

A HISTORY OF THE HERPETOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICA

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Although the Herpetological Association of Africa was founded only in 1965, it evolved from the *Herpetological Association of Rhodesia*, which was launched in Bulawayo in October 1957. The eight founder members were myself as Honorary Secretary/Treasurer (and Editor of the Journal), Dave Blake (Hon. Sec., Umtali Branch), Bill Armitage and Sid Warren (both Umtali), Father K. Tasman, S.J. (Monte Cassino Mission, Macheke), Alex Siemers (Prince Edward School, Salisbury), Viv Wilson (Game & Tsetse Control, Fort Jameson, N. Rhodesia) and Ted McCarthy (Luanshya, N.R.).

The first H.A.R. Journal (six roneoed foolscap pages) appeared in November, containing the rearing Banded Cobra badge and motto “Cavemus neque veremur” (we respect but do not fear), list of members, Constitution, “Jottings from the Cobra Corner” (my migratory Roads Department camp) *Dromophis lineatus* taken south of the Zambezi, records of *Naja melanoleuca* from Rhodesia and reports from fatal snake bites from *Dispholidus* (Karl Schmidt) and *Thelotornis* (F.J. de R. Lock).

In J.H.A.R. 2, provision was made for Associate Members outside Rhodesia and a report on the first H.A.R. expedition to Mount Selinda recorded *Naja melanoleuca* from S. Rhodesia for the first time.

In J.H.A.R. 3 (May 1958), the first Associate Members were recorded (S.A.I.M.R. and John Visser) but No. 4 gave a total of 16 full members and 15 Associates – new additions being Desmond Vesey-FitzGerald, Dick Isemonger, Luchi Balarin, Charles Pitman, Vivian FitzSimons, Walter Rose, Chuck Shaw, Roger Conant, Ed Malnate, Jonathan Leakey and John Wood. This issue saw the first article not written by me – a personal case history of an *Atractaspis bibronii* bite by Alex Siemers! New members recorded in J.H.A.R. 5 were Pat Fox and Bill Mitchell, and new associates were Desmond FitzSimons, Ray Parker and Carl Gans.

J.H.A.R. 7 (May 1959), the first to be produced in quarto size, listed John Poynton as a new associate and included a report on my visit to Lake Kariba (which was then filling), which produced the first *Pachydactylus tetensis* to be reported since Loveridge described it in 1953.

My resignation from the Roads Department to take over as Director of the Salisbury Snake Park in December 1959 led to the first break in the production of a quarterly journal. The next journal (9/10) was a double issue (February 1960) and the first to use coloured paper.

The first General Meeting of the H.A.R. was held at the Salisbury Snake Park on 10 September 1960, but was attended by only 13 members. At this stage the H.A.R. has 44 full members and 37 Associate Members. I left the Snake Park soon afterwards.

J.H.A.R. 14 (February 1961) included the first report of *Hemachatus haemachatus* from Southern Rhodesia. The following issue (June 1961) recorded my appointment as “Assistant Keeper of Zoology” at the Umtali Museum, also including an important article in the biology and behaviour of *Chamaeleo dilepis* Bob Brain, who had just been appointed as Zoologist at the Queen Victoria Museum in Salisbury.

In J.H.A.R. 17/18 (Feb. 1962) the following were made Honorary Life Members of the H.A.R. in recognition of their outstanding pioneer contribution to African herpetology: Dr V.F.M. FitzSimons, Mr A. Loveridge, Captain C.R.S. Pitman, Dr W. Rose and Father K. Tasman. In this issue I first suggested that *Riopa* (= *Lygosoma*) *modesta* was conspecific with *sundevallii* and that the larger species of the writhing skink in East Africa should probably be called *afer* (Peters).

The second General Meeting of the H.A.R. was held at the Queen Victoria Museum in Salisbury on the 25 September 1963, with only nine members attending. In J.H.A.R. 22 it was therefore first proposed that the H.A.R. should expand to become the “Herpetological Association of Africa”.

In November 1964, as J.H.A.R. 23 was not yet completed, a special stop-gap H.A.R. Newsletter was produced, in order to circulate a tropical “Report on the Opportunity for the zoological collecting afforded by the Beira-Feruka pipeline project”.

The Final number of the J.H.A.R., No. 23/23 (Feb. 1965) was a bumper issue of 58 pages and included an obituary for Walter Rose. With the break-up of the Federation of Rhodesian and Nyasaland, and Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence (U.D.I), less than half the African members were in Rhodesia (21 out of 43), so the case for the metamorphosis of the H.A.R. into the H.A.A. had become overwhelming. In a postal vote the H.A.R. full members voted 21-Nil in favour of the H.A.R. being absorbed into the new H.A.A., with Luchi Balarin returned unopposed as Chairman and myself as Secretary/Treasurer and Editor of the H.A.A. Journal. The following became Honorary Life Members: V.F.M. FitzSimons, A. Loveridge, C.R.S. Pitman, K. Tasman, C.M. Bogert, C. Gans and J.C. Poynton. The new Association had 42 members and 23 associate members when H.A.A.

The first H.A.A. journal appeared in August 1965. IN my Editorial I stated: “The Journal is not intended to be a medium for the publication of scientific papers and it should not be quoted in the literature. The object of the Journal is to keep members informed of the latest developments in African herpetology and to allow research workers to discuss their theories and lines of investigation, so that they can enlist the assistance of H.A.A members who may be able to contribute vital material or observations”.

J.H.A.A. 2 was the first to include a “Recent Literature on African Herpetology” section. No. 3 (April 1967) had an unusual bias towards reports on collecting trips, two by John Visser in the Western Cape and two of the most productive Umtali

Museum expeditions, one to the Gonarezhou and the other to the south-western Kalahari with the Smithsonian Botswana Mammal Survey.

J.H.A.A. 5 (March 1969) included obituaries for two life members, Father K. Tasman and C.J.P. Ionides, and also my preliminary article suggesting that *Boaedon* was doubtfully distinct from *Lamprophis*. J.H.A.A. 10 (March 1973) saw the switch to A4 format, and in the Editorial of No. 12 I deplored the fact that the H.A.A. Journal was being cited in the *Zoological Record*.

Journal No. 14 (November 1975) was the first to be produced in South Africa, after Vincent Carruthers offered to set up an H.A.A. office in Sandton and handle subscriptions from Africa (excluding Rhodesia) and Europe, which were now a problem following Rhodesia's U.D.I. It included abstracts of the herpetological papers read at the Symposium in Herpetology and Ichthyology held at the Kruger National Park the previous September (13 of these were subsequently published in *Zoologica Africana* 11(2) of 1976) and also the obituaries of Vivian FitzSimon, Robert Mertens and Charles Pitman.

J.H.A.A. No. 15 (February 1977) was the last that I edited and it was delayed by production problems. At this point I handed over editorship to Alan Channing who had taken over as Hon. Secretary/Treasurer.

In 1979 Bill Branch became Secretary/Treasurer. Wulf Haacke took over as Editor in 1980 but handed over to Bill Branch in 1983. With his first Journal (No. 29) Bill launched the first issue of an H.A.A. Newsletter, containing mainly Xeroxed material from various sources, on a bimonthly basis. The status of the Journal itself was upgraded by the introduction of peer review.

In 1985 Rod Douglas took over as Secretary/Treasurer and J.H. van Wyk as Newsletter Editor. In J.H.A.A. 31 the "Geographical Distribution" section was introduced, using the same format as that found in *Herpetological Review*, the newsletter of the SSAR. This was followed in the next journal by provisions for sections for "Life History Notes" and "Venoms and Snakebite". John Marais became Chairman and Newsletter Editor in 1988.

A great landmark was the successful organisation by Le Fras Mouton and colleagues of the first H.A.A. Symposium at the University of Stellenbosch from the 30 March to 2 April 1987. This was attended by more than 70 delegates, with 42 papers and posters presented. The proceedings were published in J.H.A.A. 36 (August 1989).

J.H.A.A. 34 (November 1988) was noteworthy because it contained a Provisional and Annotated Checklist of the Herpetofauna of southern Africa, edited by Bill Branch, with Baard, Haacke, Jacobsen, Poynton and Broadley as subeditors.

New H.A.A. office bearers from 1990 were Mike Bates (Chairman and Newsletter Editor), Rod Douglas (Secretary/Treasurer), Bill Branch (Journal Editor) and Richard Boycott (Journal Subeditor), but Frank Farquharson took over as Secretary/Treasurer in 1991. Mike Bates renames the H.A.A. Newsletter (now in A5 format *African Herp News*, beginning with No. 13 (August 1990).

J.H.A.A. 38 contained the proceedings of the first Reptile Husbandry Symposium, held at the South African Nature Conservation Centre, Delta Park, Johannesburg, on 23-24 September 1988.

The second H.A.A. Symposium on African Herpetology was held at the National Museum, Bloemfontein, from 8-11 April 1991. It was attended by 56 delegates (including six guest speakers) and featured 42 papers, 13 posters, six slide shows and a computer demonstration. The proceedings were published in J.H.A.A. 40 in August 1992.

The third H.A.A. Symposium on African Herpetology was held at the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, from 11-15 October 1993. It was attended by 54 delegates and 43 papers, 20 posters, four slide shows, three videos and a computer demonstration were presented. A one-day symposium was held during the meeting to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the publication of Vivian FitzSimons' *Lizards of South Africa* (1943), after which the delegates decided to initiate a multi-authored project *The lizards and Amphisbaenians of Southern Africa* (LASA), with Aaron Bauer and Bill Branch as co-editors. Kraig Adler has agreed to the publication of this book in the prestigious SSAR "Contributions to Herpetology" series. Generic and specific accounts are now being prepared by about 16 contributing authors.

Another development following the Pretoria symposium was the transfer of the responsibility for producing the H.A.A. Journal to the University of Stellenbosch, with Le Fras Mouton as Editor and J.H. van Wyk as Subeditor. The Editor's first move was to transfer the various short notes (Life History Notes, Geographical Distribution, and Venoms and Snakebite), together with "Recent African Herpetological Literature", to *African Herp News*.

The fourth H.A.A. Symposium, with the theme "Biodiversity and Conservation of African Herpetofauna", was held in the Natal Parks Board auditorium at St. Lucia from 22-27 October 1995. Sixty-one delegates attended and 45 papers and several slide shows and posters were presented. At the General Meeting held on the 24th the proposal by Bill Branch (seconded by John Poynton) that the name of the journal be changed to *African Journal of Herpetology* was accepted. The first "new" journal (as Vol. 45, No. 1) appeared in mid-1996.

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