

Herptile Activities

Amphibian Survival Alliance

A new initiative by amphibian allies from around the world was launched for further progress in saving the world's beleaguered amphibians. The Alliance will unite ongoing projects to create and enhance fundraising, research and communication. A meeting held in London early September targeted the threats, including chytrid fungus and habitat destruction. ZSL, Zoological Society of London decided to prioritise research into tackling to fungus which was discovered only ten years ago.

So far there are no reports of Chytrid in India or other South Asian countries but the number of amphibian biologists circulating in the regions forests and jungles taking samples is less than tiny--it could very well be among us in South Asia. It occurs in the Americas, Australia, Africa and parts of Asia. It has been discovered that certain species have a natural defence in chemicals on their skin...this provides a window into the possibility of a cure perhaps. Once the disease starts, it rampages through populations and has decimated whole species as many of these species live in a single locality. Biologists have to investigate to see if the above mentioned natural antidotes might be used as a means of defusing the disease in the wild. This will be a priority of the Amphibian Survival Alliance (ASA).

Even more complex and onerous is habitat destruction which is rampant throughout the world but particular in some of the developing countries which are hard pressed to develop their economy. These areas have to be protected from development or special sites within must somehow be protected, as they hold the entire populations of some species.

ASA has been under plan for several years but lacked resources to make it viable. At that time there was disagreement among researchers and scientists as to whether they would put more energy into captive breeding or field conservation. Today beaten and frightened, they have agreed the both *in situ* and *ex situ* are important.

South Korean frogs untouched by amphibian crisis

Recently I visited South Korea and was surprised to see so much development as well as so much well-vegetated countryside. I didn't make it into any forest or protected area (except the Demilitarised Zone DMZ) but generally the way that South Koreans are taking care of their country impressed me. Now I found an article by Jeremy Hance on the web which dovetailed very much with my own impressions. The Koreans I met did not know exactly the percentage of forest cover their country

had but Hance reports that is 65% forest ... not bad for a burgeoning population and economy. In addition, when you drive outside city limit and into the countryside, there are paddy fields everywhere which are home to some species of amphibians. There are also natural water sources, creeks and rivers that make survival possible for amphibians.

Pierre Fidenci, an amphibian biologist who was visiting South Korea just to see amphibians was impressed due to the forest cover and agricultural refuges for frogs. He learned about the chytrid fungus there also which he said has been found by Korean scientists in the introduced bullfrog as a carrier, but the fungus, nevertheless, is not destroying amphibian populations there and the bullfrogs can be easily eradicated.

When you drive along the very long and wide river which divides the city you can ride for an hour and see on either side a landscape like New York City ... skyscrapers everywhere ! Fidenci commented that one reason amphibians seem to be doing so well in South Korea is that the country has developed upward rather than sidewise. He called it a "vertical urbanisation process" instead of that of western countries building one story single family dwellings which take up much more land area. The result is more habitat for wildlife, both animals and plant, and a healthier national environment -
Sally Walker, Editor Emeritus.

Third School in Herpetology in India

The 3rd School in Herpetology will be held at the Arya Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati, India from 2-17 November 2009.



Topics to be covered include:

- Module I - Systematics and Biogeography
- Module II - Ecology and Behaviour
- Module III - Reproductive and developmental biology
- Module VI - Conservation and Management
- Module V - Scientific Writing

Special lectures: New frontiers in herpetology. The school will provide training in lab and field techniques in different aspects of herpetological research. Field trips will also be organized as part of the course. **Director:** Prof. Sushil K. Dutta, North Orissa University, Baripada, Orissa
Venue: Arya Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati, Assam

Write or email Co-ordinator for an application

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