

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HERPETOLOGY IN TEXAS AND THE TEXAS HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Early naturalist explorers such as Jean Louis Berlandier, John Bartlett, and William Emory made the first collections of herps from Texas. Several naturalists of historic importance, including Edward Drinker Cope, for whom the journal *Copeia* is named, studied those collections in the late 1800s. John Strecker was based at Baylor University and became known as the Father of Texas Herpetology. He published 60 articles on Texas herpetofauna, including the first checklist of Texas herps in 1915. An impressive list of noted herpetologists, including Roger Conant, Howard Gloyd, Hobart Smith, Edward Taylor, Alan Wright, and Karl P. Schmidt, W. Frank Blair, William B. Davis, John Werler, and James R. Dixon studied Texas herps after Strecker's career. Several of these herpetologists are still active today, and their students are practicing the science of herpetology at universities and museums around the world. In *Texas Snakes*, Werler and Dixon (2000, see also Dixon 2000) give a more complete history of herpetology in Texas, including the development of literature on Texas herpetofauna.

The advancement of herpetology in Texas is intertwined with the story of the Texas Herpetological Society (THS). The THS stands out as a unique group effort among amateur herpetologists, academicians, and students that has provided a systematic inventory of the herps of Texas spanning 60 years. Indeed, the list of Past Presidents of THS is a *Who's Who of Prominent Herpetologists*. The THS was conceived in 1938 at a meeting of the Texas Academy of Science, and the first meeting was held April 15-16, 1939. In the early 1940s a constitution was drafted, the first THS newsletters were published, and a few field meets were held. After a hiatus during WWII, the society was reorganized in 1946, and Bryce Brown became President. He, along with Hobart Smith, working at Texas A&M at the time, and Frank Blair at the University of Texas began building the society in earnest. Since then, THS has held annual field meets during a long weekend in April or May almost without fail.

THS field meets are an impressive gathering of amateur and professional herpetologists from all over Texas, often with a sampling of visitors from anywhere in the world. Field meets are designed to provide an inventory of herpetofauna in a particular county in Texas, usually located on a large ranch, State Park, or Wildlife Management Area. The organizing committee purposely chooses understudied areas of the state, and field meets provide important information on the distribution of herps around the state. It is not surprising to find more than 100 herp enthusiasts at the field meets. Besides its regular members, the THS welcomes university herpetology classes, high school biology classes, and anyone interested in finding and learning about herps in the field. The field meet is a time for old friends to camp and hunt herps together, and a time to gain experience in finding herps and learning about their natural history. When so many experienced herpetologists converge on an area, it is impressive how many herps are found. Most of the animals are released at the end of the meet, but some specimens may be retained for study, especially if they are the first recorded specimens from the area. As a result of THS field meets, a number of species of herps have been added to the state checklist, and dozens of species have been found in counties for the first time. Participation in THS field meets is a great activity for Texas Master Naturalist Chapters, Scouts, nature clubs or any group whose members are interested in field herpetology and natural history. The THS also holds a fall meeting and banquet, usually including a research symposium and keynote speaker. The THS and other regional herpetological societies in Texas support research and activities that benefit education and research on the natural history of herps in Texas and around the world (Box 1).

*Lee A. Fitzgerald, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles, Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection,
Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-2258. October 2006.*

Box 1. RESOURCES FOR THE HERPETOLOGICAL NATURALIST IN TEXAS

Prepared by Lee A. Fitzgerald

Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles, Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collections,
Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-2258

BOOKS:

- Conant R. and J.T. Collins. 1998. Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern/Central North America. 3rd Edition, expanded. Peterson Field Guides. Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Dixon J.R. and J. Werler. 2005. Texas Snakes. A Field Guide. University of Texas Press.
- Dixon, J.R. 2000. Amphibians and Reptiles of Texas. 2nd edition. Texas A&M Press, College Station, Texas.
- Zug, G.R., L.J. Vitt, and J.L. Caldwell. 2001. Herpetology: An Introductory Biology of Amphibians and Reptiles. Second Edition. Academic Press.
- Werler J. and J.R. Dixon. 2000. Texas Snakes. University of Texas Press.
- Greene, H.W. 1997. Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature. With photographs by Michael and Patricia Fogden. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Pianka E.R. and L.J. Vitt. 2003. Lizards: Windows to the Evolution of Diversity. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Bartlett R.D. and P.P. Bartlett. 1998. A Field Guide to Texas Reptiles and Amphibians. Texas Monthly Field Guide Series. Gulf Publishing Co., Houston. 225 pp. (note: this guide does not include snakes.)
- Crother, B.I. 2000. Scientific and standard and English names of amphibians and reptiles north of Mexico, with comments regarding confidence in our understanding. SSAR Herpetological Circular 29:1-82.
- W.R. Heyer, M.A. Donnelly, R.W. McDiarmid, L.C. Hayek, and M.S. Foster (eds.) 1994. Measuring and Monitoring Biological Diversity, Standard Methods for Amphibians. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC.
- Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles. Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles. This publication series consists of individual species accounts contributed by many authors. Each account cites all published literature about a particular species, updated distribution maps, and a summary of the species' biology.
- Axtell, R.W. Interpretive Atlas of Texas Lizards. Privately printed. Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville.
- Tenant A. R. A 1998. Field Guide to Snakes of Texas. 2nd edition. Texas Monthly Field Guide Series. Gulf Publishing Co., Houston.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETIES:

- Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR). Publishes: *Journal of Herpetology*, *Herpetological Review*, *Herpetological Circulars*, *Contributions to Herpetology and Facsimile Reprints in Herpetology*, *Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles*, *Herpetological Conservation* <http://www.ssarherps.org>
- American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH). Publishes *Copeia* <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/asih/>
- Herpetologists' League (HL). Publishes *Herpetologica* and *Herpetological Monographs* <http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/cbd/HL/HL.html>

These herpetological societies in Texas may be located on the world-wide web:

- Texas Herpetological Society
- East Texas Regional Herpetological Society
- North Texas Herpetological Society
- South Texas Herpetological Society
- West Texas Herpetological Society
- Dallas-Fort Worth Herpetological Society

SELECTED ONLINE RESOURCES:

- Herps of Texas at Texas Memorial Museum website : <http://www.zo.utexas.edu/research/txherps/>
- County lists of Texas herps by J.R. Dixon and K.R. Vaughan, updated yearly in October. Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collections website: <http://wfscnet.tamu.edu/twc/twc.htm>
- Tree of Life: Terrestrial Vertebrates. The Tree of Life is a project containing information about the diversity of organisms on Earth, their history, and characteristics. The information is linked together in the form of the evolutionary tree that connects all organisms to each other: <http://tolweb.org>.
- The World-Wide-Web Virtual Library, Herpetology. This page contains links to all known sites on the web that deal with the scientific discipline of herpetology: <http://cmgm.stanford.edu/~meisen/herp/>.
- Biodiversity and Biological Collections Web Server, Herpetology links: <http://biodiversity.uno.edu/cgi-bin/hl?herp>.