

Editorial Introduction

Honoring the Legacy of Peter C.H. Pritchard

ANDERS G.J. RHODIN, JEFFREY A. SEMINOFF, RUSSELL A. MITTERMEIER, AND ERIC V. GOODE



Peter C.H. Pritchard and an adult male Western Santa Cruz Giant Tortoise, *Chelonoidis porteri*, in La Reserva, Santa Cruz, Galápagos Islands, Ecuador, 1982.
Photo by Anders G.J. Rhodin

“Many express surprise that a career based on seeking to discover, observe and understand the shelled reptiles could have any breadth or depth; but I can assure such doubters that my life and travels have been joyous and far-reaching. For it is only travel with a theme that takes one to the remote corners of the world where the voyager, simply because he is a rare species, is embraced as a visitor from the outside world, with home hospitality to be offered, with stories to tell and hear, and meals, libations, gifts, and friendship to share.”

—Peter C.H. Pritchard in the Preface of *Tales from the Thébaïde: Reflections of a Turtleman* (Kreiger Publishing, 2007).

You never forget the first time you meet one of your heroes. Sometimes it’s a movie star, sometimes a rock star or prominent politician or world leader, but for us one of them was a turtle man: the one and only Peter C.H. Pritchard. As arguably the world’s most famous turtle conservationist and biologist, he has forever left an indelible mark on each of us and helped inspire our careers and passions.

In this issue of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* (CCB), we honor his memory and lasting legacy. He was an iconic giant in our community—one of the founding fathers of turtle and tortoise conservation, who passed away at his home in Oviedo, Florida, on 25 February 2020

at the age of 76 after a long and debilitating illness. We are deeply saddened to say goodbye to Peter, who, along with John Behler, was one of the initial editors joining Rhodin when he founded CCB in 1993. He was always a close colleague and trusted friend to us at both Chelonian Research Foundation and Turtle Conservancy, and a hero and longtime inspiration to all of us. The entire CCB Editorial Team and many authors of papers in this issue here express their lasting respects for his contributions and broad influence.

Peter was one of the world’s foremost experts on the history, biology, and conservation of the world’s turtles and tortoises, as well as their cultural and ecological

significance. For many, his books and articles were foundational resources for several generations of enthusiasts, scientists, and conservationists. Throughout his prolific career, he generously shared his knowledge and passion with many people. He founded the Chelonian Research Institute in Oviedo, Florida, which houses one of the world's most comprehensive turtle and tortoise research collections of its kind, inviting researchers and students from around the world to visit and study.

A pioneering conservationist, he raised awareness at a time when there were very few conservation initiatives for freshwater turtles and tortoises, and spent over five decades working to protect them. Peter encouraged people around the world to care for turtles, and inspired generations of conservationists. His contributions to the world of conservation will live on for as long as there are turtles and people who love them.

Many of us in the greater turtle conservation and biology community were deeply inspired by him, and he most generously shared of himself and his passion for turtles with all of us. He introduced us to the wonder of turtle diversity and natural history through his seminal 1967 book *Living Turtles of the World*, followed by his even more impactful 1979 book, the *Encyclopedia of Turtles* and many other major books and articles over his lifetime. For many of us he was not only a catalyzing inspiration and much-admired role model, but also a trusted mentor and close friend and energetic travel companion to many remote and wild places on Earth, always in enthusiastic and passionate pursuit of fascinating turtles or tortoises. He loved the natural world and the people in it, always celebrating the diversity of turtles and other animal life, as well as the people he met and befriended. He treated everyone as equals and saw in all the potentials of friendship, camaraderie, and collegiality. He was a true Renaissance man with broad interests in humanity, the natural world, and art in its many forms.

Peter Charles Howard Pritchard was born in Hertfordshire, England in 1943. He was the son of Jack Pritchard, a Rhodes Scholar medical doctor of Australian origins who was Chair of the Anatomy Department at Queen's University in the United Kingdom. He was the great-grandson of Henry Edmunds, one of Thomas Edison's assistants, the first salesman of the lightbulb, and also the man who famously introduced Charles Royce to Henry Rolls, of the Rolls Royce luxury car and high-powered engine fame. Peter's family moved to Belfast, Northern Ireland, when he was 9, and at age 13 he attended the local Campbell College. Peter's higher academic career started not in biology, but instead in chemistry, when he was admitted to Oxford University in 1961, where he earned a B.A. (with Honors) and an M.A. in chemistry and biochemistry.

During his time at Oxford his interests became increasingly focused on biology, perhaps stemming from his first trip to the United States in 1962, when he explored the swamps outside Atlanta, Georgia, and eventually made

his way to New York City. In 1964 he made his first visit to British Guiana (now Guyana), where he met his future wife, the Guyanan journalist Sibille Hart, and afterward returned to New York and New Jersey, where he met with Herb Axelrod, the famous aquarium man and publisher at T.F.H. publishers. By that time Herb had already agreed to publish Peter's first book, *Living Turtles of the World*, which came out in 1967.

By 1965 Peter had relocated to Florida from the UK to begin his Ph.D. studies at the University of Florida as a student of the famous turtle man Archie Carr, where he completed his dissertation on the systematics and reproductive cycles of the ridley sea turtle genus *Lepidochelys*. After graduation, Peter worked at World Wildlife Fund, then, in 1973, became an officer of the Florida Audubon Society, where he eventually ascended to acting President. He was the second Chair (1985–1987) of the short-lived IUCN/SSC Freshwater Chelonian Specialist Group, succeeding Ed Moll, and then he and Ian Swingland Co-Chaired the newly combined IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (1987–1990), before being succeeded by John Behler (1990–2005), who was first joined and eventually succeeded by Rhodin (2000–2012) and then Peter Paul van Dijk and Brian Horne (2012–2016), and since 2017, Craig Stanford.

Peter's globetrotting turtle adventures started soon after he went to Oxford, and by the time *Living Turtles of the World* was published he had been to South America on three occasions as well as the Middle East. Since then he traveled to over 100 countries and saw almost all species of turtles in the wild. Collectively these experiences helped Peter gain an unrivaled knowledge of all things turtle. Combined with his penchant for scientific scribing and story telling, this resulted in a prolific publication list. For many of us, *Living Turtles of the World* (1967) was our first book on turtles, for others it was *Encyclopedia of Turtles* (1979). But there was so much more: *Turtles of Venezuela* (1984, with Pedro Trebbau), *The Alligator Snapping Turtle: Biology and Conservation* (1989), *The Galápagos Tortoises: Nomenclatural and Survival Status* (1996), *The Pinta Tortoise: Globalization and the Extinction of Island Species* (2005), *Cleopatra the Turtle Girl: Travels and Adventures with Turtles in Guyana* (2006), *Rafetus: The Curve of Extinction* (2012), and his autobiographical *Tales from the Thébaïde: Reflections of a Turtleman* (2007).

In 1998, Peter founded the Chelonian Research Institute in Oviedo, Florida—near Orlando—which today is an incredible scientific research resource and collection repository with about 18,000 preserved (dry and wet) turtle specimens, extensive library and media (slides and videos), and a plethora of turtle ephemera, art, and artifacts. Plans are underway to relocate this comprehensive collection to the Turtle Conservancy's campus at Twin Peaks, Ojai, California, where it will continue to be curated and serve as a centerpiece of their turtle and

tortoise conservation and research center, further cementing and preserving Peter Pritchard's lasting legacy.

Through his turtle exploits and travels, Peter also gained a level of notoriety and fame that is rare in the turtle world. Peter was honored with the scientific names of three turtles: *Chelodina pritchardi* (Pritchard's Snake-necked Turtle from New Guinea described by Rhodin in 1994), *Podocnemis pritchardi* (a fossil turtle from the Miocene of Colombia described by Roger Wood in 1997), and *Mauremys pritchardi* (a taxonomically invalid Asian hybrid described by William McCord in 1997). He was recognized as "Champion of the Wild" by the Discovery Television Channel and as "Hero of the Planet" by Time Magazine and "Floridian of the Year" by the Orlando Sentinel, both in 2000. He received the prestigious Behler Turtle Conservation Award in 2008, awarded by the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and the Turtle Survival Alliance. He was further honored with the International Sea Turtle Society's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011 and received the Turtle Conservancy's Conservation Achievement Award in 2014.

Even with his luminary status, Peter was a kind and gentle soul, friendly to everyone, and always with turtle tales to share. He will be sorely missed by many—especially the conservationists and cheloniophiles among us—and most acutely by his wife Sibille and family, as well as his many close friends and collaborating colleagues in the global chelonian conservation and biology community. He was always "Mr. Turtle" to most of us—and we deeply mourn his passing. For many, he was simply the greatest turtle man that ever lived. He was a hero and popularizer of turtles and their diversity and a passionate advocate for their conservation, and he helped all of us realize his vision by inspiring several generations of turtle aficionados.

Peter's passing is a tragic loss to the turtle world and beyond, but we trust and know that his enthusiasm and inspiration will persist through those following in his footsteps. His legacy shall live on and Chelonian Research Foundation and the Turtle Conservancy and the entire Editorial Team of CCB will do their part to ensure that it does. For those of us who knew him the longest and closest, we bid thee a fond farewell, Peter, and thank you for being you, and for guiding us along the way.

In Honor of Peter C.H. Pritchard**Anders G.J. Rhodin**

(reprinted from CCB 2016 15(2):293)

From the beginning, the images flow,
of your passion for turtles, your desire to know,
delving and digging, defining, discovering,
describing the details—and turtles promoting.

From Britain to America, from the cold to the warmth,
you left your home country for Florida's shores,
the first book you published, *Living Turtles of the World*,
promoted your knowledge—your passions unfurled.

Sharing your knowledge with students and colleagues
among them, myself, inspired by your guidance,
mentored and guided by a colleague, a friend,
the diversity of turtles I began to comprehend.

From your home in Oviedo, your work flourished widely,
the Encyclopedia of Turtles, and saving Kemp's Ridley,
writing and traveling, popularizing and promoting—
Alligator Snappers, Leatherbacks, Galápagos tortoises—
and Rafetus softshells, their tragic decline describing.

Your museum and Chelonian Research Institute created,
and named Florida's Man of the Year, honor abounded,
then the Behler Award, further lauded in your sphere,
in resounding acclamation by your chelonian peers.

But the passage of time unfolds, unrelenting, unforgiving,
impacting our age, and our years ever mounting;
but time is our friend, not our foe—
each day is a gift, not a woe—
may our time and days continue to grow.

Now, as always, the images flow,
of your passion for turtles, your desire to know,
delving and digging, defining, discovering,
describing the details—and turtles promoting.

Thank you, Peter—Mr. Turtle—my friend,
for all you have done and all you have been—
a mentor, a colleague, a guide—
and always—a friend.