Historical Perspectives

The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists at 100: Setting the Stage for the Next Hundred Years

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On December 27, 1913, the first issue of *Copeia* was published (Smith and Mitchell, 2013). This pamphlet was developed in appreciation of “cold blooded vertebrates” and comprised five short articles, a total of four pages; *Copeia* was the brainchild of John Treadwell Nichols (1883–1958; Fig. 1A), an Assistant Curator in the Department of Ichthyology and Herpetology at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City, New York. A little over three years later—perhaps encouraged by the modest but continued growth of *Copeia*—Nichols, with the help of Henry Weed Fowler (1878–1965; Fig. 1B), the ichthyologist at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia (ANSP), and George Dwight Franklin (1888–1971; Fig. 1C), a preparator for the Department of Ichthyology and Herpetology at the AMNH, formed the Publications Committee for *Copeia*. On March 8, 1916, this group hosted a meeting of ichthyologists and herpetologists, under the name “American Society for the Study of Fish and Reptiles” at the AMNH. Just prior to the meeting, the name of this new society was changed to the more inclusive “American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists” (ASIH; Netting, unpubl.; see Smith and Bowman, 2016: appendix 1). Fifty-one individuals are listed as having paid their dues that day (I. Bowman, pers. comm.; Fig. 2). What transpired at that first meeting—who spoke, the topics covered, what if any discussion there was of future meetings of this fledgling society—has been lost to history. However, this first meeting was successful enough to organize a second meeting for the following year, held one year to the day at the ANSP. This time the meeting, which attracted attendees from as far away as Michigan, was summarized in the pages of *Copeia* (issue 42, dated April 24, 1917; 17 titles being reported, five with abstracts).

In 1932, a full 16 years after the first meeting of the ASIH, William K. Gregory (1876–1970), a curator at the AMNH whose name was registered as an attendee at the 1916 meeting, and G. Kingsley Noble (1894–1940), a fellow AMNH curator in herpetology, were charged with drafting the constitution for the ASIH. Their draft constitution was two pages in length and comprised ten articles, primarily outlining the name, scope, executive board, and details of the voting scheme. This draft was sent to ASIH Secretary M. Graham Netting (1904–1996) and Carl L. Hubbs (1894–1979), editor of *Copeia*, on April 22, 1932. Both officers offered their thanks for the draft constitution, but suggested that some changes may be necessary because of the plan to incorporate the Society in Washington, D.C. The 1932 meetings were to be held in Washington, and Hubbs suggested that a group get together to review the constitution and by-laws, as well as the incorporation itself. The articles of incorporation for the ASIH (*Copeia*, 1950:69–70) give the rationale of Washington as place of incorporation because it is the nation’s capital, it is central to everyone, and “also because of the remarkable facility under which corporations may be organized there.” Although the ASIH was ultimately incorporated in Washington, this did not occur until 1949, and a constitution was not adopted by the ASIH until 1950—18 years after Gregory and Noble took pen to paper to make a first pass at a constitution, and some 33 years after that first meeting of the ASIH. The incorporation of the ASIH exemplifies how the Society operates—namely by its members and on the backs of volunteers. From these humble beginnings, and over the course of the next 100 years, the ASIH has grown to become “the premier scientific organization dedicated to the scientific study and conservation of fishes, amphibians and reptiles. Current membership consists of approximately 2,400 scientists, students, and others. Similarly, *Copeia* is internationally recognized as one of the most prestigious scientific journals of its kind and it can be found in over 1,000 libraries worldwide” (http://www.asih.org/about).

In 2013, a committee of the ASIH was established by then ASIH President Bill Matthews, with the charge “To serve as an ‘ad hoc’ Committee for the 100th Anniversary of ASIH’ to develop plans for a year-long celebration in 2016 of the founding of the ASIH, with a focus on events at the annual meeting in that year, and to plan appropriate publications reflecting the history of the ASIH from now through the year 2016.” The ASIH thus began a four-year celebration of its centennial. As part of the celebration at the 100th anniversary meetings in New Orleans, Louisiana, a symposium for the Centennial Meeting was organized, focusing on the ASIH and its role in the professions of ichthyology and herpetology. It is through the thoughts, ideas, and actions of the members of the ASIH that this society has flourished and had such significant impact on the study of fishes, amphibians, and reptiles. This is a particularly important discussion to have during the annual meeting, as 30% of ASIH members are students and, indeed, are the future of the ASIH. The stage was thereby set for the Society to reflect on these 100 years through the perspectives of its membership.

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