2013, we convened all day during the JMIH in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Unique model for publishing.—*Herpetological Conservation and Biology* was identified as a unique scientific publication by the Chronicle of Higher Education (Howard 2011). Unlike most journals, *HCB* is not tied to a publishing company (e.g., who do copy editing). This is a real cost saver but, on the other hand, our volunteers do these vital, often tedious tasks.

Non-profit status.—*Herpetological Conservation and Biology* became incorporated in 2014. In 2023, *HCB* registered as a non-profit endeavor in the State of Nevada. We are a 501(b) organization with elected officers (basically the current Board of Directors of *HCB*), a bank account, and annual reporting obligations. This now allows us to accept donations. We have no plans to solicit donations, but the operation requires some costs (so far, covered by Board members). In 2024, an anonymous donor provided *HCB* with a substantial amount for future needs.

Efforts to address accessibility and diversity.—In 2021, *HCB* established a committee to examine ways

to promote accessibility to authors and to improve diversity among editors as a way to effectively serve all of our constituencies: authors, reviewers, and editors (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee 2021). The committee has focused its efforts on trying to ensure that we provide a welcoming venue for researchers from varied backgrounds. These efforts contributed to the introduction of a blinded review process to better ensure fair reviews in 2022. We continue to work to find editors with diverse experiences and areas of expertise. We recognize that there are areas for improvement and will continue to look for ways to make the journal more accessible and fairer to anyone who needs a venue to publish high quality research within the scope of the journal.

OPEN QUESTIONS

The Board has discussed and voted on many measures. Several issues and questions remain open, including:

Affiliations.—Earlier, we were affiliated with Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) and World Congress of Herpetology (WCH). There are no affiliates today. We had a lively discussion about possibly merging with the Herpetologists' League in 2010, but that affiliation did not happen.

Revamp the Board of Directors.—The founding members created the current Board (seven members), which has had the same people for over a decade. We have considered expansion to include new blood and promoting diverse representation; however, it is difficult enough having folks available for teleconferences as it is, and we do not plan to expand the Board at this time. Because of advanced age of some of us, however, new Board members will be needed to continue our journal in the future.

Monographs.—Monographs are on hold because they require more time and effort to produce than what we can provide currently. We are considering a program to have authors set format and/or copy edit their own works.

CONCLUSION

We believe *HCB* has exceeded our initial goals. It has developed into a major herpetological journal and continues to be free of charge, albeit because

everyone involved has volunteered their time to make *HCB* a success. We have experienced growing pains at times, and on occasion, it has been challenging to meet deadlines (publishing three issues a year). Still, our enthusiasm remains high, and we enjoy the wide breadth of topics and taxa appearing in the issues. Part of our success, we believe, is that all Board members (half of which are also Section Editors) have been with *HCB* from the start of publication. The Board, along with various Section and Associate editors over the years, has been dedicated to publishing solid biological papers on topics that often are not covered or emphasized by the long-time established journals. Also, we think we have attracted many submissions from around the world because we publish strictly online (without charge to authors), but in the format of paper journals (volumes and sequentially paginated papers). To us, *HCB* has succeeded over time. In closing, we reiterate an earlier statement (Bury et al. 2006):

“Now that we have launched this e-journal, we wish to hear your comments and suggestions to improve it or the group.”

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APPENDIX.

Inside cover of Volume 1, Issue 1, showing many of the people involved in the early history of *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*.

Herpetological Conservation and Biology Editorial Board

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