



Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

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Affiliated to the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (Registered Charity Number 209200)
and the British Herpetological Society (Registered Charity Number 205666)

Patron: Ken Livingstone MP

WART NEWSLETTER: ISSUE NO. 19 SPRING 1999

(To go out with next Herpline? - contact Jan)

Warwickshire RINGs Natural History Fair

Saturday 13 March 1999

10.30am - 4.00pm

Admission free

Kenilworth School, Leyes Lane, Kenilworth

Discover the wide range of natural history activities available in Warwickshire

Featuring WART along with other wildlife groups including those for badgers and bats

Demonstrations, games, talks, hands on exhibits, computers and information technology, competitions, posters, real wild plants and animals, refreshments, wildlife books

Including "Pick up a Pebble": a project to discover more about ice movements and distribution of glacial erratics within Warwickshire. Bring some pebbles from your garden to identify for the database in the Warwickshire Geological Records Centre

A Science Week 1999 event

Membership reminder

Subscriptions are now due. Still excellent value at £3.50 per household! Please continue to support WART. A renewal form is attached to this newsletter.

Herpetofauna Workers' Manual

Edited by Tony Gent and Steve Gibson. 1998. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

The Herpetofauna Workers' Manual has now been published and is available at £10 each to WART members (normal price £20).

The Manual was written by 14 herp workers commissioned by JNCC to produce text on their areas of expertise. It includes information on surveying, identification, catching and handling, marking and recognition of animals, prevalent threats to conservation status, habitats and their management, amphibians and reptiles and the law, site assessment and protection, translocations, herpetofauna groups, involving other people and health and safety.

Contact Jan Clemons.

WART Work-Parties at Kenilworth Common

The Kenilworth Common work-party meets at the railway bridge on Common Lane, on the first Sunday of each month, 10 am - 1 pm. Contact: Howard Eccles.
Dates coming up: 7th March,.....

Dunchurch Toads

This annual survey is now in its 10th year and has shown declining numbers of toads. If you would like to help with this year's count contact Jan Clemons.

Survey that pond!

Springtime is fast approaching, so get the nets and wellies out and plan which ponds to visit. Remember, if we don't know the wildlife is there, we can't protect it. WART now has 2 pairs of waders - contact Jan Clemons for details.

Please keep an eye out for flat toads, too! (see "Toads and Roads".)

Send any records you take to Jan and Nigel Clemons, who hold the WART database.

Toads and Roads

Toads don't get on well with roads, but they can be aided by the designation of a toad crossing point. Signs can be put up for the duration of the migration period, and Toad Patrols carry the toads across the road. However you first need to know where they like to cross the road.

Listed below are the local toad crossing sites from the Herpetofauna Workers Guide 1998. As you can see, some of the records are incomplete or vague; there is also the possibility that the toad population may now have died out, or that frogs were mis-identified as toads.

Armsbridge		
Bericote Road		
	Balsall Common	SP 23 77
Heath Lane	Brinklow	SP 43 79
Kingston Lane	Claverdon	SP 185 638
Tattlebank	Claverdon	SP 18 63
Alderman's Green	Coventry	SP 36 83
A45	Kenilworth	SP 29 70
Crackley Lane	Kenilworth	SP 291 735
Farmer Ward Road	Kenilworth	SP 29 71
Hampton Road	Knowle	SP 187 777
St. Helen's Road	Leamington Spa	SP 319 644
	Leek Wootton	SP 28 68
Catesby Road	Rugby	
Trevor White Drive	Rugby	
	Snitterfield	SP 21 59

We would like WART members to check sites near them and tell us whether these are utilised crossing sites, or perhaps you know that the pond no longer exists. It would also be helpful to inform us of any additional crossing sites that you know of.

WART member in local newspaper

The Citizen News contained the following article recently:

Frog question for a city researcher: Dr. Chris Gleed-Owen, Honorary Research Fellow at Coventry University, is conducting research which will help decide whether to re-introduce the extinct Pool Frog back to Britain.

Dr. Gleed-Owen's work will determine whether the pool frog, the last remaining specimen of which died recently, is a genuine native species to Britain, or whether it was introduced into Britain from overseas by the Victorians.

Fossil evidence he has uncovered points to froggie being a true Brit.

Dr. Gleed-Owen said: "The last remaining specimen of pool frog - *Rana lessonae* - died recently.

"It had been proposed to mate this frog with a Swedish female - Swedish Pool Frogs being the closest genetically to the British, if the decision to re-introduce had been made.

"With a view to reaching a conclusion on whether to re-introduce the pool frog, English Nature,

supported by Anglian Water, has initiated a Species Action Plan to determine through fossil evidence and records, whether the Pool Frog was a native species. My research points to this being the case.”

Tony Gent from English Nature said: “We are not yet in a position to say definitively that the Pool Frog was officially Britain’s seventh species of amphibian, but we are hoping that by April 2000 we will know for sure and can decide whether we should begin re-introducing the Pool Frog to East Anglia.”

From the other Amphibian and Reptile groups...

WART receives newsletters from the Worcestershire Reptile and Amphibian Group, the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group and the Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group (WRAG, KRAG and SARG). If you are interested in seeing these newsletters please contact Helen Newell. (I think the title WART is much better, but I admit I wish I’d thought of these newsletter names first: “Newtsletter” and “no fur, no feathers” - SARG and WRAG respectively).

Here are some snippets from their newsletters:

SARG reported on articles in the Times and BBC Wildlife magazine (Newtsletter No. 23 Summer/Autumn 1998):

A New Toad Tunnel to Czech Out: the Times has reported the opening of a new toad tunnel running under a road in Moravia, the first in the Czech republic. The opening of the tunnel has cut the annual migratory carnage from hundreds to only a few dozen. It was estimated a third of the population were being killed every year.

Smooth Newts - Size Does Matter: Research published in BBC Wildlife Magazine has found that female newts can be very pragmatic when selecting a mate. Male smooth newts with the largest crests are the best foragers and make more attractive mates. A female smooth newt that has the opportunity to mate with a large male can afford to be picky and will not mate with any smaller newts she meets later in the breeding season. Other females, who have not been so lucky and have only met males more in the Alan Titchmarsh than Arnold Schwarzenegger league, are unwilling to wait on the off-chance a male with a huge crest will appear later. So, mating with males of moderate crests does occur, but should a better partner present himself later, the female will mate with him also. A female smooth newt has the ability to store the sperm of several

males until she is ready to lay eggs. Hence she is able to use earlier matings as an insurance policy without limiting her final choice of father.

WRAG's "No fur, no feathers" (issue 14, June 1998) explains some terminology, from an English Nature publication:

Getting Technical: There is an extensive terminology used in the field of thermal ecology and reptile thermoregulation, much of which is often used inaccurately and inconsistently. The following section attempts to provide a definition of a few key terms.

Thermoregulation (= temperature regulation): the maintenance of body temperature within a restricted range despite variation in ambient temperature.

Thermoconformity (= temperature conformity): variation in body temperature that parallels variation in the thermal environment.

Ectothermy: the mode of thermoregulation in which body temperatures depend primarily on the absorption of heat energy from the environment, ie. body heat is derived mainly from external sources (used by reptiles).

Endothermy: the mode of thermoregulation in which body temperatures depend on balancing the rate of production of heat by metabolism and its dissipation to the environment, ie. body heat is derived mainly from internal sources (used by mammals and birds which tend to have high metabolic rates).

Heliothermy: form of ectothermy in which thermoregulation is achieved through basking in the sun.

Thigmothermy: form of ectothermy in which thermoregulation is achieved through absorbing heat by contact with warm surfaces.

The terms warm-blooded and cold-blooded tend not to be used in the scientific literature any more as they are archaic and frequently inaccurate, for example body temperatures of some species of lizards during activity may be 5 - 10 degrees Centigrade higher than that of endotherms. Some of the larger reptiles are known to use endothermic means of thermoregulation to a degree, for example the leatherback turtle which can maintain constant, high body temperature through their large body size, low metabolism and use of peripheral tissues as insulation.

It was originally thought that reptiles were thermoconformers and that their body temperatures passively followed those of the environment. However, a series of studies as long ago as the 1930's and 1940's demonstrated that they have rather specific preferences for body temperature and that behavioural strategies may be employed to achieve them. These early studies therefore demonstrated that reptiles were able to regulate body temperatures, sometimes with great precision, using behavioural strategies such as heliothermy (ie. basking and thigmothermy (absorbing heat by contact with warm surfaces)).

(extracted from Thermal Ecology 1: Thermal Ecology of reptiles and implication for survey and monitoring by Martin J Gaywood and Ian F Spellerberg, part of a seminar on Reptile Survey Methods edited by Foster and Gent).

KRAG News No. 12 Winter 1998-99 reports on their activities in 1998, including:

Call outs: a possible adder in PYO strawberry business near Ashford turned out to be a sloughing Grass Snake - and the farmer was delighted to have the freshly-discarded slough as a souvenir; one gardener on Romney Marsh was fed up with frogs jumping out at her from her vegetable patch and would do anything to get rid of them - she's now busily constructing a series of compost heaps and log piles to attract egg-laying Grass Snakes (yippee!); and a disconsolate pond owner from Westbere kept ringing up to let me hear a raucous Marsh Frog which had arrived in his pond - no-one was getting any sleep and no-one could catch it. He was talking about shotguns last time he rang!

Illustration by Nicola Angell.

Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to Helen Newell.

Copy deadline for next issue: 31st May 1999.

Membership renewal

I / We would like to continue to belong to WART, and enclose a cheque for £3.50 payable to the Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team.

NAME

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

TEL