



Newsletter of the British Herpetological Society

Established 1947

## ARC Trust/ARG UK

# Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2023

By Steven Allain



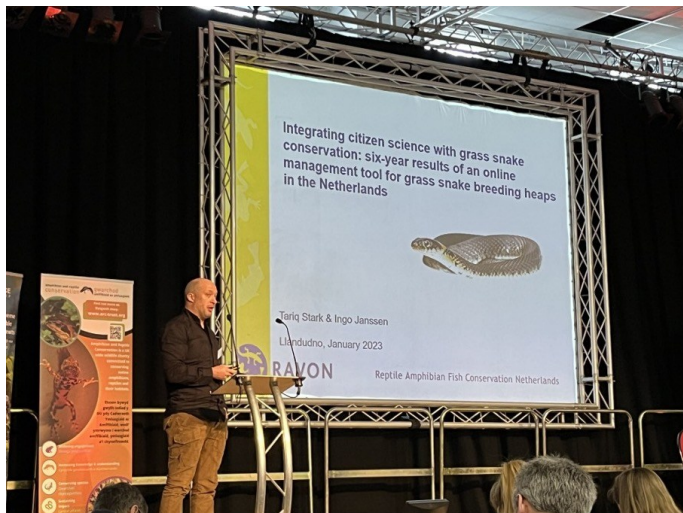
As many of you may be aware, February tends to be the beginning of the amphibian breeding season, with newts and toads returning to ponds. It is also the time when a large number of herpetologists, from all walks of life, descend upon a large conference centre in order to attend the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting – an annual event held by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, and the Amphibian and Reptile Groups UK. This year, the event was in Llandudno in sunny northern Wales. It had been three years since the last in-person meeting, so it was great to be able to mix with everyone properly again, after the restrictions and ongoing limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. I was particularly excited to attend in order to give a talk on my PhD

research. If you have seen me speak at an event in the past, it will have probably been on midwife toads, and not grass snakes.

It may have taken a long time to get to Llandudno from Canterbury (and to get back again), but it was certainly worth it! I can imagine some people would have been put off by the rail strikes (which is a shame), but there was quite a good turn out to the event. Seeing everyone again after so long, having a beer, and discussing the cool research we'd all been involved with is one of the most motivating feelings. It was also great to see so many new faces among the crowd, and to interact with some of them. Despite the fact that herpetology is a rela-



tively small field in the UK (compared to the likes of ornithology), we sure have a number of really dedicated individuals among our ranks! As with previous Herpetofauna Workers Meetings, it wouldn't be the same without a pre-conference curry on the Friday night before we all got down to business. I spent the majority of this social shaking the hands of my friends and colleagues who were congratulating me for recently completing my PhD. Battling with everything through some of the toughest times of my life was worth it for those few hours of recognition.

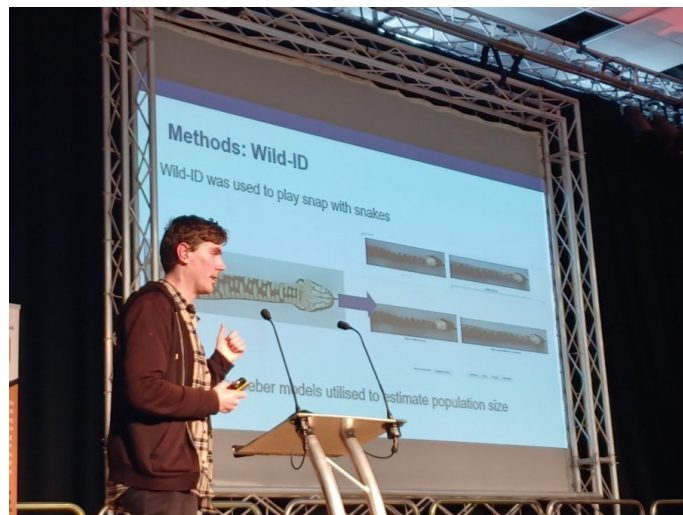


Tariq Stark of RAVON kicks off the session on grass snakes with a talk on citizen science and breeding heaps for grass snakes in the Netherlands.

Around came 9:30 am on Saturday morning, when we all collected our name badges and piled into the conference centre (Venue Cymru), we were treated to an opening address from the one and only Iolo Williams (via a pre-recorded video), before the talks commenced. Over the two days, we were all engaged with a number of brilliant talks aimed at improving our knowledge of the herpetofauna of the British Isles, and how each of the species mentioned were being impacted by a certain threat, or recovering given a particular mitigation measure. These included talks on everything from the population genetics of sand lizards in England and Wales from Ben Owens (Bangor University), to how adders in Cornwall may be stuck in a climate trap given by Becky Turner (University of Kent). There was a worrying trend to the Sunday, with a lot of the talks themed around climate change – this is certainly something to keep your eyes on into the future!

My favourite part was the Saturday afternoon. Both myself and the legendary Tariq Stark (RAVON) both delivered talks on the greatest snake species of them all, grass snakes. We took a show of hands and the majority of the audience agreed with us, most excellent! Tariq's talk related to grass snakes' increasing need for artificial egg laying sites due to a lack of natural sites, and how this is tied to a strong association between themselves and our historic agricultural practices. Tariq also spoke a bit on

the successful mitigation action of building more compost and manure heaps in the Netherlands, and the positive benefits to grass snakes. Most of these are built and monitored by volunteers, which is certainly something we should be doing more of in Great Britain. After warming the crowd up, I took the stage to give a talk on how I had spent three summers running around Norfolk like a lunatic chasing grass snakes, in order to learn more about their population size, and what the trend was. This introduced everyone to my particular methods, and I'm now hoping that a number of people take the information from both of our talks to help bolster grass snake conservation in Great Britain. It is that population-level infor-



Not the most flattering photo, but here I explain how I established which individual snake was which before entering that data into my 'Natrix matrix'.

mation that we crucially need to be able to make an informed decision about their conservation status.

Aside from the wide range of talks and amazing workshops, the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting wouldn't be the same without the coveted gala dinner and Have I Got Newts For You quiz. This is an annual event, where Jim Foster and John Wilkinson of the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust put together a comical quiz. The questions and Taskmaster-like challenge this year were superb. After not being able to compete in teams for the past three years, everyone came together and had a great time! There was a lot of speculation after the result that the team I was part of had won, with rumours that our team was cheating. However we simply knew pretty much all of the answers – without needing to risk things with a guess. That is what happens when you have a team of nutters that love amphibians and reptiles!

I'm very much looking forward to next year's Herpetofauna Workers Meeting when I may be able to share some more results from my PhD, or the final results of our long-term midwife toad project!

Hopefully, I'll see you there!

# Help shape the future of the BHS!

Happily, the Society is currently in a healthy financial position and our metrics are positive – membership for example has been growing steadily for the last few years after a previous downward trend.

So, overall we're looking good. We remain active and influential together with producing great publications – you're reading one of them right now! We fund research and conservation projects along with organising multiple annual events and meetings. But – all this is achieved only through the efforts and commitment of the Trustees who sit on our Council and who are all volunteers. Inevitably, for any number of reasons, we experience a turnover of Trustees and invariably have some vacancies on Council.

This year is no exception and the following posts are either currently vacant or will become so at the AGM in May, when some Trustees step down:

- ⇒ Secretary
- ⇒ Treasurer
- ⇒ Finance Officer
- ⇒ Trade Officer
- ⇒ Education + Young Herpetologists
- ⇒ Ordinary Member

We remain particularly grateful that Trevor Rose and Michael Wise continue to operate co-opted in the posts of Secretary and Treasurer, respectively – but the posts **are** formally vacant and remain so.

So, this is a plea – if you've ever thought of getting involved in the running and direction of the Society, PLEASE do contact either Trevor Rose [secretary@thebhs.org](mailto:secretary@thebhs.org) or Mark Hollowell [chair@thebhs.org](mailto: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!

## New BHS Report Available

Simon Townson has produced a comprehensive new report with summaries of the various talks and presentations delivered at the Amersham meeting in October 2022. The meeting had an emphasis on applied research in conservation, captive breeding, fieldwork and related subjects. The new Open Access report will help ensure that the important content of the presentations reaches the widest possible audience.

**You can find the report here:**

[British Herpetological Society Reports | British Herpetological Society \(thebhs.org\)](#)





# **Save the date!**

# **BHS AGM 2023**

## **Sunday 14th May 2023**

## **1.00-6.00pm**

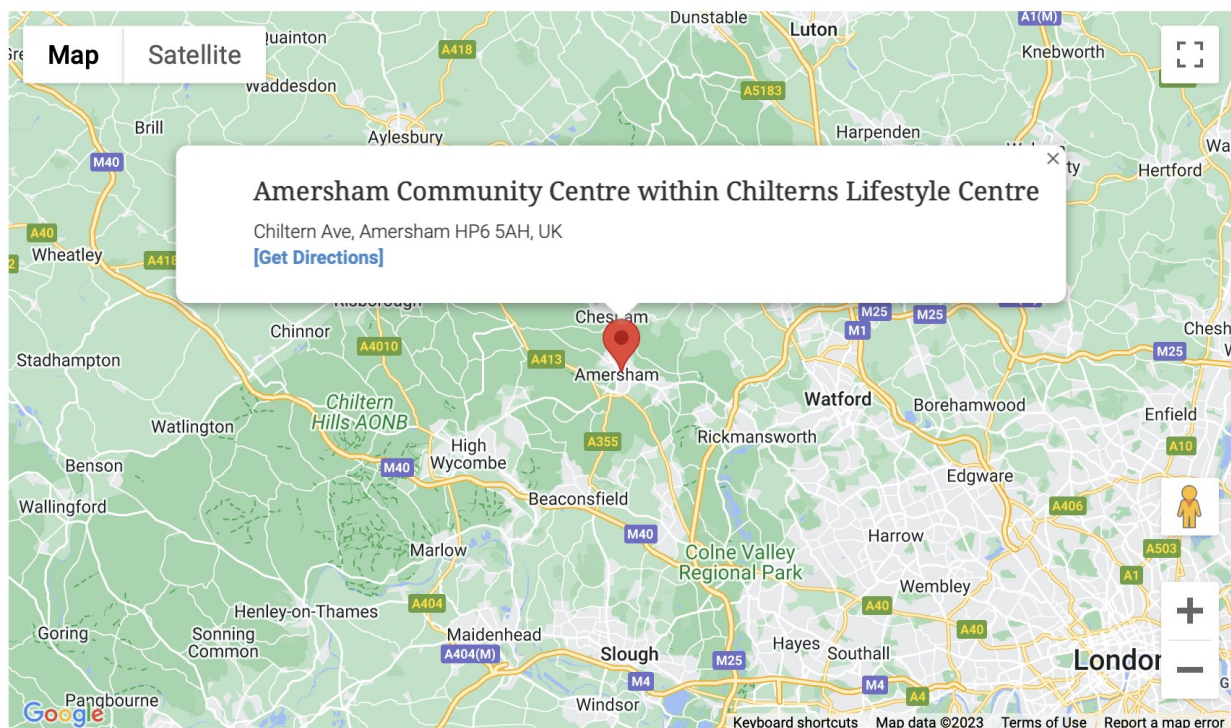


**Come join us to hear updates on BHS work and hear from great speakers reporting on their current research.**

Our AGM this year is being held on Sunday May 14th at the new Community Centre in Amersham - a great venue and accessible by road and rail. Full program and details of talks will be added as soon as we can, but please hold the date in your diary meantime!

Entry to the AGM is free for BHS members; there is a nominal charge of £10 for non-BHS members to cover cost of refreshments. To book a no-cost entry, you'll need to be logged in to the website as a BHS member and then select the correct ticket type.

In event of any problem or query, please contact [webmaster@thebhs.org](mailto:webmaster@thebhs.org)





# The Origin of Turtle Paradise

Written by Keith Parker

Hi everyone! My name's 'Keith' and I'm the owner of Turtle Paradise Boarding for the Welfare of Turtles in the UK. This is my story of how I got into turtles and the ups downs of keeping them.

## The 1st time

It began way back in the late 70s. I was visiting my local pet shop for Koi food (Koi were new to the scene too but that's another story!) when I spotted a tank full of small green turtles. This was years before the Ninja Turtle craze and they were just called terrapins. So, after a chat with owner of the shop, I bought two turtles and was told a 3ft tank would be fine and to set the tank up as if it were for tropical fish. Well, I did what they said but after a couple of weeks, there were no plants left and the food mainly consisted of Koi food and krill as there wasn't much else to feed them then. Additionally, the internal filter couldn't cope so I decided to do some research. There was no internet then so off to the library I went. I had to order some reference books as I didn't know what species they were and I soon found out they were red-eared sliders. I also realised they could get to 13 inches so a 3ft tank was no good. After reading up on the species, I decided to look for a 6ft tank and luckily someone, who my dad knew, worked on the dust and came across one. In those days, fish tanks came in metal frames. This was a 6ft x 2ft x 2ft and really heavy. It was kindly delivered and four of us managed to get it placed under a lean-to in the back garden. It was just as well, as it leaked like sieve and the putty was shot. Yes, putty was used on tank construction back then so it had to be redone. Once sorted, the two red-eared sliders lived in that for some years. By the late 80s things in my life were changing so they had to be rehomed. Thank you to Chessington Zoo, who took them.

Time jump...its now 2003...I'd been working in the NHS for 13 years but was looking at moving on. Nothing has changed much for the NHS. When the government said everyone in the NHS had to go on a "back to school training course" learning knowledge already gained, I decided I want to start an aquatics business. I enrolled on a City and Guilds Pet Shop Management course, all paid for by the NHS. While doing this, up popped the reptile section with info on looking after snakes, lizards, geckos etc which were great. Turtles information was another thing. The only info for them was to keep in clean water, provide a water heater and basking area



with a heat lamp and keep hatchlings, twelve to a 2-3ft tank. Disappointing.

We moved from Middlesex to Dorset a few years later. In 2014, I started my pond build and maintenance business. One of my daughters announced she was getting a pair of turtles to go in her flat. These were two x 6 inch yellow-bellied sliders that came in a 4ft tank with an internal filter. By now, I had a good idea what she was letting herself in for as two in that size tank and under filtered was going to be an issue. So, I offered to set up an external filter so long as she got a bigger tank. No probs. Six months later, two yellow-bellied sliders were heading down the M3 towards me as I was right, she couldn't cope with them. So after setting up a decent holding tank in the shed, that's where they stayed till they acclimatised to go in my pond. Two weeks later, she phoned to ask how they were and would I take two more as her friend didn't want them anymore. So, two more came down.

In 2016, having acquired a few more turtles over the years from people who knew me through my pond business, there was a rumour that the government was going to add certain turtles to the invasive species list to join the red-eared slider. These were to be yellow-bellied and Cumberland sliders. Well, I thought, ok I can see problems here as shops can't take them, nor can zoos. They'll be dumped in the wild even though it was made illegal to do so.

So, that's when I decided to start Turtle Paradise. It came as a big surprise how many turtles were looking for a new home, not just the invasive species. Musks came top of the list but I was also given Reeves, maps, river and Peninsula cooters. A few softshells, which I soon found new homes for, Chinese stripe necks and some sidenecks.

There was a loop hole in the law which you could "board for welfare of turtles", so long as you took down owners details and there was no time limit you could board them for. That's how the name came about, Turtle Paradise Boarding for the Welfare of Turtles in Dorset. After a while, I changed the name to UK, rather than Dorset, so I've had turtles from all over the UK dropped off.

In October 2022, I received a letter in the post from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) working on behalf of Natural England saying they would be popping round to take a look and advise on invasive species and a possible licence. No probs, more than delighted. It seems that they follow social media sites to see what's what. Well, I did have my Turtle Paradise page on Facebook where help and advice is given. I wasn't the only one



having a visit as it seems there are other people in Dorset taking in invasive species.

So a week later John and Rob turned up. Good timing really as my main pond 20ft x 12ft x 5ft deep was being rebuilt due to major flooding caused by a property behind us and all turtles were in holding tanks. These are two fibreglass holding tanks. One is 8ft x 4ft x 4ft and the other is 6ft x 4ft x 3ft and a timber lined 8ft x 3ft x 3ft. There are several 4ft x 2ft x 2ft as well as a side pond next to main pond, 9ft x 3ft x 2ft. Plus, I have several large portable holding tanks if needed. After a lot of questions, from both sides, it was agreed they would help me apply for the invasive species licence. It meant

all invasive turtles need to be chipped as using permanent marker pen wouldn't work due to the constant shedding of scutes.

Now the licence, yeah well, definitely a learning curve. The licence is free, the rest isn't. The application comes in two parts. Which covers how many turtles of each species you have and/or going to keep, housing, waste and security so no escapees. What security is in place and fencing around garden i.e. CCTV. What fire precautions are taken, your grid reference, you must be registered with a vet and what knowledge you have etc. You



need to find out from your local council if you need planning permission as it could come under "change of use" to the garden. You have to use the pre-application planning form to ask the question before you apply for planning if needed. I was lucky, none was needed. Phew!

Part two of the application has to be done by a visit from an exotic reptile vet. Few and far between as I found out. The vet I found only works in Dorset, on a Friday, as the rest of her time she works at Bristol Zoo so well chuffed. This part is the vet checking on the garden, the ponds, holding tanks and turtles habitat. Correct heating, lighting, waste management, water testing and water changes. The check also included how many turtles, what knowledge you have, oh she asked questions, and if like me, you can get them to microchip the turtles too, go for it. It's not cheap but due to the amount, I got a very good deal although it still hurt handing my card over lol. When both parts have been completed and any extra info added, then you send it off and the wait. Turtles, you've got to love 'em, they're nutters lol!



On matters of research on turtles, I cannot emphasise enough, it's no good relying on shops as they are only going by what they are told in the government hand outs when they do the pet shop management course. If indeed they still have to do it, in which case, the info it gives out is no good. When I was researching, all I had was a few books to go by but now a days, it's the internet and it's a never ending learning curve.

Turtles are loners but group together to bask only because they want the best warm area, on top of another. In my mind, turtles aren't for fish tanks, they need a lot of room that goes from the smallest to the biggest. If they can be acclimatised properly to our climate then put them outside. It's better for them. All the turtles I keep in my main pond consist of mostly yellow-bellied sliders and Cumberland sliders with a few cooters and maps. Cumberlands and cooters always get confused with yellow-bellied sliders because of the yellow markings on the head. Even shops and vets get it wrong sad to say. I also keep musks outside in separate set ups around the garden. Anyway, when keeping turtles outside, pond filtration should be able to do twice the volume of pond. I myself, go over the top as you can't really have enough filtration and you want a system that's easy to clean. That's why my 5,000 gallon pond has a filter system that can handle 40,000 gallons and my holding tanks have Easypod filters. All can be cleaned by just connecting a valve straight to drain. Keeping turtles outside in your pond means no lilies or pond weed, as they love them. Same goes for marsh marigolds and umbrella and variegated grasses. They know what they can and cant eat. Since keeping in a pond, I don't have blanket weed prob-

lems either they graze on it.

Another thing I've noticed is that they don't attack any of my koi in the pond that are healthy but any dying or dead fish they do feed on. I don't get a lot of dying or dead fish but now and again, due to the age of the fish as all my fish have been given to me from other ponds so no idea what conditions their pond was in or how old they are. The ill or dead fish are removed from the pond asap. The turtles just like chilling out so in the wild I think they're doing a clean up job in rivers and ponds.

Breeding, this does happen but most eggs are laid in water or on the basking areas. In both cases, eggs are broke and fed back to them. The Koi love them and as for hatching, no chance, the UK climate isn't hot enough to incubate the eggs so for people to say they've been breeding in the wild, is false. What they see are more dumped ones. No one has ever seen hatchlings basking in the wild, only adults.

I do cover the main pond with a tarpaulin just to keep frost and windchill off but this year will be having a clear polycarbonate roof with removable sections for the summer so the suns rays can get through to basking areas. And my final say is, the UK needs a lot more turtle rescues/sanctuaries and only shops that are specialised and trained properly in turtles and their care should be allowed to sell them. Not every aquatic shop or pet shop.

Well, I hope you enjoyed the read.

All the best,

Keith at Turtle Paradise.





# The Versatile Reptile

Written by Nicola Davies

Illustrated by Abbie Cameron

Explore the versatile world of reptiles with award-winning children's author and zoologist Nicola Davies.

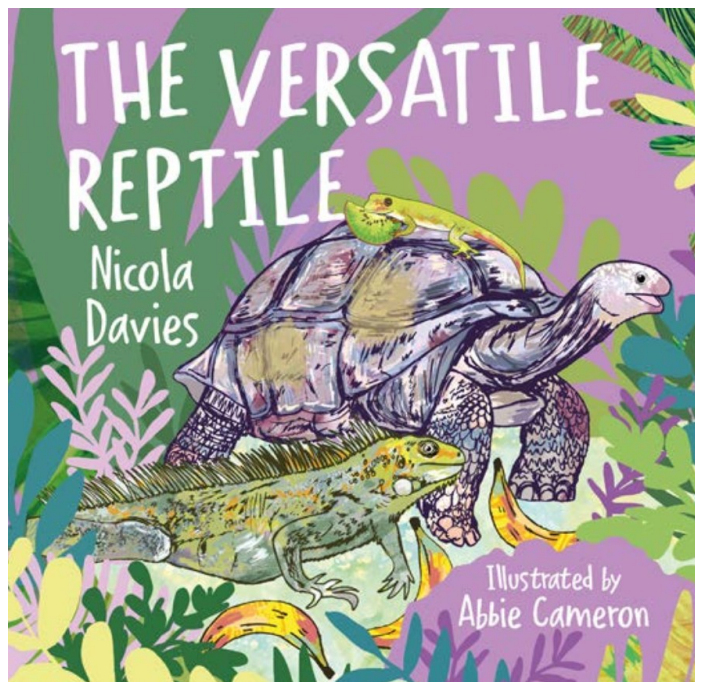
A new addition to the Animal Surprises series sees the young adventurer travel the globe meeting some of the world's most versatile creatures: reptiles. On her journey she meets snakes, lizards, crocodiles, turtles, geckos and even a dragon, teaching children about where they live, what they eat and how they have adapted to survive.

Award-winning children's author and zoologist Nicola Davies presents key facts about some of the world's most recognisable reptiles in a simple and easy-to-understand rhyming text. Accompanied by fun, colourful but accurately detailed illustrations of the creatures by Abbie Cameron, this text is perfect for introducing children aged 3-7 to the variety of wildlife.

This is the sixth book in the Animal Surprises series by the duo, following *Animal Surprises*, *Into the Blue*, *The Word Bird*, *The Secret of the Egg* and *Invertebrates are Cool!*. The series is a brilliant addition to any KS1 classroom, encouraging children to engage with the natural world around them and find out about other species that live further afield. Each also contains a fun puzzle to complete at the back of the book.

## Praise for the series:

'Perfect for igniting curiosity about the amazing variety of species which live on our planet.' **Emma Lamont, Scottish Book Trust** (*Animal Surprises*)



'Davies' rhymes are fun and bouncy, giving lots of interesting facts that kids are bound to remember.' **BookTrust** (*Into the Blue*)

'Utterly fascinating!' **Mary Esther Judy, Fallen Star Stories** (*The Secret of the Egg*)

'Illustrated facts make this really accessible for even the youngest entomologist!' **It's All About Stories** (*Invertebrates are Cool*)

Format: Paperback, 36 pages Size: 250 x 250mm

ISBN: 9781912213689

Price: £7.99

eBook also available





# Massive congratulations to our council member and trustee, Steven Allain!

We'd like to congratulate Steve on a couple big events. Steve attended the National Biodiversity Network awards ceremony on the 9th November 2022 and was awarded the winner of the 2022 NBN Award for Wildlife Recording. He has contributed and verified records for several counties since 2016 and this data is shared with ARG groups. He has also recently completed his PhD at the University of Kent and is now Dr Steven Allain.

Well done Steve! A lot of hard work and dedication!



The 22nd European Congress of Herpetology will take place in Wolverhampton, United Kingdom.

## 4th –8th September 2023

The call for abstracts will open in March, and there will be a congress webpage available soon.

For further details on the Societas Europaea Herpetologica head to:  
<https://www.seh-herpetology.org/seh-congress>



# AHH / BHS Conference 2023

at Drayton Manor Park

## "INNOVATION!"

Confirmed speakers:

- David Kirshner
- Carl Franklin
- Jonathon Howard
- Mark O'Shea
- Roman Muryn
- Fraser Gilchrist
- Frances Baines
- Sarina Wunderlich
- Matthew Shackleton
- Francis Cosquiere
- ... and more to come!



Tickets NOW on sale at [www.thebhs.org](http://www.thebhs.org)

Saturday March 18th - Sunday March 19th 2023

Single day £35 - Both days £60 - includes refreshments & lunches

Students presenting academic posters - free entry - details at [www.thebhs.org](http://www.thebhs.org)



# AHH / BHS Conference 2023

Saturday March 18th - Sunday March 19th 2023

at Drayton Manor Park

## "Innovations"

### Students: **CALL FOR POSTERS**

Does your project feature reptiles or amphibians?  
Take the opportunity to showcase your research at the 2023 event of the year!  
Free conference tickets awarded to students presenting research posters.

You can download forms and guidance at: [www.thebhs.org](http://www.thebhs.org) or use the QR code:  
For further poster queries contact: [suziesimpson@northkent.ac.uk](mailto:suziesimpson@northkent.ac.uk)



**FULL CONFERENCE PROGRAMME COMING SOON!**

Student presentations 2022  
photo (c) 2022 Frances Baines





## **British Chelonia Group (BCG) 2023 Spring Symposium: ‘Chelonia in a Changing World’**

**Date: Saturday 25th March 2023  
10.30am—5.30pm**

**Location: The Open University,  
The Berrill Theatre, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes.**

There will be speakers on veterinary, husbandry, conservation and research topics, with half price tickets for CPD participants from animal-related professions. This is a great opportunity to network with both professional and hobbyist tortoise and turtle enthusiasts.

For the full programme and further details, see the Event section of the BCG website at [www.britishcheloniagroup.org.uk](http://www.britishcheloniagroup.org.uk) Scroll down to “2023 Spring Symposium - Chelonia In A Changing World: 25/03/2023” where there is a detailed programme and you can register.

**£30.00 per person inclusive of buffet, teas and coffee.**

# 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](http://www.turtletally.co.uk)

## Turtle Tally UK Citizen Science Project



Website: [www.turtletally.co.uk](http://www.turtletally.co.uk)

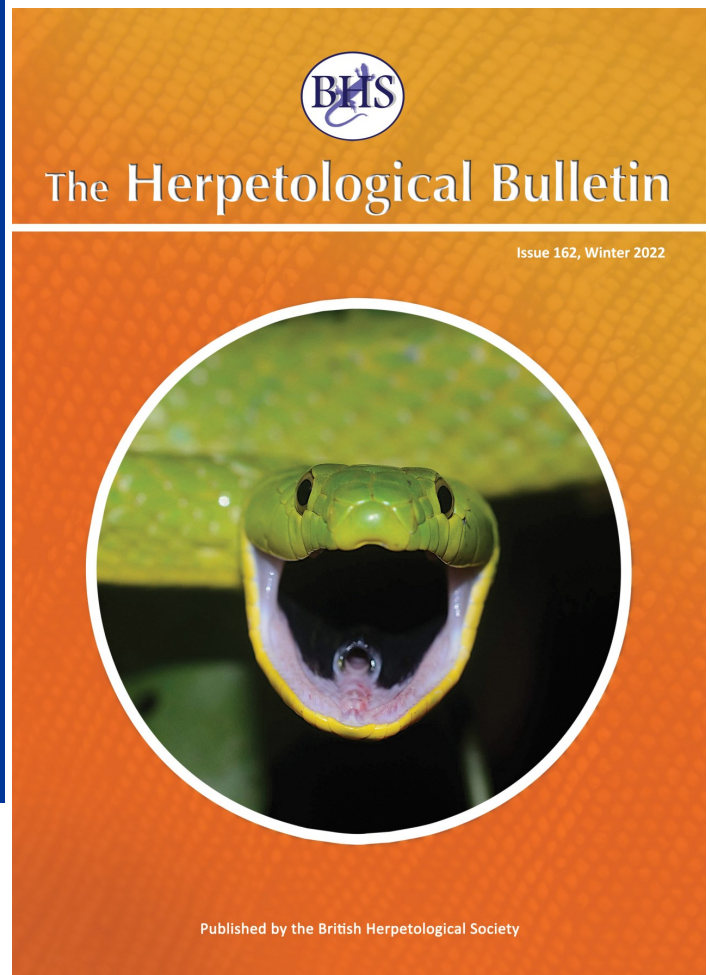
Contact us: [turtletallyuk@gmail.com](mailto:turtletallyuk@gmail.com)

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**Kent**





# 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](mailto:natterjack@thebhs.org)

**Find out more about The British Herpetological  
Society on our website at:**

<https://thebhs.org/>

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