

Surveying for Great-crested Newts

The Chairman (Jan) has an English Nature licence for Great-crested Newt survey work. WART members can become accredited agents under the terms of this licence after the licensee is satisfied that they are sufficiently proficient in the techniques available. Trapping Great-crested Newts involves skilled processes and is controlled by conservation and welfare legislation. Poor standards could even lead to prosecution if newts have suffered during trapping or are killed or injured. The actual fine is £5000 per animal! Please do not be put off by reading this as several WART members are already accredited agents after receiving training. This involves practicing surveying techniques under statutory protocols. We wondered if any other members would like to take this opportunity as one of WART's main aims is to find out where the animals are and with your help, more sites can be identified. All accredited agents must send in their records by the end of the year to meet the requirements of the licence which is renewed annually. Contact Jan.

WART Website announcement

The WART webpage developed by Nigel Clemons is complete except for three scanned photographs. We need Smooth Newt, Great-crested Newt and Common Lizard photographs. Can any computer friendly WART member help us out? Once we have these we can go live. Watch this space for the WART Webpage URL (computer jargon for address).

Dunchurch Toad Report for 1999

The ten year decline continues and only a maximum evening count of 84 animals were seen. Last summer a sewage pipe back-sucked into the pond and we measured oxygen levels with a special oxygen probe. The meter only registered between 37 – 46% (on a 200% scale) compared with levels in Rugby High School ponds of 108%. Could a gradual seepage of sewage explain the decline? We can only hypothesise at this stage and start another decade of toad recording using the oxygen meter. It is promising to note that Dunchurch College management are also worried and it is hoped that remedial measures can be taken. Grass snakes here continue to prosper and are often found by the groundsmen basking in the herbaceous borders.

WART Secretary

Irena Kruszona has unfortunately had to stand down as WART secretary. The good news is that Irena will still be a committee member but we desperately need a new secretary. Can anybody help us out please? The task is not too onerous and need only involve taking minutes of committee meetings. The committee usually meets four times a year. Please contact any WART committee member if you could spare a few hours a year.

Jan Clemons

Warwickshire RINGS Natural History Fair

Saturday 13 March 1999

Kenilworth School, Leyes Lane, Kenilworth

A wide range of organisations attended this event, including general natural history groups as well as specialist ones such as for badgers and bats. It provided a good illustration of the variety of activities available in Warwickshire connected with wildlife conservation.

WART included frogspawn and some Smooth Newts in its display, and they attracted many comments ("I haven't seen those for years" was heard twice). Other stands had twigs with Purple Hairstreak eggs on (if you could see them!), magnified springtails, pieces of rock of geological interest, computers at work and competitions, with experts on hand to answer queries.

The event was well attended by people of all ages and interests. It was also useful to have all the experts together in one place, with communications between butterfly enthusiasts and newt lovers, insect identifiers and plant people. Several new records were received, and some possible sites for Great-crested Newts were discovered. Many people went away with leaflets on garden ponds, so hopefully a few habitats will be improved!

Comments written on a quiz sheet handed out at the event were very appreciative. It would be valuable to hold another similar fair in the near future.

Helen Newell

Failure at the Fields - or Newts are a Nuisance

Five WART members arrived at Ufton Fields on a changeable Saturday and set ten newt-traps in the newt-pond at around 11am. We then walked around the reserve hoping for a grass snake to show itself; unfortunately none obliged, so all we found were some toad tadpoles in one of the larger pools. After lunch at the cafe in Ufton, we returned to check the traps, at about 2pm, to find them disappointingly empty.

The following Sunday, which was sunny, two WART members saw three smooth newts in the same pond by visual search. Jan recently returned to the pond and saw several Great-crested Newt larvae.

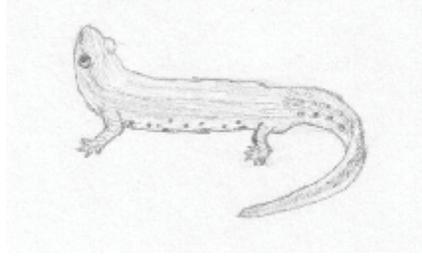
This caused me to reflect on my own experiences when searching for newts.



I have in the past taken a party to a pond in Kenilworth where I assured them we were guaranteed to see Great-crested Newts, and we didn't. Later the same day, at dusk, I returned and counted eighteen Great-crested Newts by torchlight without difficulty.

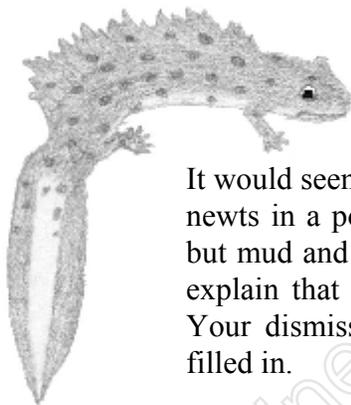
I have stood by a pond for half an hour looking for newts and seen only two. When twenty traps were put in the same pond overnight in early May, 1 Smooth and 49 Great-crested Newts were

caught. However, ten traps left overnight in mid-June yielded only 1 male Great-crested Newt and 5 Great-crested larvae.



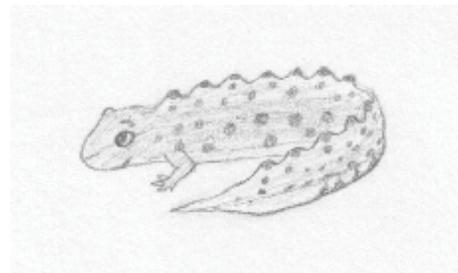
Newts are often unevenly distributed within a pond, as demonstrated by some more trapping results. Twenty traps were set overnight in each of two ponds, each group of ten placed in a separate area. In one pond: 1 Smooth Newt in the first group of ten traps, 5 Smooth and 9 Great-crested Newts in the second group. The other pond gave 2 Smooth Newts and 6 Great-crested larvae in the first, 6 Smooth and 4 adult and 20 young Great-crested Newts in the second group.

These surveys with their variable results illustrate the fact that newts can easily be missed, even if you believe you have conducted a thorough search. Weather conditions, time of year, effort put into surveying, the state of the pond (clarity of the water, covering of duckweed, accessibility, size of the pond, etc.) can all influence the results.



It would seem sensible to bear this in mind if you are asked whether there are newts in a pond that you have surveyed. Resist the response “No, nothing but mud and snails” which comes to mind after a disappointing survey, and explain that while nothing was found this time, they could still be there. Your dismissive remark could result in a Great-crested Newt pond being filled in.

The moral of the story is: if at first you don't succeed, try and try again!



Helen Newell

Membership News

If you have not yet paid your 1999 WART subscription, included with your newsletter will be a reminder note and a renewal slip. We very much hope that all existing members will renew – the success and health of the group depends in large part on an adequate membership base. WART subscription rates have been held unchanged for some years and we think they represent pretty good value for money. If you're interested in conserving Warwickshire's native herptiles – please continue your membership of WART. If you can introduce any new potential members to the group, all the better!

At present, the WART membership year runs from April to March – a bit confusing for the committee and probably some members. Starting in 2000 therefore (that's the first time I've had to type that!), the membership year will revert to the calendar year – Jan to Dec. Don't worry about trying to remember this, we'll include a reminder in the Winter newsletter. Any new members joining from October onward will be deemed to have paid for next year's membership.

Thank you to all members for your continuing support of the group.

Mark Hollowell
Membership Secretary

Reptilian Records

WART's 49 reptile records for 1998 consist of the following: 4 Slow-worms (all on Kenilworth Common - surely they must have been seen elsewhere?), 5 Common Lizards (all Jan's records, for Rugby), 38 Grass Snakes (17 of these sent in by Steve Garnett), 2 Adders (on 2 sites - Warwickshire's rarest reptile).

"No Fur, No Feathers" published by the Worcestershire group (WRAG): says "During the 1998 season, only 85 mature adders were recorded in the county of Worcestershire ... distributed among five known sites" - they don't know when they've got it good! WRAG have also previously reported on their large number of Slow-worm records.

The "Newtletter" (Sussex ARG) complains "we received a mere 96 records" of reptiles in 1998: 25 Slow-worms, 12 Common Lizards, 49 Grass Snakes and 10 Adders.

It is not surprising that southerly Sussex enjoys more sun-loving herps, but have we really got so few Slow-worms compared to relatively nearby Worcestershire?

"No Fur, No Feathers" also contains references to three cases where Great-crested Newt sites were destroyed by "development" when they might have been saved if the appropriate people had been notified of the newts' presence. In other words, send in your records!

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.

Illustrations by Nicola Angell and Helen Newell.

Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to Helen Newell.

Copy deadline for next issue: 31st August 1999.