

Guest Editorial: Iran Issue

When most people think of Iran, they envision a hot, dry land. Although much of the central area of the country fits this concept, Iran has a great geographical diversity and a corresponding floral and faunal diversity as well. Owing to the many geographically and ecologically distinct regions, a high percentage of the small animal species, including amphibians and reptiles, are limited, or endemic, to these areas. Because there is a long tectonic history of southwestern Asia, a result of collisions of Eurasia with the African and Indian plates and the near closing of the Tethys Sea, the region is a crossroads of distributions of the faunas, especially at the generic level, of animals originating in these three geographic realms. These genera have diverged during the periods of mountain and high plateau uplift and subsequent erosion to plains of great soil diversity, from coarse pebbles to aeolian deposits of sand and loess. Changes in elevation and changes in climate have created both barriers to and reconnections of faunal distributions. This paleogeographic dynamism has resulted in the greatest faunal diversity within the western Palearctic Realm.

Although the first accounts attempting to describe and catalog the Iranian fauna according to modern bio-systematic principles took place during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the number of species described, as well as interpretations of their evolutionary relationships has grown steadily. With the spread of greater scientific education in Iran and consequently, the growing number of zoologists, the twenty-first century has already seen a flowering of renewed interest in herpetological studies among those in a position to carry out long-term studies in ecology, and to initiate scientific approaches to conservation and wildlife management.

Some additional cultural and economic changes have strongly influenced the development of interest in wildlife and conservation in Iran. The growth of an educated middle class, along with access to modern field vehicles, cameras, climbing gear, GPS, etc., has created a generation of outdoor sportspeople with an appreciation and respect for nature. For example, there are now excellent photographs available of most categories of animals.

The papers in the current issue reflect something of the variety of herpetological projects being carried out currently by Iranian herpetological specialists. Few of the papers here can be characterized as conventional “conservation studies” investigating the broader issues of herpetological conservation. However, to be meaningful conservation studies require descriptive data of species and habitats, species distribution, and syntopy, and these are the kinds of studies represented in this issue (Iran) of *Amphibian & Reptile Conservation*.

As in most countries, conservation efforts for amphibians and reptiles are incidental to conservation of larger species of wildlife, for which protected areas are designated. Throughout the history of western cultures, reptiles and amphibians have been reviled and persecuted. In Iran, the Zoroastrians were persistent destroyers of these animals, which were regarded as associated with the dark and evil force of nature. Neither Islam nor Christianity held them in much higher regard. Only lately have they been seen as integral units in ecological systems.

Steven C. Anderson, Guest Editor