

The Board of Directors of TSA would like to apologize for the serious mistake that was made in the planning for the first Virtual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles. Faced with a new technology and the strictures of working within a pandemic environment, a highly regrettable error was made in creating the speaker line up. An individual not affiliated with the TSA was initially permitted a speaking spot in contravention of the Symposium Code of Conduct that we adopted in 2018. Then that mistake was compounded by a failure of our internal review and oversight process. We sincerely apologize for this grave error, and deeply regret the damage done to the collegiality of our community and those who have been affected by this individual's conduct in the past.

As the Board, we feel that it is important to make an emphatic statement. TSA decries, in the strongest possible terms, any form of discrimination, harassment or objectification, including that based on gender, race, age, nationality, ethnicity, disability, religion or religious belief or sexual orientation. This is a cornerstone of how we operate, enshrined in our employment policies and practices and in those relating to our interns, field colleagues, and volunteers, and in the way that we deal with one another. We have always encouraged anyone who is aggrieved to bring a concern or complaint forward, and for it to be investigated and dealt with appropriately within an atmosphere of zero tolerance. Our Code of Ethics and Whistleblower Policy are posted on our website so that this is clear to all.

We, together with our Symposium co-host, TFTSG, thank everyone for having made your voices heard. We listened carefully to you. As a first step, we have revised the Symposium lineup to exclude the individual as a presenter. He will not be invited to make presentations at future Symposiums. We will also take measures to ensure that the mistakes of 2020 will not be repeated. These will include, among others:

- (i) forming a task force to follow up on the comments received from many in the tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation community;
- (ii) new internal measures that will result in better defined TSA Board oversight of our annual Symposium planning;
- (iii) a review of TSA's internal diversity and inclusion policies and processes; and
- (iv) with our Symposium co-host, a review and strengthening of our Annual Symposium Code of Conduct to ensure that there is zero tolerance for sexual harassment or harassment and discrimination of any kind.

Again, we apologize. It has always been, and will always remain, TSA's objective to promote diversity, inclusivity, and the highest standards of professional behavior in our conservation community.



Patricia A. Koval,
Chair of the Board of Directors