

DEDICATIONS

Citation: Johnson JD, Porras LW, Schuett GW, Mata-Silva V, Wilson LD. 2013. Dedications (*Amphibian & Reptile Conservation* Special Mexico Issue). *Amphibian & Reptile Conservation* 7(1): iii–vi.

With the publication of this Special Mexico Issue (SMI), the contributing authors were provided with an opportunity to dedicate it to herpetologists who have played a significant role in their lives, as well as the lives of other herpetologists past and present. Each of the 10 contributors was asked to identify the person who was most influential in their respective careers, especially with respect to what each of them has contributed to SMI. The dedicatees are:



Miguel Álvarez del Toro.

Miguel Álvarez del Toro (August 23, 1917–August 2, 1996) was born in the city of Colima, Colima, México, according to an obituary in *Herpetological Review* by Oscar Flores-Villela and Wendy Hodges in 1999. He moved to Mexico City in 1932, where he attended and later graduated from high school. Although his formal education was limited, his reputation as an avid naturalist spread rapidly and at the age of 21, while still in Mexico City, he began a long career devoted to a multitude of zoological and conservation related disciplines. He moved to Chiapas in 1942, and after a short stint as keeper and curator became the Director of what then was known as the Instituto de Historia Natural located near downtown Tuxtla Gutiérrez. His reputation grew exponentially because of his tireless work at the Zoological Park and Natural History Museum, his publication record, including books and papers on numerous vertebrate and invertebrate groups, and his solemn activism on conservation issues. One of his greatest legacies was convincing several generations of politicians in Chiapas to help develop a system of natural protected

areas, and also to expand the Zoological Park and move it to “El Zapotal,” a relatively pristine site on the southern edge of the city. That new and remarkable facility was named “Zoológico Regional Miguel Álvarez del Toro, or ZOOMAT as it is popularly called today. Because of his lifetime efforts, “Don Miguel,” as he was called respectfully, was justly awarded honorary doctoral degrees from the Universidad de Chapingo, in 1992, and from the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, in 1993. Over his long career he received a plethora of other awards, and also was involved in numerous conservation projects in conjunction with various local, state, national, and international organizations.

Jerry D. Johnson, an avid “herper” since grade school and recently discharged from the Marine Corps after a stint in Viet Nam, enrolled in the 1971 wintermester course at Fort Hays State University (Kansas), and accompanied Dr. Charles A. Ely to Chiapas on a migratory bird study. Dr. Ely, after recognizing Johnson’s eagerness to search for amphibians and reptiles through all sorts of tropical and highland environments, included him on many return trips during the next several years. On that initial 1971 trip, Johnson briefly met Don Miguel at the old Zoological Park. In 1974, Dr. Ely arranged for he and Johnson to pitch tents in Don Miguel’s back yard, located near the Zoo. This initiated an opportunity to mingle with all sorts of interesting people, including the Álvarez del Toro family, their friends, and a continuous flow of traveling naturalists who were visiting the Zoo. During those times Johnson realized just how influential Don Miguel’s scientific and conservation work had become, in Chiapas and elsewhere. On a typical day, Don Miguel often would walk among the Zoological Park’s animal enclosures, and during those walks Jerry came to know him while discussing the status of herpetology in Chiapas, how conservation efforts were in dire straits, and pondering his doubts about the possibility that anything resembling a natural Chiapas would persist into the future. In 1985, Don Miguel published a book entitled *¡Así Era Chiapas!* that described how Chiapas had changed in the 40 years since he had arrived in the state. Even today, Johnson often thinks about how habitat destruction had altered the Chiapan environment since he began investigations there in 1971, as a college sophomore. He now realizes that his life and professional experiences have passed rather quickly, but sadly, environmental decay is accelerating at an even greater pace. Johnson now concentrates much of his professional efforts on conservation issues, hoping that humankind can avoid total environmental devastation. Jerry also is reasonably sure that Don Miguel really didn’t expect preservation efforts to be very successful,

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but he didn't give up his dream of a more conservation-oriented populace by continually teaching people why preserving natural habitats is important to their own well-being, which probably is the only way conservation will ever succeed. With great pleasure, Johnson dedicates his contributions to this special Mexico edition of *Amphibian and Reptile Conservation* to Miguel Álvarez del Toro, who in his opinion was the leading advocate and pioneer of biodiversity conservation in 20th century Mexico.



Roger Conant in his early 20s.

Roger Conant (May 6, 1909–December 19, 2003) was born in Mamaroneck, New York, USA. As a child he developed a passion for reptiles, especially snakes, and at the age of 19 became the Curator of Reptiles at the Toledo Zoo. After assembling a sizeable collection of reptiles for public display, he was promoted to General Curator. Because of the close proximity of Toledo to Ann Arbor, he occasionally would visit herpetologists at the University of Michigan and became close friends with a then-graduate student, Howard K. Gloyd. Eventually, Roger left Toledo to become the Curator of Herpetology at the Philadelphia Zoo, and in time became the zoo's Director. Throughout his 38-year career at Philadelphia he participated in weekly radio shows, edited the zoo's publications, and made frequent television appearances. During this time he also helped establish the Philadelphia Herpetological Society, served as President of the Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, and as President of the American Association of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. In 1947 Roger married Isabelle Hunt Conant, an accomplished photographer and illustrator who had been working at the zoo for several years, and during the following two decades the couple made several collecting trips to Mexico. Roger's first of 240 scientific publications (including 12 books) came at the age of 19; about a decade later he authored *The Reptiles of Ohio*, a landmark

book that set the standard for state herpetological publications. Roger perhaps is best known as the author of the best selling book in herpetological history, *A Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern North America*, which was illustrated by Isabelle. The book was published in 1958, and expanded versions followed in 1975, 1991, and 1998. For the majority of amphibian and reptile enthusiasts and herpetologists living in the eastern part of the United States during those years, this book became their bible. In 1973, Roger retired early from the Philadelphia Zoo, after Isabelle had become ill. The Conants then moved to Albuquerque, where Roger became an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico and devoted much of his time to herpetology. Isabelle passed away in 1976, and soon after Roger discovered that his close friend, Howard K. Gloyd, was terminally ill. Howard had been busy working on a project that he and Roger started in 1932, and because of Howard's deteriorating condition Roger made an enormous commitment and assured Howard that the project would be completed. This hugely important contribution, entitled *Snakes of the Agkistrodon Complex: a Monographic Review*, was published by the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR) in 1990. During this time Roger also was busy writing his memoirs, *A Field Guide to the Life and Times of Roger Conant*, which was published in 1997 by Selva, and details his remarkable life and illustrious career.



Roger Conant in Santa Rosa National Park, Costa Rica (1982).

Louis W. Porras and Gordon W. Schuett, two very close friends of Roger's, were involved at several levels with the *Agkistrodon* monograph and Roger's autobiography. Because of their mutual interest in *Agkistrodon*, in January of 1982 the trio traveled to Costa Rica in search of cantils and although no individuals were found in the

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field, they managed to secure preserved specimens for study. In July of that year, Porras returned to Costa Rica with John Rindfleish and collected what became the holotype of *Agkistrodon bilineatus howardgloydi*. Additional information on the life of Roger Conant appears in an obituary published in the June 2004 issue of *Herpetological Review*. Among several solicited tributes indicating how Roger had affected his colleague's lives and careers, Porras wrote the following summary:

As a giant in herpetology, no doubt many will be writing about Roger Conant's amazing organizational skills, attention to detail, literary contributions, lifelong productivity, and so on. From a personal perspective, however, Roger was my friend, mentor, and father figure. He enriched my life in so many ways, and it would warm his heart to know that by simply following his example, he will continue to do so.

Schuett summarized his tribute as follows:

In reflection, I have no doubt that Roger Conant possessed genius. His was not displayed in eccentric mannerisms and arrogant actions, but in a subtle and quiet ability to collect, organize, and process information for large-scale projects. In his research, each and every detail was painstakingly considered. Roger's vast achievements are even more remarkable knowing that he was largely self-educated. If genius is measured by the degree to which one's ideas and work influence others, Roger stands among the giants of knowledge...Cheers to you, Roger, to your remarkable and enviable life.

Yes, Indeed!

Aurelio Ramírez-Bautista was born in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico, and today is a professor and biological investigator at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. Dr. Ramírez-Bautista has authored or co-authored more than 100 publications, including five books and 40 book chapters, made numerous presentations on the ecology and conservation of the Mexican herpetofauna, and has become one of the leading herpetologists in the country. During his many years as an educator and researcher, Dr. Ramírez-Bautista advised numerous bachelor, master, and doctoral students. Vicente Mata-Silva met Dr. Ramírez-Bautista in the summer of 1998, as an undergraduate student working on his thesis on the herpetofauna of a portion of the state of Puebla. They developed a friendship, and through Dr. Ramirez-Bautista's mentoring Vicente developed a passion for Mexican herpetology, especially Chihuahuan Desert reptiles, that continued throughout his undergraduate studies and later through master's, doctoral, and post-doctoral work in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology program at the University of Texas at El Paso. They have continued to work on significant research projects on the conservation and ecology of the Mexican herpetofauna. Vicente is extremely grate-



Aurelio Ramírez-Bautista in Chamela, Jalisco (2011).

ful to Dr. Ramírez-Bautista for his farsighted and life-altering introduction to herpetology. Their association has led to a lifetime friendship, and a road of excitement and opportunities that Vicente never envisioned possible. Dr. Ramírez-Bautista is the epitome of what an educator and mentor should be, providing students the opportunity to become professional scientists working in a world sorely in need of commitment to environmental sustainability.



Hobart M. Smith in Mexico (1930).

Hobart Muir Smith (September 26, 1912–March 4, 2013) was born Frederick William Stouffer in Stanwood, Iowa, USA. At the age of four, he was adopted by Charles and Frances Smith; both of his adoptive parents died, however, before Dr. Smith finished college at Kansas State University (KSU). In the engaging “historical perspective” written by David Chiszar, Edwin McConkey,

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and Margaret M. Stewart and published in the 2004(2) issue of *Copeia*, the authors recount an amazing story indicating that when Dr. Smith (HMS) was in his senior year in high school he was plagued by tachycardia and an allergy to caffeine, which ended his interest in running and led to youthful resolution that they reported as follows: “If I’m gonna do anything worthwhile, I had better get to it, because I not gonna live very long” (!). Upon completing high school, he headed for KSU with expectations of a major in entomology. A fortunate meeting with Howard K. Gloyd, a somewhat older student who was majoring in herpetology, brought HMS a change of heart, however, and he became determined to study amphibians and reptiles. He made this decision after having traveled to the American West on collecting trips with Dr. Gloyd, whose association with Dr. Conant is discussed above. Gloyd and his major professor at the University of Michigan, Dr. Frank Blanchard, suggested that HMS contact Edward H. Taylor at the University of Kansas (KU). As noted by Chiszar et al. (2004: 419), “this was probably the act that cinched HMS to a herpetological orientation and kiboshed entomology.” In fact, these authors also claim that “HMS literally collected his BA and moments later hopped into Taylor’s car bound for Mexico,” and that “the rest is history.”



Hobart M. Smith and Rozella B. Smith at the University of Wyoming (1960).

In 1940 (Wilson’s birth year), at age 26, he married Rozella Pearl Beverly Blood, who he met while both were graduate students at KU. Their marriage endured until Rozella’s death in 1987. Dr. Smith began working in Mexico in 1932, before any of the SMI contributors was born, and those early collecting trips instilled a life-long dedication for studying the Mexican herpetofauna. Other collecting ventures followed during the remainder of the decade. The material assembled during these trips allowed him to begin a life-long journey to record the composition, distribution, and systematics of the amazing

Mexican herpetofauna. During his long life he authored more than 1,600 publications, including 29 books—the greatest output in the history of herpetology. Chiszar et al. (2004: 421–422) indicated that HMS was most proud of the three Mexican checklists, the *Sceloporus* monograph, the *Handbook of Lizards*, the comparative anatomy textbook (which Wilson used when he took the course under HMS), the *Synopsis of the Herpetofauna of Mexico*, the *Pliocercus* book, and the *Candoia* monograph. In 1947, HMS became a professor of zoology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and remained there until 1968. During this period in his career, one of the SMI contributors came under his influence. In 1958, Larry David Wilson graduated from Stephen Decatur High School in Decatur, Illinois, and the following year enrolled at Millikin University in that city. After two years and having exhausted the coursework offered by the biology department at Millikin, Wilson decided to move to the U of I, which became a turning point in his life. There, he met HMS and managed to survive a number of his courses, including comparative anatomy. During the two years that led to his graduation, Wilson cemented his interest in zoology and, due to Smith’s influence, decided to attend graduate school and major in herpetology. Also, due to Smith’s interest in Mesoamerican amphibians and reptiles, Wilson was determined to specialize in studying these creatures, and in 1962 ventured south and never returned to live in the flatlands of the “Great Corn Desert.” In 1983, Wilson had the opportunity to acknowledge his gratitude to the Smiths by organizing a symposium on the Mexican herpetofauna in their honor, which was held in connection with the annual SSAR meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah. Although much of Wilson’s overall work has focused on the Honduran herpetofauna, this special issue on the Mexican herpetofauna provided him with an opportunity to reawaken his love for the country where his fieldwork outside the US began in 1966, and to again acknowledge his debt to Dr. Hobart Muir Smith, one of the most important people in the history of herpetology. As Wilson stated in a tribute to HMS on his centenary published last year in *Herpetological Review*, “I know I am only one of many people who are indebted to Dr. Smith in ways small and large. For me, however, his influence determined the direction of my career and, in a significant way, the nature of the contributions I have made to our field.”

Acknowledgments.—The authors of the papers comprising the Special Mexico Issue are very grateful to Sally Nadvornik, who kindly supplied the photographs we used of her father, Hobart M. Smith, and Uriel Hernández-Salinas, who helpfully provided the image we used of Aurelio Ramírez-Bautista. Louis Porras provided the photographs of Roger Conant. The image of Miguel Álvarez del Toro was taken from the 3rd edition of his book, *Los Reptiles de Chiapas*.