

Published in the United States of America

2019 • VOLUME 13 • NUMBER 2

AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE CONSERVATION



**A Tribute to William R. Branch
(1946–2018)**

amphibian-reptile-conservation.org

ISSN: 1083-446X

eISSN: 1525-9153

me to show him that I could. We wouldn't go on another field trip together again until 2015, again to Angola. By this time, Bill had retired, and I was keeping the fort on my own. During the trip, around the campfire one evening, Bill told me that he can now rest in peace, knowing the Port Elizabeth Museum herpetology collection is in good hands. Thank you, Bill.

I worked with Bill for more than ten years, but I only really started to get to truly know him and his family when he was unfortunately diagnosed with motor neuron disease. It was a devastating experience to see your mentor and friend fade away in front of your eyes. Bill was determined to follow his passion to the very end, and his determination was amazing to behold. Bill has taught me life lessons that I will cherish forever. He was truly a one-of-a-kind man. He is and will be missed.

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I first met Bill in 1994, just as I was about to start my Ph.D. working on flat lizards (*Platysaurus*). I was based at the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria, and he arrived to slice up snakes as part of a project on the ecology of African snakes with Rick Shine, Jonathan Webb, and Peter Harlow. Shortly after meeting him, he told me about the Augrabies flat lizard system, which ended up being the subject of my Ph.D. and many happy field seasons. I owed him a huge debt, without realising it at the time! And as it turned out, our discussions about flat lizards led to a collaboration that continued until his death.

Everyone that meets Bill is immediately struck by how warm and caring he is. It's hard to describe, but he had a personality that immediately drew you in. And I think that's why he had such an impact on so many people. He was particularly giving and helpful to young aspiring herpetologists, and I very much appreciated his friendship and advice as a young Ph.D. student fresh on the herpetological scene in South Africa. A few years into my Ph.D., he invited me on a field trip to a remote area of northern Mozambique to survey the vertebrates of the Moebase region, the site of a proposed titanium mine (sadly). I really appreciated this gesture, because he could have invited any number of far more qualified people! His son Tom was also on the trip, to survey birds. Little did I know that this would become such a memorable trip, and that I would have experiences I still talk about to this day. There is nothing like a field trip to really get to know someone, and that trip forged a lifelong friendship. With Bill, there was never a shortage of stimulating conversation on a wide range of topics beyond herpetology. His love for natural history was

infectious. The only thing Bill spoke about with more passion was his wife Donvé. While on that same field trip to Mozambique, Bill set out to find a clay pot that was representative of the region, to take back to Donvé. I should mention that Donvé is an award winning potter, so this was the perfect gift! Our fixer couldn't quite understand what a westerner would want with a clay pot, but we examined quite a few, before buying one from a surprised local villager. Actually, I also acquired one which has survived multiple moves in South Africa and a final move to Australia. (How could I not buy one after hearing Bill wax on about Donvé and her pottery!)

Bill was larger than life and made a huge impact on African herpetology. It's hard to accept that he's gone, but he will never be forgotten. He will certainly be missed by many. I am currently working on finishing a phylogeny and revision of the *Platysaurus* with Scott Keogh and Mitzy Pepper, a project that Bill and the late Don Broadley were both involved in, and he will certainly be in our thoughts as we put together the final touches.



Fig. 39. Bill and his son Tom while passing through a village during our 1997 Mozambique trip (scanned from a slide). To this day, that field trip ranks as one of my most memorable (Photo: Martin Whiting).



Fig. 40. Bill in action during our 1997 Mozambique trip [scanned from slides] (Photo: Martin Whiting).