

## ARCO-ESPAÑA

# A WELCOMING OASIS FOR REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

By Sylvia Geldeard

Situated in a tranquil, verdant area of Tabernas, the ARCO (Amphibian & Reptile Conservation) España centre is an impressive oasis for reptiles and amphibians, making an important contribution to the protection of the species. Founded by Prof. Dr. Hermann Schleich in 2005, Arco-Espana has the status of "Instituto y Nucleo Zoologico" and works in close collaboration with Arco-Nepal reg.soc.

Nepal was the start. A spectacularly beautiful country, famous for its high mountains and warm people, Nepal is also a part of the world where turtles are hunted for their meat and their shells used for medicinal purposes or simply sold in the tourist markets.

Arco-Nepal was co-founded by Prof. Dr. Schleich together with other committed scientists with the aim of preventing Nepal's unique reptile and amphibian fauna from becoming extinct. Work continues today, with public awareness campaigns, educating students and enthusiastic volunteers and ongoing research study and conservation projects.

And so to southern Spain, where Prof. Dr. Schleich has made his home and passionately continues his work collaborating with Arco-Nepal and with zoos, universities and other breeding partners internationally.

There is a breeding programme at this peaceful conservation area which is already proving successful. Several natural ponds have been constructed and are home to some important species of turtle, circum-Mediterranean tortoises and rare terrapins. The ponds provide a wonderful natural habitat. In fact, the entire area is an abundance of trees, shrubs, grasses and cacti, looking magnificently colourful and beautiful at this time of year.

The main object of activity is the support of a reptile conservation project to give refuge to unwanted or customs confiscated animals which are not native to Spain. This also includes animals which are no longer wanted by their owners or which have grown too big. Arco provides care for species originating from Australia to Asia, thus establishing assurance colonies of endangered tortoises and terrapins. They are currently awaiting the arrival of 40 Egyptian tortoises. This particular species is endangered having once been found in large numbers in an extensive area from Libya to Egypt. Today they are confined to a small area and are gradually disappearing. The expected tortoises will have been illegally hunted down and sold



on. Fortunately, this time customs confiscated the animals, and once the necessary permissions and clearance have been organised they will continue their journey to the care and protection at Arco. Once there, they will be examined, assessed for their state of health, weighed and measured and, in the course of time, will feel at home in their new surroundings and hopefully start to breed.

Arco-Espana presents a great opportunity for those genuinely interested in learning about and understanding amphibians and reptiles. Seriously interested people are welcome to visit from spring until autumn and are encouraged to subscribe to membership of the society.

For an annual subscription of 30 euros

members have access to information on all aspects in this field of conservation, receive advice on their own natural habitat projects and can attend the annual meeting with lunch and discussions. In addition, the centre has a library with publications and books covering herpetology, biology, geology and geography and much more. Accommodation in a "Casa Rural" or other facilities can be arranged if desired. With the engagement, ideas and enthusiasm of members, the conservation work at Arco-Espana will continue.

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