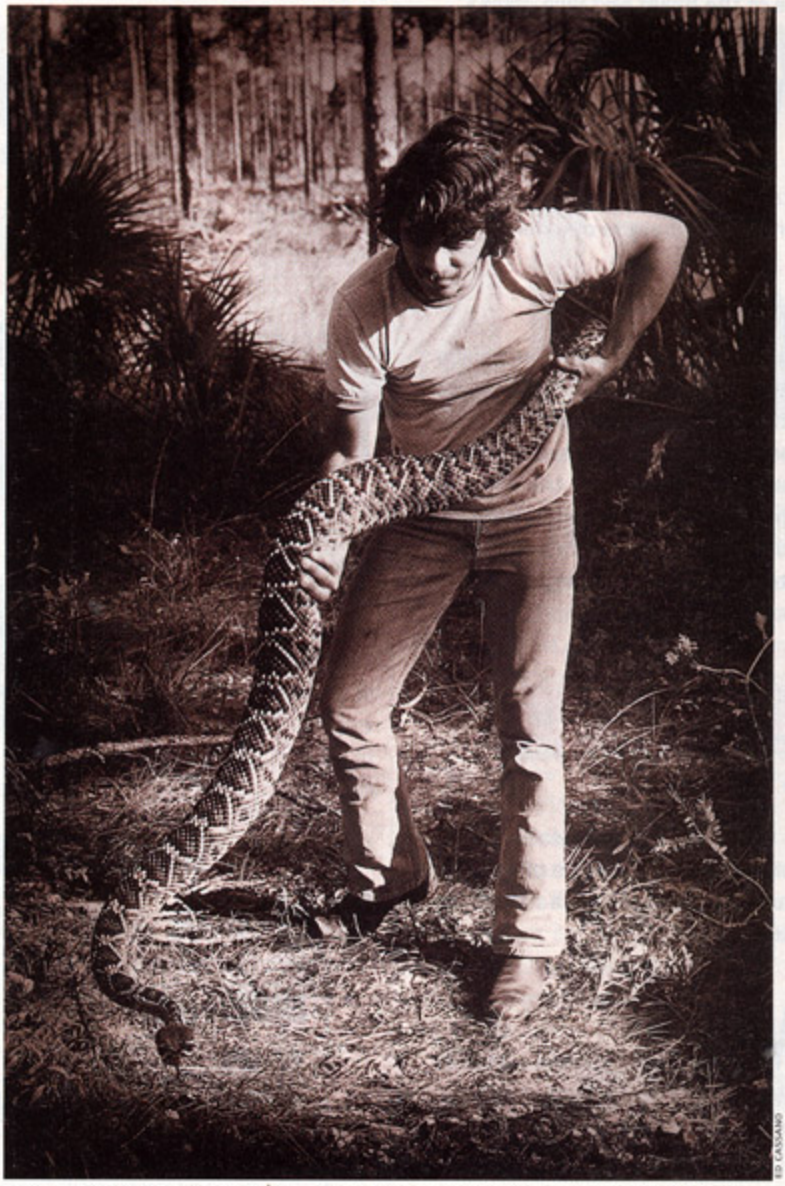
Louie Porras:

Reflections of a Herpetologist (Part I)



ED CASSANO

No, it's not the Crocodile Hunter, but Louie handling a captive-raised 7-foot 6-inch, 27-pound eastern diamondback rattlesnake *(Crotalus adamanteus)*. Large diamondbacks are now extremely rare in South Florida.

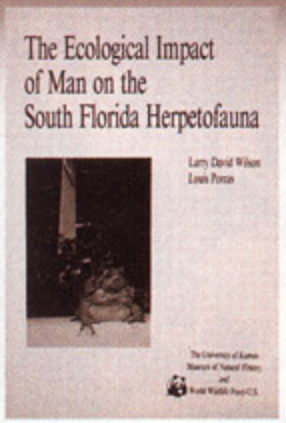
Meet one of the herp world's bright, shining stars.

interview by phillip samuelson

I FIRST MET LOUIE PORRAS SEVERAL YEARS AGO at a pet industry trade show in Los Angeles. As two editors of animal-related magazines, we shared quite a bit in common. Louie was then the co-editor of *Fauna* magazine, a publication Fancy Publications (publishers of REPTILES) was helping distribute, and I was still immersed in the early years of editing REPTILES.

Some years later, in 1997, I had the opportunity to spend time with Louie in Costa Rica while we were both there for the International Herpetological Symposium. I spent most of the last couple days there with him, and because Louie was born in Costa Rica, I felt very fortunate to be there with someone so familiar with the area. We had a great time road hunting and exploring. It was a wonderful thrill to find *Loxocemus bicolor* (Neotropical sunbeam snake) on this trip—a species high on my "wish list." Louie proved to be a fascinating traveling companion. I found him to be a very warm and kind individual, and our friendship has grown quite a bit since then.

Getting to know Louie has been an interesting process. Because of his multiple accomplishments in herpetological endeavors, I knew him by name long before meeting him in person. Once we met, however, I was quick to recognize that his soft-spoken demeanor and selfless attitude mask a truly incredible knowledge of herps. In my opinion, many people without half of Louie's knowledge have made big names for themselves through self-promotion and actively publicizing their success. While others are quick to interject their opinions and "knowledge" of herps, Louie is the sort of guy who will politely hang back and abstain from commenting about things unless asked directly.



Larry David Wilson and Louie co-authored this book, which was sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund.

Although he is probably too humble to admit it himself, I consider Louie one of the founding fathers of herpetoculture. As an importer and highly successful breeder, you would be hard-pressed to find someone who has had more experience with reptiles. He was involved in the animal trade when herpetoculture was forming it roots. During this time animal import regulations were much different than today, and as a result Louie witnessed herp importation in its heyday. Being immersed in the business, he had the opportunity to handle and work with a great number of rare reptiles and amphibians, as well as other animals.

Importation of reptiles, however, is only one part of Louie's past. Perhaps the most interesting thing about him is that he is able to bridge the gap between herpetoculture and herpetology—no easy feat. Although he is now out of the live animal business, he continues to stay active in herpetological circles. These days, however, Louie is more likely to author a magazine article or scientific paper than sell you a snake.

It brings me great pleasure to bring you this two-part interview. I think you will find Louie Porras to be as interesting and appealing a person as I do.

■ **Louie, I know you were born in Costa Rica. What was it like growing up there with your family?**

You know, Phil, people often think of Costa Rica as a peaceful country, but it wasn't always that way. I was born in 1948 in the midst of a terrible civil war. It started when a leftist movement infiltrated the government and overturned a presidential election, and it was one of my grandfather's closest friends, José Figueres, who led the fighting that ousted the Communist regime. My mother told me some chilling stories about those days, like when my grandfather was captured and narrowly escaped before being executed, and the times she had no choice but to smuggle weapons underneath my blankets. Luckily, I was too young to remember the conflict.

Then, when I was 6, the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza sent troops over the border and seized the land along the San Juan River and much of what today is Santa Rosa National Park. Figueres was then president, and since Costa Rica had abolished its army, once again he had to assemble makeshift forces. The Nicaraguan army was well trained and equipped with tanks, planes and automatic weapons, and although the Costa Rican forces were made up mostly of workers and farmers, they won a series of crucial battles. In fact, they inflicted such heavy losses that the Nicaraguans fled, leaving behind their tanks, weapons and other equipment. Several members of my family were involved in the fighting, and an 18-year-old uncle was shot several times and nearly died. I'm just thankful there's been peace ever since.


PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUIE PORRAS

A young Louie Porras sits proudly atop his mount. This photo was taken in Costa Rica in 1952.

My parents divorced by the time I was 2, but I always remained close to both of them. My dad worked in a bank, but then he moved to El Salvador and became the head of finance and public relations for the Organization of Central American States. I lived with my mom in San José, but I also spent considerable time at my grandparents' farm in San Ramôn. In those days, San Ramôn was a sleepy little town without paved roads, but for me it was a magical place from where I hold my fondest childhood memories.

■ **At what age did your interest in reptiles become a passion?**

As far back as I can remember, I was always curious about living things. My grandfather was the Chief of Police and performed his duties on horseback, so I was raised around horses. At the farm there was a large chicken coop, which at night was often raided by raccoons and opossums. It was funny to see members of my family run out the back with their machetes after these culprits, only to come back all muddy and empty-handed (chuckles)!

My grandmother's garden was filled with plants and flowers, which attracted all kinds of insects, birds and lizards. One morning when I was 4, I was in the garden looking for bugs and earthworms when I found a small black snake, *Geophis hoffmani*, under a flowerpot. Once my grandfather confirmed the snake was harmless, I continued searching and found four more. That was it. From that day on I was hooked!

COURTESY OF LOUIE FORRAS

Here is Louie in 1959 with the first *Boa constrictor* he ever found. Pictured are his father, Jorge (left), and older brother George (right). Both are now deceased.

J.K. McKENZIE

This cribo *(Drymarchon corais)* was found during a memorable trip to Costa Rica in 1967.

■ How old were you when you came to the United States?

I was 7.

■ And where did you live?

My mother, my older brother and I moved to Miami. It was a tremendous change from living in Costa Rica, but after hearing so many stories about the United States, the move was also incredibly exciting.

■ Please describe the old animal dealers who used to run businesses in Florida. Things have changed a lot since those days.

On Saturdays, I'd often get my mother to take me to the animal dealer compounds. We'd go to places like Animated, Chase's, Gators, Pet Farm and Wild Cargo, just to name a few. These were primarily wholesale operations, but they'd often sell to the public. Animal dealers, however, weren't particularly fond of sightseers, so I'd often come in and sell them the snakes I purchased elsewhere, always at a loss, just for the opportunity to come in and look around. But besides the dealers we'd also go to places like the Serpentarium to see Bill Haast handle venomous snakes, or to attractions like Tropical Hobbyland to watch Seminoles wrestle alligators. Yeah, Phil, you can certainly say that things have changed a lot since those days.

■ How did you get started in the animal business?

Well, this guy by the name of Bill Chase had the most interesting compound. I was fascinated by his place not only because he had the largest selection of reptiles, but he also had all kinds of other animals, except for fish. Chase was a busy man, always on the go, and he didn't have much time for a kid making a small transaction. So to get my foot in the door, so to speak, I asked him if I could mow his lawn, and he agreed. While mowing the lawn, I found about a dozen marine toads that escaped from an outdoor tank, as well as a couple of red-footed tortoises. I guess that must have impressed him, because he asked me to come back and do odd jobs. By the time I was in ninth grade I was working for him part-time, earning a dollar an hour.

■ **How long did you work for Chase?**

I worked for Mr. Chase—that's what I always called him—off and on for over nine years. The animal business was extremely demanding, and I had to work long hours, including on weekends. About once a week, a planeload of animals would arrive from Peru, and when I wasn't in school I'd often have to work through the night. Although I was a hard worker, I can't believe that Mr. Chase didn't fire me on account of all the stunts I used to pull. You see, I had this terrible habit of taking off on short notice, and often I'd be gone for long periods of time.

In '65, for example, Randy McCranie, Marc Whiteacre and I left on a collecting trip to Texas, Arizona and northern Mexico, and we were gone for about a month. In '67, my brother Randy and I decided to drive all the way to Costa Rica, and this time we were gone for nearly five months. Frequently I'd go to the Bahamas, where I made at least 30 trips, and once, with a friend who was 18 and had a pilot's license, we rented a plane and island hopped all the way to San Salvador Island. I also made spur of the moment trips to places like Okeetee (South Carolina), Kansas, Ohio, Louisiana, Texas—you name it. And hey, those were the '60s, so on certain weekends we'd take off to Atlanta to see the Allman Brothers, or to festivals to see Hendrix, Ten Years After, Janice or the Dead. Mr. Chase would always throw his hands up in the air and yell, "Louis, this is the last time!"—but he'd always hire me back. He was a great person and a fine boss and mentor. I learned a lot from his tutelage.

■ **What was Chase's operation like?**

Unbelievable! Up until about '67 Chase had a relatively small warehouse on Red Road that was jam-packed full of animals, but he eventually moved to an enormous facility. There, he finally had the space for large mammals like elephants and hippos, and dozens of large cats. The diversity and number of primates was staggering, and it wasn't unusual to receive more than a thousand monkeys in a single shipment. The array of birds was also pretty amazing, everything from hummingbirds to ostriches. And as far as reptiles, there were always hundreds of boas, anacondas, iguanas and tegus, most of which were kept in walk-in cages, and outdoors there'd be pools filled with caimans, turtles or marine toads, and pens with dozens of rhino or Ricord's iguanas. Inside, there were two rooms devoted to herps, and one was large enough where I could comfortably handle taipans, black mambas and king cobras.

JOHN RENDLEISH

On a sunny morning at the legendary Okeetee Hunt Club (South Carolina) in 1969, Louie and his companions found 14 canebrake rattlesnakes *(Crotalus horridus atricaudatus)*, including this fine specimen.

■ **Weren't those the days of the Vietnam War? Did you go in the service?**

Soon after high school I received my draft notice, there was a draft lottery in those days, but since I was a full-time student at Miami-Dade I was given a student deferment. I continued working part-time at Chase's, but in '68 I was offered a job at the Houston Zoo and decided to accept the position. I worked at Houston for five months, under another wonderful boss, John Werler, and I lived with Joe Laszlo, who was undoubtedly the most colorful herper I ever met. But in time Uncle Sam came calling, and I was left with the choice of either going back to school or into the service. Since I wasn't about to give up my large collection of snakes and I was also engaged to my high school sweetheart, Diane Stefanski, the choice was a no-brainer. Back to school and Chase's I went.

■ **What kind of snakes did you keep?**

Growing up I was interested in all kinds of herps, and even kept lots of turtles in the backyard. But it was the venomous snakes that really fascinated me. Back then the emphasis in zoos was in keeping snakes alive and establishing longevity records, so I ended up keeping at least a dozen snakes from 10 to 18 years. Some species, like bushmasters, Wagler's and Chinese habus, had a reputation for being difficult to keep, but I loved a challenge, and I'd often keep trying different things until I succeeded. For instance, I'd take the Wagler's out in a rainstorm, just to get it to crawl around and pass food. Or, I'd place leaves in the bottom of the habu's cage and mist the enclosure at dusk, then offer it barely weaned dark-colored mice, just to get it to eat. It's interesting, but I found bushmasters incredibly easy to keep, and I had one animal, old Butch, for over 15 years. In '75 I hatched what I believe were the first bushmasters in this country.

■ **With all your travels, you must have had some exciting collecting trips. Tell me about some of your most memorable.**

You know, Phil, I had many great trips and it's hard to single them out. But let's see, the '67 trip, when we drove from Florida to Costa Rica and back was an unforgettable one. We arrived in Costa Rica prior to the rains, and when they came the explosion of herps we encountered was nothing short of spectacular. Right in San Ramôn

there were thousands of *Agalychnis annae* as well as countless other anurans, including smokey jungle frogs. And in Guanacaste, on some nights we'd find over 50 snakes on the road, including boas, western hognose vipers, New World pythons, huge milk snakes, blunt-headed tree snakes and so many other species.

Another memorable trip was in 1970, when Randy and I traveled to the Ragged Islands under a National Science Foundation grant issued to Al Schwartz, who was my professor in school. The Raggeds are located off the southeastern coast of Cuba and were a difficult place to get to, and we were fortunate to catch a mail boat. On that trip we found several noteworthy herps, including a new boa that was named after Randy and a gecko that was named after me.

Then, in '74, we had a great trip to Mexico, this one with Randy and Ed Cassano, and we went to places like the Sierra del Nido in Chihuahua, the Durango plateau, and parts of Sinaloa. We were looking for rattlesnakes and found everything we were after, but one day we also stumbled across several Greer's kingsnakes, which at that time were known only from a single museum specimen found in a mousetrap. We sent the snakes to the San Diego Zoo, where they eventually became the founder stock in herpetoculture. Later, however, other collectors went to Mexico and found more snakes, but they came from different areas.

■ **You must have seen a lot of interesting animals come through the trade. Can you tell me about them?**

Phil, if I were to recount all the interesting animals I saw in the trade this interview could turn into a book (laughs enthusiastically)! As far as animals, about the only comparison I can make is that the animal business in those days was probably like Noah's Ark—but better (still laughing but gains his composure)!

So, let me think about some of the most memorable. As far as mammals, one day two pacaranas were born and one was an albino. And I also really enjoyed working with certain primates, like mandrills and Celebes apes. With birds, no doubt it was the baby harpy eagles. It's hard to put into words just how magnificent these creatures are. But as far as herps, nearly every day was like Christmas.

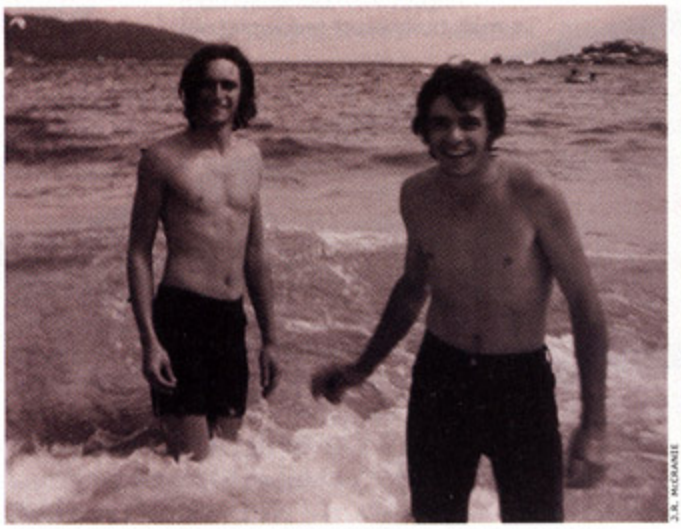
Some of the most memorable amphibians were Chinese and Japanese giant salamanders, Blomberg's toads, Cameroon toads and Goliath frogs. For lizards, there were Bengal, yellow and desert monitors, as well as all kinds of lizards from Australia and South Africa. And from northern Brazil we'd often get some beautiful solid red caiman lizards that were quite different from the ones we imported from Peru. With crocodilians there were slender snouts, Orinocos, black caimans, false and true gavials, Siamese crocs—essentially all the crocs were available. We'd also get a lot of neat turtles, like Hamilton's, flap shells, *Dermatemys*, *Claudius*, peacock softshells and so on. Tortoises would include stars, radiateds, Bolson's and huge yellow foots that weighed over 125 pounds. There were many interesting venomous snakes, such as Gold's tree cobras, *Bothrops cotiara* and *jararacussu*—sorry, but I can't think of their common names—red Schweizer's vipers, and bright orange and black *Vipera aspis* from southern France. Harmless snakes ... there were many, like solid yellow *Spilotes*, enormous yellow-tailed cribos, Colombian milk snakes. And as far as boids, there were lots of Indian pythons, Jamaican boas, 9-foot rainbows and Marajo anacondas.

J.R. MCKENZIE

Louie poses with a handful of Bahaman racers *(Alsophis v. vudii)* captured on Little Ragged Island.

ED CASSANO

A trip to the Ragged Islands in 1970 yielded a new boa (*Epicrates striatus maccraniei*).



John Rindfleish and Louie take a refreshing dip in the ocean at Acapulco, Mexico in 1971.

For years, "Butch," a Costa Rican bushmaster *(Lachesis stenophrys)* was like part of Louie's family.

Also, are you familiar with the Amazon emeralds with all the white that collectors today rave about? At one time, a dealer from northern Brazil threatened to stop doing business with Chase unless he could ship more of these emeralds, because he had over 600 in his compound!

Memorable herps (ponders while scratching his beard) ... well, there were a lot of aberrant snakes. Chase would often send me to dealers like Tropifauna to pick through thousands of baby boas to find the striped ones. I'm sure you're familiar with the "green" Burmese that you see in herpetoculture. Chase imported the original one, and I bought it for 25 dollars, but since I wasn't into keeping pythons I sold it to King Smith for the same price—and the rest is history. And once I saw an adult bright yellow and white emerald, and another that was nearly all turquoise. And speaking of turquoise, Chase once imported a huge chicken snake from Peru that was all turquoise, and a green mamba from Kenya that was splotched with green and turquoise. I could go on and on, but let's just leave it at that.

Besides venomous snakes, Louie often kept other herps. This water monitor was later donated to the Gladys Porter Zoo.

■ **Your old business, The Shed, has reached legendary status with older herp hobbyists who remember it. When did The Shed start?**

In '74, King Smith and Dave Hewett came back from a collecting trip to Okeetee with this funny looking guy from Brooklyn by the name of Joe Beraducci (smiles). Joe was hitchhiking to Florida on his way to Honduras, where he was to work as an animal handler on a film, but the project never materialized. Beraducci was a real character, and we hit it off right away. Though his herp experience was limited, I could tell that he was a quick learner, and he was also funny as hell and honest as could be. Joe had saved a little money, and it wasn't long before we decided to take the plunge and become partners in a reptile store.

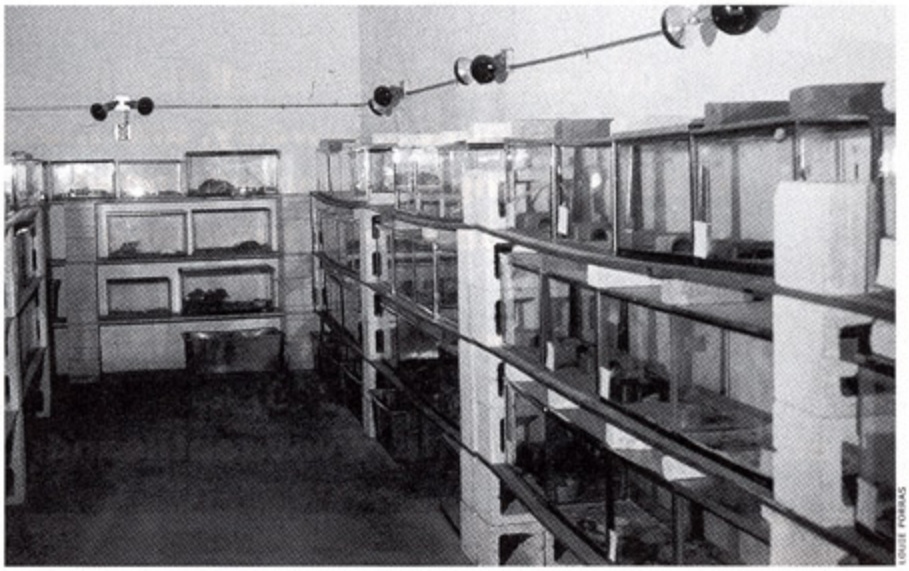
By the time we paid for rent and deposits in a strip mall and purchased a few tanks and supplies, we ran out of money. So we had no choice but to go collecting to fill up our cages for opening day. A few months later, in early '75, I decided to go to the Exumas with John Rindfleish in search of boas, which at that time were only known from a handful of specimens. We hit it just right, and in two days we found so many boas that we decided to turn about a dozen loose.

Back then Tom Huff was the director of the Reptile Breeding Foundation in Canada, probably the only facility in the world in those days to specialize in breeding reptiles. Tom was particularly interested in insular boids and wanted our entire catch, but it was winter, and instead of taking a chance with shipping I decided to drive them up. Besides collecting some much-needed cash, we worked out an exchange for the foundation's surplus. By spring, we had accumulated enough inventory to issue our first stock bulletin. The list was an immediate success and enabled our business to survive.

■ **What was your vision when you and Joe started the business?**

Over the years people seem to have immortalized The Shed, as if we were running some type of larger-than-life, visionary operation. In reality, we were just two herpers who started an under-funded reptile shop and had to work our tails off to make it work. We realized, however, that in order to succeed we had to keep the store clean,

and we had to maintain healthy animals and sell them for a reasonable price. Because Joe and I were interested in all kinds of herps, especially anything that was rare or unusual, we quickly built up a specialized clientele. Soon we were dealing with zoos and obtaining their surplus, and since Miami was the largest import town in the nation, we had the opportunity to handpick some of the best herps that other dealers imported. We also started exchanging with collectors all over the world and importing from a few selected dealers. Because of the mild South Florida winters, we had the advantage of doing this on a year-round basis.



LOUIE PORRAS

Hard work and a wide selection of healthy stock made The Shed a successful business. This photo showing rows of cages was taken in 1979.

■ **But there are other things I've heard about The Shed that set it apart from other dealerships, like it's philosophy. Can you elaborate?**

Again, over time some of this probably has been sensationalized, but one thing that comes to mind is that we realized the importance of sending animals to places where they were best suited. We always joked that The Shed wasn't really a dealership, but a home-finding service for lost and wayward herps (laughs)!

From a business standpoint, however, our philosophy wasn't really too smart. Many of our animals ended up going to zoos and institutions, and this generally meant that it would take us forever to get paid. But there was a part of our philosophy where Joe and I were always in agreement. Early on we made a pact never to deal with any questionable or illegal wildlife. Over the years, we did the best we could, but because of the nature of the business at times it was difficult to know just where to draw the line. We never did get into trouble, so I guess our philosophy must have worked.

■ **Many laws were enacted during those years. How did they affect your business?**

To be candid, the laws were pretty horrible and eventually they became a nightmare. The '69 Endangered Species Act was a telltale sign of things to come, but it was the '73 version that knocked dealers like Chase out of business. Chase hung in there for a while and moved to smaller quarters, but things were never the same. In '75, the CITES treaty came into effect, and about that time a number of states, including Florida, had issued new legislation. The mid '70s were also a time when humaniac groups were making a concerted effort to outlaw zoos and prohibit animal ownership, and the feeling in the trade was that laws were no longer being enacted to regulate, but to prohibit. The real shocker came in March of '77, when proposed regulations under the Injurious Act appeared in the Federal Register. In addition to all the recent legislation, the proposed regulations were so prohibitive that they threatened to put us out of business.

The regulations would have made it illegal for dealers to import venomous snakes, as well as many salamanders, newts and other amphibians. Since CITES had recently come into effect and many countries had yet to establish permit systems, imports for specialty dealers like The Shed had slowed dramatically. In essence, besides trying to sustain our

livelihood, we were representing an entire portion of the animal industry. So we took it upon ourselves to write a detailed letter explaining the ramifications of the proposal, to which we attached petition forms, and we mailed it to all our customers and to every herp society and organization we could think of. We also mailed the letter to countless politicians, like senators, representatives, congressmen, even the president. We raised enough commotion that people took our petitions to the streets, and it's interesting that even people in Canada got into the act!

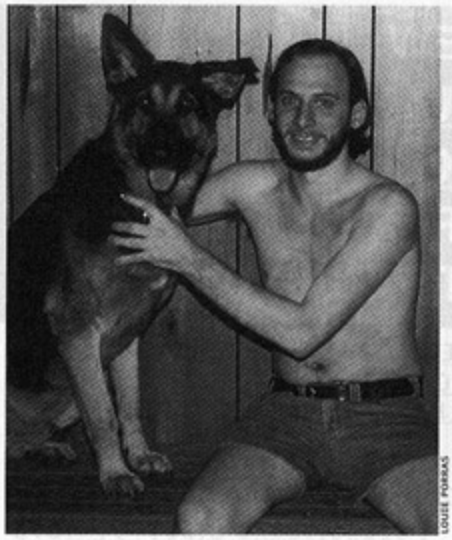
Although other groups voiced their concerns, I don't believe that any efforts were as organized or as emotional as ours, and with the amount of public outrage we elicited, I can't help but think that The Shed played a major role in the final outcome. Even before the results were made public, a Fish and Wildlife Service agent confided in me, unofficially of course, that no wildlife proposal in history had ever been defeated as soundly or effectively.

■ It's obvious that you supported yourself and your family through The Shed. Were there other advantages to the business?

Well, there were several, but primarily I'd have to say that it simply was the satisfaction of being in our position. The Shed had quickly become a national, no, let me rephrase that, an *international* conduit for the dissemination of information, which allowed us to interact with herpers in just about every segment of the herpetological community. In a sense, we were like a central clearinghouse. With herpetoculturists, for example, we'd always be providing the latest information on veterinary care. Much of this information we received from zoos and veterinarians, but in-house—and because we had such a large inventory—we were always constantly experimenting with new drugs or husbandry techniques and passing this information on to others. And in those early days of herpetoculture it seemed like everyone was coming to us for advice on what species to breed or how we saw the market developing. We reached a stage where our phones would never stop ringing, and as our business grew, we were finally forced to move to larger quarters.

■ What were the new quarters like?

It was a moderate-sized warehouse by the airport, which we framed with an escape proof room for the venomous snakes

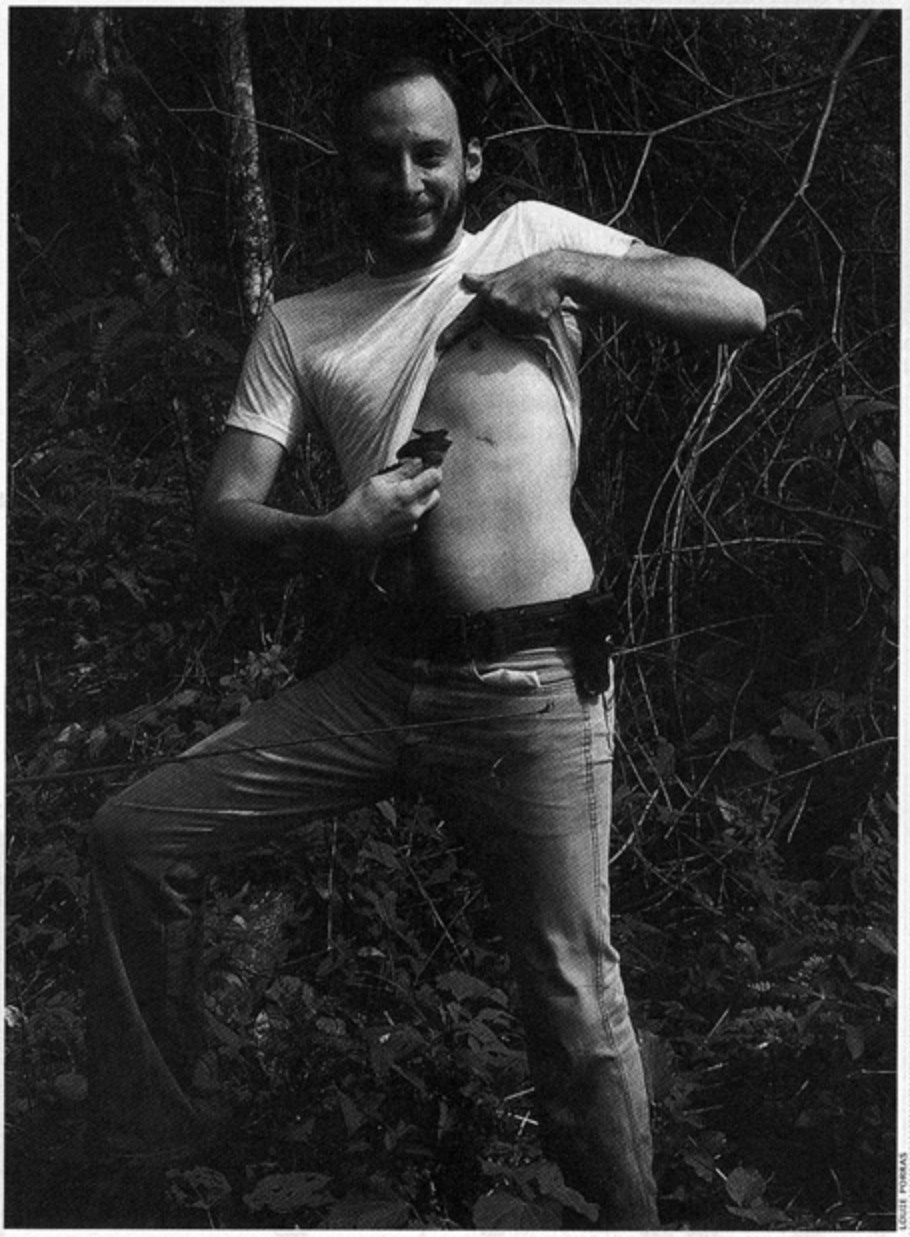


LOUISE PORRAS

Joe Beraducci is shown here in typical working attire with Buck, yet another colorful resident of The Shed.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VAL PORKVAK

This is Joe in recent years—always the joker!



LOUISE PORRAS

Joe Beraducci points to a bite from an adult male green basilisk *(Basiliscus plumifrons)* during a trip to Costa Rica in 1980.

and a bedroom for Joe. Phil, you have to realize that Joe didn't drive and he lived at The Shed. So we installed him a shower with a hot water heater, got him a waterbed and a small stove—you know, all the comforts of home. But then, you'd have to know Joe to understand. He was a ... well ... how can I say this, a ... a sort of unique individual. Oh, hell, this will say it all: He kept a damn cow skull in the shower (both break into uncontrollable laughter)!

You know, we all loved Joe, and night and day The Shed was the place where most South Florida herpers, as well as so many of the customers who visited us, would come to hang out. On most evenings there'd be music, wine and pizza, Joe's favorites, but mostly, there'd be more laughter and incredible herp stories than you could ever imagine! You know, when all is said and done, this is probably the real reason why people to this day still remember The Shed.

■ **Did you and Joe travel often?**

It was hard for us both to get away, but one of us would at least go to meetings or travel on business. Once we did manage to go to Costa Rica and we had a blast! But I'm the one that took the most time off to go adventuring.

■ **Did you encounter many rare herps in your travels?**

It depends what you mean by rare. We reported on some material, but many of these herps weren't necessarily rare. For instance, Larry Wilson, Randy McCranie and I reported on some noteworthy herps from Yucatan, and then on several species that were new to the herpetofauna of Honduras. The three of us also described *Leptodactylus silvanimbus*, and Larry and I described *Hyla catracha*. In Mexico, Randy and I found a few herps that in all likelihood are new, but over the years I've never returned there because permits became costly and difficult to obtain.

■ **Since everything was going so well for you in South Florida, what were your reasons for closing The Shed and moving on to other projects?**

First of all, I didn't close The Shed. In 1981, I decided to sell my interest in the business to Joe and began making preparations to move to Utah. It was a painful decision, not only because I'd made so many

A, B, C: These Greer's kingsnakes *(Lampropeltis mexicana greeri)* from the Durango plateau in Mexico became the founder stock in herpetoculture. Note the differences in color and pattern.

While collecting in Mexico, this waterfall in the Gomez Farias region of Tamaulipas provided a pleasant resting spot.

PHOTOS: ED CASSANO

friends through The Shed but because Joe and I were such close friends. Joe kept The Shed until about 1984, when he had the opportunity to go to Africa. You know, it's not surprising that Joe fell in love with Africa and decided to stay. Joe now owns a reptile breeding facility in Tanzania, and he often ships herps to the States.

Though it was hard, my decision to leave South Florida came because I had grown increasingly disenchanted with the crime rate in the area and didn't want my three kids growing up in that environment.

ED CASSANO

A young girl brought this albino Florida brown snake *(Storeria dekayi victa)* to The Shed inside a bucket with oil. Miraculously, the snake was alive and in apparent good health.

Equally as important was that I couldn't bear to continue watching the ecological tragedy that was happening to the region. So many of my favorite spots were being bulldozed for development, and the hydrologic cycle had been altered to such a degree that I hardly recognized portions of the Everglades. Expanses of the landscape were also being taken over by introduced vegetation like *Melaleuca* and Brazilian pepper, and most waterways had either become polluted or were blanketed with water hyacinths or filled with *Hydrilla*. But perhaps the final straw came when several landmark studies indicated that South Florida had long since reached its carrying capacity for humans, and still every day there were more and more people coming into the region. For nine years, Larry Wilson and I worked on an ecological study of the area, with respect to the herps, and the more information we drummed up the more I realized my need to live in a more pristine environment. After experiencing Utah's wide-open spaces on a trip in '79, I knew right then that's where I wanted to be.