



Newsletter of the British Herpetological Society

Established 1947

BHS/AHH Drayton Manor Herpetological Conference

Written by Suzie Simpson

In March, we welcomed delegates back to Drayton Manor for our annual collaborative event. Year on year, this event has gone from strength to strength. We listened to the feedback from 2023 and made the changes asked for. We increased the breaks and increased networking time which we all really enjoyed and were based solely within the conference centre so a more relaxing atmosphere for sure. The theme this year was 'Food for Thought' based around feeding and nutrition. Many guest speakers joined us to share their knowledge and research on the topics.

Chris Mitchell (Head of Zoo Operations at Drayton Manor) started the conference with a welcome talk and later was able to take delegates for a tour around the Drayton Manor Zoo which is always very popular. The keepers were also able to join and chat with attendees about the species housed there. We also like to thank Chris for his help and collaboration on this event each year, he has been an invaluable member of the organising team.

Lorri Torrini is a professional animal trainer and she joined us remotely from the US to share her work and research on herpetile behavioural training. Some really interesting video footage share of training protocols and processes which will certainly



have given attendees ideas regarding training their own animals. Eleanor Tirtasana Chubb (European Turtle Alliance) gave a talk on chelonian diets, how they are developing and many attendees were very much appreciative of her knowledge and experience in this topic. The talk was followed by many questions. Louise Jakobsen (London Zoo), in 2016, founded the non-profit initiative "Browse Poster", which became a registered charity in England & Wales a couple of years later. Through the years, the BIAZA certified posters and booklets have helped keepers across the UK and Europe identify suitable plant material for safe feeding of animals, whilst raising money for wildlife and habitat conservation

spoke on the benefits of browse provision to animals. This work is widely shared amongst the zoo community.

Jerry Fife, our keynote speaker, gave two talks including the after dinner lecture on his work with many species of chelonia and lizards. He talked about the trials and tribulations of breeding species such as cyclura and keeping tortoises. After lunch, Ben Tapley (Curator of Reptiles and Amphibians at London Zoo) spoke on the developments at the zoo and their new reptile and amphibian house. A lively panel discussion regarding the proposals and new legislation within other countries around the 'Black / White lists' concept followed.

Oliver Witte (German Society for Herpetology and Herpetoculture DGHT) spoke on the Citizen Conservation Initiative that is run by their society in Germany. This is a comprehensive programme where Oliver's work focuses on the development of training courses and the training of expert examiners. He has been keeping amphibians and reptiles for around 40 years and is a member of, among others, the DGHT, the BHS and the SEH.

Fraser McDade (Lower vertebrate and invertebrate Team Lead at Drayton Manor Zoo) talked on the topic of mixed species exhibits discussing what is considered a mixed species exhibit, what the issues are but also what benefits can they provide to the animals. Often a controversial topic due to the considerations involved but Fraser explained how you can mitigate issues and the considerations needed. Mary Pinborough, with 52 years in Biomedical Science, highlighted the issue of obesity of pet reptiles and how common this has become. There were many photos showing how this can look but also the impact of obesity on overall health and longevity.

Ross Hickles (Senior Keeper at London Zoo) gave a great talk on the live food work he has specialised in and talked through his husbandry and breeding of these insects for provision to animals within the zoo. A very interesting talk on protocols and practices. Then Erin Rickman (Lincoln University) spoke on her research regarding the impact of enriched environment/housing regarding cognition, welfare and behaviour. We ended the conference on Sunday with Francis Cosquiere who spoke on ways to enrich the lives of your pet snakes and different feeding methods for snakes—including difficult individuals.

A massive thank you to Halesowen College Media students for coming on the Sunday and filming the whole day for us. We work with educational institutions to provide opportunities to network, showcase their research (posters) and gain on site skills so this was a great example of the collaborative work we try to do. Also, thank you to all of the organisers who give a lot of time to making sure this event runs as well as it can. And—a final huge thank you to Drayton Manor Resort and all our great sponsors, without whom the event would not be possible!

Our keynote speaker, Jerry Fife, created a great video of the conference which can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkhgVPip8DE>

Keep an eye out for next years event which will be in March 2025! It is already up on the BHS website events page: www.thebhs.org



The British Chelonia Group Spring Symposium 2024

Written by Dr John Cooper



Tortoises, Terrapins, Turtles and Temperature Changes. The British Chelonia Group Spring Symposium in Cambridge, 9th-10th March 2024. We had a busy weekend in Cambridge, first collecting specimens (including an orangutan skull) from Cambridge Veterinary School where they had been radiographed. We stayed overnight at Homerton College and attended the BCG (British Chelonia Group) Spring Symposium. It was an excellent programme of events and some good speakers. We started the proceedings on the Sunday morning with a joint lecture about our work in Kenya with tortoises and

of reptiles, especially chelonians (see photo below). In the preamble, renowned animal author David Alderton emphasised the importance of understanding reptile biology and husbandry, Margaret Cooper discussed financial and legal responsibilities of animal keepers and John Cooper introduced the concept of diagnosis on a budget, including the role of simple in-house techniques and tests that might be used by an enterprising or knowledgeable owner. Mounted and model reptiles were used to demonstrate how samples such as faeces could be checked and/or cytological and other specimens prepared, before needing to seek veterinary attention. Some of these 'laboratory' techniques were demonstrated by veterinary surgeons Sarah Pellett and Justine Shotton (see photo below). Much fun was had and the twelve CPD participants – who each received a certificate - said that they had learnt a lot.



terrapins. It was a chance to put on record our "epitaph to Shamba Musa", our much-loved piece of African bush near Kwale, which we reluctantly sold in 2022 (see photo right).

In the afternoon we organised an interactive CPD (continuing professional development) practical session. Students and others, (in)appropriately clad in different hats and protective aprons, were taken through the principles of health monitoring



Photo credit: Margaret E. Cooper

Snakebite Prevention Uganda

Written by Dr Kevin Arbuckle

Snakebite envenoming is now recognised by the World Health Organisation as a Neglected Tropical Disease, a set of complex public health problems responsible for devastating health, social and economic consequences, but which have not received sufficient attention on the global stage. Importantly for the herpetologically-minded among us, snakebite is not only a human health problem but also a conservation problem because snakes (both dangerous and harmless) are killed as a first response in an effort to avoid bites.

In Uganda alone, data on snakebites are severely limited and the numbers are almost certainly vastly underestimated. With this in mind, current estimates suggest 14,000 venomous snakebites per year. These are estimated to result in 650 deaths, but also cause long-term and debilitating physical and mental health problems that exacerbate issues associated with poverty and a lack of social support systems, for instance the ability to work for a living or produce food for a person's family. In rural areas, access to healthcare is minimal and understandable fear of snakes is rampant, which leads to many deaths of both people and snakes (persecution/'control' is the most common threat to Ugandan snakes according to the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species).

For more than 10 years, we have been developing trusting relationships with a set of communities in rural southwest Uganda, which has now enabled us to try to tackle the problem and prevent conflict between people and snakes. We are not only trying to generate and implement solutions that work for the local people, but also understanding the problem in more depth and properly evaluate whether our actions are having the desired effect. This has needed the collaboration of herpetologists and social scientists to really start to improve things for people and snakes in the area. It is a slow process but we have made good headway, with actions including snakebite prevention workshops delivered with >160 people in the communities, hundreds of snakes safely removed from people's homes, and the creation of a motorbike ambulance service to improve access to treatment in the event of a snakebite (and other medical emergencies).

However, almost all of this has been relying on small grants and donations to implement, and we are now at the point where we must ask for help to support the work. The motorbike ambulance in particular needs fuel and sufficient funds for maintenance and repair as necessary, and although our core team there are working voluntarily, to ensure the motorbike is available at all times we also cover a small salary for some community



members to help transport people to hospital. Moreover, the whole project relies on good relations with the communities and support for local education - we have also made sure to support the communities more widely than in our efforts to reduce snakebite as a way of continuing the trust we depend on.

We are now trying to raise £1,500 to support these activities, and we ask that you consider donating to our efforts. We have set up a JustGiving page to facilitate donations, which contains further information on previous impact (not limited to snakebite):

<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/ugandacommunities>.

As we have had several people who prefer to donate in ways other than JustGiving, please get in touch with us (kevin.arbuckle@swansea.ac.uk) and we can discuss other ways of making a donation. Please also get in touch if you have any questions or want to know more about our work. Thank you so much for any donations given.



Farewell and Welcome!

Suzie Simpson has left the post of NatterJack Editor after 6 years in post:

“I have really enjoyed being in this position to share articles on the BHS work and events, to share information on researcher work and hobbyist’s articles. I don’t doubt I will come back to council in the future”.

So we say ‘Thank you to Suzie’ (image below left) and ‘Welcome’ to Maria Fillipou (image below right) who will be continuing the newsletter.

We’re excited for all the new ideas and articles that will come from this transition and wish Maria the best of luck in her new post.



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!

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

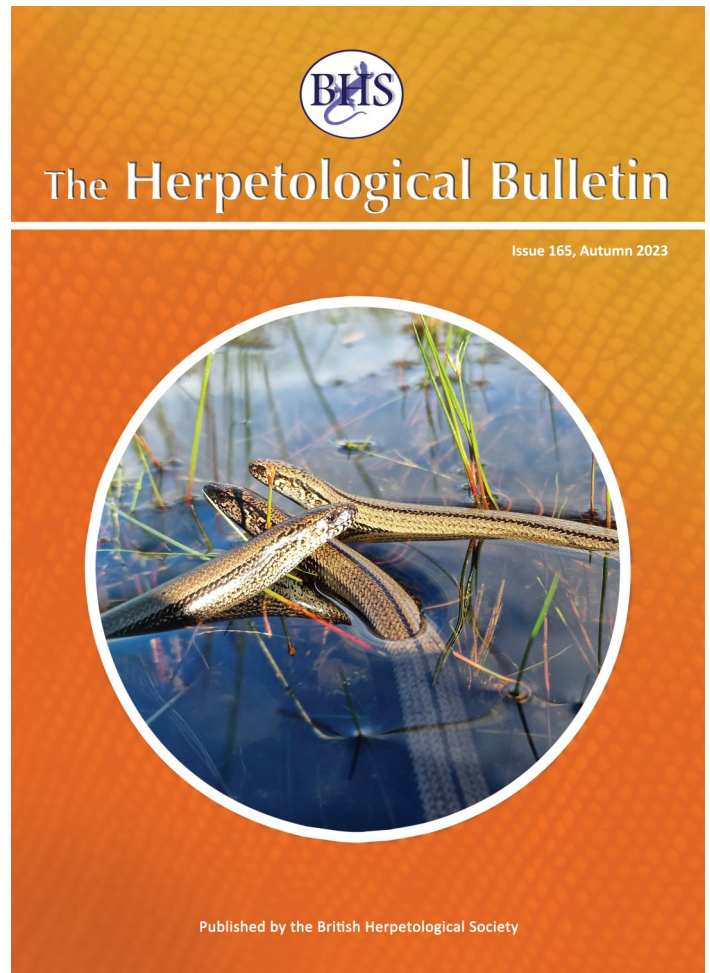
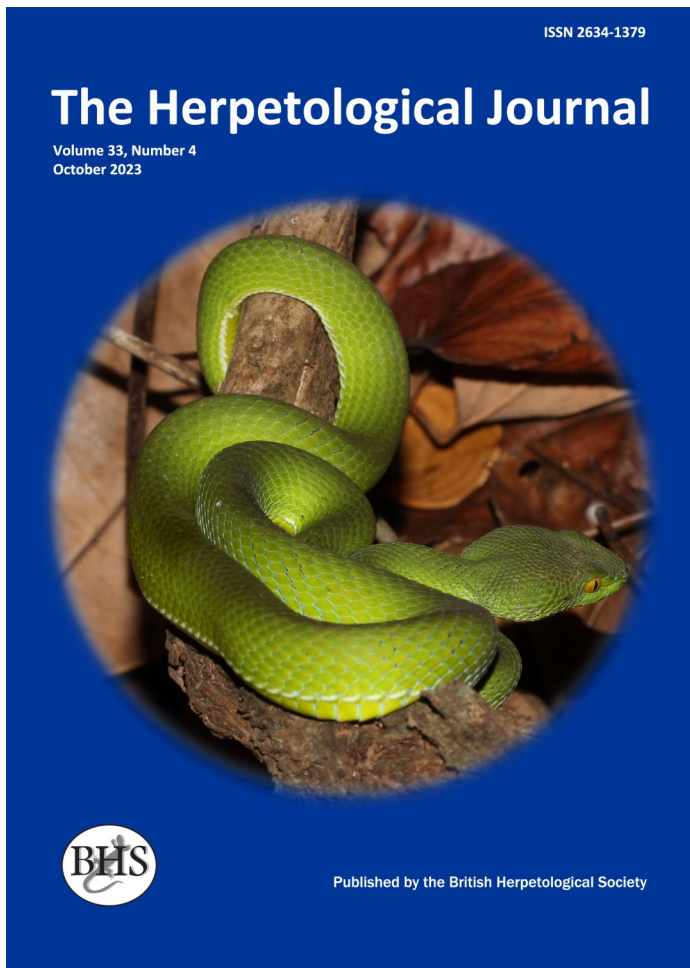


Website: www.turtletally.co.uk

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.

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)

