

Dr. Sinlan Poo (蒲歆嵐 博士, She/Her)

CURRENT APPOINTMENT

Curator of Research, Memphis Zoo
Adjunct Assistant Professor, Arkansas State University

EDUCATION & PREVIOUS APPOINTMENTS

Degrees:

- 2007, B.A. Boston University (Advisor: Dr. Karen Warkentin)
- 2014, Ph.D. National University of Singapore (Advisor: Dr. David Bickford)

Previous Appointments:

- 2021, Senior Research Scientist, Memphis Zoo
- 2019, Research Scientist, Memphis Zoo
- 2016, Post-doc, Memphis Zoo
- 2015, Research Associate, Sakaerat Environmental Research Station
- 2015, Field Lecturer, National University of Singapore
- 2008, Field Biologist, Riverside Biological Monitoring Program

Tell us a little about your research.—My research can be divided into three main areas of focus. The first is basic science and involves using model species to examine the morphology, physiology, and behavior of captive individuals compared to their wild counterparts through both *ex situ* and *in situ* studies. The second is applied conservation and includes managing captive-breeding programs that focus on reintroduction of threatened and endangered species and working with other conservation organizations. The third is increasing the impact of zoos as conservation-driven organizations, through collaborations with universities and other research institutions. In particular, I am one of the co-organizers of the Zoo–Museum Initiative (ZooMu), which works to bridge the gap between live collections at zoos and preserved collections at natural history museums, so that these biological collections can be more accessible and useful to the broader scientific community.

How do you identify as a scientist?—This is a complicated question to contemplate, as I think my identity as a scientist changes depending on the institution I’m working for, the location or country I’m working in, and the stage I’m at in my career. Currently, I am an early career, Asian woman from Taiwan who is based in Tennessee, which is a conservative state located in the southern United States. I am a researcher at a zoo, which is not an institution that is traditionally thought of as a research institution. I am a collaborator, a mentor, and a student.

What personal identity/ies do you hold that are underrepresented/marginalized in ichthyology or herpetology? How do these identities and experiences enrich your relationship with your science?—I have lived and worked in several countries in the Americas (US, Panama, Ecuador) and in Asia (Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka). For the vast majority of my



Fig. 1. Dr. Sinlan Poo. Photo credit: Dr. Anne Devan-Song.

career, I have lived and worked in countries where I am considered a foreigner, a minority, or both, based on one or multiple of my identities. While I would not say these identities have “enriched” my relationship with my science, it certainly informs and affects the way I think and function as a scientist. Most of the ways that these identities shape the work that I do, however, lay outside of the Merriam-Webster definition of *science*, as it pertains to the scientific method, and relate to the human interactions that surround the science itself.

I’m sure some of my experiences have helped me spot certain aspects of the structural and systemic issues in our profession more quickly and perhaps deal with these issues more skillfully. For instance, these experiences may have pushed me to be a stronger advocate for students and mentees with similar experiences. However, being in underrepresented and marginalized groups itself is more of a hindrance than an enrichment, so I am hesitant in putting too much of a positive spin on it.

Of your scientific experiences: What do you wish others of your identity knew? What do you wish ichthyologists/herpetologists not of your identity knew?—I would like those that share whatever part of my identity to know that finding a community with people with shared identities has been extremely helpful for me. This took time, as our professional field can be isolating for a number of reasons. But being selective about collaborators and surrounding myself with people with shared experiences has been key to maintaining perspective as we collectively navigate through the various biases each of us face.

As I know less about the experience of those who do not share my identities, it is difficult to know what to say. But perhaps I would say the same, which is that community is important, and we are all trying to navigate our respective professional fields as best we can.

What research (or other accomplishment) are you most proud of?—The project I'm most proud of is the Global Women in Herpetology Project, which is a project I co-lead with two wonderful friends and colleagues, Dr. Umilaela Arifin and Dr. Itzue W. Caviedes-Solis. The primary focus of this project is a book we are working to publish that puts a spotlight on 50 herpetologists from 50 countries and regions around the world. Through personal, narrative stories, each of these herpetologists share their experience in this profession and how their background, culture, gender, and passion for amphibians and reptiles intersect. The profits made from this book will go towards funding a student scholarship for women in underrepresented regions to attend international herpetological conferences. It has been a joy to work with all these incredible women and can't wait to share this book with our community once it's published!

What sparked your interest in fishes and/or herps? When was this in your life?—My interest in amphibians started as an undergraduate student at Boston University, when a graduate student walked into my ecology class and held up a photo of the Red-eyed Treefrog (*Agalychnis callidryas*) and asked for volunteers. I worked in several labs as an undergrad, but spent the most time in the Warkentin Lab. This led to a summer assistantship (REU) in Panama and my senior thesis working with the Red-eyed Treefrogs, which was my first research project with herps.

What is your favorite publication in an ASIH journal or memorable JMIH presentation/interaction?—My most memorable JMIH presentation was the recent presentation I gave at JMIH 2022 in Spokane, Washington on "Zoos, Herpetology, and the Scientific Community: an International Perspective" as a part of the symposium on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Ichthyology and Herpetology. This was the first time I had given a presentation that was not on a scientific project, but more on my personal experiences in the field of

herpetology, so I was a bit apprehensive as I prepared and presented this talk. However, it turned out to be an unexpectedly rewarding experience and led to a number of memorable interactions and discussions with students and colleagues who either saw some aspect of their experience reflected or had their own thoughts on the subject.

Who has had the most impactful influence on you?—It would be impossible to point to a single person who has been most impactful to me and also impossible to list all the people who have influenced the way I think and function. So to keep it brief, I would say my mother, who has blazed an impressive professional career in academia despite the obstacles she faced and continues to face.

How do you balance personal life and work? What is (are) the major challenge(s) for balancing personal and professional life?—I can't say there's much balance, though I guess we all try. One of the major challenges for me is that to pursue a professional career has meant that my family and friends are mostly on different continents. Even a lot of my close collaborators are on opposite sides of the world, which leads to challenges of its own. Though I am also lucky enough that we live in the time and age that we do (with the technologies to overcome some of these challenges), and my profession offers me the flexibility of spending time away from work a few times a year.

TO LEARN MORE

To learn more about my work: <https://www.sheilapoo.com>
To learn more about the Global Women in Herpetology Project: <https://www.womeninherpetology.com>

The questions were developed by the 2020 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee of ASIH.