

THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY: THE FIRST 50 YEARS, 1947-1997

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Twenty-one members attended the founding meeting of the British Herpetological Society on 1 July 1947. At the inaugural meeting the founding President, Dr Malcolm Smith, stressed the importance of studying the behaviour and ecology of reptiles and amphibians, appreciating that here was an opportunity for the professional and aspirant herpetologist alike. Membership grew to over 200 by 1950, and to over 1000 by 1990. The Conservation Committee was established in 1969, with the aim of protecting Britain's three rare and endangered species. There followed, in 1976, the Captive Breeding Committee, which would advise members on the care and breeding of species in captivity. Starting in 1970, the biannual *Newsletter* became the *Bulletin* in 1980, and this has been published quarterly since 1985. Filling a gap for the rapid communication of news and views to members, the monthly *Natterjack* came into being in 1995. Education has always been recognized by the society as important, and in 1983 the Education Officer established the Education Committee, which was responsible for co-ordinating activities of the Junior Section of the Society. During the 1980s the scientific standing of the society grew steadily and in 1985 the journal was renamed *The Herpetological Journal* to reflect the increasingly international nature of the papers published. Seven years later the journal became quarterly, and the submission rate of papers has continued to increase year-by-year to the present day. The increasing scientific activity within the society's ranks led to the formation of the Research Committee during the run-up to the First World Congress of Herpetology, held in Britain in 1989 and co-hosted by the Society. From a society which catered primarily for an interest in animals in captivity, the British Herpetological Society has broadened its remit over the past 25 years to one concerned with conservation, captive breeding, education and research.

INTRODUCTION

Although the pursuit of natural history is well-en-gained within the cultural history of Britain, the professional biologist is a relatively recent development. Until the present century, discoveries about the natural world were largely reported by enlightened amateurs, often regarded as pillars of local society. Typical among the early naturalists were physicians, classicists, clerics, barristers and soldiers, and it is salutary that it is just such a group that gave rise to the embryonic British Herpetological Society. Dr Malcolm Smith, a physician by training, returned to Britain in 1925 after serving in the Royal Court of Siam. His retirement allowed him time to produce a series of publications, primarily focused on the herpetofauna of south-east Asia. The end of the Second World War allowed the people of Britain to rediscover personal hobbies and interests, and as Malcom Smith was turning his attention to preparing a definitive work on the natural history of reptiles and amphibians in Britain (Smith, 1951), the time seemed ripe for a formal association of like-minded people to be formed.

The founding meeting of the British Herpetological Society was held on 11 July 1947 in the rooms of the Linnean Society of London, and was attended by twenty-one members. Some fifty people had agreed to join, and Captain J. D. Romer had been acting as Secre-

tary. The account that follows of the first 25 years is based mostly on descriptions of the Society's early days by a former President in respectively the *British Journal of Herpetology* and *BHS Bulletin* (Frazer, 1977; 1983a), and by me in *BHS Bulletin* (Lambert, 1980).

The founding members of the Society included a very strong body of naturalists and scientists: such names as Dr Malcolm Smith, Dr L. Harrison Matthews, FRS, Dr Maxwell Savage and Dr (later Prof.) Angus d'A. Bellairs are, even today, well-known beyond herpetological circles. There were also H.W. Parker (from the Natural History Museum), Louis Lantz, Prof. Jack Haldane, Major Maxwell Knight, OBE (an early broadcaster and writer on wildlife, producer of a television interview series on wildlife, and considered to be the original M in the James Bond stories!), Oliver Hook (a very fine amateur naturalist) and Jack Lester (Curator of Reptiles at the London Zoo).

YEARS TO THE JUBILEE, 1947-1972

The founding Secretary, John Romer, accepted a posting in Hong Kong in 1947, and Mr Alfred Leutscher took over as Honorary Secretary, circulating a *Bulletin* on 1 August 1947 to announce the successful inauguration of the Society. It was decided that the Society's publications should take the form of (1) a

Bulletin to be issued to members, as and when necessary, to convey information as to the Society's activities, meetings, progress, etc; and (2) a *Journal* of proceedings, free to members, to be published annually, and containing work submitted by members.

During discussions at the inaugural meeting, Dr Smith stressed the great importance of study into the habits and ecology of reptiles and amphibians as much had yet to be learnt in this field: here was an opportunity for professional and aspirant herpetologists alike. It was considered that the journal should be left in the hands of the Committee with Angus Bellairs as editor.

The bulletin was subsequently referred to as the *Notice*, and No. 2 was circulated in September 1947. The work and objects of the Society read: (1) to encourage the study of herpetology, in particular of this country and Europe; and (2) to publish a journal containing papers and reviews on all aspects of herpetology.

The Society's first General Meeting was held on 26 September 1947 at University College, London, and, although attended by no more than seventeen members, was very successful and stimulating. Malcolm Smith, as President, spoke on aspects of British herpetology which still required attention. These included research on distribution of species in the wild, and on changes in colour and growth, which could best be studied in captivity under conditions as near as possible natural, on movements in the wild (and the necessary methods of marking individuals), and on sexual cycles, which should be studied both in the wild and in the laboratory. Interesting live and preserved specimens were exhibited, including metamorphosed hybrids between *Rana esculenta* and *R. ridibunda* (Helen Spurway) and a fully grown neotenus *Triturus vulgaris* from Enfield, Middlesex (Malcolm Smith). Wartime controls were still active, and it was very difficult at this time to import livestock. The Society therefore negotiated a licence with the Board of Trade to import living reptiles and amphibians, in order to assist members' research and studies.

It was agreed that the journal should be called *The British Journal of Herpetology*, as an alternative to such names as *Coronella* or *Anguis*, and this was announced in *Notice* No. 4 (January 1948).

The First Annual General Meeting of the Society (October 1948) was held in the Linnean Society's rooms, Burlington House, London, and four additional Committee members were elected. Helen Spurway's resignation was regretfully accepted when, upon the retirement of her husband (the distinguished professor of natural history, J. B. S. (Jack) Haldane), she joined him in India.

Herpetological knowledge in the late 1940s was scanty: both field and laboratory techniques were still in a primitive state. Malcolm Smith's definitive book on amphibians and reptiles in Britain in Collins' New Naturalist series was not published until 1951, and it was appropriate that the first number of the Society's journal (June 1948) should comprise a paper on the dis-

tribution of species in the British Isles (Taylor, 1948), which was probably the first detailed distribution survey compiled anywhere.

Much of the information concerning observations in the field, and preliminary results from experimental studies, were passed on by word of mouth. Society meetings were held quarterly, at the London Zoo on Saturday afternoons, usually with one or more speakers on a set theme. These were followed by a visit to the Reptile House, especially to see Jack Lester's private vivarium there, where he kept a number of species not normally considered easy to maintain in captivity. Among those attending these meetings were David Attenborough, and Gerald Durrell, who went on to establish the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust in the Channel Isles.

The next AGM was in April 1949, and at this time it was made clear that the study of reptiles and amphibians "could take the form of scientific research, field study, or for that matter observations on animals in the vivarium". It was stressed that the intention was to help beginners. Around this time field outings were a regular activity, and included visits to see *Rana esculenta* at Ham gravel pits, Surrey, and to observe *R. ridibunda* on Romney Marsh, Kent.

By January 1950, there were over two hundred members, and it was announced in *Notice* No. 14 (July 1950) that two branches would probably be formed within the Society: a London Branch and a Northern Branch. However, through lack of support and internal differences, the Northern Branch had disbanded by 1951. The inaugural meeting of the London Branch was fixed for 12 October 1950.

The eight yearly meetings of the London Branch, held in the rooms of the Linnean Society of London, eventually superceded those of the Society which were held less frequently at London Zoo. Members displayed animals they were breeding in captivity, and commented on any difficulties or particular successes they had had with them. Geoff Haslewood, who was later to chair the Conservation Committee and sadly died in 1993, recalled Malcolm Smith on one such occasion calmly handling adders using the arm of his spectacles as a makeshift snake stick!

Fieldwork in herpetology at this time was mainly observational. Maxwell Savage had carried out the first detailed survey of *Rana temporaria* in the 1930s, his data subsequently being published in what is now the *Journal of Zoology* (Savage, 1934; 1935; 1937; 1939), and one in the *British Journal of Herpetology* some years later (Savage, 1950).

Malcolm Smith resigned as President (at the age of 80) in March 1955. Already aged 72 when he became President, he had been the founding spirit and driving force of the Society, and a strong guiding hand in its early development. He died on 22 July 1958, and a succeeding issue of the journal became a memorial number to him, including an obituary by Tenison (1959), followed by an appreciation by Bellairs (1959). An

appreciation was also made by His Royal Highness Prince Chula of Thailand (1960), one of Dr Smith's former patients! These accounts portrayed the man and his part to perfection.

In accordance with elections held at the AGM 1955, Malcolm Smith was succeeded as President by Deryk Frazer, and Monica Green became Assistant Secretary to Jim Menzies. During 1956, the Secretary took up an overseas appointment, and Monica Green took over his duties. Her appointment as Secretary was confirmed at the AGM in 1957. Remarkably, forty years on, Mrs Green still carries out the duties of secretary and treasurer with vigour and dedication. Indeed, this is a post she has held almost continuously since that time. Six Honorary Life Members were elected over this period: Dr Gerald Leighton (1952), A. E. Leutscher (1952), Dr Malcolm Smith (1953), J.D. Romer (1957), Monica Green (1960) and B.M. Smith (1962). Even 37 years ago, the Society was fully aware of the great debt owed to Monica Green in her capacity as Secretary.

From 1957, the Society maintained a steady pattern over the next 12 years of eight yearly meetings, including AGMs, at which there were talks, but mostly during which animals were displayed in the rooms of the Linnean Society of London. The Society was run on an intimate level, and had a very informal basis: in many ways it was more like a club, with a restricted range of interests and limited impact, than a Society *per se*. This was to change dramatically in later years.

The 1950s were a period of great academic freedom and the halcyon days of traditional British natural history. Before a visit to the Channel Islands, Deryk Frazer remembers asking Malcolm Smith's advice about published work on species there, and was firmly instructed to write something himself. This was subsequently published in the journal (Frazer, 1949). As is the case today, some members had a wealth of herpetological knowledge, but rarely put pen to paper to share it with others. Jack Lester once passed on some novel observations while in conversation with Malcolm Smith, who in turn submitted a manuscript to the journal under Lester's name! Angus Bellairs, returning from North Africa, once arrived unexpectedly at Deryk Frazer's London flat with a collection of amphibiaenids. These were examined on the bathroom floor, and Bellairs subsequently published research on their anatomy. At this time Edward Elkan was also breeding and maintaining *Xenopus* at Shrodells Hospital, and this subsequently led him, as many members will know, to a vast variety of research on diseases of both amphibians and reptiles.

By the late 1950s, the older members of the Society were beginning to pass away, and many of their names nearly 50 years later will not now be familiar to younger members. Jack Lester died in 1956, unexpectedly early after his second Zoo Quest with David Attenborough to South America. At the suggestion of Maxwell Knight and James Fisher (primarily an ornithologist), the Society hired the Royal Festival Hall for a programme in his memory, where the speakers were

Maxwell Knight and James Fisher themselves, David Attenborough and Peter Scott. Some of the proceeds (the remainder going to Jack's widow) were used to put up the bronze plate which can be seen to this day at the entrance of London Zoo's Reptile House.

Up until this time, ethical and conservation issues had received relatively little attention within the Society. However, at the 1951 AGM, Monica Green drew attention to the fact that many tortoises, *Testudo graeca*, were being imported during the winter months, and she represented the Society on a joint working party with the Fauna Preservation Society (now Fauna & Flora International), the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

Public awareness of environmental issues was increasing during the 1960s, and towards the end of that decade it had become clear that British amphibians and reptiles were under increasing threat from a great range of factors, particularly habitat changes, but also other environmental factors. There was grave concern over these, and a desire to take action. In 1969, Keith Corbett proposed that the Society should form a Conservation Committee, aimed at protecting Britain's rare and endangered species. This was chaired by J. W. (Josh) Steward (who died in January 1997 with an Obituary in the *Guardian*) until 1971, when Michael Lambert took over. Surveys of the declining status of the sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), smooth snake, (*Coronella austriaca*) and natterjack (*Bufo calamita*) were followed by conservation measures in conjunction with landowners, and involving liaison with county nature conservation trusts and representatives of the Nature Conservancy Council and other official bodies. Active habitat management was undertaken with the help of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers with generous aid from the Carnegie Trust Fund and World Wide Fund for Nature. Meanwhile, the threat of collection for the pet trade was reduced by the listing of these species in Schedule 1 of the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act, 1975.

In January 1970, Monica Green re-established the Bulletin as *BHS Newsletter*, which she continued to produce until January 1976 (No.13), after which it became the *British Herpetological Society Bulletin*.

FROM THE JUBILEE TO THE HALF CENTURY, 1973 to 1997

The second 25 years of the Society has seen substantial change, with enlargement, diversification, and an increased range of activities giving rise to sub-committees and additional Council posts. The Committee was renamed Council to avoid confusion with such sub-committees as the Conservation Committee, and Captive Breeding Committee (formed in 1976). With Monica Green's resignation in 1976, Michael Lambert and Mr P. A. W. Bennett were confirmed as Joint Secretaries at the 1977 AGM. With detached duty overseas

TABLE 1. List of officers on the Committee and Council of the British Herpetological Society, 1947-97, based on extant posts in 1997

President	Chairman	Secretary/ Treasurer	Journal Editor	Librarian	Bulletin Editor	Chair, Conservation Committee
M. Smith (1947-55)	M.R.K.Lambert (1977-91)	J.D. Romer (1947)	A. Bellairs (1947-55; 1957-67)	B.M. Smith (1954-61)	M. Green (1973-77)	J.W. Steward (1969-71)
J.F.D. Frazer (1955-81)	T.J.C. Beebee (1991-96)	A.E. Leutscher (1947-54)	M. Savage (1955-57)	H. Munro (1961-69)	J. Pickett/ S. Townson (1977-85; 1987-94)	M.R.K. Lambert (1971-77)
Earl of Cranbrook (1981-91)		J.I. Menzies (1954-57)	H. Fox (1967-77)	R.J. Swindells (1969-74)	J. Pickett/ M. Matthewson (1985-87)	K.F. Corbett (1977-78)
J.L.Cloudsley -Thompson (1991-96)		M. Green (1957-77; 1984-present)	M. Peaker (1977-81)	D.L. Tamarin (1974-76)	N. Clark/ S. Townson (1994-95)	T.J.C. Beebee (1978-83)
R.A. Avery (1996- present)		P.A.W.Bennett (1977-80)	R.A.Avery (1981-85)	J. Pickett (1976-85)	J. Spence/ S. Townson (1995-97)	G.A.D. Haslewood (1983-88)
		D.G.D. Lucas (1978-82)	T.J.C. Beebee (1985-91)	P.H. Eversfield (1985-91)		W.J. Whitaker (1988-92)
		J. Ridout- Sharpe (1982-83)	R.A. Griffiths (1991-present)	D.R. Bird (1991-present)		J. Clemons (1992-97)
Chair, Captive Breeding Committee	Chair, Education Committee	NW England Representative	Scottish Representative	Chair, Research Committee	Trade/Legal Officer	Development Officer
S. Townson (1976-87; 1991-92)	V.F. Taylor (1979-91)	R. Paul (1985-94)	D.R. Blatchford (1986-94)	T.R. Halliday (1988-95)	P.C. Curry (1988- present)	B. Banks (1992-94)
M. Linley (1987-91)	C. Fitzsimmons (1991-95)	P. Wisniewski (1994-present)	A.W. Darby (1988-97)	C. Cummins (1995-present)		M. Swan (1994-present)
T.A. Thatcher (1992-95)	D. Freeman (1995-present)		W. Wales (1997-present)			
J. Spence (1995- present)						

in 1977, Michael Lambert was replaced as Chairman of the Conservation Committee by Keith Corbett until December that year, when Trevor Beebee replaced him, his post being confirmed at the 1978 AGM. Malcolm Peaker also took over from Harold Fox as Journal Editor in 1977, and Michael Lambert shortly after became Chairman of Council. The list of Council officers from 1947, and in posts still extant in 1997, is shown in Table 1.

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

The Journal. As indicated earlier, the first editor of *British Journal of Herpetology* was Prof. Angus

Bellairs. The journal was very dependent on contributions from members, and many of the issues comprising volume 1 included no more than notes on a range of observations from the field or laboratory. Some contributors had never written anything for publication before, and yet made useful observations. Indeed, many of the articles were not unlike the unrefereed articles seen now in *BHS Bulletin*.

There was some excitement when the Royal Society provided a grant towards the costs of publishing a paper on toad migration by Moore (1954) which became something of a minor classic in its day. In volume 2 perhaps the most significant articles were obituaries on

both Jack Lester, who died at the early age of 47, and Malcolm Smith.

A revised survey by Taylor (1963) of the distribution of British herpetofauna appeared in vol. 3. Dr H. R. Bustard had become a regular contributor with notes on Australian reptiles. By vol. 3 (9), December 1965, Dr Harold Fox had taken over the Editorship.

Volume 4 (No. 4) caused a small stir in publishing, in French, a paper by Hubert Saint Girons on erythrocyte morphology. John Cloudsley-Thompson, later to become the Society's President, also became a regular contributor. The final issue of this volume contained a policy of amphibian and reptile conservation in Britain, compiled by the Conservation Committee, which included basic principles to be followed, and was the first public expression of the Committee's intention.

A change in page size in mid-volume was met with some consternation by many of the libraries from around the world, which by now were receiving the journal as regular subscribers. An historical outline of the Society over the first 30 years was published by J.F.D. Frazer, then President of the Society, in no. 8, June 1977, by which time the Editorship had passed on to Malcolm Peaker. Through crisp editing, he included a large number of articles in two of the journal's numbers, and thereby overcame the backlog of papers that had started to accumulate. Volume 5 (No. 12) included

a main paper on habitat management and sand lizard conservation in Britain (Corbett & Tamarind, 1979).

The period covered by volume 6, from 1979 to 1985, was one of consolidation and modest growth, but increasing reputation, reflected by the number of papers submitted from home and abroad (Fig. 1). The size of the journal increased to A4. Dr Roger Avery took over the editorship from Malcolm Peaker for four years from 1981, to be followed by Trevor Beebee.

At this point, discussions on the journal in Council included the possibility of a merger with the American-based *Journal of Herpetology*. However, it was eventually decided to continue the British journal, but to seek a new name, and this and other major changes took place in December 1985. "British" was dropped from the title without undue soul-searching and the title *Herpetological Journal* was adopted to reflect the increasingly international outlook of papers published. British herpetology continued to be well represented, however, and the period of volume 1 of the new journal - from December 1985 to June 1991 - was a time when many substantial contributions to knowledge were made. The early 1980s were a boom time for amphibian research in Britain, with vigorous groups at the Open University, University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST) - led by the late Paul Gittins - and Leicester, and this activity was reflected in the

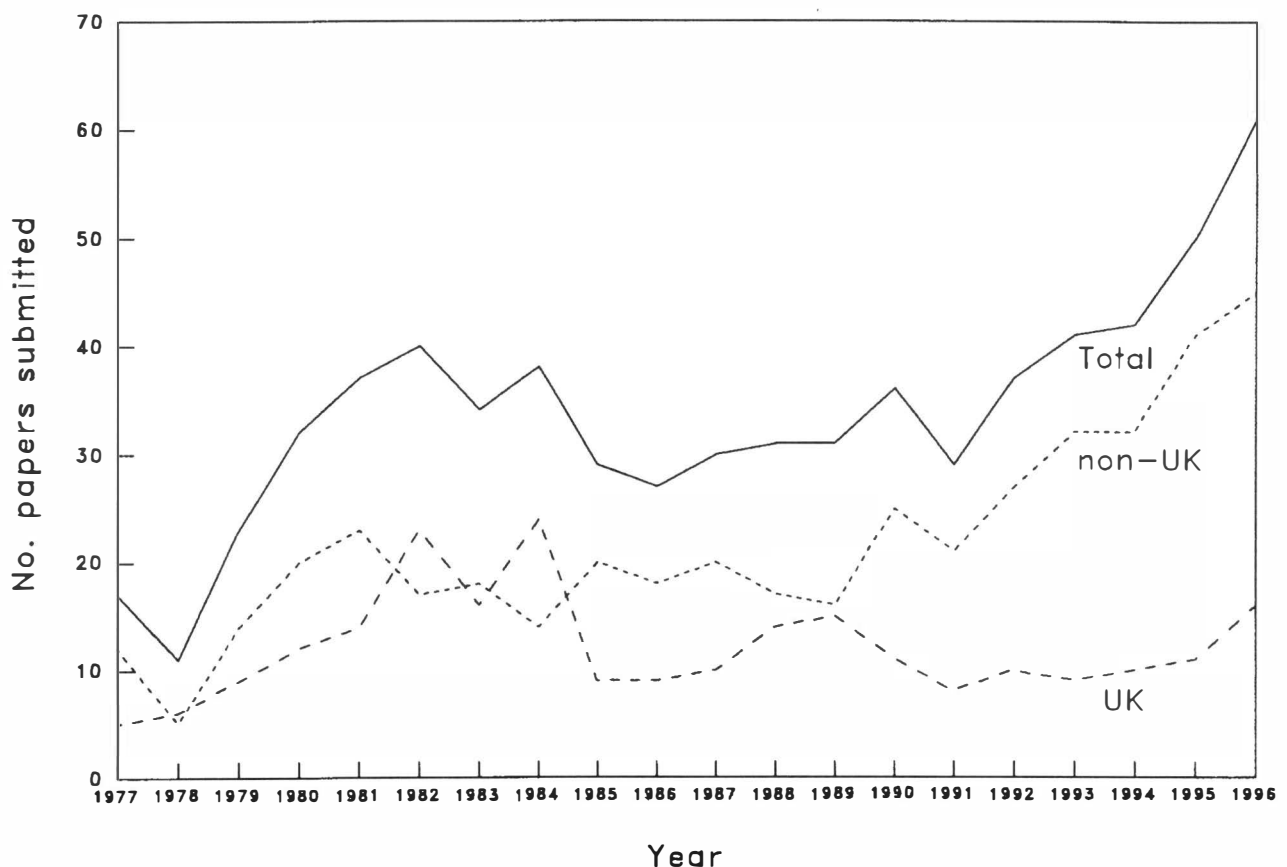


FIG. 1. Manuscript submissions to the *British Journal of Herpetology* (1977-85) and the *Herpetological Journal* (1985-96), showing the total number of papers plus those originating from within and outside the United Kingdom.

pages of the journal. This was also the period of the publication of an influential series of papers on *Natrix maura* in Spain by Adrian Hailey and Peter Davies. Otherwise it is interesting that almost all the significant contributions to British herpetology in the journal at this time related to amphibians. There were only six papers about British reptiles in the entire volume. Sadly, the last issue of this volume in 1991 contained the obituary of Angus Bellairs, one of the major figures in British herpetology for more than 35 years.

Richard Griffiths took over the Editorship (a post which he still holds) in 1991. Further sweeping changes were immediately made, including the appointment of an editorial board to streamline manuscript processing. Costs of production were reduced with the acquisition of a "desktop" publishing system, enabling a larger number of papers to be published per issue at no increase in cost. The journal began to appear quarterly in yearly volumes, and its international reputation and standing continued to grow: in the fourth issue of volume 6 (1996), there were seven major papers, six of them relating to non-British species. Submission rates doubled between 1991 and 1996 (Fig. 1), and the *Herpetological Journal* has become one of the big players in the herpetological arena, with an "impact rating" that compares well with that of comparable journals. Indeed, it is currently the only herpetological publication produced outside North America which is cited in the influential *Current Contents* listings.

The BHS Bulletin. Starting in January 1970 under Monica Green's editorship, and running in this form until January 1976 (No. 13), the biannual *BHS Newsletter* included regular reports from the Conservation Committee, announcement of Society Officers and other items of general interest to the membership, especially pertaining to keeping species in captivity. There were also reports on the Library.

The newsletter also provided a vehicle for different views on herpetology in Britain to be expressed. A topical exchange was that between a relatively small number of vivarium-keepers and fanciers at one end of the spectrum and certain conservationists at the other. The co-editors trenchantly commented on many of these views at length. Number 20 included an interesting article by Pickett (1979), which summarized the Acts of Parliament as they affected collection, possession, import, export, and sale of amphibians and reptiles.

June 1980 saw the publication renamed the *British Herpetological Society Bulletin*. The format was essentially the same, with a softbound cover and improved production, and a declared purpose "to publish news, meetings programmes, informal articles and papers on all aspects of herpetology, and members' letters and advertisements". It was intended "to increase the international interest of the bulletin, and welcome news, correspondence, and articles from foreign herpetologists". An article by Michael Lambert out-

lined the development of the Society from the beginning, based on information provided by BHS publications and organization announcements that he had to hand. Indeed, the bulletin thence included a wide range of articles on all aspects of herpetology, many from contributors based outside Britain. It has become an extremely popular publication among Society members, providing lively, entertaining and often quirky reading.

By 1985, the bulletin was receiving enough contributions to be published quarterly. *BHS Bulletin* No. 17 (September 1986) included colour plates for the first time, as a centre page spread, and showed photographs by Stephen Peltz of the water monitor *Varanus salvator* in Sri Lanka.

Although articles published in the bulletin are not refereed, the nature of many over the last ten or so years is comparable to those in the early *British Journal of Herpetology*. However, with a present adult UK and foreign membership of nearly 900, the scope and range of subjects covered by articles in four bulletin issues a year is very much greater than in the journal during the 1950s and 60s, when there were scarcely more than 200 members.

The Natterjack. With the transformation of *BHS Bulletin*, it was felt that there was a need for keeping members informed of events on a more regular basis. Edited by Trevor Rose as an initiative of the Captive Breeding Committee, the first issue of this new monthly newsheet was circulated to members in February 1995. It aimed to bring updates to events arranged by the Society, topical herp news from around the world, hints, tips, members advertisements and much more. At the outset, an appropriate, catchy and original name for the monthly publication was sought, and the winner of a competition to provide this would win £10. Issue 26 had been distributed by the 50th Annual General Meeting in March 1997, and included items under five main headings: *Warts and All* (articles from newspapers, journals and other sources); *Members' Spot* (short accounts on observations and views of interest); *Talk Back* (committee communications); *Dates for Your 1997 Diary*; and *Lineata* (wanted and for sale). The *Natterjack* has proved to be a popular item among members.

THE LIBRARY

The Library contains a large collection of books, journals and journal articles, which have been acquired through donation, purchase, exchange with other societies, or inherited from deceased members. By 1974 the library had acquired a distinguished home within the library of the Linnean Society of London in Burlington House, Piccadilly. The opening hours of the library were therefore those of the Linnean Society Library, and although the Society had its own librarian (at the time, David Tamarind) the Linnean Society Librarian co-ordinated loans and renewals. With David Tama-

rind's departure from London at the end of 1975, John Pickett became Librarian. In 1976, he requested the return of loans which had been taken out some three or so years earlier and had still not been returned. Regrettably, the library's books at this time were also on open shelves in the basement of the Linnean Society, but this resulted after a year or so in the theft of certain important works. John Pickett reorganized the Library in 1978. By 1989 the Linnean Society of London had moved the BHS Library to its upper galleries to prevent further theft of books, but then required the space for their own ever-increasing collection. In 1993 the Society's collection of books was transferred from the Linnean Society to the home of the new librarian, David Bird, who subsequently set about producing an up-to-date catalogue of its contents. Books can now be borrowed by post or through personal visit by arrangement with the librarian.

COMMITTEES OF THE SOCIETY

Conservation Committee. The Conservation Committee was formed in November 1969 under the chairmanship of J. W. Steward, and members started work on the distribution and habitat conservation of the sand lizard. It was quickly found that three species: *Lacerta agilis*, *Coronella austriaca* and *Bufo calamita* had so decreased in range and numbers that there was danger of them disappearing from Britain altogether if proper conservation measures were not applied. Following a report published in *BHS Newsletter* No. 2 (June 1970), Mr Steward presented an update on the work of the Conservation Committee at a Society meeting in November 1970, and a future conservation policy for Britain was laid down in a joint meeting of the main Council and Conservation Committee before the end of the year. Mr Steward resigned his chairmanship at the AGM in March 1971, and a report by Michael Lambert, who replaced him, on the Committee's activities appeared in *BHS Newsletter* No. 4 (June 1971).

Among the Conservation Committee's main functions and activities from the earliest days were winter tasks involving the clearance of scrub, as part of habitat manipulation, on the lowland heaths of southern England. These have been organized every year since the committee's inception. The bulk of this work has been at sand lizard and smooth snake sites in Surrey and Dorset. The tasks have always been important social as well as practical events.

The Conservation Committee has also carried out translocations of sand lizards, natterjacks, and occasionally smooth snakes, and as a result established several new populations of each species in suitable habitat around the country. The Committee contributed to the discussion on translocations in Britain through a paper in *British Journal of Herpetology*, June 1983 (vol. 6, 314-316).

The scientific basis of herpetofauna conservation has been extensively developed by Conservation Com-

mittee members. There have been numerous publications in the scientific literature, including Corbett & Tamarind's (1979) paper on habitat management for the sand lizard, and several by Banks, Beebee, Denton and Griffiths on the conservation of other species (e.g. Beebee, 1976; Griffiths, 1985; Banks & Laverick, 1986; Denton 1991). A major contribution towards smooth snake conservation took the form of a national survey of sites for this species funded by the Nature Conservancy Council during the mid-1980s, and the results of this survey were later published in *The Herpetological Journal* (Braithwaite *et. al.*, 1989).

The Conservation Committee has a long-standing input to the politics of herpetofauna conservation. Notable events included a crisis on the Merseyside dunes during the early/mid 1970s concerning the development of housing estates at Ainsdale and Birkdale, culminating in a proposed extension of the local Butlins holiday camp in 1975. Publicity generated by the Conservation Committee was instrumental in curtailing these threats, and led to a wide-ranging series of meetings at the Nature Conservancy Council headquarters between 1977-1983. The outcome was a national policy document on the conservation of Britain's three rare species: sand lizard, smooth snake and natterjack toad.

In 1985 the Conservation Committee appointed Tom Langton as honorary Conservation Officer. Later, in 1986, a Conservation Officer post for Keith Corbett was funded jointly by the Nature Conservancy Council and Worldwide Fund for Nature (UK). This was the first salaried position ever run by the British Herpetological Society.

Conservation of the commoner British herpetofauna has been a source of perpetual debate within the Conservation Committee. In recent years, with the Herpetological Conservation Trust looking after the rare species, the subject, especially in respect of great crested newts and grass snakes, has featured higher on the agenda. By and large, the Conservation Committee has not had the manpower or resources to make a substantial contribution in this area. However, during the mid-1990s, a "common species officer" post was established under the joint supervision of Herpetofauna Conservation International, Herpetological Conservation Trust, the Conservation Committee and the statutory conservation agencies.

During the 1980s, the Conservation Committee became involved in the purchase and lease of nature reserves, aided by generous private donations. Reserves are now owned on heathlands in both Surrey (Gong Hill) and Dorset (Green Pool and Trigon), and there are lease/management agreements at other sites including coastal dunes (with natterjacks) at Sellafeld in Cumbria. At about the same time, and mainly due to the efforts of Brian Banks and Dave Bird, a "Land Fund" was established to accumulate money for the purchase or lease of sites. By 1997, there were more than £40,000 in this fund.

The establishment of the Herpetological Conservation Trust in 1989 was, in an important sense, a triumph for the Conservation Committee in that a professional, well-funded organization was successfully established to perpetuate the main objectives of the Committee on a scale which the British Herpetological Society alone could never have afforded. The success of the Trust may have left the Conservation Committee with a less clear view of its own mission and purpose, but over the past five years, the Committee has taken on a more advisory role and established a database containing over 10 000 herpetofauna records for future analysis, and committee members have continued to assist the Trust with management and surveying programmes. Meanwhile, annual field trips to places of herpetological interest for Society members have been well attended. The Committee has been involved with more great crested newt work and there are plans to contribute, as leading partners, to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan for this species.

In contrast, the old arguments between the Conservation Committee and other sectors of the main Society have subsided over the years. Heated debates and acrimonious discussions on conservation versus captive breeding at AGMs and Council meetings are largely a thing of the past, partly due to the publication of an agreed policy on the subject of animals in captivity, trade and legislation in *BHS Bulletin* No. 53 (Autumn 1995) which took over two years to formulate. There has also been a growing realization that habitat protection is a much more important issue for species conservation than any threat from collection and keeping in captivity, which in any case are now illegal in respect of the rare and endangered species in Britain with the passing of the UK's 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Captive Breeding Committee. As co-editors of the *BHS Newsletter*, John Pickett and Simon Townson included an article on the contribution of captive breeding to conservation (Pickett, 1976). This in effect represented the basis for the formation of the Captive Breeding Committee, which was realized by the end of the year, with Simon Townson as Chairman. The Committee's function, as given in *BHS Newsletter* No. 15 with a list of founding members, was "to give scientific and practical advice on captive breeding and husbandry of reptiles and amphibians, to provide a liaison service between members, and to give advice relating to the breeding of animals for conservation purposes". By the following year, preliminary aims and policies of the Captive Breeding Committee were laid down. It was indicated in the Introduction that in recent years, there had been great achievements in the breeding of reptiles and amphibians in captivity, and for many species this had been proven to be quite simple. Each year brought new and more regular successes in the field, so that one could begin to look forward to breeding as the norm

rather than the exception. Previously, breeding these animals in captivity was a rare occurrence, and hence there seemed to be little widespread knowledge of many of the techniques and parameters involved. An appeal was also made for information on species kept, in order to build-up a species register.

By the following year, a list of species being bred successfully by members of the Society had come to light, and was published in *BHS Bulletin* No. 18 (July 1978). The main function of the Captive Breeding Committee was found to be that of giving advice on a variety of topics, including breeding techniques, housing of animals and general husbandry, sources of information, and legal requirements for obtaining species from overseas. Members had also asked to be put in touch with others with similar interests for fruitful exchanges of information and/or animals. Committee members had also given talks on various aspects of herpetology to a number of outside organizations. Information sheets for various species were produced on basic care and breeding in captivity (by 1997, there were twelve of these). It was also announced that a book was to be published containing a collection of papers on husbandry, breeding and behaviour, and veterinary aspects.

1980 saw the publication of *The Care and Breeding of Captive Reptiles*. Edited on behalf of the Society by Simon Townson and three other members of the Captive Breeding Committee, this was the first book to be published by the Society. The next book was by Nicholas Mrosovsky, *Conserving Sea Turtles* (1983), which was fairly audacious of the Society to publish, for it contained controversial material, and was widely reviewed. This resulted in substantial sales worldwide and established the Society as a publisher of herpetological works.

A Symposium organized by the Captive Breeding Committee was held jointly with the British Veterinary Zoological Society on 1 October 1983. Papers that were presented were subsequently edited by Simon Townson and Keith Lawrence, and published as *Reptiles: Breeding, Behaviour and Veterinary Aspects*.

In addition to organizing two evening meetings each year in July and September, respectively called "Amphibians and reptiles worldwide: their care and breeding", and "Care and breeding of amphibians and reptiles: an open meeting", there were two Symposia held jointly with other herpetological societies in Britain in 1986 (six other societies) and 1988 (four other societies). Proceedings of both symposia, edited by Jon Coote, were subsequently published by the Society in 1987 and 1990, and included additional papers to complement those read at the symposia.

The pattern of captive breeding meetings during the year became less standardized in 1991, and an autumn meeting was held on a weekend afternoon (from 1992 at New Denham Community Centre, where all captive breeding meetings during the years took place until

1996, when they were back at Birkbeck College, London).

A compilation of 51 papers from *BHS Bulletin* 1980-1992, edited by Simon Townson, was published as a collection in 1994, representing the seventh in a series of miscellaneous volumes by the Captive Breeding Committee of the British Herpetological Society.

Education Committee. Education was recognized as an important facet of herpetology, especially in relation to conservation, and Vic Taylor was Education Officer on the Conservation Committee almost from its inception. A leaflet on the British herpetofauna and its conservation, prepared by Vic Taylor, was circulated to all members of the Society as a centre-page insert with *BHS Newsletter* No. 7 (January 1973). An appeal in this Newsletter was also made for members of the Society with experience in lecturing to schools, natural history societies, youth organizations, etc. who would be interested in forming a consolidated network of part-time lecturers. It was envisaged that members of this network would gain from the pooling of experience and resources, without undue hindrance to individual style!

Vic Taylor had begun to consolidate many of his ideas on education and conservation, and expressed these in an article in *BHS Newsletter* No. 15 (December 1976). He commented on the value of supplying excess frog spawn from overflowing ponds to schools for a valuable educational experience to which children might not otherwise be exposed. He had already acted over the previous three years as Course Director for weekend herpetological courses at Theobalds College, Enfield, and plans were in hand for a course in 1977 aimed at teachers, naturalists and herpetologists interested in playing an active role in the conservation of British amphibians and reptiles.

Vic Taylor became an Ordinary member of the Society's Council in 1977, and provided an outline report on his Theobalds Field Study Centre courses in *BHS Newsletter* No. 18 (July 1978). He foresaw a course being held in Dorset with lectures on reptile and amphibian ecology, together with heathland ecology and management, backed up by site visits. With such involvement in herpetological education, it was recognized that an Education Officer should be created as a separate post of the Society's Council itself, and Vic Taylor was duly elected, the Rules of the Society being amended as necessary. As the Society's Education Officer, he also chaired an education committee.

Hitherto, membership of the British Herpetological Society had officially been restricted to adults. It was announced in *BHS Bulletin* No. 2 (December 1980) that a Junior Section had been formed, nicknamed "J Herps", which gave children and those under 18 a chance to take an active interest in the work of the Society for the first time. An advisory service was also run for J Herps which provided expert advice on specific problems. The J Herps also received their own newsletter (*J Herps Newsletter*) three times a year, containing

news, information and competitions, in addition to *BHS Bulletin* as a subsidy from the main Society. By 1982, there were around 100 J Herp members. Vic Taylor continued at the same time the education programme for the Conservation Committee, and in particular yearly displays at summer events in the Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

In 1983, an Education Committee was established which was responsible for the continued running of the Junior Section of the Society, the extension of junior activities to involve school groups and teachers in both the primary and secondary sectors, and providing a panel of speakers for non-specialist groups and general exhibition work on behalf of the Society. Part of the intention of the Education Committee was that it should bring members in to the Society at the junior stage who would graduate to become adult members once they came of age.

The Education Committee maintained steady progress over the next four years. Colin Fitzsimmons became the Exhibitions Officer in 1988, and at the end of the same year a successful New Year's day children's lecture on herpetology was held jointly with the Zoological Society of London at Regent's Park. This led to a number of joint meetings with the Young Friends of London Zoo at Regent's Park over the next few years.

The post of Education Officer was taken on by Colin Fitzsimmons in 1991, and from 1993, as an employee of the British Herpetological Society, was funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Trust. As a result, the Junior Section went from strength to strength. Membership increased to over 250, and eventually reached 459 by the end of December 1995. The name was changed from J Herps to Young Herpetologists' Club (YHC) in 1993, and editorship of the *Young Herpetologists' Newsletter*, published by the Education Committee, was taken on and given a new look by John Baker. Colin Fitzsimmons's post ran until 1996, and the Education Committee was solely represented on Council by the Chairman, Don Freeman.

Research Committee. A number of Society members are based in university departments and research establishments, and by the late 1980s the British Herpetological Society had become the logical forum for herpetological research in Britain. The proposal to form a Research Committee was approved in 1988. The first Chairman of the Research Committee was Professor Tim Halliday (Open University). The Committee's terms of reference were formulated in its first year, and it was hoped to provide a reservoir of scientific advice for the other Society Committees, and to organize meetings and symposia. It was intended that a dossier of researchers in Britain would also be produced.

A meeting of the Zoological Society of London organized by Tim Halliday on 12 June 1990, on the topic of *Behavioural Ecology of Newts and Salamanders*, tested interest within the scientific community, and was

well-attended. Other contributors at this meeting were Dr J. W. Arntzen (University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and Dr R. A. Griffiths (then based at North-East Surrey College of Technology).

The Inaugural meeting of the Research Committee, also organized by Tim Halliday, was held on Saturday, 5 December 1992, at Birkbeck College, London. Following an Introduction by the Society's President, Professor John Cloudsley-Thompson, the meeting was opened formally by the Earl of Cranbrook, former President of the Society (1981-1991) and Chairman of English Nature. At the end of the morning session of two papers, Michael Lambert made a presentation on behalf of the Society to Lord Cranbrook in appreciation of his contribution to herpetology in Britain. The day ended with a discussion led by Tim Halliday and Trevor Beebe - *Global Amphibian Declines: Real Phenomena or False Alarm?*

Tim Halliday resigned as Chairman in 1995, and was replaced by Clive Cummins (Institute of Terrestrial Ecology) who has maintained the all-day December Research Committee meetings at Birkbeck College. In April 1995, regular attendees of these meetings also contributed to an international symposium at the Zoological Society of London, *Venomous Snakes: Ecology, Evolution and Snakebite*, proceedings for which would be published as No. 70 of the *Symposia of the Zoological Society of London*.

REGIONAL GROUPS

The Society has always been aware that, for various reasons, its activities have a focus in southern Britain. As the national society, however, efforts have been made from the early days to cater for the interests of members in other parts of the country. This has not always been easy, particularly during the 1980s which saw a proliferation of independent local herpetological clubs, primarily interested in captive care. The role of the BHS regional groups has therefore been to cater for those with broad-based herpetological interests, encompassing captive breeding as well as field survey and conservation activities.

A request in *BHS Bulletin* for the establishment of regional groups in 1984 was seen by Rajan Paul, who talked to 26 Society members in the north-west region, and held a meeting to establish a group in May which attracted fifteen members. The programme for 1985 began with a visit to the Tropical House at Chester Zoo, courtesy of Keith Browne, Curator of Reptiles. Five meetings were held in the first year, setting the pattern for future years, and most successful was the first Reptile Rally, held at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Martin Mere, in July 1986. Also in 1986, through association with members of the Society's Conservation Committee, the Group became involved with digging natterjack ponds on Ainsdale Sand Dunes reserve. The position of Chairman was eventually taken up by Bob Worthington with Pat Wisniewski as North-west Representative.

The British Herpetological Society has been represented in Scotland for a little over ten years, and the initial intention of the Scottish Group was to organize meetings in Scotland so that members based there could meet and also benefit from the experiences of visiting speakers. Maintaining links with other herpetological groups in Scotland has resulted in a number of successful joint meetings. In 1988 and 1990, joint meetings were held with the Scottish Herpetological Society at Edinburgh Zoo; the first included Roger Thorpe and Wolfgang Wüster (University of Aberdeen) as speakers. In 1992, a joint symposium with the International Herpetological Society was held at the City Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, with talks by Chris Mattison and Mark O'Shea. The largest meeting to date was held in the Burrell Lecture Theatre, Burrell Collection, Glasgow, in 1994. Attended by over 120 people, it included a presentation by Quentin Bloxam of Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust. The Group has also been contacted for input to the Scottish Natural Heritage's Species Action Plan, which is helping to save vulnerable native Scottish species.

OTHER COUNCIL POSTS

Other posts on Council, created to fulfil particular functions on behalf of the Society, include the Conservation and Education Officers (already mentioned), and the Development and Trade Officers. As the first Development Officer, Brian Banks was responsible for finding ways of increasing membership and reducing expenditure; Mary Swan, his replacement, has organized yearly Herpetofauna Recorders Meetings, which have aroused much interest outside the Society. The Trade Officer (initially Legal Officer), has been concerned with legal aspects, especially those concerned with amphibians and reptiles in captivity, and was much involved with formulation of the Society's Policy on animals in captivity, trade and legislation.

THE CHANGING FACE OF HERPETOLOGY IN BRITAIN

During the Society's second 25 years, there have been some events that can be described as highlights. Transformation of the Society started in 1969 with the formation of the Conservation Committee, initiated by Keith Corbett. Described then in certain quarters as a "ginger group" within a Society primarily made up of members interested in keeping species in vivaria, the Conservation Committee brought the Society's attention to the endangered status of Britain's three rare species, which had been on the decline for some years.

Herpetology during the 1960s in Britain was at a generally low ebb, with few or no openings in the field professionally. To a degree, the British Herpetological Society could compensate for this lack, and enable academically trained enthusiasts to pursue their interest under its aegis. In strengthened state, the Society could also influence university departments, governmental

and other research organizations to include herpetology, in pure and applied forms, as a notable discipline forming part of, and yet distinct from zoology as a whole.

I believe that this academically based approach to conservation was in part a cause for resentment among certain members of the Society who, as amateurs themselves and not necessarily with biological training, also saw conservationists as a threat to their hobby of keeping species in captivity for aesthetic appreciation and personal enjoyment. Conflict inevitably arose within the Society, especially when externally the Conservation Committee became the butt of criticism from certain conservation and fauna preservationist quarters for association with a Society of members keeping wild-collected species in captivity. Perhaps a positive response to this on the part of the Society, after reflection on the implications and rationalization of keeping species in captivity, was the formation of the Captive Breeding Committee in 1976. The Captive Breeding Committee could usefully function by ensuring that there was a supply of amphibians and reptiles that could be kept successfully at home in vivaria.

To my mind, certain of those involved with fauna protection were extreme in their view, even intolerant and overstating the situation, and to some extent exaggerating the effects of collection on most species in the wild. It was an objection in principle, based partly on welfare rather than conservation issues, which also applied to commercial suppliers with a profit motive, rather than to individuals wanting to keep a few amphibians and reptiles in normal domestic circumstances.

Associated with conservation, and the use of live animals for display and educational purposes, especially in schools, education plainly had a part to play. The Society responded, and the scope of the Education Officer, already a member of the Conservation Committee, was extended. The Society's Junior Section was established in 1979 through the formation of the Education Committee. Conservation, captive breeding and education could thus run parallel, be integrated and complement each other for the benefit of members and not least the animals themselves.

Pickett's (1976) article in *BHS Newsletter* set the scene well, and laid down the case for tolerance and rational thought on the part of vivarium keeper and conservationist alike. Indeed, near the end of the article, he presents a case for the formation of the Society's Captive Breeding Committee. Beebe (1977) also requested views on a set of principles for keeping reptiles and amphibians in captivity, and stressed that the only thing the Conservation Committee was asking of Society members was acknowledgement that there is such a thing as irresponsible pet keeping (rare species fancying). Some years later in an educational context, Taylor (1987) saw that conservation and vivarium keeping could have a symbiotic relationship, and the Society's Policy on animals in captivity, trade and legislation

(*BHS Bulletin* No. 53, Autumn 1995) effectively bought an end to the whole discussion. Allaying suspicions between both interests, the strengthened Society could nurture and develop an interest in herpetology on a broader basis.

During the early 1980s, following the particularly successful European Symposium at Oxford, organized by John Coborn of Cotswold Wild Life Park (on behalf of the Association for the Study of Reptiles and Amphibians - ASRA), the Society broadened its outlook to consider herpetological activities outside Britain. Lambert (1983a) compiled a list of herpetological societies in Europe and the Commonwealth, together with a first series of reports on herpetological activity in British Universities (Lambert, 1983b) that reflected a substantially increased interest in herpetology in Britain. Cranbrook & Lambert (1983) also put together some ideas on the future role of the Society in the Commonwealth, in consideration of the richness and diversity of herpetofauna of tropical member states, which was followed by a series of articles on herpetology in different Commonwealth countries, mostly by Michael Lambert, in subsequent numbers of the *BHS Bulletin*.

Another highlight of the Society was the First Malcolm Smith Dinner, held on 16 December 1983 in the Peers' Dining Room of the House of Lords, Westminster, hosted by the Earl of Cranbrook, and during which he gave his Presidential Address. A major aim of the Society at this time was to gain the support of all those in the UK who counted themselves as professional herpetologists. Lord Cranbrook expressed a hope that all active scientists might wish to join the Society in order to give it support and make it genuinely representative of herpetology in this country. He exhorted existing members to encourage their colleagues to join. As an august social occasion, the Dinner was much enjoyed by participants, and a notice recording it appeared under 'Court & Social' of *The Times* the following day. Beside simply being a social event, it was hoped that the First Malcolm Smith Dinner would help to establish herpetology as a notable discipline in Britain, a status already enjoyed by such subjects as entomology and ornithology.

A possible outcome of the desire for the Society to reflect herpetology in Britain professionally was in its agreeing to co-host the First World Congress of Herpetology, which was held in September 1989 at the University of Kent at Canterbury. The Secretary-General of the Congress, Professor Kraig Adler (Cornell University, Ithaca, New York) - a long-standing BHS member - opted, with his casting vote, for Canterbury (there was a tie with Florence) as the Congress venue. The Congress Patron was His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, who accepted the invitation forwarded to him on behalf of the Congress Executive Committee by Lord Cranbrook. Ian Swingland was Conference Director. Professional herpetologists among Society members all became members of the National Executive involved with the Congress's organization.

Upon taking up the Chairmanship of English Nature in 1990, Lord Cranbrook resigned as President, having served the Society in this capacity since 1981. He had been involved with the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, which ratified the 1979 Berne Convention, during its bumpy course through Parliament. Britain's rare and threatened herpetofauna featured strongly in this bill. In transferring from Viscount Medway, Lord Cranbrook continued the Society membership of his father, the 4th Earl. Lord Cranbrook's period of office as President coincided with a time of change within the Society. The Society was guided through this period of unrest by his firm and positive leadership, and the confidence engendered was effectively expressed by a simultaneous near doubling of the Society membership to over 1000 by the end of 1989. One could perhaps say in herpetological terms, for the duration of the World Congress at least, that this country rose to become the crossroads between continental Europe, North America and the Commonwealth!

During the 1980s there were other highlights for herpetology in Britain. In 1983, a symposium entitled "The structure, development and evolution of reptiles", was organized by Mark Ferguson in honour of Angus Bellairs, on the occasion of the latter's retirement. This was held at the Zoological Society of London, jointly with the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland and the British Herpetological Society. The proceedings, edited by Professor Ferguson, constituted a Festschrift for Prof. Bellairs, and were published as No. 52 of the *Symposia of the Zoological Society of London* (1984). 1983 also saw the publication of Deryk Frazer's book in the New Naturalist Series (Frazer, 1983b), constituting a re-write of Malcolm Smith's earlier work.

For good or for bad, the last decade or so of the Society's history has seen a major surge of interest in keeping reptiles and amphibians in captivity. Certainly, what was once the rather genteel occupation of a few distinguished British naturalists has evolved into big business, with many species readily available in pet stores and garden centres. Indeed, one commentator has gone so far as to describe it as a 'craze', which in the long-term may do no good for herpetology as a sphere of interest (Keeling, 1992). Concomitant with this resurgence of interest has been the formation of numerous local herpetological clubs around the country. There is no doubt that people who would have once joined the British Herpetological Society now turn to their local group to further their interest. Intriguingly, however, membership of the Society has remained remarkably stable over the years. This suggests that there has been a shift in the society's membership, away from those simply interested in keeping vivaria to those with a wide range of interests including conservation, captive breeding, education and research.

CONCLUSION

And what of the Society's future? To some extent, I see the Society continuing to evolve in response to need. It is therefore difficult to anticipate the path this will take. Can the Society be reactive or proactive? I see consolidation as an ongoing process; indeed, after the First World Congress of Herpetology, there were certain signs of the Society being stretched, although members inside, and individuals outside, were able to respond well to the demands then made upon them. With such a heavy accent on the academic and professional aspects of herpetology at that time, the aspirations of vivarium keepers were a little muted, although care and breeding of species in captivity was a subject featured, and strongly supported, at the Congress. However, the process of consolidation following the Congress, under Trevor Beebee's carefully judged and effective chairmanship, was exceedingly successful, and I foresee the need for this to continue and be strengthened in the immediate future. The Society should not allow itself to be overridden by one specific interest as has been the case in the past.

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