

Preface

Perhaps, when looking back to the years and years of fieldwork, we will realize that, albeit sometimes we did not find everything we expected or cherished, for sure we always met the very best version of ourselves. Fieldwork forever!

—Ignacio De la Riva, 2021

Fieldwork is the beginning and the end for many of us. We are addicted to the thrill of discovery, the novelty of exotic landscapes and iconic species, and the allure and magic of the unknown. Fieldwork opens up whole new worlds, often exposing us to new cultures, expanding our perspectives on social and political issues, and increasing our sensitivity to diverse lifestyles, customs, and attitudes. Seeing the world through a different lens helps us to understand ourselves—who we are and who we want to be. Never mind the extreme temperatures, biting and stinging insects, cold showers (or lack thereof), bacterial and fungal ailments, and monotonous diet. We are happiest when we are in the field. It is who we are, a sentiment echoed by the contributors in this collection of essays who portray fieldwork like it really is—the discomforts, frustrations, dangers, failures, successes, inspirations, surprises, exhilarations, adventures, and discoveries.

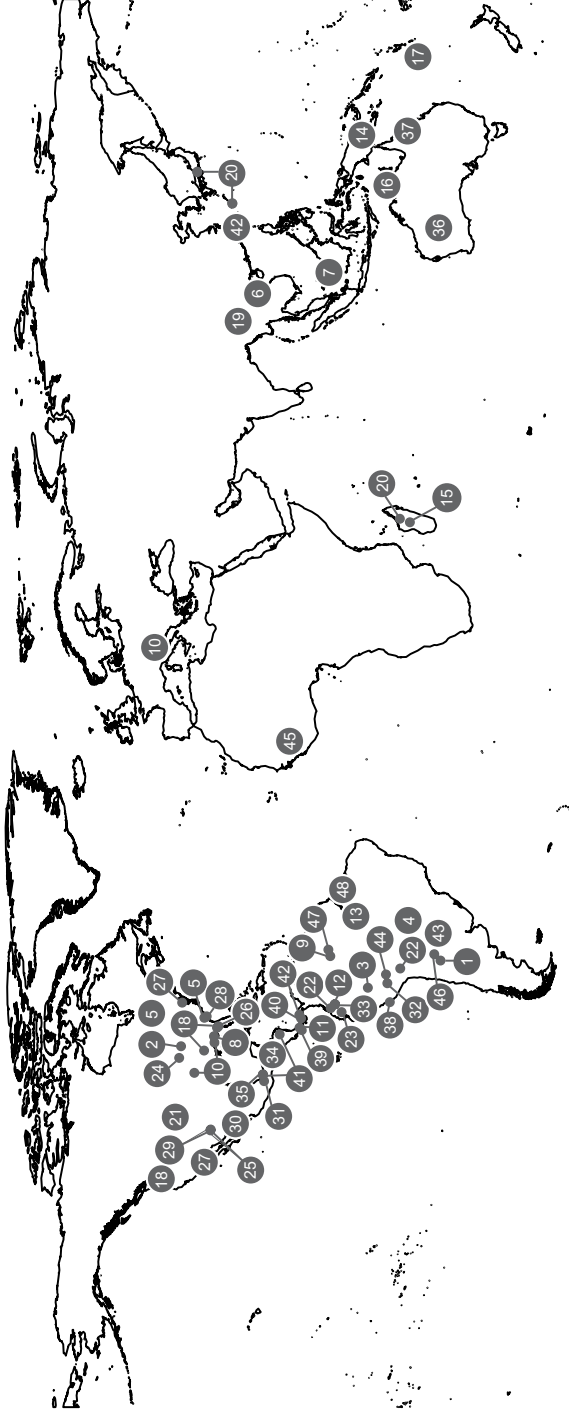
No doubt many of us will continue doing fieldwork even when we stagger under the weight of heavy backpacks, trip over tree roots at night, and are unable to hear the high-pitched peeps of treefrogs. Perhaps our children or students will carry our heavy backpacks, lead us by the hand down treacherous trails, and encourage us to sign up for those darn hearing aids. Fieldwork is in our blood.

It is most fitting that this book be published by Comstock Publishing at Cornell University Press. Field biologists study nature in nature, and that is exactly what Anna Botsford Comstock (1854–1930) advocated as one of the first educators to encourage teachers to take their students *outside* to study nature. During the late 1800s, Comstock was a major proponent of the Nature Study

Movement, whose mantra was “study nature, not books.” She found that most New York public schools did not teach nature study and that many teachers felt inadequate to teach the subject. Deciding something needed to be done, in 1909 she began writing a guide for teachers, entitled *Handbook of Nature Study*. She published the book in 1911, through her husband’s publishing house, Comstock Publishing Company. The book was 938 pages, with 232 planned lessons and suggested field trips and experiments. By 1923 when the League of Women Voters voted Anna Comstock one of the twelve greatest women in America within their chosen fields, the book had already sold over forty thousand copies. The *Handbook* has gone through twenty-five editions and has been translated into eight languages. Thanks to Cornell University Press, it is still in print and is widely used by teachers, biologists, and laypersons. It is an honor to have this collection of essays in such august company, and I can only hope that the book, like Comstock’s *Handbook*, serves to inspire the next generation of field biologists.

References

- Comstock, A.B. 1911. *Handbook of nature study*. Ithaca, NY: Comstock Publishing Company.
- De la Riva, I. 2021. Fieldwork forever. *Herpetological Review* 52(3): 559–563.



Map showing the geographic locations of field sites discussed in the essays. The numbers correspond with the essay numbers. This map was created by Alison Davis Rabosky.

LOST FROGS AND HOT SNAKES

