

The Future of *Mesoamerican Herpetology*: A Call for Help

The origin of *Mesoamerican Herpetology* (MH) dates back to the publication of *Conservation of Mesoamerican Amphibians and Reptiles* (2010), when several of the book's authors began to plan a conservation workshop for Central American reptiles to be held in Zamorano, Honduras, in 2012. Soon after, however, NatureServe (under the auspices of the IUCN) announced a similar workshop at Parque Nacional Palo Verde, Costa Rica, and thus the Honduran conference was cancelled. During the Palo Verde workshop, some of the attendees discussed the possibility of forming a regional herpetological society through which a journal might be published, and drafted an Action Plan to determine the degree of interest for such an undertaking. The plan was distributed among selected members of the herpetological community, and although it did not garner enough support to consider forming a society, the prospect of a regional journal received a considerable amount of positive feedback.

The eight countries that comprise Mesoamerica contain a high level of species diversity, and because of the region's biological importance, the lack of a dedicated herpetological journal for this area, and the degree of interest shown by members of the herpetological community, Eagle Mountain Publishing (EMP) decided to publish MH as a peer-reviewed, open access, electronic journal.

The journal, which was launched in September of 2014, was structured to consist of an Editorial Board (a Managing Editor, Associate Editors, Section Editors), a Taxonomic Board, a Social Media Team, and various Country Representatives. Because of my experience in the publishing business since 1995, and as owner of EMP since 2002, the layout and design of MH was somewhat different from what had appeared in other journals. The Articles included an Introductory Page, full color and specific elements of design interspersed throughout, icons drawn by an award-winning artist placed at the end, and biosketches and photographs of the authors; the Notes lacked some of these components, but were designed to maintain the same overall flavor. Additionally, our plans were to provide a rapid turnaround for manuscripts, and toward this end we assembled a supportive peer-review process by knowledgeable colleagues; also, because I am bilingual (Spanish/English), I often helped authors restructure the language. For all these reasons, MH rapidly gained the support of numerous herpetologists from throughout the region, as well as from other countries. To date, 15 issues of the journal have been published (for a total of 3,205 pages), which have included 68 Articles and 510 Notes (Nature, Distribution, and Miscellaneous), and involving a total of 653 different authors. The authorship has included numerous distinguished experts and specialists, but also many first-time contributors and students, something critically important for the future of herpetology. Among the highlights are several important conservation and taxonomic contributions, of which the latter include the descriptions of 22 new herpetofaunal species, as well as other papers proposing taxonomic changes. Furthermore, MH also has maintained a continuously-updated Taxonomic List of the herpetofauna of Mesoamerica on its website (presently 2,127 species.)

Although the rapid success of MH exceeded nearly everyone's expectations, it largely was the result of the dedication and hard work provided by several members of the Editorial Board. In time, as submissions kept increasing, the production costs for the journal continued to rise and the issue of finances became an important consideration. EMP had been subsidizing MH all along, but unfortunately in recent years the sale of books (EMP's source of income) has been dropping steadily. The addition of "author page charges" seemed like a logical solution to defray some of the publishing costs, but as I was about to discuss this matter with the Editorial Board in early January of this year, I developed some unexpected health issues. The doctors attributed my problems to the long hours I spend working behind a computer, as well as the amount of stress involved with meeting production deadlines for the journal. In an effort to stabilize my situation, I announced that MH would not be accepting new submissions until after the publication of Volume 5(1), which was published on April 12th, and that I would announce information pertaining to the future publication of the journal soon after. I then took some time off to collect my thoughts, and to evaluate the situation as it pertains to the future of MH.

After carefully analyzing the circumstances, I concluded that two important changes were necessary for MH to continue, viz., (1) to secure funding for the future production costs of the journal, and (2) to increase the number of positions on the editorial staff in an effort to reduce my workload (if I am to continue as the Managing Editor). The first change obviously would be harder to achieve, and thus the purpose of this correspondence is to explain the current situation to determine if any of you might be aware of a person or entity (e.g., an institution, foundation, conservation group or organization, benefactor, etc.) that might be in a position to offer financial assistance to keep MH in operation. If this goal were achieved, the second one should not be too difficult to attain.

My interest, as well as that of many of the people associated with MH, is to keep the journal viable well into the future, even if major changes are required (e.g., a change in ownership of the journal, turning MH into a society or non-profit organization). Accordingly, I will be happy to listen to any proposals, alternatives, suggestions, or feedback regarding this matter. The future of MH depends on finding an adequate solution.

Respectfully yours,

Louis W. Porras, Managing Editor/Publisher
Mesoamerican Herpetology <www.mesoamericanherpetology.com>

P.S. Potential donors can contact me by email <empub@msn.com>, or by telephone at (801) 789-4149.