Newsletter of the British Herpetological Society

Established 1947

British Chelonia Group Spring Symposium Chelonia: Far and Near

On Saturday 16th March 2019, chelonian fans gathered at The Open University in Milton Keynes. On arrival, attendees were met with an array of stands and stalls including preserved specimens, books, feed items, trinkets and souvenirs. A student from the Royal Veterinary College was surveying guests as part of their dissertation research which was refreshing to see the initiative taken to tap into such a resource of knowledge.

Henny Fenwick, the chairperson for The British Chelonia Group, orchestrated the event by introducing and organising both speakers and attendees. The first lecture was by Professor John Cooper and Margaret Cooper who told of their travels and work in Africa over the years. They talked about how they used to be more involved in veterinary work in previous years on their travels but due to the increase in more experienced people they now focus more on the 'higher standards of management'. They talked of the provision of hides and housing and the lack of funds where organisations were keeping animals. Johns particular focus was regarding disease associated management such as wooden feed trays and water pools drying up causing bacteria to grow and affect animal health. If anything, it was clear how resourceful they were in using simple, cheap instruments in order to enable better care and husbandry of the animals. John threw simple blue plastic plates into the crowd like frisbies for attendees to examine. These plain plastic plates (similar to picnic plates) were a simple solution to the issues faced regarding water provision to the animals. The humorous and witty stories that accompanied this talk were



wonderful and gave life to the lecture showing the clear enjoyment they have in travelling and assisting keepers. The story of transportation of the plates showed how difficult it can be to get simple resources out to people who need them in these locations. Transporting these plates up the coast of Mombasa through to Malindi involved Tuk Tuks, public transport, couriers, break downs and payment to rescuers in soda. John also gave an excellent example of the difference in approaches to cultural situations. When obtaining permits, he found that the best approach is to attend in person and to dress smartly (wear a tie and carry a walking stick). When visiting the Director General, it is very busy and someone such as John certainly stood out in the crowd. He would take business



cards and stand with a large envelope which altogether simple but effective housing provision that could aid in gained him enough attention to be seen. His take home message from this was, 'know the system'. In addition to this they covered the valuable work they do with the up and coming veterinary students at the Nairobi Snake Park. This involves a half day training session where the local vet students discuss wound healing and lesions on snakes allowing the students to test their knowledge. The work that John and Margaret carry out is inspiring as this is only a brief overview of the work they do involving and helping local communities.

North Somerset Reptile Rescue. Sonya gave an in depth talk on reproductive disease in chelonia with clear, graphstasis; dystocia and prolapses. She covered the signs and symptoms of these and explained how they commonly relate to husbandry issues such as poor diet, lighting and housing. Donna Stocking and Sarah Pellett followed by linking in to this and provided a further talk on captive tortoises and the issues they face. They explained how husbandry and nutrition is still poorly understood and current knowledge is not applied. There are still owners feeding dog food, lettuce, tomatoes and cucumber to their animals. Issues regarding the correct calcium: phosphorus ratio in diets leads to metabolic bone disease and hypocalcaemia. Donna talked about pyramiding and how humidity is a major factor in this occurring and that shell overgrowth in species such as sulcata and leopard tortoises is also an issue due to sitting on heat mats. Sadly, trauma is still a cause to be concerned about. Tortoises are injured due to dog bites, strimmers, being dropped, ferret bites and these types of wounds are ridden with bacteria



which does not bode well for the injured animal and their treatment. The audience was shown several examples of enclosures that can provide space, food and a natural approach to keeping. Outside wild grown areas in the back garden with greenhouses and safe walls around the perimeter gave everyone food for thought regarding the

better tortoise health.

After lunch, the CPD attendees at the conference were certainly taken off guard by the next 'presentation'. This was organised by John and Margaret Cooper in a role play style. Attendees were invited on stage and asked to choose a hat from a prop box. The scene was set that we were part of veterinary surgery, each with various roles e.g. vets, receptionist and clients. Toy animals were provided and attendees acted out scenarios such as the pet owner approaching the vet with a sick animal to ask for The next lecture was by Dr Sonya Miles from Bristol help. The aim of this was to see what attendees had gained from the talks at the conference so far to then apply them in this somewhat humorous and fun scenario. It ic images to illustrate some of the most common issues was evident that much knowledge had been gained from seen by vets. Some of these covered included: Follicular the talks and the audience joined in making it a fun ses-

> The afternoon session involved a talk from Dr Martin Stelfox discussing the issues surrounding fishing gear and Olive Ridley turtles in the Maldives. Often fishermen lose their gear when out fishing and it ends up floating in the water accumulating animals. Smaller creatures are collecting in the netting followed by larger animals trying to eat the smaller animals. This 'ghost gear' often ends up entangling turtles as, other than food, the turtles use this



type of raft to sit on to bask in the sun. In turn they get caught in the gear and die due to lack of oxygen if held under the water and not able to swim free. Martin questioned whether there was a correlation between ghost net turtles and non-ghost net turtles. He collaborated with other researchers and collected DNA samples to look further into this. His talk certainly brought awareness of the issue regarding 'ghost gear' and pollution effects on animals. Lastly, Tim McCormack from the Asian Turtle Program discussed the valuable and essential work being carried out regarding rescue and trade issues in Vietnam featured in previous articles. A great event with a broad spectrum of topics covered making it a valuable event to attend for any keeper or enthusiast of chelonian species.

Written by Suzie Simpson



BHS Annual General Meeting Spring 2019 Hadlow College

Another great meeting where both newcomers and members could meet to listen to reptile experts talking about their work. This event certainly brought a crowd to the college of which it was great to catch up with friendly faces and chat to new ones too.

Paul and Maggie Coleman, joined us to talk about their amazing work that they carry out at Munster Zoo. They are involved in breeding and rearing of Cuora spp. And were able to provide a wonderful amount of information regarding their specialism. Since the early 2000's they have with their regional Chelonian specialist group; three counties tortoise group, have been visiting the Asian turtle breeding centre at Munster Zoo, in central Germany. Raising many £thousands over the years for this internationally renowned conservation project.

Twice a year, in Birmingham and Cheltenham, they hold local health checks for the tortoise keeping community and have established a great reputation for supporting the community and this is reflected in gratitude by donations given to their conservation projects in Germany.

The work, of Elmar Meier and his wife Ingrid whom started life as private keepers of Chelonia, were asked by the Alt Wetter Zoo in Munster, to set up a dedicated breeding centre for Endangered Asian fresh water turtles in 1999. The new centre built at the entrance of the Zoo, was opened in 2004 and since that time, Paul Coleman, his wife Maggie, along with colleagues here in the UK have been making twice yearly visits to Germany.



Photo above: Four Zhou's Box turtles $\it Cuora\ zhouii$ captive bred at Munster by Elmar Meier in 2004 representing 20% of the population at that time

We were also joined by Isobel Grefen and Markus Baur, from Auffangstation fur Reptilien who gave a wonderful talk on the running and success of their reptile rehabilitation centre in Munich, Germany. Both Qualified Veterinarians, they have spent the last twenty years establishing a successful operation based at the campus of Munich University. They gave a great



insight into the day to day running and the issues that arrive in this kind of work. Markus, who heads up the centre, takes part in the medical care that the animals receive at the project. It was evident, that he could've talked for hours regarding this and we would certainly like to see him talk more in the future.

This presentation, has particular relevance to the recently incorporated National Centre for Reptile Welfare (NCRW), based at Hadlow, near Tonbridge Kent. The UK's first centre of this type.

Jan Clemons (BHS Conservation Officer), gave a talk on the recent trip that she took the BHS members on to Madagascar. She was able to share a plethora of photos from the trip and talk about the many experiences had. There were many photos from various people in the group showcasing the extraordinary number of species and how beautiful they are. You can see more in future issues.

We had our previous president, Dr Richard Griffiths, stand down from council after many years of amazing contributions to the society. And our new president was nominated and elected, Dr Gerardo Garcia, from Chester Zoo. We are thrilled to continue through to 2020 with a wonderful council who are striving to make the BHS the best it can be for our members. Please do join if you do not have a membership as there are multiple benefits to being a member of the society.

Written by Suzie Simpson and Paul Eversfield.





BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY FIELD TRIP TO MADAGASCAR

29 October – 10 November 2018

Jan Clemons, BHS Conservation Officer

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Over the past 20 years the BHS has organised field trips for BHS members to observe rare reptiles (sand lizard, smooth snake) and amphibian species (natterjack toad) to reserves in Dorset, Surrey and the Sefton coast. We have also visited the island of Jersey on three occasions to observe wall lizards, green lizards and the agile frog which are not native to the UK.

In 2017, I decided to investigate the possibility of organising a trip to Madagascar after discussions with friends and colleagues in the herpetological world who had visited the island not only for leisure but also for scientific investigation and research.

So why go to Madagascar?

• It's the oldest island in the world and has been isolated for

65 million years so it's natural history is unique.

- There is an amazing level of biodiversity it's often called the 'Eighth Continent'.
- It has a very high level of endemism which is typical of an island.
- Almost 400 reptile species and more than 500 amphibian species have been described. There are many more species that need to be formally classified and 'new' ones being discovered.
- Approximately 90% of these are endemic
- Many of these herpetofauna species are listed as endangered because of habitat loss and fragmentation and illegal





practices such as the illegal pet trade and poaching.

My investigations put me in contact with a travel company called Tailor Made Africa (TMA) who specialise in bespoke tours. Between us we decided on an itinerary, the logistics, specialist guides needed and a timeframe so conditions would The National Park is mostly primary forest and includes severbe optimal for observing the herpetofauna. The field trip was advertised on the BHS website with an accompanying interactive web resource which resulted in ten BHS members signing (Nicky), who has worked with CITES and proved to be an outup for the trip. Madagascar is a challenging country to travel standing field herpetologist and professional photographer. round as the infrastructure is poor and it takes a long time to We were also fortunate in having local guides whose get anywhere, unless you fly around which becomes expen- knowledge of the local flora and fauna was second to none. sive.

tologist to accompany us on the field trip and local guides are nocturnal. whose knowledge of the local flora and fauna would be invaluable.

Phase 1 - Andasibe - Mantadia National Park

Despite only being 150km east of the capital Antananaviro it took us a long time by minibus to get to the park. The journey was an eye-opener due mainly to the extent of habitat degradation. The natural habitat has been replaced by rice fields

and stands of eucalyptus which are coppiced for charcoal fuel. Not many native species have adapted to this new habitat and we only saw a few Phelsuma species when we stopped off for rest breaks en route.

al independently managed reserves. We were fortunate to be accompanied for the whole trip by 'Ny Aina Rakotondrazafy

We spent the next few days exploring several areas within this Consequently it was decided to have a two phase expedition reserve complex with walks in the most mornings, afternoons which fitted in with the time we had available. TMA's in- and evenings. We soon picked up the skills needed to see hercountry partner Madagascar Classic Collection fine- tuned the petofauna and on the whole it was easier to see the amphibilogistics and were tasked with hiring a Malagasy field herpe- an species, especially during the night walks as a lot of species

> Amphibians are not easy to spot during the dry season which is one of the reasons we went at the end of the wet season. My favourites were from one of the largest genera, the bright eyed frogs (Boophis spp). They are typical nocturnal tree frogs with large eyes and tips on their toes, but identification is difficult as there are lots of colour variants. There are still a lot of amphibian species that need to be formally classified which









sent.

Reptile species are also numerous and some of the lizards are masters of camouflage. The first prize goes to the Mossy leaftailed gecko (Uroplatus sikora). Some of us walked straight past it which resulted in looking at other tree trunks to see if we could spot others. Geckos seemed to be everywhere in Madagascar so a stroll around the hotel gardens always resulted in seeing lots of geckos such as (Phelsuma spp). We also saw a lot of chameleons especially during the night walks when they sleep on low branches.

Most chameleons can be divided into two genera Furcifer and Calumma, which are hard to separate in the field. Furcifer are generally more widespread and better adapted to degraded habitat and Calumma only in the east and north forests. Both have with a range of sizes from 4cm to 70cm, some are impressive colour changers whilst others have males with amazing head structures. Snakes were also numerous and on our first walk at Andasibe we observed tree boas (Sanzinia madagascariensis) lying in the undergrowth.



Sanzinia madagascarensis. Photo by Steve Richards.

Other highlights of our visit to Andasibe - Mantadia National Park included a visit to the Amphibian Survival Assurance Centre that is a successful breeding centre for critically endangered local species such as the golden and yellow mantilla frogs (Mantella spp) and the marbled rain frog (Scaphiophryne marmorata). Lemurs were a bonus and we saw lots of them including the Indri (Indri indri) with its plaintiff call, the black and white ruffed lemur (Varecia varieste) and the diadem Sifkada (Propithecus diadema). The nocturnal Mouse lemur (Microcebus sainteluclei) and a lowland streaked Tenrec (Hemicentetes semispinosus) were also seen during the nightwalks.

On the drive back to Antananarivo we stopped off at the Peyrieras Nature Farm also known as Mandraka Reptile Farm, a

makes you realise the sheer biodiversity of amphibians pre- rather run down privately owned zoo albeit with a large and varied collection of herpetofauna. This provided an opportunity to photograph a number of species many of which were not



Blommersia blommersae. Photo by Steve Richards.

indigenous to the eastern side of Madagascar. Species included the Madagascar Leaf Nosed Snake Langaha madagascariensis) an array of chameleons such as the impressive Panther Chameleon (Furcifer pardalis) and Wills Chameleon (Furcifer willsii) as well Tomato Frog (Dyscophus antongilii), Golden Mantella Mantella aurantiaca and the Madagascar Rain Frog. The leaf chameleons (Brookesia spp) were also amazing and as they will only grow to 3cm in length they are also known as dwarf lizards.

Phase 2 - Manafiafy

We returned to Antananaviro and then flew to Tolanaro (formerly Fort Dauphin) on the south east side of the island' Here we got into three 4WD vehicles for the deceptively long journey to Manafiafy which was an adventure by itself, avoiding potholes, making detours as the road disappeared, driving through the middle of villages and fording rivers for over 4 hours. We were rewarded with very comfortable accommodation located by a secluded beach with plenty of wildlife in the vicinity such as the Dumeril's ground boa (Acrantophis dumerili) and the rare Antanosy Day gecko (Phelsuma antanosy) which are only found at two locations in this part of Madagascar. There was even a resident family of collared brown lemurs (Eulemur collaris) and a tree boa that took up residence in the kitchen area.

Day and night walks resumed and we not only found species we'd already seen further north at Andasibe but new ones just found in the south east of the island. On an afternoon boat trip the mangroves we observed a giant plated lizard (Zonosaurus maximus) basking on a low branch. Our final night walk revealed both an adult and immature Madagascar Cateyed Snake (Madagascarophis colubrinus) and two interesting





species of frog; Boulenger's Climbing Frog (*Anodonthyla boulengeri*) and the Moramanga Madagascar Frog (*Bolmmersia blommersae*).

Herpetofauna species seen

Despite having knowledgeable Malagasy guides and field guides (see references) there were always some species that we couldn't identify straight away with any certainty, so the photos taken in the field by Nicky where examined on the computer screen back at base. Some members made detailed field notes and also had taken photos and as a result of this collaboration a species list of 77 herpetofauna species observed and identified was created for both Andasibe and Manafiafy (see appendix).

The list was compiled by Jon Webster using his detailed field notes and matched with the photographs taken by Nicky and some of the amphibians with Steve Richards an amphibian biologist who was also on the trip. After our return to the UK there were numerous emails between Jon, Nicky and Steve to validate that the list was as complete and correct.

However the list does provide a useful guide on the herpetofauna species found in the Andasibe and Manafiafy areas. The list is matched by close up high resolution photographs for each species, some of which are included in this article

In conclusion I would recommend a visit to Madagascar not











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only to herpetologists but to anyone who is interested in the Andry Matalan 'Ny Aina Rakotondrazafy (Nicky) natural world. The diversity is remarkable and it is possible to Steve Richards see evolution and niche differentiation in action. In pristine habitat wherever you look there is a life from exotic orchids, fabulous birds, to giraffe necked weevils, sinister spiders, colourful butterflies. It would take ages to explore Madagascar and its different ecosystems properly.

Sadly Madagascar has a fast growing population (26.2 million and growing) and day by day more land is needed for agriculture, fuel and grazing. There are over 40 registered mines in Madagascar and the potential for more. The natural ecosystems are losing ground, becoming more fragmented and isolated, consequently increasing the number of species that are becoming endangered. Ecotourism and specialist tours such as ours not only brings money into the economy but leads to the employment of local people as field guides breaking the circle References/Resources of poverty as they rely on the visitor's tips.

Undoubtedly, Madagascar is one of the best places in the (2007) by Frank Glaw and Miguel Vences world to observe such diversity and density of herpetofauna and other amazing wildlife. It is a very special place.

Thanks to:

Photographs

Species Verification

Andry Matalan 'Ny Aina Rakotondrazafy (Nicky) Steve Richards Jon Webster

Travel Consultants

Tailor Made Africa Madagascar Classic Collection

BHS Team

Jan Clemons, Jon Webster, Richard Calff, Barry Kemp, Val Bradley, Martin & Alison Sics, Chris & Jackie Burton, Steve & Lisa Richards

A field guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar

Wildlife of Madagascar - Wild Guides by Ken Behrens and Keith Barnes (herpetology section good but not all species seen were shown



Appendix: List of amphibians and reptiles observed in Andasibe and Manafiafy

ID	Class	Genus	Species	Common Name	Andasibe	Manafiafy
1	Α	Aglyptodactylus	madagascariensis	Madagascar Jumping Frog	1	1
2	Α	Anodonthyla	sp		1	
3	Α	Anodonthyla	boulengeri	Boulenger's Climbing Frog		1
				Moramanga Madagascar		
4	Α	Blommersia	blommersae	Frog	1	1
5	Α	Boophis	viridis	Green Bright-eyed Frog	1	
6	Α	Boophis	botae	Red-backed Bright-eyed Frog	1	
7	Α	Boophis	pyrrhus	Red Bright-eyed Frog	1	
8	А	Boophis	madagascariensis	Madagascar Bright-eyed	1	
9	А	Boophis	albilabris	White-lipped Bright-eyed	1	
10	Α	Boophis	guibei	Warty Bright-eyed Frog	1	
11	Α	Boophis	cf marojezensis	, , , ,	1	
12	Α	Boophis	tasymena	Forest Bright-eyed Frog	1	
13	Α	Boophis	feonnyala	Andasibe Bright-eyed Frog	1	
14	Α	Boophis	opisthodon	Eastern Bright-eyed Frog		1
		·		, ,		
15	Α	Gephyromantis	cf asper	East Betsileo Madagascar	1	
16	Α	Gephyromantis	cf sculpturatus	Sculpted Madagascar Frog	1	
17	Α	Gephyromantis	cf leucocephalus			1
18	Α	Guibemantis	pulcher	Tsarafidy Madagascar Frog	1	
19	Α	Guibemantis	cf bicalcaratus 1	Sainte Marie Madagascar	1	
20	Α	Guibemantis	cf albolineatus	White Lined Madagascar	1	
21	Α	Guibemantis	annulatus	Anulatis Pandanus Frog		1
22	Α	Guibemantis	liber	Free Madagascar Frog		1
23	Α	Guibemantis	cf bicalcaratus 2			1
24	Α	Heterixalus	betsileo	Betsileo Reed Frog	1	
25	A	Heterixalus	punctatus	Spotted Madagascar Reed	1	
26	Α	Heterixalus	boettgeri	Boettger's Reed Frog		1
27	Α	Mantella	baroni	Baron's Mantella	1	_
28	Α	Mantidactylus	melanopleura	Baron 3 Wantena	1	
29	Α	Mantidactylus	cf zipperi		1	
		Walledactylas	ej zipperi	Mocquard's Madagascar		
30	А	Mantidactylus	cf mocquardi	Frog	1	
31	Α	Mantidactylus	betsileanus	Betsileo Madagascar Frog	1	
32	Α	Mantidactylus	cf biporus	Two-pored Madagascar Frog		1
33	Α	Mantidactylus	cf femoralis	Fort Madagascar Frog		1
34	Α	Mantidactylus	transectis			1
35	Α	Platypelis	cf pollicaris	Common Giant Tree Frog	1	
3.0		Diatroselia	tub o mifa ma	Ambatoharanana Giant		
36	Α	Platypelis	tuberifera	Treefrog	1	
37 38	A	Pletodontohyla Ptychadena	notosticta mascareniensis	Mascarene Grass Frog	1 1	1



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				Т	<u> </u>	
39	R	Acrantophis	dumerilii	Dumeril's Ground Boa		1
40	R	Brookesia	superciliaris	Stumped Tailed Chameleon	1	
41	R	Calumma	nasutum	Nose Horned Chameleon	1	
42	R	Calumma	brevicorne	Short Nosed Chameleon	1	
43	R	Calumma	parsonii	Parsons Chameleon	1	
44	R	Calumma	gastrotaenia	Side Striped Chameleon	1	
45	R	Ebenavia	inunguis	Dwarf Gecko	1	1
46	R	Furcifer	verrucosus	Warty Chameleon		1
47	R	Furcifer	lateralis	Carpet Chameleon		1
48	R	Hemidactylus	mercatorius	Gray's House gecko		1
49	R	Ithycyphus	oursi	Southwestern Night Snake		1
50	R	Liophidum	torquatum	White-lipped Smooth Snake	1	
51	R	Lycodryas	carleti	Manakara Tree Snake		1
52	R	Lygodactylus	miops	Gunther's Dwarf Gecko	1	
53	R	Lygodactylus	sp		1	
54	R	Lygodactylus	cf miops			1
55	R	Madagascarophis	colubrinus	Madagascar Cat Snake		1
56	R	Oplurus	quadrimaculatus	Dumeril's Madagascar Swift		1
57	R	Palleon	nasus	Elongate leaf Chameleon		1
58	R	Phelsuma	lineata	Lined Day Gecko	1	1
59	R	Phelsuma	modesta	Modest Day Gecko		1
60	R	Phelsuma	quadriocellata	Peacock Day Gecko		1
61	R	Phelsuma	antanosy	Antanosy Day gecko		1
62	R	Phisalixella	arctifasciatus	White Banded Tree Snake	1	1
63	R	Sanzinia	madagascariensis	Madagascar Tree Boa	1	1
64	R	Thamnosophis	epistibes	Eastern Madagascar Water Snake	1	
65	R	Thamnosophis	infrasignatus	Ankafina Water Snake	1	
66	R	Thamnosophis	cf infrasignatus		1	
67	R	Thamnosophis	lateralis	Lateral Water Snake		1
68	R	Trachylepis	gravenhorstii	Gravenhorst's Skink	1	1
69	R	Trachylepis	elegans	Delphine Elegant Skink	1	1
70	R	Uroplatus	sikorae	Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	1	
71	R	Uroplatus	phantasticus	Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	1	
72	R	Uroplatus	sameiti	Leaf-tailed Gecko		1
73	R	Zonosaurus	madagascariensis	Madagascar Plated Lizard	1	
74	R	Zonosaurus	laticaudatus	Western Girdled Lizard		1
75	R	Zonosaurus	maximus	Giant Plated Lizard		1

A : Amphibian

R : Reptile

1: Presence



12





...to contribute to Hadlow College's National 'Turtle Tally' Citizen Science Project

Help us collect data on introduced turtle and terrapin species:

We are keeping the webpage open for sightings to be added throughout the year. Watch out for news on the 2020 Turtle Tally.

Visit hadlow.ac.uk/turtletally for more details on how to get involved.



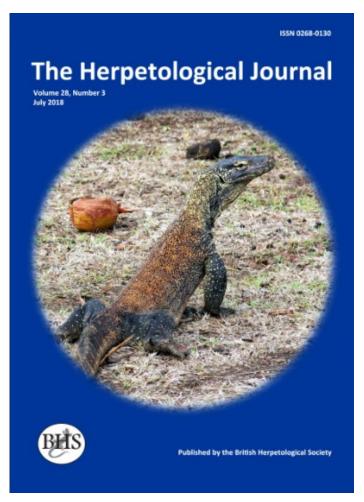


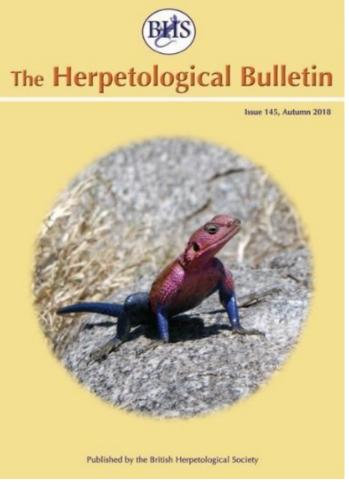


2719



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Newsletter of the British Herpetological Society Established 1948

To our BHS members,

We are always interested in hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to share anything regarding herps. We would love to about your animals, your experiences, their care and husbandry, ideas, training, research and more.

It is important to us that you have that opportunity to share with the wider community, as we all benefit from sharing knowledge and experience.

Kind regards,
Suzie Simpson

Email: natterjack@thebhs.org

Find out more about The British Herpetological Society on our website at:

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