



Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

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Affiliated to the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (Registered Charity Number 209200)
and Herpetofauna Groups of Britain & Ireland.

Patron: Ken Livingstone

WART NEWSLETTER: ISSUE NO. 27 SUMMER 2001

Forthcoming events

Events cancelled

Unfortunately many of our planned Spring events suffered under the Foot-and-Mouth restrictions. Hopefully things will return to normal soon and we can get out there and spot the wildlife again.

Remember that some places are unaffected by the problems: for example, Kenilworth Common is open (probably Warwickshire's best reptile site) – see below.

Kenilworth Common

Please come along and join in the activities to help our local herps - you might well see some wildlife while you work. You are welcome to stay for whatever time you can afford, even a short visit is very helpful.

The work-parties will be involved in bracken-pulling to open up the ground for reptiles to enable basking and feeding. Meet at the railway bridge on Common Lane, on Sundays 5 Aug, 2 Sept.

If more information is required, contact Serena and Howard Eccles.

Included with this newsletter...

...you should find Froglife's latest Advice Sheet on Great-crested Newt surveying. This is a very useful guide to survey techniques, identification, etc. and we hope you will be encouraged to go and check your local pond(s) before they are filled in and built on! If you have any further questions, or know of possible Great-crested Newt sites, please get in touch with one of us – see Contacts.

Please remember to send in any records you may have taken, even if the results were disappointing.

Also included with this newsletter is the Pond Heaven leaflet, as well as the new WART leaflet in case you have any friends interested in WART.

Toads crossing near canal

Due to the use of Toad Crossing signs, many toads have been able to cross the road at Sutton Stop. People actually slowed their vehicles down and some even stopped to help them across! There should be bumper amounts of tadpoles this year in the breeding grounds, Exhall basin.

Many of the Hawkesbury Residents have got involved to the extent that next spring we will be organising a Toad Watch to help even more amphibians safely across. Unfortunately one of the signs was vandalised, but this was a minor setback in an otherwise successful and enjoyable experience.

The Frogs and Toads at Hawkesbury are very important to the area, we are in fact a conservation site although with the amount of development in the Exhall and Longford districts it's hard to see for how long. A lot of the fields bordering Hawkesbury Junction are being developed for new housing and the wildlife has no where to go but the conservation area.

British Waterways are very sympathetic to the canal side wildlife and I manage this site in a way that allows both human and amphibian visitors to enjoy the site accordingly. The grass seems to move under your feet with tiny Frogs and Toads. A boater friend of mine entertains his grandchild by lifting bits of drift wood to reveal the baby frogs! He puts a lot of drift wood hides around the area as refuges for amphibians from the dreaded grass mowers.

The residents and boaters of Sutton Stop say thank you to WART for loan of the signs.

From a message from Steve Faulkner
Lock Keeper Hawkesbury Junction (Sutton Stop)

Surveying for Great-crested Newts

As you can see from the enclosed leaflet on surveying for newts, this can be more complicated than it sounds. In the past, I have arrived at a pond armed only with a net, to find that there is about 4 cm of water over seemingly bottomless mud, surrounded by dense reeds. Equally, a torch survey of a duckweed-covered pond is impossible.

It is a good idea to remember the possible problems you could encounter when attempting a survey, and go prepared. The Froglife advice sheet gives information on survey techniques, licensing and other useful notes on health and safety.

If a survey does not reveal any newts, it may not necessarily mean that none are present. Repeated surveys can throw up some surprises. The figures below are for the same pond; although different trap numbers were used, they were always put in the same areas.

Trap Results				
Date examined	No. traps	Great-crested	Smooth	Other
1/5/1999	20	33 male, 16 female	1 female	Frog trapped
19/6/1999	10	1 male, 5 young	0	
15/5/2001	10	0	13 male, 2 female	
22/5/2001	20	11 male, 7 female, 1 egg found	9 male, 4 female	Frog seen

THE WEST MIDLAND REGIONAL AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE GROUPS CONFERENCE

This will be held in the conference room of Hopwood Park Motorway Services - Junction 2 on M42 on **Saturday 20th October 2001**. Meet on upstairs balcony 09-30 for 10-00 start. This service area is situated off the actual motorway and is reached from the M42 / A441 roundabout.

Price will be about £11-00 which will include a buffet lunch and beverages throughout the day.

Weather permitting a trip around the SUDS System will be included, so bring waterproof clothing - actually, if it rains, you can see the system in action, **but boots are a must**.

A programme and booking form will be available soon, please contact Mike Sutton Email sutton@supanet.com for further details.

If you would like to speak or present a paper please contact Alan Email alan@worcswt.cix.co.uk

The WART Committee

Chair	Jan Clemons
Vice-Chair	Andrew Thompson
Secretary	Andi Wolf
Membership Secretary /Treasurer	Howard Eccles
Newsletter Editor	Helen Newell
Ordinary members	Jane O'Dell, Serena Eccles

Mike's Web Watch

This is the first of what may become an occasional feature of the WART Newsletter. If you come across anything on the Internet that you think will be useful or of interest to other members, send the web address of it to Helen, and we will publish the details in the next newsletter.

Yahoo Groups and you

Those members who have access to the Internet may, or may not, be aware of something called "Egroups". This was a web site that hosted various newsgroups. Recently Egroups was taken over by the people who run Yahoo, (of the famous search engine and web based email), and has now been renamed "Yahoo Groups".

The basic concept remains the same, and the way it works has stayed more or less the same, but for those of you not aware of it, I will endeavour to shed some light on what use Yahoo Groups can be to you.

Basically, they host thousands of "newsgroups" for anyone to access. A newsgroup is a group of people who have an interest in common, who want to keep in touch with each other, exchange ideas and tips, or request help or information. For instance, there may be one for owners and enthusiasts of a particular type of car. The group members would offer each other advice on the upkeep of the car, where they might obtain hard-to-find parts, that sort of thing. They would also keep each other up to date on get-togethers of owners, car meets, shows, etc.

When you first visit the Yahoo Groups home page, it will not recognise you as a "member", and will invite you to "sign up". This is very simple and just involves you typing in a very limited amount of information about yourself, most importantly your email address. Once this has been done, you can start investigating the groups that are available. There are two main ways of doing this. Firstly, you can type something into the search engine, and see what it can find for you. For instance, if you type the word "reptile" into the search engine, it will give you a list of 94 groups that either have the word reptile in their title or in the introduction text for the group.

Inevitably, this can lead to some "odd" results, as certain words can be used in more than one context. The word "newt" yielded 5 groups, but one of these didn't have the word "newt" in it anywhere, only the word "newton". Therefore, you have to think about your searches carefully, and expect some results to be of no interest to you. Another point is that sometimes people use a word in a totally unexpected way, and to this end the word "reptile" came up with one group that was for chocolate lovers, which just happened to have the word reptile in its title!! A final warning on using the search engine, there are a number of "adult oriented" groups on the site, and sometimes a search word will bring one of these up. Generally, these adult groups are not easily accessible, and can and should be easily ignored.

A better way of finding a group is to select one of the many subjects listed on the home page. The most obvious route for WART members would be to click on the "Science" heading, then on "Biology", next "animals" and finally "reptiles and amphibians". This will give you a list of sub-headings if you want to narrow it down even further, but this list has well over 650 groups in it which should keep you busy for a while!! (incidentally, the "animals" section lists almost 13,000 groups!)

The list you are now presented with has the groups title, a short introduction to what the group is about, the number of members the group has, and finally whether it is a “members only” or “public” group. The difference here is that a “public” group can be looked at in full by anyone, whereas the “members only” ones will not let you read any of the messages until you are a member. The advantage of the “public” ones is that you can have a proper look at them first to see if the content will be of interest to you before you become a member. In general though, the “members only” groups tend to have the better content and more members.

Once you have spotted a group that looks likely to interest you, click on it’s title, and you will be taken to its home page, where you will see more information about the group, along with a calendar type display which tells you how many messages have been posted to the group each month for as long as the group has been running. This gives you an idea of how active this group is. Obviously a group that gets 200 messages a month is going to be much more fun to be part of than one which hasn’t had any messages for the last three months, so again, this will help you to decide which groups to join.

The page will also tell you that you are not recognised as a member, and will invite you to “subscribe” to it. Now it is very important to realise that in this case the word subscribe is not used as it would be for a magazine. Subscribing to a group does not cost you any money (other than your usual internet call charges or whatever you pay for your internet access). The whole Yahoo Groups site is paid for by the advertisers whose adverts will be at the top of the screen and which everyone totally ignores!

If you click on the subscribe button, you will be taken to another page which has a number of options. You can have the messages delivered to you in 3 ways:- Each message individually, so if a group gets 50 messages in a month, you will get 50 messages delivered to your email inbox as they arrive during the course of the month. You can elect to have “daily digests”, so that you will get all the previous days messages in one single email sent to you. If there was only one message you will get one short message, if there were 20, you will get one long message. Be aware that if you opt for daily digest, any attachments to the original message will not be delivered to you, so if the group is one where pictures are sent on a regular basis, you won’t get these if you opt for this method. The final option is to not have mail sent to you at all, but to give you full access via the groups home page. (once you are a member of a group, you will usually have access to all the old messages via the web site too, so you can check back and see if you have missed something from before you joined the group)

You will then be asked to confirm the email address you want mail to be sent to, and you can specify a number of addresses if you want to, or just leave it at the one if that is all you have. Finally, click the submit button at the bottom of the page, and you are a member of that group. Just sit back and wait for the email to come rolling in!!

Inevitably, some of the messages will be of no interest to you, but I find that the one message that gives you some useful info outweighs the ones that don’t. If after a while you decide that you don’t want to be a member of the group anymore, you can very easily unsubscribe via the groups home page (you can also alter the delivery method in this way).

There seems to be no limit to the number of groups you can belong to, we get around a dozen ourselves. You can also start your own group if you wish, and again, this is very easy to do. I personally run the “bass-players” one if you want to check it out.

I spent last night doing a bit of research on the groups that might interest members, and just to give you a taster, here are some of the results from the search engine:-

Reptile = 94 groups

Amphibian = 24 groups

Newt = 5 groups

Frog = 108 groups

Snake = 105 groups

Lizards = 60 groups

There is a group on there called “wart”, but it only has one member and has had no messages at all, but it doesn't actually tell you what it is supposed to be about. The word Warwickshire came up with 25 groups, one of which is for birdwatchers in Warwickshire, which might interest some of you.

Finally, I had better tell you where you can find Yahoo Groups:-

<http://groups.yahoo.com>

I hope that you find it useful, and don't forget to let us know of any other useful web sites.

Mike Newell

WART on the web

WART's web-site, created by Nigel Clemons, can be found at: www.wartsoc.co.uk

Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to Helen Newell.

Copy deadline for next issue: 30th September 2001.
