

## NMHS Meeting Minutes

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New Mexico Herpetological Society

February 4, 2016

We convened at the American International Rattlesnake Museum in Old Town Albuquerque

NMHS President Scott Bulgrin called our meeting to order at 7:17 PM and welcomed 17 adult herper guests. He introduced our presenter of the evening Matt Eschenbrenner Senior Keeper of Herpetology and Institutional Representative for Crocidilians at Albuquerque's BioPark Zoo. Matt has worked at the BioPark for 16 years, 11 and a half of that in reptiles. Matt had presented to us on May 1, 2014 about the BioPark outreach to Zoo d'Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire West Africa, in particular, the captive breeding of Slender-snouted Crocodiles or, more commonly, cataphractus. Slender-snouted crocodiles are native to freshwater habitats in central and western Africa. Males may reach a length of 12' and weight of 425 lbs, females 8' and 150 lbs

Recent genetic and morphological evidence suggests that the slender-snouted crocodile in fact comprises two separate species composed of a central African population (*Mecistops cataphractus*) and the as yet unnamed west African population. The western species would, in fact, class as one of the most endangered species of crocodilian, and scientists have estimated that the two populations have been separate for 6.5-7.5 million years.

Matthew Shirley, Ph.D. led the latest research and came up with two distinct species of cataphractus, now known as African and West African slender-snouted crocodiles. This was published on December 11, 2013 in Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.

### PROGRAM

Matt brought us up to date about the Cote d'Ivoire project. How far away from Albuquerque is it? you ask. 9 hours to Paris, 7 hours to Abidjan. United Airlines says 25 hours total one way. Get visas and vaccinations ahead of time. What might you otherwise contract when you get there.? Malaria, yellow fever, rabies.

In 2014 cataphractas females laid eggs, the incubator worked and eggs hatched. In 2014 the New Mexico BioPark Society Conservation Fund allotted the project \$7,000 and in 2015 \$15,000 which was upped to \$17,500 to support 5 people to Africa and back. In January 2014 this task force spent 20 days (too many days) on the ground, in 2015 12 days (not enough days) on the ground. Matt related that the expedition in October 2015 coincided with the rainy season and the moving of five chimpanzees but not including the big male Rambo to a new larger enclosure. In two seasons the zoo has hatched 50 cataphractas and built an enclosure for the juveniles.

Installing a filtration system for the croc pool which was built by Germans in the 1980s was priority in 2015. A local well-stocked hardware store provided many items and a local manufacturer of PVC parts

provided the crucial Y-connector for the water filtration system which moves through rock and sand. Keepers who make \$140 a month, work 6 days a week and spend \$60 a month to get to and from work, came in on their days off to help install the water pump. The San Diego Zoo fund bought a new grinder which was needed at times in plumbing the filtration system.

Team-building with the Zoo d'Abidjan staff was priority. Our BioPark Society sent over soccer balls and Run for the Zoo t-shirts and coloring books and boots for the croc guys and Cote d'Ivoire logo patches for their work shirts. The project gave a Tablet to the zoo and downloaded training videos about handling animals such as crocs and hippos. Matt said that the book DON'T SHOOT THE DOG which is concerned with human relationships as well as the training of animals such as dogs and dolphins will be translated into French even though the keepers do not read. Bringing some staffers from sister zoo Zoo d'Abidjan to Albuquerque's BioPark for training will be a major relationship building feat for both zoos.

Matt introduced us to zoo staffers: Dr. Soro S. Daouda the zoo veterinarian with the equivalent of high school training; Captain who helped come up with letters of introduction to local officials. Andre and Irie are 2 of the 3 croc keepers. They take care of the day to day husbandry, filtration, food etc. Irie is also the zoo's welder and assists with many construction and fabrication projects. Yuria. Digbe who is the manager and prime contact. Clovis L. who is a translator and professor at a local university, did not help out during this year's visit. Clovis Perea is a welder, and exhibit fabricator at the BioPark, a big guy, who now wears full beard which is unusual in Cote l'Voire and was adored by school kids. The zoo has a new director who has no power within the zoo which malfunctions as a French military system in which no question is easily answered. Matt praised the keepers who have become as slick as croc work in capturing and handling the cataphractus.

And Matt introduced us to Dr. Ralph Zimmeraman head veterinarian from our Albuquerque BioPark Zoo; Richard Champion, a British zoo consultant, who volunteered his services in Abidjan in 2011 while rebuilding a zoo in Mali, and began working as deputy director in May 2013 through a two-year sponsorship with the Swiss Embassy in Cote d'Ivoire; Chaz Ahem a hoof stock keeper who worked with Siegfried and Roy in their Las Vegas, Nevada performances featuring lions and tigers; Matt Shirley PhD field biologist who is finding protected areas in which to release young cataphractas; Chelsey the chimp whisperer who trained chimps to offer their arms for blood draws' translators associated with the French embassy including Francesco who helped build the caracal enclosure; Andre; and Dr. Carol who with unmatched skill took blood samples for analysis via nasal sinus draws from 10 juvenile cataphractus. Dr. Carol is a vet at the ABQ BioPark and she helped plan the croc health exams. She has been at the BioPark for about 6 years or so.

Blood samples in cartridges were put into the I-Stat blood analyzer and in only two minutes measurements were ready of sodium, potassium chloride, ionized calcium, glucose, urea, nitrogen, creatine and hemoglobin. It was obvious that juvenile cataphractus had significantly lower levels of calcium than adults. It will take more than dead tilapia fish donated by a local farm to raise calcium levels. Our BioPark has sent 4 bags of Mazuri Exotic Animal Nutrition croc chow to Abadjan with arrival

expected in February. Donated leftover food from grocery stores intended for crocs still disappears among impoverished keepers. There is only one freezer for meat and it is under lock and key. Cataphractus grow fastest during their first five years and will be ready for release into protected areas outside the Zoo d'Abidjan when they are a meter long.

Matt told about improvements needed at Zoo d'Abidjan: bolstering walls that are undermined by equatorial tropical rains; moving the centerpiece of the Zoo, Can the African Elephant (b. 1992), from the way too small enclosure she has been in for 15 years to an exercise yard not far away; raise tilapia as part of a filtration system; build a water catchment so that rainwater replaces expensive tap water that fills the croc pool twice a week; build up to date enclosures for all animals and enrich their psychological environments; get the United States Ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire involved; maintain close ties with the fundraising organization Talon; publish research about cataphractus in scientific and zoo medicine journals. To further these plans, Matt will ask the New Mexico BioPark Society to fund the Zoo d'Abidjan project for a full five years.

Abidjan already is an important west African zoo. It has other endangered species of wildlife: a Pygmy Hippopotamus (*Choeropsis liberiensis* or *Hexaprotodon liberiensis*) listed in the European Stud Book for Zoos as well as the primate Sclater's Guenon (*Cercopithecus sclateri*)

Matt said that Zoo d'Abidjan is not likely to ever achieve AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) rank.

[On the Biopark Society website Zoo d'Abidjan Deputy Director Richard Champion was quoted in 2014 celebrating "visitor attendance that has increased from 12,000 a year in 2012 to 40,000 in 2013, to about 2,000 a week currently, "a number that continues to rise every week as the zoo gets better"] Thank you very much, Matt, for bringing us up to date on the Albuquerque BioPark Zoo outreach to Zoo d'Abidjan.

BREAK TIME for sweets was upon us at 8:30 PM

#### BACK TO BUSINESS

Scott asked Secretary Cosmos to read the Minutes from our last meeting which was held on January 6, 2016 at the Rattlesnake Museum. The Secretary's reading of the Minutes was greeted with glee, applause and shouting and unanimously accepted as read by members present.

Scott then asked our Treasurer Letitia to report on the financial state of our Society. Letitia responded that what she had to say would not be as funny as what our Secretary had just read from the Minutes of January. Undeterred and pressing on with appropriate seriousness, Letitia told us that \$3,459.10 remains in the Society's checking account. Deposits included Dues and Banquet reservations \$1,335.00 and bids from the silent auction \$200. Expenditures were for Surveyors on Sandia Pueblo \$2,688.00 and Church Street Café \$,1027.22. The Secretary's sobering Report was approved by members present.

Scott said that checks must be written to Ted Brown for snacks \$75.00, to the New Mexico BioPark Society for the Cote d'Ivoire project \$150.00, and to the Rattlesnake Museum for adoption of the New Mexico Milksnake, Banded Rock Rattlesnake and Mottled Rock Rattlesnake during 2016 \$156.00. Letitia wrote those checks. Other checks will be written to Ted Brown \$350 for completing the Sandia Pueblo Survey Report, to some surveyors from our 2015 Sandia Survey, and to speakers this year.

#### OLD BUSINESS

This evening Scott made sure that items from the silent auction in December got to Jaci and Letitia.

Scott reminded us that we still have to decide where we want the Society to go.

Our first step might be to design a new logo. Scott asked Jaci if she could ask her daughter to come up with a new design. In the past the logo has been glow in the dark snake skeleton. Letitia said that she likes the logo of a horned lizard that we are using now. Tara requested that the logo have a Zia symbol in it, something distinctive to show off to her herper friends in Texas.

Another first step is toward fundraising. Scott brought up that Caroline and Sparky Newell volunteered to do their 45-60 minute show as a fundraiser for the Society. Our Society would then ask for \$2-3 donations from guests. They no longer put on their parrot and herp programs in schools because the students have been unruly.

Then there is outreach and education. Scott recalled that at our New Mexico State Fair in Albuquerque, Tom McCain of the Horny Toad Connection, Inc. had shared space with us in the past. But being on site for many days called for too many volunteer hours from our Society members.

There's another opportunity at the Fair. Scott suggested that NMHS take over Bob Myers' display place in the Natural Resources Building for only two hours a day for two days total [Corrected to read: four hours on one day only]. The question is: may we solicit donations??

Another topic for discussion is field trips. Scott suggested having more meetings and day field trips in June and August including a potluck in the field. This calls for adequate preplanning and publicity before the event same as the Rocky Mountain Field Herpers accomplish. Scott said we should come up with destinations within New Mexico's 121,665 square miles asap. He asked Ted where the Society went on its very first field trip and Ted said that it was to Frisco Hot Springs [Corrected to read: San Francisco Hot Springs in the Gila National Forest, Catron County, New Mexico on May 9 and 10, 1964] which now is on private property. Tara said that she wanted to go somewhere where we were certain to find something. Scott said we could go to the Animas and find willardii and that the Chiricahuas and Rodeo were certain to produce stuff. Same with Sugarite Canyon and Roy. Scott asked members present whether we have ever been skunked and come up empty-handed on any NMHS field trip. Josh suggested starting herping on hot days at dinnertime when there's a cooling off although he also said that he had found geckoes at Carlsbad when the temperature was 112 degrees. Tara reminded us that during holidays there are too many people wherever there is major water. Scott accentuated the positive in pointing out that low gasoline prices are our incentive to roadtrip more. Scott again pointed out that the Chiricahuas are close to Rodeo.

Bob Myers said the rancher is okay with 6-8 herpers coming out to the ranch on April 2 to see Western Diamondbacks, Coachwhips, Cornsnakes, Bullsnares, and lizards. The location is 15 miles west of Santa Rosa. Bob said that he will lead this one. Scott suggested that a lottery could decide who gets to go. Seven members present raised hands and said they would like to go. Bob told us that a fall trip might also be arranged.

Scott brought us back to the question of where in New Mexico to go on our Memorial Day field trip spanning May 28, 29, 30.

Ted mentioned the Black Range's Lower Gallinas. He remembered that Chloride has no campground. Josh said that this area in the southwest part of our state had a forest fire which resulted in lots of water erosion.

Ted said that Ranch Manager Tom Waddell wants the Society to come back down to the Armendaris Ranch. The camping there is primitive. Jaci suggested that we could stay in the cabin or home.

Scott wanted to know the name of the falls east of Sugarite and Clayton. Ted identified it as Folsom Falls and the area as not suitable for camping because it is all rock.

Scott asked How about Clovis, Roswell? Geronimo Falls was closed the last time we were down there. How about Queen? There's lots of BLM land around there.

Ted said that we have stayed at Black Mesa State Park in Oklahoma near Kenton and herped in New Mexico. We found kingsnakes, ratsnakes, Prairie Rattlers, Bullsnares and set out turtle traps. The two major roads in the area are little traveled and to the north are even less traveled ranch roads.

Scott pitched to us again. "How about the Floridas?"

Tara suggested taking a day field trip to the Valles Caldera on the Jemez Mountain range now that it is a National Park. A NMHS survey might still be the thing to do if the work has not already been contracted out.

Scott said that we must decide by next Friday where we will go on the Memorial Day field trip and we will have a destination chosen by our meeting in March. Josh said that he will put announcements up on our Facebook page.

#### EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

April 6<sup>th</sup> Science for a Day at Wilson Middle School in Albuquerque. Scott said that he will put on a program six times back to back for classes.

Early July at Esther Bone Library in Rio Rancho, New Mexico Scott will put on a program about turtles.

#### NEW BUSINESS

Scott said that Pat Maher is moving to Tucson, Arizona which means that we need another vice-president. Josh said that Daniel Carroll and wife will move to Mesa, Arizona next week.

Scott said that he will submit purchase orders to the Pueblo of Sandia for our Surveys and contact Valle del Oro NWR about continuing our survey down there.

Josh requested an up to date NMHS email distribution list from Letitia and intends to have a newsletter out in April.

Our meeting adjourned without fanfare at 9:37 PM.

These NMHS Meeting Minutes of February 4, 2016 are read and submitted on March 3, 2016 by Secretary Cosmos.

Thank you Bob and Lorraine Myers for hosting us in your American International Rattlesnake Museum.