REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Non-Native Amphibians and Reptiles Recorded in the Faroe Islands since 1950

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Abstract.—The Faroe Islands, a North Atlantic archipelago historically devoid of native amphibians and reptiles, have experienced multiple human-mediated introductions of several taxa over the past century. Based on interviews, media reports, and photographic records, we herein present the first comprehensive overview of these introductions. Three species of amphibians (*Rana temporaria*, "*Pelophylax esculentus*" [actually a hybrid between *P. lessonae* and *P. ridibundus*], and *Bufo bufo*) and at least five species of reptiles (*Podarcis siculus*, *Iguana iguana*, *Gekko* cf. *chinensis*, *Sternotherus odoratus*, and various snakes have been recorded. Of these, only *R. temporaria* has established a viable and expanding population, particularly on Nólsoy and parts of Streymoy, via intentional and accidental translocations by local residents. No other species have shown any evidence of breeding success. This report highlights how increasing globalization, trade, and human mobility continue to facilitate the introduction of non-native fauna to the Faroe Islands despite a 2004 ban on exotic animal imports.

The Faroe Islands comprise a small remote archipelago in the North Atlantic midway between Scotland, Iceland, and Norway (Fig. 1). The archipelago consists of 18 islands, 17 of which are inhabited. Total land area is 1,394 km² and in 2025 the human population was about 55,000 (Statistics Faroe Islands 2025). As described in Koch (2023), western and northern shorelines of the islands are characterized by spectacular precipitous cliffs; inland terrain consists of valleys, mountain ridges, and upland hills, the northern islands being the most mountainous (highest peak 880 m asl); nearly 2,400 lakes and ponds occur across the islands, of which about 2,300 are smaller than 1 ha; climate is pronouncedly oceanic with mean temperatures of 4 and 11 °C during the coldest (January–February) and warmest (July) months, respectively; mean annual precipitation varies locally (823–3,261 mm) with rain falling on average more than 270 days per year; and fog or strong winds prevailing on most days.

The archipelago's isolation has resulted in a relatively depauperate flora and fauna. A total of 843 species of plants, including adventive and established introductions, have been recorded. Of these, mosses (Bryophyta) and flowering plants (Angiospermae) are the most species-rich groups, with 287 and 401 species, respectively (Koch 2023). Human settlements consist of smaller, densely built-up areas with some adjoining land, usually bordered by stone walls or other kinds of fences, cultivated mostly for hay and potatoes. No trees grow naturally on the islands, but small plantations (mostly coniferous) occur in some settlements (Hansen and Johansen 1982).

Fewer than 2,000 species of terrestrial invertebrates have been documented on the archipelago, a figure comparable to Iceland (Natural Science Institute of Iceland 2026) but far below that of mainland Scandinavia, where Norway hosts about 20,400 species (Elven and Søli 2021), Denmark around 21,000 (Agger 2025), and Scotland at least 24,000 (Macadam and Rotheray 2008). Although several large insect groups, including dragonflies, mayflies, and stoneflies, are entirely absent (Koch 2023), dragonflies have been recorded in the Faroe Islands (Jensen and Nielsen 2012). Although roughly 340 bird species have been recorded, most are migratory or accidental visitors (Jensen and Sørensen 2015). No land mammals are native, although the Norway Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), House Mouse (*Mus musculus*), and Mountain Hare (*Lepus timidus*) have become established (Jones et al. 2011; Giska et al. 2019; Puckett et al. 2020), and free-ranging domestic animals such as sheep, cattle, horses, cats, and dogs are present and exert considerable impacts on wildlife and plant communities (Koch 2023). No amphibians or reptiles are native to the islands, although some species have occasionally been introduced, intentionally or accidentally. The earliest known record of amphibians on the Faroe Islands dates to 1921, when Sigrid Mørk on a radio podcast described meeting a woman on a transatlantic ferry who was carrying live frogs in a bucket to the islands (Mørk

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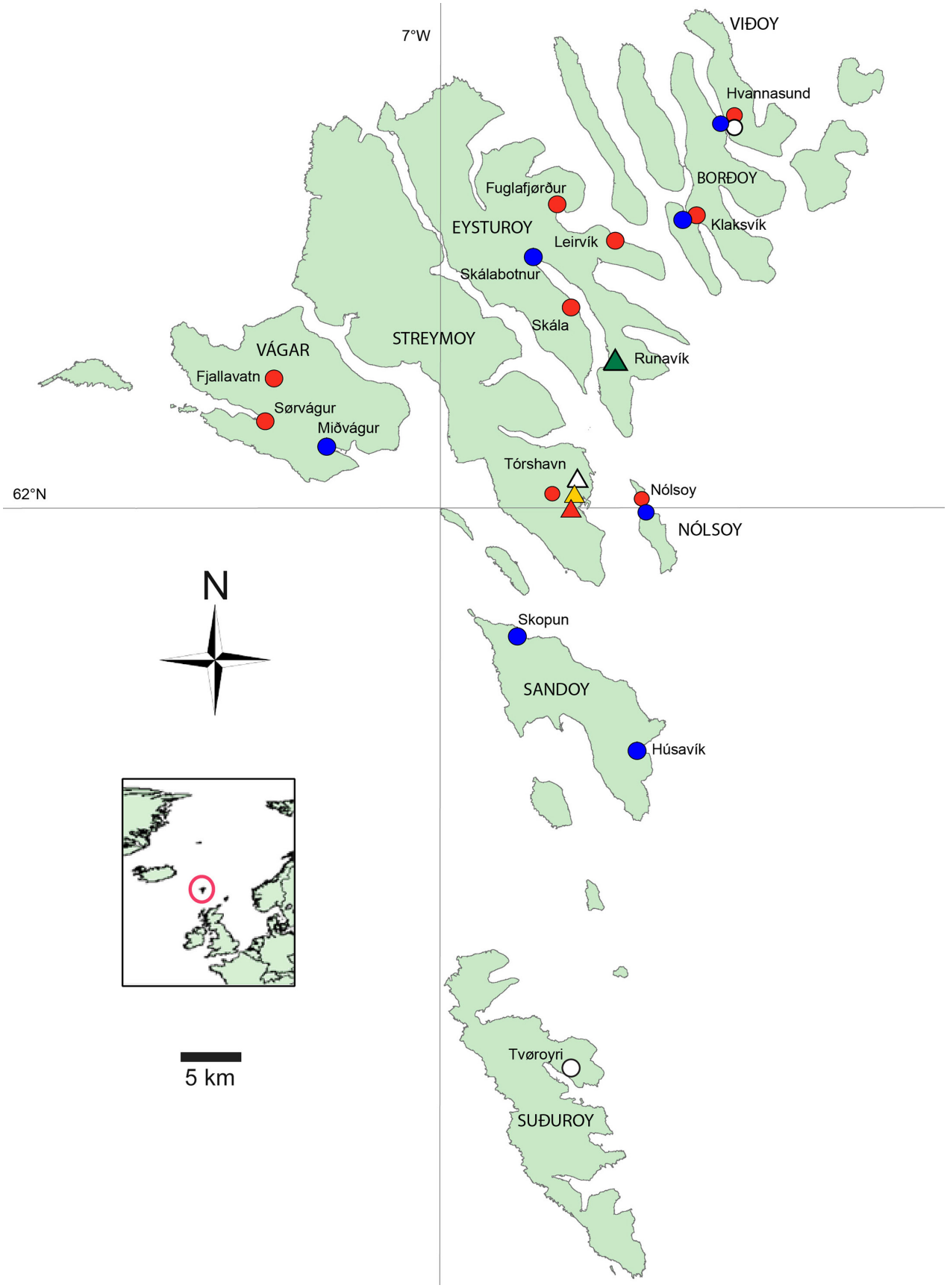

Figure 1. Geographic distribution of observations of amphibians and reptiles in the Faroe Islands. Amphibians are represented by circles: red = European Common Frog, white = Edible Frog, blue = European Common Toad. Reptiles are shown as triangles: red = Italian Wall Lizard, green = Common Green Iguana, orange = Gray's Chinese Gecko, and white = Common Musk Turtle.

2008; https://kvf.fo/umkvf/aboutus). Since then, amphibians and reptiles have been introduced multiple times, either as pets brought legally, illegally, or inadvertently through the transport of goods. Despite a 2004 decree prohibiting the import of exotic animals, including amphibians and reptiles (Lógasavnið 2004), such introductions still occur. Some released or escaped individuals have survived, and in a few instances established local breeding populations.

Although more than 100 years have passed since the first frog was introduced in the Faroe Islands, the history of introductions of amphibians and reptiles to the Faroe Islands remains largely anecdotal. Our goal with this study was to provide an overview of which species have been introduced, when and where introductions have taken place, in what numbers, and how some of these species have subsequently been translocated across the islands.

Methods

The data presented in this study were collected primarily by the first author (J-KJ) and have been accumulated over a period of approximately 50 years. Public exposure through media outlets (e.g., radio, newspapers, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram) resulted in frequent interactions with the public, sometimes long after original inquiries were made.

J-KJ identified photographs of animals based mainly on Jensen (1990). Other taxa were verified by specialists: the Italian Wall Lizard by Søren Tolsgaard (Natural History Museum, Aarhus, Denmark), the Green Iguana by Eddie Fritze (Copenhagen, Denmark), Gray's Chinese Gecko by Il-Kook Park (Kangwon National University, Chuncheon South Korea), and the Common Musk Turtle by Dániel Jespersen (Tórshavn, Faroe Islands). Photographs of sufficient quality and resolution are included in this paper.

Most records of amphibians and reptiles in the present paper originate from people personally known to the authors. We have been in direct contact with these people either through interviews or correspondence. However, since the importation of amphibians and reptiles into the Faroe Islands has been prohibited since April 2004 (Lógasavnið 2004), the names of these contributors are withheld for legal and ethical reasons.

Results

Three species of amphibians and at least five species of reptiles have been reported in the Faroe Islands (Table 1).

Amphibians

European Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*).—The European Common Frog is the most frequently observed amphibian in the Faroe Islands (Fig. 2A) The species was first introduced to the island of Nólsoy, with two known importations in 2000 (7–8 juveniles) and 2002 (three adults). Initially kept in a garden terrarium with a small artificial pond, the frogs began spawning in 2002. The first spawning produced unfertilized eggs, but in 2004 fertilized eggs successfully developed into tadpoles, which were raised in an indoor aquarium before being released in the garden (Jensen 2011).

Spawning occurred regularly from 2005 onward, and by 2007–2008 breeding was observed in a larger pond approximately 800 m north of Nólsoy Village (Fig. 3). In 2009, an estimated 5,000–7,000 eggs were recorded at this site, and the population has expanded steadily, with an estimated 150 breeding pairs present in 2024. So far, no effects of the increasing density of these frogs on the pond's native fauna or flora have been reported.

The timing of spawning varies annually. The earliest occurred on 25 March, with activity continuing into mid-April. By 2023, spawning had spread across multiple ponds in the same area, with egg deposition observed between 1 and 10 April. Tadpoles typically appear by mid-April, although in some years large tadpoles have been noted as early as late March. Most tadpoles complete metamorphosis during the first summer; however, some unknown number of individuals have required longer developmental periods. These frogs continue to breed in the original "frog-garden" in Nólsoy, and this site has become a popular educational attraction, frequently visited by schools and families. Eggs and tadpoles are often distributed by the garden's owner to visitors, facilitating further spread. As a result, European Common Frogs now occur beyond Nólsoy, with established populations on Streymoy (Tórshavn) and sporadic reports from other islands.

Streymoy (Tórshavn): Over the years, eggs and tadpoles have frequently been transported from the island of Nólsoy to Tórshavn. Around 2004, an individual in Tórshavn received live frogs from Nólsoy and released them into a garden pond. The frogs reproduced successfully, leading to the establishment of a local population. More than 20 years later, this population persists and continues to reproduce in the same garden pond. The population has remained relatively stable, consisting of approximately 30 adults, with a sex ratio of about two-thirds males and one-third females. Over the past two decades, frogs also have been occasionally reported from other parts of Tórshavn. One of the most recent observations occurred on 17 March 2025, when a resident reported a European Common Frog outside their house in Tórshavn.

Viðoy (Hvannasund): In 2008, eggs and tadpoles from Nólsoy were translocated to the village of Hvannasund on the island of Viðoy (Fig. 1 and Table 1), where they developed into adults initially kept in outdoor terraria near the owner's house. Some frogs eventually escaped, but no further

Table 1. Introduced species of amphibians and reptiles recorded in the Faroe Islands. Under Location, names in capital letters denote islands and other names refer to specific places or settlements. European Common Frog = *Rana temporaria*); Edible Frog = "*Pelophylax esculentus*" (actually a hybrid between *P. lessonae* and *P. ridibundus*); European Common Toad = *Bufo bufo*; Italian Wall Lizard = *Podarcis siculus*; Common Green Iguana = *Iguana iguana*; Gray's Chinese Gecko = *Gekko* cf. *chinensis*; Common Musk Turtle = *Sternotherus odoratus*. See text for discussion of snakes reported from the archipelago.

Location	European Common Frog	Edible Frog	European Common Toad	Italian Wall Lizard	Common Green Iguana	Gray's Chinese Gecko	Common Musk Turtle
VIÐOY							
Hvannasund	2008	2008	2004, 2008	—	—	—	—
BORÐOY							
Klaksvík	2019, 2020	—	2002	—	—	—	—
EYSTUROY							
Fuglafjørður	2008, 2024	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leirvík	2018	—	—	—	—	—	—
Runavík	—	—	—	—	2022	—	—
Skála	2015	—	—	—	—	—	—
Skálabotnur	—	—	2005	—	—	—	—
STREYMOY							
Tórshavn	2004–2025	—	2024	2014	—	2023	2024
VÁGAR							
Fjallavatn	2008	—	—	—	—	—	—
Miðvágur	—	—	2010	—	—	—	—
Sørvágur	2014	—	—	—	—	—	—
NÓLSOY							
Nólsoy	2000–2025	—	~1950	—	—	—	—
SANDOY							
Húsavík	—	—	2010	—	—	—	—
Skopun	—	—	2016	—	—	—	—
SUÐUROY							
Tvøroyri	—	2014	—	—	—	—	—

observations of them have been reported in Hvannasund in subsequent years. Three possible explanations are that the escaped frogs died shortly after release; those that survived did not reproduce, likely due to unsuitable breeding conditions, as small ponds are scarce in the village; or predation by rats or birds, which have been observed in the area, reduced their numbers.

Borðoy (Klaksvík): European Common Frogs have been reported twice from the village of Klaksvík (Fig. 1 and Table 1) on 24 September 2019, when a single frog was recorded in a private garden, and on 12 August 2020, when two frogs were reported in another garden in the village. In both cases, the frogs were most likely introduced from Nólsoy, either as eggs, tadpoles, or adults.

Figure 2. Amphibian and reptilian species reported from the Faroe Islands: European Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*) (A); Italian Wall Lizard (*Podarcis siculus*) (B); Gray's Chinese Gecko (*Gekko* cf. *chinensis*) (C); Common Musk Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*) (D); and Common Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) (E). Photograph credits: 2A–C,E: Kjeld Jensen; 2B: Hans Eli Sivertsen); 2D: Dániel Jespersen.

Eysturoy (Fuglafjørður, Skála, and Leirvík): Four reports of frogs have been documented from three villages on the island of Eysturoy (Fig. 1 and Table 1). In the summer of 2008, seven frogs, most likely European Common Frogs, were collected on the island of Fur in northern Denmark and translocated to the village of Fuglafjørður. These individuals were kept in an indoor terrarium. They did not reproduce and died within a year. None were released into the wild. On 8 June 2015, a live European Common Frog was observed near the shipyard in the village of Skála. The source of this individual is unknown, and no additional sightings have been reported. On 27 March 2018, another European Common Frog was captured in the village of Leirvík. As with the previous cases, the origin of this frog and its subsequent fate are unknown. In 2024, a single European Common Frog was discovered living outdoors in Fuglafjørður. Its origin remains unknown. The frog was subsequently placed in a garden enclosure but later escaped, and no further information is available.

Vágar (Fjallavatn and Sørvágur): Two reports of European Common Frogs have been documented from the island of Vágar (Fig. 1 and Table 1). On 18 July 2008, a local resident observed a small European Common Frog at lake Fjallavatn, located approximately 4–6 km from the nearest settlement. The origin of this individual is unknown, and no further observations have been made. On 8 October 2014, two European Common Frogs were reported from the village of Sørvágur. They were discovered together in a container of pallets that had been imported from Denmark.

Edible Frog ("*Pelophylax esculentus*" [actually a hybrid between *P. lessonae* and *P. ridibundus*]).—Two reports of Edible Frogs, also known as Green or Common Waterfrogs, have been documented in the Faroe Islands (Fig. 1 and Table 1). The first report occurred in 2008, when a

Figure 3. Approximately 90 pairs of European Common Frogs (*Rana temporaria*) in a pond north of Nólsoy village on 5 April 2023. Some are in amplexus (e.g., insert) while others have already spawned and the gelatinous egg masses are visible on the water's surface. Photographs by Jens-Kjeld Jensen.

single individual collected in Næstved, Denmark, was placed in an outdoor terrarium at a private residence in the village of Hvannasund on the islands of Viðoy. The frog is presumed to have died, as no further observations were recorded. The second report dates to 2014, when three females originating in North Sjælland, Denmark, were kept in a private greenhouse in Tvøroyri on Suðuroy. Some of these frogs escaped into the wild, but they are presumed dead, as no additional sightings have been reported.

European Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*).—Nine records of European Common Toads have been documented from eight locations across the Faroe Islands (Fig. 1 and Table 1). Despite multiple observations, no evidence of *B. bufo* successfully reproducing in the Faroe Islands exists.

Nólsoy: Around 1950, a local resident in Nólsoy received several individuals from Denmark (Fig. 1). These toads were released north of the village and persisted on the island for 4–5 years before disappearing. Local accounts indicate that several individuals were accidentally killed as hay was harvested.

Viðoy and Borðoy (Hvannasund and Klaksvík): The first report of a European Common Toad in Hvannasund (Viðoy) dates to 2002, when brewery staff in Klaksvík discovered a single female that had arrived with pallets imported from Denmark. The toad was kept at the brewery for two years and was translocated in 2004 to Hvannasund, where it was housed in an outdoor terrarium. Efforts were made to facilitate reproduction by introducing a female imported from Norway in autumn 2004 and three additional toads from Denmark in October 2008. Despite these measures, the toads never established a population. The ultimate fates of these individuals are unknown; they could have escaped from the terrarium, but no sightings were reported after hibernation.

Eysturoy (Skálabotnur): In 2005, a boy in Skálabotnur (Fig. 1) brought a *B. bufo* to his home, where it was kept in a closed terrarium outdoors. The toad escaped accidentally and was subsequently found dead on 7 August 2006.

Streymoy (Tórshavn): On 23 August 2024, a European Common Toad was observed near a hotel in Tórshavn (Fig. 1). It was delivered to a local pet shop and later transferred to the Faroese Forestry Service; its subsequent fate is unknown.

Vágar (Miðvágur): In 2010, a man in Miðvágur released two small (approx. 3 cm) European Common Toads into

his garden (Fig. 1). On 13 August 2011, another person in a neighboring area reported finding a toad in his garden, likely one of those released the previous year.

Sandoy (Húsavík and Skopun): On 5 October 2010, a resident observed a European Common Toad in the village of Húsavík (Fig. 1). Six years later on 11 October 2016, a second observation was reported on the same island when a local resident found another toad in the village of Skopun (Fig. 1).

Reptiles

To date at least five species of reptiles have been reported from two locations in the Faroe Islands (Fig. 1 and Table 1): the Italian Wall Lizard, the Green Iguana, Gray's Chinese Gecko, the Common Musk Turtle, and various species of snakes.

Italian Wall Lizard (*Podarcis siculus*).—On 14 November 2014, a single Italian Wall Lizard was discovered in a package of parsley that originated in Italy and was purchased at a local supermarket in Tórshavn (Fig. 1 and 2B).

Common Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*).—On 22 May 2022, a recently dead Green Iguana was found in a container at the port of Runavík on the island of Eysturoy (Fig. 1 and 2E).

Gray's Chinese Gecko (*Gekko* cf. *chinensis*).—On 20 October 2023, a single individual was captured in Tórshavn in a container originating from China (Fig. 1 and 2C).

Common Musk Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*).—On 25 June 2024, a Common Musk Turtle was found by a local man in a small pond in the plantation in Tórshavn (Fig. 1 and 2D).

Snakes.—Several captive snakes either escaped or were deliberately released. Although some sightings have been reported shortly after release, no information is available regarding species identity, survival, or establishment in the wild. Importation of snakes into the Faroe Islands has been prohibited since 2004 (Lógasavnið 2004). However, private individuals and companies can apply for import permits from the "Faroese Food and Veterinary Authority." Since the ban came into effect, permission has been granted to import six snake species: Ball Python (*Python regius*), Green Tree Python (*Morelia viridis*), Red Cornsnake (*Pantherophis guttatus*), California Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis californiae* [as *L. triangulum californiae*]), Pueblan Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis abnorma* [as *L. triangulum campbelli*]), and Banded Watersnake (*Nerodia fasciata*). However, whether any of these permitted snakes have escaped or been deliberately released into the Faroese environment is unknown, and an inquiry to the local pet shop elicited no useful information.

Discussion

Over time, three species of amphibians and at least five species of reptiles have been reported in the Faroe Islands (Table 1). The most widespread is the European Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*), which over the past two decades has established a population on the island of Nólsoy. From there, the species has been further dispersed, primarily through human activity, with some individuals deliberately introducing them into private gardens. Occasionally, frogs escape captivity and are subsequently reported in surrounding areas and on other islands.

The European Common Frog is a eurytopic semi-aquatic ranid with a natural distribution that extends across much of Europe from Scandinavia in the north to the Ural Mountains in the east and, apart from most of the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and the Balkans in the south. The species also occurs in parts of Asia, reaching as far east as Japan. To date, its westernmost range includes Ireland and the Shetland Islands (Jensen 1990; Vences et al. 2000; Teacher et al. 2009). These frogs are robust, capable of tolerating very cold climates and inhabiting high-altitude environments, with the highest recorded populations occurring in the French and Swiss Alps at approximately 2,630 m asl (Vences et al. 2000; Teacher et al. 2009).

Outside the breeding season, European Common Frogs live solitary lives in damp wetlands near ponds or marshes or among long riparian grass. They remain active for much of the year, only hibernating in the coldest months (Koskela 1973; Miaud et al. 2006). In the British Isles, hibernation typically occurs from late October to January, with re-emergence as early as February under favorable conditions and migration to bodies of water such as garden ponds to spawn (Johnston 1998). Larval development depends on environmental conditions and varies among geographic areas. In eastern France, these frogs took about 30 days to develop from hatching to metamorphosis (Miaud et al. 2006), whereas it took 63 to 112 days in two ponds in northern Finland (Koskela 1973). In the Faroe Islands, most tadpoles reach adulthood during the first summer.

For many years, European Common Frogs were considered an introduced species in Ireland. However, genetic analyses demonstrated that certain southwestern populations are native (Teacher et al. 2009). A comparable pattern has been observed in Shetland, located about 340 km southeast of the Faroe Islands, where amphibians have been deliberately introduced several times by humans, initially in 1895 (Johnston 1998). Today, this species is widely distributed across nearly all inhabited Shetland islands, except for the Out Skerries (Pennington 2020). Given the ecological similarities between Ireland, Shetland, and the Faroe Islands, the success of the European Common Frog in the Faroes is not unexpected.

In contrast, amphibians and reptiles are largely absent in Iceland, 440 km west of the Faroes. This absence has been considered a distinctive feature of Icelandic fauna (Anonymous 2021). Nevertheless, small populations of

introduced European Common Frogs have been reported in Garðabæ, near Reykjavík, since 2017 (Anonymous 2021; Erling Ólafsson, pers. comm.).

Norway Rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) are known to prey on frogs (Egeter et al. 2015) and to negatively affect frog populations (Towns et al. 2006). However, rats are absent from the island of Nólsoy (Puckett et al. 2020), a factor that undoubtedly has facilitated the establishment of a viable population of European Common Frogs on the island.

Introductions of frogs to new habitats can cause negative impacts, primarily through alteration of aquatic ecosystems and introduction of diseases or parasites (Semlitsch 2000; Cunningham et al. 2003). Although a viable wild population of European Common Frogs has been present on Nólsoy for over two decades, no studies have investigated their general biology, and key aspects such as diet, feeding ecology, lifespan, reproductive biology, and predation remain undocumented. Consequently, the mechanisms underlying population persistence and the species' ecological impacts on the local environment are poorly understood. However, to date, no detectable effects are associated with the increasing density of these frogs.

Unlike European Common Frogs, no evidence exists that European Common Toads (*Bufo bufo*) have successfully reproduced in the Faroes. A similar situation exists in the neighboring Shetland Islands, where multiple introductions during the 20th century were unsuccessful (Pennington 2020). Successful introductions did occur on the islands of Yell (Scotland) on 26 October 1977, and Strand (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany) on 12 April 1982 (Pennington 2020).

Edible Frogs have been introduced to the Faroes twice, both times involving imports from Denmark, but those individuals disappeared shortly after release. The only record of a Common Musk Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*) most likely reflects a released aquarium specimen.

Three of the other reptiles recorded in the Faroe Islands (Italian Wall Lizard, Common Green Iguana, and Gray's Chinese Gecko) were accidental introductions associated with imported goods. None were released into the wild. Occasional observations of snakes in the Faroe Islands elicited no information on species identities. Importation of snakes has been prohibited since 2004 (Lógasavnið 2004). However, permission has been granted by the Faroese authority to import six species, but we do not know if any have escaped or deliberately been released.

Today, the Faroe Islands maintain strong connections with the outside world via planes, ferries, and cargo ships arriving multiple times per week, which could have facilitated the accidental introduction of non-native species. Notable examples of such introductions to the Faroe Islands include four or five species of grasshoppers (Orthoptera) (Jensen 2025); two species of social wasps, the European Common Wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*) and the German wasp (*V. germanica*), which became established in 1999 (Hammer and Jensen 2019); and two species of bumblebees, the White-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*) in 2007 and the Early Bumblebee (*B. pratorum*) in 2008 (Jensen and Madsen 2013, 2018). More recent observations have identified the presence of three more species (*B. hortorum*, *B. hypnorum*, and *B. terrestris*) (Goldberg et al. 2025).

During the last decade, Faroe Islands have experienced rapid growth in tourism. In 2013, the Faroe Islands reached 94,705 overnight stays (in hotels, hostels, inns, etc.), whereas the number in 2023 was 221,757, including an estimated 130,000 foreign tourists, more than twice of the local population (55,000) (Visit Faroe Islands 2024).

One might expect, that this stronger connection with the outside world during the last several decades would also result in more animals being imported or smuggled into the Faroe Islands. However, this does not appear to be the case for amphibians and reptiles, as our study shows that all amphibians and reptiles that we know about have been imported by Faroese residents.

Many amphibians and reptiles imported into the Faroes originated from Denmark, reflecting the historical and cultural ties between the two countries. For centuries, trade with Denmark has dominated Faroese imports, and this remains the case today. However, since 1981 in Denmark and 1976 in Norway, the collection and disturbance of wild amphibians and reptiles has been prohibited by law. Furthermore, since 2004, the Faroe Islands have banned the import of exotic animals, including amphibians and reptiles (Lógasavnið 2004). Nevertheless, our data suggest that such illegal imports continue to occur, often without effective enforcement by authorities.

As the records of amphibians and reptiles presented in this study are based on information provided by people from across the Faroe Islands, additional introductions of which we are unaware likely have occurred, either because we have not received reports or because some people have chosen not to share them. Consequently, our findings should be regarded as a minimum estimate of the amphibian and reptile species introduced to the Faroe Islands.

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