

Herpetology Encyclopedia Article

Herpetology

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Herpetology

Herpetology is the study of amphibians and reptiles. The scientists who study these animals are called herpetologists. They research the structure, physiology, and behavior of these animals, as well as how they live and are related to one another. Medical researchers have been able to gain valuable knowledge from the study of these animals because they are able to survive well in captivity and they can survive operations that would kill many birds and mammals. Herpetological research also includes the extraction and biochemical study of venoms—a growing subspecialty. Because of their unique biochemistry, some venoms hold great promise as therapies for incurable or chronic diseases.

The field of herpetology appears to stem from the ancient tendency to group all creeping animals together. The Greek word *herpeton* means "crawling thing." Modern herpetology, as a popular and important science, tends to focus more narrowly on issues specific to orders or suborders of animals (e.g., the global decline of frog populations). Most technical research in herpetology is carried out in the field or at universities.

Herpetologists may work in zoos or for wildlife agencies, do environmental assessments, care for museum collections, or teach the public in a museum setting. Some herpetologists work as writers, photographers, or animal breeders. The majority of herpetologists work as professors or researchers in colleges and universities. While most herpetologists do have a doctorate, there have been some cases where novices were so renowned for their expertise, that they were invited to teach at the college and university level. Smaller colleges may hire teachers with a master's degree. Herpetologists with an entrepreneurial spirit may go into business for themselves, breeding and selling amphibians and reptiles, or marketing related herpetological merchandise and publications.

See Also

Amphibia; Reptilia.

Bibliography

Porter, Kenneth. *Herpetology*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1972.