
FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

**SRI LANKA - VENUE OF THE
4TH WORLD CONGRESS OF
HERPETOLOGY
2-9 DECEMBER 2001**

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A British Crown Colony since 1802, Ceylon became an independent member of the Commonwealth in 1948, and the island was renamed Sri Lanka (= 'Resplendent Island'). Covering an area of 25,332 square miles (65,610 km²) - with the greatest length (north-south) of 270 miles (434 km) and greatest width 140 miles (225 km) - Sri Lanka has a tropical climate, warm throughout the year, with high relative humidity, and a more temperate climate in the hills. Rainfall is generally heavy, with two main monsoon seasons: the south-west in mid-May to September, and the north-east in November to March. Inland waters make up 33 square miles (85 km²), and areas over 2000 feet (610 m) support grasslands. Adam's Peak at 7,360 feet (2243 m) is about the highest in the central massif, and is a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. Sinhala is spoken by 74% of the population, and Tamil by 18%; English is effectively the *lingua franca* and widely spoken by local people. I had the opportunity to visit Sri Lanka in December 1998/January 1999. Sri Lanka is the venue of the 4th World Congress of Herpetology, 2-9 December 2001. Further details about the Congress can be obtained from Mr. Ansem de Silva, Congress Director, 4WCH, c/o Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; fax: +94 74 470733; e-mail: dir4wch@kandy.ccom.lk OR kalds@slnet.lk. The Congress website is situated

at <http://www.4wch.com/homepg.htm>, from which the colour brochure and registration form can be downloaded. Congress practical arrangements are being made by CDC Conventions (Pvt) Ltd., 58 Dudley Senanayake Mawatha, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka; tel.: +94 1 674950; fax: +94 1 694753; e-mail: cdc1@cdcconv.slt.lk. The deadline for receipt of abstracts, registration forms and accommodation requirements is 31 August 2001.

Herpetofauna recorded in Sri Lanka comprise 225 taxa - 51 amphibians and 174 reptiles - of which 125 (55%) are endemic (de Silva, 1996a). Sri Lanka has the greatest herpetofaunal richness in South-East Asia (A. de Silva, pers. comm.), and, in relation to the island's size, the highest diversity in the world. Identified threats to species' survival include vulnerability to predators due to ecological factors associated with rapid depletion of forests and destruction of other wildlife areas; increase in the human population resulting in high levels of consumption, killing and excessive collection of species that deplete natural habitats, and large scale application of pesticides and other agrochemicals for the production of such crops as rice, tea and vegetables. There is little information on the effects of agricultural pesticides on herpetofaunal richness in Sri Lanka (de Silva, 1996a), although the highest use of pesticide is known to be for tea production, with usage also very high in rice paddies situated in wet and intermediate, as well as in irrigated dry zones in Sri Lanka. The strikingly-marked Indian Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans* is a CITES Appendix II listed species, and not uncommon in Sri Lanka's dry zone. It is regarded as a pest by farmers since tortoises enter vegetable plantations and feed on the tender leaves, buds, flowers and fruits of melons, and on the foliage of ground nuts, cow-peas and beans (de Silva, 1995c), including the new shoots of beans

heavily treated with pesticides. While also sustaining damage, often deliberate, from agricultural implements wielded by farmers, the effects of pesticides on tortoises are unknown. Farmers have also sought advice on how to control the creatures, not wanting to kill them, partly in line with their religious beliefs. There is a population of star tortoises, together with crocodiles, in the Bundala National Park in the south of the island just east of the fishing village of Hambantota.

As Congress Director, Anslem de Silva (Senior Staff Officer and Lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya) is the island's main herpetologist and President of the Amphibia and Reptile Research Organisation of Sri Lanka (ARROS). Anslem de Silva also organised the International Conference of the Amphibians and Reptiles of South Asia, that was held in Sri Lanka (with around 60 participants) at the Institute of Fundamental Studies, Kandy, and the University of Peradeniya, 1-5 August 1996. He subsequently edited the proceedings of this meeting '*Biology and conservation of the amphibians, reptiles and their habitats in South Asia*' (1998) - ISBN 955-8213-00-4 - which contains approximately 50 papers, and is made up of 375 pages (18 x 25 cm), with author index, illustrations and colour group photograph of participants. This proceedings volume is now available, and can be ordered from Anslem de Silva, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, at a price of US\$ 35. Cheques should be made out to K.A.L. de Silva.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon our re-meeting in Sri Lanka (since Gonfaron, France, 1995) at the University of Peradeniya, Anslem de Silva kindly let me have a number of his publications listed in the bibliography (below).

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