



Newsletter of the British Herpetological Society *Established 1948*

Editorial

So it has been a mixed start to the year weatherwise! It remains to be seen what the impact will be; whether the higher temperatures have prevented successful brumation or whether species have been able to get an early start without being too effected by later cold snaps!

This edition is slightly different, and the content offers a view of the shape of things to come. The Natterjack was once a source of information on all aspects of herpetology, but, in a changing world with social media and more specialised organisations, this need is lessened. Therefore, this newsletter is going to be more focussed on the activity of your BHS.

This means we have included Council minutes, so that we can be transparent with members about what is discussed and what the difficult issues facing the society may be. For example, we are in desperate need of a treasurer, ideally someone with financial skills. The cost of

Council Minutes May 2016

(Minutes will be subject to ratification by council)

Date: Saturday 7th May 2016

Venue: Angela Marmont Centre meeting room, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London

Chair: Chris Glead-Owen (CGO)

Present: Jan Clemons (JCI) minutes secretary, Dave Willis (DW), Mark Hollowell (MH), Roman Muryn (RM), Kim Le Breuille (KLB), Angelo Pernetta (AP), Stephen Copley (SC)

1. Apologies, Quoracy

Apologies had been received from: Richard Griffiths (RG), Jon Coote (JC), Paul Eversfield (PE), Simon Townson (ST), Trevor Rose (TG), Michael Wise (MW)

The council was one person short of being quorate, but Trevor Rose was available via telephone. All substantive issues that were voted upon in the meeting will be circulated among Council by email, to achieve formal quorate decision-making. **Action – CGO to collate votes from absent Council members.**

2. Approval of minutes from 16th January 2016 Council meeting

The minutes were circulated, proposed by SC as a correct record, seconded by MH and **agreed** by all present. The minutes were then signed by the Chair.

3. Matters Arising

- (i) BHS Library – a list of publications for inclusion on BHS website still

outstanding. **Action DW to discuss with Dave Bird and report to Council on progress**

- (ii) Natterjack – designing an online survey for BHS members to gauge opinion is still outstanding. **Action MH, IS & KLB**
- (iii) Submitted Reports – still outstanding. **Action – MH to provide specs for functionality & discuss with Aye-Aye.**
- (iv) **AOB – outstanding matters**
- Journal scanning – **Action - TR to inform Council of progress made.**
 - Council Posts – TR (secretary) & MW (treasurer) spend at least one day a week on BHS business. The Chair requested that other Council Members write a description of their post including tasks & time input. **Action – CGO to provide proforma template for Council members to complete asap.**
 - Rehoming of animals – Appropriate information on this matter for the website is still outstanding. **Action MH**
 - World Congress – has Robert Jehle received £300 BHS funding for this? **Action –AP to chase up.**
 - Frank Bowles – the cheque for a donation to Amnesty International was received.
 - Subscription Review – explanatory letter to print members and statement for AGM has been done. Not sure if RG has worded a tax-deductible note regarding membership fees. Not sure how an additional meeting proposed by IS is progressing.

What about the role of the Meetings Organiser (PE)?
Action – CGO to check with RG & IS on progress and discuss with PE his role and logistics involved.

- AGM matters – CGO suggested giving one year's free online membership to 'new' members attending future AGMs. We could also post this on BHS, ARG UK & ARC websites and the BHS Facebook page. However they must register in advance for catering purposes.
- Check that all recent 'new' member's info has been forwarded by TR. **Action – MH**

4. Updates from Council

Secretary – report supplied and amphibian ladders update. JCI felt local authority staff would be resistant to retrofitting, but new projects would be receptive. All agreed we need better-designed publicity. SC reported that a 'retweet' from Chris Packham heightened awareness of the project, and it was agreed to push it well in advance for next year.

Conservation Officer – JCI reported that the BHS field trip to Surrey went very well with help from the ARC field staff. There were 12 BHS attendees, including many new 'younger' members. A trip to Dorset is proposed for May 2017. **Action – JCI to write report for N/J**

Education Committee – KLB reported that Peregrine Livefoods will continue to sponsor the BHS photographic competition.

5. Subscriptions

TR had drafted a letter for Council members about membership subscription increases

(attached) for Council approval. Subject to tweaking to lessen the harshness of some wording, this was **agreed**. (CGO proposed, DW seconded).

During discussion the following points were raised about online membership v. print membership. In a straw poll at the AGM, support for online-only was roughly two-thirds, meaning a significant third of the membership is still resistant. The cost of publications is a financial burden, and online members are subsidising print members who should ideally pay full cost. Better publicity of this fact among membership may change views. Over time, people become more tolerant and receptive to electronic media.

Subscription rates were agreed at the January 2016 meeting, and the principle that print cost must be shifted wholly to print members if we retain this medium in the long term. Academia is now going electronic with papers published online as opposed to being in printed journals. The main advantage is that papers/articles can be published much earlier online, and this could solve 'bumper' issue cost hikes (**agenda item 6**).

It was **agreed** to do online-early articles that would subsequently be published in the journal which was proposed by AP, seconded by JCI with all in favour. A new section on the website will be needed.

Action – all absent members views are needed before this decision can be confirmed.

6. Herpetological Journal editorship

The transition to AP is progressing well. Robert Jehle is now Assistant Editor. After problems with emails going astray in the university email system, AP now has a BHS Journal gmail

account to receive submissions directly. **Action – MH to arrange a link from the website to the gmail address.**

AP has received 29 articles in 2016 already, and reported that 80% are not up to the Journal's standards, and could be directed to the Bulletin. The rejection rate is up from 75% to 80% recently. AP is struggling for reviewers however.

Open journal systems – are open sources, not publishing houses where small societies can publish their articles and use their management system. There would be restricted access and institutional access would be easier. Questions raised were:

- Costs involved?
- Could we still put the journal on our website?
- Could we save £2K by not subscribing to Ingenta?

AP also discussed Biotaxa.org, a platform for sharing articles among peer organisations, run by Zootaxa, in addition to our own BHS website platform. Alternatively, creating a new stand-alone sharing platform would cost c.£5k in software.

Action- AP to look at the pros and cons and report back to Council

7. Herpetological Journal Content - Refer to item 5

AP felt that current word limit (5,000 words) is too long, and should be reduced to around 2500 words, without losing tables etc. AP would also like to change the submissions policy. Ideally we need more articles on applied ecology, conservation and behaviour as there are too many on physiology which is inaccessible to many members. General support for him to narrow the submissions, and reduce word limits. **Action – AP to develop new author guidelines; DW to include**

questions about journal content in the members' survey.

8. Natterjack editorship

DW gave apologies for the lapse in production and nominally editorship had gone to IS. No issue has appeared though, so it was agreed to revert to DW as Editor, subject to change in direction towards items of purely member interest. During discussion the following points were raised:

- Do we still need it? (Agreed yes)
- Should it be by email/online-only? (Saving great secretarial burden)
- Format to be newsletter or a blog after Council Meetings? (Quarterly newsletter after meeting seems sensible).
- The editor should not be the author (Editor to compile *not* write content).
- BHS Facebook page run by IS, IR & APL has 2000+ followers; why not have a link to the Natterjack?
(Agreed)

General feeling that it should be a BHS news vehicle, with items *only* of interest to members, e.g. meetings, news, minutes, policies. There are many other sources of non-BHS news already (including the BHS Facebook page). Submission remain poor, so we need to reduce burden on the editor, and make it a simple process. **Action – DW will get the next edition together asap, to be discussed again at next Council Meeting.**

9. Subdivision of Secretary's duties (for task groups see attached Secretary role document)

With reference to a document previously produced by TR on division of his duties, the tasks were divided up as follows:

Task group 1 – essentially a membership secretary. All roles including monitoring membership, renewal reminders and recording stationary expenditure from Task Group 4. RM and KLB kindly offered to fill this role, possibly split between them, though some disadvantages of that. KLB already has an Ed Comm portfolio too. **Action: RM & KLB to discuss with TR, and decide who is best-placed to take on the role.**

Task group 2 – essentially publications secretary to liaise with their local printer over HB/HJ printing and mailing (while we still have print needs). No volunteers. This job would not be needed if we were eventually online-only.

Task group 3 – Arrange Council meetings & AGM. CGO is temporarily filling this role, but cannot continue indefinitely. It is not a heavy burden, but needs occasional time commitments. PE is already the *de facto* Meetings Officer, so fits this description?
Action – CGO to discuss with PE

A Meetings Secretary, i.e. taking minutes and creating pdfs, is also needed. JCI has already filled this role.

Task group 4 – It was discussed whether new member packs are really necessary. The overall consensus was no. Instead, KLB offered to issue laminated membership cards and create and maintain membership forms (agreed). This is sufficient for most other societies. CGO will monitor & update the BHS Constitution as necessary.

Do we keep or sell the BHS photocopier?
Action - CGO to ask TR

Task Group 5 – Keeping and mailing back issues, books etc. SC offered to fill role (agreed). In the long term it may be phased out.

Task Group 6 & 7 – Ingenta liaison and compile content for Natterjack. APL & DW offered (agreed).

To be discussed by email among Council, once voting of substantive issues has been settled by email.

Task Group 8 – Cheque signatory, CAF bank authorisation. Vacant, but could be CGO if necessary.

Task Group 9 – Answer general queries. DW offered, and IS already filling this role (agreed).

10. Subdivision of Treasurer's Duties

Concerning banking & weekly jobs – RM offered (agreed), but how much would it cost BHS to outsource to a bookkeeper and/or an accountant? If RM takes on Secretarial roles, he might not be able to do the banking also.

Action - DW to ask an accountant he knows about bookkeeping costs.

11. Requests for funding

Steve Allen & Tariq Stark have requested £1000 for basal (emerging chytrid affecting salamanders) genetic sampling in amphibian populations. The fieldwork is wholly in Belgium however, and Council would be more receptive if it included some UK fieldwork. **Action – CGO to reply.**

12. AOB

Council recorded a vote of thanks once again for our outgoing longstanding Secretary, Trevor Rose, who has been on Council continuously for 25 years until now. Thanks were also recorded for outgoing Treasurer Michael Wise. Both have very kindly been co-opted until now, but we owe it to them to relieve them of their duties.

13. Date of next meeting

Conservation

HERPETOFAUNA CONSERVATION IN THE UK - an overview

As BHS Conservation Officer I often receive emails from BHS members who would like to get actively involved in reptile and conservation work in the UK. The aim of this article is to explain what organisations are involved in this work and more importantly how BHS members can contribute.

A brief history

The BHS Conservation Committee established in 1960 ran a yearly programme of survey & management tasks for rare reptiles (sand lizard, smooth snake) and natterjack toads in Dorset, Surrey, Hampshire and the Sefton Coast. However, volunteers could only do so much and in 1989 the Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT) was established which was in the position to employ staff that could focus on conserving reptiles and amphibians. Over the years HCT (now called Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC)) has acquired more reserves totalling 80 sites covering 500hac. Rare species are still an important part of ARC's work with habitat management and reintroduction programmes for sand lizards, smooth snakes, natterjack toads and the pool frog.

To find out more about how you can get involved with ARC through events, surveys, training courses and volunteering visit www.arc-trust.org

Over the past 10 years there has been growing concern that the widespread or so called 'common species' are also in national decline, especially the adder and common toad. With this in mind, Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG UK) was established and is run by volunteers with the key aim of establishing a network of ARGs in every county in the UK. There are now over 60 groups actively involved and is often the first place I direct BHS members to if they have concerns about a site in their area, or just wish to get actively involved in practical conservation work. ARGs are involved in numerous local projects and campaigns. They represent hubs of local expertise containing many experienced herpetologists. The national voluntary ARG network represents a significant citizen science input into large scale national projects such as NARRS (see below). To find your local ARG please visit www.arguk.org

National Projects

Whether you join a local ARG or prefer to do your own thing there are plenty of national projects you can become involved in. In this edition of the Natterjack I would like to outline the NARRS programme www.narrs.org.uk The National Amphibian and Reptile Recording scheme led by ARC in partnership with ARG UK began in 2007 and has generated lots of information from widespread amphibian and reptile surveys which will be used to create a baseline from which future trends in status and distribution of all UK amphibian and reptile species can be measured.

In future editions of the Natterjack details of other national projects (with links) will be outlined and I hope this overview will inspire BHS members to get more actively involved in UK amphibian & reptile conservation

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Captive Breeding Committee Meeting

The BHS is proud to announce another exciting meeting of the Captive Breeding Committee to be held in Amersham on the 23rd October 2016.

This is always a popular and interesting event, featuring speakers from all corners of the actual and herpetological world! Previous speakers have included, Tell Hicks (Wildlife Artist) Paul Rowley (Venomous snake keeper, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine). In addition, there will be numerous captive specimens on display.

Further details to come . . .

Education Committee

Congratulations to Samantha Borrett who won 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes as the only entrant in the BHS Photography competition. Hopefully you will have some worthy competitors next year, Samantha!

Thanks to Peregrine Livefood for the donation of £250 worth of goodies!

Members' Articles

Arizona Field Trip

Anthony Von Plettenburg-Laing

A module offered at Bangor University offers students the opportunity to go on a field trip. One possible destination is Arizona, which is a predominantly herpetological trip; therefore priority is given to students studying Zoology with Herpetology.

The journey commenced at 4:30am on Monday 15 September 2014, when we travelled by coach from Bangor to Heathrow airport. We caught the direct flight to Phoenix, and arrived at 17:10. We drove to a motel in Eloy where we were staying for the first night. We had time in the evening for a quick road cruise, however the weather soon turned awful as heavy rain and strong winds forced us to head back early. On the drive back, we saw a derailed train and a lorry which had crashed in the median.

The first morning we woke early to head off to Portal. We were unfortunately delayed, allowing a few students to search the surrounding areas for reptiles. To our surprise, several Mohave rattlesnakes (*Crotalus scutulatus*) were found, including one very large individual – nick named El Mofo. Measuring it confirmed that it is the largest recorded *C. scutulatus*, with a total length of 1236mm.



We arrived at Southwestern Research Station (SWRS) at midday. The woods surrounding the research station are inhabited by a huge variation of different fauna. Skunks, white tailed deer and bears are just a few examples of the mammals in the area. Alongside the buildings runs a stream, which feeds a few ponds including one which is inhabited by the threatened Chiricahua leopard frogs (*L. chiricahuensis*). The first herp we found however, was a black headed garter snake (*Thamnophis cyrtopsis*), basking on the bank of the stream. That evening, we split off into 3 vehicles to go road cruising. We found several amphibian species including the Great Plains toad (*Anaxyrus cognatus*), green toad (*A. debilis*), Sonoran desert toad (*Incilius alvarius*), Mexican Spadefoot (*Spea multiplicata*), Couch's Spadefoot (*Scaphiopus couchii*), and a dead on road (DOR) long-nosed snake (*Rhinocheilus lecontei*) (Below).



That night, we were hit by a hurricane. The stream had flooded and the roads were blocked, so we were cut off from leaving the research station. For the following two days we stayed at the SWRS and searched the surrounding area for any more species. I had brought a light tent along with me, in which I posed several different species for photographs. As research is currently being undertaken on the hybridisation within *Crotalus*, blood and venom samples were taken from

individuals caught. We were also offered the chance to safely handle a Rattlesnake, to gain valuable experience; this involved hooking an individual from one container to another.

The hosts and staff were very kind and helpful, and we were looked after very well considering the lack of electricity and water supply! Several lizard species were found around the buildings, like the desert grassland whiptail (*Aspidoscelis uniparens*), Clark's spiny lizard (*Sceloporus clarkii*), Yarrow's spiny lizard (*S. jarrovi*), striped plateau lizard (*S. virgatus*), ornate tree lizard (*Urosaurus ornatus*), Madrean alligator lizard (*Elgaria kingii*), the greater short-horned lizard (*Phrynosoma hernandesii*), and a large black tailed rattlesnake (*Crotalus molossus*).

On Friday 19th, a few rangers arrived at the research station who cleared the path for us. On the drive down towards Portal, we saw the aftermath which included parts of the road being washed away. We arrived at the Chiricahua Desert Museum at midday, and walked through their impressive outdoor enclosure. We then split off into smaller groups, and went road cruising along the surrounding roads. We found several Texas horned lizards (*P. cornutum*), a large tarantula and a DOR Western patch-nosed snake (*Salvadora hexalepis*). We returned in the evening for a BBQ and social event, where we were also shown around the private collection.



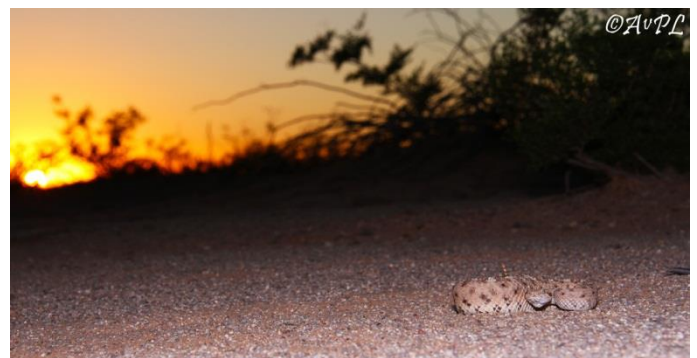
©AvPL

We visited Antelope Pass on Saturday, where we spent a couple of hours searching for more

species. We also had a chance to noose lizards, which is a great method of catching cautious individuals. Other species found here include the crevice spiny lizard (*Sceloporus poinsettii*), green toad, (*Anaxyrus debilis*) and a large Western diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus atrox*).

Over the next few days, we visited Granite Gap, Red Rock, the Huachuca Mountains and Sabino Canyon. We continued to add species to our list, and photographed most of them too. Some notable species found include a Gila monster (*Heloderma suspectum*), Canyon spotted whiptail (*Aspidoscelis burti*), Hybrid spiny-tailed iguana (*Ctenosaura sp.*) (non-native), desert iguana (*Dipsosaurus dorsalis*), long-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia wislizenii*) and the beautiful ridge-nosed rattlesnake (*Crotalus willardi*). We also undertook radio telemetry of tiger rattlesnakes (*Crotalus tigris*) and black tailed rattlesnakes (*C. molossus*).

This was my most successful herping trip, and I believe it was one of the best trips for the University, with 56 species of reptiles and amphibians being found over 10 days.



©AvPL

Total species count was 56 out of the reported 132 species present in Arizona.

To see more photos from this trip, please visit www.anthonyvpl.co.uk/arizona-2014.html

Species list

Anaxyrus cognatus
Anaxyrus debilis
Anaxyrus punctatus
Arizona elegans
Aspidoscelis burti
Aspidoscelis exsanguis
Aspidoscelis sonora
Aspidoscelis tigris
Aspidoscelis uniparens
Coleonyx variegatus
Coluber flagellum
Cophosaurus texanus
Crotalus atrox
Crotalus cerastes
Crotalus molossus
Crotalus scutulatus
Crotalus tigris
Crotalus viridis
Crotalus willardi
Crotaphytus collaris
Ctenosaura sp.
Dipsosaurus dorsalis
Elgaria kingii
Gambelia wislezenii
Gopherus morafkai
Gyalopion canum
Heloderma suspectum
Heterodon kennerlyi
Holbrookia maculata
Hyla arenicolor
Hypsiglena sp.
Incilius alvarius
Lampropeltis getula splendida
Lampropeltis pyromelana
Lithobates catenensis
Phrynosoma cornutum
Phrynosoma hernandesi
Phrynosoma modestum
Pituophis catenifer
Plestiodon obsoletus
Rhinocheilus lecontei
Salvadora hexalepis
Scaphiopus couchii
Sceloporus clarkii
Sceloporus cowlesi
Sceloporus jarrovii
Sceloporus magister
Sceloporus poinsettii
Sceloporus slevinii
Sceloporus virgatus

Spea multiplicata
Terrapene ornata
Thamnophis cyrtopsis
Thamnophis marcianus
Urosaurus ornatus
Uta stansburiana

Next editions

So this will be the shape of things to come, but we need to hear from you! If you have been on an amazing herping holiday, seen something incredible in your local area, done some habitat restoration work or bred an unusual exotic please get in touch.

Anything herpetological from members will be considered!

Any questions or queries send them through to: natterjack@thebhs.org