

## COMMENTARY

A Professional Journal for All Herpetologists<sup>1</sup>

Wolfgang Böhme

Bonn, Germany

When people focus their attention on amphibians and reptiles — by inclination instead of commercial motives, of course! — this interest essentially plays itself out on three main levels: The vast majority of these individuals are simply fascinated and inspired by the variety of shapes, the bizarre appearance, and the aesthetic beauty of many amphibians and reptiles. People at this level often have the desire to care for these animals in a terrarium in their own homes in order to learn more about them and how they live. Ultimately, they want to communicate their experiences and also learn from the knowledge of others.

A second, smaller group of people with longer-term and greater experience desires contact not only with like-minded individuals, but also with professional scientists. These individuals would like to share their experiences with the scientific community and allow their previously unknown observations on the biology and behavior of amphibians and reptiles to contribute to the growth of knowledge.

Finally, a relatively small number of professional herpetologists endeavor to solve the many outstanding questions regarding the systematics, distribution, ecology, behavior, and biology of amphibians and reptiles using a variety of academic research methods.

As most professional herpetologists are motivated by their own interests in amphibians and reptiles in the same way as the two aforementioned groups, they certainly will benefit from maintaining close contact with those groups and to support their efforts. The best means to accomplish all of these endeavors is through an up-to-date, regularly published journal. Therefore, the provision of publications that serve the needs of all three groups is of the utmost importance.

So far, only the second group — the dedicated hobbyist/would-be scientists — has ready access to a suitable herpetologically oriented publication. On the purely scientific level, however, a professional herpetological journal of sufficient caliber and yet capable of facilitating communication between all three groups is lacking. The situation for the largest group, the hobbyists interested in amphibians and reptiles, is quite similar. Although

some magazines publish interesting and popular reports applicable to our area of interest, amphibians and reptiles often play a minor role in publications largely dominated by fish.

I therefore enthusiastically welcome the efforts of the editors of *Herpetofauna* to create a journal dedicated exclusively to amphibians and reptiles that will contain articles that provide hobbyists the necessary, extended opportunity not only to learn, but also to share information with others. In my endeavor to promote an interest in and knowledge of amphibians and reptiles at all levels, I wish this journal a good start and pledge it my full support.



### “Us” versus “Us & Them” *Reptiles & Amphibians* and the Need for Common Ground

Wolfgang Böhme’s comments of more than three decades ago still ring true in America today. Although the European (and especially German) herpetological community has long been characterized by fruitful communication and collaboration between professionals and amateurs, this has not been the American experience. Now, as for most of the last 50 or more years, communication between the three groups of herpetologists described by Böhme has been limited at best. Even the serious amateurs interested in both consuming and contributing to the literature are largely alienated by the ever more technical nature of the professional journals in the field. Likewise, hobbyist magazines focused chiefly on husbandry are of little interest to professionals and are often unsatisfying to more serious and sophisticated amateurs as well. Natural history (in the broad sense), however, provides a common ground for all herpetologists, capturing many of the elements that drew most of us to reptiles and amphibians in the first place — their diversity, their lifestyles, and their aesthetics. Natural history is “good” science that is also accessible science. A well-written natural history article can be as interesting, useful, and understandable to a beginning hobbyist as to a seasoned academic. *Reptiles & Amphibians*, with its focus on natural history and conservation (another topic of critical concern to all herpetologists), is one of the few publications that can provide the link between the various segments of the herpetological community through its compelling all-color articles on broad-ranging topics. With continued support, both in the form of subscriptions and especially article submissions, by herpetologists of all stripes, *R&A* can foster communication between all herpetologists and help to break down the historical divide between amateurs and professionals.

Aaron M. Bauer

Department of Biology, Villanova University

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the *Geleitwort* (= Foreword) in the first issue of *Herpetofauna*, published in Ludwigburg-Obweil, Germany in June 1979. Translated by AJ Gutman.