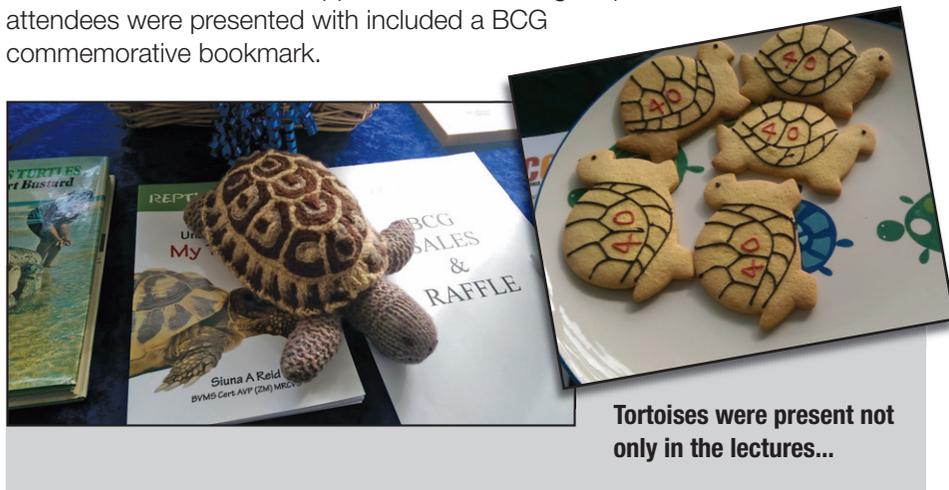


SPRING SYMPOSIUM 2016

IN PICTURES



The 2016 BCG Spring Symposium took place in our 40th anniversary year. The BCG celebrated it quietly, with a 'Welcome screen' which listed the achievements of our Charity over 40 years, by courtesy of Matt Kirton and Ute O'Meara, present and past PROs. Delegates were presented on arrival with a tortoise-shaped cookie for consumption with their coffee, depicting the number 40 on their backs (courtesy of the BCG Bake-Off Team: Debbie Jones and her partner Den, Mary Datson and Janet Curtis). The cookies were so popular that the extra ones baked were taken home by delegates, who placed a small contribution in a money box for the Radiated Tortoise Appeal. And the delegate packs that attendees were presented with included a BCG commemorative bookmark.



Tortoises were present not only in the lectures...

The first speaker of the day was **Dr Robert Bustard**, a population ecologist and a life-long conservationist, an expert on archaic reptiles, chelonians and crocodylians. Dr Bustard is a founder member of the IUCN (International Union of Nature Conservation and of three other IUCN/SSC groups. The title of Dr Bustard's presentation was **'THE HAWKSBILL TURTLE: CONSERVATION RESEARCH'**.

It was especially interesting as he concentrated the talk on the turtle population and the rookeries of the Hawksbill Turtles in Australia, a part of the world we do not receive a lot of first hand information on. There are seven species of turtle with a wide distribution and an estimated 20 - 23,000 Hawksbill Turtles. He also related that there was still a lively tortoise shell industry in Australia and showed us the



Dr Robert Bustard presented a talk on the Hawksbill Turtle, its habitat and distribution, and concepts of the conservation of threatened species

many rookeries on the various beaches and some very beautiful photos of turtles in their natural habitat. The small hatchlings making their way to the waterline especially appealed to the audience. We hope to have Dr Bustard back to give us another lecture on the Flatback Turtle of Australia, a re-discovered species, which will be fascinating.

Our second speakers were well known to us: **Professor John and Mrs Margaret Cooper** with a double bill. A husband and wife team from the United Kingdom, John trained as a veterinary surgeon and is now a specialist pathologist with particular interest in wildlife and exotic species, tropical diseases and comparative medicine. Margaret is a lawyer who trained originally as a British solicitor and has made the study of animal and conservation laws her special interest. The Coopers have spent nearly twenty years living overseas, ten in Africa working with mountain gorillas in Rwanda. In 2009 they returned from seven years at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago where they combined their medical and legal backgrounds in the promotion of an interdisciplinary approach to veterinary and biological education, wildlife conservation and forensic appointments. They continue their work with wildlife, especially reptiles, domesticated animals and rural communities in East Africa.

The BCG is proud to sponsor some of their work in Africa. The title of their joint

presentation was: **'KINIXYS, KOBE AND KENYANS: forty years of progress in East Africa'**. Their talk was, as always, entertaining and showed their travels in Africa and lectures delivered in the most isolated places, with people (and animals) benefitting from their knowledge. And if you are wondering what the word 'Kobe' referred to, it means 'tortoise' in Swahili.



Husband and wife team Prof John Cooper and Margaret Cooper gave a lively talk, illustrating some of their many projects undertaken in East Africa, providing hands-on veterinary workshops in animal rescue stations and facilitating the training of local students and animal welfare workers.

There then followed a presentation by Monsieur **Bernard Devaux** of **SOPTOM, the Tortoise Village in France**. SOPTOM is in its 30th year, and the BCG has supported this wonderful conservation centre since its inauguration. Throughout 2015, the BCG ran an appeal to help the Village with its plan to change its location from Gonfaron to Carnoules, and Bernard Devaux was there to say "thank you" and to show us something of the work undertaken at the Village and of the new plans. The President of SOPTOM, **David Stubbs**, acted as interpreter/translator and the presentation gave a wonderful insight into what is being achieved at SOPTOM. It showed details of the site, the enclosures, the veterinary clinic, the reception centre and also the greenhouse/conservatory for the tropical tortoises, which had been previously partly funded by the BCG. Building work, which had just started on the new site, was also shown, and the hope was expressed to open the new site in 2017.

THE KAY GRAY AWARD

Before lunch, there was one more duty to perform. The BCG presents annually the Kay Gray Award, an award in honour of our benefactress Kay Gray. The award is made to a person or organisation which has made a significant contribution to chelonian welfare. The person who was the proposer for the nomination this year is one of our oldest and most loyal members, Mrs Pat Evans. Because of her age (she is over 90) she could not be with us, but she had said that she would be with us in spirit. She made a fantastic choice, because she nominated the originators of SOPTOM, the Tortoise Village in France, as the recipients of the 2016 Award. And what better choice for our fortieth anniversary than a conservation centre in Europe which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, and which the BCG has been supporting for its entire existence? The three originators are Professor Ian Swingland, and the founders Mr David Stubbs and Monsieur Bernard Devaux.



From left: Professor Swingland, Bernard Devaux and David Stubbs were delighted to receive the 2016 Kay Gray Award as originators of SOPTOM.

The three judges all had read the summaries of the work of the three candidates and their immense contribution to the conservation of chelonian worldwide, and unanimously gave their full support to these pillars of chelonian conservation. Certificates for the award and the silver trophy, which is to be retained for a year, were presented to the worthy candidates, after which everyone left for a well deserved lunch.

WORKSHOP WITH VETERINARY AND ANIMAL CARE STUDENTS

The first session after lunch was to be taken by a veterinary surgeon, but due to her having been taken ill on the Thursday before the Symposium she had to cancel her engagement, much to her regret. The slot was gallantly taken over at short notice by **Professor John Cooper** and **David Alderton**, and with the help of a soft toy tortoise, borrowed from the sales stall, the CPD (Continued Professional Development) attendees were entertained (and grilled) on their knowledge of how to handle a tortoise if handed in at their place of work. It was a light-hearted and amusing educational session, and both gentlemen showed themselves well versed in the skill of dealing with young people, which was also much appreciated by the audience.



David Alderton and Prof John Cooper (above, both sharing the podium with a participating student) held an impromptu training session with CPD students, discussing health assessment criteria for a tortoise handed into their care.

Next followed **Dr Anna Wilkinson**, a Senior Lecturer in Animal Behaviour at the School of Life Sciences, University of Lincoln, UK. Anna has done her PhD at the Department of Psychology, University of York, and a three year postdoctoral fellowship at the Austrian Science Foundation, Department of Cognitive Biology, at the University of Vienna, Austria. The title of Anna's talk was: **'COLD-BLOODED COGNITION: What does a tortoise know and why does it matter?'**

The cognition tests used on a variety of animals made her think that her pet tortoise, a male Red-footed Tortoise, might be able to perform similar cognition tests as he seemed very bright. Anna found that he even outperformed rats in controlled experiments such as standard small-scale navigation tests, as well as



Dr Anna Wilkinson's presentation about reptile cognition revealed amazing performances by Red-footed Tortoises in spatial ability tests, and their ability to apply learned responses to visual clues even several months later - demonstrating their long term memory powers.

in tests using coloured shapes on a touch-screen. There is now a group of these Red-foots at the 'Cold-blooded Cognition Lab' of Lincoln University, lovingly looked after by a technician, in both indoor and outdoor premises. The animals are ideal as they are non-hibernators, so the work can take place all year round, and they have all shown a very high rate of ability in performing cognition tests, and even claiming their rewards (a small piece of strawberry, especially adored by Red-foots) by, for example, learning to tap a button on a computer screen. Knowing the animals' cognitive abilities is of great interest to their eventual success in surviving and evolving in an ever changing world, as well as scientists and tortoise keepers learning to understand signs of stress in captivity and promote optimum husbandry. A most interesting talk and much appreciated by the audience.

After the tea break it was **David Alderton's** turn. Growing up in a home surrounded by a wide range of pets which included both tortoises and terrapins, his interest in reptiles and the natural world grew as he did and ultimately led him to Cambridge University. As a writer specialising in the field of pet care and natural history, David's books have sold over 6.5 million copies in 30 languages. His title 'Tortoises and Turtles of the World' was first published in 1988 and has been in print ever since. David came up with the idea for 'Practical Reptile Keeping' magazine, the only newsstand title on this topic, which always includes information about chelonians, and he has been its editor since its launch seven years ago. The title of David's talk was: **'KEEPING PACE: Chelonian care past, present and future'**. David first took us back to 1976. There were no Horsfield Tortoises

A most informative talk was given by David Alderton spanning 40 years of chelonian husbandry in the UK, with advances in lighting and heating equipment, better tanks for aquatic species and specific veterinary care.

As more new chelonian species are being kept as pets the UK, biologists, vets and keepers need to meet the challenges of looking after these animals according to the needs of their species, e.g. their specific environmental and dietary requirements.



in the UK yet, just Spur-thighed and Hermann's Tortoises, and the only terrapins were Red-ears and Caspian Turtles. However, tank structures improved with new materials becoming available. Better heaters and filters made keeping aquatic chelonia easier. There also were great advances over the past decades in knowledge, especially on the veterinary front. Heat lamps of various kind were mentioned, which makes keeping tropical tortoises more feasible, and the newest lamps available now allow the growing of suitable wild plants for consumption of our charges during the winter. A nice and comprehensive overview over forty years which gave every one in the audience something new to think about.

The last lecture of the day was presented by **John Hayward**, Co-ordinator of the National Theft Register: Zoological Wildlife Investigations. Twenty years ago the then Federation of Zoos, (now BIAZA) invited John to set up a national co-ordination service in respect of all zoological and exotic species stolen throughout the UK. At that time John was a senior Police Officer with Thames Valley Police in charge of the criminal intelligence department specialising in cross border crime. John has been CITES trained by the Secretariat Geneva. Shortly after the formation of the Register several other organisations, including the British Chelonia Group, came aboard.

The title of John's talk was: **'PROTECTION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES'**. John presented us with a series of 'cases', thefts of chelonia, both at individual houses when tortoises were victims of casual theft, or targeted when groups of animals disappeared from premises of wildlife parks or zoos. In many cases, John's efforts in publicising the crime via the various media had success. Over the years, tortoise thefts have decreased - no doubt as a result of the Register.

20 years ago, John Hayward was instrumental in setting up the UK National Theft Register which records, and aims to recover, exotic and CITES listed species. He has advised the BCG about tortoise security and theft prevention and recovery throughout these years.



Following John Hayward's lecture, the winning raffle tickets were read out and the CPD delegates were asked to come to the podium to receive their certificates.

After the closing announcements the speakers, the catering department of the University, the sales team and raffle organisers, all the people manning the stalls and both our present and past PROs were thanked for their contribution. The speakers, the Symposium organisers, Joy Birch and her husband Paul, and the OU Technician were asked to come to the podium and were presented with a token of the BCG's appreciation.



The CPD delegates receive their attendance certificates.

Henny Fenwick, Chairperson of the BCG, thanks the Symposium speakers and organisers.

Those of you who could not make it, you missed a great day. But join us next year at the 2017 Spring Symposium. Make a date for your diary for Saturday 17th March 2017.

The Northern Symposium for 2016 will take place at Chester Zoo on 1st October 2016 and we hope to see you there.