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## f-Element heavy pnictogen chemistry

Jingzhen Du,<sup>a</sup> Philip J. Cobb,<sup>b</sup> Junru Ding,<sup>a</sup> David P. Mills<sup>b</sup> and Stephen T. Liddle<sup>b</sup>

The coordination and organometallic chemistry of the f-elements, that is group 3, lanthanide, and actinide ions, supported by nitrogen ligands, e.g. amides, imides, and nitrides, has become well developed over many decades. In contrast, the corresponding f-element chemistry with the heavier pnictogen analogues phosphorus, arsenic, antimony, and bismuth has remained significantly underdeveloped, due largely to a lack of suitable synthetic methodologies and also the inherent hard(f-element)–soft(heavier pnictogen) acid–base mismatch, but has begun to flourish in recent years. Here, we review complexes containing chemical bonds between the f-elements and heavy pnictogens from phosphorus to bismuth that spans five decades of endeavour. We focus on complexes whose identity has been unambiguously established by structural authentication by single-crystal X-ray diffraction with respect to their synthesis, characterisation, bonding, and reactivity, in order to provide a representative overview of this burgeoning area. By highlighting that much has been achieved but that there is still much to do this review aims to inspire, focus and guide future efforts in this area.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to their widespread and important applications in magnetic materials,<sup>1,2</sup> electronic devices,<sup>3,4</sup> bioimaging,<sup>5,6</sup> synthesis,<sup>7,8</sup> catalysis,<sup>9,10</sup> materials science<sup>11,12</sup> and nuclear

technologies,<sup>13,14</sup> there has been burgeoning interest in the fundamental chemistry of the f-elements over the past few decades. Since f-element metal ions, that is group 3, lanthanide, and actinide ions, are hard Lewis acids with typically large radii and high coordination numbers, they preferentially bind with hard bases (by the hard–soft-acid-base definition); the chemical bonds of these ions are understood to be predominantly ionic, thus their solution chemistry is dominated by N-, O-, and halide-donor ligands.<sup>15</sup> With ever-developing synthetic methods

<sup>a</sup>College of Chemistry, Zhengzhou University, Zhengzhou, 450001, China<sup>b</sup>Department of Chemistry and Centre for Radiochemistry Research, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK. E-mail: david.mills@manchester.ac.uk; steve.liddle@manchester.ac.uk

Jingzhen Du

Jingzhen Du received his BSc in 2013 from Shangqiu Normal University. Before moving to the University of Manchester as a President's Doctoral Scholarship PhD student in 2016 to investigate actinide nitride chemistry with Prof. Steve Liddle, he had a few years research training in Prof. Liang Deng's Group working on organometallic d-block compounds at Shanghai Institute of Organic Chemistry. In 2020, he received

his PhD degree from the University of Manchester and continued as a Postdoctoral researcher in the Liddle group. In 2023, he started his independent career at Zhengzhou University. His research interests are organometallic f-block complexes with unusual structures, properties, and reactivities.



Philip J. Cobb

Philip Cobb gained his PhD in 2018 from the University of Manchester after conducting a research project on the chemistry of uranyl chemistry under the supervision of Prof. Steve Liddle. He then spent 2 years researching f-element complexes at Manchester before moving into the nuclear industry.



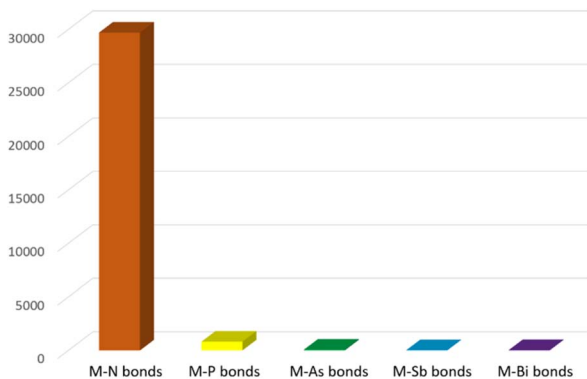


Fig. 1 Bar graph summarising the number of molecular structures deposited into the CCDC by 10-08-2023 for any type of f-element pnictogen bond. Total numbers: M-N = 29 713, M-P = 817, M-As = 67, M-Sb = 21, M-Bi = 28.

and characterisation techniques, molecular non-aqueous f-element chemistry has developed in recent years, and under non-aqueous conditions f-element complexes with novel linkages involving softer donor atoms can be accessed and investigated.<sup>16</sup> More peripherally, but still relevant, it is known that softer donor ligands can effect better selectivity in extraction processes, so the study of such linkages can provide bonding



Junru Ding

*Junru Ding received her MSc degree at Zhengzhou University in 2023, and then began her PhD investigating f-block organometallic chemistry under the supervision of Prof. Jingzhen Du at the College of Chemistry, Zhengzhou University.*



David P. Mills

*David P. Mills is a Professor of Inorganic Chemistry in the Department of Chemistry at The University of Manchester, where he started his independent career as a Lecturer in 2012. His current research interests are focussed on the synthesis, characterisation, and applications of coordinatively unsaturated complexes with unusual electronic structures and bonding motifs, mainly with the f-block elements.*



Stephen T. Liddle

*Steve Liddle is Professor and Head of Inorganic Chemistry and Co-Director of the Centre for Radiochemistry Research at the University of Manchester Department of Chemistry, which are positions he has held since 2015. His research interests broadly encompass the physical-inorganic chemistry of the f-elements, with particular interests in synthesis, reactivity, magnetism, small molecule activation, and catalysis.*

benchmarks of wider relevance.<sup>17</sup> For group 15, the pnictogens, f-element chemistry is well developed for nitrogen ligands, *e.g.* amides, imides, and nitrides, but this is not the case for the heavier congeners phosphorus, arsenic, antimony, and bismuth.<sup>18–20</sup> To illustrate the point, a search of the Cambridge Structural Database (CSD, 10th August 2023<sup>†</sup>)<sup>21</sup> for any type of crystallographically characterised chemical bond between the f-elements and any pnictogen reveals a stark picture, Fig. 1. There are almost thirty thousand complexes with f-element nitrogen bonds, over 30 times the total number of 933 for f-element heavier pnictogen complexes. Furthermore, below phosphorus there are only 67, 21, and 28 examples of f-element bonds to arsenic, antimony, and bismuth, respectively, with most of those examples reported in the last decade.

The above data parallel transition metal chemistry in many regards, though are a more extreme picture reflecting that stabilisation of the heavier and softer pnictogen ligands multiply bonded at large and hard Lewis acidic f-element metal ions is certainly more challenging. However, f-element pnictinidene and pnictido complexes remain of interest since in addition to being heavy amide, imide, and nitride analogues, they are isoelectronic congeners of transition metal alkyls, carbenes, and carbynes, respectively, that have developed into excellent catalysts for various organic transformations<sup>22</sup> or as precursors to inorganic materials.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, whilst f-element phosphorus and arsenic multiple bonding is preceded, f-element antimony or bismuth multiple bonds are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as group 15 is descended the pnictide ions become increasingly electropositive and metal-like, which increases the challenges of pairing electropositive f-element and increasingly large pnictogen metal ions together to form weak and highly polarised metal–metal bonds. Thus, well-defined molecules are of vital importance to study the inherent physicochemical properties and nature of covalency in f-element ligand bonds. This in turn could benefit the development of new synthetic methods, ligand design, catalytic

<sup>†</sup> Shortly after the census date of this review, reports of a yttrium-bismoly complex and a yttrium-bismuth cluster were published by Demir and co-workers, and an account of rare-earth phosphinidene complexes was published by Chen and co-workers. See ref. 156–158 for details.



Table 1  $^{31}\text{P}$  NMR chemical shifts of reported f-element complexes with phosphorus ligands in this review

Complex name	$^{31}\text{P}$ NMR (ppm)	Solvent	Ref.
$[\text{Y}(\text{Cp}^n)_2(\text{THF})(\text{PHSi}^i\text{Bu}_3)]$ (5)	-181.1	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	44
$[\text{Y}(\text{Cp}^n)_2\{(\mu\text{-PH}_2)(\mu\text{-Li}\{\text{tmeda}\})_2(\text{Cl})\}]$ (6)	-218.5	Toluene- $d_8$	45
$[\text{Yb}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\{(\text{PCHCMeCMeCHC})_2\}]$ (8c)	191.6	THF- $d_8$	48
$[\text{Yb}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\{(\text{PCHCMeCMeCHC})_2\}]$ (8c)	178.2	Toluene- $d_8$	48
$[\{\text{Lu}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PMes})_2\}]$ (9)	186.8	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	50
$[\{\text{Lu}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PMes})_2\}]$ (9)	18.1	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	50
$[\{\text{Nd}(\mu\text{-PDipp})(\text{I})(\text{THF})_3\}_2]$ (10)	-168	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	51
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PTripp})_2\}]$ (13)	227.4	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	53
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PTripp})_2\}]$ (13)	7.0	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	53
$[\text{Sc}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PDmp})(\mu\text{-Br})\text{Li}]$ (14)	9.8	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	53
$[\text{Sc}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PDmp})(\mu\text{-Br})\text{Li}]$ (14)	8.0/13.2	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	53
$[\text{Sc}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PDmp})(\mu\text{-Br})\text{Li}(\text{DME})]$ (15)	56.1	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	53
$[\text{Sc}(\text{PNP}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PDmp})(\mu\text{-Br})\text{Li}(\text{DME})]$ (15)	10.8/5.6	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	53
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PXyl})_2\}]$ (16)	183.8	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	54
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{iPr}})(\mu\text{-PXyl})(\text{DMAP})_2\}]$ (17)	181.3	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	54
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{iPr}})(2,2'\text{-bipy})\{\eta^2\text{-P}_2(\text{Xyl})_2\}]$ (18)	30.0/25.9	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	54
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{iPr}})_2(\mu\text{-S})\{\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{-P}_2(\text{Xyl})_2\}]$ (19S)	-79.0	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	54
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{iPr}})_2(\mu\text{-Se})\{\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{-P}_2(\text{Xyl})_2\}]$ (19Se)	-72.2	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	54
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{NCCNiPr})_2(\mu\text{-Te})\{\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{-P}_2(\text{Xyl})_2\}]$ (19Te)	-60.1	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	54
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Dipp}})(\text{Me})\{\text{P}(\text{H})\text{Dipp}\}]$ (20)	-90.9	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	55
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Dipp}})_2(\mu\text{-CH}_2)(\mu\text{-PDipp})]$ (21)	84.1	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	55
$[\{\text{Y}[\text{PhC}(\text{NDipp})_2](\mu_2\text{-Me})_3(\mu_3\text{-Me})(\mu_3\text{-PPh})]$ (26Y)	138.8	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	56
$[\{\text{Lu}[\text{PhC}(\text{NDipp})_2](\mu_2\text{-Me})_3(\mu_3\text{-Me})(\mu_3\text{-PPh})]$ (26Lu)	103.4	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	56
$[\{\text{Y}[\text{PhC}(\text{NDipp})_2]_3(\mu_2\text{-Me})_2(\mu_3\text{-Me})(\mu_2, \eta^2: \eta^3\text{-PC}_6\text{H}_4)]$ (27Y)	262.48	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	56
$[\{\text{Lu}[\text{PhC}(\text{NDipp})_2]_3(\mu_2\text{-Me})_2(\mu_3\text{-Me})(\mu_2, \eta^2: \eta^3\text{-PC}_6\text{H}_4)]$ (27Lu)	192.52	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	56
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{Cp}^{\text{Me}})_2\}_3(\mu\text{-PMes})_3\text{Li}][\text{Li}(\text{THF})_4]_2$ (28Y)	57.24	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	58
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Dipp}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (29)	412.0	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Dipp}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (29)	157.2	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Dipp}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (29)	402.3	THF- $d_8$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Dipp}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (29)	158.5	THF- $d_8$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Me}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (30)	324.8	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Me}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (30)	169.0	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Me}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (30)	312.2	THF- $d_8$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Me}})\{\text{PP}(\text{EDA}^{\text{Dipp}})\}]$ (30)	166.8	THF- $d_8$	59
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Me}})\{(\mu\text{-PB})[\text{N}(\text{Dipp})\text{CHCHN}(\text{Dipp})]\}(\mu\text{-Cl})\text{K}]$ (35)	11.4	Toluene- $d_8$	60
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Me}})\{(\mu\text{-PB})[\text{N}(\text{Dipp})\text{CHCHN}(\text{Dipp})]\}(\mu\text{-Cl})\{\text{K}(\text{DB18C6})\}]$ (36)	19.6	Toluene- $d_8$	60
$[\text{Sc}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{Me}})\{\text{N}(\text{Pr})\text{C}(\text{PB}[\text{N}(\text{Dipp})\text{CHCHN}(\text{Dipp})])\text{N}(\text{Pr})\}]$ (37)	-103.1	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	60
$[\text{Y}(\text{Tp}^{\text{tBu, Me}})(\text{Me})(\text{HPDipp})]$ (38Y)	-117.8	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	61
$[\text{Y}(\text{Tp}^{\text{tBu, Me}})(\text{PDipp})(\text{DMAP})_2]$ (40)	-5.5	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	61
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})](\mu\text{-I})(\text{THF})_4(\mu_6\text{-P})\}\{\text{K}(\text{C}_7\text{H}_8)\}]$ (41)	347.4	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})](\mu\text{-I})(\text{THF})_4(\mu_6\text{-P})\}\{\text{K}(\text{C}_7\text{H}_8)\}]$ (41)	154.7	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})](\mu\text{-I})(\text{THF})_4(\mu_6\text{-P})\}\{\text{K}(\text{THF})\}]$ (42)	346.6	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})](\mu\text{-I})(\text{THF})_4(\mu_6\text{-P})\}\{\text{K}(\text{THF})\}]$ (42)	154.3	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}(\text{I})(\text{THF})_2\}\{\text{Y}(\text{THF})_2\}_2(\mu\text{-I})[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})]_4(\mu_5\text{-P})]$ (43)	358.8	THF- $d_8$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}(\text{I})(\text{THF})_2\}\{\text{Y}(\text{THF})_2\}_2(\mu\text{-I})[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})]_4(\mu_5\text{-P})]$ (43)	148.4	THF- $d_8$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}(\text{I})(\text{THF})_2\}\{\text{Y}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{iPr}})\}_2(\mu\text{-I})[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})]_4(\mu_5\text{-P})]$ (44)	400.7	THF- $d_8$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{I})\}\{\text{Y}(\text{I})(\text{THF})_2\}\{\text{Y}(\text{NCCN}^{\text{iPr}})\}_2(\mu\text{-I})[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})]_4(\mu_5\text{-P})]$ (44)	176.3/172.9	THF- $d_8$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{THF})\}\{\text{Y}(\mu\text{-I})(\text{THF})_2\}\{\text{Y}(\text{THF})\}\{\text{Y}(\text{Cp}^*)\}(\mu_3\text{-I})(\mu\text{-I})[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})]_4(\mu_6\text{-P})\}\{\text{K}(\text{THF})\}]$ (45)	300.9	THF- $d_8$	62
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{THF})\}\{\text{Y}(\mu\text{-I})(\text{THF})_2\}\{\text{Y}(\text{THF})\}\{\text{Y}(\text{Cp}^*)\}(\mu_3\text{-I})(\mu\text{-I})[\mu_3\text{-P}(\text{Dipp})]_4(\mu_6\text{-P})\}\{\text{K}(\text{THF})\}]$ (45)	72.8 to 130.4	THF- $d_8$	62
$[\{\text{Sc}(\text{NN}^{\text{fC}})\}_3\text{P}_7]$ (47Sc)	-131.4 to 23.2	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	64
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{NN}^{\text{fC}})(\text{THF})\}_3\text{P}_7]$ (47Y)	-130.4 to -20.4	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	64
$[\{\text{Sm}(\text{DippForm})_2\}_2(\mu^2\text{-}\eta^4\text{-}\eta^4\text{-P}_4)]$ (48)	453	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	67
$[\{\text{Y}(\text{DippDBD})(\text{THF})_2(\text{P}_3)][\text{K}(\text{18C6})(\text{toluene})]$ (49)	-273.01	THF- $d_8$	68
$[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{PPh}_2)_2]$ (50)	143	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	79
$[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-PPh}_2)_2\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_2]$ (51)	177	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	79
$[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-PPh}_2)_2\text{Pt}(\text{PMe}_3)]$ (52)	149.3	Toluene- $d_8$	80
$[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-PPh}_2)_2\text{Pt}(\text{PMe}_3)]$ (52)	-3.3	Toluene- $d_8$	80
$[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{PHTripp})_2]$ (53)	1.66	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	81
$[\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{PH}_2)]$ (54Th)	-144.08	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	83
$[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{PH}_2)]$ (54U)	595.07	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	82
$[\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TCHS}})(\text{PH}_2)]$ (55Th)	-133.01	THF- $d_8$	84
$[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TCHS}})(\text{PH}_2)]$ (55U)	605.91	THF- $d_8$	84
$[\{\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\}_2\{\mu\text{-P}[(2,6\text{-CH}_2\text{CHCH}_3)_2\text{-4-}^i\text{PrC}_6\text{H}_3]\}]$ (57)	161.9	$\text{C}_6\text{D}_6$	81



Table 1 (Contd.)

Complex name	<sup>31</sup> P NMR (ppm)	Solvent	Ref.
[{Th(Cp*) <sub>2</sub> (μ-PTripp)(μ-PHTripp)(K)} <sub>2</sub> ] (58)	171.91	THF- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	87
[{Th(Cp*) <sub>2</sub> (μ-PTripp)(μ-PHTripp)(K)} <sub>2</sub> ] (58)	−110.54	THF- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	87
[Th(Cp*) <sub>2</sub> (PTripp)(PHTripp)][K(2,2,2-cryptand)] (59)	177.86	THF- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	87
[Th(Cp*) <sub>2</sub> (PTripp)(PHTripp)][K(2,2,2-cryptand)] (59)	−106.99	THF- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	87
[{Th(Cp <sup>tt</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> (PMes*)(ClK)} <sub>2</sub> ] (60)	108.79	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	93
[Th(Cp <sup>tt</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> (PMes*)(μ-Cl){K(18C6)}] (61)	133.5	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	93
[U(Cp*) <sub>2</sub> (PMes*)(OPMe <sub>3</sub> )] (62)	71.06	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	95
[U(Cp*) <sub>2</sub> (PMes*)(OPMe <sub>3</sub> )] (62)	−59.84	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	95
[Th(Cp <sup>tt</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> (PMes*)] (63)	145.7	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	97
[{U(Tren <sup>TIPS</sup> )(μ-PH)}{K(2,2,2-cryptand)}] (66)	2460.4	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	82
[Th(Tren <sup>TIPS</sup> )(PH)][Na(12C4) <sub>2</sub> ] (67)	198.8	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	83
[Th(Tren <sup>TCHS</sup> )(PH)][Na(2,2,2-cryptand)] (69Th)	266.16	THF- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	84
[U(Tren <sup>TCHS</sup> )(PH)][Na(2,2,2-cryptand)] (69U)	2628.50	THF- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	84
[{Th(Tren <sup>TIPS</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> (μ-P)][Na(12C4) <sub>2</sub> ] (70)	553.5	THF- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	83
[{Th(Tren <sup>TIPS</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> (μ-PH)] (71Th)	145.7	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	83
[Th(Tren <sup>TIPS</sup> )(OCP)] (74Th)	−339.91	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	110
[U(Tren <sup>TIPS</sup> )(OCP)] (74U)	−319.96	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	109
[{Th(Tren <sup>TIPS</sup> ) <sub>6</sub> (μ-OC <sub>2</sub> P <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> (μ-OC <sub>2</sub> P <sub>3</sub> H) <sub>2</sub> Rb <sub>4</sub> ] (76)	217.99 to 261.14	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	110
[{Th(Cp <sup>tt</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> }(μ <sup>2</sup> -η <sup>4</sup> -P <sub>6</sub> )] (77)	−41.9 to 125.3	Toluene- <i>d</i> <sub>8</sub>	111
[{Th(Cp <sup>tt</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> }(μ <sup>2</sup> -η <sup>3</sup> -P <sub>3</sub> ){Th(Cp <sup>tt</sup> ) <sub>2</sub> Cl}] (78)	−94.5 to −69.7	CD <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	111
[{U(Cp*)}(C <sub>8</sub> H <sub>6</sub> (Si <sup>†</sup> Pr <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> (μ <sup>2</sup> -η <sup>4</sup> -P <sub>4</sub> )] (79)	718	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	112
[{Th(Cp <sup>tt</sup> ) <sub>3</sub> }(μ <sup>2</sup> -η <sup>2</sup> -P <sub>4</sub> )] (80)	−246.55 to 323	C <sub>6</sub> D <sub>6</sub>	113

transformations, and materials precursors. Reflecting the growing nature of this field, there have been a number of excellent but very general or ligand-specific review articles and book chapters covering the historical developments of some of the subtopics,<sup>20,24–29</sup> but recent developments justify a broad but detailed review specifically focussed on this topic.

This review highlights the most notable achievements in the field of f-element heavy pnictogen chemistry from phosphorus to the heaviest abundant main group element bismuth up to August 2023. In line with the criteria for reviews, a representative selection, rather than a complete literature survey, is presented, and discussions concentrate on structurally characterised molecules. We aim to highlight the major advances involving all heavy pnictogen ligand types, with the exception of phospholyl and arsolyl ligands, which were reviewed in 2021,<sup>30</sup> and (OCE)<sup>−</sup> (E = P, As) ligands, which were reviewed in 2019 and are normally O-bound unless the E centre decisively directs the chemistry;<sup>31</sup> several other previous reviews have separately covered the ligand classes that comprise this review.<sup>20,24–29</sup> Here we present current challenges to inspire researchers and focus and guide future efforts of the field to develop f-element heavy pnictogen chemistry more rapidly in the future. In this review, we include the group 3 elements scandium, yttrium, and lanthanum under the heading of lanthanide sections for convenience. <sup>31</sup>P NMR chemical shifts for P-bound complexes covered in this review are compiled in Table 1.

## 2. Nomenclature

Metal heavy pnictogen nomenclature depends upon the pnictogen identity, charge and binding mode. The prefix is

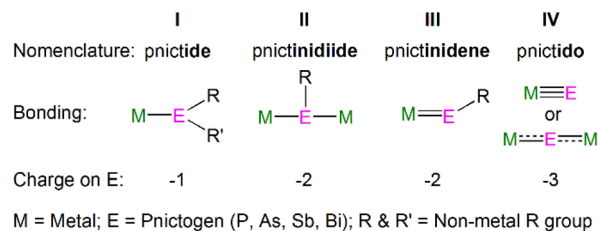


Fig. 2 General nomenclature for pnictogen metal bonding.

determined by the pnictogen identity; the general prefix is 'pnict-', whilst bonds involving phosphorus, arsenic, antimony and bismuth begin with 'phosph-', 'ars-', 'stib-', and 'bism-', respectively. The suffix denotes the charge of the pnictogen and binding mode; the suffix 'ide' is used for a terminally bound pnictogen bearing a formal −1 charge, whereas a terminal pnictogen with a −2 charge ends with 'inidene'. A bridging pnictogen with a −2 charge has the suffix 'inidiide', and lastly a pnictogen bearing a −3 charge ends with 'ido', independent of the binding mode. This gives the four bonding types: pnictide (I), pnictinidiide (II), pnictinidene (III) and pnictido (IV), Fig. 2. Exceptions to these rules are seen for (As)<sup>3−</sup> and (R<sub>2</sub>As)<sup>−</sup> ligands, which are given the prefix 'arsen-' to give the respective terms arsenido and arsenide when bound to metal centres. An additional exception is made for the parent phosphide (H<sub>2</sub>P)<sup>−</sup>, which is given the unique moniker 'phosphanide'. However, within some f-element pnictinidiide and pnictido examples, the ligands can be bridged by more than two metal centres to form more complex bonding modes which are not presented in Fig. 2, but will be discussed with specific examples in the following sections.



### 3. Synthetic methodologies for generating f-element pnictogen bonds

Precise synthetic strategies can vary depending on the type of pnictogen reagents and f-element precursors, but a pnictogen donor ligand is commonly installed on an f-element metal centre in one of the following general ways:

(1) Dative coordination of a neutral phosphorus or arsenic ligand to form an adduct with an f-element complex that has an available vacant coordination site; this tends to not be the case for antimony or bismuth, which need to be negatively charged to coordinate to an f-element metal centre.

(2) Salt elimination/metathesis of alkali metal pnictogen anions with an f-element halide (or halide equivalent) precursor to produce a polarised-covalent f-element pnictogen linkage.

(3) Alkane elimination between a primary or secondary pnictogen precursor and f-element alkyl (or cyclometallate) complex exploiting the acidic nature of the proton on the pnictogen atom.

(4) Oxidising highly reducing low-valent f-elements with pnictogen compounds.

(5) Combining salt and alkane elimination approaches using a primary pnictide alkali metal salt to react with an f-element alkyl and halide starting material (mainly used to produce metal–ligand multiple bonds).

### 4. Lanthanide phosphorus complexes

The past few decades have seen significant progresses in f-element phosphorus chemistry, with many novel f-element phosphorus motifs isolated and investigated.<sup>20,24–29</sup> The neutral, soft phosphine donor tends to form weak dative bonding interactions to hard f-element metal ions, though this can be overcome by incorporating P-donor centres into polydentate ligands as demonstrated separately by Fryzuk and Lu,<sup>32–34</sup> and such complexes were reviewed previously, so these compounds are not included here.<sup>20,26,32–34</sup> This section discusses recent advances in f-element complexes containing phosphide/phosphanide, phosphorin, phosphinidide/phosphinidene, phosphido, and inorganic polyphosphorus ligands.

#### 4.1 Lanthanide phosphide complexes

Due to the large size of the metal ions, lanthanide phosphide complexes tend to form multi-nuclear species with bridging phosphide ligands; mono-nuclear complexes are therefore relatively rare and usually require bulky stabilising phosphorus substituents as demonstrated by Izod.<sup>35–37</sup> The first mono-nuclear lanthanide phosphide complex  $[\text{Tm}\{\text{P}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_3(\text{THF})_2]$  (**1Tm**) was reported by Rabe and co-workers in 1995, Fig. 3; this was prepared from the reaction of  $[\text{TmI}_3(\text{THF})_{3.5}]$  with three equivalents of  $\text{KP}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$  in THF *via* salt elimination.<sup>38</sup> The molecular structure of **1Tm** exhibits the five-coordinate thulium centre in a distorted trigonal bipyramidal geometry with two axial THF molecules and three equatorial bis(trimethylsilyl)phosphide ligands. The Tm–P bond distances



Fig. 3 Examples of lanthanide–phosphide complexes 1–6.

of 2.709(1) and 2.701(2) Å are typical of single bonds. Subsequently, the isostructural neodymium analogue  $[\text{Nd}\{\text{P}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_3(\text{THF})_2]$  (**1Nd**) was isolated using the same synthetic approach, Fig. 3. The Nd–P bond lengths of 2.80(4) and 2.83(3) Å are slightly longer than those in **1Tm**, attributed to the larger metal radii of Nd than Tm in the same coordination environment.<sup>39</sup> However, because of the paramagnetic metal centres, no resonances were observed in their <sup>31</sup>P NMR spectra. However, the similar reaction of the divalent samarium precursor  $[\text{SmI}_2(\text{THF})]$  with two equivalents of  $\text{KP}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$  in THF produced dinuclear and asymmetric  $[\text{Sm}\{\text{P}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_2\{\mu\text{-P}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_2\text{Sm}(\text{THF})_3]$  (**2**).<sup>40</sup> Using a similar salt elimination method, Nief and co-workers showed that monomeric divalent lanthanide phosphide complexes could be accessed by isolation of  $[\text{Ln}\{\text{P}(\text{Mes})_2\}_2(\text{THF})_4]$  (Ln = Yb, **3Yb**, Sm, **3Sm**; Mes = 2,4,6-Me<sub>3</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>2</sub>), Fig. 3, where the metal centres adopt octahedral geometries with two axial bis(mesityl)phosphide ligands and four equatorial THF molecules.<sup>41,42</sup> According to the +2 oxidation state, the Sm–P bond of 3.034(2) Å in **3Sm** is significantly longer than those of trivalent **1Ln**. In 1997, Rabe and co-workers also reported the synthesis and molecular structures of the first examples of divalent lanthanide phosphide complexes containing primary phosphide ligands,  $[\text{Ln}\{\text{HP}(\text{Mes}^*)\}_2(\text{THF})_4]$  (Ln = Yb, Eu; Mes\* = 2,4,6-<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>3</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>2</sub>), which also exhibit octahedral metal centres.<sup>43</sup>

In 2002, Westerhausen and co-workers isolated a dinuclear yttrium phosphide complex  $[\text{Y}\{\text{P}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_2\{\mu\text{-P}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_2]$  (**4**) and a mono-nuclear yttrium phosphide complex  $[\text{Y}(\text{Cp}'')_2(\text{THF})(\text{PHSiBu}_3)]$  (**5**, Cp'' = 1,3-(SiMe<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>C<sub>5</sub>H<sub>3</sub>), Fig. 3.<sup>44</sup> The latter contains one primary phosphide ligand stabilised by the sterically demanding Cp'' ligands paired with the bulky phosphorus substituents. With the convention of using a Cp'' centroid as a ligating point, the molecular structure of **5** revealed that the metal centre adopts a pseudo-tetrahedral geometry and the Y–P





that the complex formed *via* the dimerisation of a transient terminal phosphinidene species, [Lu(PNP<sup>iPr</sup>)(PMes)].

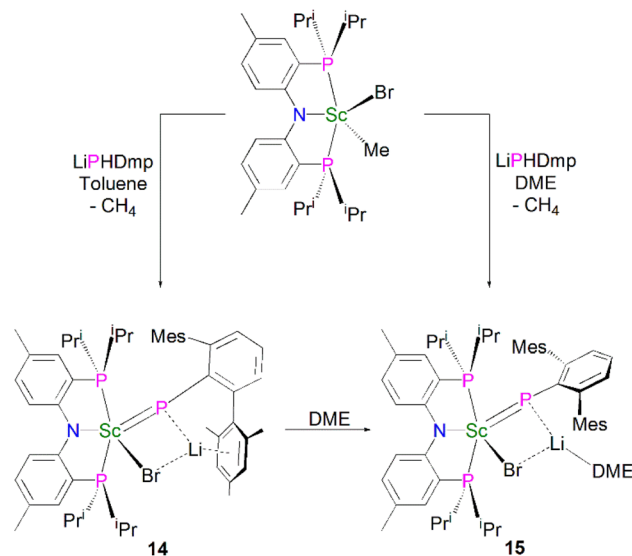
Soon afterwards, Chen and co-workers reported the synthesis of the first early lanthanide phosphinidide complex, [Nd(I)(μ-PDipp)(THF)<sub>3</sub>]<sub>2</sub> (**10**, Dipp = 2,6-<sup>iPr</sup>Pr<sub>2</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>3</sub>), *via* the concomitant salt elimination and silyl redistribution reaction of [NdI<sub>3</sub>(THF)<sub>3.5</sub>] with two equivalents of KP(SiMe<sub>3</sub>)(Dipp) to eliminate one equivalent of P(SiMe<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>(Dipp) and two equivalents of KI, Scheme 2.<sup>51</sup> The Nd(III) ions in **10** exhibits pseudo-octahedral geometries, with the two bridging phosphinidides forming an asymmetric Nd<sub>2</sub>P<sub>2</sub> core that is analogous to the Ln<sub>2</sub>P<sub>2</sub> core of **9**, with Nd–P bond distances of 2.7314(15) and 2.7769(16) Å. In common with **9**, the phosphorus atoms in **10** are trigonal planar, with the sum of bond angles equalling 359.1°. The authors carried out preliminary investigations into the reactivity of **10**, establishing that it reacts in a similar fashion to carbenes with substrates such as benzophenone to give a phosphalkene.

In 2010 Chen and co-workers later expanded the range of neodymium phosphinidide complexes, utilising **10** in salt metathesis reactions with two equivalents of either KCp\* or KTp<sup>Ph</sup> (KHB(3-Ph-N<sub>2</sub>C<sub>3</sub>H<sub>2</sub>)<sub>3</sub>) to yield the phosphinidide complexes [Nd(Cp\*)(μ-PDipp)(THF)<sub>2</sub>]<sub>2</sub> (**11**) and [Nd(Tp<sup>Ph</sup>)(μ-PDipp)(THF)<sub>2</sub>]<sub>2</sub> (**12**), respectively, Scheme 2.<sup>52</sup> Complex **11** was isolated as the major product in a yield of 52%. Complex **12**, however, was initially isolated as a crystalline mixture with the cyclometallated complex [Nd(Tp<sup>Ph</sup>-*cyclo*)(TpPh)], with purification of the two complexes performed *via* the manual separation of crystals. The solid-state structure of **11** revealed that there is a loss of the trigonal planar geometry of the bridging phosphinidides, indicated by the decrease of the sum of bond angles of the phosphorus atom to 349.2(3)° when compared to complexes **12** [358.9(4)°] and **10** [359.1°], which could be a result of the coordination of the sterically demanding Cp\* ligand. Complex **11** exhibits an analogous Nd<sub>2</sub>P<sub>2</sub> core to that of **10**, with inequivalent Nd–P distances of 2.7456(11) and 2.7827(10) Å, whilst **12** demonstrates a more regular core geometry with Nd–P distances of 2.7808(16) and 2.7911(15) Å. The molecular structure of **12** exhibits one inverted pyrazolyl group on each Tp<sup>Ph</sup> ligand, which is a result of isomerisation of the ligand *via* a 1,2-shift to relieve steric buttressing between the Tp<sup>Ph</sup> ligand and the phosphinidide Dipp group.

In 2010, Mindiola and co-workers reported that the reaction of the sterically demanding phosphide precursor, LiPH(Tripp) (Tripp = 2,4,6-<sup>iPr</sup>Pr<sub>3</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>2</sub>), with [Sc(PNP<sup>iPr</sup>)(Me)(Br)] yielded the bridging phosphinidide dinuclear scandium complex



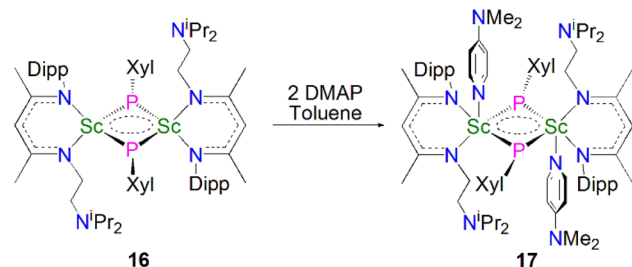
Scheme 3 Synthesis of Sc–phosphinidide complex **13**.



Scheme 4 Synthesis of Sc–phosphinidide complexes **14** and **15**.

[Sc(PNP<sup>iPr</sup>)(μ-PTripp)]<sub>2</sub> (**13**), Scheme 3, again *via* the elimination of one equivalent each of methane and lithium bromide.<sup>53</sup> The authors postulated that **13** formed *via* aggregation of a transient terminal scandium phosphinidene species, [Sc(PNP<sup>iPr</sup>)(PTripp)]. The molecular structure of **13** revealed an asymmetric four-membered Sc<sub>2</sub>P<sub>2</sub> ring core, with similar Sc–P bond distances of 2.5446(8) and 2.5527(10) Å. Based on the crystallographic data for **13** the authors proposed that the phosphorus lone pairs are delocalised around the Sc<sub>2</sub>P<sub>2</sub> core.

Mindiola and co-workers subsequently disclosed the first mononuclear rare earth phosphinidide complexes. The Li-capped complexes [Sc(PNP<sup>iPr</sup>)(μ-PDmp)(μ-Br)Li(DME)<sub>n</sub>] (Dmp = 2,6-Mes<sub>2</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>3</sub>; *n* = 0, **14**; *n* = 1, **15**) were prepared from the concomitant salt metathesis and protonolysis reactions of the bulky primary phosphide lithium salt, LiPHDmp with [(PNP<sup>iPr</sup>)Sc(Me)(Br)], eliminating methane as the driving force, to give **14** (55%) and **15** (47%), Scheme 4.<sup>53</sup> The exact product depends on the reaction solvent; complex **15** was also synthesised by the addition of a stoichiometric amount of DME to **14** (21%). Single crystal X-ray diffraction studies revealed that both **14** and **15** have short Sc–P bond lengths of 2.338(2) and 2.3732(18) Å, respectively. Calculations performed on **15** indicated that the Sc=P bond has significant multiple bond character with a Mayer bond order of 1.46. The authors varied the reaction



Scheme 5 Synthesis of Sc–phosphinidide complexes **16** and **17**.



conditions for the synthesis of **14** and **15** to investigate if the elimination of LiBr was possible. However, heating reaction mixtures up to 100 °C did not liberate the occluded LiBr.

In 2013, Maron, Chen and co-workers utilised a similar one-pot salt metathesis and protonolysis methodology with the reaction of KPXYl (Xyl = 2,6-Me<sub>2</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>3</sub>) with [Sc(NCCN<sup>iPr</sup>)(Me)(Cl)] (NCCN<sup>iPr</sup> = MeC(NDipp)CHC(Me)(NCH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>N<sup>iPr</sup>)<sub>2</sub>) yielding the bridging phosphinidide dinuclear scandium complex [{Sc(NCCN<sup>iPr</sup>)(μ-PXYl)}<sub>2</sub>] (**16**, 74%), *via* the elimination of KI and methane, Scheme 5.<sup>54</sup> In contrast with the previously reported Sc-phosphinidide complex **13**, the Sc<sub>2</sub>P<sub>2</sub> core in **16** is more symmetric with Sc–P distances of 2.522(1) and 2.528(1) Å. They also attempted to synthesise a terminal Sc-phosphinidene complex by reacting **16** with a strongly donating ligand, DMAP (DMAP = 4-NMe<sub>2</sub>-C<sub>5</sub>H<sub>4</sub>N) to break the dimer up; however, this resulted in the formation of the adduct [Sc(NCCN<sup>iPr</sup>)(μ-PXYl)(DMAP)]<sub>2</sub> (**17**) in a 90% yield. The authors noted that **17** was the major product if an excess of DMAP (four equivalents) was added to **16**. Whilst **17** retains its Sc<sub>2</sub>P<sub>2</sub> core, the Sc–P bonds are longer than **16** at 2.540(1) and 2.589(1) Å, reflecting the increased Sc coordination numbers.

Maron, Chen and co-workers showed that **16** exhibits notable redox chemistry; for example, the addition of three equivalents of 2,2'-bipyridine (2,2'-bipy) results in the oxidative coupling of two phosphinidide fragments to form a diphosphanide Sc-complex [Sc(NCCN<sup>iPr</sup>)(2,2'-bipy){η<sup>2</sup>-P<sub>2</sub>(Xyl)<sub>2</sub>}] (**18**), with the single electron reduction of two molecules of 2,2'-bipy



Scheme 6 Selected redox reactions of **16**.



Scheme 7 Synthesis of the Sc-phosphinidide complex **21**.

affording [Sc(NCCN<sup>iPr</sup>)(2,2'-bipy)<sub>2</sub>] as a side product, Scheme 6. Similarly, the oxidative coupling of the two (PXYl)<sup>2-</sup> ligands to (P<sub>2</sub>(Xyl)<sub>2</sub>)<sup>2-</sup> promotes the reduction of elemental selenium/tellurium or Ph<sub>3</sub>P=E (E = Se or S) to S<sup>2-</sup>, Se<sup>2-</sup> or Te<sup>2-</sup>, yielding the bridging chalcogenido complexes [{Sc(NCCN<sup>iPr</sup>)}<sub>2</sub>(μ-E){μ-η<sup>2</sup>-P<sub>2</sub>(Xyl)<sub>2</sub>}] (**19E**, E = S, Se or Te). The authors also found that **16** readily undergoes nucleophilic addition chemistry with a range of unsaturated allene, nitrile, isocyanide, and CS<sub>2</sub> substrates to generate the corresponding organophosphorus scandium complexes. In follow-up work they reported that **16** could readily cleave the boron–oxygen bonds in pinacol–borane and catecholborane to give complexes featuring a newly-generated ligand (HB{P(Xyl)}<sub>2</sub>)<sup>2-</sup>, demonstrating the reactive nature of the Sc-phosphinidide species due to the highly ionic Sc–P bonding interaction.<sup>54</sup>

In 2015, Maron, Chen and co-workers found that thermal decomposition of the scandium phosphide precursor [Sc(NCCN<sup>Dipp</sup>)(Me){P(H)Dipp}] (**20**, NCCN<sup>Dipp</sup> = {MeC(NDipp)<sub>2</sub>CH} supported by the NCCN<sup>Dipp</sup> scaffold afforded the scandium phosphinidide complex [{(NCCN<sup>Dipp</sup>)Sc}<sub>2</sub>(μ-CH<sub>2</sub>)(μ-PDipp)] (**21**). However, this reaction also gave a diphosphide by-product [(NCCN<sup>Dipp</sup>){P(H)Dipp}]<sub>2</sub> in a 1 : 1 ratio with **21**. An optimal route was then implemented by reacting one equivalent of **20** with [Sc(NCCN<sup>Dipp</sup>)(Me)<sub>2</sub>], giving **21** in a 77% yield, Scheme 7.<sup>55</sup> Complex **21** exhibits Sc–P bond lengths of 2.495(1) and 2.508(1) Å, which are shorter than other scandium bridging phosphinidide complexes. Interestingly, there is an up-field shift of the phosphinidide moiety resonances in the <sup>31</sup>P NMR spectrum of **21** to 84.1 ppm, *cf.* **13** (227.4 ppm) and **16** (183.8 ppm), which is presumably due to one of the bridging phosphinidide units being replaced by a methylenidene fragment.

In the same publication Maron, Chen and co-workers conducted a reactivity study of **21**; this revealed that, in contrast with the previously reported complex **16**, the phosphinidide ligand in **21** is relatively unreactive, with all small molecules reacting at the adjacent methylenidene centre, Scheme 8. The reaction of **21** with either CO<sub>2</sub>, PhCN, <sup>t</sup>BuNC or CS<sub>2</sub> resulted in



Scheme 8 Reactivity of Sc-phosphinidide complex **21**.















Scheme 15 Synthesis of Th phosphide complexes 50–52.

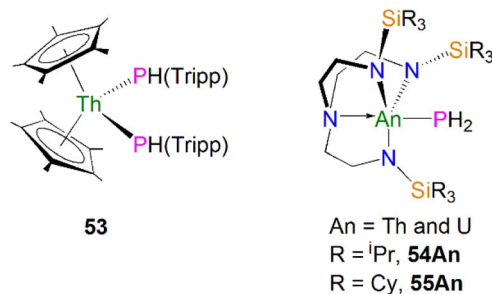


Fig. 7 Actinide phosphide and phosphanide complexes 53–55An.

### 5.1 Actinide phosphide complexes

In terms of actinide complexes containing metal–phosphorus single bond interactions, monoanionic charged phosphide ligands can have stronger interactions with actinide metal centres than neutral phosphine ligands, which only form dative bonds to actinide ions.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, some actinide phosphide complexes are useful precursors to novel linkages such as actinide–metal and –ligand multiple bonds (see below), low-valent U–P bonds,<sup>76</sup> and hydrophosphination catalysts.<sup>77,78</sup>

The first examples of actinide phosphide complexes were reported in 1985 by Ryan and co-workers. The mononuclear complex  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{PPh}_2)_2]$  (**50**) was prepared by a salt metathesis reaction between  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{Cl})_2]$  and potassium diphenylphosphide, Scheme 15.<sup>79</sup> Importantly, the phosphide ligands are able to coordinate to transition metals as well, supporting actinide and transition metal interactions, making it possible to investigate actinide–metal bonding. Treatment of **50** with  $[\text{Ni}(\text{COD})_2]$  (COD = 1,5-cyclooctadiene) under a CO atmosphere, or  $[\text{Pt}(\text{COD})_2]$  in the presence of  $\text{PMe}_3$ , led to the formation of the heterobimetallic compounds  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-PPh}_2)_2\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_2]$  (**51**)<sup>79</sup> and  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-PPh}_2)_2\text{Pt}(\text{PMe}_3)]$  (**52**)<sup>80</sup> in moderate yields, respectively, Scheme 15. The  $^{31}\text{P}\{^1\text{H}\}$  NMR spectrum for **51** exhibits a signal at 177 ppm, which is shifted downfield from the resonance for **50** found at 143 ppm. In contrast, the  $^{31}\text{P}$  NMR spectrum for **52** shows a doublet at 149.3 ppm, and a triplet at  $-3.3$  ppm. These were attributed to the  $[\text{PPh}_2]^-$  and  $\text{PMe}_3$  ligands, respectively. Both resonances contain coupling to Pt, suggesting a direct interaction between the phosphorus atoms of both ligands and the transition metal. The solid-state structure of **51** revealed the Th–P bond lengths to be 2.869(4) and 2.900(4) Å, which are close to the Th–P distance of 2.866(7) Å found in the mononuclear starting material **50**. The Th–P bond lengths in **52** are unexceptional and are similar to those in **50**. The distance between the thorium and nickel atoms in **51** was found to be 3.206(2) Å, which is longer than the sum of the covalent single bond radii of Th and Ni (2.85 Å). In contrast, in **52** the distance between the thorium and platinum centres was

found to be 2.984(1) Å, which is similar to the sum of the covalent single bond radii of Th and Pt (2.98 Å). The metal–metal bonding interactions in **51** and **52** were interpreted as a weak, donor–acceptor dative bonds from the low-valent electron-rich Ni(0) and Pt(0) ions to the electron-poor thorium(IV) ions.

As well as actinide phosphide complexes with secondary phosphide ligands, there are also some actinide complexes containing primary phosphide ligands, which could potentially be used to access actinide phosphorus multiple bonds. For example, in 2015 Walensky and co-workers reported the thorium bisphosphide complex  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{PHTripp})_2]$  (**53**, Tripp = 2,4,6- $\text{iPr}_3\text{C}_6\text{H}_2$ ), prepared by the reaction of  $\text{H}_2\text{PTripp}$  with the thorium dimethyl precursor  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{CH}_3)_2]$  in a 2 : 1 stoichiometric ratio *via* an alkane elimination method, Fig. 7.<sup>81</sup> The Th–P bond distances in **53** (2.8754(6) and 2.8830(6) Å) are very close to those in **50–52**, indicative of typical single bond interactions. However, the  $^{31}\text{P}\{^1\text{H}\}$  NMR spectrum of **53** has a resonance at 1.66 ppm, whereas the  $^{31}\text{P}\{^1\text{H}\}$  resonances in **50–52** range from 143 to 177 ppm. Complex **53** is a useful precursor to thorium phosphinidide and phosphinidene complexes (see below). Unlike complexes **50–53**, which contain bulky phosphide substituents, by using bulky triamidoamine ligand frameworks Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers synthesised the first actinide parent phosphanide complexes  $[\text{An}(\text{Tren}^{\text{R}})(\text{PH}_2)]$  ( $\text{Tren}^{\text{R}} = \{\text{N}(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{NR})_3\}^{3-}$ , R = TIPS, triisopropylsilyl, An = Th and U, **54An**; R = TCHS, tricyclohexylsilyl, An = Th and U, **55An**), Fig. 7.<sup>82–84</sup> Complexes **54An** were prepared by salt metathesis reactions of the corresponding actinide precursors with  $\text{NaPH}_2$ ,<sup>82,84</sup> whilst **55An** were synthesised by protonation of their respective terminal parent phosphinidene complexes due to the lack of suitable actinide precursors for salt metathesis reactions.<sup>84</sup> These four terminal phosphanide complexes are the only known examples to date for any f-element. The solid-state structures of **54An** and **55An** revealed trigonal-bipyramidal metal geometries with the parent phosphide group well-protected by the bulky silyl substituents. The An–P bond distances are 2.982(2), 2.883(2), 3.0360(15), and 2.8725(13) Å for **54Th**, **54U**, **55Th**, and **55U**, respectively, which are slightly longer than the respective sum of the single bond covalent radii for thorium and phosphorus (2.86 Å) and uranium and phosphorus (2.81 Å). Due to the P–H coupling, the  $^{31}\text{P}$  NMR spectra for **54Th**, **54U**, **55Th**, and **55U** exhibit triplet resonances at  $-144.1$ , 595.0,  $-133.0$  and 605.9 ppm, respectively. As expected,





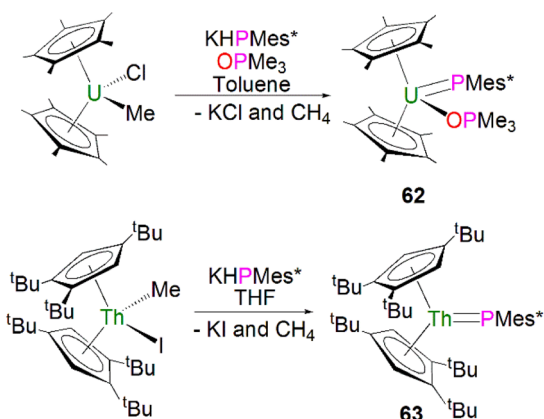
density to be donated from the phosphorous atom to the thorium centre.

Recently, Walter, Ding, Zi and co-workers reported the salt metathesis/protonolysis reaction of one equivalent each of  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2(\text{Me})(\text{Cl})]$  ( $\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}} = 1,3\text{-}^t\text{Bu}_2\text{-C}_5\text{H}_3$ ) and  $\text{KPH}(\text{Mes}^*)$  to synthesise the dinuclear phosphinidide complex  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2(\mu\text{-P}(\text{Mes}^*))(\text{Cl})\}_2]$  (**60**) in 78% yield, Scheme 18, with elimination of one equivalent each of methane and potassium chloride.<sup>93</sup> The authors reported that **60** could be converted to the mononuclear terminal phosphinidene complex  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2(\text{P}(\text{Mes}^*))(\mu\text{-Cl})\{\text{K}(\text{18C6})\}]$  (**61**, 92%) by the addition of 18-crown-6.<sup>93</sup> The solid-state structure of **60** and **61** revealed that **60** exhibits a slightly shorter Th–P distance of 2.560(1) Å and a more acute Th–P–C<sup>Ar</sup> angle of 162.6(2)° than found in **61** (2.582(1) Å; Th–P–C<sup>Ar</sup> angles = 171.3(1)°) which is most likely a result of the removal of the interaction between phosphorus and the potassium cation from **60** to **61**. The authors reported that all four complexes **58–61** exhibit  $^{31}\text{P}\{\text{H}\}$  NMR resonances in the range 108.8 to 177.85 ppm.

### 5.3 Actinide phosphinidene complexes

Although uranium imido chemistry is well-developed,<sup>18</sup> actinide complexes containing heavier pnictogen An = PnR (An = actinide; Pn = P, As, Sb, Bi) multiple bonds are scarce.<sup>20</sup> To date, there are few complexes containing An=PnR double bonds outside of cryogenic matrix isolation conditions, but only with P or As ligands, not for Sb and Bi ligands. Also, there is no example of a terminal actinide heavy pnictido An≡Pn triple bond isolated under ambient conditions. Even for d-block metals there are relatively few structurally characterised terminal metal pnictinidene complexes (~50), far fewer than their imido counterparts (>3000).<sup>94</sup> Actinide pnictinidene complexes normally require kinetic stabilisation by sterically demanding ancillary ligands, coupled with bulky pnictinidene substituents (*cf.* **59** and **61**).

In 1996, Burns and co-workers reported the first example of a terminal uranium phosphinidene complex utilising the sterically demanding Cp\* supporting ligand. The salt elimination/protonolysis reaction of one equivalent each of

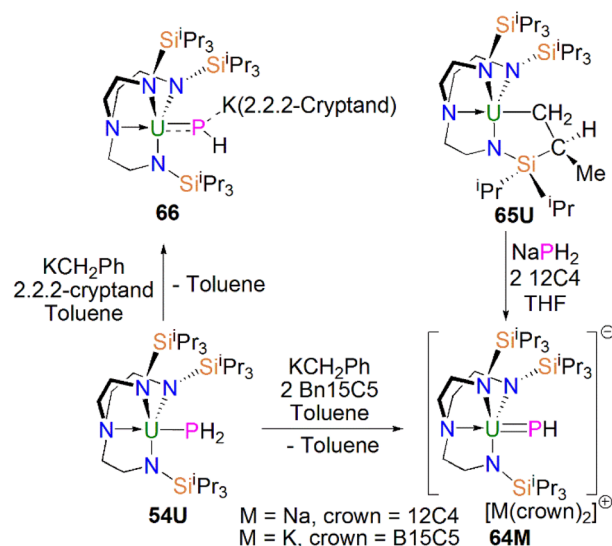


Scheme 19 Synthesis of terminal uranium and thorium phosphinidene complexes **62** (top) and **63** (bottom).

$[\text{U}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{Me})(\text{Cl})]$  and  $\text{KHP}(\text{Mes}^*)$  in the presence of  $\text{OPMe}_3$  gave  $[\text{U}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{P}(\text{Mes}^*))(\text{OPMe}_3)]$  (**62**), in yields of up to 62%, Scheme 19 (top).<sup>95</sup> Complex **62** exhibits a U–P distance of 2.562(3) Å, which is shorter than the bridging phosphinidide U–P distance in **56** or, for example, the U–P distance in the phosphide complex  $[\text{U}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\{\text{P}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}(\text{Cl})]$  (2.789(4) Å).<sup>96</sup> The authors postulated that the U–P–C<sup>Ar</sup> angle of 143.7(3)° in **62** was due to crystal packing forces, or a result of the combination of heavy main group elements generally adopting bent geometries in addition to the preferred linear geometry required to minimise P–U  $\pi$ -overlap.

In 2018, using sterically demanding cyclopentadienyl ligands, Walter, Ding, Zi and co-workers reported a base-free terminal thorium phosphinidene  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{ttt}})_2(\text{P}(\text{Mes}^*))]$  (**63**,  $\text{Cp}^{\text{ttt}} = 1,2,4\text{-}^t\text{Bu}_3\text{-C}_5\text{H}_2$ ), Scheme 19 (bottom).<sup>97</sup> Complex **63** was prepared by a similar salt metathesis/protonolysis reaction that was employed to prepare **62**; reaction of one equivalent each of  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{ttt}})_2(\text{Me})(\text{I})]$  and  $\text{KPH}(\text{Mes}^*)$  produced **63** in high yield (80%), with elimination of one equivalent each of methane and potassium iodide. The molecular structure of **63** further confirmed a base-free terminal phosphinidene species with a short Th–P bond distance (2.536(2) Å). The  $^{31}\text{P}\{\text{H}\}$  NMR spectrum of **63** shows one resonance at 145.7 ppm, which is close to those for **59** and **61**. Calculations probing the Th=P bonding of **63** and the theoretical monomeric model of **63** suggest more covalency in this linkage than related imido complexes. The authors additionally treated the thorium complexes **63** with a wide range of unsaturated substrates to probe the reactivity of Th–P double bond. In general, the actinide metallocene phosphinidene motif has proven practicable to effect with a range of cyclopentadienyl substituents.<sup>98–105</sup>

From the above examples, it is clear that sterically demanding cyclopentadienyl ligands have proven effective at stabilising actinide phosphinidide and phosphinidene complexes, but sterically demanding triamidoamine ligands



Scheme 20 Synthesis of uranium phosphinidene and phosphinidide complexes **64M** and **66**.





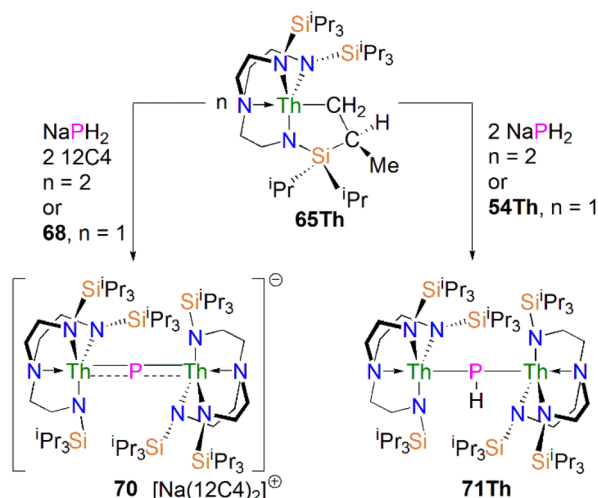
phosphinidene ligand was observed in both structures, with An–P–H angles of 65.83(17)° and 65.23(13)°, respectively. In addition, absorptions corresponding to P–H stretches at 2072 and 2070 cm<sup>-1</sup> for **69Th** and **69U**, respectively, were observed in their ATR-IR spectra. The An=P vibrations are also observed in the Raman spectra of **69Th** and **69U** at 306 and 296 cm<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. The <sup>31</sup>P NMR spectrum for **69U** exhibits a broad resonance at 2629 ppm due to the paramagnetic uranium(IV) centre, while this is not observed in **64M**. Similar to **67**, **69Th** exhibits a doublet resonance at 266.2 ppm in its <sup>31</sup>P NMR spectrum due to P–H coupling.

Reflecting the basic and nucleophilic nature of **69An**, Liddle, Scheer, and co-authors additionally found that treatment of **69An** with [HNET<sub>3</sub>][BPh<sub>4</sub>], as a proton source, in THF resulted in the isolation of the phosphanide complexes **55An** in good yields, Scheme 22,<sup>84</sup> which have similar bond metrics to **54An**.<sup>82</sup> Alternatively, **55U** could be prepared by oxidation of **69U** with AgBPh<sub>4</sub> in benzene. The formation of **55U** in these oxidation reactions may involve a transient U(v)=PH species (or valence isomer, e.g. U(IV)=P'H), which then abstracts a proton (or H<sup>+</sup>) in the reaction mixture due to the HSAB mismatch of U and P. This reactivity contrasts to the disproportionation observed for Tren<sup>TIPPS</sup>-supported U(v)=NH chemistry, which produces U(IV)–NH<sub>2</sub> amide and U(VI)≡N nitride products.<sup>108</sup> These reactivity outcomes reflect the periodic differences between nitrogen and phosphorus, and that when the latter is paired with electro-positive metals P-based electrons can become involved in redox reactions as found in the reactivity of **16**.

#### 5.4 Actinide phosphido complexes

Actinide phosphido complexes remain exceedingly rare. There are only a few bridging dinuclear complexes isolated in recent years with no examples of terminal actinide heavy pnictido An≡Pn triple bond isolated under ambient conditions to date.<sup>20</sup>

In 2016, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers reported the first example of an actinide–phosphido complex [Na(12C4)<sub>2</sub>



Scheme 23 Synthesis of bridging thorium phosphinidide and phosphido complex **70** and **71Th**.

[{Th(Tren<sup>TIPPS</sup>)<sub>2</sub>(μ-P)] (**70**), where the phosphido ligand bridges two thorium centres, Scheme 23.<sup>83</sup> Complex **70** was also the first such f-element phosphido species, and was prepared by the reaction of two equivalents of **65Th** with NaPH<sub>2</sub> in the presence of two equivalents of 12C4 in up to 57% yield. Alternatively, **70** can be synthesised by the stoichiometric reaction of **67** with **65Th**. The authors additionally reported the synthesis of the bridging phosphinidide complex [{Th(Tren<sup>TIPPS</sup>)<sub>2</sub>(μ-PH)] (**71Th**) in a 40% yield, either by treatment of **54Th** with one equivalent of **65Th**, or the reaction of two equivalents each of **65Th** with NaPH<sub>2</sub>, eliminating one equivalent of 'Na<sub>2</sub>PH'. However, attempts to prepare **70** by deprotonation of **71Th** were unsuccessful. Complex **70** has a symmetrical ThPTh core with Th–P bond distances of 2.740(2) and 2.735(2) Å, which are shorter than those in **71Th** (2.898(2) Å) but compares well to that of the terminal phosphinidene **67** (2.7584(18) Å), and lies between the sum of the covalent single and double bond radii for thorium and phosphorus (2.86 and 2.45 Å, respectively), suggesting multiple bonding interactions in the ThPTh linkage. The <sup>31</sup>P NMR spectra for **71Th** and **70** exhibit doublet and singlet resonances at 145.7, and 553.5 ppm, confirming the presence of (HP)<sup>2-</sup> and P<sup>3-</sup>, respectively.

Subsequently, in 2017 Liddle, Scheer, and co-authors reported that addition of one equivalent of KCH<sub>2</sub>Ph to a mixture of **54U** and [U(Tren<sup>TIPPS</sup>)(THF)][BPh<sub>4</sub>] gave the bridging diuranium phosphinidide complex [{U(Tren<sup>TIPPS</sup>)<sub>2</sub>(μ-PH)] (**71U**)<sup>86</sup> that is isostructural to **71Th**, Scheme 24. Importantly, the authors found that deprotonation of **71U** with benzyl potassium in the presence of two equivalents of B15C5 produced the diuranium(IV/IV) phosphido compound [K(B15C5)<sub>2</sub>][{U(Tren<sup>TIPPS</sup>)<sub>2</sub>(μ-P)] (**72K**), Scheme 24,<sup>86</sup> recall that this method did not work for **71Th**.<sup>84</sup> Complex **72K** was found to rapidly decompose, which was attributed to steric overload, and so,



Scheme 24 Synthesis of bridging uranium phosphinidide and phosphido complexes **71U**–**73Na**.



seeking a more stable combination, the slightly less bulky and asymmetric sodium analogue of **72K**,  $[\text{Na}(\text{12C4})_2][\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}})\}(\mu\text{-P})]$  (**73Na**;  $\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}} = \{\text{N}(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{NSiMe}_2\text{-}^t\text{Bu})_3\}^{3-}$ ) was prepared<sup>86</sup> by the reaction of one equivalent each of **64Na** with the cyclometallate complex  $[\text{U}\{\text{N}(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{-NSiMe}_2\text{-}^t\text{Bu})_2(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{NSi}(\text{Me})(\text{CH}_2\text{-}^t\text{Bu}))\}]$ , which is a less sterically demanding Tren ligand compared to  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}}$ .

Unlike **70** which is stable, **72K** and **73Na** are to various extents unstable in solution, in line with the paucity of such phosphido species, which resulted in both complexes being isolated in relatively low yields of 29% and <5% for **73Na** and **72K**, respectively. Interestingly, **73Na** exhibits an asymmetric UPU core, with two U–P bond distances of 2.657(2) and 2.713(2) Å, and the shorter U–P distance is the  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}}$  ligated unit. In contrast, **72K** has a symmetric core with statistically indistinguishable U–P bond lengths of 2.653(4) and 2.665(4) Å, which are shorter than those in the phosphinidide **71U** (2.8187(12) and 2.8110(12) Å). Calculations on **72K** and **73Na** suggested that the U–P bond are less covalent than the terminal phosphinidene species **64M**. This is reflected by smaller U–P Mayer bond orders of 1.41/1.43 and 1.44/1.66 for **72K** and **73Na**, respectively, when compared to **[64K]<sup>-</sup>** (1.92). DFT calculations also suggest that the Th–P bonds in **70** are more polarised and ionic than the U–P bonds in **72K** and **73Na**, as evidenced by smaller Th–P Mayer bond orders of 1.26 and 1.28 for **[70]<sup>-</sup>**. However, these An–P Mayer bond orders are nearly twice that of the single U–N<sub>amide</sub> bonds (~0.71), suggesting that these An–P bonds are polarised multiple bond interactions.

### 5.5 Actinide 2-phosphaethynolate complexes

Transition metal 2-phosphaethynolate (OCP)<sup>-</sup> complexes have proven to be useful precursors to prepare phosphido complexes *via* redox or photolysis process.<sup>31</sup> Recently, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers reported the two new actinide–OCP complexes



Scheme 25 Reduction of actinide–OCP complexes **74An** to produce actinide complexes **75** and **76**.

$[\text{An}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{OCP})]$  (**74An**, An = Th and U) and their reduction chemistry.<sup>109,110</sup> Reduction of **74U** with  $\text{KC}_8$  in the presence of 2.2.2-cryptand gives  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})][\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}_2\{\mu\text{-}\eta^2(\text{OP})\text{:}\eta^2(\text{CP})\text{-OCP}\}]$  (**75**), Scheme 25.<sup>109</sup> Although there was no phosphido species isolated from this reduction, the coordination mode of this trapped OCP-ligand is unique, and derives from a novel highly reduced and bent carbene-like form of this ligand with a bridging P-centre and the most acute P–C–O angle of  $\sim 127^\circ$  in any complex to date. The mixed valence diuranium(III/IV) formulation is supported by the characterisation data and DFT calculations, where back-bonding from uranium gives a highly reduced form of the OCP unit that is perhaps best described as a uranium stabilised  $(\text{OCP})^{2-}$  radical dianion. In contrast, reduction of **74Th** with  $\text{KC}_8$  or  $\text{CsC}_8$  produced the phosphinidide C–H bond activation product  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}\text{Th}\{\text{N}(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{NSiPr}_3)_2[\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{SiPr}_2\text{CH}(\text{Me})\text{CH}_2\text{C}(\text{O})(\mu\text{-P})\}]]$  and the oxo complex  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\mu\text{-OCs})_2]$ . Surprisingly, using  $\text{RbC}_8$  for the reduction afforded a hexathorium complex,  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}_6(\mu\text{-OC}_2\text{P}_3)_2(\mu\text{-OC}_2\text{P}_3\text{H})_2\text{Rb}_4]$  (**76**), which contains four five-membered  $[\text{C}_2\text{P}_3]$  phosphorus heterocycles *via* a  $[2 + 2 + 1]$  cycloaddition, Scheme 25.<sup>110</sup> In addition, this hexathorium complex can be converted to the oxo complex  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\mu\text{-ORb})_2]$  and the known cyclometallated complex **65Th** at 80 °C, *via* an otherwise hidden example of reductive cycloaddition reactivity in the chemistry of 2-phosphaethynolate. From the above examples it can be seen that the reduction chemistry of 2-phosphaethynolate for actinides can be quite complicated.

### 5.6 Actinide polyphosphorus complexes

Similar to most polyphosphorus complexes, actinide polyphosphorus complexes are most often prepared from  $\text{P}_4$  and low-valent actinide compounds.<sup>29</sup> In 1991, Scherer and co-workers reported the first examples of actinide polyphosphorus complexes,  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2\}_2(\mu^2\text{-}\eta^4\text{-P}_6)]$  (**77**) and  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2\}(\mu^2\text{-}\eta^3\text{-P}_3)\{\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2\text{Cl}\}]$  (**78**), prepared by treatment of  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2(\eta^4\text{-C}_4\text{H}_6)]$  with  $\text{P}_4$  at 100 °C in the absence, or presence of,  $\text{MgCl}_2$ , respectively, Fig. 8.<sup>111</sup> The solid-state structures of **77** and **78** revealed distinct structural differences: a bicyclic  $\text{P}_6^{4-}$  ligand is bridged by two thorium(IV) centres in **77**, whilst *cyclo*- $\text{P}_3^{3-}$  is bridged in **78**, with Th–P bond distances between 2.840(7) and 2.921(7) Å. The <sup>31</sup>P NMR

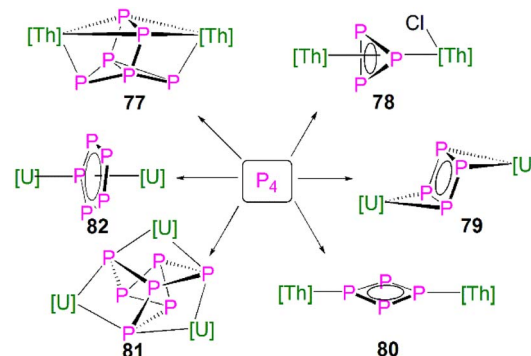


Fig. 8 Core structures for reported actinide polyphosphorus complexes **78–82** prepared from  $\text{P}_4$ .





more stable P–P coupled **83**. In addition, a preliminary reactivity study demonstrated that **83** can be converted to uranium *cyclo*-P<sub>3</sub> complexes [M(arene)<sub>4</sub>]<sub>2</sub>{U(Tren<sup>TIPS</sup>)<sub>2</sub>(μ-η<sup>3</sup>:η<sup>3</sup>-P<sub>3</sub>)} (M = K, Rb, Cs; arene = toluene or benzene); these reactions are low yielding, implying the presence of reactive phosphido intermediates.<sup>107</sup> DFT calculations indicate that uranium moves from π-bonding to P<sub>2</sub> and *cyclo*-P<sub>3</sub> to δ-bonding with *cyclo*-P<sub>5</sub>, highlighting the flexibility of the chemical bonding of uranium.

## 6. Lanthanide heavier pnictogen complexes

Upon descending group 15, the number of f-element heavier pnictogen bonds falls away rapidly, and lanthanide complexes containing heavier pnictogen ligands from As to Bi are much rarer than P analogues. Furthermore, such complexes tend to form multi-centre clusters with bridging pnictogen ligands. Thus, well-defined mononuclear species are sparse. To the best of our knowledge, there are no lanthanide complexes isolated to date with multiple bonding to As, Sb, or Bi.

### 6.1 Lanthanide arsenic complexes

The first crystallographically characterised complex containing a lanthanide–arsenic bond was reported in 1988 by Schumann and co-workers. It was found that [Lu(Cp)<sub>2</sub>(μ-CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>{Li(TMEDA)}] (TMEDA = *N,N,N',N'*-tetramethylethylenediamine) reacted with diphenylarsine in benzene to afford the lanthanide–arsenide complex [Lu(Cp)<sub>2</sub>(μ-AsPh<sub>2</sub>)<sub>2</sub>{Li(TMEDA)}] (**84**), Fig. 9, *via* methane elimination.<sup>119</sup> The solid-state structure of **84** revealed the Lu–As bond distances are 2.896(2) and 2.870(2) Å, with a As–Lu–As bond angle of 81.14(6)°. By using the reducing nature of Sm(II), Evans and co-worker prepared [Sm(Cp\*)<sub>2</sub>(AsPh<sub>2</sub>)] (**85**), Fig. 9, by the reaction of two equivalents of [Sm(Cp\*)<sub>2</sub>] with Ph<sub>2</sub>AsAsPh<sub>2</sub> *via* reductive cleavage.<sup>120</sup> This strategy also works for making the phosphide analogue. When dissolved in THF, **85** converts to the THF adduct [Sm(Cp\*)<sub>2</sub>(-AsPh<sub>2</sub>)(THF)], which can ring open THF to produce [Sm(Cp\*)<sub>2</sub>{O(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>4</sub>AsPh<sub>2</sub>}(THF)] under thermolysis conditions.

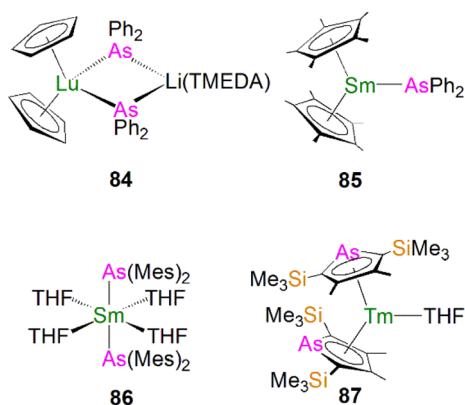
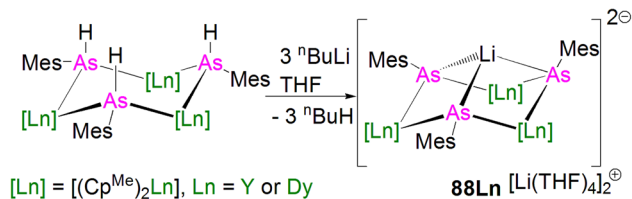


Fig. 9 Selected examples of lanthanide complexes containing metal–arsenide bonds **84**–**87**.



Scheme 27 Synthesis of the yttrium and dysprosium arsenidiide complexes **88Ln**.

In the molecular structure of **85**, there are two independent molecules in unit cell, and the Sm–As bond distances are 2.973(3) and 2.966(3) Å, respectively, which are slightly longer than those seen in **84**. Apart from these Ln(III) arsenide complexes, there are two Ln(II) complexes containing metal–arsenic bonds, where Nief and co-workers reported the preparation of [Sm(AsMes)<sub>2</sub>(THF)<sub>4</sub>] (**86**)<sup>36</sup> and [Tm(Dsas)<sub>2</sub>(THF)] (**87**, Dsas = 2,5-bis(trimethylsilyl)-3,4-dimethylarsolide)<sup>121</sup> *via* salt metathesis, Fig. 9.

During 2015 and 2016, Layfield and co-workers synthesised the bridging arsenidiide lanthanide complexes [Ln(Cp<sup>Me</sup>)<sub>2</sub>]<sub>3</sub>(μ-AsMes)<sub>3</sub>Li[Li(THF)<sub>4</sub>]<sub>2</sub> (**88Ln**; Ln = Y, Dy; Cp<sup>Me</sup> = C<sub>5</sub>H<sub>4</sub>Me; Mes = mesityl), Scheme 27, when investigating the effects of arsenidiide ligands on SMM properties.<sup>122,123</sup> Deprotonation of the bridging lanthanide arsenides [Ln(Cp<sup>Me</sup>)<sub>2</sub>]<sub>3</sub>(μ-AsHMes)<sub>3</sub> (Ln = Y or Dy), with three equivalents of *n*-butyl-lithium gave **88Y** and **88Dy**, in yields of 73% and 77%, respectively, in addition to three equivalents of butane gas. Complexes **88Ln** feature bridging pnictide units, similar to the phosphinidiide clusters **28Ln**. The central Ln<sub>3</sub>As<sub>3</sub> core shows a chair-like arrangement that is analogous to the Ln<sub>3</sub>P<sub>3</sub> cores in **28Ln**. The authors reported that **88Ln** exhibit Ln–As bond distances (Y: 2.8574(6)–2.8893(7) Å; Dy: 2.8515(6)–2.8908(7) Å) that are shorter than in their arsenide counterparts [Ln(Cp<sup>Me</sup>)<sub>2</sub>]<sub>3</sub>(μ-AsHMes)<sub>3</sub> (Ln = Y,



Scheme 28 Synthesis of lanthanide polyarsenide complexes **90**–**92Ln**.

2.977(2)–3.019(2) Å; Dy, 2.984(2)–3.009(2) Å). Computational studies of **88Y** indicated that the Y–As bonding is ionic with a small amount of covalent character, which is greater than the component seen for the yttrium arsenide precursor. The authors reported that **88Dy** demonstrated SMM behaviour at low temperatures (<5 K) with a  $U_{\text{eff}}$  value of 23(2)  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  and magnetic hysteresis observed up to 1.8 K. Although the structurally authenticated terminal phosphinidene complex **40** was reported very recently, an analogous lanthanide terminal arsinidene complex still remains elusive.

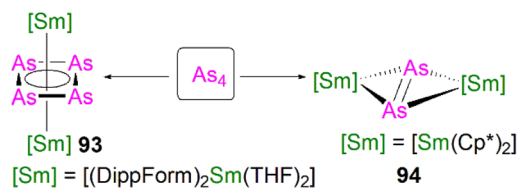
Due to synthetic difficulties, the chemistry of lanthanide polyarsenide complexes progressed rather slowly until the last decade. In 2016 Roesky and co-workers showed that treatment of  $[\text{Fe}(\text{Cp}^*)(\eta^5\text{-As}_5)]$  (**89**) with  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})_2(\text{THF})]$  gave the first examples of lanthanide polyarsenide complexes,  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})_2(\mu\text{-As}_7)\text{Fe}(\text{Cp}^*)]$  (**90**) and  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^4\text{-}\eta^4\text{-As}_4)\text{Fe}(\text{Cp}^*)]$  (**91**) by using different solvents, Scheme 28.<sup>124</sup> The solid-state structures of **90** and **91** revealed hetero-trinuclear and -dinuclear 3d/4f clusters with the  $\text{As}_7$  and  $\text{As}_4$  ligands bridged between multiple metal centres. Complex **90** exhibits a norbornadiene-like structure with two short As–As bonds in the scaffold, whilst **91** is also the first 3d/4f-triple decker sandwich complex with a purely inorganic ligand middle deck. DFT calculations and physical characterisation data indicated that the central  $\text{As}_4$  ligand is dianionic, which is isolobal with the 6p-aromatic cyclobutadiene dianion  $[\text{C}_4\text{H}_4]^{2-}$ . This is consistent with the As–As bond distances within the *cyclo*- $\text{As}_4$  ligand in **91**, which were found to be in between an As–As single and double bond.

More recent work from the Roesky group has proved that a redox strategy, using  $[\text{Fe}(\text{Cp}^*)(\eta^5\text{-As}_5)]$  as an arsenic ligand source to react with low-valent lanthanide starting materials, is an effective way to synthesise new lanthanide polyarsenide complexes. Three new 3d/4f polyarsenide complexes in the separate ion pair form  $[\text{K}(\text{18C6})][\text{Ln}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^4\text{-}\eta^4\text{-As}_5)\text{Fe}(\text{Cp}^*)]$  (**92Ln**, Ln = La, Ce, Nd) were prepared by the reduction of  $[\text{Fe}(\text{Cp}^*)(\eta^5\text{-As}_5)]$  with formally low-valent bridging arene lanthanide compounds in moderate yields, Scheme 28.<sup>125</sup> The molecular structures of **92Ln** are very similar to each other, containing highly reduced  $\text{As}_5$  units with an envelope shape. In **92Ln** the Fe centre is  $\eta^4$ -coordinated by the *cyclo*- $\text{As}_5$  unit and the shortest As–As bond distance of 2.3781(6) Å is observed, while the rest of the As–As bonds range from 2.3928(5) Å to 2.4325(5) Å. As expected, Ln–As bond distances vary over a wide range because of the steric constraints and anisotropic charge distribution within the  $\text{As}_5$  ligand. In other work, Roesky and co-workers found that reacting the arsenic source  $[\{\text{Co}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})\}_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{-}\eta^2\text{-As}_2)_2]$  with samarocenes produced two new mixed 3d/4f

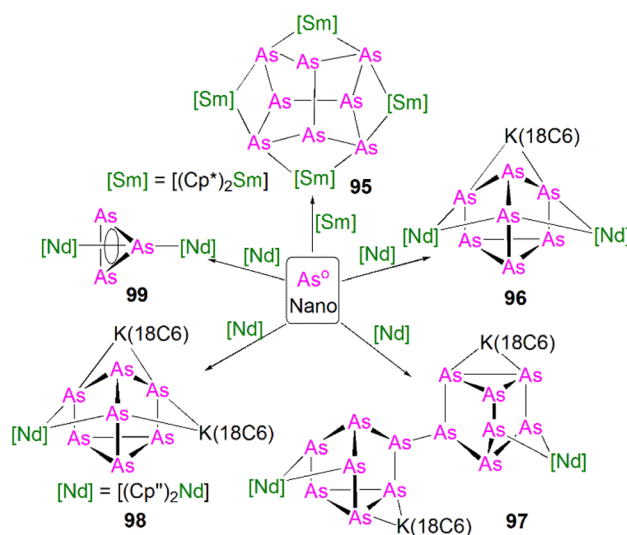
polyarsenic complexes  $[\{\text{Co}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})\}_2(\mu\text{-As})_4\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^{\text{Me4R}})_2]$  (R = Me, *n*-propyl), which represent the first examples of lanthanide complexes with open chain-like polyarsenic ligands.<sup>126</sup>

More recently, Roesky and co-workers found that yellow arsenic ( $\text{As}_4$ ) is also a useful source to introduce polyarsenic ligands to lanthanides. Due to the unstable nature of this  $\text{As}_4$  allotrope under ambient conditions, the authors used freshly-prepared  $\text{As}_4$  in solution to react with the divalent precursor  $[\text{Sm}(\text{DippForm})_2(\text{THF})_2]$ ; after workup, red crystals of the *cyclo*- $\text{As}_4$  complex  $[\{\text{Sm}(\text{DippForm})_2\}_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^4\text{-}\eta^4\text{-As}_4)]$  (**93**),<sup>61</sup> Scheme 29, were obtained as a minor product, which is essentially isostructural to the lanthanide *cyclo*- $\text{P}_4$  complex **48**. Unfortunately, the presence of non-removable impurities hampered further characterisation on **93** because of the instability of  $\text{As}_4$  in solution. In parallel work, the authors also explored the reactivity of  $\text{As}_4$  with  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})_2]$ . As both reagents are highly reactive and light sensitive, this reaction was performed with the exclusion of light; after work-up, a few single crystals of  $[\{\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^{\text{t}})_2\}_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{-}\eta^2\text{-As}_2)]$  (**94**), Scheme 29, with inseparable side products were isolated.<sup>127</sup> The solid-state structure of **94** revealed a rare diarsenic lanthanide species with the  $\text{As}_2$  ligand side-on bound to two samarium centres. The As–As bond distance of 2.278(2) Å indicates As=As double bond character, and hence a dianionic charge on the  $\text{As}_2^{2-}$  unit. The Sm–As distances of 3.014(1) Å are statistically the same because of the presence of an inversion centre in **94**.

The practical difficulties of working with  $\text{As}_4$  solutions has spurred the development of new arsenic starting materials for construction of polyarsenic complexes. Roesky and co-workers reported the preparation for arsenic nanoparticles using a reductive synthetic method developed by Feldmann and co-workers.<sup>128</sup> The elemental  $\text{As}^0$  nanoparticles (*nano*- $\text{As}^0$ ,  $d = 7.2 \pm 1.8$  nm) can be formed by the reduction of  $\text{AsI}_3$  with a freshly prepared solution of lithium naphthalenide at 0 °C in THF. The *nano*- $\text{As}^0$  can be isolated in a pure form as the LiI by-product is sufficiently soluble in THF and  $\text{Et}_2\text{O}$  to be washed away; this has



Scheme 29 Synthesis of lanthanide polyarsenide complexes **93** and **94**.



Scheme 30 Synthesis of lanthanide polyarsenic complexes **95**–**99**.







Scheme 34 Synthesis of samarium polyantimony complexes **104**–**107**.

equivalents of  $\text{MesSbH}_2$ ; however, stibine dehydrocoupling to give the distibane ( $\text{Sb}_2\text{H}_2\text{Mes}_2$ ) and tetrastibetane ( $\text{Sb}_4\text{Mes}_4$ ) can occur. The second reported route to **103Ln** involved the cross-dehydrocoupling reaction of one equivalent of the stibide precursor **102Ln** with one equivalent of  $\text{MesSbH}_2$  to give one equivalent each of **103Ln** ( $\text{Ln} = \text{Y}$ , quantitative; or  $\text{Dy}$ , 45%) and mesitylene, and two equivalents of hydrogen gas. Complexes **103Ln** exhibit solid state structures with  $\text{Ln}_3\text{Sb}_3$  cores akin to the arsinidiide **88Ln** and phosphinidiide **28Ln** analogues, however in **103Ln** the  $\text{Sb}_3$  unit is capped with a  $\text{Sb}^{3-}$  fragment to form a Zintl-like moiety. Complexes **103Ln** feature mean  $\text{Y-Sb}$  and  $\text{Dy-Sb}$  bond distances of 3.1211(15)–3.1420(16) Å, and 3.119(1)–3.138(1) Å, respectively. These bond distances are very similar to that of the stibide precursors **102Ln**, which exhibit  $\text{Ln-Sb}$  bond distances of 3.0987(11)–3.2008(6) and 3.092(6)–3.212(3) Å for  $\text{Y}$  and  $\text{Dy}$ , respectively. This observation differs from the analogous pnictinidiide complexes **28Ln** and **88Ln**, where the  $\text{Ln-Pn}$  distances are shorter than the pnictide precursors; this is likely due to **103Ln** exhibiting  $[\text{Sb}_4\text{Mes}_3]^{3-}$  units as opposed to discrete  $\text{RSb}^{2-}$  stibinidene ligands. The authors reported that both **102Dy** and **103Dy** show SMM behaviour, with  $U_{\text{eff}}$  values of 345 and 270  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , respectively, and both complexes exhibiting magnetic hysteresis at 1.8 K.

In 2018, Roesky and co-workers utilised  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2]$  to stabilise a range of samarium polyantimony complexes, Scheme 34.<sup>134</sup> The reaction of  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2]$  with an  $\text{Sb}/\text{Hg}$  amalgam in toluene yielded a mixture of the polyantimony complexes  $[\{\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\}_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{-}\eta^2\text{-Sb}_2)]$  (**104**) and  $[\{\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\}_2\text{Sb}_2(\mu\text{-Hg})]$  (**105**), Scheme 34. The product was dependent upon the temperature of the reaction; whilst at room temperature the primary products were **104** and **105**, if the reaction mixture was heated at 60–70 or 120 °C, the polyantimony complexes  $[\{\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\}_3(\text{Sb}_4)_2\text{Hg}]$  (**106**) or  $[\{\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\}_4(\text{Sb}_8)]$  (**107**) were isolated, respectively. Using a  $\text{Sb}/\text{Hg}$  amalgam however resulted in difficult to separate antimony products, so the authors

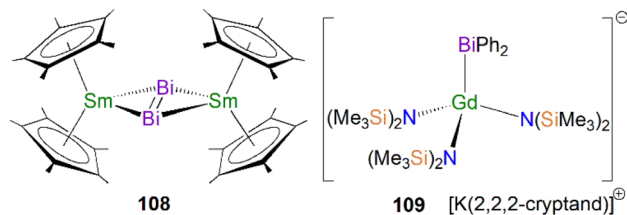
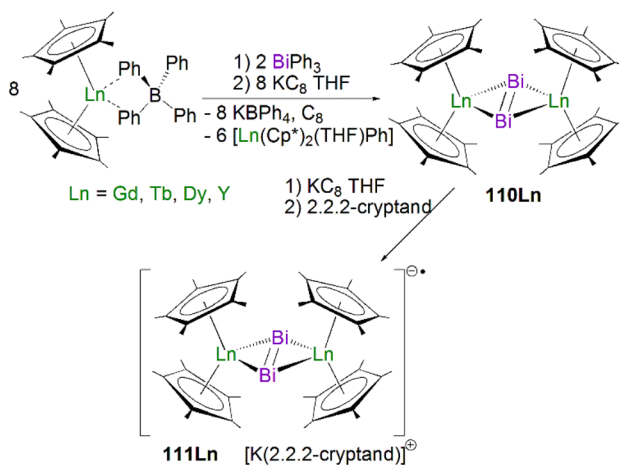


Fig. 10 Lanthanide–bismuth complexes **108** and **109**.

reported an alternate synthetic route to both **104** and **107** via the reaction of  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2]$  with antimony nanoparticles. Complex **104** exhibits an  $\text{Sm-Sb}$  bond distance of 3.2141(9) Å, which is comparable to complex **100**, whereas complex **105** demonstrates significantly shorter  $\text{Sm-Sb}$  distances of 3.0052(14)–3.0158(13) Å. Complexes **106** and **107** exhibit longer  $\text{Sm-Sb}$  bond distances of 3.2238(8)–3.3694(8) Å and 3.3134(8)–3.4119(7) Å, respectively. More recently, Roesky and co-workers have shown that  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2]$  can also be used to make 4d/4f polyantimony clusters containing a planar  $\text{Sb}_4$ -unit that is similar to that seen in **91**.<sup>135</sup>

### 6.3 Lanthanide bismuth complexes

The first example of a structurally authenticated lanthanide bismuth interaction was reported in 1991 by Evans and co-workers. The reaction of two equivalents of  $[\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2]$  with one equivalent of  $\text{BiPh}_3$  in toluene afforded  $[\{\text{Sm}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\}_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{-}\eta^2\text{-Bi}_2)]$  (**108**) in yields of up to 60%,<sup>136</sup> Fig. 10. The complex is isostructural to the diantimony complex **104** and exhibits  $\text{Sm-Bi}$  distances ranging from 3.2645(10) to 3.3108(11) Å, which are longer than that the  $\text{Sm-Sb}$  distances in **104** (3.2141(9) Å). More recent work from the Evans group has shown that the reaction of  $\text{BiPh}_3$  with the  $\text{Gd}(\text{II})$  complex  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Gd}\{\text{N}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_3]$  afforded a mononuclear  $\text{Gd}(\text{III})$ -bismuthide complex  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Gd}\{\text{N}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}_3(\text{BiPh}_2)]$  (**109**),<sup>137</sup> Fig. 10, which is the only example of a mononuclear lanthanide–bismuth compound. In the molecular structure of **109**,

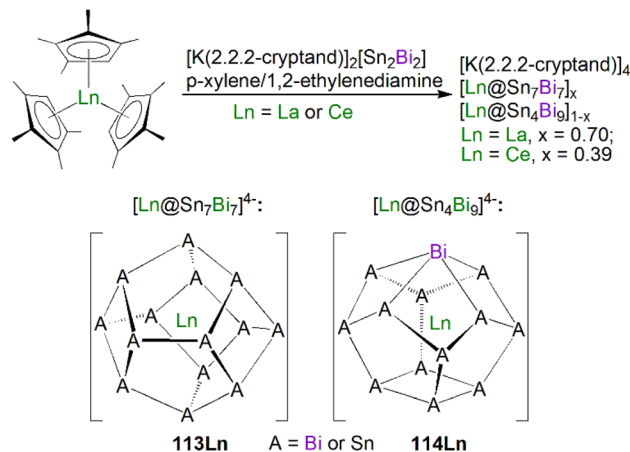


Scheme 35 Synthesis of lanthanide dibismuth complexes **110Ln**–**111Ln**.

Bi bond distance of 3.3516(5) Å is very close to the Sm–Bi bond in **108**.

Very recently, Chilton, Demir and co-workers reported two new sets of lanthanide dibismuth complexes, Scheme 35. The neutral complexes  $[\{\text{Ln}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\}_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{:}\eta^2\text{-Bi}_2)]$  (**110Ln**, Ln = Gd, Tb, Dy, Y) were prepared by the one-pot reactions of eight equivalents of  $[\text{Ln}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{BPh}_4)]$  (Ln = Gd, Tb, Dy, Y), two equivalents of triphenylbismuth, and eight equivalents of  $\text{KC}_8$  at room temperature under argon.<sup>138</sup> Complexes **110Ln** are quite soluble in toluene, thus the poor atom-efficiency of the reaction is overcome by separation from the poorly soluble byproducts. Reduction of **110Ln** using  $\text{KC}_8$  in the presence of 2.2.2-cryptand in THF afforded the radical complexes  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})][\{\text{Ln}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{:}\eta^2\text{-Bi}_2)\cdot^-]$  (**111Ln**, Ln = Gd, Tb, Dy, Y).<sup>138</sup> Complexes **111Ln** are the first examples containing the heaviest dinitrogen radical analogues of dibismuth for any d- or f-block metal. The radical nature of **111Ln** are confirmed by the characterisation data and DFT calculations. Reflecting the radical electron in the  $\pi$ -antibonding orbital of the  $\text{Bi}_2$  ligand in **111Ln**, the Bi–Bi bond distances of (2.9310(11) to 2.9450(13) Å) are longer than those in neutral **110Ln** (2.8418(10) to 2.8549(9) Å), and the Ln–Bi bond distances are shorter in **111Ln** (3.1865(8) to 3.2064(5) Å) vs. **110Ln** (3.2335(2) to 3.2611(8) Å). Magnetic studies have shown that the  $\text{Bi}_2^{3-}$  radical-bridged **111Tb** and **111Dy** are SMMs with magnetic hysteresis where the  $\text{Bi}_2^{3-}$  radical as the bridge engenders antiferromagnetic exchange coupling with the paramagnetic lanthanide ions, leading to a ferrimagnetic ground state.

Similar to antimony chemistry there have been a range of lanthanide–bismuth interactions stabilised through the isolation of Zintl anions bound to the lanthanide metal ions. In 2011, Dehnen and co-workers utilised this method to synthesise a mini-fullerene-type Zintl-lanthanide complex, Scheme 36. The reaction of  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[\text{Sn}_2\text{Bi}_2]\cdot\text{en}$  (en = 1,2-ethylenediamine) and  $[\text{Eu}(\text{C}_5\text{Me}_4\text{H})_3]$  in toluene gave  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_4[\text{Eu}@\text{Sn}_6\text{Bi}_8]$  (**112**) in a 11% yield.<sup>139</sup> The solid-state structure of **112** indicates each position of the cage is occupied by either a Sn or Bi atom in a ratio of 0.76–0.11 and 0.24–0.89, respectively. The Eu–(Sn/Bi) bond distances exhibited by **112** span a wide range of 3.3515(8)–3.5770(9) Å. The Sn/Bi atoms in the non-equatorial positions exhibit shorter mean Eu–Sn/Bi



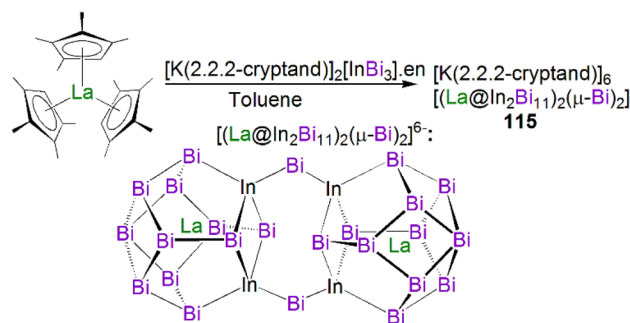
Scheme 37 Synthesis of lanthanide polybismuth Zintl anionic clusters **113Ln** and **114Ln** and representations of the polyhedral architectures. Ln–A interactions are omitted for clarity.

distances (3.4743(11) Å) compared to the equatorial distance (3.5208(15) Å). Complex **112** exhibits a short mean axial Eu–Sn/Bi distance of 3.3418(10) Å.

In 2012, Dehnen and co-workers further expanded the range of lanthanide bismuth clusters, Scheme 37; the separate reactions of  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[\text{Sn}_2\text{Bi}_2]\cdot\text{en}$  with  $[\text{Ln}(\text{C}_5\text{Me}_4\text{H})_3]$  (Ln = La or Ce) in *p*-xylene gave mixtures of tin–bismuth clusters surrounding lanthanide centres in  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_4[\text{Ln}@\text{Sn}_7\text{Bi}_7]_x[\text{Ln}@\text{Sn}_4\text{Bi}_9]_{1-x}$  (Ln = La,  $x = 0.70$ ; Ln = Ce,  $x = 0.39$ ).<sup>140</sup> The crystallographic data for both complexes demonstrate two types of cluster, the 14-vertex anion  $[\text{Ln}@\text{Sn}_7\text{Bi}_7]^{4-}$  (**113Ln**) and 13-vertex anion  $[\text{Ln}@\text{Sn}_4\text{Bi}_9]^{4-}$  (**114Ln**). Like previous Sn/Bi clusters, anions **113Ln** and **114Ln** exhibit disorder of the Sn and Bi atoms occupying the same atomic positions in the cluster. The clusters **113Ln** have similar structures to **112**, exhibiting longer mean Ln–Sn/Bi equatorial distances of 3.539(2) (La) and 3.493(3) Å (Ce) when compared to the non-equatorial distances of 3.433(2) (La) and 3.416(2) Å (Ce). Clusters **113La** and **113Ce** exhibit mean Ln–Sn/Bi axial distances of 3.426(2) and 3.436(2) Å, respectively. The second cluster type, **114Ln**, features Ln–Sn/Bi bond distances over the range of 3.107(4)–3.557(2) and 3.046(12)–3.543(3) Å for La and



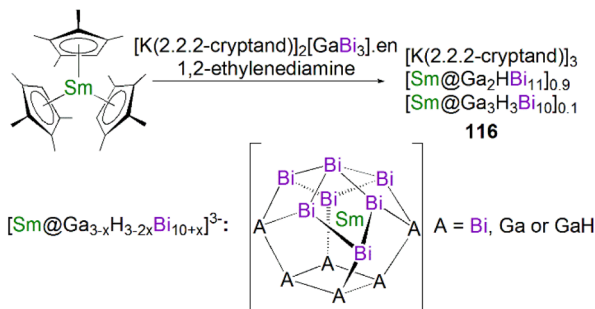
Scheme 36 Synthesis of europium polybismuth Zintl anionic clusters **112**. Eu–A interactions are omitted for clarity.



Scheme 38 Synthesis of lanthanum polybismuth Zintl anionic clusters **115** and representation of the polyhedral architecture. La–Bi interactions are omitted for clarity.







Scheme 39 Synthesis of samarium polybismuth Zintl anionic clusters **116**. Sm–Bi/A interactions are omitted for clarity.



Scheme 41 Synthesis of lanthanide polybismuth anionic clusters **121Ln**.

Ce, respectively. The authors postulated that the differences in Ln–Sn/Bi distances between the La and Ce analogues of **114La** and **114Ce** is most likely a result of the different ionic radii of La(III) and Ce(III).

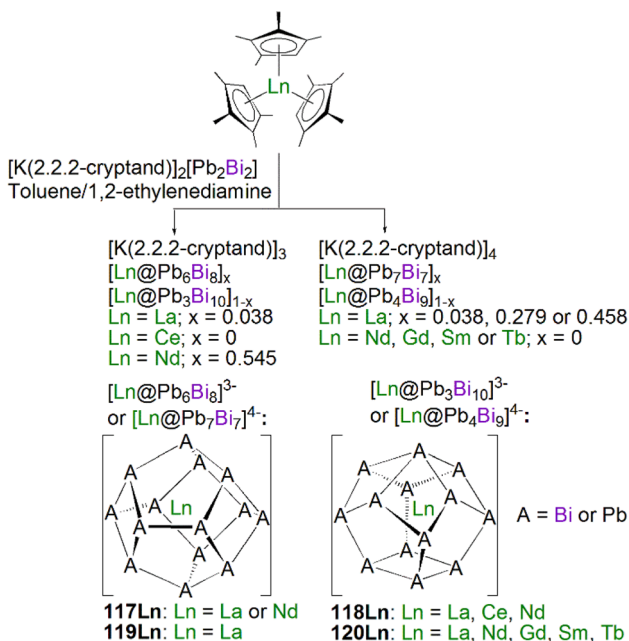
In parallel work in 2012, Dehnen and co-workers reported the synthesis of the indium metalloid bismuth Zintl cluster,  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_6[La@In_2Bi_{11}]_2(\mu\text{-}Bi)_2$  (**115**) via the reaction of  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[InBi_3] \cdot en$  with  $[La(C_5Me_4H)_3]$  in toluene in a yield of 11%,<sup>141</sup> Scheme 38. Complex **115** features two 13-vertex anions connected via two bridging bismuth atoms. The La–Bi distances exhibited by **115**, 3.1343(8)–3.5018(9) Å, are similar to that of the anion **114Ln** [3.106(4)–3.557(2) Å].

In 2014, Dehnen and co-workers utilised similar protocols to expand the number of 13-vertex lanthanide–bismuth metalloid clusters to include the gallium-substituted cage  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[Sm@Ga_2HBi_{11}]_{0.9}[Sm@Ga_3H_3Bi_{10}]_{0.1}$  (**116**) via the reaction of  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[GaBi_3] \cdot en$  with  $[Sm(C_5Me_4H)_3]$ , Scheme 39.<sup>142</sup> The authors reported that the two different

trianionic fragments feature disorder similar to the tin analogue **113Ln**, with several of the atomic positions in the cluster being occupied by Bi, Ga and GaH. Formulation of each anionic cluster was determined by the examination of a combination of techniques, namely single crystal diffraction, energy dispersive X-ray and electrospray ionisation mass spectrometry (ESI-MS), which indicated that the two fragments were present in a ratio of 92% to 8% for  $[Sm@Ga_2HBi_{11}]$  and  $[Sm@Ga_3H_3Bi_{10}]$ , respectively. The Sm–Bi/Ga distances in **116** span 3.0464(6)–3.4134(6) Å, which is similar to the other 13-vertex lanthanide cluster complexes **114Ln** and **115**.

In 2015, Dehnen and co-workers reported the synthesis of a wide range of lead bismuth cages. The separate reactions of the *in situ*-generated Zintl lead precursor  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[Pb_2Bi_2] \cdot en$  with  $[Ln(C_5Me_4H)_3]$  (Ln = La, Ce, Nd, Gd, Sm, Tb) in toluene yielded ten complexes,  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_3[Ln@Pb_6Bi_8]_x[Ln@Pb_3Bi_{10}]_{1-x}$ , ( $x = 0.038, 0$  or  $0.545$  for La, Ce or Nd respectively) or  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_4[Ln@Pb_7Bi_7]_y[Ln@Pb_4Bi_9]_{1-y}$  (Ln = La;  $y = 0.038, 0.279$  or  $0.458$ ; Ln = Nd, Sm or Tb;  $y = 0$ ), depending on the lanthanide used, Scheme 40.<sup>143</sup> All ten complexes feature a mixture of 14- and 13-vertex anions,  $\{[Ln@Pb_6Bi_8]_x\{Ln@Pb_3Bi_{10}\}_{1-x}\}^{3-}$  (**117Ln** $_{x118Ln_{1-x}}$ )<sup>3-</sup> and  $\{[Ln@Pb_7Bi_7]_y\{Ln@Pb_4Bi_9\}_{1-y}\}^{4-}$  (**119Ln** $_{y120Ln_{1-y}}$ )<sup>4-</sup>; the structures for the differing anions are analogous to those of **113Ln** and **114Ln**. Like the previously reported lanthanide bismuth cages (**114Ln** and **116**), the anionic clusters **117Ln**–**120Ln** all contain disorder, resulting in both Pb and Bi occupying the same atomic sites.

In 2021, Demir and co-workers reported the synthesis of  $[K(THF)_4]_2\{[Ln(Cp^*)_2]_2(\mu\text{-}Bi_6)\}$  (**121Ln**, Ln = Tb, Dy) by one-pot reactions of  $[Ln(Cp^*)_2(BPh_4)]$  (Ln = Tb, Dy) with triphenylbismuth in THF, followed by reduction with  $KC_8$  at 45 °C, Scheme 41.<sup>144</sup> The authors proposed that the use of  $KC_8$  induced reduction and bismuth cluster formation. The solid-state structures of **121Ln** revealed  $[Ln_2Bi_6]$  cores with lanthanide centres bridged by a rare  $[Bi_6]^{6-}$  Zintl ion. Notably, complexes **121Ln** are the first examples of a cyclic bismuth hexamer in an organometallic complex with any metal. The Ln–Bi bond distances for **121Tb** and **121Dy** are 3.055(1)–3.070(1) and 3.042(1)–3.060(1) Å, respectively, which are approximately 0.2 Å shorter than that the Sm–Bi bonds in **108** (3.2645(10)–3.3108(11) Å). The Bi–Bi distances of 3.029(1)–3.042(1) and



Scheme 40 Synthesis of lanthanide polybismuth Zintl anionic clusters **117Ln**–**120Ln**. Ln–A interactions are omitted for clarity.



3.027(1)–3.036(1) Å for **121Tb** and **121Dy**, respectively, are significantly longer than multiple Bi–Bi bonds (2.82–2.87 Å), and are comparable with Bi–Bi single bonds (>2.99 Å). Magnetic data and quantum calculations indicates strong ferromagnetic interactions between the lanthanide ions facilitated by the Zintl [Bi<sub>6</sub>]<sup>6-</sup> ligands, resulting in magnetic blocking and open hysteresis loops that are rarely observed for super exchange-coupled SMMs containing solely lanthanide ions.

## 7. Actinide heavier pnictogen complexes

In parallel with lanthanide chemistry, actinide complexes containing heavier pnictogen ligands (from As to Bi) are much rarer than actinide–phosphorus congeners. Again, these complexes tend to form multi-nuclear clusters with the heavier pnictogen ligands bridged by two or more metal centres, thus well-defined mononuclear species are sparse. However, significant advances have been achieved in actinide arsenic multiple bonding chemistry that are discussed in this section. In contrast, there are currently no examples of actinide complexes featuring multiple bonding interactions with antimony or bismuth ligands.

### 7.1 Actinide arsenic complexes

In 1994, Using a similar synthetic approach used for the preparation of **77**, Scherer and co-workers synthesised the first examples of an actinide polyarsenic complex  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}})_2\}_2(\mu^2\text{-}\eta^3\text{-As}_6)]$  (**122**) by the treatment of  $[\{\text{Cp}^{\text{tt}}\}_2\text{Th}(\eta^4\text{-C}_4\text{H}_6)]$  with elemental As<sub>4</sub> in boiling xylene,<sup>145</sup> Fig. 11. Complex **122** is also the first structurally characterised actinide complex containing metal–arsenic bonds, which is isostructural to the polyphosphorus analogue **77**. In the molecular structure of **122**, the Th–As bond distances span the range of 2.913(2) to 3.044(2) Å. However, it would be more than 20 years before more actinide–arsenic complexes started to emerge, reflecting the synthetic challenges of the area.

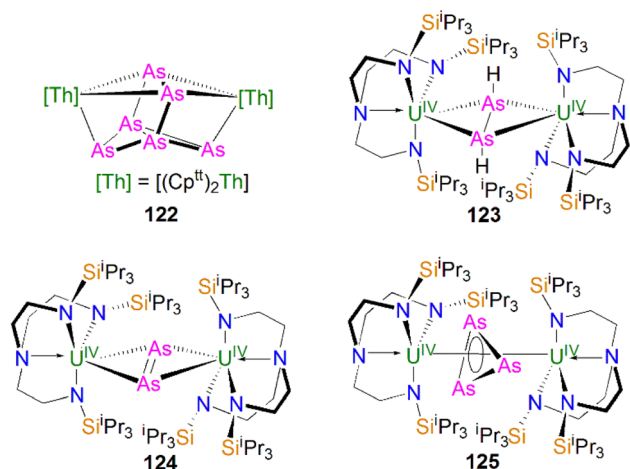


Fig. 11 Examples containing actinide–arsenic bonds **122**–**125**.

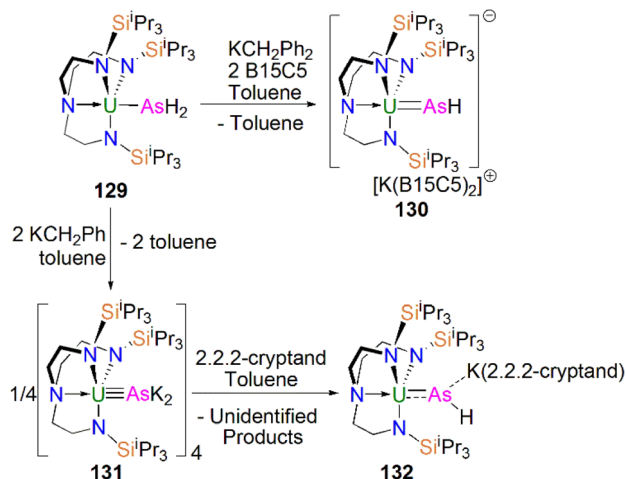


Scheme 42 Synthesis of thorium arsenide and diarsene complexes **126**–**128**.

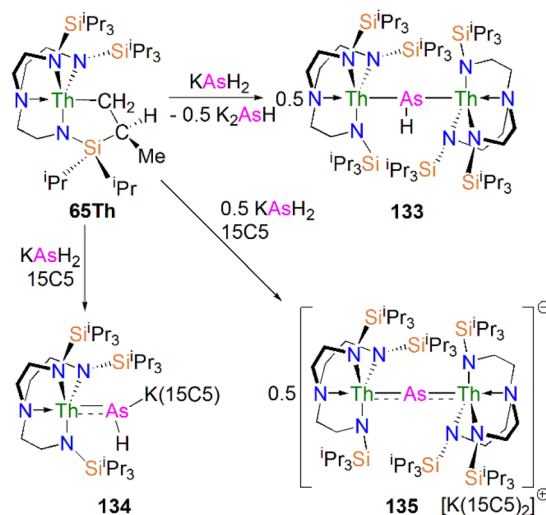
In 2015, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers reported the diuranium complex  $[\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{:}\eta^2\text{-HASAsH})\}]$  (**123**)<sup>146</sup> by the reaction of  $[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{THF})][\text{BPh}_4]$  with  $\text{KAsH}_2$  in 1 : 1.4 ratio *via* a dehydrocoupling process, Fig. 11. On one occasion, the uranium diarsenic complex  $[\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^2\text{:}\eta^2\text{-As}_2)]$  (**124**)<sup>146</sup> was also obtained from the reaction in less than 1% yield, which can be viewed as a fully dehydrocoupled product, Fig. 11. The solid-state structures of **123** and **124** are similar to each other, though the As–As bond distance in **123** (2.4102(13) Å) is longer than that in **124** (2.2568(14) Å), indicating As–As single and As=As double bond characters, respectively. The +4 oxidation state of **123** was confirmed by magnetometry data, so the diarsene ligand has been reduced to its diarsane-1,2-diide form. Complex **123** is the first example of HASAsH complex for any d- or f-block metal. The characterisation data and theoretical calculations supported the presence of back-bonding-type interactions from uranium to the HASAsH  $\pi^*$ -orbital, indicating the strong  $\pi$ -accepting ability of this ligand. In other work, the authors also reported the structure of  $[\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})_2(\mu\text{-}\eta^3\text{:}\eta^3\text{-As}_3)]$  (**125**)<sup>147</sup> Fig. 11, but the low yield for this compound prevented further characterisation.

In between 2016 and 2021, Walensky and co-workers reported the synthesis of thorium arsenic complexes, Scheme 42. Using methane elimination, the authors prepared the bridging dithorium arsenide complex  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-AsMes})_2\}]$  (**126**) and the arsenide complexes  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{HASAr})_2]$  (Ar = Mes, Tripp) by the reactions of  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{Me})_2]$  under different conditions.<sup>148</sup> It





Scheme 43 Synthesis of the uranium arsenidene complexes **130**, arsenido **131**, and arsenidiide **132** from the arsenide **129**.



Scheme 44 Synthesis of thorium arsenidiide and arsenido complexes **133–135**.

was found that  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{HASMes})_2]$  is unstable at room temperature and converts to the dehydrocoupled product  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\mu\text{-As}_2\text{Mes}_2)]$  (**127**) with the release of  $\text{H}_2$  gas. Applying the same synthetic approach, the uranium analogues of **126** and **127** were prepared. With the bulkier substituents on the arsenide group,  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2(\text{HASTripp})_2]$  is thermally stable at room temperature and its reactivity with *tert*-butyl isocyanide  $^t\text{BuNC}$  to give an arsaazaallene product was investigated.<sup>149</sup> The authors reported that deprotonation of  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\{\text{AsH}(\text{Tripp})\}_2]$  with one equivalent of  $\text{KN}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$  gave  $[\text{Th}(\text{Cp}^*)_2\{\mu\text{-As}(\text{Tripp})\}\{\mu\text{-AsH}(\text{Tripp})\}\text{K}_2]$  (**128**) in yields of 77%.<sup>86</sup> The Th–As bond distances in **126** (2.8787(6) Å) and **127** (2.923(2)/2.971(3) Å) are quite long; by contrast, **128** exhibits a short Th–As distance of 2.7994(4) Å, indicating a multiple bonding interaction. This was probed computationally, revealing a Th=As Wiberg bond index (1.30) nearly twice that of the Th–As single bonds (0.70).

In 2015, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers adapted the synthetic protocols used for the preparation of the uranium phosphinidene complex **64K**. Deprotonation of **129** with benzyl potassium in the presence of two equivalents of  $\text{B15C5}$  produced the analogous arsenidene complex  $[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{AsH})]$  (**130**),<sup>147</sup> Scheme 43. Most surprisingly, double deprotonation of **129** by two equivalents of benzyl potassium afforded the arsenido complex  $[\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\mu\text{-As})(\mu\text{-K}_2)\}_4]$  (**131**).<sup>147</sup> Attempts to abstract the potassium cations from **131** using 2.2.2-cryptand resulted in formation of the arsenidiide  $[\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\mu\text{-AsH})\}\{\text{K}(\text{2.2.2-cryptand})\}]$  (**132**),<sup>147</sup> with K/H exchange from solvent. The authors additionally reported an As–H stretch in the ATR-IR spectrum of **130** at  $1857 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . Complex **131** is a tetramer with an  $\text{As}_4\text{K}_6$  adamantane-type core, with the bridging potassium ions self-evidently playing an indispensable role in stabilising the arsenido  $[\text{As}]^{3-}$  centres, *cf.* formation of **132**.

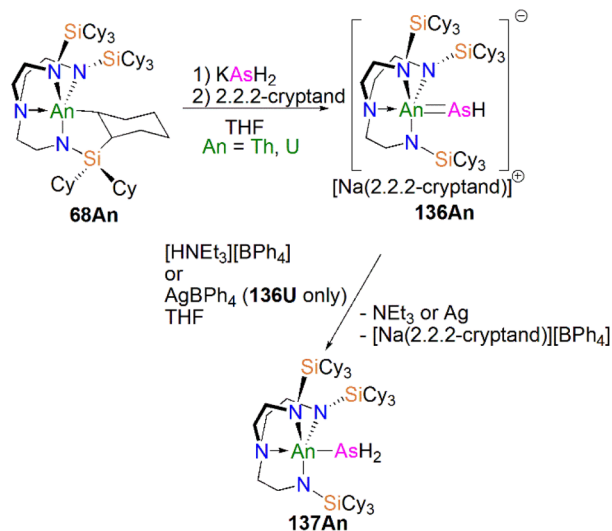
The U–As distance of 2.7159(13) Å in the terminal arsenidene complex **130** is shorter than that seen for the potassium-capped arsenidiide complex **132** (2.7489(10) Å) and the arsenido complex **131** (2.730(2)–2.775(2) Å), which is due to the

coordination of the potassium ion (or ions) to the arsenic centre(s). Computational analysis showed highly polarised single, double, and triple uranium arsenic bonding interactions for U–AsH<sub>2</sub> (**129**), U=AsH (**130**) and U≡As (**131**), with substantial 5f orbital contributions to these bonds.

In 2017, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers adapted the protonolysis chemistry used to access **67**, **70**, and **71**, performing protonolysis reactions of **65Th** with different ratios of  $\text{KAsH}_2$  both with and without 15C5 to synthesise a range of Th–As complexes, Scheme 44, including the parent arsenidiide  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}_2(\mu\text{-AsH})]$  (**133**), the arsenidiide  $[\{\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\mu\text{-AsH})\}\{\text{K}(\text{15C5})\}]$  (**134**), and the bridging arsenido  $[\text{K}(\text{15C5})_2][\{\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}_2(\mu\text{-As})]$  (**135**), Scheme 44.<sup>150</sup> The authors reported that attempts to prepare a terminal arsenidene  $[\text{K}(\text{L})_n][\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{AsH})]$  (L = crown ethers or 2.2.2-cryptand) under various conditions were unsuccessful. Complex **134** could also be readily prepared in a 70% yield *via* the deprotonation of the parent arsenide  $[\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\text{AsH}_2]$  (the Th analogue of **129**) with one equivalent of benzyl potassium in the presence of one equivalent of 15C5. The ATR-IR spectra of **133** and **134** exhibited As–H stretches of  $1930$  and  $1922 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ , respectively. Consistent with the arsenido nature of **135**, no As–H stretch was observed in the ATR-IR spectrum of **135**.

Complexes **133–135** have respective Th–As distances of 2.9619(6)/3.0286(6), 2.8565(7) and 2.8063(14)/2.8060(14) Å, which are shorter than that of the parent arsenide  $[\text{Th}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\text{AsH}_2]$  [3.065(3) Å]. When compared to the sum of the covalent single and double bond radii of Th and As of 2.96 and 2.57 Å, respectively, these Th–As bonds are relatively long and clearly polarised. An acute Th–As–H bond angle of  $79.1(2)^\circ$  in **134** suggested that a Th⋯H ‘agostic-type’ interaction could be present. The solid state structure of **135** is analogous to the thorium phosphido complex **70**, with a symmetrical ThAsTh core and near linear Th–As–Th angle of  $177.04(6)^\circ$ . In line with the multiple bonding interaction in the ThAsTh linkage, the Th–As distances exhibited by **135** (2.8063(14)/2.8060(14) Å) are





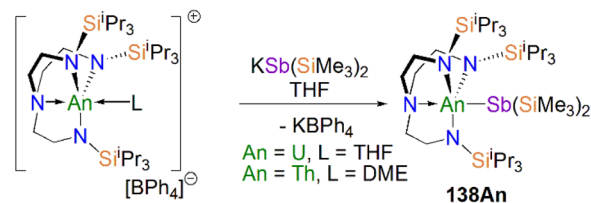
Scheme 45 Synthesis of terminal actinide parent arsinidene and arsenide complexes **136An** and **137An**.

shorter than those in **133** (2.9619(6)/3.0286(6) Å). The authors reported that attempts to prepare a terminal  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}}$  thorium arsenido  $\text{Th}\equiv\text{As}$  species using the similar double deprotonation method for **132** proved unsuccessful; indeed, closely related work attempting to construct thorium nitrides supported by  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}}$  consistently resulted in the formation of parent imido complexes.

In 2022, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers showed that a terminal parent arsinidene at thorium (and uranium for comparison) could be isolated using the bulky  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TCHS}}$  ligand, Scheme 45. Specifically, reaction of **68An** with  $\text{KAsH}_2$  in the presence of 2.2.2-cryptand in THF afforded directly, in good yields,  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})][\text{An}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{AsH})]$  (**136An**), Scheme 45.<sup>84</sup> The molecular structures of **136An** confirmed the presence of terminal arsinidene ( $\text{AsH}$ )<sup>2-</sup> units that are well-protected by the tricyclohexylsilyl groups. The An–As bond distances of 2.8521(8) Å and 2.7581(6) Å for **136Th** and **136U**, respectively, are statistically invariant to those in **134** and **130**, indicating multiple bonding interactions in these An = AsH linkages that were confirmed by DFT calculations. ‘Agostic-type’ interactions between the metal ions and arsinidene ligands are observed in both structures, with An–As–H angles of 60.50(12)° and 61.18(12)°, respectively. In addition, ATR-IR spectroscopy revealed As–H stretches at 1867 and 1875  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  for **136Th** and **136U**, respectively. The authors found that treatment of **136An** with  $[\text{HNEt}_3][\text{BPh}_4]$  in THF results in the isolation of the parent arsenide complexes  $[\text{An}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TCHS}})(\text{AsH}_2)]$  (**137An**) in good yields, Scheme 45; oxidation of **136U** also gave the protonated product **137U**.<sup>84</sup>

## 7.2 Actinide 2-arsaethynolate complexes

Following the aforementioned developments in f-element 2-phosphethynolate chemistry, the chemistry of the corresponding 2-arsaethynolate anion ( $\text{OCAs}$ )<sup>-</sup> is beginning to emerge. In 2018, Meyer and co-workers reported reactions of the U(III)



Scheme 46 Synthesis of the actinide–antimony complexes **138An**.

complex  $[\text{U}\{\{\text{Ad,MeArO}\}_3\text{N}\}(\text{DME})][\{\{\text{Ad,MeArO}\}_3\text{N}\}^{3-}]$  = trianion of tris(2-hydroxy-3-(1-adamantyl)-5-methylbenzyl)amine with one equivalent of  $[\text{Na}(\text{OCAs})(\text{dioxane})_3]$ , and 2.2.2-cryptand giving  $[\text{Na}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})][\{\{\text{U}(\{\{\text{Ad,MeArO}\}_3\text{N}\})(\text{THF})\}(\mu\text{-O})\{\{\text{U}(\{\{\text{Ad,MeArO}\}_3\text{N}\})(\text{CAS})\}\}]]$ .<sup>151</sup> In contrast, using two equivalents of  $[\text{Na}(\text{OCAs})(\text{dioxane})_3]$  yielded the binuclear,  $\mu$ -oxo bridged diuranium(IV) complex  $[\text{Na}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[\{\{\text{U}(\{\{\text{Ad,MeArO}\}_3\text{N}\})(\mu\text{-O})(\mu\text{-AsCAS})\}\}]]$ , which contains a  $\mu\text{-}\eta^1\text{-}\eta^1$ -coordinated ( $\text{AsCAS}$ )<sup>2-</sup> ligand.<sup>151</sup> In 2019, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers reported the first U–OCAs complex  $[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{OCAs})]$ , and treatment of this complex with  $\text{KC}_8$  and 2.2.2-cryptand as an *in situ* electrode mixture yielded  $[\text{K}(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})][\{\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}_2\{\mu\text{-}\eta^2(\text{OAs})\}:\eta^2(\text{CAS})\text{-OCAs}\}]$  which is the As analogue of **75**, with a highly reduced bent, carbene-like OCAs-ligand.<sup>152</sup> In contrast, reduction or photolysis of  $[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{OCAs})]$  with  $[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})]$  gave the mixed-valence arsenido complex  $[\{\{\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\}_2(\mu\text{-As})\}]$ , in very low yield, or **123**, respectively.<sup>152</sup> All of these results demonstrate the challenges of using the OCAs ligand to synthesise actinide–arsenic bonds and also that the synthetic methods and ancillary ligands drive the ( $\text{OCAs}$ )<sup>-</sup> bond cleavage chemistry in very different directions.

## 7.3 Actinide antimony complexes

In 2017, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers reported the isolation and characterisation of the first discrete (*i.e.* not multi-centre) An–Sb bonds (An=U and Th) from the reactions of  $[\text{An}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})(\text{L})][\text{BPh}_4]$  (An=U, L=THF; An=Th, L=DME) and  $\text{KSb}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$  in THF, yielding  $[\text{An}(\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}})\{\text{Sb}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}]$  (**138An**), Scheme 46.<sup>153</sup> The closely related uranium complex  $[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}})\{\text{Sb}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}]$  with a less sterically bulky supporting ligand could also be prepared using the same synthetic approach.<sup>153</sup>

Complexes **138Th** and **138U** exhibit An–Sb distances of 3.2849(3) and 3.2089(6) Å, respectively. The authors observed a shorter U–Sb bond in **138U** (3.2089(6) Å) compared to  $[\text{U}(\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}})\{\text{Sb}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}]$  (3.2437(8) Å), likely a result of the differing sterics between the  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}}$  and  $\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}}$  ligand



Scheme 47 Synthesis of the uranium–bismuthide complex **139**.





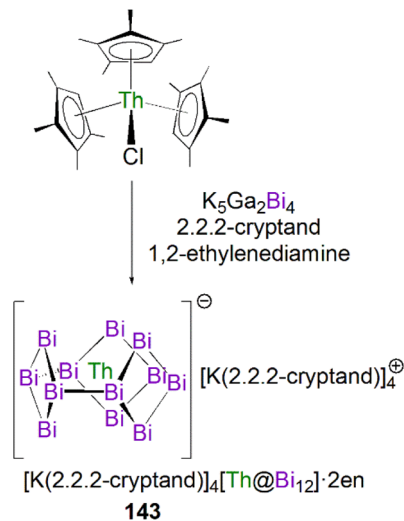
Scheme 48 Synthesis of the uranium–bismuth Zintl anionic clusters 140–142. U–Bi bonds are omitted for clarity.

systems; the latter results in more orthogonal, and presumably weaker, binding of the stibide ligand. The analogous U–P and U–As complexes were also prepared in that study, revealing increasingly pyramidalised pnictide centres as the group is descended.

#### 7.4 Actinide bismuth complexes

In the same publication describing the work in Section 7.3, Liddle, Scheer, and co-workers also reported the synthesis and characterisation of the first two-centre-two-electron (2c–2e) U–Bi bond,  $[U(\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}})\{\text{Bi}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2\}]$  (**139**), by the reaction of  $[U(\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}})(\text{THF})][\text{BPh}_4]$  with  $\text{KBi}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$  in THF, Scheme 47.<sup>153</sup> It was found that the U–Bi bond could not be stabilised using the bulkier  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}}$  ligands, likely due to steric overload. Complex **139** exhibits U–Bi distances of 3.3208(4) Å which is longer than the above An–Sb bonds. Whilst the U–Bi bond in **139** was isolable, no Th–Bi bond could be isolated with  $\text{Tren}^{\text{TIPS}}$  or  $\text{Tren}^{\text{DMBS}}$ , underscoring the fragility of these linkages. Complex **139** is the only monomeric actinide complex containing a discrete bond to Bi to date.

Dehnen and co-workers reported actinide bismuth clusters in 2016. Reaction of  $[U(\text{C}_5\text{Me}_4\text{H})_3]$  with  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[EE'Bi_2]\cdot en$  ( $E = \text{Ga}, \text{Tl}, E' = \text{Bi}; E = E' = \text{Pb}$ ) in 1,2-ethylenediamine gave either  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_3[U@Bi_{12}]$  (**140**),  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_2[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})(en)][U@Ti_2Bi_{11}]$  (**141**) or  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_3[U@Pb_7Bi_7]_{0.66}[U@Pb_4Bi_9]_{0.34}$  (**142**), Scheme 48.<sup>154</sup> The structure of the trianionic fragment of **140** is analogous to the antimony cluster **101Ln**, exhibiting longer equatorial U–Bi bond distances (3.463(3)–3.545(3) Å) than the non-equatorial U–Bi bond distances (3.119(3)–3.167(3) Å). Complex **141** exhibits a 13-vertex cluster that is analogous to **114Ln**, with U–Bi



Scheme 49 Synthesis of the thorium–bismuth Zintl anionic clusters **143**. The Th–Bi bonds are omitted for clarity.

distances ranging from 3.068(1) to 3.4515(6) Å. Complex **142** has an isomorphous structure to **118Ln/120Ln**, exhibiting U–Bi bond distances ranging from 2.885(9) to 3.6885(12) Å.

In 2021, Dehnen and co-workers extended this Bi cluster chemistry to include the first example of a thorium bismuth cluster containing Th–Bi bonds, Scheme 49. The authors reported that reaction of  $[(\text{C}_5\text{Me}_4\text{H})_3\text{Th}(\text{Cl})]$  with  $K_5Ga_2Bi_4$ , which can be used as an *in situ* source of  $[\text{GaBi}_3]^{2-}$  and  $\text{Bi}_4^{2-}$ , in the presence of 2.2.2-cryptand in 1,2-ethylenediamine afforded  $[K(2.2.2\text{-cryptand})]_4[Th@Bi_{12}]\cdot 2en$  (**143**) as black, prismatic crystals, Scheme 49.<sup>155</sup> The structure of **143** was confirmed by single-crystal X-ray diffraction and the Th:Bi ratio within the cluster was verified by micro-X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy. The molecular structure revealed Bi–Bi bond distances over a relatively small range (3.0420(14)–3.132(1) Å) and Th–Bi bond lengths (3.2104(11)–3.5908(9) Å) that are comparable to the An–Bi bonds in **139–142**. Magnetic data and theoretical studies on **143** confirm the formal assignment as  $\text{Th}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Bi}_{12}^{8-}$  with a remarkable ring current strength of 24.8 nAT<sup>−1</sup> for  $[Th@Bi_{12}]^{4-}$  (and 23.7 nAT<sup>−1</sup> for  $\text{Bi}_{12}^{8-}$ ). This is much larger than in 6π-aromatic benzene (11.4 nAT<sup>−1</sup>), but close to that in 26π-aromatic porphine (25.3 nAT<sup>−1</sup>), despite the much smaller number of 2π-electrons involved. The aromatic nature of  $[Th@Bi_{12}]^{4-}$  extends aromaticity to the heaviest all-metal inorganic system.

## 8. Conclusions and outlook

Although f-element heavy pnictogen chemistry initially progressed quite slowly for many decades, with the resurgence of non-aqueous f-element chemistry momentum in this area has increased significantly in recent years, as evidenced by the burgeoning array of novel metal-heavy-pnictogen bond types that are now known. These well-characterised compounds have enabled us to secure new structural motifs and probe the nature of f-element ligand chemical bonds to further deepen our



understanding of chemical bonding with increasingly heavy ions in non-relativistic to relativistic regimes. Overall, f-element heavier pnictogen chemistry is developing well but there are certainly numerous opportunities to advance knowledge and understanding in this burgeoning field.

Looking forward, there are several appealing directions for researchers to explore in this area: (1) in general terms, f-element-phosphorus chemistry is maturing, but arsenic and especially antimony and bismuth are poorly developed – bringing the latter three to the same level of maturity as phosphorus will do much to elucidate periodic trends; (2) there are still relatively few actinide–pnictidene/ido multiple bond complexes and even fewer lanthanide analogues – however, the reports of isolated complexes to date suggests that there is ample scope to secure new Ln and An double and triple bonds to P, As, Sb, and Bi if the right supporting ligands can be identified and coupled with suitable synthetic approaches; (3) heavy analogues of dinitrogen are now known and even as radical species, but examples remain few in number – developing better synthetic approaches would open the area up and provide interesting electronic and physicochemical properties and potential atom-transfer methodologies; and, (4) though relatively few in number, it is already clear that f-element pnictogen clusters can exhibit novel magnetic and aromaticity properties – expanding the range of such compounds can only enhance our understanding of these fundamental phenomena.

## Author contributions

J. D., D. P. M. and S. T. L. designed the structure of the review. All authors contributed to the writing of the article.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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