

O B I T U A R I E S

John L. Behler (1943–2006)¹

I had the good fortune of spending a day with him just a week before his death as we put the finishing touches on a manuscript on which we were working. At the end of the day, we made plans to meet in late winter at Bog Brook, where we had been surveying turtles together for nearly a quarter of a century. His death has been a great shock to me and everyone who knew him.

Alvin Breisch
New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation

John Luther Behler was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Miami and his master's degree in biological sciences from East Stroudsburg University. After teaching biology at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, he joined the Wildlife Conservation Society, which operates the Bronx Zoo, as a New York State Council on the Arts curatorial trainee in 1970. In 1976, he became Curator of the Herpetology Department. Since 1996, he also served as program coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Wildlife Survival Center on St. Catherines Island, Georgia.

Behler assumed leadership positions in the development of captive breeding programs for endangered and threatened crocodilians, tortoises, and freshwater turtles. Through his efforts, Batagur Turtles (*Batagur baska* and *Callagur borneoensis*) and False Gharials (*Tomistoma schlegelii*) successfully bred in captivity for the first time at the Bronx Zoo. He received the American Zoo and Aquarium Association's (AZA) Edward



John Behler with a Spotted Turtle (*Clemmys guttata*) equipped with a tracking device. John conducted extensive field studies on this species, which is becoming increasingly rare throughout much of its range.

H. Bean Award in 1980 for most significant reptilian birth for his work with Chinese Alligators (*Alligator sinensis*). Behler's interests also focused on the ecology and behavior of reptiles and reptilian diseases. He also conducted extensive field studies of tortoises in Madagascar and of Spotted and Bog turtles (*Clemmys guttata* and *Glyptemys mublenbergii*, respectively) in North America.

Among his many conservation affiliations, Behler chaired the World Conservation Union's Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and was a member of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Turtle Trade Working Group. He was a former coordinator of the AZA's Crocodilian Advisory Group and was a member of the AZA's Chelonian and Lizard Taxon Advisory Groups. Behler worked closely with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Endangered Species Unit and the U.S. National Park Service. He served on his community's Conservation Board and on the Westchester County Environmental Management Council.

In the early 1990s, he warned about an increasing trade of wild Asian turtles in China, where they are prized as food and in preparing traditional medicines. At the time, the Chinese had been importing turtles from Thailand, Indonesia, and even the United States. Behler argued against the practice and pushed for the opening of turtle farms in China to supply the growing commercial market.

He authored more than 40 popular and scientific articles and five guidebooks highlighting reptiles and amphibians, the best known of which was the 1979 reference book that remains in wide use, the *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians*, coauthored with F. Wayne King.

¹ The bulk of this obituary was provided by Alvin Breisch, much of it based on data provided by Linda Corcoran, Wildlife Conservation Society; a small amount of additional information came from the obituary published in the *New York Times* on 5 February 2006.

Raymond Walker



Raymond Walker and Nancy Woodfield, BVI National Parks Trust, during a *Cyclura pinguis* Species Recovery Plan workshop held in Tortola, BVI, July 2001.

Raymond Walker died on Saturday, 21 January 2006, from complications following surgery to remove a brain tumor. For the past six-plus years, Raymond worked for the British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust, where he oversaw the Anegada Iguana Headstart and Recovery Programme. That program experienced many changes and improvements under Raymond's oversight, growing from a basic headstart operation to one that has repatriated 72 iguanas back to the wild since 2003. Those of us who worked in the BVI on the iguana project with Raymond knew him to be a decent, genuine, and hard-working individual, one who took great pleasure in contributing to the progress of the program. He was always helpful and upbeat, with a contagious smile that made working with him a pleasure. Some members of the Iguana Specialist Group met Raymond when he attended the ISG meetings in Puerto Rico (1999) and Grand Cayman (2001).

Personnel at the BVI National Parks Trust office are deeply saddened by this tragic turn of events. He will be missed by all of us who worked with him over the years.

Please join me as we extend our sincere condolences to his family, including his wife and two very young children, and co-workers.

Rick Hudson
ISG Co-chair