

Obituary

Julia Wycherley

1940–2009



Julia Wycherley, an outstanding member of Britain's herpetological community, died in September 2009. For many people, Julia was a welcome and familiar face at herpetological group meetings where she regularly contributed stimulating talks, always focused on some aspect of her passion for amphibian and reptile conservation. My first recollection of her was a memorable account of great crested newt distribution in Surrey, which she gave at one of the first annual herpetofauna recorders' meetings in the early 1980s. By that time Julia was already leading the way in what rapidly became one of the most consistently successful local amphibian and reptile groups (ARGs) in the country. Indeed, she chaired the Surrey ARG for more than three decades, standing down only when deteriorating health made it necessary to do so. It would be impossible to exaggerate the efforts Julia made in identifying, and helping to conserve, good sites for amphibians and reptiles in her home county. I sometimes thought that there couldn't be any pond in Surrey that Julia didn't know about, and as often as not she could tell you what species were in it, who owned it, and what needed to be done to improve it.

Julia was much more than a good naturalist and conservationist. She had strong scientific interests, and in the 1990s became heavily involved in a project to determine whether pool frogs were native to Britain (contrary to the longstanding view that they were all introduced recently by man). Her take on the problem was to investigate the calls of breeding males, and try to find out if they had "lo-

cal accents" that might give clues about their history. I was delighted when Julia joined me to work for a PhD so she could explore this original idea, and was deeply impressed by her ability to develop new skills (especially in statistics!) and ultimately to provide impressive evidence supporting the pool frog's status as a longstanding native species. She also had no problem impressing her examiners, and was awarded the degree in 2003. During this period and afterwards, Julia, together with her husband Ralph, made trips to Sweden to compare pool frogs there with those previously in Britain, where the last native population died out in the 1990s. Ultimately frogs from Sweden were used to repopulate a site in England, once again with substantial help from Julia despite increasingly fragile health – it would take more than that to diminish her enthusiasm. Few people can lay claim to assisting the reintroduction of an extinct species back into Britain, but Julia was one of them.

Last but by no means least, Julia was a delight to be with and (often together with Ralph) provided all manner of personal support to anyone in need of a little bucking up. All who knew her were delighted when, in 2008, she was given a well-deserved reward – national recognition by way of an MBE for her work in herpetology and conservation. Her loss was profoundly sad both for herpetology and for all her many friends and colleagues.

*Trevor Beebee
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