

## 2007 Behler Turtle Conservation Award Announced

**Anders G.J. Rhodin**



J. Whitfied Gibbons

The IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and IUCN Turtle Survival Alliance in 2006 established the John Behler Turtle Conservation Award, a major annual award to honor leadership and excellence in the field of turtle and tortoise conservation. The award honors John Behler, previous Chair of the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and Curator of Herpetology at the Bronx Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Society, who passed away in 2006.

The Behler Award is presented jointly by the IUCN Turtle Survival Alliance and IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and includes an honorarium of \$3000. Co-sponsoring organizations for the award are: Chelonian Research Foundation, Conservation International, Chelonian Research Institute, Behler Chelonian Center, World Chelonian Trust, and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.

The 2nd annual Behler Award was presented in Atlanta, Georgia, in July 2007 at the 5th Annual Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises. Presenting the award were Anders Rhodin, Chair of the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, and Rick Hudson, Co-Chair of the IUCN Turtle Survival Alliance.

The honoree receiving the 2nd Behler Award was Whit Gibbons, a life-long turtle researcher and conservationist, whose work and leadership in the field have been inspirational for many. Dr. Gibbons earned a BS and MS from the University of Alabama

and a PhD from Michigan State University. He is Professor of Ecology at the University of Georgia and Senior Research Scientist and Head of the Environmental Outreach and Education program at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory. He has taught herpetology at the University's main campus in Athens since 1978 and been major professor to 47 doctoral and master's students, many of whom are noted for their conservation efforts. His research interests have focused on the population dynamics and ecology of fish, amphibians, and reptiles, particularly turtles, with a primary goal of documenting and explaining the distribution and abundance patterns of herpetofauna. His emphasis has been on application of basic research findings to environmental impact and conservation issues, with special emphasis on educating the public about environmental issues. Whit lives with his wife, Carol, in Aiken, SC.

He was a co-founder and first national chair of Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC), president of the Association of Southeastern Biologists, the Herpetologists' League, and the South Carolina Herpetological Society. His honors include the 2006 Henry Fitch Distinguished Herpetologist Award 2006, the Southeastern Outdoor Press Association's First Place Award for the Best Radio Program, the South Carolina Governor's Award for Environmental Education, and the Meritorious Teaching Award presented by the Association of Southeastern Biologists, and now the 2007 John Behler Turtle Conservation Award.

Dr. Gibbons is the author of more than 300 scientific and popular magazine publications, and for more than 30 years has written a weekly newspaper column on ecology and contributed the section on Zoology for the Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year. He wrote the latest edition of "Reptile and Amphibian Study," the merit badge booklet for the Boy Scouts of America, and is author or editor of ten books on herpetology and ecology, including "Life History and Ecology of the Slider Turtle" (1990, Smithsonian Institution Press) and "Their Blood Runs Cold: Adventures with Reptiles and Amphibians" (1983, U. of Alabama Press).

In addition to honoring the life-time achievements of leading turtle and tortoise conservationists such as Dr. Gibbons, the Behler Award plans to also honor current conservation efforts by mid-career individuals who are making major contributions to the field. Recognizing and valuing the often tireless and dedicated efforts made by these individuals is important, and the Behler Award hopes to provide some inspiration and reward for those working on the front lines of global turtle conservation efforts.

Citation:

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<http://www.iucn-tfts.org/whit-gibbons/>.