



Second WDA Latin America Section Newsletter

EDITORIAL Volume I, number II – September, 2015

Interview to Prof. Dra. Marcela Uhart

Questions for the WDA Latin America Newsletter – Second Edition:

1) In your opinion, how relevant is WDA in the dissemination of knowledge and settlement of alliances in the research field of wildlife conservation medicine?

When it comes to free ranging wildlife, WDA is a very relevant organization because it brings together the most prominent specialists in the field and publishes a reference scientific journal on wildlife related issues, the Journal of Wildlife Diseases. Through their annual meetings, WDA actively promotes the connection between professionals and the exchange of information. In spite of that, the organization makes great effort to bring young students and professionals together with professors, tutors and renowned researchers. With its geographical sessions, WDA stimulates regional representation and enables the creation of bonds and collaborations among local colleagues, sometimes made difficult in a global level due to economical and/or language barriers.



Photo: Dra. Marcela Uhart

2) What are your expectations for the WDA Conference to be held in Bogota, Colombia?

I have no doubt that it will be a high quality event that will promote excellent studies being developed in Latin America in the fields of wildlife and One Health. It will also be the ideal opportunity to share experiences with local colleagues and straighten professional and personal relationships. WDA is one big family and through our local meetings we have the opportunity to bring up and build up our own Latin American family, with our very own characteristics. I have great expectations for the conference that is right around the corner and I am sure that it will be a great success; not only because of the efforts of our Colombian colleagues in organizing the meeting, but also because of the high

level of all participants and unquestionable hospitality of beautiful Bogota.

3) Please explain how your participations in WDA meetings and conferences have influenced your carrier and field of research (aside from broadening your professional network)?

I cannot even begin to list all that I have learned from working in the general organization and particularly, at the annual meetings. I believe that many professionals from my generation, including myself, had a phase when they were considered “underdogs”, especially during grad school, because we did not fit into the traditional vet profile. Imagine how surprised I was when I went to my first WDA conference, around 1999 and met many other “underdogs”! To me it was like heaven.

The year I spent attending WDA conferences allowed me not only to keep myself updated on the breakthrough of wildlife medicine studies from all over the world, but also to improve myself as a veterinarian in an uniquely friendly environment. When a newly grad student starts in this field it is fundamental to have access to a network with hundreds of people that share the same interests, including professionals that are a reference in the field, and being welcomed with open arms, such as WDA does. The organization makes great efforts to enroll young people and promote their professional development, which is one of the highlights of this meeting.

There is no doubt that during the high quality WDA events our brains get exhausted with so much information, but full of ideas. Many of the research projects in which I have worked on throughout my career came up or were build up through the exchanges with other colleagues during the events or

after key lectures that brought up an initial question. Ultimately, watching the lectures helped me to have professional standards and parameters of excellence, once there is no bigger pressure than the one we get from the colleagues we admire and want to impress.

4) Now a few words to the veterinary students: in your opinion, how relevant is it for the biology-based students to participate and be affiliated to organizations such as WDA?

Few opportunities are more enriching than interdisciplinarity. Since I started in this field, I have been working daily with biology professionals from a broad variety of disciplines (ecologists, mathematicians, microbiologists, oceanographers, chemist, engineers, physicians), as well as with naturalists, native para-biologists and para-veterinarians, and more and more with enthusiastic citizens. There is no field of research that does not benefit from this broad networking. There are no questionings, methods or conclusions more valuable that those born in collaborative processes.

Interdisciplinarity is a must, because each and every field benefits from the exchange of knowledge and skills. I have spent years working this way and I am always surprised when people ask me about it, because personally, I have never experienced any conflicts whatsoever regarding this issue. WDA is a unique forum that brings together health professionals from all areas of expertise, something rare in the traditional veterinary scene. We are all very like to be part of it!



AN INFIRMITY AND AN OPPORTUNITY: AMPHIBIANS INSIST ON SENDING US A MESSAGE

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In the late 80's Costa Rica noticed a decline in several different anuran populations, especially of high altitude species. Among the ones that disappeared was the mythical golden toad (*Incilius periglenes*), inhabitant of one of the most important ecotourism sites in the country, Monteverde. As well as many other species, the golden toad was not observed by herpetologists for almost two decades. Unfortunately, Costa Rica turned into one of the most affected places, but this phenomenon was described in many other territories around the world.

Since the first reports of species disappearances, the reasons behind its possible causes are still under debate and it has been a tough discussion...

In the mid-90's there is a possibility of a pathogenic agent playing a central role in the declines. In the south border of Costa Rica the first sightings of what would be later described as a chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) occur. This fungus has been one of the most important infectious agents to capture the world's attention due to its presence in many of the amphibian

population declines all over the world. After a decade of studies in Costa Rica, we notice its clear presence in practically every territory within the country; from the sea level up to 10.000 feet areas, and in the majority of ecosystems that this geographically heterogenic country provides us. Without a doubt, many questions come up regarding its role in the reported declines.

Nowadays, almost three decades later, nature gives us a second chance. Many of the populations we considered vanished, some of them for almost two decades, are returning. In Costa Rica, there are reports of herpetologists lead by the School of Biology and Center of Microscopic Structure Investigations (CIEMic) of the University of Costa Rica, of some species that have reestablished their populations and are currently healthy and coexisting with *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*. Among them is the Holdridge's toad (*Bufo holdridgei*) endemic to Costa Rica and one of the most commonly seen toad species during three decades, the vibicaria toad (*Lithobates vibicarius*), endemic of Costa Rica and Panama; where there were no reports of its presence since its disappearance. Both inhabit the chain of mountains that spread throughout the Costa Rican territory. Following their examples, several species around the country have survived thanks to the conservationist efforts of selected individuals and national organizations. This picture is undoubtedly a unique opportunity to study these animals and get a better understanding about the factors that allowed their survival. Such news brings us hope and motivation to follow through with study projects and research, aside from every possible conservationist effort in our power to protect these species.



BIENNIAL CONFERENCE, BOGOTÁ, 2015.

Dear WDA-LA Members,

We know that many of you have been involved either directly or indirectly in the organization and broadcasting of our conference (reporting the event, sharing news and informations, sending summaries, collaborating with the committee's evaluation, etc.). We would like to congratulate each and every one of you and thank you for all your efforts!

The final program with the list of research studies to be presented at the conference and their authors is already available on our website. Please go to <http://www.wda.veterinariosvs.org/>

For those members who have already registered, we have a few reminders:

On Thursday, September 24th 2015, as a courtesy of the Colombian National Parks, the first 80 attendees registered will contemplate a guided tour of the Chingaza National Park. We will provide the overview papers (meeting place, information about the park, recommended gear, etc.) in the following days.

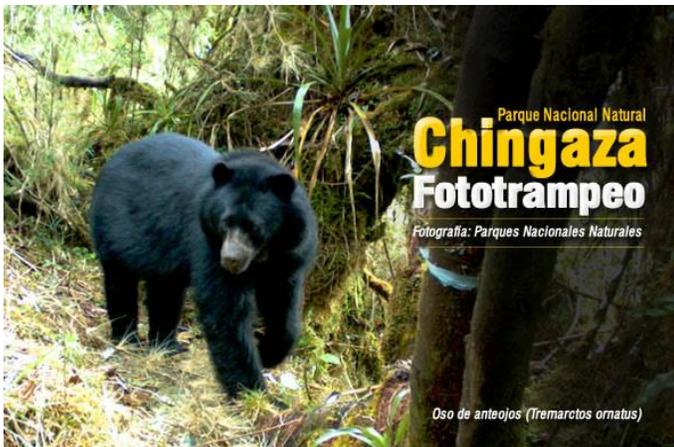


Photo: Spectacled bear, Chingaza NP, Colombia.

On Wednesday, September 23rd 2015, the workshop entitled: ***What does it mean to work in situ with wildlife health and what does it take? Challenges and Opportunities for "nontraditional" veterinarians.*** Dr. Luz Dary Acevedo and Dr. Marcela Uhart will preside the meeting. Duration: 8hrs.

This space is intended for veterinary students and professionals who are planning to broaden their view and expertise in the field of wildlife medicine.

On Monday, September 28th 2015, the workshop entitled: ***The impact of diseases on wild populations***, presided by Dr. Nicole Gottdenker and Dr. José Luiz Catão-Dias will discuss the following themes:

- Current context and conditions of research studies of wildlife diseases in Latin America: ecosystem and biological data collection and sampling -impacts of relevant infermities in different taxa. Duration: 8hrs.

For further information about the workshops, please email us at: wdala2015@gmail.com

Voting for the photo contest is still open! To visualize the pictures and vote, go to:

<http://www.wda.veterinariosvs.org/inicio/concurso/>

We would like to reinforce our gratitude towards all our members and hope to see you in Bogota!



Photo: Botero's Museum, Bogotá. Pedro Szekely, 2010

Best regards,

WDA-LA Organization Committee.

MESSAGE TO THE STUDENTS

Dear students,

In an attempt to promote greater exchange of information and experiences among our students and as a request from members of our Section, the Student Committee of the WDA-LA will promote a scientific get-together session during our next meeting, at the II WDA-LA Conference in Bogotá, Colombia.

After the Student Meeting we will have a session of short presentations (about 3 minutes) for the associated students, in order to share with all our colleagues our line of research, work and internship opportunities.

Come join our first Student Research Fellowship, dedicated exclusively to you, student member of the WDA-LA!

The future of the Association depends on our participation!

WDA-LA Student Committee