



# Rafael de Sa (1961-Present)

Professor of Biology

University of Richmond

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*“Work hard, work harder than your peers, for you are expected to prove yourself twice to get the same merits and rewards.” Rafael de Sá, 2005.*

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## Overview

Dr. Rafael de Sá is currently a professor of biology at the University of Richmond, where he teaches a variety of courses, including evolution, conservation biology, and natural history. His research focuses on frog biodiversity and the evolutionary biology of frogs. Some of his selected publications are below:

- Larson\*, P. and R. O. de Sá. 1998. Chondrocranial morphology of Leptodactylus larvae (Leptodactylidae: Leptodactylinae): its utility in phylogenetic reconstruction. *Journal of Morphology* 238:287-305.
- de Sá, R. O. and C. Swart\*. 1999. Development of the suprarostrals plate of pipoid frogs. *Journal of Morphology* 240:143-153.
- Camargo\*, A., de Sá, R. O. and W.R. Heyer. 2006. Phylogenetic analyses of mtDNA sequences reveal three cryptic lineages in the widespread neotropical frog *Leptodactylus fuscus* (Schneider, 1799) (Anura, Leptodactylidae). *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society* 87: 325-341.
- de Sá, R., W.R. Heyer, and A. Camargo\*. 2005. A phylogenetic analysis of *Vanzolinius* (Amphibia, Anura, Leptodactylidae): Taxonomic and life history implications. *Arquivos do Museu de Historia Natural do Rio de Janeiro*, 63(4):1-20

*This interview was conducted in 2015.*

## Early Life and Education

Rafael de Sá grew up in Uruguay, the younger of two children born to parents Americo de Sá and Nelly Rodriguez. de Sá's childhood environment greatly influenced his motivation to pursue a career in higher

education, as his community placed a tremendous value on learning. Although his parents encouraged him to attend a university, they allowed him the freedom to decide which academic path to pursue.

When de Sá was very young, he became involved with a local museum that sponsored summer workshops in various scientific fields. Through these workshops, de Sá learned about everything from taxidermy to zoology. The museum also organized field trips with university professors, and de Sá was invited to go with them. As a result, from the time he was a young teenager, de Sá was often surrounded by academics and others involved in biology and conservation. His fascination for the field grew out of his experiences with these mentors.

## **Career**

de Sá graduated from the University of Uruguay with a Bachelor of Science in biological sciences, and continued his studies in the United States, where he received a Master of Science in systematic ecology and a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Texas at Austin. de Sá is currently a professor of biology at the University of Richmond, where he teaches a variety of courses, including evolution, conservation biology, and natural history. His research focuses on frog biodiversity and the evolutionary biology of frogs. de Sá says he has dedicated his professional life to the environment because, quite simply, he loves it and cannot imagine doing anything else. Most importantly, he loves to teach others about the environment, and tries to involve undergraduate students in his research. de Sá has been teaching since he was 19 years old. He began teaching high school biology and chemistry as a way to support himself as an undergraduate at the University of Uruguay.

## **Importance of Mentoring to Career**

While de Sá has benefited from the mentoring of both his master's and Ph.D. advisors - Dr. Linda Trueb and Dr. David Hillis, respectively - he credits his undergraduate mentor, Dr. Nibia Berois, as having the greatest influence on his career. de Sá performed his thesis research on the histological and embryological issues of amphibians in her laboratory; since then, the two have continued to work and publish papers together.

## **Mentoring Others**

de Sá currently mentors minority undergraduates that work in his lab. He is proud that many of his former students have since gone on to medical and graduate school. In addition, de Sá mentors students studying abroad in South America, South American students who train in his lab, and many of his international colleagues. de Sá is a faculty advisor to the Minorities in Science scholarship program at the University of Richmond; he is also involved in the Oliver Hill Scholars Program (formerly Cigna Scholars), which promotes diversity and offers tuition support for research and study abroad. Additionally, de Sá participates in university outreach programs targeting Richmond-area high school students interested in the sciences.

## **Advice to Young Professionals**

de Sá says finding a job in the field that he loves and gaining tenure at the University of Richmond have been the highlights of his career. He has also experienced challenges along the way, mostly related to social stereotypes and a lack of cultural understanding. Despite such occasional low points, de Sá says his most significant achievement by far has been helping undergraduates discover and share his love of biology. For those minorities who share his passion and are contemplating a career in the field, de Sá has just a few words of advice: “Work hard, work harder than your peers, for you are expected to prove yourself twice to get the same merits and rewards.”

## **For More Information**

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