



THE NATTERJACK

THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

EST.1947

BHS in Action: Recent Event Highlights

MARK HOLLOWELL

DRAYTON MANOR CONFERENCE 2025

Once again, we had a very successful event, attended by around 165 people with international speakers and delegates. The conference has now established itself as one of the herpetological highlights of the year for many people involved in the care, husbandry, and breeding of reptiles and amphibians, in both private and professional capacities.

Huge thanks as ever to Drayton Manor for the provision of the excellent conference facility, to all our many sponsors, and to the volunteer organising team – all of these people and businesses are critical to making the event happen.



The venue is already booked for the 2026 conference on the 21st & 22nd March, and the organising team is hard at work planning for another great weekend – we've already confirmed the return of Carl Franklin from Texas as one of the keynote speakers!

For more photos and a link to a full conference report, go to the [2026 event page](#) on the BHS website!



2025 BHS SUMMER MEETING & AGM

We're happy to report a successful and quorate meeting, with around 40 attendees, held at the Manchester Museum Vivarium in June. Big thanks to the Museum and particularly to Matt O'Donnell, Curator of Herpetology at the Museum, for hosting us there and making us feel very welcome. Have you been to the Museum Vivarium? It houses around 30 different species of reptiles and amphibians, and is definitely worth visiting if you're in the area Vivarium - Manchester Museum.

Many of the meeting attendees took the opportunity offered by Matt and his staff of guided tours of the Vivarium during the break. As ever, the meeting included a range of talks on a variety of herpetological topics, merchandise and book sale tables, plenty of opportunities to meet and chat with other members and of course a small 'AGM business' section. Whilst the AGM section is important – and of course required annually as part of good charity governance - we try to keep it relatively short and not too dry (!) so please don't be put off attending this event in future years....

Our speakers this year were:

Matt O'Donnell, who gave us an update and insights into the important Breeding programs, Conservation and Research activities at the Museum Vivarium. The Vivarium has long maintained a specialist interest in Anurans and is currently the only collection outside the Americas to house the variable harlequin frog (*Atelopus varius*).

Thom Lyons, Ecologist and PhD Researcher – Thom spoke on his ongoing PhD research on the northern pool frog, the target of a species recovery project by ARC and Natural England. Two key elements of Thom's work are (1) creating a Habitat Suitability Index for pool frogs in the UK and (2) developing genetic methodologies to identify and define native type pool frogs.

Our own **Dr. Gerardo Garcia**, who updated us on exciting, cutting-edge work being carried out to utilise miniature accelerometers to monitor captive species behaviour and use of the environment. Some initial trials have been carried out on captive Komodo dragons, which have generated plenty of fascinating data. Very much in the early stages of development, this kind of approach could potentially be applied to wild species also in the future.



Along with the great talks, one of the purposes of the meeting is, of course, to formally confirm the make-up of the BHS Council for 2025 / 26. The full updated Council is included in this edition of the Natterjack for members' information. We confirmed several changes this year, including new Trustees and new posts.

We're very happy to welcome:

Jackie Wellings took up the post of the new Finance Officer

Maria Filippou as the new Natterjack Editor

Anna Maria-White as our Social Media Officer – a new post created in recognition of the importance of developing and maintaining our presence in the ever-expanding social media landscape

Paul Eversfield is moving into the post of Trade Officer

Erin Rickman-Hills is joining us as an Ordinary Member of Council

The Society can only run as effectively as it does due to the continuing time and effort put in by these and all other Trustees - all on an entirely voluntary basis, of course.

And finally, it was our great pleasure during the AGM part of the meeting to recognise and give due thanks to Jan Clemons on her retirement from the post of Conservation Officer of the BHS in 2023.



Jan joined the then Conservation Committee in 1986, shortly after joining the Society. Throughout the years since, Jan remained fully involved with the UK Conservation activities of the BHS, with periods as Conservation Committee Chair and more latterly as Conservation Officer – being a driving force for UK herp conservation generally and ensuring the Society maintained relevance and key associations in this area as ARC was instituted and local ARGs were set up around the country.

Amongst many other things, Jan organised and led several field trips for BHS members both in the UK and farther afield – for example, Madagascar in 2018! Hopefully, Jan will write up some of her experiences during this time for a future NJ edition....

In recognition of the many years of Jan's very active involvement with the Society, we were delighted to make her a Fellow of the British Herpetological Society, following a unanimous vote by Council earlier this year. Many thanks, Jan, and we wish you the very best of luck for all your future endeavours.



BHS Council 2025–26

President
Chairman
Treasurer
Secretary

Dr. Gerardo Garcia
Mr. Mark Hollowell
Vacant (*Mr. Michael Wise co-opted*)
Vacant (*Mr. Trevor Rose co-opted*)

Finance Officer
Research Officer
Education and YH Officer
**Head of International Conservation
and Captive Breeding Projects**
UK Conservation Officer

Ms. Jacqueline Wellings
Dr. Chris Gleed-Owen
Ms. Jennie Shea

Dr. Simon Townson
Mr. Steven Allain

Herpetological Journal Editor

Dr. Kevin Arbuckle
Prof. Jelka Crnobrnja-Isailovic
Vacant (*Dr. Rick Hodges overseeing*)
Miss Maria Filippou
Mrs. Katherine Mitchell

Herpetological Bulletin Editor
The NatterJack Editor
Website & Communications Officer

Social Media Officer
Development Officer
Trade Officer

Mrs. Anna-Maria White
Mr. Mark Hollowell
Mr. Paul Eversfield

Ordinary Members

Mr. Stephen Copley
Ms. Catherine Whatley
Mr. Vince Goodhall
Ms. Erin Rickman



“June”, the Higham Marsh Leviathan

PAUL EVERSFIELD

Following a call in June from the National Centre for Reptile Welfare, I was requested to assist in dealing with an 8.4Kg adult female Common Snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*).

She was found on the RSPB nature reserve at Higham Marshes, near Gravesend, Kent. Out of the water, she had been in the process of laying eggs. These highly aquatic North American turtles rarely leave the water, except in spring/early summer, when gravid females will embark on a cross-country hike to find a suitable nest site. These sites are typically well above the water shed and can be some distance from their ponds or lakes, where they are clearly a top predator. “June” has likely been living feral in the marshes for some considerable time, and judging by her body condition, has been thriving in Kent.



JUNE LEVIATHAN OF HIGHAM MARSH 2025



TAKING JUNE'S MEASUREMENTS

Her prey would be a variety of aquatic invertebrates, which may include the highly invasive American Signal Crayfish and Mitten crabs. However, other molluscs, carrion, and during spring, also water birds, such as Moorhens, ducks, etc. Some aquatic vegetation is also on the menu, and since being securely housed with me in Surrey, she is certainly eating a carpet of Duckweed (*Lemna minor*).

Originally imported, no doubt as a hatchling for the UK pet trade, a diminutive 8-10 gram baby, she has grown to 8.4Kg and a 34 cm SCL adult. Either released by the former owner or possibly having escaped from an insecure captive enclosure. Although highly aquatic in nature, when motivated, these very large turtles are very adept at climbing using powerful claws and a very long tail to secure holds, which enable amazing climbing skills.

“June” will be retained in my private collection of aquatic turtles and is housed as a singleton within a secure pond, inside a greenhouse. She and a smaller adult male will be used for educational purposes. Over decades, I have spent a lot of personal time educating people on aquatic Chelonia and, in the last six years, have been involved with the [Turtle Tally project](#), which is based at Hadlow College and [the National Centre for Reptile Welfare](#).

These turtles are generally famed for their attitude, and one has to take great care when being handled. Both potential bites or damage inflicted by the powerful claws mean that they really should not be considered as a pet.

NB, she subsequently went on to lay two clutches of eggs, totalling over 30!



JUNE LEVIATHAN OF HIGHAM MARSH 2025



JUNE AND PAUL SMILING TOGETHER

Responsible Reform: REPTA's Commitment to Welfare-Led Self-Regulation

CHARLES THOMPSON – REPTA TRADE DELEGATE

The reptile-keeping community stands at a crossroads. As public scrutiny of exotic pet keeping increases and policymakers consider the perils of positive lists and tighter controls, REPTA – the Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association – has taken significant steps to demonstrate that the sector is both capable of and committed to responsible self-regulation. At the heart of this renewed direction is a clear, dual policy commitment: to phase out the sale of animals carrying deleterious genes, and to introduce due diligence standards at the point of sale for so-called "giant" species.

These measures are not about appeasement or optics; they reflect a deliberate, welfare-focused strategy prompted by government pressure to self-regulate or face the potential alternative of imposed legislative reform. More than this, they represent an ethical pivot for REPTA – one that prioritises long-term animal welfare outcomes and responds constructively to the concerns of welfare scientists and veterinary professionals alike.

A Mandate for Change

In late 2023, discussions between REPTA, DEFRA, and allied bodies made clear that self-regulation by the entire pet sector was now expected. Regulators expect each sector to act with a level of responsibility commensurate with the growing public interest in animal welfare. The UK government's policy direction has increasingly embraced a precautionary ethos. It is within that landscape we understand pet keeping, in its entirety, will be under scrutiny.

REPTA, as the only trade association representing reptile businesses in the UK, recognised that it had to lead this change or risk losing the ability to shape the future of the hobby and industry altogether. The message was clear: either demonstrate due diligence and modern standards of care internally or face the likelihood of external enforcement that may not be informed by specialist expertise. A truly disastrous outcome, particularly for those with rare or endangered species.



Deleterious Genes: A Line in the Sand

The first major policy action applicable to REPTA members was a ban on the intentional breeding and sale of reptiles carrying known deleterious genes. This includes cultivars associated with high rates of neurological, metabolic or dermatological impairments –these are connected traits associated with visually desirable morphs but come at a cost to the animal's quality of life.

Unlike the continuum line breeding of dog, rabbit and cat breeds where breed standards seem to encourage extreme breed features (mostly associated with brachycephaly) reptile breeders have a binary decision to make, to pass on a known copy of a deleterious gene or not. Where it is evidenced that animals are impaired as a result of a gene being activated it will be added to our banned list. Worthy of note is that many of the morphs listed are perfectly stable when only a single copy of the gene is present within the animal, the problems arise when a double copy (or super form) is created. REPTA has gone to lengths to explain this to the membership, and to discourage themselves or members of the reptile keeping public at the point of sale from pairing animals both with a copy of the problematic gene.



EXAMPLES OF DELETERIOUS GENES - JAGUAR CARPET PYTHON

While REPTA acknowledges the diversity of views within the community, it is now unequivocal in its stance: animals bred with avoidable and predictable welfare impairments have no place in a responsible future for reptile keeping. The breeding and commercial promotion of lines such as Spider Royal Pythons, Jaguar Carpet Pythons, and more will be actively banned from sale and unsupported within member businesses.

This decision aligns closely with veterinary and academic recommendations and international welfare trends. We hope it also signals a cultural shift – from prioritising aesthetics or rarity to focusing squarely on captive reptiles' health, behaviour, and wellbeing.

Giant Species: Raising the Bar for Due Diligence

REPTA's second major reform targets the sale of large-bodied reptiles whose adult size and care requirements routinely exceed the expectations or capabilities of novice keepers.

The Giant Species Policy will be rolled out in four distinct sections, each dealing with a reptile group: giant constrictors, giant lizards, terrestrial chelonia, and aquatic chelonia. These animals are not being banned from sale. Instead, REPTA has introduced a pre-ownership assessment and guidance for member businesses at the point of sale. This includes the seller's responsibility for confirming that customers understand the long-term commitment involved, have appropriate facilities, and are not acquiring the animal on impulse.

The motivation here is not only welfare-driven but pragmatic. Giant species, when poorly kept or irresponsibly sold, generate disproportionate reputational and regulatory risk. By encouraging careful, well-informed placements and scrutinising high-risk sales, REPTA aims to prevent the potential problems with these animals while also improving the trade's credibility with governmental and veterinary stakeholders.

A New Chapter of Engagement

REPTA fully acknowledges that the British Herpetological Society and other conservation and research organisations have not always viewed the trade favourably – and sometimes for good reason. In the past, elements of the commercial sector have prioritised profit over principle, and in doing so, have occasionally compromised the very animals they claim to support.

But we are working to change that narrative. These new policies are not isolated decisions: they are part of a broader REPTA strategy designed to raise baseline standards across the sector, support responsible businesses, and proactively address the key concerns voiced by genuine welfare groups, government, and the scientific community.

The removal of deleterious genes and the responsible handling of giant species are proof-of-concept for this model. They show that the trade can act pre-emptively, decisively, and in good faith when it comes to difficult issues.

Looking Ahead REPTA's message is simple: the future of reptile keeping depends on responsibility. These reforms are just the beginning!

Snapped!

THE WINNERS OF THIS YEARS BHS PHOTO COMPETITION

The results are in — and we're so excited to share them! This year's BHS Photography Competition was bursting with amazing entries showing off the beauty, behaviour, and diversity of amphibians and reptiles native to the UK. Huge thanks to everyone who entered — your creativity and passion made this competition something really special! We will contact the winners shortly!

REPTILES



PETER HOWARTH



KEVIN CLARKE



BEN MCINTYRE

AMPHIBIANS



KEVIN CLARKE



JOSH DAY



BEN MCINTYRE

YOUNG HERPETOLOGIST

WINNER

ROBIN PRING





Calling All Young Herp Artists!



CATEGORIES

 Ages 5-8

 Ages 9-13

 Ages 14-17

The BHS is running our first Young Herpetologists competition in Autumn 2025. We want to see your drawings, paintings, sketches, mosaics—whatever your favourite art form is!

🏆 Winners will be showcased in the next issue of 🏆 the NatterJack and receive a certificate!

SEND A SCAN OF YOUR ENTRY WITH YOUR NAME AND AGE BY 5TH DECEMBER 2025 TO:

education@thebhs.org



We want to hear from the Young Herpetologists!

Our YH section is in the midst of a revamp, and we want to hear from you!

It's time for you to have your say about what you get from your membership. Fill in our quick survey to let us know your thoughts!

Share
your
Thoughts

UPCOMING EVENTS

OCT

12

JOINT BHS/THAMES & CHILTERN'S GROUP AUTUMN MEETING
13:30 to 18:00 - Ammersham Community Centre

NOV

29

ARC & BHS JOINT SCIENTIFIC MEETING 2025
10:00 to 16:30 - Bournemouth Natural Science Society

DEC

6

VENOM DAY
09:00 to 18:00 - Bangor University

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





**BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND THAMES
& CHILTERN HERPETOLOGICAL GROUP**

Joint meeting Sunday 12th October 2025, 2.30 – 6.30 pm at the Meeting Hall, Amersham Leisure Centre, Chiltern Ave, Amersham, Bucks, HP6 5AH. Amersham is easy to get to via J18 of the M25 or by tube/rail to Amersham station. Parking is available and refreshments are free. There will be a small charge of £5 cash on the door. Free entry to YH members and any adult accompanying them.

2.30 – 3.00 Arrival and coffee/refreshments

Chairman: Simon Townson

3.00 – 3.30. Tony Gent, Karen Haysom and Nick Moulton (Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, UK). ‘The Status and Conservation of the Smooth Snake in England’.

3.30 – 4.10. Andrés Valenzuela-Sanches (Zoological Society of London and Asociación Ranita de Darwin) and **Ben Tapley** (Zoological Society of London). ‘An Emergency Response for the Southern Darwin’s Frog (*Rhinoderma darwinii*)’.

*Short break and refreshments/informal session (see below)

Chairman: Colin Melsom

4.50 – 5.20. Robert Stebbings, Ian Prestt and *Richard A. Griffiths. (*Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent). ‘A Pioneering Study of Grass Snake Ecology in Dorset, UK, 1958-1962’.

5.20 – 6.00. Jay Redbond (Chester Zoo, UK) and **Olivier Marquis.** (Museum National D’Histoire Naturelle, Parc Zoologique de Paris, France). ‘A Journey with the Largest Chameleon on the Planet’.

***Exhibition** of posters and items of herpetological interest. There will be limited space for up to 15 exhibits. Members who would like space should contact Simon Townson (07707751900 or s.townson@imperial.ac.uk), or Colin Melsom (07852 949405 or colinmelsom@sky.com)



Welcome to the latest issue of the Natterjack!

We'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. 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

