

the natural history of West Indian amphibians and reptiles. I doubt that he would've been up to reading it, but I did want him to know that I had written it (with Bob Powell). Perhaps my ego (or insecurity) hoped he'd at least think, "Bob's done OK."

## In the Field with Henry Fitch

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I received a phone call from Alice Fitch Echelle in the fall of my junior year at Baylor University. I knew Alice, Henry Fitch's daughter, through her husband Tony Echelle. Tony was teaching a graduate course in Systematics at Baylor, and had given me permission to enroll in his class as an undergraduate. That course opened my eyes to the exciting possibilities of phylogenetics. Tony and Alice often let me come along on their many field trips to collect fishes throughout Texas, so Alice knew that I was enthusiastic about fieldwork.

Over the phone, Alice described how her father had received a small grant to study the impact of human exploitation of iguanas for food, and was planning a semester-long field trip through Mexico and Central America. As Henry was nearing retirement, Alice was worried about him making the trip alone, and she knew that I had a passion for anything to do with herpetology. She wanted to know if I was interested in taking off a semester from school and accompanying Henry in the field. "I would love to do it, but I'll need to think about it," I said, as I considered how delaying my graduation by a semester might affect my future plans for graduate school. I hung up the phone and thought for about 30 seconds, then called Alice back. "I'll do it...when do we leave?" That was the extent of the background and the planning for what was to be my most educational semester as an undergraduate.

I was already quite familiar with Henry Fitch through his books and research articles. I had met him the previous summer as he visited Alice and Tony, when I asked him to sign my copy of his book, *Reproductive Cycles of Lizards and Snakes*. I remember that he was pleased to see that my copy of the book was worn and obviously heavily used. Henry had been embarrassed and modest, acting as if he felt honored to be asked by an over-eager undergraduate for his autograph. I couldn't believe that such a famous person could be so modest.

Henry drove down from Kansas and picked me up in Texas in early January, in an old International Harvester pickup with a well-worn camper in the bed, which was to be our home for the next four months. We crossed into Mexico the next day, and I learned very quickly that there was little justification for Henry's modest demeanor. I asked questions about everything we saw, and rarely did I manage to stump him. At every camping site, I caught practically every herp, fish, insect, spider, crustacean, and mammal that I could find, and Henry told me something about them all. He frequently also would explain fundamental concepts of geology, climate, ecology, and just about every other aspect of natural history as we slowly moved south through Mexico into Central America. His impromptu lectures stimulated me to write long entries in my field journal every evening.

The funded purpose of the trip was to study iguana exploitation, and we did that. But Henry was fascinated with anoles, and it became clear to me that Henry was much more interested in studying the systematics, ecology, and behavior of anoles than he was in studying iguanas. That was fine with me; I didn't care what we studied, as long as it was related to herpetology. We traveled fairly slowly, so that we had plenty of time to collect anoles and other herps at every campsite.

I had never before met an adult who was so completely immersed in the study of natural history, so we hit it off immediately. Henry was as enthusiastic about being in the field as I was, at least by day. I was surprised,

however, that Henry did not accompany me on my nightly forays into the forests around our campsites after dark. His diabetes had affected his night vision, and so he did not see well at night. But he was always enthusiastic about all the herps I would find and bring back to him in the camper after dark, and we would often stay up late talking about our latest captures and what interesting research problems they might suggest. To Henry, every species provided new questions that were waiting to be answered. I couldn't imagine a more exciting life.

As much as I was enjoying myself, there were a few aspects of Henry's approach to fieldwork that caused me some aggravation. First, he insisted on doing all the driving, even though I'd been asked by Alice to accompany Henry on the basis that he would need some help. Given his poor night vision, his night-driving proved quite frightening to everyone on the road except Henry, and more than once I was convinced we would drive off one of the many precipitous roadsides in the mountains of Central America. Eventually, I insisted that he had to let me drive at night, or else I would only get in the truck with him by day. We drove only by day from then on; I was still not permitted to drive the old International Harvester pickup.

A second minor aggravation was what can generously be described as Henry's rather parsimonious nature. We bought and cooked all our own food, which was fine with me, except that Henry was a straight Midwestern meat-and-potatoes man, and we almost never had any meat. So we ate mostly potatoes. After the first few weeks of a steady potato diet, I was getting desperate for something I could taste. I started buying a few peppers and spices from the markets on the sly, and catching land crabs, freshwater prawns, and fish from the streams around our campsites. Soon I was cooking up two meals: boiled potatoes for Henry, and a spicy concoction of whatever I could catch around our campsites for me. Henry politely tried my attempts at culinary diversity a few times, but he always returned to potatoes for dinner. Sometimes, for excitement, he would put a little salt and pepper or butter on them, or even add a scrambled egg when he was feeling extravagant.

Other than gasoline (which cost about 30 cents a gallon in Mexico at the time), I think Henry was spending less than a dollar a day for all our other living expenses. So when we reached the Guatemala–El Salvador border on a Saturday in February, and Henry discovered that the weekend fee for crossing the border was 50 cents/person, but that the weekday rate was 25 cents, we of course had to turn around and camp out in Guatemala until Monday morning to save 50 cents. At our Guatemalan campsite near the border, I found synbranchid eels in a small stream, and I had a blast figuring out how to catch them (and I still have fond memories of *Synbranchus* stew). By Sunday I had to hang my clothes out to dry, and some locals who had been drinking decided to take advantage of the situation. They grabbed my clothes and ran, and I briefly gave chase, until one of them turned and pulled out a machete. I returned to camp and suggested to Henry that we might want to find a new camping spot. Henry did not seem very interested in doing so until rocks started raining down on us from the cliff above our campsite. We pulled out just as a large rock smashed our windshield. When I last saw that pickup many years later, that broken windshield had never been repaired.

On Monday morning after the windshield-smashing event, we arrived at the border at 8 AM, just when the weekend rate was supposed to change back to the weekday rate. But after the customary spraying of the truck with DDT (a ritual that was practiced on both sides of every Central American border), the border official charged us 50 cents a person. Henry objected, and pointed to the clock on the wall, which said 8:05 AM. The border official calmly went to the clock, changed the time to 7:55, and charged us the weekend rate. It was one of the few times in four months I saw Henry mad about anything. For the most part, he would roll with whatever life dished out, and make the best of every situation.

Our study of human exploitation of iguanas and ctenosaurs reached a peak during Lent, when the markets of Central America became well stocked with these large lizards. Lizard is not considered "meat" by many people who give up meat for Lent, so iguanas and ctenosaurs were sold and



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Henry Fitch examining an iguana in a market in El Salvador, February 1979.

eaten by the thousands during this time. But after Lent, we were back into the mountains, looking for more species of anoles. By then, we had hatched a project to study intra- and interspecific variation of anole dewlaps, and were busy collecting series of as many species as we could locate.

One might think that it would have been a physical mismatch to pair a young strapping undergraduate with a professor nearing retirement on an extended field trip. It was...I had a hard time keeping up with Henry. He wasn't fast, but he never stopped. He could walk all day up steep mountainsides in pursuit of the next species of anole, and we did so just about every day. Some years later, as a graduate student at the University of Kansas, I would take public education classes of schoolchildren out to the KU Natural History Reservation where Henry and his wife Virginia lived. Even well into his "retirement" years, Henry took great pride in leaving kids in the dust. As he cruised through the Reservation, he would grab snakes as he walked, checking their ventral clips for individual identification. "Aha! It's female number 1675! I have captured this racer more than 300 times in her life...I am glad to see that she is still alive." The kids were always wide-eyed with amazement, as they stood there trying to catch their breath before Henry rushed off to the next snake.

As it turned out, Alice need not have worried about Henry's "advancing age" when we set off for our Central American field trip. Henry remained active in the field for another three decades after that trip... a full career for many people. Henry collected more data after he "retired" than most people collect in their lifetimes. I doubt anyone will ever be able to repeat the kind of long-term autecological studies that he perfected. But more than the specific knowledge that I learned from Henry, what I admired most about him was his child-like enthusiasm for nature and everything in it, and his unquenchable need to ask questions about everything he encountered. Several gen-

erations of herpetologists benefited from his wisdom, his kindness, and his passion. Mention his name to anyone who ever met him, and you will get a smile and a story. I can't think of a better legacy for a great naturalist who squeezed so much out of such a long and productive life. Henry, we will all miss you, but we will smile every time your name is mentioned.

## Natural History Observations of Henry Fitch

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The Second World Congress of Herpetology was held in Adelaide, Australia in 1994. One symposium was on the biology of snakes, and Henry Fitch was a presenter. For many in the audience, this was their first time to hear the legend in person. So as Henry walked to the podium, the audience's initial mood (or at least mine) was one of excitement, anticipation, and respect.

Henry gave an amazing talk. The theme was long-term (really long-term!) demographic trends of all of the snakes on the Kansas Natural History Reserve. The results were stunning but depressing: The density of essentially every species had declined over time.

The audience (largely snake buffs of the first order) quickly became somber. Adding to the poignancy of the moment, we all recognized that this grim result was being delivered by a kind and gentle man whose deep love for snakes and their natural history had inspired him to carry out a life-long study of these snakes. But the clear conclusion emerging from all of his immense work was that his beloved subjects were declining to extinction. Sometimes, life doesn't seem fair.

Either in his talk, or in the question period afterwards, Henry noted that a primary cause was a policy of suppressing fires on the Reserve: as a result, succession was unchecked, such that habitats on the reserve were increasingly forested and increasingly unfavorable to snakes.

Someone asked, "Why don't you light a fire?" Henry thought for a moment, and then replied quietly, "I can't do that." My distinct impression at the time was that he really did want to do just that, but that he couldn't do so ethically, given his position at the Reserve.

But I also remember distinctly feeling at the time that Henry was sending a subliminal message to us in the audience: "If you want to start a fire..."

For me, Henry's talk was certainly among the most memorable ones of the entire Congress. Moreover, its central lesson still haunts my thoughts. We should do science because we love the process, not because we need to love the results. Henry Fitch could not have loved the results of his work, but there's no doubt he loved the process.

## Memories of Henry Fitch

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Henry Fitch was one of the most gracious, kind, and gentle men I have ever known. I greatly respected him for his long list of professional achievements, but I also respected him for the man he was and how he treated others. He was always the gentle encourager to me and I often think of his example when I get in an exasperating situation with my students or colleagues. I never heard a degrading word spoken against Henry the man