

## ***My Idyllic Academic Career***

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I have been exceedingly fortunate throughout my entire academic career. Beginning in Minnesota at Carleton College, a small liberal arts school, where I majored in biology, I went on to graduate school at the University of Washington Seattle where I earned my Ph. D. in 1965. Funded by an NIH predoctoral, I studied species diversity of flatland desert lizards of North America at series of ten study sites. Several were in the cold deserts of the Great Basin in Idaho and Nevada. A few others were in the Mojave desert in California and Nevada, and several others in the Sonoran desert in California and Arizona.

A 3-year NIH postdoctoral fellowship in 1965 to 1968 allowed me to study with Robert H. MacArthur at Princeton, where I prepared an NSF proposal to extend my studies to the Australian deserts. With my ex-wife Helen, we spent 16 months doing fieldwork down under, mostly in the Great Victoria desert of Western Australia, where we found the most diverse lizard assemblages known (55 species occur in sympatry at my most diverse study area). We also

discovered half a dozen as yet undescribed new lizard species (two of which are named after each of us). A. R. Main and G. M. Storr were my Australian mentors, both providing invaluable advice and support. In April 1968, I returned to Princeton with a collection of some 3,000 Australian lizards (now deposited in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History).

I arrived at the University of Texas in August 1968 and since then I have taught ecology to about six thousand undergraduates and literally hundreds of graduate students over the past half century. I have supervised 21 graduate students, half of whom hold tenured professorships at major universities.

I grew weary of apologizing for the inadequacies of available textbooks, and so in 1974, I published my own textbook “Evolutionary Ecology”, which became a “Citation Classic” that has persisted through 40+ years. This book went through six editions (three publishers) and has been translated into Greek, Japanese, Polish, Russian, and Spanish. Recently I published it as an eBook in a 7th edition. Using this textbook, I developed my own signature course “Evolutionary Ecology”, which I taught for many years until 2013, when my TA was taken away at the last moment because “only 40 students” were registered for my class. Until that semester, I had always been given a competent TA and my class was well received as judged by course evaluations from students. That was the last time I taught “Evolutionary Ecology”, since then I have been teaching a

large freshman level class for non-majors “Ecology, Evolution, and Society”. I feel this is an opportunity and an obligation to educate people who will learn little biology in their lives with the goal of making them into better informed citizens of this, our one and only spaceship, planet Earth.

In 1986, I was extremely fortunate to be awarded the Denton A. Cooley Centennial Professorship in Zoology for life. Funds from this endowment have kept my research program alive for three decades when few other sources of support were available. I relinquished this professorship in August 2018 when I became a fellow.

I became a Fellow of Ecological Society of America in 2013. I was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2014. In 2015, I gave the Keynote address at the Interdisciplinary World Conference on Monitor Lizards at Phranakhon Rajabhat University in Bangkok, where I won the [Auffenberg Medal](#) for "excellence in monitor research." The Ecological Society of America awarded me their highest honor of "[Eminent Ecologist](#)" ([U.T.News](#)) in 2015. The American Society of Naturalists held a [Symposium](#) in 2016 celebrating his classic paper on Latitudinal gradients in species diversity: A review of concepts. American Naturalist 100: 33-46 [Download pdf](#).

This paper has been reprinted in 3 books and was [celebrated in Asilomar in 2016](#). Latitudinal Gradients in Species Diversity: 50 years since Pianka.

At 80, I am too old to take on new graduate students because it is tantamount to adopting an adult for many years – since I can no longer guarantee such a 4-5 year commitment required to finish graduate school, I declared an end to all that with my 21st grad student. Instead, I now sponsor South American academics, both postdocs and grad students, which requires only one semester to a year. Because I no longer have graduate students or grants, my teaching load has been increased, a not so subtle form of age discrimination.

During the last few years I have published several important papers, including:

Pianka, E. R. and S. E. Goodyear. 2012. Lizard responses to wildfire in arid interior Australia: Long-term experimental data and commonalities with other studies. *Austral Ecology* 37: 1-11. [Download pdf](#)

Pianka, E. R. 2012. Can humans share spaceship earth? (“Point of View”) *Amphibian and Reptile Conservation* 6(1): 1-24(e49). [Download pdf](#)

Böhm, M. et al. with 217 coauthors (one of whom is Eric R. Pianka). 2013. The conservation status of the world’s reptiles. *Biological Conservation* 157: 372-385. [Download pdf](#)

Pianka, E. R. 2014. Rarity in Australian Desert Lizards. *Austral Ecology* 39: 214-224. [Download pdf](#)

Mesquita, D. O., Colli, G. R., Costa, G. C., Costa, T. B., Shepard, D. B., Vitt, L. J. and Pianka, E. R. 2015. Life history data of lizards of the world. *Ecology* 96: 594. [Download pdf](#)

Winemiller, K. O., D. Fitzgerald, L. Bower, and E. R. Pianka. 2015. Functional traits, convergent evolution, and periodic tables of niches. *Ecology Letters* 18(8): 737–751. [Download pdf](#)

Mesquita, D. O., R. G. Faria, G. R. Colli, L. J. Vitt, and E. R. Pianka. 2016. Lizard life-history strategies. *Austral Ecology* 41: 1-5. [Download pdf](#)

Mesquita, D. O., G. C. Costa, R. Colli, T. B. Costa, D. B. Shepard, L. J. Vitt, and E. R. Pianka. 2016. Life history patterns of lizards of the world. *The American Naturalist* 187: 689-705.

Pianka, E. R. 2016. Challenges facing today's lizard ecologists. *Journal of Herpetology* 51: 2-11.

Grundler, M R., E. R. Pianka, [N. Pelegrin](#), M. A. Cowan, [D. L. Rabosky](#). 2017. Stable isotope ecology of a hyper-diverse community of scincid lizards from arid Australia. *Plos One* 12: DOI:10.1371. [Download pdf](#)

Pianka, E. R., [L. J. Vitt](#), [N. Pelegrin](#), [D. B. Fitzgerald](#), and [K. O. Winemiller](#). 2017. Towards a Periodic Table of Niches or Exploring the Lizard Niche Hypervolume. *The American Naturalist* 190: 601-616. [Press Release](#). [Early View](#). [Download pdf](#).

Huey, R. B. and E. R. Pianka. 2017. Body temperature distributions of active diurnal lizards in three deserts: skewed up or skewed down? *Functional Ecology* 2017: 1-11. [Early view](#). [Download pdf](#)

Muniz Leão, S., E. R. Pianka, and N. Pelegrin. 2018. Is there evidence for population regulation in amphibians and reptiles? *Journal of Herpetology* 51: 28-33. [Download pdf](#).

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