



# WORLD CONGRESS OF HERPETOLOGY

## NEWSLETTER No. 2

10 September 1984

This newsletter henceforth will serve a dual purpose: provide a means of communication amongst the Executive Committee (EC) and the International Herpetological Committee (IHC) and, at the same time, be a status report to those organizations and individuals who have decided to support the Congress. Since this is an international effort, I encourage comment from all persons who receive this newsletter, in order for me to become better aware of the diversity of concerns and opinions. This newsletter presently is distributed to over 100 persons and it is not always possible for me to respond to every letter; please be assured, however, that I carefully read each communication and often incorporate your ideas into these newsletters, as you will see below.



Kraig Adler

### 1. Executive Committee and International Herpetological Committee.

I am pleased to announce the final composition of the EC and the IHC, as printed on this stationery. I appointed the EC and they, in turn, elected the IHC. The list is truly international, with persons from more than 30 countries included, and there is an excellent balance of institutional affiliations (universities, museums, research institutes, zoos, conservation organizations). It is clear from the correspondence that the enthusiasm for a Congress is extremely high and I am most grateful for the participation of those persons on the EC and the IHC.

The IHC is an advisory group, from which I have and will continue to solicit opinions. Collectively, these opinions will determine the priorities and the scope of the Congress, within which the EC will make the final decisions. At least, for the moment, this seems to be the best way to proceed. During the first Congress we will have to decide in a more formal way how the machinery of our organization is to operate in the future.

### 2. Sponsoring Organizations.

I am pleased to report that many national and international herpetological societies, in response to my official invitations, have voted to become sponsors of the World Congress, namely: American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists, Australasian Affiliation of Herpetological Societies, British Herpetological Society, Chinese Society of Herpetologists, Deutschen Gesellschaft für Herpetologie, Herpetological Society of Japan, Herpetologists' League, Societas Europaea Herpetologica, and Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles. In addition, several other national societies have indicated their intention to become sponsors, but I do not yet have official notification.

This widespread vote of confidence in the Congress is most encouraging and will greatly increase the chance for a successful first Congress. The

#### Secretary-General

**KRAIG ADLER**  
Cornell University  
Section of Neurobiology and Behavior  
Ithaca, New York 14853-0240 (U.S.A.)

#### Treasurer

**MARINUS S. HOOGMOED**  
Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie  
Postbus 9517  
2300 RA Leiden (Netherlands)

#### Executive Committee

**DONALD G. BROADLEY**  
The National Museum, Bulawayo (Zimbabwe)

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McGill University, Montreal (Canada)

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The Australian Museum, Sydney (Australia)

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Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay (India)

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Zoologisches Museum, Berlin (German D.R.)

**TOSHIO KAWAMURA**  
Hiroshima University, Hiroshima (Japan)

**MICHAEL R. K. LAMBERT**  
c/o Tropical Development and  
Research Institute, London (U.K.)

**BENEDETTO LANZA**  
Museo Zoologico de "La Specola," Firenze (Italy)

**HUBERT SAINT GIRONS**  
Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris (France)

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Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo (Brazil)

**DAVID B. WAKE**  
University of California, Berkeley (U.S.A.)

**ZHAO ERMI**  
Academia Sinica, Chengdu (China)

#### International Herpetological Committee

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collective financial support of these societies (pro-rated as 1 Dutch guilder per member) will be crucial in supporting our activities until the first Congress.

In addition, several persons have joined as individual members. We have also received support from the Centro Pirenaico de Biología Experimental (Spain) and the Cayman Turtle Farm Ltd. Eventually a list of all sponsors will be published, in the official program of the Congress.

### 3. International Union of Biological Sciences.

The IUBS, headquartered in Paris, is the official organization that sanctions world congresses. Therefore, I have submitted a formal application requesting that our group be recognized as the "Section of Herpetology" of IUBS; a decision on our request will be made at the next IUBS General Assembly, in August 1985 in Budapest. Recognition of our World Congress by IUBS will be important in many ways, in particular by making it easier for persons to obtain travel funds to attend our meeting.

### 4. Sponsorship of World Checklists.

The EC recently decided to sponsor a new series of books, the "Amphibian and Reptile Species of the World" checklists. To be published by the Association of Systematics Collections in conjunction with Allen Press, these volumes will be patterned after the "Mammal Species" book issued in 1981. The Editorial Committee presently consists of Robert Drewes, Carl Gans, Alice Grandison and Marinus Hoogmoed, with William Duellman as coordinator. I am currently negotiating the contract, which calls for the Congress to receive 6% royalties on all sales. We will have academic responsibility for the project, in choosing the Editorial Committee and in refining the overall format.

These checklists will be highly useful compilations, including the authorship, literature citation, type locality, holotype designation, range, and relationships for all currently-recognized taxa. Since these books will cover the entire world herpetofauna, they will be widely used and provide an important activity for our organization in addition to the Congress itself. The Amphibia volume is now complete and hopefully will be published in about six months; this particular volume is the collective effort of 54 contributors and reviewers from throughout the world.

### 5. Site and Date of First Congress.

We now come to the key purpose of this newsletter, a review of the opinions solicited from members of the EC and the IHC concerning the criteria to be used in selecting the site and date for the first Congress. Nearly everyone responded to my inquiry and the diversity of comments was very great, especially concerning the site. I will attempt to summarize those opinions and mention the various points of view, so that each of you can see how complex the task before us is. At the end of this section (page 4) I will request some further advice. My goal is to establish a list of criteria and to reduce the list of possible sites to 4 places which I can then contact to inquire about their interest, availability and costs.

Eight questions were originally posed, as follows:

(1) "How important is convenient access to the Congress site by public transportation (airlines, railroad, etc.)?" Most of you felt that proximity of international air connections to the meeting site was not the most important criterion in choosing the site, but only if convenient ground transportation to the meeting site was available. It was pointed out that domestic air travel is often more expensive, proportionately, than international air travel. Many of you noted the advantages of meeting in a small city (see no. 4, below) within 50-100 km of a major international transportation center. If we decide to hold our Congress in such a place, I trust it will be possible for the meeting organizers to provide chartered buses to transport us between the transport centers and the meeting site.

(2) "Should we attempt to choose a site somewhere near the geographic center of the world distribution of herpetologists?" As one person pointed out, if this question is taken literally the only possible place would be on board a ship somewhere in the North Atlantic Ocean! A majority felt that the first Congress should be held in Europe or North America, with the preference being Western Europe. There were a number of contrary views. Several persons pointed out that large



herpetological meetings are routinely held in Europe and America already and that we ought to go elsewhere. Some felt that the meeting should be held in a socialist country because of ease of access by all persons and, in addition, the difficulty for people in those nations to travel in Western countries. Several people recommended that we hold the Congress in some developing country, in one instance where the plight of some endangered species could be highlighted. Two persons thought we should meet near some attractive tourist area, for the benefit of families. Many persons noted that "geographic center" ought to be defined in terms of ease of access (i.e., cost of transportation) rather than actual distribution of herpetologists.

To generalize, the common theme amongst responses was that for the first Congress we need to pick a site that is reasonably inexpensive to reach (thus assuring the maximum attendance), where there are people experienced in running such large meetings, and where local costs are low. Western Europe was the most frequent choice, North America next, but with the strong desire that subsequent congresses be held in all parts of the world. There was a persistent concern that the first congress must be a complete success, with a large attendance, if we are to assure the future health of our organization.

(3) **"What would be some ideal sites for the Congress?"** Let me first list the suggestions: Argentina, Australia (Darwin, Sydney), Austria (Linz, Vienna), Belgium, Brazil (São Paulo), Canada, China (Chengdu), Costa Rica (San José), Czechoslovakia (Prague), F.R. Germany (Frankfurt, Munich, "small city"), Fiji, France (Montpellier, Paris), Gabon, German D.R. (East Berlin), Greece, Hungary (Budapest), India (Bombay, Madras), Italy (Florence, Milan, Rome), Japan, México, Netherlands (Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden), Poland (Warsaw), Portugal (Lisbon), South Africa, "Southeast Asia," Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Canary Islands), Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland (Geneva), U.K. (Cambridge, Canterbury, London, Oxford), U.S.S.R. (Leningrad, Moscow), U.S.A. (Boston, Dallas, Gainesville, New York City, San Antonio, San Francisco, Washington), and Yugoslavia. Interestingly, with three exceptions, no one volunteered their own city! So far, what we have is a "wish-list". We must now consider some practical questions. Which places are easiest (and cheapest) to reach? Which have the proper facilities (both size and modern) to handle a meeting which, depending upon site, could have 600 to 1000 people in attendance? Which sites (and hosts!) would be willing to welcome us? These considerations rapidly begin to shrink the above list.

Let me provide another list of sites, partially overlapping the first. You will recall that we have advertized in dozens of journals around the world asking potential hosts to contact me. To date, the following places (and potential hosts) have written to me:

Canada: University of Guelph, Guelph, 70 km west of Toronto (James P. Bogart).

Czechoslovakia: Convention Center, Prague (Zbyněk Roček).

India: Madras Snake Park, Madras (Romulus Whitaker).

Singapore: Convention Center, Singapore (Professional conference office).

Spain: University of Barcelona, Barcelona (Juan Pablo Martínez Rica).

U.K.: University of Kent, Canterbury, 70 km SE of London (Ian Swingland).

U.S.A.: Florida State Museum/University of Florida, Gainesville, 190 km NE of Tampa and 100 km SW of Jacksonville (Walter Auffenberg).

Of course, it is not necessary to restrict our thinking to these seven sites, but there are a number of potentially acceptable venues here and, moreover, there are local people who have already expressed an interest in hosting the Congress. No single site collectively will satisfy all of our criteria; that is clearly impossible. So we must decide which criteria are most important and remember that there will be later congresses in other parts of the world.

(4) **"Should we choose a metropolitan site or an isolated site?"** Here there is a near unanimous preference for an isolated site, providing there is convenient transportation to it. The primary points in favor: less expensive, fewer distractions, and quieter than a metropolitan site. One person recommended a metro site because it would be easier to navigate for foreigners, but the four others who chose it did so only with the provision that it be inexpensive.

(5) **"How important is it to choose a site that has a diverse local heperto-fauna? Or zoos, universities, museums and other attractions nearby?"** Three persons said this was highly important, five others only moderately so and then primarily for spouses. The vast majority felt that it was desirable but not vital, or even not necessary. Several persons mentioned that participants and their families can easily stop at such places enroute to or from the Congress, and many pointed out that hundreds of herpetologists collecting in the field could decimate the local fauna.



(6) "Can the local arrangements be run exclusively by a conference office, or is it essential to have a local committee of professional herpetologists involved?" Only one person felt that a conference office alone could do the job, but also pointed out that such arrangements are usually more expensive (since there is no volunteer labor involved). Everyone else said that it was essential to have a local professional herpetologist intimately involved, although this person would have to work closely with the EC.

(7) "When is the best time to schedule the Congress, in order to avoid conflicts with research, academic terms, and other meetings?" The clear preference is for late August or early September, although nearly every month of the year was mentioned at least once. There is a distinct dichotomy, however, between those persons in the Northern and Southern hemispheres, with the latter usually choosing December or January. There is also a problem with August and September, in that many European and American meetings are scheduled at that time. The actual timing will be decided, in part, by availability of facilities at our chosen site, but there ought to be enough flexibility to adjust for other meetings and perhaps even take advantage of semester breaks.

(8) "How long should the meeting last?" Recommendations ranged from 3 to 10 days. The majority felt that a 5-7 day meeting with a full day's break in the middle (for visits to zoos, museums and other activities) would be ideal. More important concerns were expressed about the structure and content of the Congress, and that the length of the meeting was intimately related to a stimulating program.

There were a number of other issues raised (official language or languages, travel grants, open meeting or by invitation, etc.). I would like to defer these issues until a later exchange of letters; I will keep on file the various comments already received.

#### REQUEST FOR ADVICE

Now that I have summarized the opinions of the EC and the IHC, I wish to ask several specific questions. From this summary I believe that a clear policy already is reflected for questions 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8, although I would be happy to read additional views on these topics. The most important task, however, is to look in more detail at questions 2, 3 and 7. Specifically, please respond to these points:

(2) Is it really important to have the first Congress in an established herpetological center--such as Europe or America--or should we hold our meeting in a developing area? How important is a large attendance at the first Congress to the success of subsequent congresses?

(3) Considering the many places suggested and especially those seven for which we have invitations, please now vote for four (4) sites. I will tally the votes and contact potential hosts at each site, asking for financial details, an expression of interest, and information on facilities. This information will then be referred to the EC for action.

(7) Although late August/early September seems to be the most popular time, there are a number of problems. Are there ways to avoid or reduce these problems? I would especially appreciate hearing from colleagues in the Southern Hemisphere. Are there semester breaks that we can take advantage of? I would also like to know about major meetings that are routinely held at that time of year. Our Congress may not be held for another 3-4 years, but we ought to be able to anticipate some potential conflicts. Conversely, are there international meetings being held during late August/early September that would provide an added inducement for herpetologists to attend our Congress, if those meetings were held nearby and just before or after our meeting?

Please send me your response to these questions (or other matters) no later than 10 November 1984. As before, your comments will be kept confidential and not identified as to source. I look forward to completing this next stage in our work and moving on to planning the conference itself. Your continuing interest and cooperation is greatly appreciated.

**NOTE:** During approximately 5 January to 15 June 1985 I will be at Cambridge as Visiting Fellow in Pembroke College. At this time your letters should be addressed to me at: Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EJ, England.

Best wishes.