



# Book Review: Tadpole Hunter

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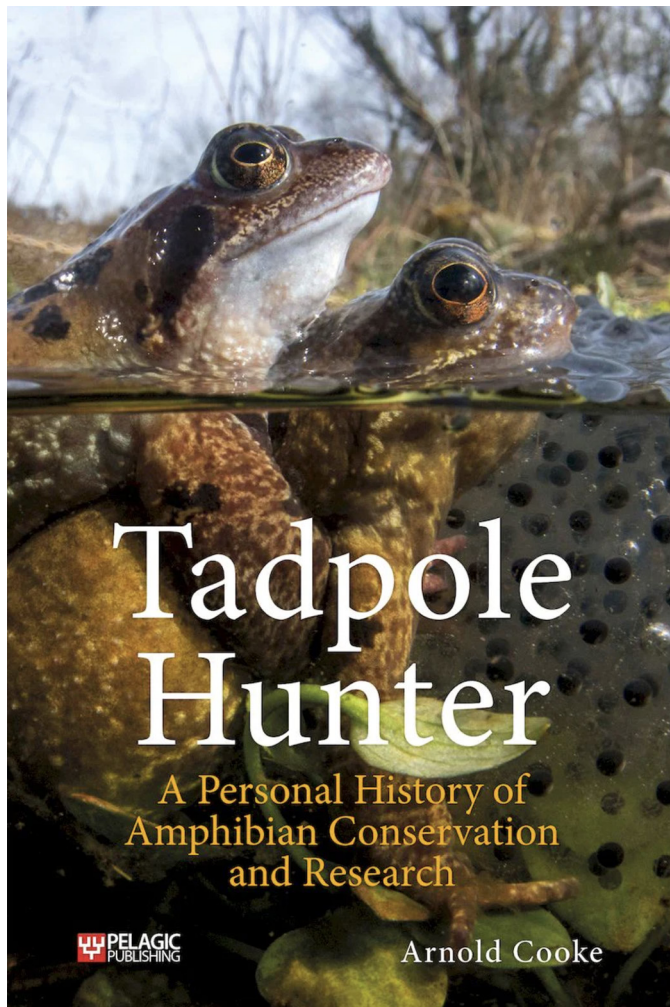
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*Tadpole Hunter. A Personal History of Amphibian Conservation and Research.* 2023. Arnold Cooke. Pelagic Publishing, London, United Kingdom. 305 pp., 106 color photographs, 24 graphs and charts, and 7 maps. Paperback – ISBN 9781784274481. \$39.00. Ebook – ISBN 9781784274498. \$39.00.

I would hazard a guess that most people who have conducted fieldwork investigating the ecology or natural history of amphibians in Great Britain have not heard of the name Arnold Cooke, although I personally consider Cooke to be one of the pioneers of amphibian conservation in Britain and one of only a handful of researchers able to transform what was previously considered a hobby into a serious field of science. The lack of notoriety probably reflects the reality that this modest researcher has shied away from conferences and public events in recent times due to ill health and other commitments, at the very time when more biologists than ever are working in amphibian conservation.

*Tadpole Hunter* is an engaging personal account of how this field was shaped over the past five decades. If you know anything about the herpetofauna of Great Britain, you realize that we are not blessed with an abundance of diversity. Nevertheless, we as a nation have had a number of truly amazing people (including Cooke) make significant contributions to our understanding of amphibians both nationally and globally. Some of these discoveries have been made at home, whereas others have been overseas, presumably while also attempting to escape our horrendous weather.

As someone who has worked at some of the sites mentioned in the book, especially early in my academic career, I felt a personal connection to the narrative. However, even someone lacking first-hand experience with Britain’s amphibian fauna and featured landscapes will enjoy Cooke’s accessible writing style and copious use of photographs. Still, what elevates this book beyond mere entertainment is the inclusion of both primary (previously unpublished) and secondary data illustrating trends revealed by the number of long-term monitoring projects Cooke initiated and which consumed most of his working life.



I always enjoy learning more about the research of those who came before me, the only way to truly understand the origins of ideas we take for granted, a chronology necessary for not only providing a historical perspective but to envision where we may be headed in the future. Before embarking on what can only be described as a very personal journey through his career in amphibian research and conservation, Cooke provides a genealogy of those pioneering researchers accompanied by citations to books and scientific papers for

further exploration. I personally found a number of resources of which I was previously unaware but will put to good use in my future pursuits. I also was gratified to see a few of my own research papers mentioned.

This extremely powerful yet entertaining contribution to the narrative of amphibian conservation in Great Britain highlights the threats faced by these often overlooked crea-

tures while appealing to readers ranging from enthusiasts, amateur herpetologists, and students in the early stages of their academic journeys to seasoned academics and professional conservationists. I expect to refer back to it regularly both for more information or as a reminder to keep on fighting when the future seems dim.