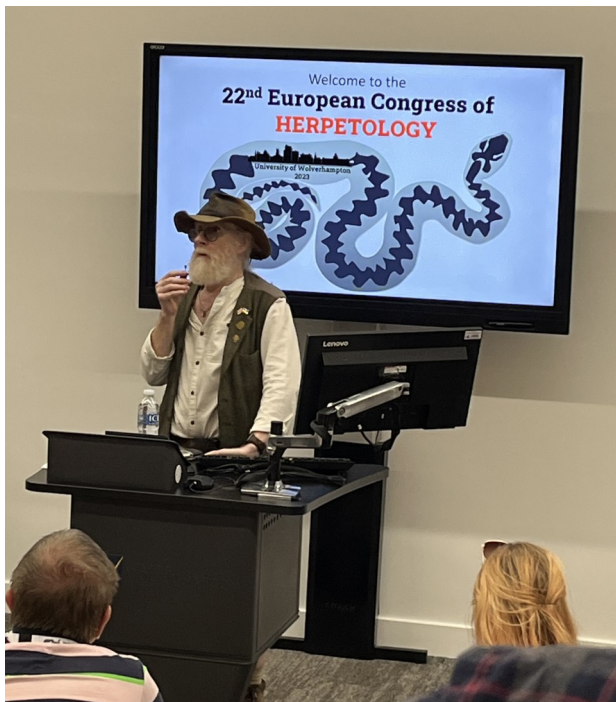




Newsletter of the British Herpetological Society

Established 1947

SEH European Herpetological Congress University of Wolverhampton



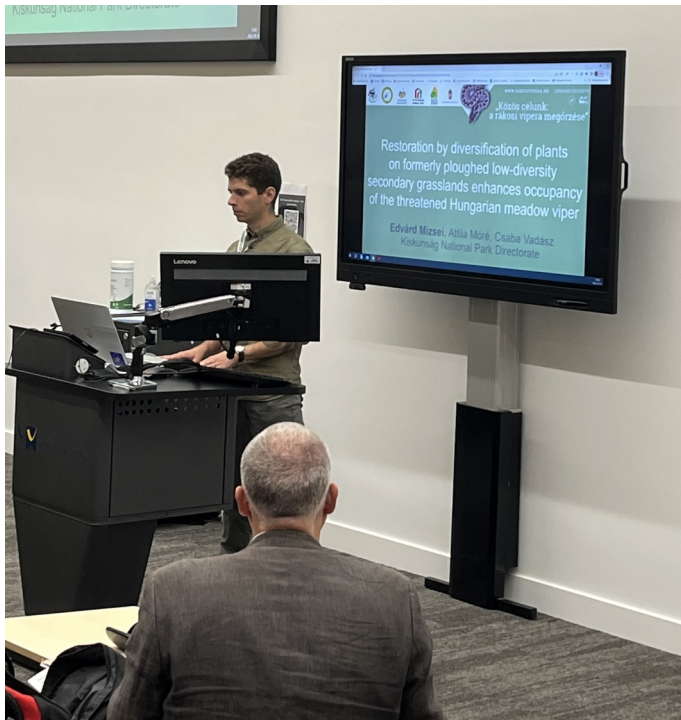
The 22nd SEH European Congress of Herpetology took place at the University of Wolverhampton at the Springfield Campus, UK. A great start to the conference where delegates from across Europe attended and were able to spend the week listening to researchers sharing their knowledge and investigative insights. We were warmly welcomed by Mark O'Shea MBE and the team where they gave a run down of the key elements linked to the precluding event and activities.

Professor Richard Griffiths gave an initial opening talk on the 'Reintroductions and Rewilding in a Changing World' which was a great talk marking the differences in perspectives. He made the observation that many environmentalists are trying to plant trees whereas herptile conservationists are trying to cut them down to clear areas for basking opportunities for

reptiles. And that to see highly successful reintroductions of reptiles and amphibians 'may need 10-20 years to achieve high levels of success'. There was also a mention of 'maverick rewilding' and that rewilding, in itself, is a complex topic with many elements to consider before, during and after the project is implemented. And that we need to ensure we collaborate with the relevant organisations and use science to make decisions throughout and monitoring being an important part of the process. Another key message was that 'Failures are important in the learning exercise' and this is so true. We gain so much insight from these. Thereafter, the conference was setup so that certain rooms were allocated species names and themes and delegates could move between these to hear speakers.

A talk from Edvard Mizsei on the 'Restoration by diversifica-

tion of plants on formerly ploughed low-diversity secondary grasslands enhances occupancy of the threatened Hungarian meadow viper'. With a small isolated population lacking suitable habitats or degraded habitats and pressure from predators, they were looking to restore areas of grassland through plant cultivation and sowing seeds in addition to invasive plant management. This area was monitored following the restorative management for viper presence over time. They found that occupancy rates increased in diversified sites and colonisation



was increased significantly. The extinction risk was significantly reduced and presence of vipers were noted at 3 sites where no previous data of them being there existed.

Another talk discussing 'A comparison between population trends estimation from abundance and occupancy data', research collaboration by Elia Lo Parrino, Mattia Falaschi, Raoul Manenti and Gentile Francesco Ficetola. Often, when monitoring populations, we firstly assess the population through presence/absence surveys and abundance. But the researchers asked the question 'Do we obtain different results analyzing trends of occupancy vs abundance?'. Using brown frogs and newts they were able to test this. They concluded that there were more significant declines seen with occupancy (*Rana latastei*) and abundance declined earlier for most species. This meant that they could spot declines earlier with abundance data but the surveys needed robust estimates and the method was species-dependent. With occupancy data, it was easier to spot

the declines, the framework was more robust regarding detection probability and general use ie. Life cycles and species. Although, occupancy data showed it was slower to detect the declines.



Ben Owens gave a talk on 'A population genomic approach to assess isolated sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) populations and the implications for ex-situ conservation'. Ben used stored DNA samples and Low Coverage Whole Genome Sequencing (LCWGS) to assess the species genome. Two aims of the research were to 1) Assess population structure in the UK and 2) Determine genetic health of isolated populations. He concluded that there are two UK clades of sand lizards, one being the 'Dune Phase' and the other being the 'Heathland Phase'. The sand lizard populations that were isolated showed high average genome-wide heterozygosity but notes that homozygosity can be masked (inbreeding) when there is high heterozygosity. He recommends the LCWGS method for pre- and post- conservation efforts.

Denisse Dalgo gave an interesting talk on the 'Diet analysis of the Galapagos Marine Iguanas subspecies based on DNA Metabarcoding'. These animals are the only lizard adapted to marine life and have a special diet of marine macroalgae. The revised taxonomy shows subdivision into 11 subspecies where genetic clusters occur on each island (some exceptions). Due to general observations to identify diet, the metabarcoding was used to identify species of algae eaten. They successfully targeted red algae with new primers and found that there was only a minor overlap in the marine iguanas diet. This meant that they were feeding on different algal communities to each other with maybe different preferences. Further investigation is on-

going and we look forward to hearing more in the future on



this topic.

Sara Ashpole gave an illuminating talk on her work in South Okanagan Valley, Canada. Sara has been working on amphibian conservation in the area for over 20 years and had so much to talk to us about regarding the barriers to conservation. A road running along some of the main water bodies where amphibians were breeding caused a lot of issues. Sara showed she had a great way in dealing with the politics in conservation and raising funds and grants for the work that she carried out. An inspiring talk.



The whole conference ran very smoothly with so many interesting talks and lots of opportunities for people to network and chat regarding their own interests or professional ventures. The BHS were happy to sponsor the event and held a stall in the main area where we met with delegates and chatted. They were also able to sign up for membership, buy society polo shirts and browse the many different publications we have to offer.



We were also able to give away many hard copies of The Herpetological Bulletin and The Herpetological Journal for people to read and enjoy.



A big thank you to everyone involved in organising the event: Mark O'Shea MBE, Dr Simon Maddock, Dr Natasha Kruger, Dr John Wilkinson, Ms Rebecca Morris, Dr Deepak Veerappan and Mr Rémi Martin.

Written by Suzie Simpson

Could you help to shape the future of the British Herpetological Society?



We are currently in the process of reviewing and updating the society's strategy and would really appreciate feedback from members and non-members of the BHS, to help with our long-term planning and to make it as great a Society as possible!

Please fill in our seven question survey (it only takes a couple of minutes) and share far and wide.

Here's the link to the survey: <https://forms.gle/csXAeVy16ih2Sp3P8>

Tribute to Dr Nicholas Arnold

Born: 16th October 1940

Died: 23rd September 2023

We'd like to pay tribute to Nicholas Arnold who sadly passed away recently of heart failure. He was a scientist and museum curator specialising in herpetology and had discovered at least 36 species of reptiles. Four of these species were named after him i.e. *Dipsoschelys arnoldi* (a giant tortoise). He wrote the 'Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Britain and Europe' (1978) and aided David Attenborough with the series of a 'Life in Cold Blood' (2008).

At the age of 11, he wrote in a diary that he had been cycling through London looking for newts in ponds at night. He studied zoology at St Peter's College in Oxford where he met and married Renate Atkinson in 1967. Arnold completed his doctorate at Oxford and studied Lacertidae lizards, supervised by Nikolaas Tinbergen (Nobel Prize Winner). Arnold began working at the Natural History Museum (NHM) where he spent the rest of his career. Arnold retired in 2000 but still had a lab in the NHM. Both Renate and Arnold retired in Oxford and occasionally retreated to an apartment they held in Mallorca where he would watch the wildlife and read. We are sorry to hear of his passing.

Small Stature, But Big Personalities – An Ode to Keeping Micro Gecko Species in Captivity

Written by Alexia Hesten



As the cost of living rises and our knowledge of welfare and husbandry requirements of our captive herpetological companions improves, a common lament of the average reptile keeper is: “I wish I had more space!”. Providing enough space for pet reptiles is often a challenge in a home setting, from managing the costs of heating and lighting for larger enclosures, to trying to convince a long-suffering partner that ‘yes, your favourite snake DOES need a vivarium THIS big and yes, it DOES need to take up the majority of our living room!’. As our understanding of the natural history of these amazing animals increases, one would hope that hobbyists will consider the ethics and practicalities of keeping larger species carefully whilst researching the addition of new animals to a collection. Of course, there is an element of life histories to be considered too, such as activity levels, cognitive abilities, risk of cohabitation etc.

As much as I love tortoises, beautiful monitor lizards, iguanas and large snake species, I have always been wary of keeping these kinds of animals in captivity – particularly with the complex dietary requirements, space and enrichment required by many of them. Even with more common species like bearded dragons or leopard geckos, as soon as you have more than a

couple of animals at home, in order to provide them with enough space, it can quickly feel like the main décor feature of your house is large terrariums (which may be acceptable for many of us, but perhaps this is not always the case for long-suffering partners!).

This is where micro gecko species enter the stage. If you love reptiles, but feel like quite literally scaling down the species you work with, micro geckos can be an excellent choice. There is a wide variety of genera to choose from: *Gonatodes*, *Lygodactylus*, *Stenodactylus*, *Sphaerodactylus* and *Tropiocolotes*, just to name a few, from tropical, arboreal species to arid, terrestrial species. Some of the species that are relatively easy to find in the UK trade (with a bit of digging) include: viper geckos (*Hemidactylus imbricatus*), mourning geckos (*Lepidodactylus lugubris*), ashy geckos (*Sphaerodactylus elegans*), yellow headed day geckos (*Gonatodes albogularis*), elegant geckos (*Stenodactylus sthenodactylus*) and dune geckos (*Stenodactylus petrii*).

Pros to Keeping Micro Geckos

- It is possible to give them plenty of appropriate space, even if



you are limited on space at home (note that it is important that enclosures are large enough to provide a suitable thermal gradient).

- Quite a few micro gecko species can do well co-habiting in single sex groups (if done carefully and the animals are of a similar size) and some are actually quite sociable, such as mourning geckos and viper geckos.
- A lot of them are fun to watch (though note that a lot of micro gecko species are crepuscular/nocturnal) and make nice display species in bioactive set ups.
- A lot of micro gecko species on the market in the UK are arid/desert species, so relatively low maintenance in terms of husbandry and they are quite robust.
- They diminutive size makes them excessively cute (if that sort of thing is your cup of tea!)

Cons to Keeping Micro Geckos

- Some species can be tricky to ethically source. There are a limited number of captive breeders in the UK. Some species, such as viper geckos may be likely have low genetic diversity as they were originally sourced from countries like Pakistan, where exports are now less common. Some particular species are likely to be wild caught and some are very rare in their native range (such as *Lygodactylus williamsi*), so purchasing should be done responsibly, to help ensure that these amazing animals continue to exist sustainably in the wild.
- Most micro gecko species aren't as flashy and colourful as some bigger gecko species and morphs are almost non-existent.

- It can be difficult to source small enough prey items if you are not keen on breeding insects at home.
- They are generally more fragile than some larger species of gecko and are not really a group of animals that is well suited to being regularly handled. Some of the tropical species have advanced husbandry requirements.
- Due to being quite a niche interest, any breeding needs to be considered carefully as many of these species are prolific breeders, but there is a limited pool of interested buyers (with the exception of mourning geckos as feeders).
- It can be difficult to sex them early on and veterinary care can be difficult due to their size.

As with taking on any new animal, the key to good husbandry is research, research, research! However, due to micro geckos not being a mainstay of the hobby, information about the husbandry of some species in captivity and indeed their natural history in the wild, can be difficult to find. However, there are some dedicated social media groups out there, some good care sheets and some friendly and enthusiastic breeders that are more than happy to share their knowledge. A good starting point for browsing information micro gecko species in captivity is www.dwarfgeckos.com. For all micro gecko species, suitable heating and UVB lighting is essential, as is an escape proof tank, such as Exo Terras.

By promoting interest in micro geckos, we can encourage the keeping of species at a high level of welfare, even for hobbyists who are limited on space and budget in the home.

Welcome New BHS Trustees!

We are so pleased to welcome the following trustees to the BHS Society. They will be assisting us in carrying out charity aims and objectives.

I am a masters student doing an MRes Ecology, Evolution & Conservation, and recently graduated with a BSc Biology. Since I was young I have been extremely interested in herpetofauna, and over the years I have been exploring my interest in evolutionary biology. My dream is to combine both and study evolutionary biology in relation to herpetofauna to further understand these organisms and better protect them, alongside spreading awareness and inspiring the younger generations to be curious about herpetology and their environment. I have been a member of the BHS for 2 years and am extremely excited to be a part of the council as an ordinary member and support all the amazing work the society is doing.



Maria Filippou



I have many years of experience working with a wide range of reptiles and amphibians both in the wild (both in the UK and abroad) and in captivity at institutions such as ZSL London Zoo and Chester Zoo. I have experience in herpetological research and conservation, including the publication of several herpetological papers and presenting at several conferences. I am currently finishing my Ph.D. in wild common frog (*Rana temporaria*) reproductive ecotoxicology, and I have also completed a masters in Zoo Conservation Biology and a BSc in Zoology. I am about to start a new position as reptile and amphibian policy and advice officer at NatureScot, where I am excited to get involved with all the fantastic projects currently underway to help protect Scotland's herpetofauna.

I wanted to be a trustee of the British Herpetological society because I am inspired by all the good work the society does regarding the conservation of reptiles and amphibians, and especially how the society champions young herpetologists. I hope to be able to bring my knowledge

Catherine Whatley

Alexia Hesten is a PhD student at Liverpool John Moores University. Her research focus is on sustainability and disease management in the trade in captive reptiles and amphibians in the UK. Alexia has previously worked for the Non-native Species Secretariat and in the wildlife team at the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), as a zookeeper in the herpetology department at Jersey Zoo, and as an ecologist for Froglife and various consultancies. Her favourite herps that she has seen in the wild were European green lizards in Albania and she has a soft spot for micro species of geckos, of which she keeps several at home as a hobbyist. Having been a BHS member for years, I'm excited to give back to the community as a trustee and help in any way I can.



Alexia Hesten



Vinnie Goodall

Most people call me Vinnie and I moved to south Lincolnshire when I was 8 and lived on a farm, I've spent most of my childhood working on the farm with a wide variety of livestock and arable so spent a lot of time outside exploring nature. I moved into engineering and mechanics when I left school for a number of years before moving into farming again and also working for a tour company from time to time doing 4x4 tours in Morocco which was another opportunity to explore nature. (I didn't know it was called herping then).

After an illness, in 2008, my life changed quite a bit and I started working at what was The National Parrot Sanctuary, now Lincolnshire Wildlife Park. Shortly after that, I met and married Joy and before long we were keeping reptiles and from their it turned into more of a hobby and soon started attending different events. I joined the BHS some years ago and have always tried attending the events. I'm hoping I'm able to help in any way with the running and organising of the events and be a useful addition to the team.



Introducing the British Herpetological Society publication digitisation project

How can you help?

By Steven Allain

Since 1948, the British Herpetological Society (BHS) has been publishing natural history notes, short papers, and full articles in various publications, some of which have changed name through time. Given that, the British Herpetological Society has a very clear geographic origin, the focus of these articles that have been (and continue to be) published by the Society, often come from much further afield. A number of articles do still focus on the amphibians and reptiles of Great Britain and Ireland, but an increasing number also include data or observations on species from Australia, Brazil, India, and other herpetofauna rich countries. This of course provides quite the varied reading but one day I had a thought, which had not yet been answered, how has the geographic representation of species and authors changed through time?

To answer this question, first off we need to know where each of the species within the various articles published by the British Herpetological Society originated. Not every article published focusses on wild animals, so for the sake of simplicity, those studies conducted on captive animals have not been included in the project I am about to introduce. For most of the articles relating to wild amphibians and reptiles, some form of geographic data is provided, such as coordinates in a range or formats, or a place name. All of this information is important for trying to pinpoint exactly where observations were made, especially with the older records, as countries may have since changed name, and borders shifted. By being able to georeference these locations to the best of our knowledge, this allows for a more informed dataset which will be important in the subsequent analysis (once all of the data has been collated).

This is going to be a task that would take one person quite an amount of time, so I am appealing to members of the herpetological community who have some spare time on their hands to assist me in this venture. I have put a protocol together to allow my assistants to help digitise all of the species distribution data within *The Herpetological Journal*, *The Herpetological Bulletin*, and their predecessors (if we can easily access their contents). My hope is that once all of this data has been compiled, we will be able to explore the temporal and spatial trends in the distribution of the species in the articles published. Which species groups are best represented in these pub-

lications? Which geographic regions have seen increases or decreases in representation through time? These and the myriad of other questions should help us to identify areas where the Society could help to increase this representation, or assist in reducing barriers to publishing in those countries where there are a lack of articles being submitted from. This could be as simple as trying to increase awareness of the Society and its publications, or helping with the translation of manuscripts into English.

An added bonus (and the one I am most excited about) is the potential use for the distribution records once they have been compiled. The British Herpetological Society has recently become a data partner of the National Biodiversity Network, the NGO which curates all of the species distribution data in Great Britain. Through the NBN Atlas, we will also be able to share occurrence records with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). These will make those species distribution records available to researchers worldwide, which is extremely important given the current biodiversity crisis in multiple ways. First of all, by understanding the distribution of species, these data can be used to prioritise conservation efforts, protect endangered species, and preserve critical habitats. Species distribution records are fundamental for ecological research. They help in studying species interactions, population dynamics, and the impact of environmental changes on ecosystems. Tracking changes in species distributions over time can provide insights into the effects of threats such as climate change, disease and other factors. It is therefore my hope that these species records will be used by researchers for decades to come, making a significant contribution to the herpetofauna of the world.

I have worked closely with Sophia Ratcliffe from the NBN Atlas to help design a protocol that anyone can follow, in order to extract the most out of the previously published articles throughout the Society's portfolio.

If you would like to get involved with this project and contribute to the future conservation of amphibians and reptiles by digitising historic amphibian and reptile records, please email me (steveallain@live.co.uk).

BHS trustee post positions still available!



We happily appointed new trustees at our AGM this year but are still looking for the following positions to be filled. We actively fund research and conservation projects along with organising multiple annual events and meetings including, the ever popular, Drayton Manor event. But – all this is achieved only through the efforts and commitment of the Trustees who sit on our Council and who are all volunteers.

The following posts are currently vacant:

- ⇒ **Secretary**
- ⇒ **Treasurer**
- ⇒ **Finance Officer**

If you would like to be involved in the running and direction of the Society, PLEASE do contact either Trevor Rose secretary@thebhs.org or Mark Hollowell chair@thebhs.org to arrange an informal chat about the different roles or just how you might be able to get involved. Some basic information about the different Council posts can be found in the 'Our Officers' section of the website here [Our Officers | British Herpetological Society \(thebhs.org\)](#) but Trevor or Mark will happily talk about them in a bit more detail with you – and nothing's cast in stone as regards scope and focus of the posts.

As with any organisation, the Society is constantly evolving and developing. It would be great to hear from you!



#HerpJSM2023

Join us in person on
Sat 25th Nov!

ARC-BHS Joint Scientific Meeting 2023



Bournemouth Natural Science Society

Tickets: Members, students and concessions £32.00

Standard ticket price £64.00

10:00-10:30

Arrival, registration and coffee

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 10:30-10:35 | Welcome – Prof Richard Griffiths, ARC Trustee |
| 10:40-11:10 | Invasion biology of the tokay gecko in southern Florida – Tommy Fieldsend, Florida International University |
| 11:10-11:40 | 100 years of alpine newts in the UK - so what? – Sarah Ball, Institute of Zoology |
| 11:40-12:20 | Coffee |
| 12:25-12:55 | Malagasy amphibians – Angus Carpenter, University of Cumbria |
| 12:55-13:15 | The heat is on! Mild winter temperatures can benefit hibernating wall lizards – Miary Raselimanana, Bangor University |
| 13:15-13:35 | TBC |
| 13:35-14:45 | Lunch |
| 14:50-15:20 | A 20-year tale of herpetofaunal conservation in Canada's arid desert – Sara Ashpole, St. Lawrence University, New York and co-Chair, Amphibian Specialist Group Canada |
| 15:20-15:50 | Adventures in Indian herpetology including the description of a new species of Gloydus – Stuart Graham, Bangor University and Ecoloyia |
| 15:50-16:20 | Raffle, Coffee and departure |

For further details and registration head to the ARC website:

<https://www.arc-trust.org/event/scientific-meeting-2023#:~:text=The%20Joint%20Scientific%20Meeting%20run,from%20the%20UK%20and%20overseas.>





Venom Day 2023

Date: 09 December 2023

Venue: Brambell Building, Bangor University, Deiniol Road, Bangor, UK

Join us for an exciting day dedicated to all things venomous! Get ready to dive into the fascinating world of venomous creatures and learn about their unique adaptations. This event will cover talks on a wide range of topics including how venom has evolved, pharmaceutical uses of venom, management of venomous animals in zoos, treatment of snakebite and everything in between. This event is open to everyone regardless of scientific background.

Other activities:

- **08 December 2023 (20:30).** Pre-conference Social - free to attend but registration essential. Location: The Management Centre, College Road Bangor .(https://www.bangor.ac.uk/management_centre/). The social will consist of a quiz and a bar to buy drinks. To make the event more economically accessible and avoid high food costs, there will be no meal service, so please have dinner before joining us!
- **09 December 2023.** Post-conference Chinese Banquet. Location: China Hot Chilli Chinese Restaurant, Bangor.

Organisers: Bangor University Herpetological Society, Bangor University, Swansea University, Newcastle University.

Sponsors: British Herpetological Society (<https://www.thebhs.org/>), Toxins (<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/toxins>).

Purchase tickets here: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/venom-day-2023-tickets-741446575667?aff=ebdssbdestsearch&keep_tld=1

We look forward to welcoming you all to Bangor!





SAVE THE DATE! AHH / BHS Conference 2024



Food for Thought..

Saturday & Sunday
March 16th - 17th
at
Drayton Manor
Resort



AHH / BHS Conference 2024

Saturday & Sunday March 16th - 17th
at Drayton Manor Resort



“Food for Thought..”

Students: Call for Posters

Does your project feature reptiles or amphibians? Showcase your research!
Free conference tickets awarded to students presenting research posters.

Download forms and guidance at: www.thebhs.org or use the QR code:
For further poster queries contact: education@thebhs.org



Student presentations 2023
photo (c) 2023 Frances Beines



Have you seen turtles in the UK?



Take part in our research on the distribution of released pet turtles in UK waterbodies. Submit your sightings of turtles to our survey and find out more on our website: www.turtletally.co.uk

Turtle Tally UK Citizen Science Project

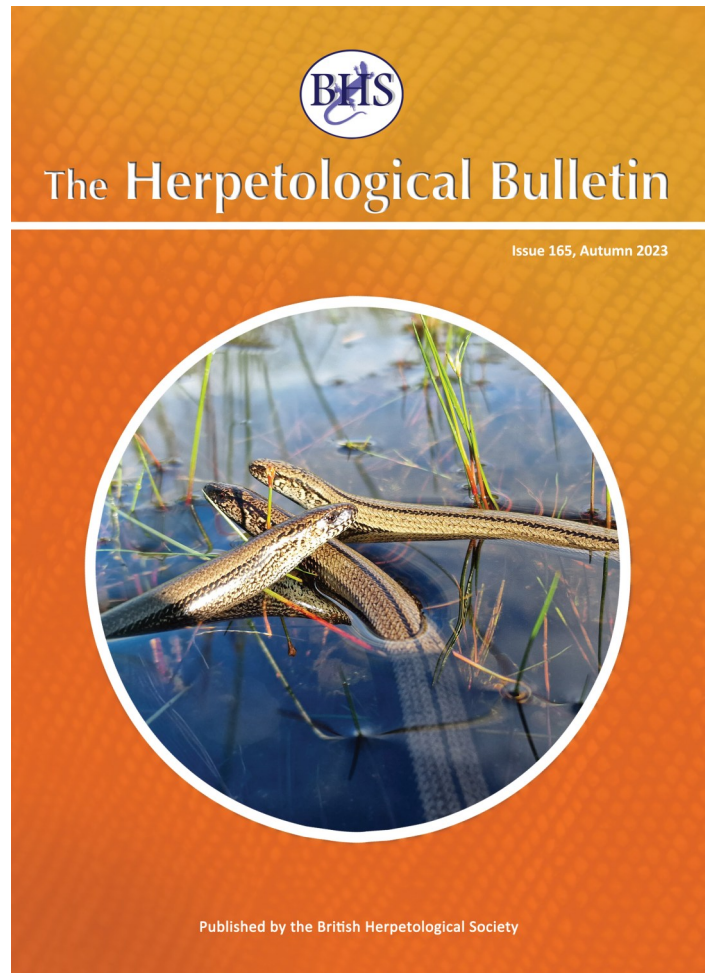
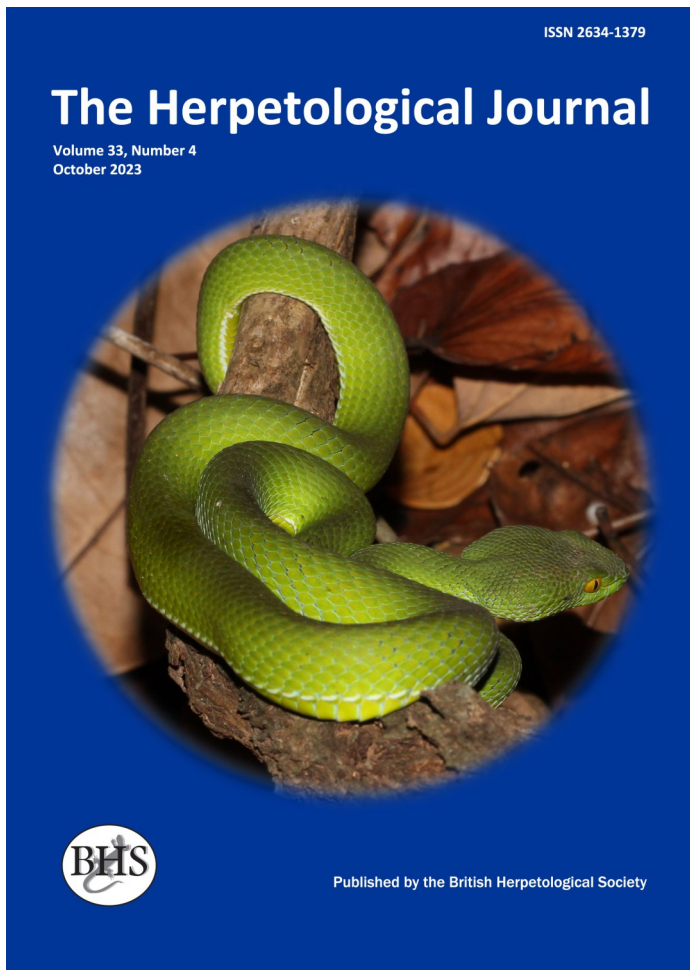


Website: www.turtletally.co.uk

Contact us: turtletallyuk@gmail.com



Why not take a look at our other publications?



Membership with the British Herpetological Society
gives access to all three publications for just
£25 a year (student members, £18).



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 hear 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:

<https://thebhs.org/>

Check out our social media pages too:

<https://www.facebook.com/The-British-Herpetological-Society-BHS-295241210567422/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/454242811428496/>

Twitter: [@britishherpsoc](https://twitter.com/britishherpsoc)

