

Biography - W. Bryan Jennings, Ph.D.



(Photo: Bryan observing a wild Galápagos giant tortoise, Santa Cruz Island, 2013)

I am an ecology and evolutionary biologist who specializes in studies of reptiles and amphibians. As a child, I became fascinated with the snakes, lizards, and turtles found in the natural areas near my family home in southern California. These experiences generated a desire within me to explore wild places around the world as a herpetologist.

While an undergraduate student at the University of California at Santa Barbara, I took several courses that reinforced my decision to make biology my life's work. The first was Herpetology, a course that solidified my desire to study reptiles and amphibians and inspired me to pursue an academic path in science. The other two memorable courses I had introduced me to California's plants and taught me crucial skills such as plant identification—a skill that would later play a key role in my Masters research on desert tortoises. I graduated from UCSB with a B.A. degree in Zoology in 1990.

After graduation, I accepted a position as a naturalist at a desert tortoise preserve in the Mojave Desert. Noticing my expertise in Mojave Desert plant diversity—an unusual skill for a herpetologist, the U.S. Government invited me to conduct a pilot study that spring on the food preferences of desert tortoises. Owing to the study's success, I returned to the tortoise preserve the following spring to continue the tortoise research as my Master's thesis. In 1993, I earned an M.S. in Biology from the University of Texas at Arlington.

For my doctorate, I studied Australia's extraordinary lizard diversity—to discover why the land down under had more lizard species than anywhere else in the world. As part of this study, I conducted fieldwork in the Australian outback and gathered DNA sequence data from a molecular genetics laboratory. In 2002, I obtained a Ph.D. in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior from the University of Texas at Austin. As a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Washington and Harvard University, I studied the evolutionary diversification of lizards and birds in Australia using genomic data.

I have held teaching appointments at Harvard University, Humboldt State University, and the National Museum of Brazil. Since 2010, I have been affiliated with the Zoology Graduate Program at the National Museum of Brazil and Federal University of Rio de Janeiro where my research has been concerned with the conservation biology of reptiles and amphibians in the endangered Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest. Shortly after arriving at the museum I co-founded the museum's molecular laboratory for biodiversity research. In 2016, I published the technical reference book *Phylogenomic Data Acquisition: Principles and Practice* (CRC Press/Taylor & Francis). In 2020, I joined the Department of Evolution, Ecology & Organismal Biology at the University of California, Riverside as an Associate Professional Researcher.