



Meet the Speakers and
Sponsors for the 2026
AHH / BHS Conference!

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.

[Texas Turtles | TEXAS TURTLES](#)

Having previously spoken at the 2023 conference, Carl will be returning in 2026 to do the after-dinner talk on Saturday evening – sure to be informative and entertaining!



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. Simultaneously, she 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.



[PiksteinLab](#)

Rachel will be giving two talks at the conference:

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

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



CONSERVATION RESEARCH & EDUCATION

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.



<https://responsibleherpetoculture.foundation/about-us/thomas-marriott>



Viviana Ricardez

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

[Texas Turtles | TEXAS TURTLES](#)



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.

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.



Aquatect: Custom Aquarium & Fish Tank Builders & Installation

James will be doing a talk at the conference

‘Building and Theming Naturalistic Exhibits for Reptiles and Amphibians’

Exploring a range of materials and techniques to create naturalistic exhibits for reptiles and amphibians in zoos, public aquariums and educational settings.

and is also doing one of the practical workshops on both Saturday and Sunday

‘You will learn how to create realistic rock themed backgrounds for your vivariums and enclosures using concrete and a range of techniques to texture and colour it.’





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.

‘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?’

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.”



[Rattlesnake Canyon | Home](#)



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.



<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/conservationpark>





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 keeper's 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)

Chaz will be discussing REPTA's new policy on Deleterious Genes in captive herptiles

<https://repta.org>

<https://snakesnaddersonline.co.uk>



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.

‘Morphs, Mutations & Selective Breeding – some veterinary thoughts on a current talking point’

Tariq is well known to many in the UK herptile keeping community – along with offering some thoughts on the topic of ‘deleterious genes ‘ in reptiles in a special session planned for Saturday, he’ll be doing the two Vet Q&A workshops on Saturday and Sunday



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 team at Eckerd currently have no less than 12 active projects in progress (November 2025) . Erin was a speaker at the Herpeton conference in Florida in Oct / Nov 2025 and we're hoping that she will be able to attend the Drayton Manor conference in person to update us on key research results to date.

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.

<https://herp.eckerd.edu>



Daryl Lott

'Amphibian Breeding Differentiations'

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 *Thelederma*, *Megophryidae*, *Cruziohyla* and *Atelopus*.





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