

**2026**  
**International Herpetological  
Symposium**



**JUNIOR HERPETOLOGIST  
AWARD APPLICATION**

**July 29 to August 1, 2026**

**Rodeo, New Mexico**





Dear Junior Herpetologist Award applicants,

Thank you for your interest in the Junior Herpetologists program. This program's goal is to help support young people who are interested in reptiles and amphibians from all over the country to attend IHS. There are not other opportunities like this available anywhere for young persons passionate about herpetology and herpetoculture. This program is only possible due to the kindness and generous support of our sponsors, primarily Timberline Live Foods, Eco Wear and Publishing, Zoo Med, Reptile Industries, and a number of outstanding donations from individuals in the reptile community.

The IHS, over the past 50 years has been at the forefront for disseminating the latest herpetological information. This year we have an amazing array of talks already scheduled from herpetologists, herpetoculturists, and conservationists from around the world. As never before, reptiles and amphibians are faced with pollution, climate change, over-collection for food and traditional medicine, habitat destruction and fragmentation, and an ever-increasing attack on their lives in nature. With knowledge gained through IHS presentations, we are better able to understand their needs and what we can do to help protect them.

Before many reptile and amphibian books were written, and long before there was the Internet or reptile shows, the International Herpetological Symposium was there. And although you can now retrieve information on just about any reptile or amphibian in the world online with the touch of a few buttons, IHS remains relevant and has an important place in the herpetological community. In this complicated, seemingly impersonalized world, IHS fulfills our desire to communicate directly with others who share our passions. This year, some of the biggest, most important names in herpetology, ecology, field biology, and herpetoculture are coming to New Mexico to share their work, exciting information, and new discoveries with us. In the great tradition of the IHS, information will be exchanged, hands will be shaken, and new friends will be made.

The purpose of the IHS is as follows:

- (1) To provide a yearly symposium for the dissemination of information and research pertaining to the natural history, conservation biology, captive management, and propagation of amphibians and reptiles.
- (2) The publication of such information. Unlike most herpetological societies or associations, IHS does not have a voting membership, but an Electoral Body that consists of members of the Board of Directors, the Advisory Council, Publication Editors, and Chairs of various committees. These individuals are selected from all areas of herpetology and herpetoculture. Zoologists, herpetologists, and private herpetoculturists are all involved in planning and organizing the annual symposia.

(3) To provide grants for financial assistance to individuals or organizations conducting herpetological research, conservation, and education.

The IHS meetings have evolved and a flow of excited attendees of all ages show up each year to learn about reptiles and amphibians, including new advances in their care, and the study of their lives in nature.

No matter what walk of life brings you to IHS, I hope you enjoy every talk and I thank all of the speakers, sponsors, and attendees for keeping this incredible tradition alive and strong!

The committee look forward to reviewing your applications for this unique award and we look forward to meeting our 2026 Junior Herpetologists in Florida!

Thank you,

**Russ Gurley**  
**Director, IHS Junior Herpetologist/NextGen Herpetologist Program**

**Myke Clarkson**  
**IHS President**

## **INTERNATIONAL HERPETOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM JUNIOR HERPETOLOGIST AWARD**

**The International Herpetological Society's JUNIOR HERPETOLOGIST PROGRAM was created by the IHS board and other passionate herpetologists and herpetoculturists around the country to help promote the fields of herpetology and herpetoculture to young people.**

**IHS Junior Herpers will spend time with some of the world's best known herpetologists, herpetoculturists, and conservationists.**

**Ask them the hardest questions you can think of, how they got interested in herps, and how they made a career of their love of reptiles and amphibians!**

**Share your own ideas about reptiles and amphibians!**

**Tell them about yourself and what got you interested in herps!**

**The IHS also gives young herpers an opportunity to meet other young people with similar passions, and a chance to see some of the nation's best reptile and amphibian collections, all in a fun and informative meeting place.**

One winner in each age category will receive an all-expenses paid trip to the 2026 International Herpetological Symposium at the Chiricahua Desert Museum in Rodeo, New Mexico from July 29 to August 1, 2026. This includes free registration for admission to all talks, free banquet, and lots of field herping.

Three runners-up in each age category will receive free registration to the 2026 IHS meeting, free banquet, and \$200 towards travel expenses.

For this year's Junior Herpetologist program there will be one winner and three runners-up chosen in each of three different age categories: Age 12-15, Age 16-18, and Age 19-22 (NextGen Herpetologist), based on the applicant's age at the time of submission of materials. In the Age 12-15 and the Age 16-18 divisions, a parent or guardian will also receive airfare to accompany the traveling minor; IHS will also provide one free registration and one free banquet for this parent or guardian.

**Applicants must submit all of the following materials before the deadline for consideration:**

1. **COVER LETTER** explaining why the applicant should be chosen as the Junior Herpetologist winner. Please also list the **APPLICANT'S NAME, AGE category, MAILING ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER, and EMAIL ADDRESS**, as well as an **ADULT CONTACT NAME** if 17 years or younger. **Applications without this information included will not be considered.**

2. In the appropriate age division, select one category (A. Natural History/Conservation or B. Herpetoculture) and write a short **ESSAY** using the following guidelines:

Age 12-15: One short essay on your favorite reptile or amphibian species (500 to 1,000 words, 1.5 spacing, Times New Roman, black). Include the following information in one category listed below:

**A. *Natural History/Conservation***

- \* Where are they found?
- \* What are their unique characteristics?
- \* Why are they special and why are they special to you?
- \* Are they threatened?
- \* Do you have any ideas of how to protect them in nature for future generations?

**B. *Herpetoculture***

- \* A short history of this species in herpetoculture
- \* What are their unique characteristics that make them good captives?
- \* What is the ideal way to establish and maintain them in captivity?
- \* Are they best kept indoors or outdoors?
- \* Why are they special and why are they special to you?
- \* Are they threatened in nature?
- \* What can be done to ensure they are around for future generations of hobbyists?

Age 16-18: One short essay on a reptile or amphibian species (500 to 1,500 words, 1.5 spacing, Times New Roman, black). Include the following information in one category listed below:

**A. *Natural History/Conservation***

- \* Feature their unique characteristics and the problems they are facing in nature today.
- \* Are there programs in place to help save this species for future generations?
- \* What other ideas do you have for saving this specific species?

**B. *Herpetoculture***

- \* A short history of this species in herpetoculture
- \* What are their unique characteristics that make them good captives?
- \* What is the ideal way to establish them in captivity?
- \* Are they best kept indoors or outdoors?
- \* Why are they special and why are they special to you?
- \* Are they threatened in nature?
- \* What can be done to ensure they are around for future generations of hobbyists?

**NextGen Herpetologist**

Age 19-22: One short essay on a reptile or amphibian species (1,000 to 1,500 words, 1.5 spacing, Times New Roman, black). Include the following information in one category listed below:

**A. *Natural History/Conservation***

- \* Feature their unique characteristics and the problems they are facing in nature today.
- \* Are there programs in place to help save this species for future generations?
- \* What other ideas do you have for saving this specific species?

## **B. Herpetoculture**

- \* A short history of this species in herpetoculture
- \* What are their unique characteristics that make them good captives?
- \* What is the ideal way to establish them in captivity?
- \* Are they best kept indoors or outdoors?
- \* Why are they special and why are they special to you?
- \* Are they threatened in nature?
- \* What can be done to ensure they are around for future generations of hobbyists?

**3. TWO LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION** (teacher, local herpetologist/herpetoculturist, zookeeper, parent/guardian, or another person who knows the applicant and his/her accomplishments or potential).

\* Although not required, applicants may also opt to include one piece of supporting original artwork (drawing, poster, flyer, postcard design, etc.), one photo, and/or one piece of poetry or creative writing along with their applications. Please do not send videos or any copyrighted materials.

**\* Please note that we are very strict on these details. Applications not adhering to these instructions will be removed from the judging process.**

**DEADLINE & SUBMISSION METHODS:** Due to the large number of applicants, in order to be considered applications must be received by NOON (12:00 pm) CST on **April 1, 2026**. Materials can be either downloaded into GOOGLE DOCS and notification sent to: RussGurley1313@gmail. **All applications received after NOON (12:00 pm) CST on April 1, 2026 will not be considered.**

**Winners will be notified directly on April 15, 2026.**

\* Winners of each division will be required to present a 15-30 minute PowerPoint presentation related to the topic of their winning essay during the IHS meeting.

**\*\* Previous Winners are not eligible to apply in consecutive years (winners may apply again two years after winning), but we hope you will join us for all future IHS meetings and be a part of the IHS family!**

Please contact me if you have any questions or need clarification at RussGurley1313@gmail.com.

Thank you -

**Russ Gurley**  
**Director, IHS Junior Herpetologist Program**