

# I nterview with DGHT (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Herpetologie und Terrarienkunde*)



**Author(s):** the interview was conducted by **Dmitri Tkachev** and **Leandro Bergmann (RHJ)**; the questions were answered by Dr. **Markus Monzel** (President of the DGHT) and Dr. **Axel Kwet** (Managing Director DGHT) (**DGHT**)

**RHJ:** Could you please inform us about the history of your society (DGHT)?

**DGHT:** The study of amphibians and reptiles has a long tradition in the German-speaking world. The roots of the keeping and breeding of amphibians and reptiles, terrarium science, which is closely related to scientific herpetology, also go back to the second half

of the 18th century. The traditional history of herpetology and terrarium studies in Germany took a rapid upswing in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, when vivaristic societies were founded in many places, including the «casual association of younger terrarium and aquarium enthusiasts» in Magdeburg, i.e. the present-day DGHT.



**Figure 1.** Markus Monzel (DGHT) at “Wir fürs Tier”.



**Figure 2.** Markus Monzel and Heiko Werning with Anton Hofreiter.

**RHJ:** When and by whom was it founded?

**DGHT:** The DGHT was founded as early as 1918 as «Salamander» by Willy Wolterstorff in Magdeburg. In 1964 it was renamed the German Society for Herpetology and Terrarium Science on the occasion of a conference in Frankfurt

am Main. Partly on the initiative of the famous herpetologist Prof. Robert Mertens, the aim was to institutionalize the connection between professionally active herpetologists and knowledgeable private keepers of amphibians and reptiles. However, it is important to emphasize that our association has existed without interruption since 1918.



**Figure 3.** Talks in Stuttgart (2023) Photo by A. Kwet

**RHJ:** What goals and tasks were originally set and how have they changed today?

**DGHT:** From a strong focus on pure animal husbandry, the tasks have changed in particular towards more applied species conservation. Especially the close connection between private animal husbandry and basic research or applied conservation makes it possible to integrate the knowledge gained through personal observation in terraristics into concrete conservation projects, be it as information for breeding programmes (in situ) or also as an impetus for further herpetological research fields.

**RHJ:** How is it structured?

**DGHT:** Today the DGHT has over 5,000 members from over 30 countries worldwide. However, the majority of the members are located in Germany, where the DGHT has its headquarters. In addition to the parent organization, the association comprises 15 working groups on specific groups of amphibians and reptiles (including a working

group on field herpetology and species conservation, a working group for veterinarians specialized in reptile and amphibian diseases and a working group on systematics). In addition to these working groups, the DGHT has around 35 city, regional and national groups, including a national group for Switzerland, so that there is a relatively close-meshed network of regional contact points for the exchange and association of amphibian and reptile keepers in the German-speaking European region. The sub-groups of the DGHT, whose leaders form the DGHT advisory board, organize lectures, excursions and further training; they ensure cohesion among the members and a regular exchange of experiences. The DGHT is led by the presidium (president plus 5 vice-presidents), which together with the current 9 advisory councils forms the overall board. The operative business is ensured by a full-time managing director and a staff member responsible for administration and member support. In addition, 5 DGHT officers deal with specific fields of activity, for example as editors-in-chief of our English-language scientific journal «Salamandra» or the monographic supplement series «Mertensiella».



**Figure 4.** Axel and Malte Arkona at “Tigerenten”.



**Figure 5.** Talk with Dr Peter Schulze MdB.

**RHJ:** What successes can your organization claim today and what are its plans for the future?

**DGHT:** When asking about «successes», one has to look in particular at the results of long-term public relations work, reliable project work, the massive increase in publications and, last but not least, the personal approach to important political decision-makers. Without a doubt, the DGHT is now one of the most sought-after contacts on issues of species and animal protection as far as amphibians and reptiles are concerned. Successes therefore consist precisely in the fact that the DGHT is regularly consulted on legislative projects relating to the aspects mentioned and is also often the first contact for the press on questions of so-called «exotic keeping». One of the DGHT's great successes is the quality certification of the expert courses it offers together with the VDA. Through many years of work in the association's policy, it has also succeeded in playing an intensive and decisive role in the development of suitable solutions in the field of animal husbandry (e.g. in so-called

«dangerous animal laws») in several concrete legislative projects in federal states.

**RHJ:** Does your organization support international contacts? If yes, which ones?

**DGHT:** The DGHT is a project partner of the IUCN (World Conservation Union), the Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and Flora Fauna International, among others. Traditionally, there are close contacts with the Austrian Society for Herpetology (ÖGH), the Coordination Centre for Amphibian & Reptile Conservation in Switzerland (info fauna karch), the British Herpetological Society (BHS) and US keepers who want to organize themselves in a similar way. At the European level, the DGHT is represented in the Presidium of the European Association of Terrariums and Aquariums (EATA) and maintains close contacts with the European Pet Organization (EPO). Furthermore, we are an institutional member of the Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH) and the European Board of Herpetological Societies (EBHS).



**Figure 6.** DGHT is a project partner of CITES, regularly participating in its meetings.

**RHJ:** Who are your most important partners today?

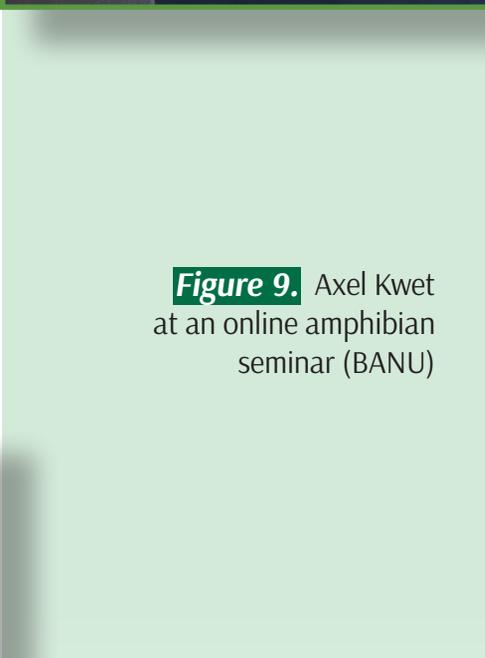
**DGHT:** On a national level, the VDA (Verband deutscher Vereine für Aquaristik und Terraristik) is certainly our traditionally closest partner; the DGHT runs the Sachkunde GbR with them, where ISO-certified courses and examinations for acquiring expertise according to § 2 and § 11 TierSchG as well as a specific hazardous animal expertise can be completed. There are also traditionally close partnership links with the BNA (Bundesverband für sachgerechten Natur-, Tier- und Artenschutz). In addition, the DGHT maintains intensive project cooperation with the Association of Zoological Gardens (VdZ) and numerous other species conservation organisations, in particular also with the Zoological Society for Species and Population Conservation (ZGAP) and NABU.



**Figure 7.** ZGAP-BNA-DGHT.



**Figure 8.** With VdZ and Stiftung Artenschutz.



**Figure 9.** Axel Kwet at an online amphibian seminar (BANU)

**RHJ:** Which projects of your organization do you consider the most important?

**DGHT:** The DGHT's project portfolio is extremely broad. One of the most important projects is the Citizen Conservation project ([www.citizen-conservation.org](http://www.citizen-conservation.org)), carried out jointly with the Association of Zoological Gardens (VdZ) and the Frogs & Friends association as sponsors. Furthermore, as a contractor of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), we have published Breedability Charts of the species of reptiles and amphibians included in Appendices I and II of the Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) within the framework of the last two Conferences of the

Parties; a third volume is currently planned. The establishment of a Centre of Species Survival (CSS) in cooperation with the IUCN (World Conservation Union) is another milestone in our species conservation work. A central project of the DGHT, which is particularly visible in German-speaking countries, is the «Amphibian/Reptile» of the Year campaign, which we organize in a leading role together with other partners, e.g. NABU, every year with great public attention. We are also significantly involved in BANU (Bundesweiter Arbeitskreis der staatlich getragenen Umweltbildungsstätten), a Germany-wide umbrella organisation for educational work, and have helped develop the examination and training materials on native herpetofauna.



**Figure 10.** Accountability report MV 2021 with elaphe.

**RHJ:** Is there also printed information material from the DGHT?

**DGHT:** Exactly, we have a very extensive portfolio of different print materials that play a major role for the DGHT in addition to our diverse project work. In addition to the monographic supplement series «Mertensiella», which is published irregularly 1-2 times a year, and our scientific flagship, the English-language peer-reviewed journal «Salamandra», which was founded in 1965 and is published online four times a year, but is also printed as a complete annual volume in a small edition, this includes first and foremost our member journal «elaphe», which is published six times a year. «elaphe» is available to all members free of charge as an online journal and, on request, can also be sent out in printed form via our distribution partner Natur und Tier - Verlag (NTV) for an increased membership fee. In addition, there are the various

publications of several working groups, which are also regularly printed and sent to all members of the respective working groups as a supplement to the elaphe. These include the amphibia of the AG Urodela (twice a year), the ophidia of the AG Schlangen (twice a year), the Eidechse of the AG Lacertiden (3 times a year), the Sekretär of the AG Literatur und Geschichte der Herpetologie und Terrarienkunde (1-2 times a year) as well as the two journals of the AG Schildkröten, the Radiata Deutsch and the Radiata English (both 4 times a year). The journal Chamaeleo of the AG Chamäleons is also published irregularly. Not to be forgotten, of course, are the annual action brochures, children's brochures, flyers and posters on our respective species of the year, which are distributed in large print runs of many thousands of copies, as well as other irregularly published print products such as husbandry guidelines or hygiene measures when dealing with pathogens.



**Figure 11.** Current DGHT presidium.

**RHJ:** Perhaps you have further information you would like to discuss or present?

**DGHT:** Important message: Interested knowledgeable private keepers (amphibians, reptiles, other terrarium animals) should join the DGHT, because only in a large strong community can it also succeed in generating the necessary clout to make both the protection of species and animals and the important contribution of private pet keeping to these issues heard. The DGHT Presidium represents the interests of serious terrarium keeping to political decision-makers at all levels. Expertise is the key to greater animal welfare, and ex situ husbandry is indispensable for modern species conservation. The DGHT represents these important factors and integrates them into concrete projects.

