

THE NATTERJACK

THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY EST.1947

Annual General Meeting 2024

MARK HOLLOWELL

Our 2024 AGM took place in late June at the Amersham Community Centre. AGMs are a constitutional requirement and part of running a charity properly—but they're also a great opportunity to update members on the Society's work: finances, membership, activities, plans, and to confirm any new Council members co-opted since the last AGM. We know the formal business might not be a huge draw on its own (though we think it should be!), so we always include a few engaging talks to make it a proper half-day event.



ANGELA JULIAN SHARING THE INFLUENTIAL WORK OF ARG UK..

This year, we enjoyed three excellent talks. Monte Jackson from the National Centre for Reptile Welfare (NCRW) shared insights into herpetological stowaways—reptiles and amphibians that accidentally arrive in the UK in shipments of fruit, vegetables, or plants. NCRW often steps in to collect and care for these animals, and Monte has compiled some fascinating data from recent cases. We'll aim to make his presentation available to BHS members soon. In the meantime, you can learn more about NCRW, [here](#).



NCRW'S MONTE JACKSON HER RECENT RESEARCH AT THE 2024 AGM.

Angela Julian gave an inspiring talk on ARG UK—how it has grown since its early days, the current network of over 40 local Amphibian and Reptile Groups across the UK and Channel Islands, and the huge conservation effort powered by more than 5,000 volunteers. Jan Clemons and I helped found one of the earliest ARGs—Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team (WART!), which is still active today. ARG UK is always looking for new volunteers, so if you're interested, visit arguk.org.

Our own Steve Allain rounded off the talks with a deep dive into his research on midwife toads in the UK. These populations were once assumed to originate from France, but new genetic work by Steve's team suggests some eastern England populations came from northern Spain—revealing a more complex story. The team is also investigating the presence of chytrid fungus in these toads. For more, check out Steve's open-access article [here](#).

We also confirmed several Council roles for 2024–25. Dr Kevin Arbuckle and Prof Jelka Crnobrnja-Isailovic are now joint editors of the Herpetological Journal—a first for the Society, with Jelka also being our first editor based outside the UK.



DR STEVE ALLAIN GIVING HIS TALK ON MIDWIFE TOADS IN THE UK.

Katherine Mitchell was confirmed as Communications Officer and Maria Filippou as an Ordinary Council Member. Maria has since taken over as Natterjack Editor from Suzie Simpson, who stepped down due to work commitments. Huge thanks to Suzie for her excellent work, and to Maria for stepping into the role with fresh ideas and energy.

Information from the AGM - including financial update - is available to BHS members via the Member's Downloads section of 'My Account' [here](#), but you'll need to be logged in to access this folder!

We hope that the 2025 AGM will be held in the exciting Manchester Museum Vivarium - keep an eye on the website for details!

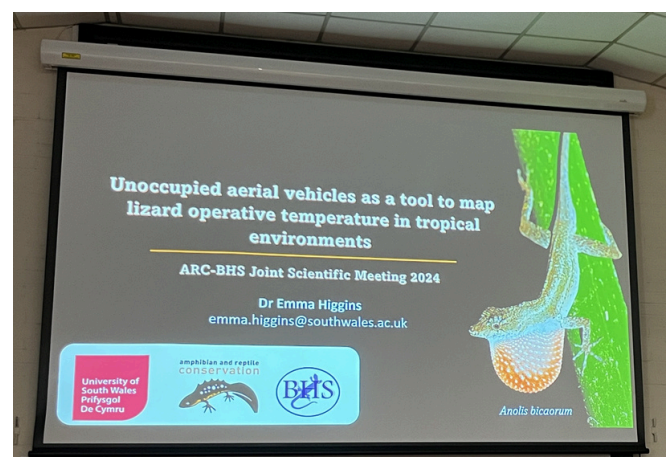
ARC & BHS Joint Scientific Meeting 2024

DR STEVE ALLAIN

In an unusual turn of events, this year's annual gathering did not take place on the first weekend of December, as is customary, but rather on the last weekend of November. For many, this shift likely signified the commencement of the Christmas countdown, prompting either a sense of urgency regarding unfinished gift shopping or a feeling of anticipation for quality time with family. However, for us herpetologists, this weekend marked the annual Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust – British Herpetological Society Joint Scientific Meeting, held each year in Bournemouth. What makes this event particularly noteworthy is its inclusive nature; rather than being exclusively attended by seasoned academics, it welcomes a diverse range of amphibian and reptile enthusiasts from various backgrounds and experience levels, making it a truly enriching occasion.

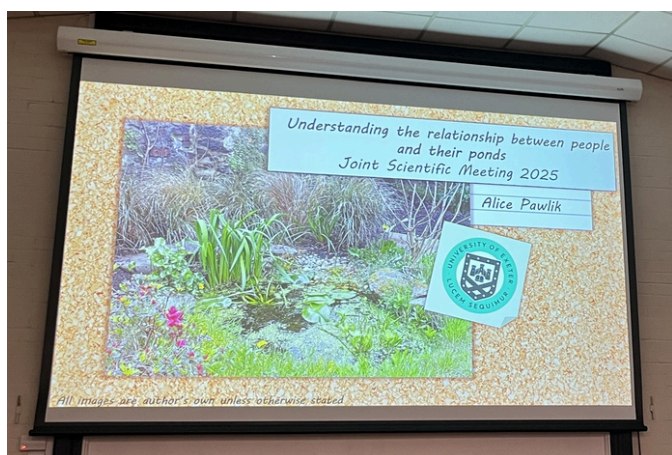
This year's meeting featured six talks instead of the usual nine; however, their exceptional quality and engaging content ensured that this reduction in number was hardly noticeable.

The presentations covered a range of compelling topics, including the application of genomics in herpetofauna conservation (a subject of particular interest to me), an exploration of human relationships with ponds, perceptions of adders in North Wales, and the use of drones to survey lizards in tropical regions. A presentation of particular significance was delivered by Emily Corden, one of my MSc students from ARU Writtle. Emily presented her thesis research, which investigated whether a museum collection of amphibians in South Korea could provide insights into potential shrinkage in response to climate change. For those who were unable to attend, there is no need for concern—we are currently working on publishing the results.



A TALK BY DR EMMA HIGGINS AT THE RECENT JOINT SCIENTIFIC MEETING

As is tradition at the Joint Scientific Meeting, a well-attended curry dinner took place the evening before the conference, followed by a raffle at the event's conclusion. I was fortunate to acquire several fascinating books in a silent auction featuring items from Tim Halliday's personal library, in addition to a few charming trinkets from the raffle. All prizes were generously donated by attendees, and I extend my gratitude to those who contributed such delightful items. Overall, this year's meeting was an immensely enjoyable experience, and I eagerly anticipate learning about more groundbreaking research in the future. Perhaps next year, I may even present some of my own findings. Will I see you there?



ALICE PAWLICK'S PRESENTATION ON HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT

Amersham Autumn Meeting 2024

MARK HOLLOWELL

The Autumn joint meeting, organised jointly between the BHS and the Thames and Chilterns Group, was held as normal at the Amersham Community Centre. Following the Leisure Centre's redevelopment during Covid, this is a great venue for us – excellent facilities, plenty of car parking, but also accessible by rail or underground from central London.

The meeting remains deservedly popular with a wide audience and an attendance last year of around fifty people. A full report on the meeting and talks will be produced later this year by Dr. Simon Townson and will be published as open access in the 'BHS Reports' section of the website. The meeting had a total of seven speakers who gave excellent talks on many aspects of herpetology – see the program [here](#) for those who didn't attend.

The 2025 Autumn meeting will be held at Amersham on Sunday, 12th October – save the date! Full program details will be available on the BHS website nearer the time.

Herp Workers Meeting 2025

CATHERINE WHATLEY

In early February, the annual Herp Workers Meeting was held in Sheffield, at the Mercure Sheffield St Paul's Hotel & Spa. This was my first time attending, and although I had high expectations, I was truly blown away by how enjoyable it was. The venue was beautiful, and the atmosphere was electric as everyone geared up for the day ahead with plentiful coffee and pastries.

Following an opening address from Dr Tony Gent (ARC), we had a short introduction to the local herpetofauna from Angus Hunter (Sheffield City Council). Our first talk was from Dr Carlos Abraham (Baker Consultants), who gave a fascinating presentation on the use of bioacoustic monitoring in Natterjack toad populations. The quality of talks was consistently high throughout the day. Dr Silviu Petrovan, for example, highlighted his research on evidence-based guidance for road mitigation of British herpetofauna, with important emphasis on the need for species-specific approaches.



HOWARD INNS CHAIRING THE FIRST SESSION ON THE FIRST DAY

The breaks provided time to browse the stalls, fill up on coffee, and place bids in the book auction. After that, we moved into the workshop sessions. The four workshops were: Reptile mitigation in peatland habitats by Chris Cathrine (RSK Biocensus); Rewilding: what does it mean for amphibians and reptiles? by Dr Angela Julian (ARG UK) and Kate Gamez (Environment Agency); Improving perceptions of adders by Matt Cooke (ARC) and Thom Lyons (Swansea University); and Protecting herptiles of the British Isles: investigating best practices for biosecurity by Alice Pawlik, Kacey St John, and Ben Brown (University of Exeter). All sessions sparked valuable conversations that continued throughout the conference.



DR SILVIU PETROVAN PRESENTING ON ROAD MITIGATION FOR BRITISH HERPETOFAUNA



STIMULATING GROUP DISCUSSION ON REPTILE MITIGATION FOR PEATLAND RESTORATION PROJECTS

As is tradition, the day ended with a conference dinner and the infamous Have I Got Newts for You quiz, which was excellent fun—even if it did feel like a fever dream at times! The annual raffle to raise money for ARG UK was also a hit, with top-shelf prizes such as vouchers for herping trips up for grabs.

The second day of the conference was just as impressive. Dr Emma Gardner (UK CEH), Daniel Digges (University of Sheffield), and Lucy Day (University of Nottingham) presented research on ground-truthing a process-based model for common lizards in Oxfordshire. Several more excellent talks followed, including one from Harry Searle-Webb (Bangor University) on differing ecomorphology of common lizards across habitats and the potential implications for conservation translocations. Another highlight was Nicole Grimason (University of Wolverhampton), who discussed an ongoing PhD project on common frog genetic diversity.

After another full day of engaging conversations, lunch, talks, and workshops, Chris Monk (ARG UK) closed the conference for another year. This conference is sponsored annually by BHS, and having experienced it for the first time, I can say it's a truly worthwhile event that brings the UK herp community together. If you've never managed to attend, I'd encourage you to make the journey—you won't be disappointed.



BHS PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION!

CALLING ALL HERP ENTHUSIASTS & PHOTOGRAPHERS!

The BHS invites you to take part in our first ever photo competition. Whether you're an experienced photographer or a budding nature enthusiast, we want you to showcase the beauty of amphibians & reptiles of the UK!

PRIZES & RECOGNITION

- 1st place** – BHS hoodie
- 2nd place** – BHS t-shirt
- 3rd place** – BHS cap

Winners will also be featured in The Natterjack and on BHS socials!



RULES

- Max 3 photos per person
- Title each photo
- Must be your own work, taken in the UK
- By entering, you agree to your photo being shared (with credit) in BHS publications and social media

CATEGORIES

- UK Reptiles
- UK Amphibians
- Junior Photographer - *Young Herpetologists only!*

SEND YOUR ENTRY BY 15.08.2025 TO:

natterjack@thebhs.org



Student Grant Scheme Winners

MARIA FILIPPOU

The BHS Student Grant Scheme supports undergraduate and postgraduate students conducting research on amphibians and reptiles. Open to applicants from the UK and abroad, the scheme helps fund fieldwork, lab studies, and conservation projects. Applying is simple, with clear guidelines and deadlines provided on the [BHS website](#). Below, we celebrate some of this year's successful applicants and their exciting projects!

THOMAS ODEYO



My name is Thomas Odeyo, an MSc candidate in Animal Ecology at Kenyatta University, where I study reptile diversity and conservation. I'm passionate about finding ways to balance human and wildlife communities. My journey began when I realized that reptiles and amphibians are often overlooked in research, despite being among the most threatened species. These animals have played a crucial role in pest control since their evolution and help maintain ecosystem balance. With one in five reptile species at risk of extinction, there's no better time to focus on them than now.

My current work is driven by a desire to protect endangered reptiles in Kenya's coastal forests, particularly in Shimba Hills. Once a haven for endemic species, the area is now under threat from charcoal production and illegal logging. Collecting data on reptiles such as the endangered Usambara soft-horned chameleon (*Kinyongia tenuis*) will help raise awareness of these rare species and support ongoing conservation efforts.

I aim to share my findings with local communities to encourage them to become stewards of their environment. As global reptile populations decline, I hope to ensure that this region does not follow the same trend. I want all stakeholders to care and take part in conservation. Protecting endangered reptiles isn't just about saving wildlife—it's about preserving natural heritage. Through data, I hope to change perceptions and inspire long-term conservation action.

LEO LASRADO

I originally set out with the intention of researching gecko vocalizations; however, after reaching out to the Bristol Zoological Society for potential co-supervision, they mentioned that they operate in the Sahamalaza-Iles Radama National Park in northwest Madagascar in conjunction with the AEECL (Lemur Conservation Association).

The Sahamalaza peninsula is home to at least 20 species of amphibians, including the critically endangered *Boophis tsilomaro* and *Boophis ankarafensis*, which are microendemic to a few river systems.

Despite this high level of diversity and endemism, the park receives little to no formal policing and is experiencing increasing anthropogenic pressures, mainly from slash-and-burn agriculture (tavy).

My project will survey the local amphibian populations and assess any changes that have occurred over the last decade. The project consists of a combination of long-term acoustic monitoring and rapid visual surveys. One unique aspect of Malagasy research is that you are paired with a local Malagasy student counterpart who is funded as part of the research costs. I believe this is an incredibly important aspect for the long-term sustainability of conservation within Madagascar.



GEORGE MELLOR

The Namaqua dwarf adder (*Bitis schneideri*) is the world's smallest viper, with a maximum length of just 251mm. It inhabits a strip of desert along the coast of Namibia and South Africa. The Namibian range of *B. schneideri* lies entirely within the Tsau //Khaeb National Park, which has had restricted access for over a century, helping maintain high biodiversity—the highest in Namibia. However, a large green hydrogen development is planned for the area, which the Namibian Chamber of Environment predicts will lead to habitat degradation and fragmentation.



Currently, *B. schneideri* is considered a single species across the Orange River, the natural border between Namibia and South Africa. However, an unpublished master's thesis by Rebecca Nicholas at Bangor University found genetic evidence suggesting the two populations may be distinct. If the Namibian population is an endemic species, the planned development could pose a significant threat, and the species' conservation status may need to be reassessed from Low Concern to a more critical level.

In my research, I plan to use whole genome sequencing to investigate the species boundaries within *B. schneideri*. If I find that the Namibian population is indeed endemic, I hope my findings will help push for mitigation measures to reduce the impact of the planned development on the species and its habitat.

If you're interested in applying for or learning more about the BHS Student grant Scheme, get in touch with Dr. Chris Gleed-Owen for more information!

chris@gcoecology.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

JUN

14

2025 BHS SUMMER MEETING & AGM

12:30 to 17:00 - Manchester Museum

SEPT

08 - 11

23RD SEH EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF HERPETOLOGY

09:00 to 17:00 - University of Bonn

OCT

12

JOINT BHS/THAMES & CHILTERN'S GROUP AUTUMN MEETING

13:30 to 18:00 - Amersham Community Centre

CHECK OUT OUR [EVENTS PAGE](#) FOR MORE DETAILS!



Welcome to the latest issue of the Natterjack! I am excited to introduce myself as the new editor. My name is Maria, and I am particularly passionate about research and making science accesible-this is one of the reasons I am proud to be a part of the BHS.

You may have noticed this issue arrived a little later than usual-thank you for your patience! We're making a few behind the scenes changes to refresh the newsletter and ensure it continues to reflect the diversity, dedication, and curiosity of the BHS community.

As I settle into this role, I'd love to hear your thoughts! Any feedback, suggestions, or ideas for future issues are very much appreciated. The Natterjack is a space for all members-from researchers and students to fieldworkers and enthusiasts-and your voice matters.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and I look forward to sharing many more with you!

Maria Filippou
Editor, The Natterjack
natterjack@thebhs.org

