

To the attention of:  
**Thomas Vinke**  
**Sabine Vinke**  
(via email)

Buenos Aires, July 6th, 2019

Dear Thomas and Sabine Vinke,

Although quite unusual in the professional world, at this time I am addressing you together, since this has been the way you yourselves have chosen to work.

For a long time now, I and other colleagues of the BPSG have been putting up with certain behaviors from you that have now reached a point of significant gravity. Please allow me to remind you that it was I, when I became the BPSG Chair, who invited you to join the group. I did so in the belief that being based in Paraguay and because of your conservationist formation and interest in reptiles, you would be able to contribute to our work.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. Not only have you not produced any significant contribution to the group, but to the contrary, you have been very clearly working for your own agenda, a radical anti-use, anti-trade one, very afar from the objectives and vision of IUCN.

In past years, you have fostered serious conflicts with the Paraguayan authorities and with officials whom we hold in high regard. It is clear to me, and to several of our colleagues in Paraguay, that you have failed to build a positive, constructive relation with stakeholders in the country that has so generously received you.

I am particularly concerned about how far you are decided to go in your quest to promote IUCN Red List categories of high threat for different species, with no supporting data or valid arguments and with total disregard to the damage that such an approach will cause on the credibility of this valuable and internationally recognized instrument.

In this regard, your publication on the supposed decline of red tegus in their range States is simply unacceptable. Colleagues who have read it coincide in pointing out the lack of data, the poor science and the obvious sources of like-minded radicals like yourselves. The aim is crystal-clear and I must now tell you that this IUCN/SSC Group will not serve as a platform for the launching of such unfounded concepts. You even include a statement in a recent email on this paper, which needs to be brought up here:

*"We have been impressed by the reactions of authorities and decision makers respectively advisers regarding leather trade. Particularly authorities criticized that the article will not result in a category of threat in the Red-Listing process. Furthermore, it had been mentioned that IUCN-SSC in general shows a lack of distance to leather trade, especially the BPSG and Natusch/Waller had been mentioned."*

I will not go into a detailed analysis of the paper itself at this time, but it is easy to analyze and any scientist can detect its serious flaws in a short time. Really, a lack of respect for colleagues who have worked with the species for many years and now have to waste their valuable time in refuting your biased arguments

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supporting a serious decline in the population of the Red tegu, a circumstance that only seems to be clear in the title.

However, more importantly, the allegations at the end of the paragraph are completely unacceptable. I will not allow these kinds of references concerning the IUCN/SSC, the BPSG, myself and/or members of the group I preside, even though disguised under a vague reference to “what had been mentioned”. The aim of quoting such defamatory, ill-intentioned remarks from unknown sources in such a widely-distributed e-mail is also very clear and such behavior, intolerable.

Let me tell you that I feel honored to work with such accomplished professionals with whom I have had the opportunity of learning and growing. This is especially true in the case of Daniel Natusch, a young, committed, honest professional and an extraordinary and brilliant researcher. These qualities, as well as his credibility, have never been questioned by his peers and I will not permit that to happen in this ambit. Daniel has supported me beyond all expectations in my responsibilities as BPSG Chair and I greatly respect, admire and appreciate him.

As you should know, as SSC members you are not supposed to “advocate” but to provide unbiased scientifically sound advice on different matters. The fact that some governments seem to take into consideration your opinions and unfounded publications, if true, worries me, and also suggests some form of discrimination, because you are European and apparently have more relationship with European authorities and better ways of influencing them. I will take up this subject at a later stage with the Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, Jon Paul Rodríguez, given the seriousness of such biases in the IUCN system.

In short, it is now my duty as Chair to stand out for its members and eliminate any form of conflict and of unethical behavior toward the institution and other BPSG members. This is not to be tolerated within the IUCN system.

For all of the above, by the authority vested in me as Chair of the Boas & Pythons Specialist Group, I hereby inform you that you are both removed from the Group, of which you are no longer members, from this day forward.

Sincerely,



Tomás Waller  
Chair  
IUCN/SSC Boa & Python Specialist Group

Cc: Jon Paul Rodriguez, Chair, IUCN Species Survival Commission



## EL PROGRAMA NACIONAL SOBRE LA NATURALEZA DEL PARAGUAY



Declarado de Interés Educativo Nacional por  
el Ministerio de Educación y Cultura  
de la Presidencia de la República del Paraguay

Declarado de Interés Turístico Nacional por  
La Secretaría Nacional de Turismo  
de la Presidencia de la República del Paraguay

Declarado de Interés Nacional por  
La Honorable Cámara de Senadores de la Nación Paraguaya

### Your letter from July, 6

Tomas

It is not the first time you send such an emotional letter addressed to us. This time you copied Jon-Paul and therefore it is necessary to amend your untenable claims.

We realize your intention to paint an image of disliked and isolated strangers in Paraguay, but this is simply a lie. Our work here in Paraguay is honored by the National Congress as of "National Interest", initiated by 4 Senators of 3 political parties, inclusive a former President of Paraguay (Fernando Lugo), and the at that time President of the Congress (Mario Abdo), now our President of Paraguay. Additionally 2 national ministries declared also national interest. No need to mention that it's is not very usual that strangers receive such high honors.

Our connection to the Ministry of Environment and Development (MADES) is excellent; inclusive we donated to them a free commercial spot in our weekly prime time TV documental, yesterday just minutes before the transmission of the final of the "Copa Americana" in the same channel. During our last premiere of a cinema documental the Director of "Vida Silvestre" held a commemorated speech. Scientists and NGOs use our data and pictures for scientific publications and educational purposes. Far from complete, this should be sufficient, to show that we have an excellent reputation in the country which is our home since many years.

Even if an article about the Red Tegu is not really an item for BPSG, just some few words. The article is peer reviewed and published in a serious journal. The comments of the reviewer showed that the person had a good knowledge and own experiences regarding the concrete species. Not necessary to say, that the article was not written "against IUCN-SSC" or whatever you feel to be offended. The article was written to highlight a conservation problem of the Red Tegu as consequence of habitat loss, in combination with some other threats. The article contains a very large list of references, which is definitively complete. Even in the debate in the assessment group was no article added that gave other, better or additional information. To say we did not select correctly, or in your words that we used a "selection of like-minded radicals" is absurd and shows just a total lack of facts to criticize the article on a scientific base.



## EL PROGRAMA NACIONAL SOBRE LA NATURALEZA DEL PARAGUAY

Which influence this article will have to the Red Listing process is not our responsibility, but of the chairman, and this is not up to BSPG to discuss that.

As conservationists we have a broad network, that is correct, but also it is conventional to send out published articles to those networks, there is no need to lament something you do also frequently. Neither your name, nor Daniel Natusch, nor BSPG was mentioned by us (why should we, when sending out an article about the red tegu?). As written to Phil Bowles, it was a (not a single) reaction, maybe, because we had the BSPG in our signature of email.

But to be honest, very much likely as explanation, was the recent article in "BUSINESS OF FASHION" as reaction to the decision of Chanel to ban reptile leather.

Coming finally to BSPG. It is no secret that we are not lucky with your administration. The group is completely nontransparent, there is no mailing-list, there is not even a member list. A scientific exchange is impossible and disliked. Publications the name of BSPG as a whole had not been consulted (Keering), and later after complaints drafts had been send to the group, but influence is limited in such a way, that the response exclusively could be sent to you and therefore an open and transparent scientific debate within the group is impossible.

The only open discussion in the group was initiated by Mark Auliya and was closed by you with verbal assaults against him and anybody who participated.

Considering this fact, to accuse a lack of input is simply hypocrisy. Everything which is not 100% your point of view results in a letter with verbal assaults.

We remember well when we mentioned in the facebook, that the Yellow Anaconda is a rare species in the Paraguayan Chaco and we received a real shitstorm from you. By the way we supported the classification of "LC" for that species in the Paraguayan national red-listing assessment, because of the positive data of the east part of Paraguay (as well as the group unanimously assessed the Red Tegú in Paraguay as "VU" due to habitat loss).

We confess that we, inclusive the team of Paraguay Salvaje, had been and still and are very successful regarding environmental education in general, but also in particular for birds by different publications and actions in Paraguay.

If Jon Paul shares the opinion that our published peer-reviewed article of a species that not even is in the focus of the BSPG, but is disliked by the chairman in combination with untenable accusations and personal defamations are sufficient to kick us out of the specialist group, we will accept that.

Saludos  
Thomas & Sabine

Filadelfia, 2019/08/07