



Welcome to Drayton Manor

# Conference Programme

Talks, Workshops, Evening Entertainment.

21st - 22nd March 2026



# AHH BHS Herpetology Conference 2026

On behalf of the British Herpetological Society and Advancing Herpetological Husbandry community, we are delighted to welcome you to the AHH BHS Herpetological Conference 2026 at Drayton Manor.



This conference brings together researchers, veterinarians, field conservationists, students, and dedicated enthusiasts who share a passion for amphibian and reptile science. As pressures on global biodiversity continue to intensify, collaboration across disciplines has never been more important. The AHH BHS Conference provides a vital forum to exchange knowledge, showcase emerging research, and discuss practical solutions for advancing herpetological health, welfare, and conservation.

Our 2026 programme reflects the breadth and depth of contemporary herpetology — from biosecurity and deleterious genes to conservation, husbandry innovation, and field-based research. Through keynote lectures, workshops and discussion sessions, we aim to foster meaningful dialogue and strengthen professional networks within our community.

We are especially pleased to welcome early-career researchers and students, whose contributions are essential to the future of herpetological science. The Society remains committed to supporting inclusive collaboration and evidence-based practice across all sectors of our field.

We hope you find the conference both intellectually stimulating and professionally rewarding, and that it inspires continued partnership in addressing the challenges facing amphibians and reptiles worldwide.

Thank you for being part of AHH BHS Herpetology Conference 2026.



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## Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March



8.00-9.00

**Registration**

**Welcome and talks from:**

**James Dale**

'Building and Theming Naturalistic Exhibits for Reptiles and Amphibians'

**Rachel Pikstein**

'Black and White and Red All Over: Phenotypic Plasticity and Hybridization Delineation among Invasive Tegu Lizards (*Salvator merianae*; *Teiidae*)'

10.30-10.55

**Break**

11.00-11.45

**Viviana Ricardez**

'Texas sized turtle conservation from tiny tortoises to beastly behemoths'

11.45-13.00

**Workshops**

- Specialist vet Q&A session
- Sunlight power density importance and measurement
- Practical workshop on creating rock work for vivaria
- Practical workshop on creating lighting in vivaria

13.00 -14.00

**Lunch**

**Chaz Thompson**

REPTA's new policy on Deleterious Genes in captive herptiles

14.00-15.30

**Tariq Abou-Zahr**

'Morphs, Mutations & Selective Breeding - some veterinary thoughts on a current talking point'

15.30-16.00

**Break**

16.00-16.45

**Alexia Hesten**

'Attitudes and behaviours relating to biosecurity amongst reptile and amphibian keepers in the UK: how can we mitigate the risk of disease spillover from captivity to the wild?'

17.00-1800

**Zoo Tour**

18.30-00.00

**Evening Meal and Entertainment with talk from Carl Franklin**



# Our Speakers



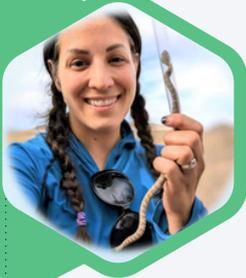
## James Dale

James serves as the owner and director of Aquatect, a company specializing in services for zoos and aquariums. With more than 20 years of experience in the field, he has held positions at institutions such as Blue Planet Aquarium, Chester Zoo, and ZSL London Zoo. Aquatect has designed and installed aquariums, vivariums, and zoo enclosures for zoos, land-based colleges, and universities nationwide.



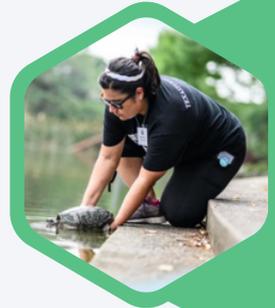
## Rachel Pikstein

Rachel is an environmental biologist, ecologist, & herpetologist who moved to the Sonoran Desert of Phoenix, Arizona USA in 2016 with her husband Joey, from their native freshwater backyard-wetlands of southeast Michigan. She worked as a Biology Professor for Grand Canyon University and the University of Dubuque for 7 years, while teaching grade school science for an overlapping 6; a teaching career spanning 13 years, joyfully retiring in 2023.



## Viviana Ricardez

Viviana Ricardez is Vice President of the conservation nonprofit Texas Turtles. Viviana generates a contagious passion that drives her research and leadership roles in Texas Turtles. When not tackling day to day business affairs of Texas Turtles, she is active in fieldwork, and outreach events that safeguard turtle populations while engaging communities in conservation science. She has studied turtles from virtually every part of Texas, authored numerous publications, appeared several times on television and worked as a turtle consultant for blue chip documentary films as well as local, state and federal policy makers. Additionally, she manages one of the largest herpetological research libraries in Texas (1000+ book titles alone!), co-manages a scientific research collection of turtle specimens primarily from Texas and a growing genomic tissue collection and advocates for an increase in the standard of humane treatment of turtles used in field studies.





## Our Speakers

### Alexia Hesten

Alexia Hesten is a PhD student currently in her final year of research at Liverpool John Moores University. Her work investigates dynamics of the wildlife trade of reptiles and amphibians in the UK and how these have changed over time. Furthermore, she has an interest in the risk of diseases such as Chytridiomycosis and ranaviruses spilling over from the pet trade to wild animals in the UK. Some of her research has included surveying reptile and amphibian keepers, to determine what biosecurity risks are associated with different types of keeping behaviour and how we can find ways to minimise these risks. Alexia has worked as an ecologist for Froglife, as a zookeeper in the herpetology section at Jersey Zoo, as a project manager at the Animal and Plant Health Agency and has previously been a trustee for the BHS. She has contributed to an expert elicitation exercise that helped to produce government guidance on BSAI and has published three peer-reviewed papers on herpetology related topics. She is an advocate of responsible pet keeping and has a fondness for building bioactive terrariums and fake backgrounds in her enclosures. Alexia has two snakes and three geckos at home and loves seeing herps in the wild whenever she can.



### Chaz Thompson

Charles (Chaz) Thompson Chaz is owner of Snakes 'N' Adders reptile centre a nationally recognised store that has been under Chaz's ownership for the last 22 years. In a career with reptiles spanning 34 years Chaz has kept thousands of animals and helped to develop many keepers' skillsets over the decades. Chaz is passionate about children having an access route into this hobby and advocates for their right to own companion reptiles. Chaz is now a lobbyist for the reptile industry working closely with figure heads within the sector and developing connections with government organisations such as DEFRA, CITES, JNCC and APHA. Chaz is trade delegate for REPTA (Reptile and Amphibian Trade Association) and its representative in stakeholder groups such as the Companion Animal Sector Council (CASC) and CITES Sustainable User Group (CSUG)





# Our Speakers

## Tariq Abou-Zahr

Tariq graduated from the University of Bristol in veterinary science in 2014 and after a year in small animal general practice with some exotics, he embarked on a combined 4 year internship and residency program at Great Western Exotics in Swindon. He gained his RCVS certificate in zoological medicine in 2018 through the University of Edinburgh and passed the final synoptic exam with distinction. He passed the ECZM(Avian) exams in 2021 and became a diplomate of the European College of Zoological Medicine. He presently works in 100% avian and exotic practice, doing 1st opinion and referral work at Valley Veterinary Hospital in Cardiff. A keen aviculturist and herpetoculturist, Tariq maintains a collection of birds and reptiles privately.



## Our Evening Guest Speaker

### Carl Franklin

Carl has held a lifelong fascination and passion for herpetology with a keen focus on turtles. Over the past 27 years, he has worked at the herpetology departments of the Fort Worth Zoo, Dallas Zoo and the Amphibian and Reptile Diversity Research Center at the University of Texas at Arlington. He has assisted in and conducted numerous herpetological expeditions across North, Central and South America, Java and Sumatra, contributing to new breakthroughs in science as well as the discovery of hundreds of new species of amphibians and reptiles. Carl has also bred and maintained several species of reptiles and received the Joseph Laszlo award for outstanding contributions in herpetoculture. He is a member of the IUCN SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and Founder of Texas Turtles, a non-profit organization devoted to the conservation and study of Texas turtles.



# Tell Hicks In Memoriam



Young male ( albino form )

Tell was a man who committed fully to his passions: falconry, music, especially Bob Dylan, the art of Norman Rockwell, travelling extensively, his greenhouse full of cacti, playing the flute, guitar, and especially harmonica, single malt whisky, and, above all, going “herping” – that’s heading out in search of reptiles and snakes.

As a father, Tell was fun and inspirational – his sons’ very own Indiana Jones. He stoked their interests by sharing his passions. Dylan inherited the love of reptiles; Ben his passion for falconry and the outdoors; Leon developed a fascination with space – which Tell happily indulged, taking the family to Florida to watch a space shuttle launch during one break from reptile hunting.

He dearly loved his grandchildren Ella, Lauren, Rowan, Lucas, Ffion and Cerys and was immensely proud of them all. Between them they have inherited either his love of music, animals, art or the great outdoors.

Behind Tell’s passion and zest for life stood his loving wife Eileen – providing the steady foundation that allowed Tell to live such a full, adventurous life.

Tell was laid-back, friendly, funny, and kind. He rarely swore, never spoke ill of others (unless they truly deserved it), loved his family and was deeply loved by them.

Tell painted his whole life. From childhood to his final years, not letting anything, even paralysis, get in the way of creating. He lived guided by curiosity, generosity, humour, and a deep love for the natural world. Most people will not know that he was a co-founder of the IHS which was birthed whilst Tell was working at Drayton Manor and living in a caravan!



We will remember Tell Hicks as a man who followed his passions, inspired others, loved his family fiercely, and left the world richer, more colourful, and more interesting than he found it.

From his BHS and AHH friends at the conference which he has supported each and every year.





AHH BHS Herpetology Conference 2026

# Evening Entertainment

18.30

Bar opens

19.00

Dinner served

20.00

Guest Speaker - Carl Franklin Texas Turtles

21.30

Annual Conference Quiz

00.00

Bar closes



QUIZ  
NIGHT



8.00-9.00

**Registration**

9.00-10.30

**Erin Rickman-Hills**

'Active Research Projects at the Herpetological Environments and Research In Practice (HERP) Lab.'

**Daryl Lott**

'Amphibian Breeding Differentiations'

10.30-10.55

**Break**

11.00-11.45

**Adam Radovanovic**

'King of the Colubrids - Keeping and Breeding the Eastern Indigo Snake'

11.45-13.00

**Workshops**

- Specialist vet Q&A session
- Sunlight power density importance and measurement
- Practical workshop on creating rock work for vivaria
- Practical workshop on creating lighting in vivaria

13.00 -14.00

**Lunch**

14.00-15.30

**Thomas Mariott**

Caledonian Day Geckos - in the wild and captivity

**Rachel Pikstein**

'Lizards & Legacy: How Herpetology Heroes Learn to Balance Science, Husbandry, and Stewardship'

15.30-16.00

**Break**

16.00-16.45

**Mike Conabeer**

'Insight into venomous snake husbandry and the process of licence application.'

16.45-17.00

**Conference Close**



## Our Speakers

### Erin Rickman- Hills

As Tenure-Track Assistant Professor at Eckerd College, Erin founded and leads one of the first labs of its kind in the field of captive reptile research in the United States, the Herpetological Environments and Research in Practice (HERP) Lab, standing alongside the UK's Cold-Blooded Cognition and Care Laboratory at the University of Lincoln. The field combines principles of biology, psychology and animal care to provide a complete picture of reptile well-being, thereby deriving evidence-based principles, standards and recommendations that keepers - both private and professional - can use to ensure the highest welfare standards for animals in their care. Erin has published a number of papers on these topics and more are in preparation. Erin's journey began in the UK, where she achieved an FdSc in Animal Science through the University of Brighton, a top-up BSc (Hons) in Applied Animal Behaviour and Welfare from the Royal Agricultural University, and is currently completing her Ph.D in Animal Behaviour and Welfare at the University of Lincoln, focusing on Leopard Geckos.



### Daryl Lott

Daryl has a professional background in herpetological zookeeping, fieldwork project coordination and in-situ conservation work - including rhino anti-poaching in South Africa. He currently works on the harlequin toad project with citizen conservation. He has been passionate about amphibians for many years and currently maintains a diverse personal collection, specialising in the genera *Theloderma*, *Megophryidae*, *Cruziohyala* and *Atelopus*.





# Our Speakers

## Adam Radovanovic



As Head of Reptiles at Birmingham Wildlife Conservation Park, Adam is well known to many regular conference delegates. He has published work on husbandry, reproduction and enrichment in peer-reviewed journals. Adam has travelled extensively observing reptiles and amphibians in the wild and now leads herpetological trips to Madagascar and Costa Rica (@greigsmithtravels). His work has included aid in herpetological survey work, mainly in Guatemala, and he caught the first banded snail-eater (*Tropidodipas fasciata*) which was a new record for the country. He is currently on the committee of the International Herpetological Society and has been involved with the hobby of herpetoculture for over two decades.

## Thomas Marriott

Thomas Marriott is the Manager of Exotics Keeper Magazine and Executive Editor of the Responsible Herpetoculture Journal. He has travelled to dozens of countries finding and photographing reptiles and amphibians and sharing the stories of conservationists working with them in the field. Thomas has authored over 200 magazine articles and worked on several other projects including a documentary on New Caledonian Geckos and the EK Survey Report, aimed at capturing data on the UK reptile-keeping hobby.





# Our Speakers



## Rachel Pikstein



Simultaneously to her other work, Rachel would launch non-profit Pikstein Laboratory for Conservation Research & Education, while beginning a PhD in Biology at Loma Linda University to continue her study of invasive lizard biology. Now studying in California she is grateful to be continuing the 11 year study of her specialty species, *Salvator merianae* (black and white tegu lizard), under the guidance of renowned rattlesnake and venom specialist, Dr. Bill Hayes.

## Mike Conabeer

Mike runs Rattlesnake Canyon, one of the few reptile and amphibian retail outlets in the UK that is licensed to keep and trade DWA (Dangerous Wild Animals) species. "Having been in the aquatic and reptile trade since 1989 and owning my own shop, Rattlesnake Canyon in Birmingham since 2011, I have kept and bred many species of reptiles and invertebrates. I developed an interest in venomous in the late 90s when I imported a few species from Africa. I am self taught with regard to handling and husbandry on venomous (not something I'd recommend but there we go!). Over the years I have worked with many different species and my talk will provide an insight into venomous snake husbandry and the process of licence application, including things such as room design, record keeping and bite protocols."





# Feedback and Memberships



## Feedback

We would greatly appreciate your feedback. Please scan the QR code to complete our short survey — your comments are invaluable and help us plan and improve next year's conference.



## Join the British Herpetological Society

Whether you are a conservationist, scientist, field naturalist, student, or interested in reptile and amphibian husbandry, the BHS has something to offer. Founded in 1947, the Society is one of the world's oldest and largest herpetological organisations, supporting research, education, captive breeding, and conservation.

Membership from just £18 per year includes:

- Online access to The Herpetological Journal, The Herpetological Bulletin, and The NatterJack
- Meetings and conferences
- Members-only downloads and videos
- Regular updates and specialist resources

Scan the QR code to join today or visit the BHS stand this weekend!



## Young Herpetologists (YH)

The Young Herpetologists section of the British Herpetological Society is free to join for anyone aged 5-17 with an interest in reptiles and amphibians.

Members receive newsletters, articles, and online access to The Herpetological Bulletin and The NatterJack. In 2026, we are launching a brand-new YH website area with exciting resources and activities.

Follow our social media to stay up to date and scan the QR code to join today or visit the BHS stand this weekend!



# Our Sponsors



We want to extend our thanks to our sponsors for their generous support of the AHH BHS Herpetological Conference 2026. Their contribution makes this event possible and supports continued collaboration, research, and progress in amphibian and reptile health and conservation. We are sincerely grateful for their commitment to our community.



A final thank you to our Conference Committee, who generously volunteer their time, expertise, and dedication each year to organise and deliver this event. Your hard work behind the scenes makes the conference possible, and we are incredibly grateful for your continued commitment and support.