



DAVID HILLIS

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