



Strasbourg, 18 August 2025

T-PVS(2025)08e

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND
NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

45th meeting

Strasbourg, 8 – 12 December 2025

**12th meeting of the Group of Experts
on the Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles**

Tuesday 25 March 2025, 9.00 – 12h30

(Online)

- Meeting Report -

Document prepared by the Secretariat

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- take note of the report of the 12th meeting of the Group of Experts on the Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles which took place on the 25 March 2025;
- take note of the information provided by Parties on national activities and initiatives on the conservation of amphibians and reptiles;
- take note of the proposal to follow-up on the survey on developing Important Herpetofauna Areas and to plan identifying and developing IHAs at the European level and further encouraging it at the national level, in coordination with the European Union, particularly on data collection.
- take note of the information provided by Parties on national measures to control the spread of *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus (Bsal);
- take note of the priorities proposed by the Group to reinforce its collaboration with the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species (IAS) for a better fight against alien pathogens and pathogens spread by IAS and on e-commerce and IAS;
- take note of the proposal by the group to have a meeting of the Group of Experts in person.

1. Opening of the meeting by the Chair

The Chair, Ms Eliška Rolfová (Czechia), opened the meeting, welcomed the participants and wished the Group of Experts a fruitful meeting.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The meeting agenda was adopted with no amendments.

3. Inspiring examples of national activities and initiatives on the conservation of amphibians and reptiles

The Group of Experts was informed of activities and initiatives implemented on herpetofauna conservation in five Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention.

The representative of the **United Kingdom**, Mr Matthew Ellis, gave an overview of national efforts for monitoring and conserving herpetofauna species, in particular through joint projects, based on a combination of questionnaires and field surveys. Mr Ellis also presented the Wales Great Crested Newt Monitoring Scheme, which was launched in 2016 for ten target sites and has collected over 106043 records in its database, as well as the cross-border Jack Conservation Project Nature, a liaison project led in England, Scotland and Wales to promote best practice in management, monitoring and recording. It was also highlighted that other actions being undertaken in England include disease risk analysis and health surveillance. The slides of Mr Ellis' presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of **Switzerland**, Ms Irina Bregenzer, reported on the current situation regarding conflicts between railway lines and amphibian migration, in particular the mortality effects of animals being run over by trains and the strong barrier effect of the railway tracks and embankments, which prevent animals from crossing and divert the whole migration. Ms Bregenzer highlighted the lack of observations on these issues due to security measures on railway lines, and that Switzerland has been working with two different federal agencies to study this issue since 2019. This analysis was used to identify 726 potential conflict sites between the amphibian migration and the railway, and to develop a standard methodology to evaluate these potential sites in the field to find amphibians. The final step was informing the Swiss railway companies of these different potential conflict sites, asking them to assess whether amphibians can be found on their sites and then to implement protective measures if necessary, such as combining amphibian deflectors with ballast trenches or other measures on the railway embankments. The slides of Mr Bregenzer' presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of the **Czech Republic**, Mr Vojtech Baláž, informed the participants that action plans for the nationally critically endangered aesculapian snake (*Zamenis longissimus*) and the natterjack toad (*Epidalea calamita*), were in action and being prepared respectively. Mr Baláž added that a genetic study of the aesculapian snake (*Zamenis longissimus*) populations has been carried out to investigate the diversity within the historically known populations. He also reported about the spread of the nationally critically endangered common wall lizard (*Podarcis muralis*), probably caused by human activities. In general, the major issue in amphibian conservation remains the habitat loss and intensification of fish farming and aquaculture.

Mr Ronald Zollinger, on behalf of **the Netherlands**, presented the latest assessment of distribution trends in population sizes of Dutch amphibian and reptile species. Mr Zollinger also informed the Group of Experts of recent activities and actions, in particular that a new Red List of Amphibians and Reptiles had been published last year. He presented a [video](#) showing a ladder for amphibians, allowing a variety of species to get out from sewerage. Finally, it was highlighted that habitat improvement for amphibians, especially the creation and management of ponds, is

receiving a lot of attention in the Netherlands.

The representative of **Germany**, Mr Timm Reinhardt, reported on a cooperative project on the conservation and research on the fire salamander and the development of population genetics in a transboundary population with the Czech Republic. Funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in the state of Saxony, it combines citizen science data and historical data to see the state of the population distribution, which currently appears to be declining compared to the up to 100-year-old data sets on the genetic diversity of the population. Mr Reinhardt added that the common frog was probably one of the most declining species in Germany at the moment, becoming the least common of the three brown frogs in Germany due to the spread of the agile frog. The presentation of Mr Reinhardt may be found [here](#).

In addition, Ms Emina Sunje (in her capacity as Head of the Herpetological Association in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**) informed the meeting participants about the role and activities of her association: 1) a habitat restoration project in northern Posavina (BiH) - creating a 3-ha pond for amphibians, focusing on *Pelobates fuscus*; 2) conservation efforts for the stenoendemic Bosnian Alpine newt (*Ichthyosaura alpestris reiserii*) on Mt. Vranica - construction of an artificial pond and a large hibernaculum, as the main habitat (Prokoško Lake) is compromised by fish presence; 3) a herpetofauna inventory across the Federation of BiH in collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, possibly leading to a long-term conservation strategy. More information can be found [here](#).

Finally, Mr Bálint Halpern (Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH) - European Herpetological Society) informed the meeting participants about the role of his organisation in and its activities related to the conservation of herpetofauna in Europe.

The Chair thanked all the experts and country representatives for their presentations and sharing of experiences and commended them on the conservation efforts undertaken. It was also stressed that the conflicts between railway lines and amphibian migration is an issue that could be further addressed by the Group.

4. Important Herpetofauna Areas (IHAs): survey responses by parties to the Bern Convention

The Chair, Ms Eliška Rolfová, recalled that there was no recognised map of the most important areas for reptiles and amphibians in Europe, while defining such IHAs is of great importance, in particular for directing conservation actions, ensuring sufficient site safeguards, raising stakeholders' awareness of biodiversity and ascertaining whether sufficient conservation attention is given to key biodiversity hotspots. A questionnaire was developed for Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention and the responses were summarised by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention in 2024 (the survey responses are accessible at this [link](#)). The Chair informed the Group of Experts that many Parties considered that it would help them in respect of biodiversity conservation to know what the Important Herpetofauna Areas were in the country (at Global/European/National level); most of the Parties indicated that it would help to first make a general analysis at European level (preferably on a 10 x 10km scale). As there was no meeting since the survey was concluded, the Group was invited to consider its results and possible follow-up steps at the present meeting, such as development of a new hotspot analysis.

Mr Ronald Zollinger, Strategic Advisor at Reptile, Amphibian and Fish Conservation the Netherlands (RAVON) and Chair of Reptile and Amphibian Conservation Europe (RACE), presented the Hotspot Analysis of European herpetofauna in the N2000-Emerald network (the report is accessible at this [link](#)). Mr Zollinger recalled that the project started with an assessment of the information from the Natura 2000 and Emerald network databases, and then defined a roadmap to move forward with the identification of IHAs, using the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) approach to identify IHAs and other distributional data sources. It was also highlighted that, following the publication of the interim report on the IHA project (the report is accessible

at this [link](#)), the Dutch government agreed to support a partially new analysis focusing on the hotspots. The comparison of the Natura 2000 and Emerald network databases highlighted the difference between the designated areas and the amphibian and reptile areas at a scale of 50 by 50 kilometres. Finally, Mr Zollinger emphasised that the process of identifying IHAs in Europe was not yet complete and should be further developed, as indicated by at least 70% of the countries that responded to the survey.

The Chair thanked Mr Ronald Zollinger for the update, appreciating the work done with the support of the Dutch Government. During the discussion, it was suggested that follow up work could be done at the European level and further encouraged at the national level in order to identify and develop important herpetofauna areas. This Expert Group and the Bern Convention should also coordinate with the European Union, particularly on data collection.

5. Prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus (Bsal)

The Group of Experts was informed of measures implementing [Recommendation No. 176 \(2015\)](#) to control the spread of *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus (Bsal) in 5 Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention.

The representative of **Germany**, Mr Timm Reinhardt, informed the Group of Experts that the country had the highest number of cases of Bsal, as it was present in at least five federal states, although the mortality rate was not necessarily high. Mr Reinhardt added that as the disease continues to spread, some populations appear to be showing early signs or recovery after infection. It was also highlighted that some surveillance activities were underway, particularly in transboundary populations. Overall, all states were aware of the need to control the spread of Bsal and some were in the process of developing action plans to combat it, as nature conservation in Germany is the responsibility of each state and each state has its own monitoring and recovery programme. The publication Mr Reinhardt referred to (in German but with all figure description provided also in English) may be accessed [here](#).

The representative of **Czechia**, Mr Vojtech Baláž, informed that there were no cases of Bsal in his country and that the testing and monitoring of Bsal was decreasing because the dedicated project finished and the resources were very limited at the moment. It was emphasized that in some places surveillance was still ongoing, while in others it was more occasional, as few laboratories were equipped to analyse the samples.

Mr Ronald Zollinger, on behalf of the **Netherlands**, informed that the Netherlands was monitoring the dispersal of Bsal in the outbreak area where it first occurred. He explained that Bsal was still very low and that sometimes a new outbreak was detected very locally, temporarily preventing local reintroduction. It was emphasised that even if the virus did not cause high mortality, it could spread throughout the country and then decline. With regard to the great crested newt, DNA research, analysis of population ecology and various other aspects were carried out.

The representative of the **United Kingdom**, Mr Matthew Ellis, informed that there was no significant change from previous UK reports. Bsal had not been detected in the wild but had been found in captive salamanders and identified as a notifiable disease. Mr Ellis added that a control strategy was being finalised and that the publication of biosecurity guidance was imminent, recommending safety measures for captive amphibians to minimise the risk of spillover to wild populations. Finally, it was stressed that one of the major risks in the UK was the release of captive, non-native alpine newts, which appear to be carriers of Bsal.

The representative of **Belgium**, Mr Philippe Goffart, reported on the first results of the monitoring: at least five identified populations of fire salamanders and two ponds of newts, in particular crested newts, were found to be positive for Bsal. He added that passive monitoring with foresters and workers was the only way to detect populations affected by Bsal so far, while active screening and searches of ponds with DNA analysis were inconclusive.

In addition, Ms Emina Sunje informed the meeting participants of the first results achieved in

Bosnia and Herzegovina. BHHUATRA launched the first official Bd/Bsal screening in BiH, currently ongoing, funded by the association and the Faculty of Science, University of Sarajevo, to support Bd/Bsal screening of approximately 400 amphibians across the country. Samples will be collected opportunistically during the ongoing herpetofauna inventory (previously mentioned). Duplex RT-PCR screening will be carried out in collaboration with Dr. Frank Pasmans, with initial results expected by the end of 2025.

The Chair concluded the item by emphasising the importance of increased effort at national level to address the ongoing issue of Bsal and the essential role played by the Bern Convention system in this regard, in particular the exchange of experience within the Group.

6. Collaboration with the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

The Chair recalled that at the last meeting in 2023, it was recognised that enhanced cooperation with the Group of Experts on IAS was essential for a better fight against alien pathogens and pathogens spread by IAS, as well as e-commerce and IAS since all these issues were interlinked. It was supported by the Standing Committee ([Recommendation No. 210 \(2021\) on Ecommerce](#) and [Recommendation No. 215 \(2022\) on alien pathogens and pathogens spread by Invasive Alien Species](#)). As a follow-up to this idea of cooperation, the Group on Invasive Alien Species met for the first time in several years on 20 March 2025 to discuss the proposal to work together on issues relevant to both groups. The IAS experts were generally supportive of the idea. It was proposed to organise a joint online meeting in April or at a later date to open the discussion on priority areas of work or priority topics to be followed up.

The Group of Experts discussed possible priorities for cooperation. It was proposed to exchange practical knowledge on eliminating some invasive alien species that are specific to herpetofauna, such as the raccoon, and to share experiences with navigating through the different rules and pieces of legislation to achieve specific results in this regard. The relevance of the Guidance on e-commerce and IAS - [T-PVS/Inf\(2021\)39](#) was stressed.

7. Proposals to the Standing Committee for further issues to address

The Group of Experts discussed further issues to be addressed in proposals to the Standing Committee, such as cooperation on invasive alien species and the impact of climate change.

The Chair drew the attention of the Group of Experts to the possibility of inviting a representative of the European Wild Reptile Health Consortium, a new platform focusing on reptile diseases, to the next meeting. The Consortium could present the results of their work on a joint publication on the importance of reptile diseases for conservation.

Further ideas for possible follow-up:

- Collaboration in monitoring habitats and species in remote environments, in particular how to involve people in monitoring of those species that are widespread and should be more common than they are at present;
- Railways lines and their impact on amphibians;
- Ways of restoring a more natural hydrology in the landscape to allow natural formation of water bodies; availability or lack of habitat has an enormous impact on populations of amphibians; appropriate habitat and may allow them to better withstand other threats, such as disease or invasive species.

Finally, the Group of Experts proposed that the next meeting of the Group be held in person.

8. Next meeting of the Group of Experts

The Chair informed the Group of Experts that the next online meeting would be held in 2026 and

the next meeting in person - in 2027 in Strasbourg, possibly as a joint meeting with the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species.

9. Election of the Chair

The Group re-elected Ms Eliška Rolfová as the Chair of the Group of Experts.

10. Any other business

No other business was raised.

11. Closing of the meeting

The Chair thanked the members of the Group of Experts for the productive meeting and looked forward to working with the Group in the future, then declared the meeting closed.

Appendix I – Agenda of the meeting

Strasbourg, 10 March 2025

T-PVS/Agenda(2025)11

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS

Group of Experts on the Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles

12th meeting

25 March 2025, 9.00–12.30, online

AGENDA

TIME	AGENDA ITEM	<i>RELEVANT DOCUMENTS AND EXPECTED RESULTS</i>
9.00	<p>1. OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE CHAIR AND TOUR DE TABLE</p> <p>Opening remarks by Ms Eliška Rolfová, Chair of the Group of Experts and tour de table.</p>	
9.10	<p>2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Meeting Agenda</i> <i>T-PVS/Agenda(2025)11</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Report of the 11th meeting</i> T-PVS/Agenda(2023)27</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Participants are informed of the objectives of the meeting. The meeting agenda is adopted.</p>
9.15	<p>3. INSPIRING EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES ON THE CONSERVATION OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES</p> <p>Representatives of Bern Convention Contracting Parties and Observer Organisations, who expressed their interest in sharing an update, are invited to present contextualised, inspiring actions and initiatives at national level on herpetofauna conservation.</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>Participants are informed of recent initiatives and actions implemented at national level on the conservation of amphibians and reptiles.</p>
10.15	<p>4. IMPORTANT HERPETOFAUNA AREAS: SURVEY RESPONSES BY PARTIES TO THE BERN CONVENTION</p> <p>Presentation by the Chair.</p> <p>Discussion on the findings and identify possible follow-up.</p>	<p>Development of Important Herpetofauna Areas - Survey responses by Parties to the Bern Convention T-PVS/Inf(2024)07</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The Group identifies implications of the survey in term of its possible follow-up.</p>
10.45	BREAK	

<p>11.00</p>	<p>5. PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF THE <i>BATRACHOCHYTRIUM SALAMANDRIVORANS CHYTRID FUNGUS</i> (BSal)</p> <p>Representatives of Bern Convention Contracting Parties and Observer Organisations are invited to present on actions and initiatives at national level to control the spread of <i>Batrachochytrium Salamandrivorans Chytrid fungus</i> (max 3mn each).</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>Participants are informed of recent initiatives and actions relevant to Bsal implemented at national level.</p>
<p>11.30</p>	<p>6. COLLABORATION WITH THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES</p> <p>Introduction by the Chair.</p> <p>Outcomes of the discussion of the Group of Experts on IASs.</p> <p>Discussion on proposed priorities for collaboration.</p>	<p>Recommendation No. 210 (2021) on E-commerce and Invasive Alien Species</p> <p>Recommendation No. 215 (2022) on alien pathogens and pathogens spread by Invasive Alien Species</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The Group agrees on the next steps in the collaboration with the Group of Experts on IASs, including date of their joint meeting</p>
<p>12.00</p>	<p>7. PROPOSALS TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR FURTHER ISSUES TO ADDRESS</p> <p>Discussion on concrete proposals for themes to be further addressed by the Group of Experts on Amphibian and Reptiles.</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>The Group agrees on issues to be addressed in its work in the future.</p>
<p>12.15</p>	<p>8. NEXT MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS</p>	<p>Date and venue for the next meeting of the Group of Experts, in 2027, are agreed on.</p>
<p>12.20</p>	<p>9. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR</p>	
<p>12.25</p>	<p>10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p>	
<p>12.30</p>	<p>11. CLOSING OF THE MEETING</p>	

Appendix II - List of Participants

Contracting Parties	
ANDORRA / ANDORRE	<p>Ms Maria SALAS Chef d'Unité d'Évaluation d'impact environnemental, biodiversité et paysage Ministeri de Medi Ambient, Agricultura i Sostenibilitat Govern d'Andorra</p> <p>Mr Alain GRIOCHE Estadístico en Govern d'Andorra</p>
BELGIUM / BELGIQUE	<p>Mr Philippe GOFFART Attaché scientifique Observatoire de la Faune, de la Flore et des Habitats (OFFH), Département de l'Étude du Milieu naturel et agricole (DEMna), Service Public de Wallonie (SPW) - DGO3 - Direction de la Nature et de l'Eau</p> <p>Mr Nicolas PARDON Agency for Nature and Forests (Flemish Government)</p> <p>Mr Nicolas BRACKX Agency for Nature and Forests (Flemish Government)</p>
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA / BOSNIE ET HERZEGOVINE	<p>Ms Emina ŠUNJE Herpetological Association of Bosnia Herzegovina (BHHU ATRA)</p>
CZECH REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE	<p>Ms Eliška ROLFOVÁ Unit of International Conventions Department of Species Protection and Implementation of International Commitments Ministry of the Environment</p> <p>Mr Vojtech BALÁŽ Department of Ecology and Diseases of Zoo-animals, Game, Fish and Bees Faculty of Veterinary Hygiene and Ecology University of Veterinary Sciences Brno</p>
FRANCE / FRANCE	<p>Ms Audrey TROCHET Société Herpétologique de France (SHF)</p> <p>Ms Anne LOMBARDI Société Herpétologique de France (SHF)</p>
GERMANY / ALLEMAGNE	<p>Mr Timm REINHARDT Scientific Officer Department of Wildlife Conservation German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN)</p>
NETHERLANDS / PAYS-BAS	<p>Mr Ronald ZOLLINGER</p> <p>Strategic advisor at Reptile, Amphibian & Fish Conservation Netherlands (RAVON) Chair of Reptile Amphibian Conservation Europe (RACE)</p>
POLAND / POLOGNE	<p>Mr Tomasz ŁACHNIK General Directorate for Environmental Protection Department of Nature Conservation</p>

SLOVAK REPUBLIC/ RÉPUBLIQUE SLOVAQUE	Mr Peter PUCHALA State Nature Conservancy of Slovak Republic Malé Karpaty Protected Landscape Area
SWITZERLAND/ SUISSE	Ms Irina BREGENZER Scientific collaborator, info fauna - Koordinationsstelle für Amphibien- und Reptilienschutz in der Schweiz (karch)
TÜRKIYE/ TURQUIE	Ms Berna YALCINKAYA Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Directorate General of Nature Conservation and National Parks Department of Wildlife Management Mr Burak TATAR Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Directorate General of Nature Conservation and National Parks Department of Wildlife Management
UNITED KINGDOM/ ROYAUME-UNI	Mr Matthew ELLIS Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs Ms Catherine Whatley Reptile and Amphibian Advisor NatureScot government agency Mr Tim Bernhard Natural England
Other experts	
Reptile & Amphibian Conservation Europe (RACE)	Mr Tony GENT Chief Executive Officer Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH)	Mr Balint HALPERN Chair of the Conservation Committee Mr Tom KIRSCHY Member of the Conservation Committee NABU Federal Specialist Committee on Field Herpetology and Ichthyofaunistics
Ghent University	Ms An MARTEL (excused) Mr Frank PASMANS (excused) Professors Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Department of Pathology, Bacteriology and Poultry Diseases
IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group	Mr Riccardo SCALERA Independent consultant

Secretariat, Council of Europe	
Bern Convention	Mr Mikaël POUTIERS Secretary of the Bern Convention
Bern Convention	Ms Marta MEJLIŃSKA Programme Manager