

EDITORIALS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

NON-PEER REVIEW SECTION

DAWNING OF *HERPETOLOGICAL CONSERVATION AND BIOLOGY*: A SPECIAL WELCOME TO YOUR NEW JOURNAL

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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 in Tampa, Florida. Some of the initial questions we posed for a new herpetological journal were as follows: (1) is there a need; (2) audience; and (3) support? If any one of these did not exist, then the concept should be abandoned or modified. We critically examined these questions through discussions with many individuals and informal surveys performed on the Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) listserver (parc@listserv.uga.edu) and other forums. Early on, it was obvious to us that there was strong demand for an outlet serving natural history, field ecology and conservation studies, especially descriptive investigations and management case studies that appeared to lack a home in other journals. The road traveled since those discussions has been fast paced, culminating in this 2006 launch of *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* (HCB).

By September 2005, we concluded that the herpetological community had several outlets for publishing these kinds of manuscripts, but competition was keen for publication space. While the kernel of a new journal started germinating, we were unconvinced that launching a new printed journal was either possible or necessary. The initial journal committee was composed of Stan Trauth, Bruce Bury and Malcolm McCallum, with Richard Wassersug joining the effort in late September. We discussed the possibility of using traditional publishers for the journal and approached three for information.

By October 2005, six more members joined the advisory board: David Sever, Brian Miller, Raymond Saumure, Joe Mitchell, Jeff Humphries, and Mike Plummer. The founding members (N = 10) provided much of the initial concept formulation for the group and the journal. Two members (B. Miller and M. McCallum) volunteered to act as the first editorial staff. However, the method of publication remained a roadblock. We knew that financial difficulties hampered several other herpetology journals

(e.g., *Herpetological Natural History* was ceasing publication), and overcoming the inherent fiscal problems of publishing required a different tactic.

At this time, R. Wassersug suggested we consider an electronic platform, and he provided an example of a recent publication from *Nature*. We investigated electronic publishing and discovered that there were many high profile electronic journals being developed, and both the new generation of herpetologists and most established scientists were highly receptive to an online publication. A survey to the PARC listserver revealed overwhelming support for an electronic herpetological journal and several suggested that a number of hard (printed) copies should be generated and housed at academic institutions or high-profile museums. Also, it was clear that electronic publishing would provide us with a method of preventing manuscript backlogs, while remaining low cost.

In November, one of us (B. Bury) recommended making the journal open access (i.e., available online and free to authors). In December, we ran a series of surveys to determine if open access or page charges were desirable for funding a journal. Several respondents suggested that an e-journal could be inexpensive because the publishing costs are minimal (e.g., costs for data storage are low). Thus, the Advisory Board decided to focus on an open use journal with no costs to authors. We agreed not to request page charges or access fees for the electronic version.

From the outset, we wished to complement the existing printed journals in herpetology and conservation biology, of which we are strong supporters. For example, several of our "senior" editors have been members of *Herpetologica* for 5 decades and the *Journal of Herpetology* since its inception in 1968. Two of our editorial board members authored papers in *Journal of Herpetology* in its first year (Bury 1968; Stewart 1968). Many of those serving on our editorial board are members, editors or elected officials (now or earlier) of all the major herpetological journals. Our goal is to expand publication of worthy material on natural history, field ecology, conservation and management of amphibians and reptiles. These papers will appear in electronic format and, we trust, will not influence publication in other journals. We



FIGURE 1. Photograph of attendees at the first organizational meeting of *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*, Henderson, NV, on 2-3 June 2006. Left to right: Standing - Stan Trauth, Bruce Bury, Malcolm McCallum, Roger Luckenbach, Phil Medica, and Raymond Saumure; Sitting - Gwen Bury and Dave Germano. Photographed by Stan Trauth.

decided to welcome in-depth scientific articles (no news notes) as well as broader implications of studies on conservation and management issues. We opened the door for critical reviews (**Forum**) and well-thought-out reviews (**HerpSpectives**). These carve a niche somewhat different from other current publications. There is some overlap, but a little competition never hurt anyone. Still, our goals and electronic publication differ from most other outlets.

Further, we also determined that we will publish each issue of the journal as a single print volume at the end of each year. These will be available at or near production cost but our intent is to limit distribution to select university and museum libraries. This allows permanent storage of hard copies.

In December, David Germano and Erin Muths joined as Associate Editors. The journal Advisory Board exploded to 29 members in January 2006. Our email boxes quickly filled as members began actively brainstorming on various operating and logistical issues. We also developed a mock website that was eventually refined into our current site.

In February, several major organizational events defined our new path. Whit Gibbons joined the advisory board, and the total number of members was expanded to 36. He kindly forwarded the journal concept to the PARC Executive Board to encourage their support. We were asked to submit a formal proposal to PARC to cement a close tie of the groups. In March, PARC agreed to a teaming of PARC and *HCB*, which has proven mutually beneficial for both organizations. About this time, Raymond Saumure drafted the 'Instructions for Authors,' for *HCB* and the members provided input leading to the current version. We also began receiving inquiries about publishing in *HCB*, but we were not ready to accept manuscripts.

By April, we had 46 editorial members including Executive, Associate, Assistant and Advisory Editors. The large editorial staff was designed on purpose to minimize workloads on any one editor. Our goal for editorial staff is that the Associate Editors should handle no more than 15

manuscripts per year. As submission rates rise in the future, so will the number of editors.

We also established a new position of Assistant Editor, who we call an editor-in-training. These individuals have little prior editorial experience and are often beginning their professional scientific careers. They are assigned to senior editors who serve as their mentors. Our goal here was to cultivate strong editors for the future that can fill future staff vacancies and ensure the sustained health and growth of *HCB*. In about a year, we intend to reassess this position along with the other ones to ensure each is effective and of value to the journal and its supporters.

On 14 April 2006, we released our first call for papers, including posting on the PARC listserv. In the first 10 days, the website received >1000 visits from over 39 countries. Although most visitors were from the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, the number of inquiries from foreign countries was surprising. We quickly began receiving manuscripts, and the peer review process proceeded. We also invited submissions from Henry Fitch and Hobart Smith—two icons of herpetology—that we respect, and both accepted our offer. We point out that these two herpetologists were contributors to the first issue of the new journal *Herpetologica* (Smith 1936a, b; Fitch 1939a, b).

We held the first organizational meeting of *HCB* on 2-3 June 2006, at the USGS Field Office in Henderson, Nevada (organized by B. Bury and hosted by Phil Medica). The meeting was highly productive as the collective group (Fig. 1) made many unanimous decisions regarding journal workings and management (Table 1). Some topics were too complex to decide at the time and were tabled (e.g., having elected officials). Several attendees had known each other for decades while others had never met in person, although all the key members had corresponded many times via email. To encourage some comradeship (and interest in field ecology), we also took a late afternoon/evening field trip to the Kelso Dunes and vicinity in the eastern Mojave Desert, California. We enjoyed reminiscences and knowledge by Roger Luckenbach, who conducted surveys in the area in the 1970s (e.g.,

TABLE 1. List of measures, issues and policy decisions at the meeting of *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*, Henderson, NV, on 2-3 June 2006. Votes were by both the SC = Steering Committee present (n = 5) and All = all attending (n = 9). Y = Yes, motion passed; T = Tabled; discuss at the next meeting.

<u>Issue Voted On</u>	<u>SC</u>	<u>All</u>
Policy and Direction		
Accept Rule of Order: each passed measure must receive a majority vote of members present at the meeting (those on Steering Committee, Executive Committee and Associate Editors; n = 5); and record vote of all <i>HCB</i> members present (n = 9).	Y	Y
Accept offer by S. Trauth to investigate establishing a non-profit foundation to handle all finances as well as non-profit status for the journal.	Y	Y
Accept offer by S. Trauth to serve as the archivist/historian, and deal with libraries and museums for the archive.	Y	Y
Add name "International" to the definition and scope of <i>HCB</i>	Y	Y
Continue discussion to establish a partnership with the World Congress of Herpetology	Y	Y
Change name of the "International Board of Advisors" to the "Editorial Guild".	Y	Y
Accept proposal to develop a new organizational structure with elected officials (e.g., President, Board of Directors, etc.).	T	T
Journal Development and Production		
Publish Journal a minimum of 2 times per calendar year with goal of 4/yr	Y	Y
Inform authors that once there is final acceptance, the paper will be published in the next available issue.	Y	Y
Release first issue when the Steering Committee is satisfied that the contents are sufficient to represent a solid issue.	Y	Y
Develop a "flash list" to announce release of each new issue (online version).	Y	Y

Luckenbach 1975, 1982). All members left the meeting and field foray confident that everyone was on the same page.

After several discussions with Aaron Bauer, President Elect of the World Congress of Herpetology, this group also agreed in late June to partner with *HCB*. Along with ties to PARC, this was another defining moment in our brief history. The involvement of the World Congress provides an opportunity for *HCB* to become the first truly international journal in herpetology. We are currently working with the World Congress to expand the editorial staff to include the entire international community. Although our editorial staff included members from around the world, most are from North America. We hope to change this landscape with a major expansion or reorganization of the editorial staff. To remain abreast with the latest happenings, please visit our webpage: www.herpconbio.org.

Although there are many intricacies in journal operations that continue to bedevil us, in a little more than one year *HCB* evolved from an idea to an operational journal. To us, it is incredible that so many individuals volunteered to develop a common effort. We think this demonstrates the need, audience, and support for a new herpetological journal that is on line.

We hope that all who use this journal for publication, information, learning or recreation, will appreciate the amount of work that was devoted by so many individuals. This is a group effort and it will only be as good as the time we devote to it. We also hope that this journal will become an important resource for all those who work diligently to investigate, conserve, and manage herpetofauna populations around the world. They need our help.

With the support and encouragement of the global herpetological community, there can be no doubt that this journal will flourish due to the readership and sacrifices of time by the Editorial Board. The development into one of the premier herpetological outlets at a later time lies with your continued interest and support. 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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