

# The Natter Jack

March - April 2011

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NEWSLETTER OF THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## 64<sup>th</sup> BHS AGM Report

On the 26<sup>th</sup> March around 50 Society members and guests gathered at the ZSL meeting rooms in Regents Park for the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting. As previously, members arriving early for the meeting had the opportunity for a free visit to the London Zoo Reptile House.

The AGM has an important function in the operation of the Society and, as such, it's always pleasing when the meeting enjoys a respectable attendance from the membership. It's also an opportunity for Council members to see and meet people who have recently joined the Society – it was good to see several new members at this year's AGM.



THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY



64 Years in Herpetology  
Registered Charity No. 205666  
Website: <http://www.thebhs.org>





Records of the Society business conducted at the AGM are available in this issue of *The Natter-Jack*, so need not detain us here! But it's just worth pointing out that various Council members – including the Chairman and Treasurer – produce valuable and detailed reports for the meeting, and of course the meeting itself is organised by Trevor Rose, the BHS Secretary. Please do take time to read the reports when they're available on the website. It's YOUR Society.....

willing and able to attend the meetings on the Society's behalf. Council will update membership on this issue via either *The Natter-Jack* or website.

AGM attendees were treated to two excellent talks during the afternoon:

Professor John Davenport updated us on recent and (for my part) fascinating research on Leatherback turtles – in particular the shape and bulk changes that individual turtles undergo when going through periods of feasting and fasting. Significant size differences were

also noted between different Leatherback populations, after allowing for individual and seasonal variations. One outcome of the research was to validate the recorded weight of the largest Leatherback ever caught – the 916kg individual

*BHS Chairman Jon Cooté announces the winner of the photographic competition*



Some interesting and lively discussion was sparked by Mike Hine, who raised the issue of the developing EU Commission Strategy on Invasive Alien (non-native) Species and possible impacts to private and public collections. One of the conclusions was that the BHS should be represented if possible at relevant Defra meetings being held to develop the UK Government position on the Strategy. Of course, as ever, this is dependent on a qualified individual being

washed up in Wales in 1988 and now resident (stuffed!) in the Cardiff museum. Doubts had been cast on this weight by some people but the research undertaken by Professor Davenport and his team demonstrated beyond doubt that Leatherbacks are capable of reaching this kind of body mass.

Dr. Gerardo Garcia gave us an overview of the successes, difficulties and future plans of the project to save the mountain chicken – *Leptodactylus*



*fallax* – one of the world’s largest frogs. Many BHS members may be familiar with some of the work undertaken by a number of organisations and dedicated individuals in recent years to try and establish stable captive populations of this highly endangered species. Dr. Garcia updated us on recent reintroduction attempts and emphasised the need to integrate combined conservation strategies – both in the wild and in captivity – to hopefully deliver a successful outcome. Much has been learned about the species and breeding / conservation approaches; learning will continue as experience is further refined in the future.

We hope to add copies of both speakers’ presentations to the member’s

section of the website in the near future so that members who missed the meeting will be able to get at least a flavour of the talks.

The traditional BHS photo competition was held in the interval between the talks – with all attendees voting for their favourite photos from the considerable and high quality selection on offer. Kim LeBreuille also took the opportunity to present YHC member John Hancock with prizes for correctly identifying the cover photo on the YHC Newsletter.

All in all, a very worthwhile afternoon. If you haven’t yet attended an AGM – give it a go, you may be surprised! Hope to see you next year.

Contributed by Mark Hollowell

## **PROVISIONAL MINUTES OF THE 64<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**Date:** Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2011

**Venue:** Huxley Theatre, London Zoo, Regents Park, London.

**Chair:** Jon Coote

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Roger Avery, Trevor Beebee, Val Bradley, Bob Catchpole, John Cooper, Robert Jehlé, Chris Monk, Richard Parkinson, Adam Radovanovic, Terry Thatcher.

This AGM was quorate (26/423).

### **2. Minutes of the 63<sup>rd</sup> AGM**

The Minutes were circulated, approved and signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the 2010 63<sup>rd</sup> AGM.

### **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

### **4. Annual Reports**

4 i) The Chairman’s report for 2010 was circulated at the meeting.

4 ii) The Treasurer’s report (1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010) was circulated and a narrative was given by Michael Wise.



## 5. Election of Council for 2011–12

Council for 2011-12 was approved as given below, including five nominations for vacant posts.

(years served in current term of office given in brackets).

President	Prof. Trevor Beebee (5)
Chairman	Mr. Jon Coote (2)
Treasurer	Mr. Michael Wise (2)
Secretary	Mr. Trevor Rose (5)
Research Committee Chairman	Dr. Chris Gleed-Owen (1)
Education Committee Chairwoman	Ms. Kim Le Breuilly (co-opted)
Captive Breeding Committee Chairman	Dr. Simon Townson (1)
Conservation Officer	Mrs. Jan Clemons (1)
Herpetological Journal Editor	Dr. Robert Jehlé (2)
Herpetological Bulletin Editor	Mr. Todd Lewis (2)
NatterJack Editor	Ms. Mikaela Lock (co-opted)
Website Editor	Anne Braae (1)
Development Officer	Mr. Mark Hollowell (1)
Trade Monitoring Officer	Vacant
Meetings Organiser	Vacant
Scottish Group Representative	Mr. Frank Bowles (1)
North West Group Representative	Mr. Richard Parkinson (1)
Ordinary Member 1	Mr. David Willis (2)
Ordinary Member 2	Dr. Ian Stephen (co-opted)
Ordinary Member 3	Vacant

Members standing for continuation in their posts:

President	Prof. Trevor Beebee
Secretary	Mr. Trevor Rose

Nominees for vacant posts:

NatterJack Editor	Ms. Mikaela Lock
Trade Monitoring Officer	Mr. Robert Catchpole
Meetings Organiser	Mr. Simon Maddock
Ordinary Members (2 posts)	Dr. Angelo Pernetta
	Mr. Adam Radovanovic
	Dr. Ian Stephen

All Council nominees re-standing in post and those nominated un-opposed for vacant posts, specifically Ms. Mikaela Lock for NatterJack Editor, Mr. Robert Catchpole for Trade Monitoring Officer and Mr. Simon Maddock for Meetings Organiser were voted in to office by the membership.

As there were three nominations for the two vacant Ordinary Member posts, a ballot was held amongst the attending members by show of hands. Dr. Ian Stephen and Dr. Angelo Pernetta were duly elected into office.

## 6. 2012 Subscription Fees

In accordance with the Constitution, a review of subscription rates was undertaken at the previous Council meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2011 in preparation for the AGM. TR gave a brief account of the outcome of the review.

It was noted that fees had increased on 1st January 2011 as a result of a similar review 12 months previously. TR announced that the review of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2011 had shown that the recent increase had improved the nett income from subscriptions to offset the inevitable rises in printing and postage costs, which had been correctly predicted in 2010 and expected to increase further during 2011/12. As rates had recently risen and the forecast was that income from subscriptions would cover printing and postage costs for the foreseeable future, no further increases in subscriptions were deemed necessary for 2012 .

## 7. Any Other Business

- i) Michael Hine raised the subject of new legislation, due for implementation in 2012, regarding the importation of “invasive” species. MH noted that without opposition, this legislation would be in place by the end of 2012 and would affect many BHS members currently keeping certain species proposed for listing under the new legislation.

JC noted that the UK has the best representation possible with a dedicated team working on the legislation, although BHS is not directly involved in this. JC also noted we can only influence this issue if we participate in discussions.

MH offered delegates a copy of the relevant statements for those interested. Peter Curry proposed that BHS should send a representative to the forthcoming stakeholders meeting (hosted by DEFRA), to be held on 15<sup>th</sup> April. This was seconded by several members including Stephen Copley. JC noted that BHS is represented through its affiliation to FBH and the spokesman, Chris Newman. MH noted his intention to attend. PC also offered to attend; this was accepted by JC

**Action:** PC to report back to BHS members after attendance at the meeting.

The Chairman closed the AGM.



# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY FOR 2010

The Society is clearly benefiting from the efforts of both its new and existing Council members, as outlined in the numerous reports below. We have been through difficult times in recent years, however it is now clear that we will probably be back on target, particularly with regard to our publications, by the end of this year. We should all be very proud of our website, our window for the world. Social networks may well be equally important for us to consider in the near future. This year we hope to have more to report to members on reptile and amphibian trade issues. Perhaps the most important of these is currently the European Union's intentions to legislate for more control of captive species that have the potential to be harmfully invasive. Suggestions of a 'white' list of approved species, that could be kept, may well be considered far too draconian for many of our members. Most would prefer a 'black' list of species that are instead prohibited, which would be a more proportionate solution. This year should also see more meetings organised for the benefit of our members. This is an important function of the Society that has been sadly lacking now for many years.

Subscriptions to year end for 2010 show yet another fall, as some of our members find the need to reduce their outgoings, and others rationalise by switching from Full membership to Ordinary membership. Our subscription rate increase at the end of 2010 will no doubt affect these numbers again this year and it will be interesting to see to what extent our membership base changes as a result. Our core membership remains strong and we are all grateful for their continuing support and pleased to be able to serve their needs.

Membership as at 31st December 2010:

UK Full members	298	(343)
UK Ordinary members	98	(83)
UK Family members	15	(19)
UK Student members	21	(19)
YHC members	72	(85)
Overseas members	69	(77)
Life & Honorary members	18	(17)
Institutional members	141	(138)

(figures for 2009 given in brackets)

There were some significant improved activities within BHS during 2010. For the second year running, our editors produced five issues each of our main publications, the *Herpetological Journal* and *Herpetological Bulletin*. This continues to bring the publication of our periodicals nearer to cover date and we aim to be fully back on track by the end of 2011. We have also opted for an online mailing system which has considerably reduced the time between printing and delivery to members, as well as reducing the overall cost of postage incurred by the Society. Following an initiative by Dr. Robert Jehle, BHS collaborated with Laurenti-Verlag in the publication of the English version of the book, "*The Crested Newt – A dwindling pond-dweller*", securing sole distribution rights in the UK. This new book was finally published during February of 2011 and I am pleased to report that it is selling very well, with almost one third of the initial print run sold in the first six weeks.

We were most pleased to be able to award long-standing BHS member Prof. John Cooper with a Fellowship of the British Herpetological Society, for his considerable contribution to both the Society and to herpetology in general. Prof. Cooper is well



known for his conservation work in Africa and India and has contributed numerous articles to the Journal and Bulletin. He retired in 2010 and BHS Council felt this was a well-deserved and fitting tribute to his work spanning many years, both at home and abroad.

The Young Herpetologists Club was founded in 1980 by Vic Taylor and in 2010 the YHC celebrated its 30th year, an excellent achievement for the club. The Education Committee attended seven events in 2010, and we thank Kim Le Breuille and Richard Butler for their efforts promoting both the BHS and YHC. The YHC Newsletter has a competition based on the front cover illustration of each issue, with a series of questions relating to the reptile or amphibian depicted. The winners receive a copy of the cover photograph, a

certificate and a voucher or book. The only winner in 2010 was young herpetologist, John Hancock. Kim and Richard have undertaken to produce care sheets over the next 18 months for the Society; these will be published on the website with a download option.

BHS were also represented at a further three events with a table attended by Mark Hollowell, and at the Herp Worker's Meeting held this year in Cardiff. New promotional material in the form of display banners and other media have been designed and procured which considerably enhance the way our image is portrayed to the general public.

The annual Amersham meeting took place on Sunday 28th November 2010 and

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## AGM Photo Competition

This year's BHS AGM Photo Competition was again popular with almost thirty entries. The standard was high as always, and all participants should be congratulated for their efforts and thank you for taking the time to submit your great photos.

Photos were judged by the attending delegates and 1<sup>st</sup> prize went to Dereck Webster of St. Ives, Cambridgeshire, for his superb adder in bracken, taken in Glen Esk, Angus during 2010. Dereck receives a £125 voucher from Peregrine Livefoods.

Both runner-up prizes were scooped by Phyl King of Hereford for images of a leaf-tailed gecko (2<sup>nd</sup> prize) and Madagascan day gecko (3<sup>rd</sup> prize). Phyl wins vouchers of £75 and £50 respectively for her super photos.

BHS are once again very grateful to Tim Green and Dave Perry of Peregrine Livefoods, Ongar, for their continuing sponsorship of our photographic competition and donating this year's prizes. Find them at [www.peregrine-livefoods.co.uk](http://www.peregrine-livefoods.co.uk)

### Photos overleaf:

**Top : Winning entry - Adder in Bracken by Dereck Webster**

**Below left : 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize - Leaf-tailed gecko by Phyl King**

**Below right : 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize - Madagascan Day gecko by Phyl King**



**1st**

**Adder in Bracken,  
by Dereck Webster**



**2nd**

**Leaf-tailed Gecko,  
by Phyl King**



**3rd**

**Madagascan day Gecko,  
by Phyl King**



(continued from Page 7)

was a great success with the feedback all positive. A full house of 100 delegates was rewarded with lively talks from Dr Ian Stephen, Matthew Rendle and John Berry.

The Captive Breeding Committee funded Blue Iguana Recovery Programme, on Grand Cayman, continues. The final retreat design has been a great success. This is now in the production and deployment stage in the QEII Botanic Park and the Salina Reserve. Dr Simon Townson recently provided a written progress report on the project for the *NatterJack* (Jan 2010), and a full report has now been published in the *Herpetological Bulletin*, Issue No. 114. Essentially, the research and retreat production funded by this BHS project has resulted in a significant step forward for the survival of this species.

In September 2009 the Captive Breeding Committee funded an application from the Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology (UK) and Madagasikara Voakajy (Madagascar), on the conservation of the very rare Belandana Chameleon (*Furcifer belandanaensis*) from the SW of Madagascar. Dr Simon Townson has written an introductory article on the Belandana Chameleon project for the *NatterJack* (May-July 2010). During 2010 fieldworkers have spent considerable time surveying for these rare animals and found a new population in southern Madagascar, although the total number of animals recorded still remains very small. Prof Richard Griffiths (DICE) recently visited Madagascar to plan for the ongoing conservation and management of the Belandana Chameleon, including discussions on *ex-situ* (captive breeding) options.

The 2010 BHS field visit was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> May to rare reptile sites in Dorset. Over 20 BHS members were rewarded in the morning with sightings of smooth snakes, sand lizards, common lizards and slow worms. However the weather deteriorated by the afternoon but that did not prevent us from finding slow worms and adders under refugia.

Thanks must also go to Gary Powell, Dorset Field Officer for Amphibian & Reptile Conservation whose knowledge of the sites visited ensured our success. Seeing over 15 smooth snakes in two hours takes some beating!

The Conservation section of the BHS website has been overhauled and rewritten to reflect the recent changes including useful links to the ARG UK voluntary network and the changes to how the BHS Land Fund is to be used. The BHS Land Fund is now to be used in two ways; firstly to provide funds up to a maximum of £10,000 for purchasing sites with either rare, less widespread or excellent amphibian and/or reptile assemblages with a management plan in place. Sites are considered on their individual merits and the species concerned should have a local species action plan as part of the local biodiversity action plan. Secondly the Land Fund can give grants up to £1000 for practical conservation work such as pond creation, purchase of tools and materials for habitat management, preferably match funded.

The Research Committee approved two Student Grants in 2010, to BHS members Darryn Nash (MSc Biodiversity and Conservation, University of Leeds) and Simon Maddock (MZool, University of Wales, Bangor). We look forward to publishing the results of their studies in the Bulletin in due course.

The Joint Scientific Meeting was held in Bournemouth on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2010. The conference packed in nine speakers on varied subjects and was also used as the platform for announcing a new DICE/University of Kent and University of Sussex collaborative project to improve reptile and amphibian survey protocols for the national volunteer-based NARRS project coordinated by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust.

The Research Committee is also happy to report that the Society has contributed £1000 towards a research project to investigate the potential susceptibility of English adder populations to inbreeding



depression. Many fieldworkers are reporting year-on-year declines in adder populations, and genetic bottle-necking is postulated as one of the problems that small, increasingly-isolated populations could face. The project involves the Institute of Zoology, the University of Oxford, and Natural England. BHS Council agreed to contribute funds from the Research Committee, Conservation and general Society accounts, to fund the laboratory analysis aspects of the project.

In Scotland, our representative Frank Bowles expresses concern for the loss of habitat for the installation of wind farms and the clearance of large areas of uplands - ideal reptile habitats - to accommodate already large numbers of sheep. Three Grass Snake records from a seemingly reliable source (Dumfries & Galloway ARG) from Langholm in Dumfriesshire may indicate the effects of climate change and an expansion of the species' range further north.

Our flagship publication, the Herpetological Journal continues with its fine quality. All 2010 issues (volume 20) have been published and mailed, a significant step forward in regaining the publication schedule. In 2010 102 manuscripts were received; around a two-fold increase compared to previous years (2006-2009). Two new Associate Editors (Anthony Herrel, Natural History Museum Paris, and Simon Loader, University of Basle) were appointed; the collaboration with all four current Associate Editors works extremely well. The current ISI impact factor of the Herpetological Journal is 0.68, a slight decrease from the previous year (0.76); we hope this will improve as the Journal is published closer to cover date.

The Herpetological Bulletin also maintains high quality of content and continues to attract a good level of submissions, which are at an all-time high. Editor Todd Lewis is doing a sterling job despite his new, very busy, and very distant posting to Costa Rica. Todd would welcome feedback on any aspect of the Bulletin in pursuit of continuous improvement.

Anne Braae and Joe Kellard maintain our most important resource, the BHS Website. Unsurprisingly this is proving to be the main source of new membership applications and provides our portal to the world about our activities. We encourage comments on the website from members and always hope to accommodate requests for improvement.

We continue to successfully meet the challenges of running the Society for the benefit of both the members and the creatures that enthral us. Although we have suffered somewhat, along with many others, by the economic downturn, our Society does continue to display a robust need for the services that we deliver to the membership. All the signs are that we shall continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Most of all we should appreciate the sterling work done for us by our secretary Trevor Rose. In almost all respects this annual report is more his than it is ever mine!

**JON COOTE**  
BHS Chairman

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## **Membership subscriptions: Note from the Secretary**

As members will be aware, our subscriptions increased on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011. I would like to bring to the attention of members who pay by Bank Order that some payments have been received short, i.e. at the old rate. This is due in some cases to members failing to update their Bank Order to BHS, and in others to banks not processing the new Bank Order forms in time for the change. It would be appreciated if anyone paying by Bank Order could check the rate that they have paid to BHS for 2011, and submit any shortfall in payments. All subscriptions have been graced for the time being and I will be writing to those affected in due course.

**Trevor Rose, BHS Secretary**



## Local ARG Prevents Unnecessary Damage to Lizard Habitat

A new development north of the coastal town of Montrose threatened the lives of a common lizard colony.

The cycle path, linking Montrose town to Northwater viaduct cuts through prime common lizard habitat, one of the few remaining lowland populations of the species in Angus.

Work had already started near to the viaduct when local ARG Friends of Angus Herpetofauna noticed that construction worker's storage units had been placed on the Kinnaber Moor section of the planned cycle path. FAH contacted the local Council's Road's Department and arranged to meet the engineer in charge of the works. Plans revealed the proposed route for the cycle path was the line of an old railway, a raised embankment now covered in gorse scrub, long since abandoned and home to hundreds of common lizards.

As common lizards are protected against intentional killing and injuring, the Council were obliged to accommodate mitigation measures. The use of refugia was discussed as was the possibility of monitoring for lizard movements when the

excavators move in. However, there was no mention of delaying the project to allow for mitigation to take place over a suitable period of time and the contractors were due to begin clearing the gorse in April.

On the basis that the Council were unwilling to change their schedule or employ ecological professionals to undertake the work, FAH arranged for refugia to be laid out and immediately set about monitoring the site on a daily basis in search of the resident lizards. A general plea for volunteers was sent out and over 50 respondents were enlisted.

Kinnaber Moor is a large site of around 200 hectares, with populations of common lizards throughout. The proposed cycle path only affects a narrow tract of habitat across the moor, but the old railway embankment it is one of the most important features in the area.

"The resident lizards use the embankment as a hibernaculum and are just beginning to emerge at this time of year", said an FAH spokesman. "They will begin to disperse into the surrounding rank grass vegetation once it has grown on later in the year, but for now they are basking, feeding and preparing for courtship on and around the embankment. This is a very important feature on the landscape and the development is putting them at considerable risk".

He continued, "Common lizards are numerous in the Glens and foothills of the nearby Cairngorms, but are fragmented and rare on the





lowlands and coastal areas. This population is one of only four that are known to FAH in Angus, are therefore very precious, and need our protection”.

Over the next few weeks, FAH continued to lobby the Council and the local press added pressure to the plight of the lizards. Discussions with the Roads Department resulted in the route of the cycle path being altered slightly to preserve half of the habitat which would otherwise have been destroyed. FAH were also permitted to monitor the excavation process and advised contractors to place the spoils to create further habitat for the future.

Angus Council are also considering the installation of an information notice for passers-by and users of the new path to bring to their attention the presence of the lizards and to acknowledge the effort that went into preserving them.

“All in all, our efforts have been rewarded with very few or possibly no lizard deaths, due in the main to the vigilance of volunteers and monitoring of refugia, modified route of the path (biased westward) which reduced the gorse cutting and habitat destruction by 50%, and the careful cutting of topsoil and placement of spoils by the contractor in the final phase,” the FAH spokesman said. “However, we are disappointed that Angus Council will not acknowledge that they have failed to implement current legislation correctly or instigated the procedures necessary in the planning stage to identify this site as a habitat for protected species, and that without our intervention a wildlife crime would have been committed. Nor do they plan to review their internal procedures or policies to ensure that such a scenario will not arise again”. ❖

## **EXPERTS TO PERFORM HEALTH CHECKS ON ENGLANDS ONLY VENOMOUS SNAKE**

Snake experts from Natural England, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Oxford University have teamed up to perform a vital health check on Britain’s only venomous snake, the adder, following worrying declines.

With its iconic zig-zag markings, the adder was once a common sight in large parts of the British countryside. But in the last decade it has slipped into decline, with surveys suggesting a third of remaining adder populations may comprise fewer than ten adults.

Scientists believe this is down to the disappearance, degradation and fragmentation of habitat, resulting in smaller and more isolated populations of this enigmatic reptile.

It is feared that if these smaller populations, particularly in the English Midlands, are not able to maintain a healthy level of genetic diversity, their resilience to disease will be reduced and a concentration of genetic defects could occur, leading to local extinctions.

For the first time, a team of snake experts are heading into the undergrowth to obtain genetic samples from adders. This simple, harmless test involves taking a DNA swab, which can be used to determine current levels of genetic diversity.

Whilst the scientific procedure is risk-free for the snakes, the experts will be taking every safety precaution necessary to avoid being bitten – this is not something that should be tried at home.

Dr Trent Garner, Senior Research Fellow at ZSL’s Institute of Zoology said: “Genetic diversity has been shown to be a key component for successful adder populations in Sweden and Hungary, but has yet to be studied in the UK. Our goal is to provide the first insights into how population size and isolation may be related to genetic diversity of the UK’s adders.” ❖ *ARG Today*



## ARG's BARMY Swabbing Army

An army of volunteers will be wading into ponds across the UK this spring to map the spread of a killer amphibian fungus.

Scientists from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) are working with 400 volunteers recruited by Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG-UK) to swab more than 6,000 amphibians for the presence of chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*).

Teams of volunteers will be heading out after dark between April and June to swab amphibians in more than 200 ponds across the UK. The Defra-funded survey will include 100 more sites than the last chytrid survey in 2008, with volunteers in action in Northern Ireland for the first time.

In addition to sampling common toads, natterjack toads and the UK's three species of native newt, volunteers will also be swabbing non-native species such as the alpine newt and marsh frog. ZSL scientists are targeting new species and covering more locations in a bid to create a more complete picture of the UK's chytrid infection.

Chytrid fungus causes the disease chytridiomycosis, which results in the

thickening of amphibian skin and prevents the transfer of vital salts across it. Scientists are now racing against time to understand how the deadly disease is spread and which species are most at risk.

"Chytrid has had devastating effects on amphibian populations across the globe, even causing some species to become extinct. It is essential that we understand where the fungus occurs in the UK so that we can identify the toads and newts that are under threat from succumbing to the disease," said Freya Smith, scientific coordinator of the survey at ZSL.

Jonathan Cranfield, vice-chair of ARG-UK said: "The volunteers play a critical role in helping us to understand what is happening in our ponds. Ensuring the future of our best-loved amphibians would not be possible without the dedication and enthusiasm of the volunteer network."

The volunteers will collect samples of DNA from 30 amphibians at each site by swabbing the surface of their skin. The samples will then be analysed in laboratories at ZSL to check for the presence of chytrid fungus. ❖

*BHS Source: ARG Today*

## Happy Birthday Frank !

Our esteemed Scottish Representative, Frank Bowles, celebrated his 80th birthday on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2011.

Frank has been an active member in Scotland for many years now and continues to participate whenever the opportunity arises, despite being burdened by arthritis which has prevented him from some of the more practical tasks of late, including hunting for reptiles in the Angus Glens. However, he still travels 500 miles each way to attend BHS Council meetings in London.

We wish you all the best Frank and long may your herpetological escapades continue!





## SKYE IS A SANCTUARY FOR SMUGGLED SNAKES

You'd expect to find eagles on Skye, alongside majestic red deer and maybe the occasional elusive otter.

But what about snakes, lizards, tortoises and even tropical frogs? Unlikely as it seems, the island is home to dozens of them. They live at Skye Serpentarium - a reptile refuge and education centre in Broadford run by husband and wife team Catherine and Alex Shearer.

Together, they've helped save over 600 abandoned or rescued reptiles and amphibians many of them endangered creatures smuggled into the country illegally.

Catherine and Alex opened the centre 20 years ago after moving to Skye from Falkirk. Originally it was intended as a home for their extensive reptile collection - it became a rescue centre quite by accident. In fact, even the couple's own collection started by accident - the day they bought their first snake, they'd actually set out to get a three-piece suite!

Shopping in Glasgow, they took shelter from the rain in the doorway of a pet shop. Inside they noticed they were selling snakes and Catherine admits she was instantly smitten. She parted with £25 even though the shopkeeper admitted he didn't know which breed the snake was.

"I'd never recommend buying an animal on

a whim but I knew we could give the snake a good home - we both love animals and had kept many pets".

Catherine's research revealed she was the owner of a non-venomous King snake. She devoured book after book on snakes and other reptiles as her interest grew. Less than a year later, the former nursing sister had amassed a total of 46 snakes!

When the couple moved to Skye, they leased an old water mill they thought would be ideal to house and show their collection. Shortly after opening, the serpentarium took in its first rescued snake.

Catherine and Alex also begun breeding reptiles with amazing success - their centre is the first in the country to breed many rare species of snake and tortoise. The centre's reputation spread and now even the HMRC call her for advice. Catherine said "One day we got a call from Heathrow. They wondered if we'd be interested in taking a load of snakes they'd confiscated from a smuggler. Now we are so successful in getting some rare animals to breed - like the pancake tortoise - that customs call us before internationally renowned places like London and Edinburgh Zoo".

"The illegal trade in animals is second only to drugs. We're just happy to be able to help save some of the creatures involved". ❖

### Upcoming BHS Meetings

#### 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011 British Herpetological Society SUMMER MEETING

To be held in the afternoon at Huxley Theatre, London Zoo, Regent's Park. Details of the meeting to be advised. Range of speakers and a chance to meet other BHS members. It would be helpful if you could confirm your likely attendance to [development@thebhs.org](mailto:development@thebhs.org) by 30<sup>th</sup> June.

Correspondence for **The Natter Jack** should be sent to Trevor Rose at the following address:

11 Strathmore Place, Montrose, Angus, DD10 8LQ. Alternatively e-mail: [natterjack@thebhs.org](mailto:natterjack@thebhs.org)

All other correspondence, including membership enquiries and subscriptions, should be sent to:

The British Herpetological Society, c/o The Zoological Society of London, Regents Park, London, NW1 4RY.



# Book Review

## The Private Life of Adders

by Roger McPhail

Rarely these days am I motivated to pick up a book and read it fully from cover to cover. How pleased I was then to come across this brilliant little book with the striking front cover, all about what has recently become my favourite reptile species.

*The Private Life of Adders* is enthusiastically written and superbly illustrated by Roger McPhail. The text is mercifully unscientific for the most part, instead being quaintly written in the first person with eloquent and at times poetic grammar. The passion the author has for his subject is eminently clear from beginning to end and has to be admired.

It would not escape one's notice that the quantity and quality of photographs alone make this publication well worth the cover price, and anyone with an interest in adders could not browse this book without admiring the depth of the adder's ecology and habits captured by the author. All conceivable aspects are covered by 163 colour plates, with great photographic skill, including feeding (and moment of strike), sloughing, courtship, combat, mating and birth, to name a few.

That is not to say that the text itself is not worthy of praise. Fifteen chapters accompany the photography and include

a fascinating account of how the adder became so-named, and some interesting facts regarding breeding size, age and frequency.

The book rounds off, somewhat unnecessarily, with contributions from eminent members of the British herpetological community today. These essays, covering head markings, habitat management, translocation and decline make valuable comment on the status, welfare and conservation of the adder but I felt were a little misplaced in this book. After reading over ninety pages of Roger's wonderfully worded work, I found the final thirty pages or so rather an anti-climax, but nonetheless appreciate the comments that they make are of value.

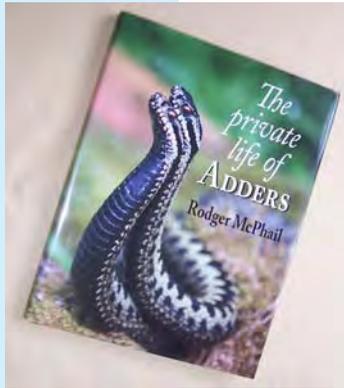
This book must be amongst the best in its subject matter and is surely a necessary addition to the bookshelf of anyone with an interest in our most iconic British species. For less than £15 this book truly entertains and is highly recommended. There can be few better ways to spend such a meagre amount of money. ❖

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Reviewed by Trevor Rose



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