

HERPETON 2019 REVISITED

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Herpeton was a US herpetocultural conference held at the Marriott Courtyard, San Diego, CA in May 2019 (Fig. 1-3).

For all who attended, it was seen as one of the most significant and wonderful herpetocultural events of the century, so far.

It came about in part because of nostalgia. In the US through the 1980s and most of the 1990s, there were two annual herpetocultural conferences/symposiums that were attended by most of the founding members of what has been called the Modern Herpetocultural Movement. These events lasted three days and people would fly from all over the country or from overseas to attend. The best known and still thriving today is the International Herpetological Symposium (IHS), the other was the Northern California Herpetological Society (NCHS) Conference on Husbandry and Propagation. IHS currently has pdfs of the proceedings for the talks presented during that period on its website (<https://internationalherpetologicalsymposium.com/>), and they are a goldmine of history and information on keeping a breeding a wide range of species. With a little bit of digging, one can also find some of the proceedings from the NCHS conferences. The NCHS ended its annual conference in the early 90s. IHS, still the premier herpetological conference of the US, has shifted its focus from herpetoculture to a blend of topics heavily slanted toward herpetology, herpetological natural history, and conservation.

I wanted to have a conference that brought back the focus on herpetoculture, which being an interdisciplinary field offered the opportunity for the presentation of a wide range of content from husbandry and propagation to vivarium design, plants and bioactive substrates, nutrition,

veterinary concerns, legislative issues, and conservation. I also felt that neither social media, websites, forums, or YouTube allowed exposure to the range or synthesis of ideas that a conference and the in person mingling of like-minded people could bring. In the past you might have been a lizard keeper but attended a talk on frogs where the design of a vivarium inspired novel ways of thinking. Species you had never considered before would pique your interest. Veterinary issues you had never thought about would cause you to review your husbandry or decide on a testing protocol. But the real magic, the rewarding human relationships, occurred during conversations with fellow herpers. You would make new friends. You would get inspired. You would develop new trains of thought. You would gleam gems of information that would get you all charged up, motivated, and ready to make major changes in care or species after getting home.

I brought the idea to my dear friend, Allen Repashy, who so often has supported me in different projects. We had bounced the idea of a conference before, but both of us being so busy, put it on a back burner. This time was different. At one point in our conversation, we both agreed “Let’s try to bring back the magic”. “Let’s do it,” Allen said.

I thought of it as a one time event to remind everyone of what could be. I initially proposed to Allen, “Let’s call it The Last Great Herpetocultural Conference.” Allen did not agree with me, not only because it was presumptuous but because he thought a new and much needed annual conference with a focus on herpetoculture could be created. “Let’s think of another name,” he



Herpeton PASSION
'LEGENDS' HERPETOCULTURAL CONFERENCE 2019 KNOWLEDGE
KINSHIP

Keeping and Breeding Reptiles and Amphibians in a Changing World
HOSTED BY ALLEN REPASHY AND PHILIPPE DE VOSJOLI



June 7-9, 2019
Marriot Courtyard/Mission Valley
San Diego, CA

FEATURED SPEAKERS:
Dmitri Tkachev (BION Ukraine) | Quetzal Dwyer (Reptiliandia, Costa Rica)
Evgeny Ryboltovsky | Petr Necas | Nick Mutton | John Michels | Jay Sommers
Scott Stahl | DVM | Emmanuel Van Heygen | Donald Schultz and many more...

Program and Registration: www.Herpeton.org | Email: info@herpeton.org

Figure 1. Announcement of Herpeton 2019 conference.

insisted. It took several days of back and forth and it was decided to call it Herpeton (it was as close to a herp version of “Comic-Con” as we could get).

Putting together a conference is a lot easier said than done. Although I had the general idea and plan, it was Allen who had the great organizational and business skills. He also had previous experience with this type of event, having put together the outstanding New Caledonian Gecko Conference in Tinley Park, Chicago in 2006. So... he took on the management of Herpeton and, of course, did an incredible job of it.

It took months of work and communications to recruit speakers, find the right location and address all the logistics, including promotion,

renting and transporting the audio-video equipment, reserving blocks of rooms, and organizing the Saturday dinner event (planning meal selection with the catering service, audio-video for the post dinner talk, auction for USARK, and award presentations).

To accomplish this, a small team of volunteers who jumped on the opportunity to support this crazy idea was assembled. Gina Martino, a close friend, rose to the occasion and did much of the organization and coordination with the hotel facilities, catering, and attendees that made Herpeton the success it was.

The one factor that one cannot emphasize enough when putting together a conference is location, location, location.

Living near San Diego we already had a great

advantage. The area has great weather, beautiful beaches, the renown San Diego Zoo, Sea World, great restaurants and bars, several herp stores, and was within easy driving of the Anza Borrego Desert for anyone interested in a night of field herping. But experience had shown us that even more important than the city, the most important factor for success was that the main hotel where most attendees would stay should also be where the conference takes place. The hotel also had to have plenty of gathering spaces, such as seating areas in the lobby and bar, one or more restaurants, and catering services for the dinner event. In short it had to offer inviting amenities that made people want to linger, socialize, and converse between talks and into the evening hours. It took weeks to find a location that met those criteria at a reasonable cost. As it turned out, The Marriott Courtyard ended up meeting all

our expectations and more.

A big obstacle realizing these lofty plans was expense. The projected costs of the conference were adding up to amounts greater than any revenue from registrations could bring in. Fortunately, the leading industry players of herpetoculture (Zoomed, Exo Terra, Zilla, Timberline, Repashy Enterprises, BION (Ukraine), Reptile Super Show, and many others) came through with support both financially and by attending the event. Without them, the Herpeton Conference would likely have been canceled.

Herpeton would never have been possible without the great contributions and range of topics covered by the speakers, including members of the San Diego Zoo. Instrumental to the great success of Herpeton were the presentations and perspectives of international speakers and attendees: From BION in Ukraine:



Figure 2. Allen Repashy on Herpeton 2019.

Dmitri Tkachev, Oleksii Marushchak, Sergei Prokopiev, and Petr Necas; from Russia, Evgeny Ryboltovski who gave through video a mind-boggling talk on breeding rare frog species; Quetzal Dwyer, owner of Reptilandia Zoo in Costa Rica; Emmanuel Van Heygen who flew in to give an informative and beautiful post dinner presentation on Day Geckos.

After the success of the conference, many asked whether we would have another Herpeton conference in 2020. The 2019 Herpeton had put a lot of stress and demands on our lives and, honestly, we had great reservations about repeating the process. But the memory of the event, the great sense of camaraderie, the unity of purpose and all-around positive energy led us to plan the next one (and my wife, having seen the amount of time I devoted to it, was not exactly pleased). As it turned out, things did

not go as planned. After months of work and organization, recruiting potential speakers, and funding the reservation of space and rooms, the emergence and spread of Covid and California legislation to address the epidemic, forced us to cancel Herpeton 2020. All that work and preparation ended up being for naught.

As things stand, the future of Herpeton is on hold. Allen and I are ready to pass the Herpeton torch to the younger generation that will set the course for the future of herpetoculture. My only advice is: "How about we bring back the magic!"

Note: The talks of Herpeton 2019 were recorded by Brian Kusko of Triple B TV and are available for viewing on his channel on YouTube. We cannot thank Brian enough for taking the time to record the event.



Figure 3. BION's team on Herpeton 2019.