

BEHLER AWARD



Jim Juvik, 2020 Behler Turtle Conservation Award Honoree

A. Ross Kiester

This year's prestigious 15th Annual Behler Turtle Conservation Award, generally considered the "Nobel Prize" for turtle conservation and biology, honors Professor James O. Juvik from Hawaii, USA, who has dedicated his career to studying turtles and tortoises around the world, and working to prevent their extinction.

Jim Juvik was born and raised in Sacramento, California, at a time when it was wonderful to grow up being interested in nature in general, and amphibians and reptiles in particular. Like many children in the 1950s, he was given a pet Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), complete with a bowl and a plastic palm tree. Jim took this turtle to heart and, from a very early age, became committed to turtles and tortoises.

After graduating high school, Jim spent the summer working for a tiny circus for which he was paid with a live Galapagos Tortoise (*Chelonoidis nigra*). He enrolled in a local college where he pursued gymnastics, but transferred to the University of California at Davis, majoring in geography. He then went to Harvard University to study under E.E. Williams, one of the world's top turtle and tortoise taxonomists. However, he soon transferred to the University of Hawaii where he received a Ph.D. in geography, with a focus on biogeography and climatology. Following his graduate studies, Jim stayed on at the university, becoming a Professor of Geography, where he worked for 42 years.

In academia, because geography is broadly defined, its practitioners pretty much do whatever they want. Jim took maximum advantage of this lack of definition to



Jim with a Geometric Tortoise at the Turtle Conservancy's Preserve in South Africa.

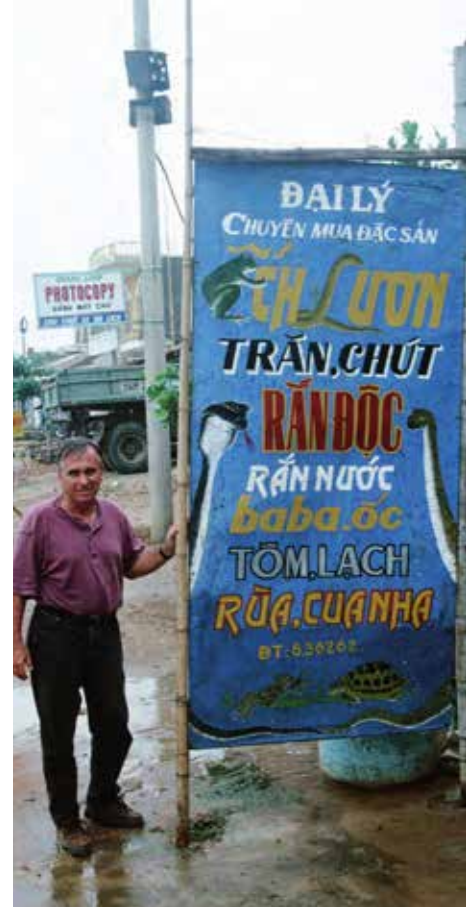
work on an incredible variety of topics: fog interception and its measurement by a gauge he designed and is now widely used, cloud forest ecosystems, biogeography of birds, Fijian iguanas, plant colonization on lava flows, land use planning, and ecology of the islands of Micronesia. He took some time off to be the designer and Director of the Panaewa Rainforest Zoo and Botanical Garden in Hilo, and with his wife, Professor Sonia Juvik, he wrote an important paper on *Mauna Kea and the Myth of Multiple Use*, a trenchant critique of a then common conservation paradigm for land use.

But through all of this work, one thing never changed: his interest in turtles, and especially tortoises. In 1970, encouraged by Ronald Beltz, he traveled to Tanzania and Madagascar where, working with the French herpetologist Charles Blanc, he rediscovered the natural population of Ploughshare Tortoises (*Astrochelys yniphora*) on Cap Sada. With Blanc, Jonah Andriananarivo, and Roger Bour, he wrote the first IUCN Recovery Plan for this tortoise in 1982. He also visited South Africa in 1971, for the first of many times, to search for its many tortoises. Back in Hawaii, he and Sean McKeown of the Honolulu Zoo described the extraordinary nest building and guarding by the Asian Giant Tortoise (*Manouria emys*), a major advance in tortoise biology. In 1992, he returned to Madagascar with Ross Kiestler to help Gerald Durrell's efforts to protect and enhance the population of Ploughshare Tortoises. In 1996, at the invitation of Le Dien Duc, he and Kiestler went to Vietnam, where they saw first-hand that virtually all species of turtles and tortoises there were in danger of extinction due to their over-collection and export to China. In 1997, they presented a paper at a U.S. herp meeting on the dire situation in Asia. As a result, George Rabb, Director of the Brookfield Zoo, asked them to hold a workshop later that year on what is now known as the "Asian Turtle Crisis." Appropriately for this Behler Award, John



Jim with a caiman in Costa Rica at an Organization for Tropical Studies course.

Behler himself attended that meeting and then issued a broad warning to the turtle community which, in 2001 at the Fort Worth Zoo, also led to the creation of an IUCN Task Force that eventually became the Turtle Survival Alliance. In 2006, Juvik and Kiestler went to Namibia to begin a long-term study of the Nama Padloper (*Chersobius solus*), that lives in hyper-arid southern Namibia, and is perhaps the only tortoise that is, as Jim likes to say, an "ambush herbivore" (meaning that it only comes out to feed after rain or fog events, when ephemeral plants have sprouted). Jim has now spent much time there, and has supervised the first Namibian herpetologists to obtain Master's degrees. More recently, Jim has spearheaded the Turtle Conservancy's effort to protect the Geometric Tortoise in South Africa. This work has led to the purchase and protection



Jim with a sign offering to buy any turtles and other reptiles in Vietnam.

of nearly 1,000 acres of Fynbos habitat, home to the tortoise's last known substantial population of approximately 800 animals.

Jim is the embodiment of the Hawaiian spiritual concept of Aloha: people who really enjoy bringing joy to others. His openness, friendly demeanor, and genuine interest in peoples and cultures, combined with his lifelong experience of multicultural Hawaii, make him a wonderful ambassador for turtles. Always appearing at gatherings bearing Hawaiian macadamia nuts and other gifts, our colleague Peter Paul van Dijk calls Jim the "tropical Santa Claus" – an apt description of his generosity, collegiality, and seemingly magical abilities. Turtles and tortoises the world over owe him their grateful thanks, as do all of us in the turtle conservation community.