Editorial

African Journal of Herpetology and the future of African herpetology

SINCE the conception of the Herpetological Association of Africa (HAA) in 1965, herpetology has undergone a rapid transformation and is now composed of many subdisciplines. Consequently, collaborative ventures involving expertise from multiple fields is increasingly the norm. Modern systematists often employ a multitude of techniques (morphology, anatomy, molecular approaches, behaviour, etc.), in a total evidence approach (e.g., Cannatella *et al.* 1998), to elucidate phylogenetic relationships (although combining data sets is not without contention). In turn, herpetologists are increasingly using this information (patterns) to explore the mechanisms (processes) responsible for the observed relationships (e.g., Losos 1990; Bauer *et al.* 1996). In short, herpetologists now have the machinery (new phylogenetic techniques, advances in the comparative method, new statistical methods, high powered molecular techniques, allometric engineering, etc.) to address complex problems.

The journal, under the recent editorship of le Fras Mouton, has begun attracting studies of the caliber published in the major herpetological journals. At the same time, Africa remains largely unknown herpetologically. This is primarily due to a combination of civil conflict, inaccessibility, and a lack of resident herpetologists. It is my goal as editor to encourage work that helps bridge this gap. Basic surveys and taxonomy are essential to meeting this end. At the same time, the society must strive for a balance between important baseline studies and high quality science. Through *African Herp News*, the HAA has an outlet for species lists, range extensions and important anecdotal life history observations. ***African Journal of Herpetology*** is therefore an outlet for studies resolving taxonomic conflict, systematics, morphology, genetics, physiology and physiological ecology, ecology and life history strategies, evolutionary ecology, behavioural ecology, and other disciplines. Studies involving hypothesis testing and employing rigorous quantitative techniques are especially encouraged.

The journal introduces a new section, *Forum*. The purpose of *Forum* is to encourage debate on issues relevant to herpetology (e.g., species concepts, phylogenetic approaches), and provide an arena for intellectual exchange and constructive evaluation of previously published data. Contributions to *Forum* will be solicited, but authors are encouraged to contact me with ideas for submission. (Especially when problems are identified with recently published papers.)

The HAA has started a web site (http://www-tm.up.ac.za/herpet/haa.htm). In addition to providing broader coverage for the society, the home page will also serve as a source for electronic material either not suitable for publication in the journal (e.g., species lists) or supplemental data (e.g., photographs, sound clips, video clips, raw data, illustrations, maps, equipment specifications, etc.). This material will be referenced in the journal publication, if submitted with an article.

LITERATURE CITED

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