

*Societatis Europaeae Herpetologicae brevis historia**

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This text was compiled from two earlier accounts that dealt with the history of SEH (Böhme, 2014, 2024). This new compilation, produced at the request of the local organizing committee, is designed to provide background information about the society for participants in the 23rd SEH Congress in Bonn, its founding location, where it returns for the third time in the 46 years of the society's existence.

The idea to start a supranational scientific herpetological journal arose nearly simultaneously at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, France (MNHN) and at the Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum Alexander Koenig (ZFMK) in Bonn, Germany. On the German side, I thought it inadequate that there were three well-established scientific herpetological journals in the United States, but none in Europe! European national journals, such as *Salamandra* in Germany, the *Bulletin de la Société Herpétologique* in France, the *Herpetological Journal* in the United Kingdom, and others could not fill this gap at that time, because those publications also included submissions from non-academic herpetology and herpetoculture. Alain Dubois in Paris had similar thoughts, and we agreed on a first meeting, to be held on 31 January 1979. I went to Paris together with my colleague Klaus Busse, who was officially the ZFMK's ichthyologist but who worked primarily on frogs. At the MNHN, we met a French delegation of ten colleagues, including Jacques Bons, Édouard R. Brygoo, Alain Dubois, Jean-Paul Gasc, Jean Lescure, Jean-Jacques Morère, Rolande Roux-Estève, Hubert Saint-Girons (Fig. 1A), and two guests, Raymond Laurent and Jean-Paul Risch, from Tucumán, Argentina, and Luxembourg respectively, who just happened to be in Paris. This first

discussion resulted in the agreement that founding a society would be the best option, and a prerequisite, to create and sustain a scientific journal.

During our productive discussions, we also agreed to have a second meeting, again in France, to which more colleagues from other European countries should be invited. It was Jacques Bons who extended an invitation to his institute at the École Normale des Hautes Études in Montpellier for 21 June 1979. His invitation resulted in a meeting of Alain Dubois and myself, joined by Emilio Balleto, Adelaide Cherchi, and Benedetto Lanza from Italy; Juan Pablo Martínez Rica and Alfredo Salvador from Spain; Jan van Gelder, Charles Klaver, and Marinus Hoogmoed from The Netherlands; Franz Tiedemann from Austria; Jean Lescure, Jean-Jacques Morère, and Jean-Claude Guillaume from France; and Wolfgang Bischoff and Klaus Busse from Germany (Fig. 1B). Alas, the discussion was bogged down by details and ended without a clear joint result, which prompted me to declare an invitation to hold a foundation meeting in Bonn on 10 September 1979, where everybody interested in forming the new society and journal would be welcome.

My invitation was accepted by the following herpetologists, who became founders of SEH: Wolfgang Bischoff, Wolfgang Böhme, Klaus Busse, Ulrich Gruber, Helmut Hemmer, Hans-Hermann Schleich, Josef Schmidler, and Heinz and Johanna Wermuth from Germany; Charles Klaver, as a Dutch DAAD fellow at the ZFMK; Alain Dubois, Jean Lescure, Jean-Jacques Morère, Jean Paul Risch, and Rolande Roux-Estève from France; Josef Eiselt and Franz Tiedemann from Austria; Emilio Balleto and Adelaide Cherchi from Italy; Marinus Hoogmoed and Jan van Gelder from The Netherlands; Alfredo Salvador from Spain; and Ibrahim Baran from Turkey (Fig. 1C). Ursula Bott, technician in the Herpetology Section at the ZFMK, assisted Helmut Hemmer as chair of the meeting, and after the Executive Council election, she assisted Josef Eiselt, the first SEH president. All Executive Council positions were designed to have two individuals sharing responsibility:

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Figure 1. (A) The first French-German meeting to discuss the foundation of a European scientific herpetological society took place in January 1979 at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, France. Back row (from left): Jean-Paul Gasc, Alain Dubois, Wolfgang Böhme, and Rolande Roux-Estève. Front row (from left): Jean Lescuré, Raymond Laurent, Hubert Saint-Girons, and (partly covered) Jacques Bons. (B) Participants of the second discussion meeting before the foundation of SEH in June 1979 at Montpellier University, France. From left: Rolande Roux-Estève, Alfredo Salvador, Benedetto Lanza and Adelaide Cherchi. (C) Participants in the SEH foundation meeting in September 1979 at Museum Alexander Koenig in Bonn, Germany. From left: Ursula Bott, Ulrich Gruber, Hans-Hermann Schleich, Ibrahim Baran, Alfredo Salvador, Josef Schmidler, and Helmut Hemmer.

President and Vice President (Jean Lescure), General Secretary (Marinus Hoogmoed) and Vice Secretary (Alfredo Salvador), Treasurer (Heinz Wermuth) and Vice Treasurer (Franz Tiedemann), First Co-Editor of the journal (Helmut Hemmer) and Second Co-Editor (Alain Dubois). We chose to give the society a supranational and scientifically sounding Latin name, the Societas Europaea Herpetologica.

It was more difficult to find a name for the new journal, which was a main objective of this founding session. The idea to use the name of a prominent European herpetologist (e.g., George Boulenger or Robert Mertens) failed to receive a majority of voices, as did the proposal by Alain Dubois of *Alytes* (a mainly European frog species with a rather euphonious name). My proposal of *Acta Europaea Herpetologica* (a name corresponding to that of the society) was also rejected, but finally a compromise offered by Helmut Hemmer was successful. He thought of the French theriological journal *Mammalia* and suggested in analogy the simple *Amphibia-Reptilia*, which found at last majority support. Concerning the former proposals, Alain Dubois left the Executive Council after a short time and created his own, purely batrachological society in Paris and created the new French journal named *Alytes*. The name *Acta Herpetologica* was adopted by Italy, first with the addition of *Italica*, but now exists without this addition.

Also invited to our foundational meeting was Harald Wiebking from the Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft in Wiesbaden, Germany, as a possible publisher for the new journal. This publishing house was famous for its multivolume handbook series on the birds of Central Europe and the sequel on the mammals of Europe. A herpetological counterpart was scheduled under my editorship. As a result, the Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft became the publisher that provided test prints with the names that had been proposed and duly produced the first volume of *Amphibia-Reptilia* (Fig. 2), a quadrilingual journal (English, French, German, Spanish) to reflect Europe's cultural diversity. Alas, soon afterwards the publisher went bankrupt, and a new manager founded a new enterprise named AULA that kept the profitable handbook series but not the rather loss-making scientific journal. SEH was forced to find a new publisher, which we found in the academic publisher Brill in Leiden, The Netherlands, where *Amphibia-Reptilia* is still published today.

With Brill, *Amphibia-Reptilia* soon changed into a unilingual, anglophone journal and evolved into a premier scientific herpetological journal, comparable to

the three well-known American journals. The primary goal that had led to the society's founding was achieved.

The society itself also developed successfully, holding biannual scientific congresses (Fig. 3) and integrated Ordinary General Meetings (OGMs) with only few irregularities in timing. The first congress was held in Vienna, Austria (1981), two years after the foundational meeting, followed by León, Spain (1983); Prague, Czechoslovakia (1985); Nijmegen, The Netherlands (1987); Canterbury, England (1989), combined with the First World Congress of Herpetology (I-WCH); Budapest, Hungary (1991); Barcelona, Spain (1993); Bonn, Germany (1995); Prague, Czech Republic (1997), combined with II-WCH; Le Bourget-du-Lac, France (1998); Iraklio, Greece (1999); Žalec, Slovenia (2001); St. Petersburg, Russia (2003); Bonn (2005); Porto, Portugal (2007); Kuşadası, Turkey (2009); Luxembourg (2011); Veszprém, Hungary (2013); Wrocław, Poland (2015); Salzburg, Austria (2017); Milan, Italy (2019); Belgrade, Serbia (2022); and Wolverhampton, England (2023). This year's congress will again be held in Bonn.

Even though there have been many congresses, there have been few irregularities. The congress in Le Bourget du Lac (1998) did not have an OGM because at II-WCH in 1997, on the regular odd-year schedule, there was only an OGM but no SEH-specific scientific program. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a three-year inter-congress interval (2019–2022), and to return to the usual, odd-year schedule, it was decided to hold a congress in 2023 without an OGM (in Wolverhampton). Thus, while there are 23 congress sites (Fig. 3), only 22 congresses had an OGM.

Nine congresses resulted in proceedings volumes with full manuscripts on the topics of talks held during the meetings. Such somewhat expansive volumes (Fig. 4) were published by the organizers of the congresses in Prague (1985), Nijmegen (1987), Budapest (1991), Barcelona (1993), Bonn (1995, 2005), Iraklio (1998), Žalec (2001), and St. Petersburg (2003).

An important accomplishment was the foundation of several committees. The Conservation Committee was tasked with overseeing conservation issues regarding European herpetofauna and to provide professional advice to matters of the Berne Convention. The Mapping Committee was established to publish a distribution atlas, edited by Gasc et al. (1997), with a second edition published in 2004 (Fig. 5). A Taxonomic Committee was established as an authority to publish lists with the official species names of European amphibians and reptiles (last updated by Speybroeck et al., 2020).

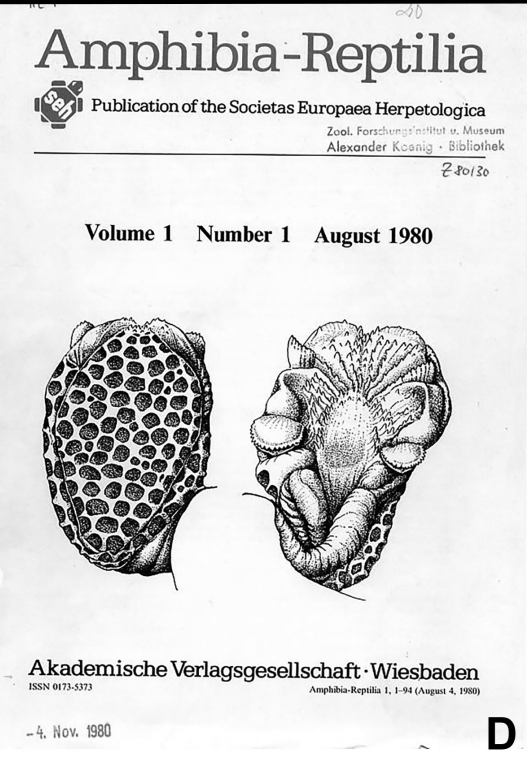
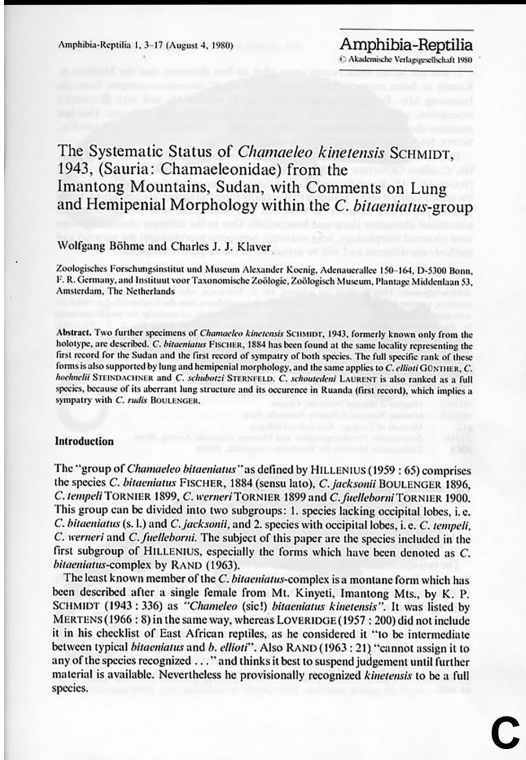
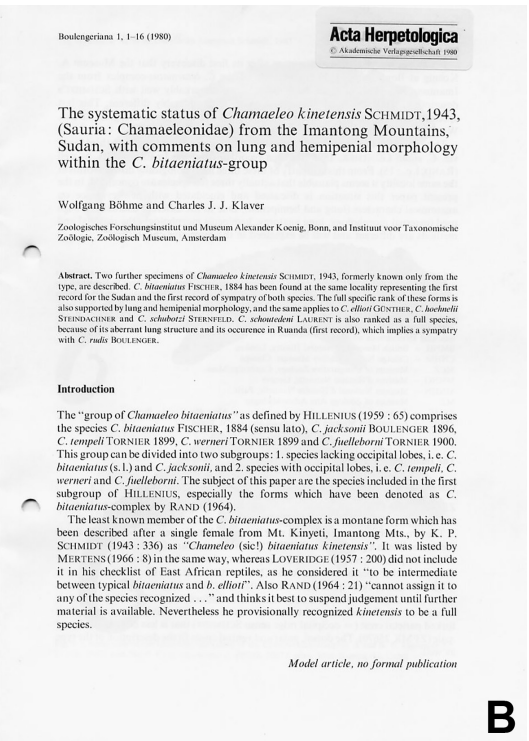
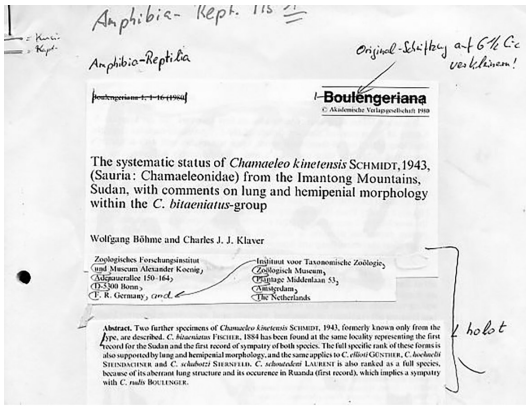


Figure 2. Genesis of the society's flagship journal *Amphibia-Reptilia*. (A) Test print for the proposed SEH journal, as *Bouleangeriana*. (B) A second try, as *Acta Herpetologica*. (C) The final version, using the name *Amphibia-Reptilia* with Page 1 of the first article in the first issue. (D) Cover of the first issue of the first volume.

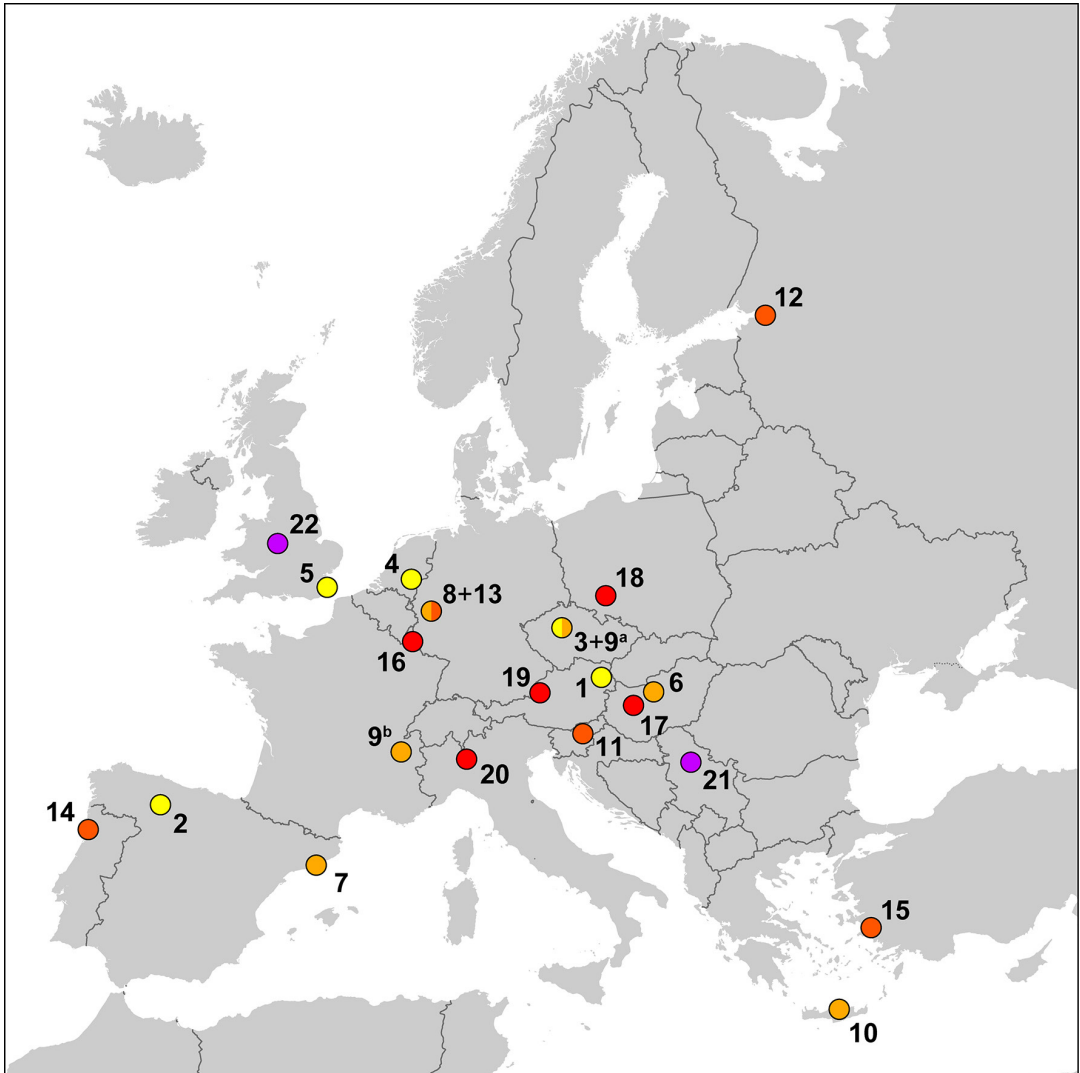


Figure 3. Map of SEH congress locations across Europe. 1 – Vienna (1981), 2 – León (1983), 3 – Prague (1985), 4 – Nijmegen (1987), 5 – Canterbury (1989), 6 – Budapest (1991), 7 – Barcelona (1993), 8 – Bonn (1995), 9a – Prague (1997), 9b – Le Bourget du Lac (1998) 10 – Iraklion (1999), 11 – Žalec (2001), 12 – St. Petersburg (2003), 13 – Bonn (2005), 14 – Porto (2007), 15 – Kuşadasi (2009), 16 – Luxembourg (2011), 17 – Veszprém (2013), 18 – Wrocław (2015), 19 – Salzburg (2017), 20 – Milan (2019), 21 – Belgrade (2022), 22 – Wolverhampton (2023). Colours indicate year ranges as follows: 1980–89 (yellow), 1990–99 (orange), 2000–19 (red), 2020–23 (purple).

During my two four-year terms as SEH president (1993–2001) I tried to increase membership in the society. I intended to do this not dropwise as usual but by giving the society a second function, as the pan-European umbrella organisation for the various national herpetological societies in Europe. Beyond an increase in SEH membership, my idea was to gain a stronger voice among political decision-makers by being able to speak for thousands of scientists,

not merely a few hundred. I was not as successful as I hoped, perhaps because in those days some international colleagues may have been concerned about German dominance. More recently, SEH did form such a common umbrella, under the leadership of past SEH President Mathieu Denoël, known as the European Board of Herpetological Societies (EBHS). This association of national societies was initiated and established in 2019 during the OGM in Milan.

SCIENTIA HERPETOLOGICA

A

Societas Europaea Herpetologica

HERPETOLOGIA BONNENSIS

edited by
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HERPETOLOGIA BONNENSIS

B

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HERPETOLOGIA PETROPOLITANA

D

Societas Europaea Herpetologica

HERPETOLOGIA PETROPOLITANA

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BOGDAN PETROVIC 1928-2018

Figure 4. SEH Proceedings volumes. (A) Barcelona. (B) Bonn. (C) Bonn. (D) St. Petersburg.

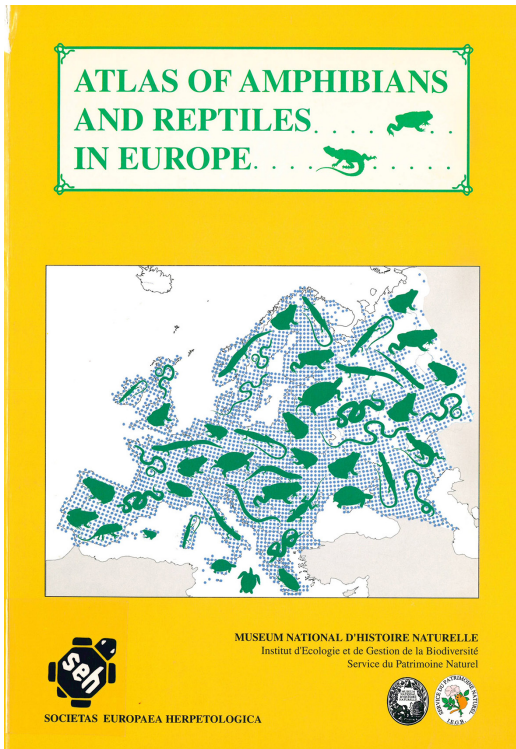


Figure 5. The *Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe*, the distribution atlas of European herpetofauna published by SEH.

As of this writing, SEH partner societies as part of EBHS include AHE (Spain), APH (Portugal), BHS (United Kingdom), DGHT (Germany), KARCH (Switzerland), ÖGH (Austria), MME (Hungary), SHI (Italy), and HSC (Cyprus). More European national societies are expected to join this board, which gives me a certain, late satisfaction.

In 2001, a second online journal, *Herpetology Notes* (Fig. 6) was created through the efforts of Miguel Vences for the fast, open-access publication of contributions not suitable for *Amphibia-Reptilia*. These include natural history observations and range extensions, but some full articles featuring smaller data sets, trial observations, or faunal inventories are also published. *Herpetology Notes* is currently in its 18th volume and has found broad acceptance among the global community of herpetologists. Under the leadership of Hinrich Kaiser (to whom I am indebted for a linguistic revision of this text), *Herpetology Notes* now routinely publishes more pages each year than *Amphibia-Reptilia* and most other herpetological journals.



Figure 6. Cover of the first volume of *Herpetology Notes*, still in a print edition.

Seen in retrospective from a personal point of view, I consider the 45 years of SEH a history of successes, and I therefore conclude this short essay again with Latin words:

Societas Europaea Herpetologica: vivat, crescat, floreat!

[The European Herpetological Society: may it live, grow, and flourish!]

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