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## OBITUARY

### Tim Walker, Herpetologist

Thomas R. Van Devender, Greater Good Charities, 6262 N. Swan Rd., Suite 165, Tucson, AZ; [yecora4@comcast.net](mailto:yecora4@comcast.net)

In 1968, I followed Ernest Tanzer to graduate school at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Tanzer was my professor at Lamar State University in Beaumont, Texas, and a herpetologist. I took vertebrate natural history from him and went on a fieldtrip to Tamaulipas with him—my first trip to Mexico. I remember that he had a white Texas ratsnake that he found in College Station, Texas. He was working on his doctorate at the UA with Robert Chaisson and Charles Lowe. Tragically, he died of cancer within a year.

Steeped in lore of magic snakes found in the Huachuca Mountains that I read about in my Wright and Wright 1957 *Handbook of Snakes*, I went to Carr Canyon in search of them. I found rock rattlesnakes (my favorite *Crotalus*), but the mythical *willardi* and mountain kingsnakes were elusive. Hiking the trail on

top, I met a quiet man named Tim Walker. After a bit he showed me a baby *willardi* in his backpack. A week later, he showed up in my graduate student shack in Tucson and gave me a gorgeous mountain kingsnake from Indian Creek in the Animas Mountains, New Mexico. He thought of me when he found it. To me this was a better gift than a gold snake hook! Tim was a friend for life. He passed away on March 24, 2020.

In graduate school, I worked with Charles Lowe and Paul Martin, who inspired me with wonders of evolution, biogeography, Ice Age history of the Sonoran Desert, and plants. With Everett Lindsey, I got into vertebrate paleontology, especially fossil reptiles and amphibians. I had a very large reference collection of herp skeletons. Eventually I donated the collection to paleontologist Jim Mead, now Director of the



**Fig. 1. A.** *Crotalus willardi willardi*. Huachuca Mountains. Photo by Erik F. Enderson. **B.** *Lampropeltis pyromelana*. Sierra Los Locos, Sonora. Photo by R. Wayne Van Devender.

Mammoth Site of Hot Springs Site museum and paleontological dig in South Dakota. He tells me that he has the skeleton of the Animas Mountains *Lampropeltis pyromelana* that Tim Walker collected on September 21, 1968!

### Biography

Thomas (Tim) Walker was born on May 12, 1937 in Dayton, Ohio. He grew up in the small country town of Clayton about 10 miles from Dayton. His parents recognized his talent for collecting animals and taming them, primarily snakes, but also turtles, skunks, squirrels, and other mammals. He spent much of his time volunteering at the Dayton Museum of Natural History, now the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery. Young Tim handled snakes for the public at the annual snake show and was regularly featured in the Dayton Daily News.

Tim graduated from North Carolina State in Raleigh in 1959 with a degree in forestry. He first went to Arizona to work for the Forest Service during the summer breaks from college. After college he joined the Army for two years at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas. Then he then secured a position with the US Forest Service working on the north rim of the Grand Canyon in Kaibab National Forest. He worked full-time for the Forest Service until 1966. After that he worked as a fire lookout part time in the Chiricahua Mountains at Monte Vista, Sentinel, and Silver Peak Lookouts until 1974. The lookouts were so remote that he spent 75 days without a day off.

In 1963, Tim met Sally Maclagan. She was a native of Bournemouth, England, and studied at the horticultural school in Waterperry, Oxfordshire. While she was working in New Zealand, she went on a collecting trip to Chile, but found out that the only way to get back was through the United States. There she decided to take a '99 days for \$99' tour of the country and met Tim Walker. He asked her if she would like to go

camping, and the rest is history. They were married in Las Vegas in a small chapel without family attending. Tim had a collecting trip to Álamos, Sonora, Mexico planned with Louis Pistoia, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles at the Columbus Zoo, that became their honeymoon! In 1966, their daughter Karen was born. They lived in Paradise, Tucson, and Cochise, Arizona.



**Fig. 2.** Tim Walker and common kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula*) in North Carolina. Snake is ca. 4 ft 7 in long.

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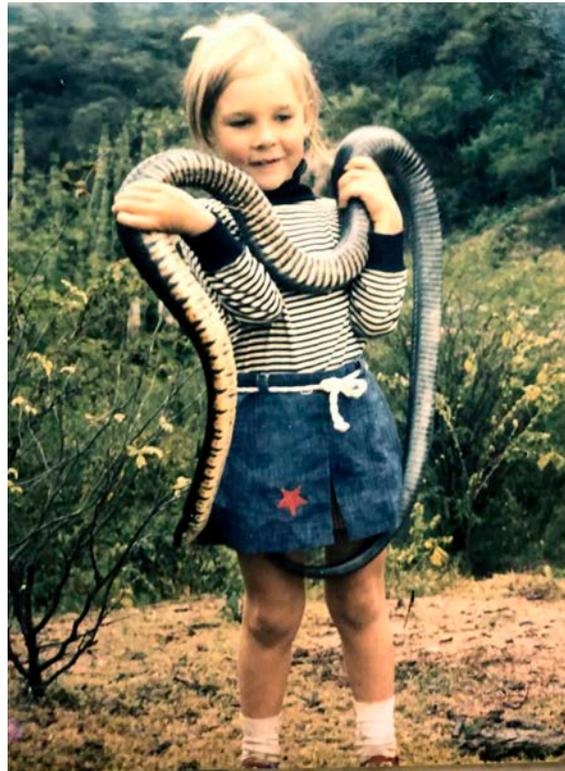
**Fig. 3.** Tim Walker's North Carolina State University graduation photo in 1959.

About 1970, I visited Tim at his home in Paradise in the Chiricahua Mountains, where I met Sally and saw her herbarium. They made extensive plant collections in the Álamos area in southern Sonora, along the Durango-Mazatlán highway in Sinaloa and Durango, and many other areas. Their specimens are in the herbaria at the universities of Arizona and California at Riverside, Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Kew Gardens in London, Missouri Botanical Garden, and the New York Botanical Garden. Their herbarium is now part of the Utah State University Herbarium in Logan, Utah. In 2018, David H. Lorence at the National Tropical Botanical Garden in Hawaii, George M. Ferguson at the University of Arizona Herbarium, and I described *Chiococca grandiflora* (Rubiaceae) as a new species. It was based on a Paul Martin specimen from Tepoca, Sonora, and two Walker specimens collected in 1970 and 1978 from El Palmito, Sinaloa, a dense pine-oak forest area along the Durango-Mazatlán highway (MEX 40) in the Sierra Madre Occidental.

In 1974, Tim left the Forest Service, chaffing at all the rules that he didn't agree with and their approach to nature. In 1975, Sally and Tim started **Sally's Seedery** which became **Southwestern Native Seeds**. Tim would travel into Mexico and the Southwest collecting seeds (and of course snakes!). Sally traveled to Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, and other northern states collecting seeds. They sold seeds to gardens and botanists all over the world for 42 years. In 1996, Sally received the Marcel Le Piniec Award from the North American Rock Garden Society.



**Fig. 4.** Tim and Sally in a wedding chapel in Las Vegas in 1963.



**Fig. 5.** Karen Walker at age five with indigo snake in Álamos, Sonora in 1971.

### Snakes, Always Snakes

Tim's interest in snakes lasted his entire life. As a teenager in Ohio, he likely used *The Reptiles of Ohio* published by Roger Conant in 1938. Conant became the Curator of Reptiles at the Toledo Zoo in 1929, and later General Curator. During the Great Depression, he oversaw the construction of a new reptile house working with the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) program to provide relief labor and using salvaged stonework, lumber, and radiators. The Reptile House was officially opened in September 1934, to house over 485 reptiles and amphibians. In 1935,

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Fig. 6. *Crotalus polystictus* from Jalisco in Dallas Zoo in 1989. Photos by R. Wayne Van Devender.

Conant became the Curator of Reptiles at the Philadelphia Zoo. In 1958 his *A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America* was the first field guide in the popular Peterson field guide series. Roger Conant was a descendant of Roger Conant, Puritan leader credited for establishing the communities of Salem, Peabody, and Danvers, Massachusetts in the 1600s.

During his college career at North Carolina State in the late 1950s, Tim spent most of his free time collecting snakes in the state.

Louis Pistoia was a close friend of the Walker family. He joined the Columbus Zoo in 1958 as Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles and built a nationally known herpetological collection. Tim sent many rare rattlesnakes, including the Lance-headed Rattlesnake (*Crotalus polystictus*), to the Columbus Zoo. He was reimbursed by the Zoo for the cost of shipping. He collected for Pistoia until the Endangered Species Act came into being in 1973, who died about the same time.

Tim and Lou had a close relationship, communicating with letters sharing stories about snakes from Arizona and Mexico, exotic reptiles in the zoo, and interactions with famous herpetologists like Laurence Klauber, Curator of Reptiles and Amphibians at the San Diego Natural History Museum and rattlesnake expert and Carl Kauffeld, Director of the Staten Island Zoological Society. Kauffeld's book *Snakes and Snake Hunting* was published in 1957 while Tim was in college. I personally met Kauffeld in 1967 when he was a

special guest on the Texas Herpetological Society's annual fieldtrip to Mentone in west Texas. Ernest Tanzer and I visited and took him to a western diamondback den on a hot, sunny day. He quenched his thirst with whiskey from his canteen!

Some of Tim's letters to Pistoia were about the search for the Gray-banded Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis mexicana blairi*), the Holy Grail of southwestern herpetologists in the 1960s and 1970s. They discussed William Degenhardt's capture of a *L. m. alterna* in 1962. Degenhardt later became the Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles in the Museum of Southwestern Biology, University of New Mexico. He coauthored the 2005 book *Amphibians and Reptiles of New Mexico*. In 1963, My brother Wayne and I, attended a meeting of the Strecker Herpetological Society at the Fort Worth Children's Museum. Mike Devine was working on a master's degree on the herpetofauna of Val Verde County, Texas at the University of Texas at Austin. He opened his presentation with three live *L. m. blairi* in separate gallon jars—numbers 9, 10, and 11 known individuals for this mythical kingsnake! That same summer, Wayne and I along with Ben Dial and Jerry Glidewell went to the Big Bend and found a DOR near Sanderson—number 12! Later I joined fellow herpers Steve Hale, Frank Retes, and Tom Boyden on a number of annual pilgrimages from Tucson to Val Verde County and the Big Bend of Texas. I saw lots of interesting Chihuahuan Desert herps, but never the elusive Gray-banded Kingsnake. Tim Walker camped

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Fig. 7. *Lampropeltis mexicana alterna* ("blairi"). A. Light phase from Val Verde County, Texas. B. Dark phase from Brewster County, Texas. Photos by R. Wayne Van Devender.



Fig. 8. Tim Walker's last VW bus in 2020.

on the Devil's River in the heart of *blairi* country and captured both light and dark phase *blairi* in 1968, 1970, and 1976. Today perfect captive-born babies are readily available in pet stores.

This is an excerpt from Tim's field journal on August 15, 1967 in the highlands of Michoacán in southwestern Mexico: "High thin clouds this morning allow very little sunlight and remain uniformly thick. At midday there is just enough sunlight and heat to make it ideal for snakes and at exactly 12 noon in the llano or Potrero de las Manzanillas, my two Mexican companions Francisco Mayoral and Juan Estrada spot two *Crotalus polystictus* coiled near each other in the grass and weeds with scattered rocks on a slope below a rock wall. These are caught then *Lampropeltis doliata* (= *triangulum*) *arcifera*, *Salvadora bairdi*, and another *C. polystictus*! Before 1400 hrs. The *polystictus* were all preparing to shed; the last one collected was closest to it of any of them and the old skin tore in places when pinned. They bit and struck ferociously when pinned and were very quick to strike as well as very quick moving in the grass."

In September 1967, Tim was bitten by a Mexican Black-tailed Rattlesnake (*Crotalus molossus nigrescens*) near Zamora, Michoacán. Sally remembers that he was adamant to get to the hospital in a hurry and told her she was driving way too slowly. He was injected with antivenin (*suerio anti-crotalico* – *Crotalus terrificus*). The

hospital staff helped Sally take care of a rambunctious one-year old Karen. He passed several very painful days in the hospital. As soon as Tim was released from the hospital, he returned to camp to try catch rare rattlesnakes one-handed!

Steve Hale remembers Tim and Sally living in Tucson. At that time both Steve and Tim had large private snake collections. Young Karen remembers that her friends were afraid to visit her house because of the snakes. Tim was raising mice to feed his snakes and to sell to local pet stores. Tim gave Steve tips on how to raise his own mice.

Another of Tim's passions was traveling into Mexico, alone or with his family. They traveled in a series of VWs, which I know from experience break down constantly and burn up engines easily. The first trip to Mexico when Karen was a year old was in a 1965 bug with the back seat modified as a crib. Tim went through four VW buses! I vividly remember my 1968 VW bug engine failure in Coahuila in 1978. Tony Burgess towed the car with his old side-step Chevy pickup first using a jury-rigged old tire as harness to Laredo, Texas and then back to Tucson with a tow bar. Steve McLaughlin and I rode inside the bug. I missed a planned canoe trip in the Rio Grande with Steve Hale and his girlfriend. Hale remembers that Tim never got Mexican auto insurance. His last trip to Mexico was in 2009. He continued to look for snakes all the way through the 80s and 90s but did not bring them home.

#### University of Arizona Connection

The fire lookout job allowed Tim to spend the winters in Mexico hunting snakes and plants from 1966 to 1974. Later he collected snakes in Mexico on seed collecting trips for **Southwestern Native Seeds**.

Tim was a major contributor to the University of Arizona Herpetological collection. Bob Bezy, Jay Cole, and Mike Robinson were graduate students in Charles Lowe's herp lab. They recall that Tim and Sally were occasional interesting visitors in the lab in 1964 to 1969, who would come back from exotic places in the mountains of Mexico with carloads of goodies. Bob

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Fig. 9. A. Bob Bezy and Jay Cole collecting lizards in Yucatán in 1968. B. *Barisia imbricata* from Durango in 1973. R. Wayne Van Devender photo.



**Fig. 10. A.** Charles Lowe in the Sierra Madre Occidental. Photo by R. Brusca. **B.** Charles Lowe, Mike Robinson, and Howard K. Gloyd in Gloyd's office at the University of Arizona in 1970. Gloyd was formerly the Director of the Field Museum in Chicago and a professor at the University of Arizona from 1958 to 1974. In 1940, his doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan was entitled *The rattlesnakes, genera *Sistrurus* and *Crotalus*: A study in zoogeography and evolution*. He named the Florida cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus conanti*) after Roger Conant.

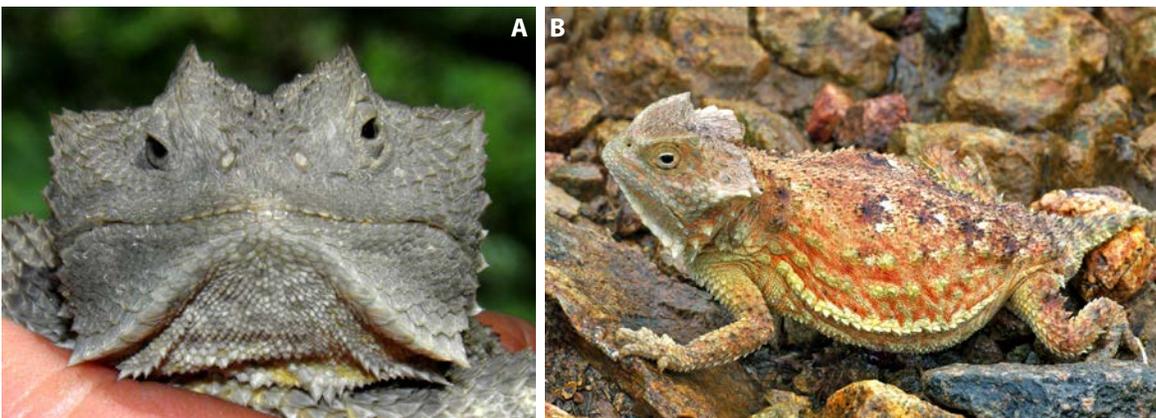
especially remembers a wonderful Transvolcanic Alligator Lizard (*Barisia imbricata*). Bob did his Ph.D. thesis on Xantusiidae night lizards and became a curator in the Herpetology Department in the Natural History of Los Angeles County Museum. Jay did his dissertation on the genus *Sceloporus* and became a curator in the Department of Herpetology at the American Museum of Natural History. His chromosome counts on *S. maculosus*, *S. merriami*, and *S. utiformis* collected by Tim in Coahuila, Texas, and Jalisco were later used in a scientific monograph. Mike did his dissertation on the endemic chuckwallas in the Gulf of California and went on to study lizards, amphibians, and rodents in Africa, Kuwait, Oman, and Venezuela. In the early 1970s, he was involved with Lowe, Vince Roth, and Wayne Howard in the rediscovery of the Rock Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma ditmarsii*) after 72 years. While visiting the lab, Tim and Sally would stay in a motel on Oracle Road and let Lowe have the cream of the crop for the University of Arizona Herpetological Collection. They sold the rest of the specimens to the Pet Corral on Oracle Road. Steve Hale remembers this store as a family business owned that sold reptiles from around the world.

#### Legacy

We are all influenced and formed by the times we live in, the knowledge of others who went before us, and friends and family that shared our lives. Tim Walker was a quiet, thoughtful, very private person, who was passionate about snakes, Mexico, and his family. He was not a famous person, but his connection to nature was similar to that of more famous ecologists. Apparently, the interest in reptiles was growing rapidly in the midwestern United States during Tim's youth. Roger Conant's *The Reptiles of Ohio* was published in 1938 and his *A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America* in 1958. Reptile houses flourished at zoos in Columbus, Toledo, Philadelphia, New York, San Diego, and elsewhere.

Aldo Leopold was born in Burlington, Iowa, in 1887. He was very much an outdoorsman in his youth, exploring the hills and woods and spending hours studying birds. He graduated from the Yale School of Forestry and in 1909 took a job with the U.S. Forest Service in Apache National Forest in Arizona. His natural history experiences helped form his views on wilderness, wildlife management, and the land ethic that are the foundations of modern conservation.

Charles H. Lowe was born in Los Angeles, Cali-



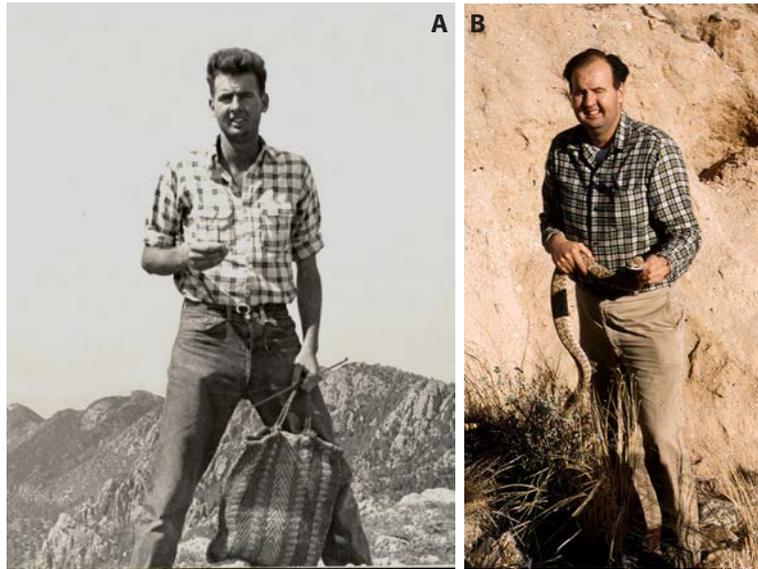
**Fig. 11. *Phrynosoma ditmarsii*. A.** Near Toribusi. Photo by T. R. Van Devender. **B.** Rancho las Palmas, Sierra Verde. Photo by Erik F. Enderson

ifornia in 1920 (Rosen 2004). In high school about the time Tim was born, he was constantly collecting snakes in the southern California deserts with fellow herpetology club members. He hunted western diamondbacks on foot with S. H. Walker at Blythe in 1941, cruised roads with Lawrence M. Klauber, and accompanied Charles M. Bogert into the Sierra de Álamos, Sonora in 1942. Bogert and Oliver (1945) published the first summary of the herpetofauna of Sonora. In 1950, Lowe arrived at the University of Arizona, where he was a professor for 45 years. He was a leading southwestern naturalist and ecologist for many years. He developed the University of Arizona Herpetological Collection, now totaling over 50,000 specimens. He personally collected 8,500 of them

from all over the Southwest and Mexico. He taught me about evolution, biogeography, and critical thinking.

Paul S. Martin was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1928. He too was drawn into natural history through bird watching. He went to Cornell University, University of Michigan, and Yale University. His doctoral dissertation was on the amphibians and reptiles of the Gómez Farías region of Tamaulipas in the Sierra Madre Oriental in northeastern Mexico. His interest in biogeography lead to a distinguished career in Pleistocene environments, extinction of the megafauna, and much more. He was a professor at University of Arizona contemporaneous with Charles Lowe. Later he followed in the footsteps of Howard Scott Gentry in the Río Mayo region of Sonora, publishing *Gentry's Río Mayo Plants* in 1998. As my doctoral advisor, he helped me delve into the Ice Age secrets of the Chihuahuan and Sonoran Deserts, learn to love and appreciate plants, and lured me into the tropical lowlands of Álamos and the forests of the Sierra Madre Occidental near Yécora.

I was born in Beaumont, Texas in 1946. My brother Wayne and I grew up chasing horned lizards, snakes, alligators, and bullfrogs in New Mexico, Texas, and South Carolina. Like Tim, I moved to Arizona after graduating from college, and never left. I learned to love the mountains in Arizona and Mexico. I ex-



**Fig. 12.** Charles H. Lowe. **A.** On top of the Sierra de Álamos in 1942. Photo by Charles M. Bogert. **B.** Handling *Crotalus atrox*.

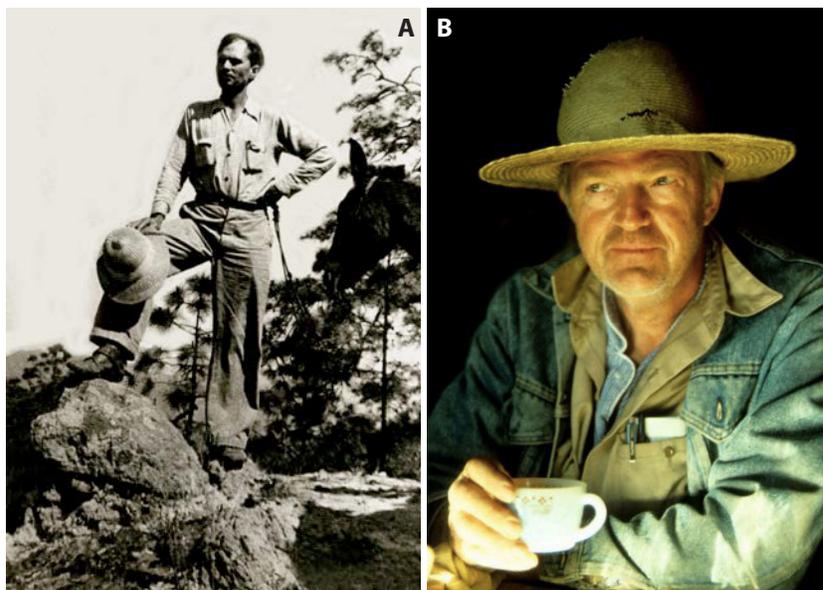
plored them in my 1968 VW beetle, and later owned a VW bus. I too was lured to Val Verde County, Texas by the siren call of *blairi*. I love to travel in Mexico. I too was pulled into the intellectual vortex of Charles Lowe.

**Acknowledgements**—I thank Karen and Sally Walker for sharing stories and images of their beloved father and husband. Bob Bezy, Jay Cole, Mike Robinson, Steve Hale, and Jim Mead shared their memories of Tim. Wayne Van Devender shared his great herp images. Phil Rosen provided the image of Charles Lowe on top of the Sierra de Álamos.

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Charles H. Lowe was born in Los Angeles, California in 1920 (Rosen 2004). In high school about the time Tim was born, he was constantly collecting snakes in the southern California deserts with fellow herpetology club members.



**Fig. 13.** **A.** Howard Scott Gentry. Sierra Surotato, Sinaloa in 1943. **B.** Paul S. Martin. Batopilas, Chihuahua in 1990. Photo by Kik Moore.

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## BOOK REVIEW

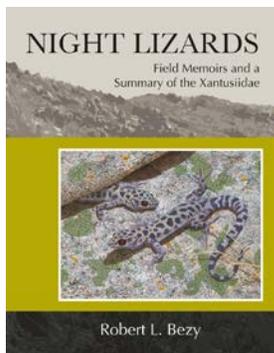
# Night Lizards: Field Memoirs and a Summary of the Xantusiidae

Review by Robert A. Villa, President, Tucson Herpetological Society, Tucson, AZ; [cascabel1985@gmail.com](mailto:cascabel1985@gmail.com)

What is it like to pursue a career around your passions? Eminent night lizard (xantusiid) scholar Robert L. Bezy gives us an enjoyable example filled with adventures, and a monograph of the night lizard family (Xantusiidae). It includes important researchers, aspects of evolutionary ecology, phylogeography, standing questions, species accounts, keys, and a thorough bibliography. The book's cover is graced with a handsome painting of two Granite Night Lizards (*Xantusia henshawii*) by artist Tell Hicks (erroneously labeled as *Xantusia vigilis*). Also included within the book are art and illustrations by Randall D. Babb, Kit Bolles Bezy, and Jackson D. Shedd.

The Preface and Introduction acknowledge everyone who has graced the author's pursuit of herpetological and scientific happiness. Apart from close family and friends, Charles H. Lowe (known as the "dean" of Sonoran Desert ecology) stands out as a sometimes frustrating but much-loved mentor and advisor. In his acknowledgement of grant sources, one will read "National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)." You'll have to read the book to discern this curious confluence of disciplines.

Bezy's brief autobiography is a charming description of a wild childhood and adolescence in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. We also glimpse his academic journey from grade school into college, complemented by



**Title:** Night Lizards: Field Memoirs and a Summary of the Xantusiidae

**Authors:** Tell Hicks (Artist), Robert Bezy (Author)

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an ontogenetic series of photos from infancy developing into adulthood and a family of his own. We learn that apart from being mentored by the legendary Charles H. Lowe at the University of Arizona, herpetological all-star Howard K. Gloyd was also a formative influence on Dr. Bezy. He also goes into aspects of professional and family life, and rolling with life's curves.

After these details of early life, the reader is zipped like the Ghost of Herpetology Past, between memorable field trips and moments with colleagues, friends, and family across four continents in the career of Dr. Bezy.

An overview of night lizards follows. Bezy begins with the story of the discovery and initial descriptions and classification of *Xantusia*. This includes biographical sketches of important xantusiid researchers, beginning with Janos Xantus—the audacious and eccentric Hungarian immigrant whom the genus and family is named after. The reader then learns about how Dr. Bezy became interested in *Xantusia*. As an appreciator and admirer of plants, the author of this book review was

Bezy's brief autobiography is a charming description of a wild childhood and adolescence in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. We also glimpse his academic journey from grade school into college, complemented by an ontogenetic series of photos from infancy developing into adulthood and a family of his own.