

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