



Eric R. Pianka '60 • Distinguished Achievement

Widely known as the 'Lizard Man,' Eric Pianka is a world authority on lizard ecology and one of the globe's foremost ecologists, especially in the areas of species diversity and interactions, community ecology, and life history. In 2004 Pianka was declared International Distinguished Herpetologist of the Year, and three species are named after him.

Pianka's 1974 textbook *Evolutionary Ecology* remains in print (now in its sixth edition) and is a citation classic that has been largely responsible for educating an entire generation of ecologists. Among Pianka's other books are *The Lizard Man Speaks* (1994), *Lizard Ecology: Historical and Experimental Perspectives* (1994), and *Lizards: Windows to the Evolution of Diversity* (2003), a coffee table book that won several honors.

Pianka's 2008 field expedition to the Great Victoria Desert in Western Australia was the focus of *Lizard Kings*, shown on NOVA and internationally. Earlier in his career, Pianka did fieldwork in the Australian Outback as a Guggenheim fellow in 1978 and as a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar in 1990. In addition, Pianka's studies have taken him to the North American Great Basin and the Mojave, Sonoran, and Kalahari Deserts, and his intercontinental comparisons have become a standard textbook example.

Pianka earned a PhD in zoology from the University of Washington–Seattle in 1965

and a doctor of science in ecology from the University of Western Australia in 1990. He has been a professor at the University of Texas–Austin since 1968, teaching ecology and evolution to thousands of students, both undergraduate and graduate. Eleven of his 19 graduate students hold tenured positions at major universities. In 1986 he was named the Denton A. Cooley Centennial Professor in Zoology.

The prolific Pianka has dozens of papers, articles, reviews, and chapters to his credit, has received numerous grants, and is in demand as a lecturer and symposium speaker around the world. He was elected to the American Society of Naturalists in 1971, was elected a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1981. He is a member or officer of several other professional societies and committees and is on several editorial boards. He was named Distinguished Scientist by the Texas Academy of Science in 2006, among other honors.

Currently, Pianka is engaged in groundbreaking research exploiting molecular techniques and modern comparative methodology in phylogenetic systematics to trace the probable actual course of evolution. He also is organizing his life's work to save his massive data set for use by future generations of ecologists and herpetologists.

Pianka has two daughters and lives on a small ranch near Johnson City, Texas.