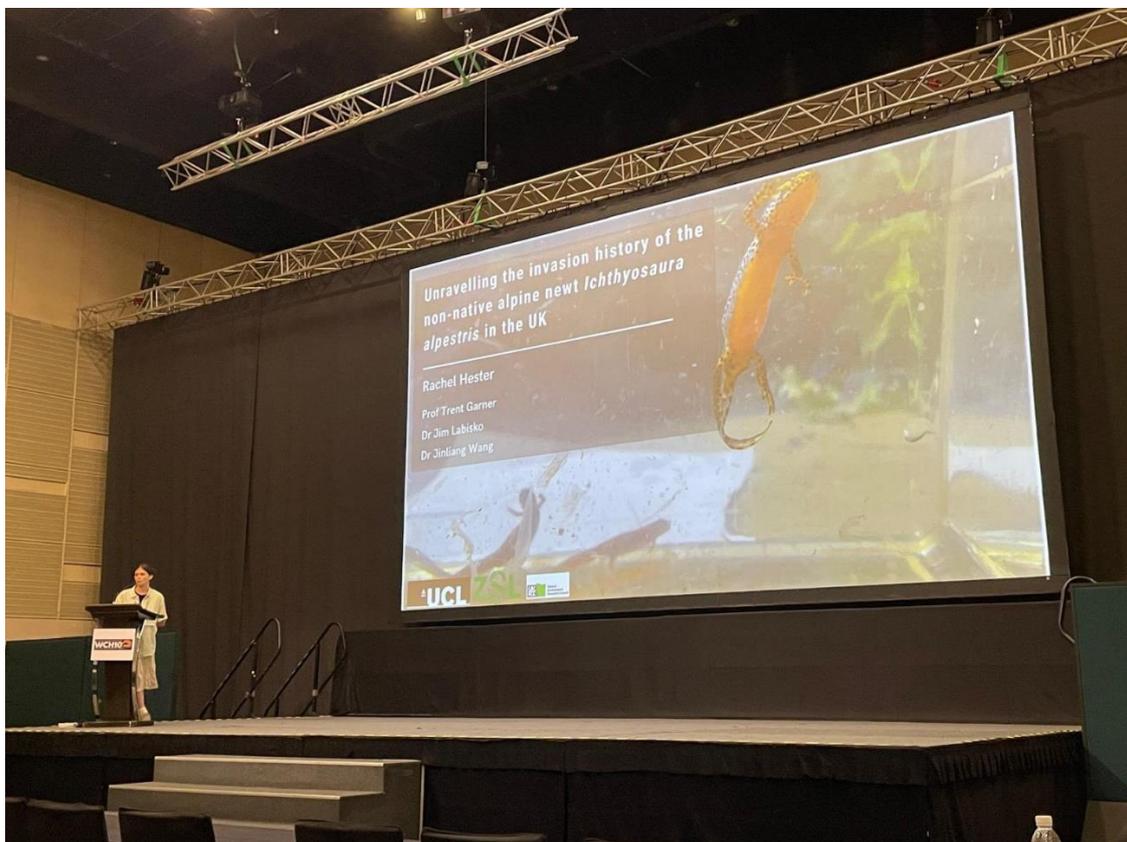


**Rachel Hester**  
**University College London (UCL)**  
**10<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Herpetology, Kuching, Malaysia**

I was delighted to receive a travel grant from the Royal Society of Biology, which I used to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Herpetology in Kuching, Malaysia. This was my first international research conference and my first time travelling to Borneo, and it was an incredible experience. I am very, very grateful to the RSB for providing this support, without which I could not attend this conference.

I am a final year PhD student currently undertaking my research at University College London (UCL) and the Institute of Zoology (IoZ). At the conference, I presented my PhD research which uses population genetics to understand the invasion history of the non-native alpine newt *Ichthyosaura alpestris* in the UK. I had a 15-minute oral presentation during one of the open sessions, and really enjoyed presenting to attendees and answering their questions. I had engaging discussions with many researchers following my talk, who provided useful feedback and ideas for the future. I was also very thankful to receive a student award for my talk, which was 'Best Student Talk in the category Salamandridae'.



Presenting my research at the World Congress of Herpetology 2024

Receiving this grant and attending the WCH has influenced my research career in a number of ways. On a practical level, I was able to speak with other attendees about my research and received lots of help and ideas for my PhD. It has also benefitted my future career, as I have been able to meet and engage with people I am interested in collaborating with, or working with for a postdoc. Being at the WCH also reminded me how passionate I am about my field of research and provided me with a reignited sense of motivation – which is very welcomed in the final year of a PhD.



Being awarded for best talk in the category Salamandridae.

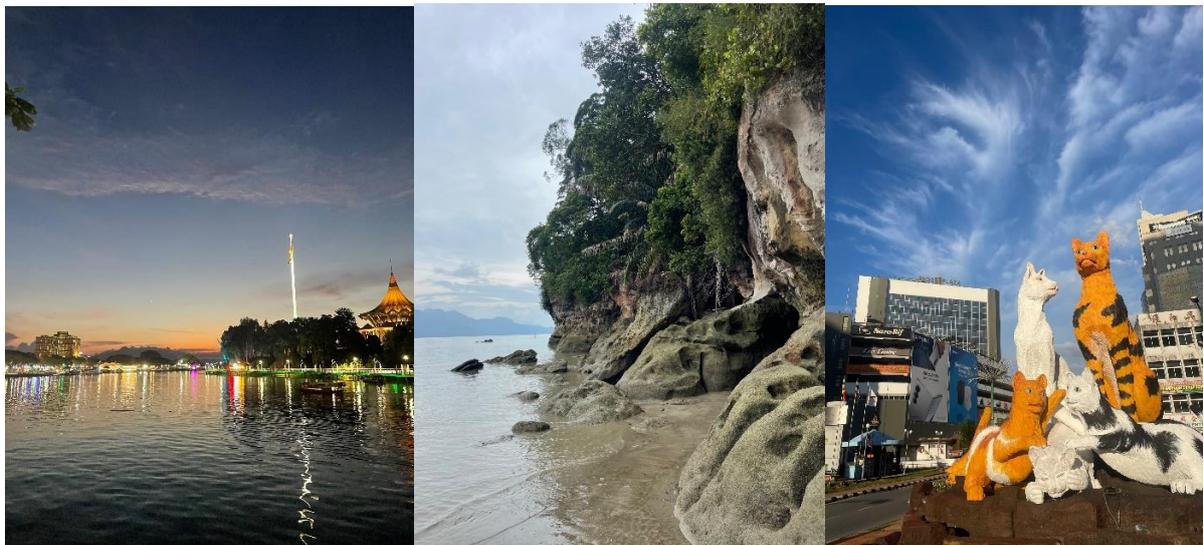
The best part of the WCH was getting to attend so many talks from international researchers and find out what herpetology conservation is happening in these regions. Some of my favourite talks of the conference were

- Desert Dynasties: Unraveling the Tales of Arabian Reptiles through Systematics, Biogeography and Evolution
- Evaluation of Herpetofaunistic Detection Dogs in Monitoring and Conservation
- Evolvability of the Explosive Sea Snake Radiation
- The Power of Community Engagement in Frog Conservation
- Wildfire Impacts to Populations of a California Endemic Newt



Some of the frogs and lizards seen in Borneo.

It was amazing to listen to the talks about projects that have been going on for a long time, and how people have dedicated their lives to protecting these animals. However, the highlight of visiting Kuching was definitely the people of Sarawak, who are some of the kindest, friendliest and most welcoming people I have ever met.



Kuching at night, Bako National Park and cat statues in Kuching (The City of Cats).

I had a life-changing experience at the WCH10 in Kuching, and attending it has made a huge impact on my scientific journey and my academic career. I am extremely grateful to the Gans Collections and Charitable Fund for enabling me to attend the conference!