

Approved Meeting Minutes

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New Mexico Herpetological Society (NMHS)

May 1, 2014

American International Rattlesnake Museum

President Scott Bulgrin is away at an Environmental Protection Agency conference in Dallas. Newsletter Editor Josh Emms opened the meeting at 7:25pm attended by 16 adults, 1 pre-teen and 1 toddler herper. He welcomed all present and introduced our presenter of the evening Matt Eschenbrenner who's been working at our Albuquerque Biopark Zoo for about 14 years, 10 and a half of that in Reptiles, and now is Senior Herpetology Keeper and Institutional Rep for Crocodilians. Then it was lights out.

Program

Croc Conservation in Cote d' Ivoire,

Matt told us that in January 2014 he and Dr. Ralph Zimmerman, head veterinarian, delivered much-needed supplies, trained keepers and worked with the animals at Zoo d'Abidjan the only zoo in Cote d'Ivoire West Africa. Funding (\$8,500) for their 20-day stay was provided by the Albuquerque BioPark Society.

Matt E. taught general protocol, husbandry, capture and health exam techniques to the croc keepers, who have never had any formal training. Dr. Z examined and treated reptiles and mammals.

Zoo d'Abidjan was formed in that port city in the late 1970s and currently is being rehabilitated after years of unrest and civil war through a project initiated by the Association Du Calao a small but very active and proactive Conservation group. Richard Champion, a zoologist from Britain who rehabs zoos around the world, is working under 2-year contract with the Swiss Embassy to update Zoo d'Abidjan and serves as its assistant director.

Located in Cote d'Ivoire's largest city with a population of twelve million, the zoo houses the largest captive population (39) in the world of the critically endangered West African slender-snouted crocodile (*Mecistops cataphractus*), a candidate for a Critically Endangered listing on the IUCN Red List. Cataphractus is Greek meaning clad in armour.

Kim Lovich, an associate curator at San Diego Zoo Global, has been working with the Ivorian Ministry on the cataphractus import to the U.S and has a permit is in the works to bring 6 of individuals complete with Trovan® [microchip ID] numbers into the US to be 'Founding Fathers' (and mothers) in a breeding program. Of the 38 critically endangered cataphractus already in the U.S., 33 are related.

Dr. Matt Shirley, a croc researcher from Univ. of Florida and manager of safari development at SFM Safari Gabon which has concessions for conservation tourism, had done genetics work to separate the Central African Slender-snouted Crocodile *cataphractus* from the West African Slender-snouted Crocodile now awaiting its own taxonomic species name.

Emily, Matt S.'s significant other from France, served as a translator.

Clovis was principal translator. A professor in the university, Clovis wants to become the zoo educator.

Dr. Soro is the part-time, high school-educated Abidjan vet,

Michel grad student doing PhD work on captive crocodilians

The Albuquerque-Abidjan team caught and examined:

37 West African slender-snouted crocodile (*Mecistops cataphractus*).

21 Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*), the second largest extant reptile in the world, after the saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*), and

3 African dwarf crocodile (*Osteolaemus tetraspis*), aka as broad-snouted or bony crocodile.

Zoo d'Abidjan has 13 West African crocodile or desert crocodile (*Crocodylus suchus*), a species of crocodile related to – and often confused with – the Nile crocodile (*C. niloticus*).

Matt S. shopped in a nearby market place and for \$80 bought a broken down soda fridge with glass front to convert into a *cataphractus* egg incubator. Now located in the zoo education building it holds 90% humidity and 49 *cataphractus* eggs due to hatch in June.

Matt E. emphasized to the keepers the need for team work, to have the other fellow's back, to develop an animal-person mentality and to not hit the reptiles with poles. Croc jaws and heads are loaded with integumentary sensory organs (ISOs) which makes their skin 10x more sensitive than a human's.

Matt E and Dr. Z travelled to the town of Assinie for a day to look over 6 *cataphractus* in a well-maintained private croc farm/mini zoo run by Manu who owns the resort hotel the Africa Queen. Manu might trade out 2 of their *cataphractus* for 2 from Zoo d'Abidjan.

The Governor of Yamoussoukro invited the Matt E. and Dr. Z to the city of 300,000 population that is the capital of Cote d'Ivoire. Forty years ago the croc-phile President of the country Félix Houphouët-Boigny aka Papa Houphouët or Le Vieux (The Old One), tribal chief, Sage of Africa, the Grand Old Man of Africa, moved the capital from Abidjan to his home town of Yamoussoukro, had the world's largest church built there, the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro, at a cost of US\$300 million. and had sacred lakes created as habitat for introduced sacred Nile Crocodiles. The result is an over-population of females up to 9' and males up to 17' (1,700 lbs.) Some crocs have ventured into surrounding residential areas and eaten humans.

Matt E. told us about the Death of the Crocodile Handler Dicko Toki (The Old One) here two years ago at the end of Ramadan that can be viewed on YouTube

The online description of the video is: "this man Took care of the Crocodiles of Our first president for about 40 years, Early september 2012, he slept and fall facing one of the crocodile he fed all he's life, But the animal have instinct no friendship."

Matt E. and Dr. Z met with chiefs of the Baoule tribes and recommended modern husbandry practices for the Yamoussoukro crocs that are so sacred that they eventually end up in their own sacred burial ground.

The San Diego Zoo is funding improvements to the complex.

Matt told us that housing at our BioPark for salt water crocodiles still is in the planning.

8:30pm We had a sweets break.

8:53pm

Secretary Cosmos read Minutes of our April 3rd Meeting. The Minutes were approved and accepted.

Treasurer Leticia reported our bank account has a balance of \$2,480.54.

Sue Brown announced that she had picked out ear rings to give to former Vice-President Nancy Bush in appreciation for her smart work for NMHS.

Josh Emms presided over our business meeting. He announced that Ted and Sue Brown would be at Villanueva, New Mexico State Park on June 28th, the Wildlife West event in Edgewood, New Mexico would be coming up on June 21st and our summertime potluck will be at Jaci Fischer's on Saturday July 12th starting at 6pm. He said that Scott Bulgrin still had not heard from Bitter Lakes NWR or Bottomless State Park about allowing our field trip to be held there. Other locations suggested were the BLM's Datil Wells Campground and many campsites in the Jemez Mountain range. Josh asked for a show of hands: 5 went up for Datil Wells, 3 for the Jemez. Sue Brown suggested that we find out whether camp sites will be available at Datil Wells and have a back-up plan just in case the campground is filled. Because of the field trip we will not have an NMHS meeting in June. We will decide on the location for the fall field trip during our August 7th meeting.

New Business.

Scott Bulgrin will be returning tonight and will lead in opening the Survey and the bucket traps on Sandia Pueblo on this coming Saturday at 9am. Josh reminded us to bring water, sunscreen and shovels and wear long pants.

Jerry reported that he and Kelley Hill had travelled to the Round Rock, Texas no-kill Texas Rattlesnake Festival where some visitors said they had passed on going to the kill-type Annual Sweetwater, Texas

Jaycee's World's Largest Rattlesnake Round-up. Guests Joyce Murdock of Placitas and Jason Pettijohn were with us. Our meeting adjourned at 9:38pm. These Minutes of the May 1 Meeting are submitted by Secretary Cosmos