

Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry CV3 3GW. Tel (02476) 302912 Fax (02476) 639556
Affiliated to the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (Registered Charity Number 209200)
and Herpetofauna Groups of Britain & Ireland.
www.wartsoc.co.uk

Editorial

Hello there WART fans! It's another year and another newsletter! With all the doom and gloom in the world at the moment you can count on nature to get on with itself and bring a smile to everyone's faces. This newsletter will epitomise why amphibians and reptiles are so amazing, and if you don't smile at least once whilst reading it, then its time to shed this newsletter editor like the skin of grass snake. 2009 brings with it new seasons and new challenges and hopefully herpetofauna in this county will go from strength to strength. So let's start then with some....

Forthcoming Events for your diary.....

Saturday 14th March Amphibian Surveying Workshop 2.00pm

This workshop is aimed at the non professional who is interested in helping us survey amphibians on our nature reserves. Learn more about the ecology and behaviour of amphibians. The workshop will involve both an indoor ID session to help you improve your ID skills, and then an evening visit to an amphibian site to see the animals in their natural environment. Refreshments provided.

Cost: £6.50 per person which includes a free Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team (WART) membership. If you book on the reptile and the amphibian workshop then one is free. Places are confirmed upon receipt of payment in advance.

Saturday 18th April Reptile Surveying Workshop 10.00am

This workshop is aimed at the non professional who is interested in helping us survey reptiles on our nature reserves. Learn more about the ecology and behaviour of amphibians. The workshop will involve both an indoor ID session to help you improve your ID skills in the morning, and then an afternoon visit to a reptile site to see the animals in their natural environment. Refreshments provided.

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All Frogs Are Edible Frogs It Seems

Everyone is well aware of the threats facing frogs; habitat destruction and climate change being well publicized in the press. However, there is a new threat on the horizon it seems....Human hunger.

[David Bickford](#) of the National University of Singapore and his team are calling for greater regulation of the global market for frog meat, in order to avoid species being "eaten to extinction".

According to UN figures, global trade in frog meat has soared in the past 20 years. France and the US are the two largest importers, with France importing between 2500 and 4000 tonnes each year since 1995. Indonesia exports more than 5000 tonnes annually, mostly to Europe. Frogs' legs are also very popular in Asian cuisine.

Bickford estimates that about 180 million to a billion frogs are harvested each year worldwide. "That's based on both sound data and an estimate of consumption for just Indonesia and China," he says.

Article courtesy of [New Scientist Magazine](#).



Common frog by Neil Aldridge

Toads on Roads



Toads on Roads 2009

It's that time of year again when amphibians start thinking about making their annual trek to the breeding ponds. Unfortunately for them us nasty humans have successfully put roads in the way of many of their historic routes. As a result thousands of toads die on our roads each year. To combat this WART have teamed up with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to pilot a new Toads on Roads Rescue Scheme. Rather than the traditional method of visiting known sites in the dark armed with torches and buckets, this year in trial locations we will be putting up fences along known toad crossing routes, with a bucket sunk into the soil periodically to catch toads as they try to navigate around the fence. The buckets are then emptied by volunteers on a regular basis reducing the danger to volunteers assisting in the scheme whilst at the same time hopefully increasing the survival crossing rates. This year we will be concentrating on a few sites to study the success of the project, which if successful will be rolled out to more sites in subsequent years.



New Meaning To The Phrase "My Old Man"

A rare New Zealand reptile has become a father, possibly for the first time, at the age of 111.

Henry a tuatara arrived at Southland Museum in the South Island city of Invercargill in 1970 and, his keepers say, soon became overweight and idle. He was known for his foul temper and had a tendency to attack other tuatara - forcing the museum to keep him in solitary confinement for many years.

The keepers of Henry had thought he was past his prime - especially after showing no interest in females during 40 years in captivity. But he mated with 80-year-old Mildred last July and 11 of the eggs she produced have now hatched. Henry's keepers have put his newfound vigour down to a recent operation to remove a tumour from his bottom. Since his operation, Museum tuatara curator Lindsay Hazley said he had had a "major personality transplant".

Tuatara, which are found only in New Zealand, are sometimes referred to as "living fossils". They are the only surviving members of a family of species which walked the Earth with the dinosaurs more than 200 million years ago.



Article courtesy of www.bbc.co.uk

Pond Creation Project in 2009!

WART are in the early stages of liaising with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the [Herpetological Conservation Trust](#) over the creation of new ponds on Trust reserves. More information will follow in future correspondence but it is likely that the pond creation projects will happen in the autumn of 2009 and will involve contractors and volunteers. It'll be a great opportunity for WART members to get their hands dirty and get involved in a truly exciting new project. So watch this space for further details!....

Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team 2008 Report

WART remains the one-stop shop for herpetofauna conservation in Warwickshire with important links with [Warwickshire Wildlife Trust](#) (WWT), the Biological Record Office, County Ecologist, Natural England and local Councils.

The committee met three times in 2008 and 2 newsletters were published.

WART participated in 'Toads on Roads 2008' by checking the Dept of Transport sites to see if toads were still crossing here. Several of these sites are believed to be negative and there are two active sites - one on the DoT list and a new one at Meriden. Records have been sent to Froglife.

Three committee members were involved in the IOZ chytrid survey and it has been confirmed that the populations sampled have a clean bill of health.

Two training days in partnership with WWT for amphibians and reptiles respectively were undertaken in 2008 and thanks is given to the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for providing a venue for these training events at their offices at Brandon Marsh. These courses were specifically aimed at the non-professional and we asked for a £6.50 booking fee, which covered the cost of WART membership and refreshments. This strategy of course is guaranteed to increase WART membership and NARRS surveyors. Both workshops were well attended with attendees on both courses well into double figures.

Amphibian emergence (in particular newts) was delayed by cold weather and few great crested newts were recorded in ponds before the middle of March. The amphibian workshop took place on the 15th March, which coincided (by accident) with the first period of rainfall since the start of February. The evening element of the workshop included a torch search of a cluster of great crested newt breeding ponds on the outskirts of Coventry.

A small number of newts were recorded within the ponds and the party were also rewarded for tolerating the wet conditions by witnessing the first strong wave of newts migrating back to the ponds. At least 30 great crested newts were recorded and at least a similar number of smooth newts migrating south towards the ponds. The group were also able to identify newts emerging from small crevices as well as identifying areas where migrating newts could become trapped on their return to the ponds.

The reptile workshop was similarly affected by cool weather conditions and the planned visit to a known

common lizard site was replaced with an informative exploration of grass snake habitat at Brandon Marsh. No snakes were found but Ian Jelley was kind enough to bring some slowworms for the group to see and Natalie Walker had some adder and grass snake sloughs for the group to look at and compare.

Ian Jelley has been appointed as a conservation advisor to a Coventry school that has a cluster of great crested newt breeding ponds within its grounds. Ian wears two hats as part of his role, one is his involvement with WART and the other is his post as Reserves Officer with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. This appointment is driven by the BREEAM initiative and could be a very affective mechanism for ensuring continued conservation management following development work. Other groups may be interested in knowing more about this initiative or may have further experiences of the BREEAM process.

WART have been involved in the review of the Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull's Biodiversity Action Plan for the adder and great crested newt. The adder is on a negative trend (extinct?) and crested newt status remains the same. We still hear of reports of adder sightings most of which turn out to be grass snakes. The search for a receptor site for two population restoration projects is a high priority for next year.

Following the sudden death of Nigel in August the committee realised how much he did for WART. He kept tabs on the membership, database, biological recording protocols with the BRC and looked after our website. Fortunately WWT are now looking after the membership and BRC will coordinate the amphibian & reptile records. At the time of writing we have yet to find a new database manager. Money raised in Nigel's memory will be used for herpetological conservation on WWT reserves.

Jan Clemons
WART Chair



Slow worms by Nigel Clemons

Committee

Chair - Jan Clemons

Vice-Chair – Ian Jelley

Secretary – Natalie walker

Treasurer – Howard Eccles

Membership secretary – Ian Jelley

Newsletter Editor – Ian Jelley

Ordinary members – Serena Eccles, Ian Tanner, Becky

May, Lucy Cash

CONTACTS

Jan Clemons

Chairperson 34 Montalt Road, Cheylesmore,

Coventry, CV3 5LU.

Tel 024 7650 6416

e-mail janice.clemons@virgin.net

Howard Eccles, Treasurer

42 Moseley Road, Kenilworth CV8 2AQ

Tel 01926 858378.

Ian Jelley, Vice Chair, Membership Secretary and Newsletter Editor

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Brandon Marsh Nature

Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry, CV33GW

Tel 024 7630 2912

e-mail ian.jelley@wkw.org.uk

Natalie Walker, Secretary

Flat 4, Wentworth Court

Kingsbury Road, Erdington,

Birmingham

B24 8QN

Tel: 07789 860354

Email: natalie.walker@arup.com

Illustrations by Nicola Angell and Lucy Cash.

Photographs by Lucy Cash and Natalie Walker.

Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to

Ian Jelley, ian.jelley@wkw.org.uk



Toad by Philip Precey