World Congress of Herpetology

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Letter from the Editor

Richard Griffiths

Has the face-to-face conference had its day? This is a topic that frequently comes up among both conference organisers and those that attend them. It is much easier and cheaper to meet and chat online rather than spending hours or days in a car, train or plane to reach a conference venue. And justifiably, virtual conferencing results in much smaller carbon footprints. So are we seeing the death throes of the conference based on face-to-face talks and long conversations that stretch into the early hours over beer or coffee? I don't think so. As you will see from the events calendar of this (and previous newsletters), there seem to be more opportunities for such meetings than ever before. The traditional herpetological conference season is usually when the herps have finished breeding or are entering their summer or winter slumbers. This autumn I attended several such meetings and all were full houses. So why do we hit our hard-earned and diminishing budgets ever harder to travel long distances to meet and listen to the adventures of other herpetologists when we could chat to a bunch of talking heads online in the comfort of our own homes? Communication and forging collaborations is not just a visual experience - it relies on body language and social signalling which cannot be achieved via a phone or PC screen. Everyone comes away feeling buoyant after a stimulating conference so it is great for improving well-being. Despite fears about conferences being potential super-spreader events, I firmly believe they can also improve your health!

Picking up on the issue of well-being, in this issue of the newsletter we have a series of short articles by students and early career researchers about what they wish they knew when they started their careers. Reading these, there are several common themes that resonate with the start of my own career several decades ago. Clearly, struggling with statistics, languages and new technologies are challenges that transcend the herpetological generations and still cause sleepless nights. But hopefully some of the experiences described within the articles will reassure those just starting out that you are not alone and the seemingly insurmountable early career hurdles are navigable!

Richard

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On the cover

Salamandra s. bernardezi, an iconic species of the region of Asturias (where the 11th World Congress of Herpetology will be hosted). Photo by Javier Lobón Rovira.

What I wish I knew more about when I started my herpetological career

Leading this section: **Richard A. Griffiths**

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We all know that starting out on a new career pathway is an exciting but, at times, daunting endeavour. Learning and applying new skills, developing new working relationships, hitting tight deadlines and getting the best out of your line manager or supervisor are all part of the journey. To use a well-worn cliché, it is very much a roller coaster ride of exhilarating highs making new discoveries and despairing lows when nothing seems to work or you just can't get your head around an analysis. Although your manager or supervisor may be sympathetic and supportive, they just seem far too busy to give you the quality time you feel you need. There are times when you think that your peers are so much smarter and are making so much better progress, when the reality is that they are facing the same struggles as you are. In such cases, problems shared are problems halved. Indeed, it is your peers who can play a major role in helping you along this bumpy road.

In this section, we present the findings from two exercises. (1) We canvassed past and present doctoral students within my own institution for reflections and thoughts on their own experiences; and (2) we put a call out to early career herpetologists from around the world to write a short piece entitled 'What I wish I knew more about when I started my herpetological career'. I am deeply grateful to the many students and early postdocs who responded to this call by sharing their experiences. Indeed, the response was so good that we are publishing the reflections in two parts, with a second tranche of reflections to follow in the next WCH Newsletter. As you will see, there are many common themes emerging, and we welcome any feedback from other herpetologists just starting out.

What I wish I knew when I started my PhD

Observations of past and present PhD students at the University of Kent on their experiences. Compiled by Gail Austen.

"It's a marathon not a sprint"
"It doesn't matter what it looks like, no one really knows what they're doing for the first 12-18 months"
"Your rate of work increases exponentially during the final year"
"It can be lonely, but you're really never truly alone"
"Make sure you enjoy your pre-PhD holiday/time-off"
"Some weeks are completely productive, 10/10. Some weeks are totally unproduc-

tive. When you feel bad about the latter, remember that they don't come without the former"

"There is no one size fits all recipe for productivity - you might be a morning person, and be done with your working day by 3 pm, or an evening person and don't even start before lunch, love the shared office or be fully team 'work from home'. Experiment to find what works for you."

"Get a non-academic hobby"

"It can feel very absorbing and all-consuming and important - but it won't matter as much in 5 years. Keep nourishing friends / family relationships around you and keep doing OTHER fun stuff."

"If you're doing field work check early on if your supervisors have collaborations established or you need to establish them (particularly for overseas field work)."

"Don't expect to be at the same point as everyone around you. You're all on different paths."

"You probably feel like you don't know anything but that's normal and no PhD really turns out how you expect, just have to go with the flow and adapt your plans."

"Nobody will die if you don't submit your draft on time."

"Don't compare yourself to other people or what they are doing!"

"No one is behind, there's just different journeys and processes."

Judith Ankamah
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Invest in the less glamorous skills needed for career development

When I first stepped into herpetology, I was fuelled by excitement and curiosity, eager to spend time in the forest searching for frogs and reptiles. What I didn't realize then was how much more goes into being an effective herpetologist beyond field skills and passion. I wish I had known more about the "other side" of the work, the science communication, data analysis, and fundraising that are just as essential as handling a specimen or running a transect.

Early in my career, I found myself deeply involved with amphibian surveys in Ghana's Ankasa Conservation Area, especially with the Critically Endangered puddle frog (*Phrynobatrachus intermedius*). I had the field enthusiasm, but I quickly learned how much I needed to grow in areas like GIS mapping, statistical analysis, and turning raw data into publishable science. At the same time, I realized that conservation is not just about species, but also about people. Building trust with local communities, explaining why frogs matter to livelihoods and ecosystems, and inspiring others to care became as important as recording calls or measuring habitats.

Another big lesson was the importance of opportunities that extend beyond the field. Writing grants, presenting research, and networking with collaborators have all been skills I had to learn along the way, skills I wish I had been more prepared for at the start. These gaps were challenging, but filling them has shaped me into a stronger, more rounded conservationist.

If I could go back and give advice to my younger self, I'd say: enjoy the thrill of fieldwork, but also invest in the less glamorous skills of writing, communication, leadership, and partnerships. They will open doors, sustain your projects, and make your science meaningful beyond the data sheet. Those are the lessons I carry with me now, and I hope they encourage others beginning their own herpetological journey.

The Critically Endangered puddle frog (*Phrynobatrachus intermedius*) within the Ankasa Conservation Area, Ghana. © Judith Ankamah

Community education on the conservation of the Intermediate Puddle frog.

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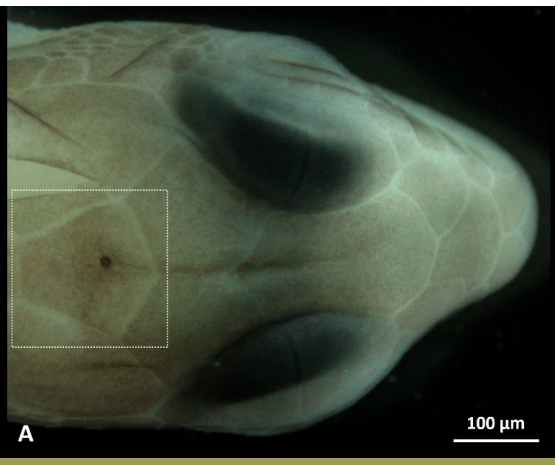
From Parietal Eyes to Gecko Retinas

I started my herpetological career during my Bachelor's studies while writing a theoretical thesis on the parietal eye in lepidosaurian species. I'm now a first-year PhD student in the Department of Histology and Embryology. My research focuses on retina development in two gecko species with different circadian activity. I've always dreamt of doing something connected with science. Initially, learning about developmental processes felt quite surreal to me. It was fascinating, but I couldn't really imagine how they work. However, the more time I spent studying about them, the clearer it became.



Photograph showing the parietal eye of a sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis* L.) embryo on day 23 of its embryonic development.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of a team that's one of the few in the world studying reptile embryonic development. I work with amazing and incredibly talented researchers who can share their knowledge, and I've received plenty of helpful advice from them. This experience has taught me efficient work organisation and proper laboratory practices. I've learnt many staining methods and how to perform microscopic analyses or create 3D models of developing organs using specialised software. Accuracy, care and meticulousness are essential in this type of work.

I've always known that scientific work is challenging, but I didn't realise how many things could go wrong. I'll never forget how fun it was learning how to cut the material using a microtome. The eerie sound of the glass knife destroying the epoxy resin block still haunts me. You also sometimes have to cope with malfunctioning equipment, especially when running out of time. As they say: 'the perversity of inanimate objects'! An indispensable part of any study is also the repetition of specific tasks. Because of this, I've learnt patience and persistence. Even if you don't realise it then, such moments are valuable too. Another instructive experience was reviewing the literature, which takes a long time to do correctly.

Back then, I didn't even have the guts to think about presenting in front of a large audience. Thankfully, I'm gradually overcoming this fear. I was happy to present a poster on the gonadal development of the sand lizard at the 35th Conference on Embryology in Katowice and to present the results of my Master's thesis at the Seasonal School – Science for a Sustainable Now and Future. I'm now looking forward to participating in the following events.

If I could go back in time and give my younger self some advice, I'd tell her that: 'First of all, if there's something you don't know, feel free to ask somebody, and it's never too late to learn something new, even if you think it's impossible'.

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Analytical skills can turn a hobby into a career

My fascination with herpetology began with a Taiwanese television program called Taiwan Ecology Blog. When the host introduced wild snakes and their behaviors, something about it truly struck me, and I was captivated. From that moment, I spent much of my free time herping and reading every article and research paper I could find.

My first professional step into herpetology was working on the eradication and monitoring program of the Asian water dragon (*Physignathus cocincinus*). Later, during my bachelor's degree, I studied the parasites of snakes, focusing mainly on the Chinese cobra (*Naja atra*). To strengthen my parasitology skills, I completed an internship in the Department of Helminthology at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University in Thailand.

I am currently pursuing my master's degree at National Taiwan Normal University, working in the Amphibian and Reptile Lab. My research focuses on the behavior of snakes and freshwater turtles, as well as the invasion biology of snakes. In addition, I am actively involved in efforts for sea snake conservation, which has been challenging but continues to be a meaningful pursuit. Over the years, I have worked with three supervisors during different stages of my studies and research. All of them already knew me from lectures, workshops, and conferences before I joined their teams. Those earlier conversations and connections made it possible for me to join the lab, and they showed me that networking is not just helpful; it is essential.

Attending events such as the World Congress of Herpetology (WCH) provides opportunities to learn, exchange ideas, and build meaningful connections. Listening to talks can inspire new research directions, and casual conversations often lead to collaborations. I encourage students to participate actively in these gatherings, not only to meet people but also to develop communication and presentation skills. From some of my own unsuccessful experiences seeking collaborations and supervisors, I learned that clear, thoughtful communication is as important as good science.

In terms of knowledge, I found that analytical skills, particularly in statistics and molecular biology, are often the toughest to acquire when turning a hobby into a scientific career. It takes time and patience to bridge that gap, and mistakes are part of the learning process.

I would also like to express my appreciation to everyone who promotes herpetological education and outreach. These efforts truly inspire the next generation, including me. I hope we all continue to nurture our enthusiasm for herpetology. I look forward to meeting many of you at WCH 11 in Gijón, Spain, in 2028, hopefully as a new PhD student who has found his place in this exciting field of snakes.

ATTENTION ALL OPHIOLOGISTS! MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The first World Congress on Snakes will take place in Kandy, a World Heritage city. The conference will include plenaries and presentations covering a wide range of topics related to snakes, such as ecology, phylogeny, conservation, behavior, illegal trade, and snakebite. Additionally, there will be workshops, field trips, and opportunities to experience local culture.

Please distribute this flyer to your colleagues.

We will be sending the details regarding submitting of abstracts and full paper.

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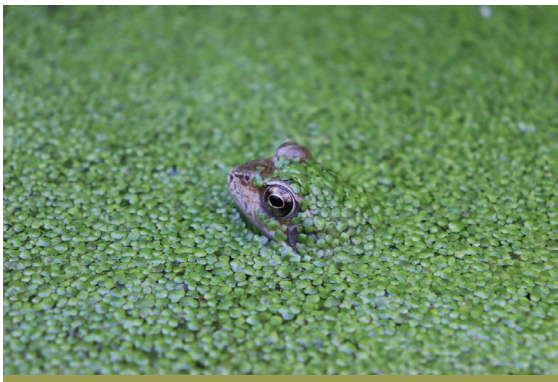
Patience, communication, and flexibility will keep you going

When I first got into Herpetology, I was so happy to be learning about the animals that were not so 'popular.' Everybody likes pandas and pygmy hippos because they are cute right? Not everybody likes the suddenness of frogs leaping, or the stealthiness of snakes passing by unnoticed. Reptiles and amphibians are fascinating creatures, and if my academic career was just focused upon learning everything there was to know about them and rolling around in the mud trying to catch a frog to take a DNA sample, then my life would be much simpler. I am currently in my second year of my PhD, and my current research project aims to determine trends in population density, occurrence, and genetic diversity of *Rana temporaria* (common frog) across the UK using a multi-disciplinary approach. I am investigating the genetic diversity and population trends of the common frog across the UK using genetic sampling and social surveys, and looking back, there is so much more I would have liked to have known from the start.



Common frog (*Rana temporaria*) in a garden pond in England.

I would have liked to have had more experience with mapping software like Qgis and ArcGIS. Having a good map for research talks and academic posters is really important and is a great skill to have. I would have liked to have had more experience in statistics and R Studio. My undergraduate degree in Environmental Science and Ecology was not very statistics based, and we only learnt the very basics using SPSS. R studio is needed to analyse data and create figures for academic publications so knowledge of this piece of software is crucial. A big part of conservation in recent years also uses genetic data which requires a basic knowledge and understanding of coding, and my knowledge of this was very limited. It has been a struggle at times to learn something that requires coding when I only have a basic understanding of it. I also wish I had appreciated early on just how important good data (and good data management!) really is. Field notes scribbled in a damp notebook are fun memories, but organised data truly saves time (and sanity) in the long run. Having a good system that can be replicated easily is necessary.

And maybe most of all, I wish I had known that curiosity will get you started, but patience, communication, and a healthy dose of flexibility will keep you going. The animals teach us plenty, but so do the processes and skills learnt alongside them.

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Lizards, languages and learning new skills

I've grown up in rural Georgia. In that time, one of the hobbies I had was watching various living beings, including lizards and snakes. At that time, I could not imagine that turning my childhood interest into a profession would require dealing with the significant challenges of language barriers, learning statistical modeling, and several other complex skills.

I wish I had known earlier how critical language skills would be. The basic literature on Georgia's wildlife was in Russian, which I didn't speak. The powerful translation technologies we use currently weren't available back then, and a lot of valuable research was stuck in books. Even worse, I didn't know personally people who shared my interests. There was no local bubble with a common interest or a mentor to explain that it was okay to be interested in animals that scared people. I only started to feel less alone when I arrived at Ilia State University, joined other students interested in animals and ecology, and met the professional zoologists.

New problems came up quickly. I wish I had understood the importance of statistics from the very beginning. For years, I had a hard time with even the simplest analytical models, and learning R felt like attempting to learn a foreign language that was hard to understand and where a single missing comma could ruin the work. Well, after all, I had to learn through a trial-and-error approach. If I had learned statistics well from the start, I would have saved a significant amount of time and been able to detect patterns in my data much sooner.

I learned about the power of Citizen Science while working on my Master's degree. Then, my point of view really changed. It seemed like the answer to the loneliness I (and, probably, many others) had felt years before. Social contacts are a valuable means of obtaining essential distribution data when traditional sources are insufficient. This insight established the foundation of my study on snake distribution and is now a significant element of my PhD research. Currently, I need to apply a combination of approaches, including DNA barcoding, habitat modeling, and community data, to fill the gaps in our understanding of animal preferences and distribution patterns.

Giorgi with a group of rescued Schmidt's whip snakes (*Dolichophis schmidti*).

So, what do I want to know? Languages bridge the gap between modern and ancient knowledge; statistics help validate hypotheses and formulate new ones. The professional and amateur zoologist community drive is the basis of discovery. If you're new, don't underestimate how much you can do on your own. When resources are limited, the best thing to do is to develop the resources yourself - whether it's a dataset, a new algorithm, or a group of other people who are interested in the same thing.

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Obstacles that become opportunities in Uganda

My journey into herpetology began during my MSc studies, when I carried out fieldwork on amphibians and reptiles with support from the JRS Biodiversity Foundation. It was my first time leading research in the field, and I quickly realized how different reality was from theory. Long days in wetlands, unexpected weather, and the challenge of gaining community trust made the work exciting but also overwhelming.

One of the first obstacles I faced was in sampling methods. Since it was my first time conducting independent research, I struggled with applying the techniques correctly and confidently in the field. Beyond that, I discovered other major gaps in my skills and knowledge. For instance, I could collect data, but when it came to analysing and interpreting results, I felt unprepared. I also lacked experience in GIS and mapping, which are now essential tools in conservation. Another gap was in proposal writing and fundraising. While I was eager to design projects, I didn't yet know how to secure the resources to make them possible.

To overcome these gaps, I actively sought opportunities to learn beyond the classroom. Volunteering with Nature Uganda became a turning point: I was exposed to biodiversity surveys, report writing, and public engagement. Mentors helped me understand how to structure proposals and apply for small grants. Slowly, I built confidence, and eventually received my first independent research funding. Receiving CARN Aspire Grant and Rufford Foundation Grant was a milestone.

Looking back, what seemed like obstacles were actually opportunities. Struggling with statistics pushed me to practice and ask for help. Not knowing GIS motivated me to take short courses. Rejections in grant writing taught me how to improve proposals. Difficulties with sampling methods taught me the value of preparation and practice in the field. These lessons shaped not only my technical skills but also my resilience.

For other students and early-career researchers, I would say: expect gaps, but don't see them as failures. Each gap is a pathway to growth if you stay curious, seek mentorship, and keep building networks. The conservation challenges we face are big—but so are the opportunities for young researchers willing to learn and adapt

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Like a chameleon: cautious and taking my time, yet moving steadily forward

Ever since I was a child, I remember feeling great affinity for amphibians and reptiles and amazed with their wonderful appearance, although people generally perceive them as frightening creatures. When I began studying them at university and delved into the world of herpetology, it was an enriching and exciting experience, but also one full of challenges that, in hindsight, I wish I had anticipated. For example, I did not clearly comprehend the importance of using technological tools and interdisciplinary approaches, which I now recognise as fundamental for the understanding of herpetofauna. And surely, if I had had a broader vision, my first steps in research would have been more solid and strategic.

Juvenile Diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus atrox*) in northern Zacatecas. This record forms part of the state's herpetofauna check list.

I also would have liked to better understand the relevance of systematics, since initial contact with herpetology focuses on learning how to identify species. Systematics provides an essential framework for understanding the evolutionary relationships between taxa, which helps interpret their biogeography, behaviour, and ecology. This would have allowed me to immediately recognise the importance of integrative taxonomy, which combines morphology with ecological and molecular data (which I was afraid to learn for a long time) and thus enable the resolution of taxonomic uncertainties and the formal description of new species. For example, in my home country (Mexico), there is a taxonomic dilemma between *Crotalus molossus* and *C. basiliscus* rattlesnakes, as they tend to hybridise in certain zones.

Now that I am just about to embark on the study of chameleons of the genus *Calumma* of Madagascar, I am convinced that GIS are essential in their study, as we can include environmental, climatic, topographic, and even social information to model the potential distribution of these species. This would help identify priority conservation areas and predict how climate change could alter their habitats. Additionally, the generation of this information could improve the living conditions of the locals by gaining access to high-quality spatial information.

This work will largely benefit from the availability of complete metadata on each specimen, from photographs reporting diagnostic characteristics, to morphometric measurements, collection coordinates, environmental conditions, among others, and offer me the opportunity to reflect on the huge importance of compiling such data in the field.

Last but not least, I acknowledge the need to open myself up to other cultures and, therefore, to other species and environments that will help my personal and professional growth. I wish I would have been more efficient to deepen my knowledge in different languages before to facilitate contact and exchange with colleagues and different communities, and I hope that this PhD will represent a great opportunity to significantly improve this.

Environmental education work with locals of Zacatecas, Mexico. The image shows people being told about the false Coralsnake (*Lampropeltis polyzona*) and its ecological importance (Photo by JAB-A).

Undoubtedly, there is still much for me to learn, which excites me, and I am grateful to all the people who have kindly supported me in my study of herpetofauna since I started this adventure. I am certain that many opportunities will open on my path and I hope that I will have the chance to improve the conservation of these frequently misunderstood organisms.

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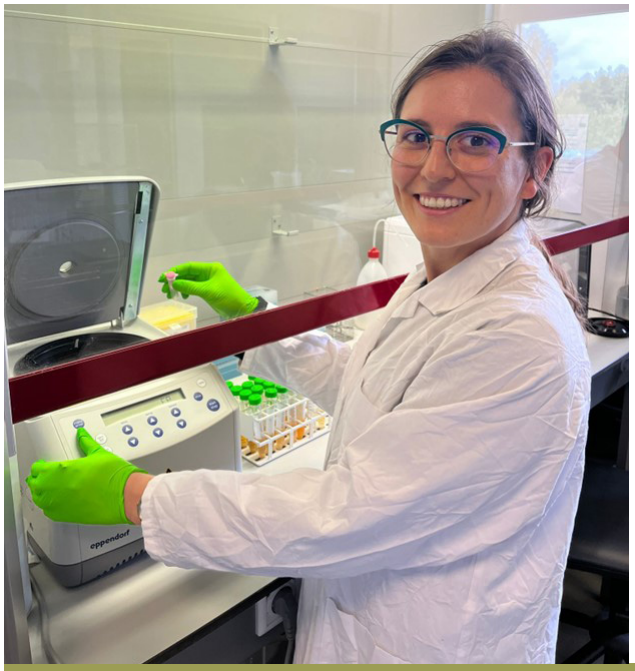
Herpetology is a broader field than you may think

From a young age, I was drawn to studying and protecting nature. My passion for herpetology arose from a master's internship in a research laboratory investigating the impact of pollutants on frogs: from that moment on, I wanted to dedicate my career to research focused on amphibian conservation. After completing a PhD between Liège University (Belgium) and Laurentian University (Canada) in collaboration with ZSL London Zoo (United-Kingdom), I am now a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University (Belgium), where I study amphibian diseases. Looking back, there are a few things I wish I knew more about when I started my herpetological career.

You might feel a bit discouraged by the limited number of jobs in herpetology, but the field is broader than you may think. Herpetological work can revolve around research, species monitoring, applied in-situ (in the wild) or ex-situ (in zoos) conservation, education and outreach, policy making, and more. In addition, these activities can take place in a large array of institutions, from academic research laboratories to zoos and their associations (AZA, EAZA, CAZA...), natural history museums, nature-focused NGOs, government agencies, national parks and even veterinary clinics specialized in herps. There is no single path to building a herpetological career!



Extracting newt RNA to determine how pathogenic fungi affect host gene expression.

It is important to be proactive and seek out opportunities. Be bold and approach people whose work inspires you! Every researcher has an old dataset that they never got time to analyse, many zoos rely on volunteers to care for their animals, and NGOs involved in habitat restoration are always looking for extra help. Volunteer to build experience and connections and ensure that your contributions are acknowledged in outputs (contribution to research publications, participation in outreach events...): this will boost your CV – especially if you want a career in academic research! A few grants can support your volunteer work and your career start (SSAR, PARC, BHS student grants, ...).

One of many exciting side projects: studying Galapagos giant tortoises' welfare at ZSL London Zoo.

Building a unique and versatile skillset is fundamental. This applies especially to herpetological research as it is the field I know best. Expertise in areas beyond herpetology (ecology at large, statistics, bioinformatics, high-throughput sequencing...) will give you job security outside of the field and will strengthen your CV. If you have to choose between classes during your studies, take the technical, challenging ones: it will be easier to teach yourself herpetology than statistics in your spare time! Indeed, most of the work of a herpetology researcher consists of reading scientific articles, designing protocols, conducting experiments, coding and analysing data, writing scientific articles, teaching, grant writing ... not just catching frogs and snakes in the forest (although it is our favourite part indeed!). In conclusion, set yourself up for success by being proactive and by building your path with a long-term vision: a career in herpetology is not easy, but it's a fascinating one!

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Transforming a passion into filling the knowledge gaps

Starting out as a first-year university student, I knew very little about herpetofauna except that I loved them (a view not common among students). Snakes particularly fascinated me, so the obvious degree to study was biology. To be completely transparent, despite loving my degree and having a deep passion for learning, I was left rather disappointed at the lack of focus on herpetofauna throughout my studies. Although early evolution and the extinct reptiles were covered, I felt I had barely scratched the surface. Although my knowledge was still slim, my desire to understand them was greater than ever. When I got to honours I thought "now is my chance", yet no modules covered reptiles or amphibians. At this point I decided to take matters into my own hands. I dived into the available literature, began volunteering at a reptile park, watched online lectures, and took part in snake handling courses. Now, as a first-year master's student and after changing universities, I am at last gaining more training and insight into the ecology of snakes through research for my thesis. Although at the beginning of my herpetology career, I still feel that my knowledge is rather limited, especially regarding Southern African snakes. However, this time it is not due to a lack of focus but rather to major knowledge gaps in the literature, such as their ecology, population trends and the effectiveness of conservation strategies. What once felt like a strange personal obsession (loving snakes), transformed into the recognition that the world needs more advocates who share this passion. Not only is more research required, but this knowledge has real-life implications for snake conservation. If we knew more and focused specifically on herpetofauna, perhaps they would be considered more often in conservation policies and management strategies in our rapidly changing world. Looking back, what I wish I had appreciated was that the depth of knowledge that I yearned after had to be self-taught. This included the ecology, taxonomy and field skills associated with working with herpetofauna, as well the true extent of the knowledge gaps that needed to be filled. Being aware of these earlier might have guided my learning more effectively. In addition, I wish I had been aware of the deep-rooted fear of snakes within the wider public, the myths that surround them, and the importance of education. I urge all those with a passion for herpetofauna not to be discouraged by the knowledge gaps and lack of focus but instead put yourself out there, become the educator that you wish you had, and publish that paper you wish you could have read, as you can play and important part in transforming these existing systems.

Lauren measuring soil temperature using a thermocouple during MSc field work.

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Learning skills leads to lifelong assets

Reflecting on my current (arguably brief) career in herpetology, two key takeaways stand out: developing practical skills as early as possible and actively engaging with the community.

The most valuable insight I have gained so far is that skills acquired early on remain with you throughout your career, particularly when practised consistently. The practical toolkit of almost any modern herpetological research project includes statistics (including coding fluency in R), spatial analysis (such as GIS), and field or laboratory methods. These are essential skills for many topics in herpetology, and getting a good basic understanding across as many of these as possible can open many new doors later. My current master's project focuses on magnetic orientation in amphibians. It is a very interdisciplinary project where I needed to expand or refresh my knowledge across multiple fields: understanding physics concepts (magnetic fields), learning circular statistics, and strengthening my experimental design and field skills.

Field methods are best learned through direct experience. Volunteering with citizen science projects or local conservation groups provides training in survey techniques, species identification, and handling protocols that cannot be replicated through textbooks alone. I recommend focusing on areas that motivate you most while ensuring you develop at least a basic competency across multiple methodologies. These skills create opportunities throughout your career and should be prioritised early.

During my undergraduate studies in Scotland, local herpetology opportunities were limited. To access relevant expertise, I contacted researchers in Hungary, where I am originally from, and this resulted in productive collaborations across institutions and borders, eventually leading to a publication. Even if someone you reach out to cannot assist directly, they are typically generous in directing you toward colleagues who can.

Male Brilliant-thighed poison frog (*Allobates femoralis*) perching in its territory in the Nouragues Nature Reserve in French Guiana.

Attending conferences early is equally important. Conferences serve as venues for building professional relationships as much as presenting research. Some of my most valuable connections developed from conversations at SEH and WCH, and these relationships have influenced my research direction. The herpetological community is approachable and supportive of early-career researchers. Do not hesitate to write emails, seek advice, or introduce yourself at confer-

ences. Building your professional network actively and early will benefit your research throughout your career. On top of all this, you have the chance to forge lasting friendships.

I am now completing my MSc at the University of Bern, studying magnetic orientation in amphibians. As my next step, I am seeking PhD opportunities in herpetology, and I am discovering how competitive the field is, with some projects getting over a hundred applications per position. Nevertheless, building skills and professional connections early on has been invaluable in helping me not to feel lost in this process. Each challenge has strengthened my abilities as a researcher, so my advice to anyone beginning in herpetology is to invest in developing skills and networks early, as they form the foundation upon which everything else is built.

Renata Ibelli Vaz

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From Zoos to Academia and Amphibian Ark

Before entering the research world, I started my herpetological career at a zoo, where my focus was animal husbandry and education rather than research. At that time, I had no previous experience with scientific research or understanding of how academia worked. When I transitioned to this new environment, I quickly realized it was a very different world. Academic research required managing independence, self-discipline, and many unspoken expectations that were completely new to me.

Unlike in a corporate workplace with clearly defined roles and departments, in academia the path to solving problems can be less obvious, and reaching out for support requires confidence and initiative. Looking back, I wish I had understood sooner the importance of asking for help. Doing so can save enormous amounts of time and energy. No one can be an expert in every skill required for research, whether it is statistics, experimental design, or other specialized techniques. Knowledge is spread throughout society, and reaching out to others is not a sign of weakness but a strength. Developing the ability to find the right people and having the confidence to ask for support is a skill that will not only help you overcome challenges but will also naturally grow your network.

Networking is not just about meeting people at conferences or connecting on professional platforms. It is about building genuine, long-term relationships based on trust and collaboration. Many of the individuals you meet early in your career may later cross paths with you again, as collaborators on projects, members of selection committees, or even as future colleagues. These connections can open unexpected opportunities and provide valuable support throughout your journey.

Working on the husbandry of *Ololygon alcatraz* at São Paulo Zoo in 2013. Early-career experiences in animal care and welfare built the foundation for my later transition to research and conservation program coordination.

Over time, I have learned that success in your herpetological career depends not only on technical expertise but also on relationships and soft skills. Communication, adaptability, and partnership are just as important as scientific knowledge. Today, in my current roles, I rely on these skills every day. For example, coordinating international amphibian conservation programs requires me to build partnerships with multiple institutions and communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders. Furthermore, the opportunities I have now came from a combination of my professional experience and the network I built throughout the years. Many of these connections began with people I met, collaborated with, or simply asked for advice along the way.

Looking back, I see how valuable it would have been to start developing these soft skills earlier, during my academic years. They not only make research more effective but also prepare you for the many different career paths you may follow. If I could share one piece of advice with anyone starting out, it would be to never hesitate to ask for help and take time to build authentic connections. Science is a collective effort, and your network and interpersonal skills will be as important to your success as the data you collect.

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Balancing motherhood and science is achievable

When I began my herpetological journey, I wish I had known more about what it really means to combine a scientific career with becoming a mother, especially at a young age. In today's academic world, more and more people delay parenthood, often feeling that there is no "right time" for it. I had my daughter when I was 24, just a few months before starting my PhD. The following years were anything but easy. I moved from the anxiety of missing out on her early development, to the fear of not completing

my studies, to burnout during the pandemic, and later into a period of depression when I couldn't seem to focus or publish enough. What helped me move forward was having mentors who were also parents and understood the difficulties I was going through.

Essential was the support of my husband, who took parental leave for the first two years. Traveling abroad for fieldwork, training, or conferences always involved negotiation and logistical juggling, but once things were settled, our parents stepped in to help us. The flexibility of my doctoral program made it possible to adapt, but I had to learn how to use my time efficiently very quickly. There were (and still are) limited windows in which I can work. For a while, a "healthy lifestyle" meant mashed fruit purées and running through the park between swings. Hobbies moved far into the background, but I remind myself that, with small steps, I'll find ways to bring them back into my life.

Sabina with a Caspian whipsnake (*Dolichophis caspius*).

One thing I didn't expect, and which brings me so much joy, is how quickly children absorb your passion. Sooner than I imagined, I started hiking with her in nature, and she began asking about the colour patterns on frog skin and tapping curiously on tortoise shells. Moments like these reminded me why I chose this field in the first place: curiosity, patience, and discovery. Moreover, at least for a while, I have a new partner with whom I share the same awe in front of nature.

I also wish I had known that even if you don't have many friends, you can still find people along the way who understand the challenges of being a parent and doing science. Some will listen, share their own experiences, or offer advice when you need it most. Some will stay in your life, others you'll have to let go of, and that's part of evolving too.

Balancing motherhood and science is challenging, and some days it can feel like being pulled between two separate lives. But I no longer aim to be the perfect parent or the perfect scientist. I want to be present in my family's life, and I want to keep enjoying the beauty of science, even when it's challenging. And if there's one thing I've learned, it's that both science and motherhood require steady effort, curiosity, and dedication, qualities I wish I had recognized and valued more when I started my herpetological career.

Waseem Ahmed

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Bridging Science and Conservation Action

When I first stepped into the world of herpetology, I didn't fully grasp how wide-ranging and interdisciplinary the field truly is. My journey began during my MSc in Wildlife Management at PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi, where I conducted a behavioural study on captive Ball Pythons (*Python regius*). That experience ignited my fascination with reptiles and amphibians — an interest that deepened through my M.Phil. work, in which I explored the occupancy and detection of the endemic Murree Hills Frog (*Nanorana vicina*) and Hazara Torrent Frog (*N. hazarensis*) in both urban and natural habitats.

Looking back, I wish I had known earlier how essential it is to integrate genetics, spatial ecology, and field-based conservation to truly understand and protect amphibians and reptiles. My PhD research now focuses precisely on these intersections — examining movement patterns, habitat use, and genetic diversity of amphibians in contrasting landscapes.

Over the years, my fieldwork has taken me across Pakistan, Malaysia, and the United States, from high-altitude Himalayan streams to lowland agricultural fields. I've used diverse tools, from acoustic recorders and GIS to DNA sequencing, to uncover how environmental change affects herpetofaunal communities. During a research visit to Purdue University, USA I expanded my genetic research skills, examining variation in Sphaerotheca frogs across fragmented habitats. These experiences taught me that conservation today demands more than fieldwork: it requires molecular tools, spatial modeling, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

More recently, I had the opportunity to apply these skills in a real-world context through the Punjab Wildlife Census Project, where I served as a Project Associate and Consultant Herpetologist with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Leading a province-wide census of amphibians and reptiles was both challenging and fulfilling. It emphasized just how much we still need to learn, especially in understudied regions, and how vital long-term monitoring is to understanding species trends.

Wasim capturing a Bengal monitor lizard (*Varanus bengalensis*).

Beyond research, I've come to appreciate the value of science communication and training. I've led workshops, trained university students and field staff in herpetofaunal survey techniques and participated in outreach programs like SAVE THE FROGS Day. Engaging with the public and younger researchers has become one of the most rewarding parts of my career.

If I could offer one piece of advice to those starting in herpetology, it would be this: learn broadly, collaborate often, and never underestimate the importance of policy, education, and community engagement. Herpetology is more than just fieldwork — it's a bridge between science and conservation action.

Herpetological Associations of the Iberian Peninsula




Written by **Gonçalo M. Rosa[1], Rui Rebelo[2], Jaime Bosch[1] & Rodrigo Megía Palma[3]**

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The Portuguese Association of Herpetology: A growing hub for amphibian and reptile enthusiasts

The *Associação Portuguesa de Herpetologia* (APH), the Portuguese Association of Herpetology, serves as the central force driving research, conservation, and community engagement for amphibians and reptiles across the country. It provides a unifying platform for all those involved in the study of these often-misunderstood creatures. The association's work is about to take center stage as the APH, in collaboration with the *Asociación Herpetológica Española* (AHE, the Spanish Herpetological Association), will co-organize the 11th World Congress of Herpetology (WCH11) in Gijón, Asturias, Spain, in September 2028. This international event marks a significant opportunity to showcase Portuguese expertise and further integrate national conservation efforts into the global herpetological community.

The spark for a community: from SPH to APH

While the APH was officially established as a non-profit scientific association in June 2015, its roots stretch back two decades earlier. The flame was first lit by the *Sociedade Portuguesa de Herpetologia* (SPH; Portuguese Society of Herpetology), founded in February 1994. The SPH was a primarily academic society, uniting professional researchers in Portugal. Over its years of activity, the SPH played a vital role in communicating with its members through the periodical *Folha Herpetológica*, which ran three times a year until 2004, when the rise of digital media made print newsletters less viable. Beyond publications, SPH members organized herpetological conference cycles at universities, fostered environmental education partnerships, and led field trips.

APH
ASSOCIAÇÃO PORTUGUESA DE HERPETOLOGIA

Crucially, SPH established a partnership with Spain's AHE, co-organizing the biennial Iberian Congresses of Herpetology since 1994, an event that takes place in Portugal every fourth edition. Following a relocation of its headquarters and subsequent dissolution, the SPH was reborn in 2015 as the APH, absorbing all active members and continuing and expanding the community's mission and activities towards non-professionals, namely, on environmental education, environmental advice and management actions.

Medium-size country, rich (herpeto)fauna

Despite its size, Portugal boasts a remarkable diversity of herpetofauna. From unique species in the country's varied landscapes, including a few endemic species, this community faces the universal threats of habitat loss, climate change, and disease, echoing the challenges seen across the Iberian Peninsula. To protect this natural heritage, the APH focuses on three core pillars: research, conservation, and education.

Advocacy, education, and collaboration

The APH's commitment to herpetology is realized through a range of volunteer-led activities:

- Supporting research and outreach: APH's objectives include advancing and promoting research and scientific outreach initiatives, along with active participation in scientific projects. They also collaborate with AHE on publishing the scientific journal, *Basic and Applied Herpetology* (indexed in Scopus).
- Education and engagement: The association is deeply involved in education, offering training, and engaging local communities, families, and students. They are committed to public awareness and understanding of herpetology.
- Policy and advocacy: APH plays a vital role in offering opinions and influencing governmental and non-governmental entities on matters related to herpetology.
- Networking and support: They actively collaborate with similar organizations and foster the next generation of herpetologists by granting awards and scholarships to students and early career professionals. They continue the tradition of co-organizing the Iberian Congress of Herpetology with AHE.

Looking ahead to the World Congress of Herpetology

The World Congress of Herpetology (WCH) is the world's premier meeting for amphibian and reptile specialists. The APH and AHE are joining forces to host the 11th edition in Gijón, Asturias, Spain, in September 2028. This co-organization is a testament to the strong, enduring partnership between the Portuguese and Spanish herpetological communities. It provides a unique opportunity to draw global attention to the Iberian Peninsula's conservation challenges and triumphs, leverage the APH's foundational work, and inspire a new generation of Portuguese herpetologists. The WCH will serve as a powerful catalyst for policy influence, collaboration, and capacity building, ensuring that the legacy of the APH's dedicated community continues to grow and make a lasting impact on biodiversity conservation.

The Spanish Herpetological Association: Guardians of Spain's amphibians and reptiles

Spain is among Europe's most herpetologically rich countries. From mountain salamanders in the Pyrenees to marsh frogs in Andalusia, and from Iberian vipers to sea turtles along the Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines, amphibians and reptiles ("herpetofauna") face a suite of challenges: habitat loss, fragmentation, emerging diseases, road mortality, climate change, pollution, invasive species, and more.

The *Asociación Herpetológica Española* (AHE; the Spanish Herpetological Association) plays a central role in the study, conservation, and public awareness of these species. Founded in 1984, the AHE is a non-profit scientific association with around 500 members, which include professional researchers, students, educators, and enthusiasts. AHE's multifaceted work in conservation and research is a vital force protecting this herpetofauna. Its efforts are building momentum toward the upcoming World Congress of Herpetology in Asturias, which presents a critical opportunity to significantly advance herpetological science, policy, and community collaboration in Spain and beyond.

Key conservation and research activities of AHE

AHE implements a wide array of programs, monitoring schemes, research, and outreach aimed both at scientific knowledge and applied conservation. Some of its prominent initiatives include:

- Data infrastructure and monitoring: AHE maintains SIARE (*Servidor de Información de Anfibios y Reptiles de España*), a national-scale information server for amphibians and reptiles in Spain. Its goals are to provide open access to distributional and observational data, support volunteer networks, monitor long-term population trends, define reliable indicators of herpetofauna health, and make data accessible to scientists, conservationists, and citizen scientists.
- Volunteering and citizen science: AHE runs an active volunteer network where citizens play a crucial role in conservation, contributing observations, gathering data in the field, and monitoring species. These citizen science programs, such as SARE (monitoring amphibians and reptiles in Spain) and the *Red de seguimiento de poblaciones de víboras ibéricas* (tracking populations of Iberian vipers), extend the spatial and temporal coverage of monitoring, a critical asset in a country with such varied geography.
- Programs targeting specific threats:

• SOSanfibios.org is AHE's project to fight emerging diseases of amphibians caused by fungal pathogens (e.g. chytrid fungi) or viruses, which are among the main causes of declines in amphibian populations globally. The project involves monitoring, sample collection, reporting mortality events, and mitigation.

• The *Plan Stop Atropellos de Fauna Española* and *Recopilación de los puntos negros de atropellos de anfibios* are campaigns focused on identifying roadkill hotspots, implementing mitigation, and raising awareness about fauna mortality on roads. Since roads are a major source

of direct mortality, especially for amphibians whose seasonal migrations often lead them across roadways, these programmes are effective in reducing losses.

- Species-level and habitat-level projects: AHE runs targeted species-level and habitat-level projects across Spain. These include the vital *Programa de Marcado de Tortugas Marinas* (tracking marine turtles) and other tortoise/turtle projects. Furthermore, AHE works to mitigate habitat fragmentation by designing ecological corridors, such as the one for amphibians in Madrid ("*Corredor ecológico para anfibios madrileños*"), which connects green spaces to facilitate migration. The association also conducts essential species monitoring in Natura 2000 sites, including projects in Castilla-La Mancha under the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC), specifically focusing on listed amphibians and reptiles.
- Publications, dissemination and education: The association manages several vital channels for scientific dissemination and public education. AHE co-publishes the scientific journal *Basic and Applied Herpetology*, the *Boletín de la Asociación Herpetológica Española*, monographs, and other works. Beyond publications, AHE organizes congresses, meetings, and workshops at local and national levels to gather scientists, students, and conservation practitioners. These events serve not only to share research results but also to set priorities, foster new collaborations, and actively influence conservation policy. Furthermore, the AHE conducts extensive outreach activities and exhibitions, such as "*Anfibios españoles: Los más amenazados de nuestra fauna*" in collaboration with the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, which raises awareness about threatened species and their life cycles.

Dr Elba Montes monitoring *Podarcis pityusensis* populations in Ibiza.

- Recognition and impact: AHE efforts have been awarded the Premio BBVA a la Conservación de la Biodiversidad (BBVA Award for Biodiversity Conservation), acknowledging the significant impact of its "rigorous, ongoing monitoring of amphibian and reptile populations ... engaging society through its volunteer programs and the knowledge acquired through citizen science". Moreover, as a member of IUCN, AHE participates in national and international conservation networks.

Why the World Congress of Herpetology in Asturias Matters

The World Congress of Herpetology (WCH) is the foremost global gathering of specialists in amphibians and reptiles. It brings together researchers, funding bodies, conservation organizations, governments, ed-

ucators, and citizen scientists. Iberia will host the next edition (WCH11) in Gijón, Asturias in September 2028. This moment is pivotal for herpetofauna conservation in the region, offering a unique platform to leverage AHE's ongoing work and maximize its contributions to science and policy through:

- Showcasing and strengthening Spanish herpetology: Hosting the congress puts a global spotlight on Spain's herpetofauna, its richness, and its challenges. It is an opportunity for Spanish researchers and the AHE to present long-term monitoring data, new species discoveries, conservation strategies, and policy recommendations to an international audience.
- Promoting collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches: Many threats to amphibians and reptiles are interdisciplinary: epidemiology, climate science, landscape ecology, public policy, human infrastructure, etc. A congress is a place where ecologists, veterinarians, modelling specialists, environmental planners, and policymakers can collaborate, share methods, and integrate perspectives. AHE's data resources (SIARE, monitoring, species databases) are valuable foundations for comparative studies and collaboration.
- Scaling local programs and best practices: Programs like SOSanfibios, road mortality mitigation, volunteer monitoring, ecological corridors are generally designed and implemented locally. Under an international congress format, these can be compared with international best practices, improved, perhaps receive funding, and be replicated in other parts of Spain or in countries with similar landscapes or threats.
- Policy influence and conservation action: The visibility of WCH11 will help push conservation policy forward: stronger protections under Natura 2000, funding for herpetofauna monitoring, integrating amphibian and reptile conservation into infrastructure planning (roads, housing), veterinary regulation of pet trade, disease management in wildlife. AHE's voice, backed by robust research, can help shape calls to action by regional and national governments as well as EU bodies.
- Capacity building and education: WCH11 will enable training workshops, skill-development (field techniques, disease diagnostics, statistical methods), and educational outreach. This invests in the next generation of herpetologists in Spain. AHE's volunteer base and local groups can be deeply involved, ensuring awareness spreads to schools, local municipalities, protected area managers, and the public.

Direct engagement with the community and aspiring herpetologists is key to the APH's mission of raising awareness for local herpetofauna.

Challenges and gaps: where more work is needed

While the AHE has achieved much, conservation of herpetofauna in Spain remains a complex endeavor, facing several challenges:

- Emerging diseases and pathogens: Amphibian declines worldwide have been driven in large part by fungal pathogens (e.g. *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) and more recently viruses. Detection, surveillance, mitigation are still difficult. SOSanfibios is a step in the right direction, but capacity must be increased.
- Habitat loss, fragmentation, and climate change: Spain's varied topography means that many species have narrow ranges, sometimes in mountain systems or coastal wetlands, making them vulnerable to both land-use change and climatic shifts.
- Road mortality and infrastructure: Countless amphibians and reptiles die from roadkill. While hotspots are being identified, and mitigation schemes sometimes put in place, many roads remain poorly managed with respect to herpetofauna.
- Data gaps and funding: Some species or populations are understudied, particularly in remote areas or lesser-known taxa. Funding for long-term monitoring, disease work, habitat restoration, and enforcement of regulations lag behind needs.
- Public awareness and perception: Reptiles often suffer from negative perceptions. Amphibians less so, but many people do not appreciate them, their ecosystem services, or their vulnerability. Outreach, education, and citizen involvement remain crucial.

Enrique Ayllon checking traps for invasive snakes in Ibiza (Spain).

The *Asociación Herpetológica Española* stands as a major force in understanding, protecting, and advocating for Spain's amphibians and reptiles. Its multifaceted work, spanning from data infrastructure to public outreach, provides a rigorous conservation framework powered by sound science and deep community engagement. The forthcoming World Congress of Herpetology in Asturias (WCH11) represents a unique opportunity. The event will serve as a powerful catalyst, consolidating existing conservation efforts, sparking new collaborations, accelerating policy changes, and inspiring both professionals and citizens to invest more in herpetofauna. For Spain, this means not only preserving its natural heritage but also contributing globally to our understanding of how to live sustainably with amphibians and reptiles under increasing environmental pressures. For the global herpetology community, leveraging AHE's work and the Spanish richness of species will add critical data, perspectives, and solutions.

As we approach the congress, celebrating AHE's efforts, engaging with its programs, and supporting its mission will help ensure that the conservation of herpetofauna is stronger, more resilient, and more visible in Spain. This will ultimately make the Asturias gathering a moment not just of reflection, but of action.

Dr Jaime Bosch tagging *Bufo spinosus* for radio tracking.

Pedro L. Hernández sampling amphibians for the herpetofauna monitoring plan in Cabañeros National Park.

Carlos Caballero, training volunteers for citizen science work.

APH members bring scientific communication to life through talks and presentations at schools, universities and research centres across the country.

Herp news around the world

Leading this section: **Julia Riley**

This section features news, announcements, and initiatives from herpetological societies around the world. The news is ordered based on the global regions as defined by the WCH Executive Committee. Each news snippet is a short summary and highlights of what each society is getting up to, so please check out their own websites, social media sites, and newsletters for more information! If you have news you want to be featured in this section in future WCH newsletters, please contact Julia Riley (**jriley@mta.ca**).

Western Palearctic Region

IUCN Red List Update for Europe

The new European IUCN Red Lists for amphibians and reptiles were recently published. As a brief summary, nearly ⅓ of amphibians are now considered threatened in Europe and 76% of amphibians species have declining populations. In comparison, about 13% of reptiles are now considered threatened. For more detailed information, as well as a summary of threats, these documents present a current state of affairs for Europeans amphibians and reptiles.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Group, MME Birdlife Hungary

The HUN-REN Balaton Limnological Research Institute (BLRI), together with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Group of the MME Birdlife Hungary and the Hungarian Biological Society, held the 8th Herpetological Symposium on 20 October 2025 in Tihany. Nearly eighty participants arrived from all parts of the country, representing numerous universities, research institutes, government ministries, national parks, and civil organisations.

The scientific program, consisting of 24 presentations, was opened by a plenary talk by Andrew Hamer, who illustrated—through examples from Hungary and Australia—how urbanisation affects amphibians. This was followed by the first section, entitled “Diseases”, in which four lectures addressed fungal and viral infections affecting native species in Hungary.

After the coffee break came the “Habitat Effects” section, which included discussions of native lizards, the Hungarian meadow viper, the dice snake, and the fire salamander, as well as the factors influencing and threatening their populations. We also gained insight into the amphibian fauna of small urban ponds in Budapest. After lunch, topics from the “Genetics and Evolution” section followed: we heard about new developments in sex-marker research, the genotoxic stress affecting dice snakes, the evolution of adhesive toe pads, and the processes influencing amphibian extinction. The “Behavioural Responses” section revealed that behavioural thermoregulation can provide effective protection against viral infections and may even be linked to animal personality. There were also talks on how starvation-induced stress alters lizard behaviour and how microplastic pollution affects tadpoles. The programme concluded with the “Monitoring” section. Here we received up-to-date information on the presence of non-native species in Hungary, learned about a new lizard survey technique, and saw an overview of the results of the meadow viper reintroduction programme and its innovative monitoring methods. A wetland restoration project was presented, and reports were given on the herpetofauna of Debrecen and on changes in habitat occupancy of several reptile species following a conservation intervention. The event ended with a lively raffle. The program of the symposium can be downloaded here, and the abstracts (in Hungarian) of the presentations are available here.

Participants of the 8th Hungarian Herpetology Meeting in Tihany, Hungary. Photo by Péter Takács – BLRI.

Societas Europaea Herpetologica

The "SEH Grant in Herpetology" will be made available in 2026 again to support projects oriented to the conservation of the amphibians and reptiles of Europe and the Mediterranean basin, focused on either a species or habitat, with two grants of up to EUR 5,000 each.

The SEH Conservation Committee and the SEH Council will decide on the project applications by taking into consideration the following:
1. Conservation orientation/ value of the proposal
2. Extent of the area to be covered
3. Likelihood of success, with a realistic timetable and measurable targets
4. Costs and time table (expenses for the project- material, other costs (e.g. petrol)
5. Scientific background
6. Necessity of SEH funding: pilot projects are welcome
7. Conservation status of targeted species.

Precondition of application is active SEH membership status. Applications from young researchers are particularly encouraged.

The deadline for applications is 12th January 2026 and they should be sent to the SEH Conservation Committee (e-mail: **balint.halpern@gmail.com**) as PDF Files and should include the words "SEH Grant application" in the email subject line.

Applications should include:

- A short curriculum vitae of the prospective candidate(s).
- An outline of the project, including a timetable, the goals that are intended to be achieved and the means for reaching these goals.
- A financial plan, including a statement on other financial support for the project and should include a statement on why SEH funding is being requested.

Please send your application in a single document – a maximum of 4 pages. (The collected data will not be provided to third parties).

A decision on the applications will be announced until 31st January 2026. The grants will be provided on the understanding that the funds are used exclusively for the purpose that they were requested for, and that a report (to be published in AMRE and on the SEH website) will be submitted to the SEH Conservation Committee immediately after the project has been completed.

Nearctic

Advocates for Snake Preservation

Advocates for Snake Preservation (ASP) is a charity committed to changing how people view and treat snakes. As important predators and prey, snakes are an essential part of a vibrant, functioning planet, but negative attitudes about snakes may be the biggest barrier to their conservation.

ASP provides science-based solutions to everyday human-snake conflicts that sometimes end badly for people and often prove fatal for snakes. We make snakes more familiar and less scary by busting myths and misconceptions, illustrating lesser-known and appealing behaviors like parental care, and sharing stories of individual snakes to show what they're really like. Often this information is enough for people to welcome their snake neighbors and appreciate, rather than fear, their encounters. But we also recommend yard and human behavior modifications to reduce human-snake conflicts and make coexistence with venomous snakes safer. Join our email list to learn more about ASP's work and how to get involved.

The Inaugural Snake Week was 13-19 July 2025 - Hundreds of conservation groups, scientists, zoos, museums, and herpetological societies held special events celebrating the world of snakes. Folks all over the world learned about their local snakes and how to safely coexist with them. Watch the recordings from our webinar series on the website www.SnakeWeek.org.

Join us for Snake Week 2026! Here's how to get involved:

- Register your Snake Week event
- Sign up for the Snake Week newsletter
- Follow Snake Week on Facebook, Instagram, and Bluesky

Are You an Educator or Interpretive Naturalist? - ASP is putting together a suite of resources for educating the public about snakes. If you're interested in contributing to or receiving these resources, please get in touch with Melissa.

The Snake Week logo was designed by Emma Hsiao.

Turtle Survival Alliance

Global Highlights

- Between January and February 2025, four cyclones struck the Turtle Survival Alliance's Lavavolo Tortoise Center (LTC) in southwestern Madagascar, causing severe flooding that endangered more than 13,000 Radiated (*Astrochelys radiata*) and Spider (*Pyxis arachnoides*) tortoises in our care, and damaging or destroying tortoise compounds, staff housing, and program facilities. Approximately 8,000 tortoises required treatment or preventative care for pneumonia caused by the cold floodwaters. Thanks to an outpouring of global support, tortoise compounds have since been relocated to higher ground, and new elevated staff housing and program facilities are nearing completion.
- In February 2025, law enforcement in Madagascar, Tanzania, and Comoros dismantled a multi-country tortoise trafficking network, rescuing over 3,200 endangered tortoises and arresting 23 individuals. The operation recovered critically endangered Radiated Tortoises (*Astrochelys radiata*), Ploughshare Tortoises (*Astrochelys yniphora*), and Spider Tortoises (*Pyxis arachnoides*), dealing a significant blow to the illegal pet trade and seizing key assets linked to wildlife crime. Government agencies, conservationists, and local volunteers united to strengthen the fight against illegal wildlife trafficking, ensuring greater protection for Madagascar's tortoises. All confiscated tortoises were placed in Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA)'s specialized care centers to ensure their well-being, with the ultimate goal of reintroducing the Radiated and Spider tortoises into protected areas in the wild as part of our *Confiscation-to-Reintroduction Strategy*. The Ploughshare Tortoises, considered functionally extinct in the wild, were incorporated into TSA Madagascar's captive assurance colony to safeguard the species and support future conservation efforts.
- From March–May 2025, the Turtle Survival Alliance-supported Koh Kong Reptile Conservation Center (KKRCC) received 92 hatchling Asian Giant Softshell Turtles (*Pelochelys cantorii*) from nests protected on the Mekong River. This marks the first year in which the KKRCC will head-start every hatchling from protected nests along the Mekong River, in response to the drastic decline of this critically endangered species' population. The KKRCC is managed by the Cambodian Fisheries Administration and the Wildlife Conservation Society–Cambodia.

- In May 2025, Kenya launched the National Recovery and Conservation Action Plan for the Pancake Tortoise (*Malachochersus tornierii*) (2025–2035). Once scattered across Kenya's rocky hills and escarpments, this uniquely adapted reptile is now listed as Critically Endangered, threatened by habitat destruction and degradation, as well as illegal collection for the exotic pet trade. The plan was unveiled in Chiakariga, Tharaka Nithi County in a powerful gathering of conservationists, local leaders, and national agencies. The development of this plan was led by the Kenya Wildlife Service, National Museums of Kenya, and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, with financial support from the Turtle Survival Alliance, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, The Turtle Conservation Fund, Re:wild, and Cheyenne Mountain Zoo through the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. It was created in close collaboration with species experts from the National Museums of Kenya, ensuring a science-based and collaboration-driven approach.
- In May 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance and local partners in Myanmar hatched 284 Burmese Roofed Turtle (*Batagur trivittata*) eggs amongst three assurance colonies in the country. The addition of these animals brings the total number of Burmese Roofed Turtles, once considered extinct in the wild, to well over 2,000 individuals in their native Myanmar.
- In May 2025, the Turtle Survival Alliance–supported Koh Kong Reptile Conservation Center (KKRCC) hatched a record to date of 99 captive-bred Southern River Terrapins (*Batagur affinis*). This marks the fifth consecutive year that captive-reared Southern River Terrapins have successfully reproduced at KKRCC, in a country where they were once presumed extinct in the wild. The KKRCC is managed by the Cambodian Fisheries Administration and the Wildlife Conservation Society–Cambodia.
- In May 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance and local partners in Myanmar hatched 284 Burmese Roofed Turtle (*Batagur trivittata*) eggs amongst three assurance colonies in the country. The addition of these animals brings the total number of Burmese Roofed Turtles, once considered extinct in the wild, to well over 2,000 individuals in their native Myanmar.
- In July 2025, the Turtle Conservation Coalition, which includes Turtle Survival Alliance, published the 2025 edition of *Turtles in Trouble: The World's Most Endangered Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles*, a comprehensive and urgent assessment of the planet's most imperiled species. Of the 364 species assessed, including both living and recently extinct species, 201 are either threatened or extinct. Among these, 196 species (53.8%) are classified as Vulnerable, Endangered, or Critically Endangered. With 359 species remaining today, this underscores that turtles and tortoises are among the most threatened groups of vertebrates on Earth. Despite the crisis, notable conservation successes demonstrate that targeted, collaborative conservation can yield positive results. Turtle Survival Alliance prioritizes science-driven, evidence-based conservation focusing on 150 priority species, currently impacting 43 of the 66 highlighted in the report, and calls for urgent global action.
- In October 2025, over 2,000 wild-caught turtles, including critically endangered Vallarta Mud Turtles (*Kinosternon vogti*), were seized in Jalisco, Mexico. With support from Turtle Survival Alliance, the surviving turtles are now under intensive care at Zoológico Guadalajara, receiving veterinary treatment, quarantine, and monitoring. The turtles were part of an organized trafficking network targeting international markets. Authorities have prosecuted three individuals, highlighting the scale and impact of wildlife trafficking on threatened species. As of November 2025, thanks to funding, more than 1,400 turtles are housed in individual enclosures to prevent disease spread and reduce stress, while disease testing continues.
- In October 2025, The Turtle Conservation Society of Malaysia (TCS), with the support of Turtle Survival Alliance, carried out its largest-ever release of critically endangered Southern River Terrapins (*Batagur affinis*). A total of 680 hatchlings were released into the Kemaman River, Terengganu, as part of a long-term community-based conservation program that began in 2011. Since then, more than 11,000 eggs have been incubated and over 6,000 terrapins have been released. The event also featured educational exhibits, traditional games, workshops, and community activities, demonstrating how wildlife conservation and local livelihoods go hand in hand.
- In October, the Corporación para el Desarrollo Sostenible de La Mojana y el San Jorge (CORPOMOJANA), with support from Wildlife Conservation Society Colombia and Turtle Survival Alliance, released twenty Red-footed Tortoises (*Chelonoidis carbonarius*)—a species now listed as Endangered (in press) on the IUCN Red List—into the La Carranchina Nature Reserve in Sucre, Colombia. This marks the first scientifically guided rewilding of the species in the country.
- As of November 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) partner Estudiantes Conservando la Natureleza A.C., in collaboration with the City of Puerto Vallarta and with funding from TSA and Oxxo®, is nearing completion of a concrete wall to protect one of the last remaining habitats of the Vallarta Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon vogti*), the most imperiled turtle species in the Western Hemisphere.

New Projects

- In March 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance commenced a new project in Costa Rica to examine how the country's biogeography has shaped freshwater turtle diversity, identify current knowledge gaps, investigate genetic diversity and lineages, and develop strategies to conserve its nine continental species and subspecies.
- In July 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance announced a new project in eastern Australia in collaboration with the Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management (BMRG). We have expanded our work to support the Mary River Turtle (*Elusor macrurus*), classified as Endangered, and the White-throated Snapping Turtle (*Elseya albagula*), which has not been evaluated by the IUCN but is recognized as Critically Endangered by the Australian Government. We look forward to working with BMRG to implement conservation initiatives for these species, including genomic research for species recovery strategies, community-based habitat restoration, national turtle conservation workshops, and the integration of traditional ecological knowledge.
- In August 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) announced a new project in northern Australia for the Pig-nosed Turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*), a monotypic and unique riverine species whose range is restricted to New Guinea and Australia. Heavy poaching in New Guinea underscores the need for its conservation in Australia. However, its distribution in Australia and the population status of its stronghold in the Daly River remain unknown. Filling these knowledge gaps is critical to protecting the species in Australia, particularly given the constant threat of water extraction from the catchment for agricultural irrigation. In partnership with the University of South Florida, the University of New England, and Heinrich Ecological Services, the TSA is supporting biologists in conducting demographic and population status studies, as well as identifying threats to Australian populations.
- In October 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) announced a new project in Burkina Faso and Togo to document understudied areas of biodiversity. TSA supports research in this region on the distribution and community ecology of freshwater and terrestrial turtles, aiming to identify which habitats and populations still exist. Thanks to a grant from the Fonseca Species Conservation Fund, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and Re:Wild, PhD student Amétépé Hounmavo is conducting these studies, which include field transects, trapping, face-to-face interviews, and bushmeat market surveys—all of which have proven effective in this region for other research. Gathering data on the distribution, habitat preferences, and local status of turtle populations will provide a better understanding of the conservation actions needed. Species featured in this study include the Senegal Flapshell Turtle (*Cyclanorbis senegalensis*), the African Softshell Turtle (Trionyx triunguis), the West African Mud Turtle (Pelusios castaneus), the Sahelian Helmeted Turtle (*Pelomedusa olivacea*), the Western Hinge-back Tortoise (*Kinixys nogueyi*), the African Spurred Tortoise (*Centrochelys sulcata*), and Africa's rarest turtle species, the Nubian Flapshell Turtle (*Cyclanorbis elegans*).

Events & Announcements

- In November 2025, the Turtle Survival Alliance Canada (TSAC) was established in Toronto, Ontario, as a new Canadian charity. TSAC was established to secure a future for some of the world's most threatened turtles. Governed by an independent Canadian Board of Directors, TSAC offers a dedicated means for Canadian donors to support turtle conservation worldwide.
- In November 2025, Turtle Survival Alliance held its first international Drink Beer. Save Turtles.® fundraising event in Valley Heights, Australia, in collaboration with 1 Million Turtles, to support TSA's Australian turtle conservation projects. The event drew hundreds of attendees and featured a specialty beer, the proceeds of which support our conservation work.
- The 24th Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles, hosted by Turtle Survival Alliance and the IUCN SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, will be held from August 3–7, 2026, in Guadalajara, Mexico. Registration and Abstracts & Travel Grant submissions will open in early 2026. For updates, visit: https://turtlesurvival.org/annual-symposium/
- The 4th Annual Chelonian Biology, Conservation, and Management Course will be held from September 13–19, 2026. Affectionately known as "Turtle School," this week-long course takes place at the Turtle Survival Center in Cross, SC, USA, and is sponsored by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums Chelonian Advisory Group in conjunction with the Turtle Survival Alliance. Learn more here: https://turtlesurvival.org/events/chelonian-biology-conservation-and-management-course-2026/

Special News

GARD26 Conference

The 2026 Global Amphibian and Reptile Disease (GARD26) Conference will be held 8-12 June 2026 in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA. GARD26 will include 4 days of presentations with plenary talks, workshops, and social events intermixed. Several field trips are planned on Friday, 12 June. The Call for Abstracts will occur in November, with a 1 February submission deadline. More details on GARD26 are posted at: http://tiny.utk.edu/gard26.

Hisscord: a new information exchange network for young herpetologists

Hissscord is a new Discord server primarily for young herpetologists. Based on an idea at SEH2025, a few young herpetologists set up this new Discord server to provide a (safe) space for networking, exchanging ideas, and getting quick help from colleagues worldwide.

You can join here: discord.gg/VKJByuXjYj. If you have any questions, please contact **hissscord@gmail.com** or the server host N. Joris Fleck (joris.fleck@gmx.de) directly.

Future meetings and conferences

- January 3–7, 2026. The Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology (SICB) Annual Meeting. Portland, Oregon, USA. Link
- January 8–9, 2026. CA/NV Amphibian Populations Task Force (APTF) Annual Meeting. Sierra Nevada Brewery, Chico, CA, USA. Link
- January 30–February 1, 2026. Southeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (SEPARC) Annual Meeting. Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, North Carolina, USA. Abstracts due November 10, 2025. Link
- February 23–27, 2026. The 13th Latin American Congress of Herpetology. San Jose, Costa Rica. Link
- February 24–27, 2026. Desert Tortoise Council Annual Meeting & Symposium. Las Vegas, NV, USA. Link
- March 21–22, 2026. Annual Conference of the British Herpetological Society and Advancing Herpetological Husbandry Group. Drayton Manor, Tamworth, UK. Link
- March 22–26, 2026. Journal of Experimental Biology Symposium: Bio-Inspired Robotics in Comparative Biomechanics. Tenuta il Cicalino, Massa Marittima, Italy. Link
- April 6–9, 2026. Joint Annual Conference of The Wildlife Society (Washington) and the American Fisheries Society (WA-BC). Wenatchee, Washington, USA. Link
- June 8-12, 2026. Third Global Amphibian and Reptile Disease Conference. Knoxville, Tennessee, USA. Link
- June 20–24, 2026. Evolution: Joint meeting of the American Society of Naturalists, the Society of Systematic Biologists, and the Society for the Study of Evolution. Cleveland, Ohio, USA. Link
- July 8–12, 2026. Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (JMIH). New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. Link
- July 29–August 1, 2026. International Herpetological Symposium. Rodeo, New Mexico, USA. Link
- October 1–4, 2026. World Congress of Snakes. Kandy, Sri Lanka. For more information, contact Dr. Anslem de Silva (**kalds@sltnet.lk**).

Request for advice

The first versions of the WCH Newsletter (no. 1–5. published by Kraig Adler between 1983-1986), focused mainly on the organization of the first WCH congress in Canterbury. A section within these newsletters was called 'Request for Advice', and in this section Kraig Adler solicited advice from the global herpetological community on how to structure the congress. Specifically he said, "Since we are not bound by tradition we should try new approaches wherever they seem worth attempting." There were some 'radical' decisions made for the first congress as an outcome of this – for example, no oral contributed papers, instead attendees presented their contributed research in a series of poster sessions!

In general, WCH has a unique format. All attendees of a congress are considered members of the society, and vote at each congress to advise on the location of the next congress and members of the International Herpetological Committee (IHC) and Executive Committee (EC). Both the IHC and EC are the advisory board to guide the WCH congresses, but the organization of each congress is carried out by a local organising committee. The IHC and EC relies on feedback and expertise from the global herpetological community to guide and prioritise the actions and initiatives carried out at WCH congresses.

In the renewal of the WCH newsletter, it is important to us to continue to ask for your advice. In the future we may ask for your advice on specific topics (e.g., call for symposia, plenary speakers, or nominations for IHC and EC members). At the moment, if you have any suggestions or comments about the format and content of WCH congresses, WCH initiatives, or an idea of content you would like to see in future newsletters, we would be delighted to receive it.

You may have also seen that we are asking for submissions of news from herpetological societies and organizations (the *Herp News around the World* section). We are really looking forward to receiving these insights from the global herpetological community.

To submit advice, please e-mail it to **worldcongressofherpetology@gmail.com** with "Advice for WCH" in the subject line. Any comments will be kept confidential, and will not be identified to source, they should adhere to the WCH Code of Conduct, and they will be compiled and submitted to the EC twice a year. The IHC and EC has long relied on ingenious ideas from the herpetological community to move WCH congresses forward in new, exciting, and inclusive ways. We look forward to hearing from you!

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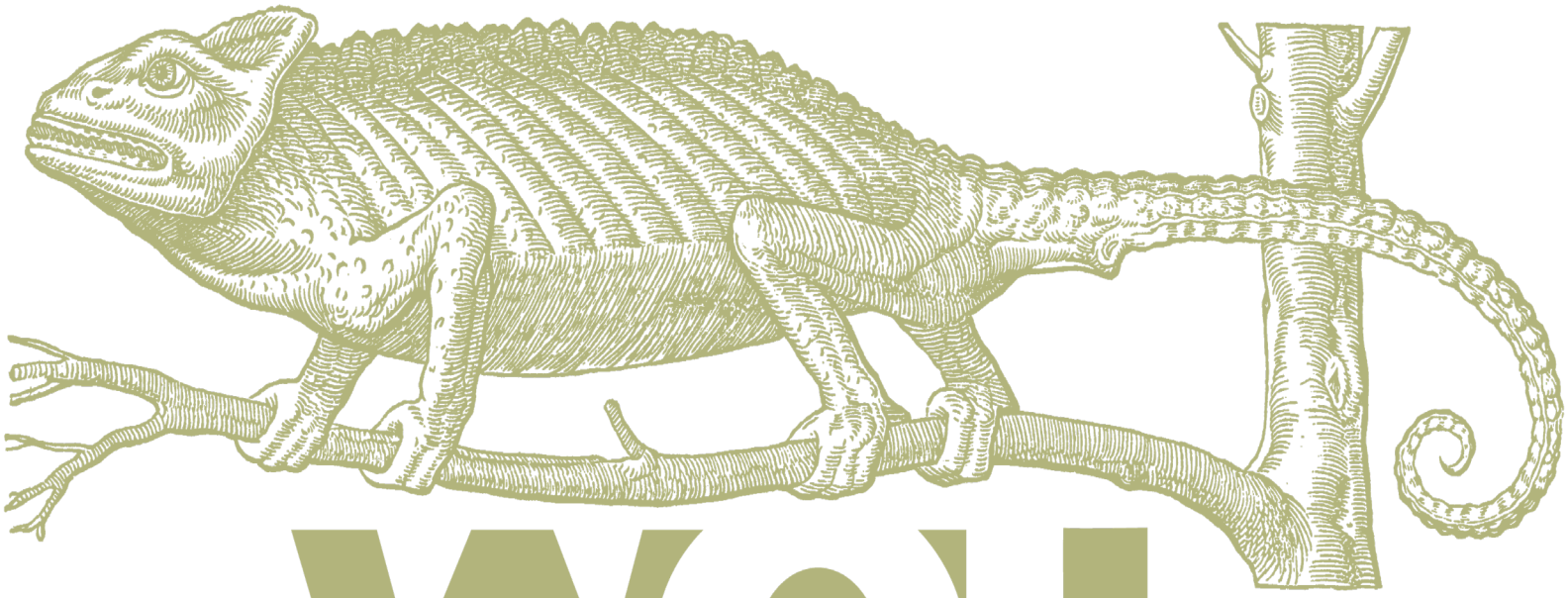

WCH
World Congress of Herpetology

The World Congress of Herpetology (WCH) is an International Scientific Nonprofit Organization that is also a Scientific Member of the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS). The mission of the World Congress of Herpetology is to promote herpetological research, education, and conservation, by facilitating communication between individuals, societies, and other organisations engaged in the study of amphibians and reptiles.

The aim of the WCH newsletter is to provide a means of communication during the period between WCH congresses that are typically held every three to five years. We want it to be a means of communication between the WCH Executive Committee (EC), the International Herpetological Committee (IHC), and the global herpetological community, and a place to feature ongoing actions being taken to study amphibians and reptiles by individuals and herpetological societies globally. It will be published bi-annually in June and December.

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