

Peter Pritchard Receives the 2008 Behler Turtle Conservation Award

Anders G.J. Rhodin



Peter C.H. Pritchard

The IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and IUCN Turtle Survival Alliance established the John Behler Turtle Conservation Award in 2006, a major annual award presented jointly by these groups to honor leadership and excellence in the field of turtle and tortoise conservation. The award honors the memory of John Behler, previous Chair of the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and Curator of Herpetology at the Bronx Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Society.

The 3rd annual Behler Award was presented to Peter Pritchard in Tucson, Arizona, in September 2008 at the 6th Annual Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises. Presenting the award were Anders Rhodin, Chair of the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, and Rick Hudson, Co-Chair of the Turtle Survival Alliance. The Award includes an honorarium of \$3000, and co-sponsors this year were Chelonian Research Foundation, Conservation International, Chelonian Research Institute, Behler Chelonian Center, World Chelonian Trust, and Deborah Behler and Brett Stearns.

This year's honoree, Peter Pritchard, is a life-long turtle researcher and conservationist, whose work and leadership in the field have been inspirational for many. He has been recognized as a "Champion of the Wild" by the Discovery Television Channel, a "Hero of the Planet" by Time Magazine, and "Floridian of the Year" by the

Orlando Sentinel. He has undertaken extensive field work with turtles in all continents and many remote islands, and he has established a permanent field station for turtle conservation in northwestern Guyana. Three species of turtle are named after him—a snake-necked turtle from New Guinea, a pond turtle from northern Burma, and a giant fossil sideneck turtle from Colombia.

For many of today's younger crop of turtle researchers his writings served as key inspirational references. Key to his broad appeal were his early seminal books, *Living Turtles of the World* (1967) and *Encyclopedia of Turtles* (1979). Other important books were *Turtles of Venezuela* (1984), *The Alligator Snapping Turtle* (1990), *Galapagos Tortoises: Nomenclatural and Survival Status* (1996), and *Tales from the Thèbaïde* (2007). He has also created a cinematography project entitled "The Turtle Planet," with two hour-long films, *Bostami, Vishnu, and Walter*, and *Sidenecks of Gondwanaland* having been produced in this series.

Dr. Pritchard was born in England in 1943, and was raised in Northern Ireland, relocating to Florida in 1965. He has a B.A. and M.A. in Chemistry and Biochemistry from Oxford University, and a Ph.D. in Zoology from the University of Florida, where he studied sea turtle biology with Dr. Archie Carr. He worked first with World Wildlife Fund, and then Florida Audubon Society, where he held various positions including Acting President. In 1998 he founded Chelonian Research Institute in Oviedo, Florida, of which he remains Director. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Biology at Florida Atlantic University and the University of Central Florida, and lives with his wife Sibille in Oviedo, Florida.

He has served on numerous turtle conservation policy committees, including Chair of the Florida Endangered Species Advisory Committee, Co-Chair of the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, and a member of the IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group. He was Co-Chair of the Southeast Region Marine Turtle Recovery Team, and a member of the USFWS Manatee, Kemp's Ridley, and Florida Panther Recovery Teams. He also served on the National Academy of Sciences Sea Turtle Conservation Committee, and is a member of the Executive Board of the Turtle Conservation Fund.

Dr. Pritchard has developed the art of conservation without confrontation, recognizing that finding common ground with those identified as opponents, and developing consensus positions by a process of mutual education, may be the only way of establishing lasting changes without provoking constant challenges and demanding impractical levels of law enforcement. He has applied these techniques both in Florida and around the world, and has, over the years, been invited by the governments of nations ranging from Trinidad and Tobago to Papua New Guinea to develop socially sensitive programs for wildlife conservation. These and various research and conservation projects and consultancies have taken him all over the world, especially Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

He founded and directs Chelonian Research Institute, a large systematics collection of turtle and tortoise specimens built up without sacrifice of live animals. Including over 13,000 specimens, it is the most comprehensive turtle collection in existence, with 100% of genera and about 95% of living species represented.

Previous recipients of the Behler Award have been Ed Moll and Whit Gibbons. In addition to honoring the life-time achievements of senior turtle and tortoise conservationists, the Award plans to also honor conservation efforts by younger individuals who are already 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.

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