



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution-Cuba Relations  
Oral History Interviews, 1998

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Smithsonian Institution Archives  
Washington, D.C.  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <a href="mailto:osiaref@si.edu">osiaref@si.edu</a>
<b>Title:</b>	Smithsonian Institution-Cuba Relations Oral History Interviews
<b>Identifier:</b>	Record Unit 9613
<b>Date:</b>	1998
<b>Extent:</b>	3 audiotapes (Reference copies).
<b>Creator::</b>	
<b>Language:</b>	English

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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9613, Smithsonian Institution-Cuba Relations Oral History Interviews

### Use Restriction

Restricted. Contact [SIHistory@si.edu](mailto:SIHistory@si.edu) to request permission.

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## Historical Note

The Smithsonian Institution and Cuba have had close scientific relations since the founding of the Institution in 1846. The Smithsonian's first curator and second Secretary, Spencer Fullerton Baird, established a scientific correspondence and specimen exchange with the noted Cuban naturalist Felipe Poey in the 1850s, and those research ties were maintained throughout the twentieth century.

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## Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives' record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also reminiscences and interviews recorded by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

The Smithsonian Institution/Cuba Relations Oral History Interviews were recorded by Smithsonian research associate Pedro M. Pruna-Goodgall, of the Cuban Academy of Sciences as part of his research on the history of Cuban natural history and the Smithsonian's role in that field of study.

## Descriptive Entry

In 1998, Pedro M. Pruna-Goodgall, Senior Scholar, Centro de Estudios de Historia y Organizacion de la Ciencia "Carlos J. Finlay," Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, and Research Collaborator of the Institutional History Division, Smithsonian Institution Archives, conducted a series of interviews with Smithsonian administrators and a Conservation International scientist who had been active in Smithsonian-Cuban relations in the prior three decades. David Challinor (1920-2008) served as special assistant for tropical biology from 1966 to 1967, deputy director from 1967 to 1969 and then director from 1969 to 1971 of the Office of International Activities, as Assistant Secretary for Science from 1971 to 1984, and Assistant Secretary for Research from 1984 to 1987. Upon his retirement in 1987, he was named special advisor to the Secretary, and in 1996 was named Scientist Emeritus, National Zoological Park. Ross B. Simons (1951- ) served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Science/Research and implemented the international programs for Challinor. He later served as Associate Director for Science at the National Museum of Natural History. Michael L. Smith (1950- ), Caribbean Biodiversity Research Program Fellow, Center for Applied Biodiversity Science, Conservation International, maintained close research ties with Cuban and Smithsonian scientists, as well. Pruna focused on relations with Cuba following the 1977 Smithsonian staff visit to Cuba hosted by Dr. Abelardo Moreno, director of the Havana Zoo, which led to a Memorandum of Understanding between the Smithsonian and the Cuban Academy of Sciences to ensure continued scientific cooperation. This collection contains three interview sessions, totaling approximately 3 hours of recording and 58 pages of transcript.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- International cooperation
- Interviews
- Oral history

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Baird, Spencer Fullerton, 1823-1887
- Center for Applied Biodiversity Science
- Challinor, David
- Conservation International
- Moreno Bonilla, Abelardo, 1913-1992
- Poey, Felipe, 1799-1891
- Pruna, P. M., interviewer
- Simons, Ross B.
- Smith, Michael L.
- Smithsonian Institution. Assistant Secretary for Research
- Smithsonian Institution. Assistant Secretary for Science
- Smithsonian Institution. Office of International Activities
- Smithsonian Institution. Special Assistant to the Secretary

Geographic Names:

Cuba

Preferred Titles:

*Conferencias y estudios de historia y organización de la ciencia*

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## Container Listing

### Interviews

Interviews

#### **Interview 1: September 4, 1998**

Interviews

Interview of Ross B. Simons at the National Museum of Natural History, begins with biographical background including his education; career at the Smithsonian; memorandum to Secretary S. Dillon Ripley in 1976 urging scientific cooperation with Cuba; Simons' role on 1977 scientific trip to Cuba; challenges of travel to a country without diplomatic relations with the United States; preparation for Ripley's 1980 trip to Cuba to establish a cooperative agreement between the Smithsonian and the Cuban Academy of Sciences that would encompass the National Museum of Natural History, National Zoological Park, and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute; c. 1960s-1990s.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-21, of audiotape cassette recording, 1.0 hour

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 audiocassette tape
- Preservation Master: 2 digital audio .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette tape and 2 digital audio .mp3 files

Interviews

#### **Interview 2: September 10, 1998**

Interviews

Interview of David Challinor at the National Zoological Park provides biographical background; discusses his education, early career, and management positions at the Smithsonian; his early years managing the Office of International Activities; his 1985 trip to Cuba, facilities visited, meetings with Cuban counterparts, and plans for cooperative work in the future; reaction of United States Department of State; and assessment of the ongoing relationship with Cuba, c. 1920s-1980s.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-16, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 audiocassette tape
- Preservation Master: 2 digital audio .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette tape and 2 digital audio .mp3 files

Interviews

#### **Interview 3: October 5, 1998**

Interviews

Interview of Michael L. Smith at the Center for Marine Conservation in Washington, D.C., provides brief biographical background information; covers his work at University of Michigan, American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the Center for Marine Conservation beginning in 1992; first visit to Cuba in 1989 because it is exactly the center of distribution of the puffer fish he is most interested in; first informal visit to Cuba to establish collegial relationships; joining forces with Ross Simons to facilitate Cuban field research and visits of Cuban scientists and students to the U.S.; return field trips in 1990 and with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration in 1996; creation of two U.S./Cuban Roundtable on the Environment conferences with Simons, c. 1950s-1998.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-21, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 audiocassette tape
- Preservation Master: 2 digital audio .wav files
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