

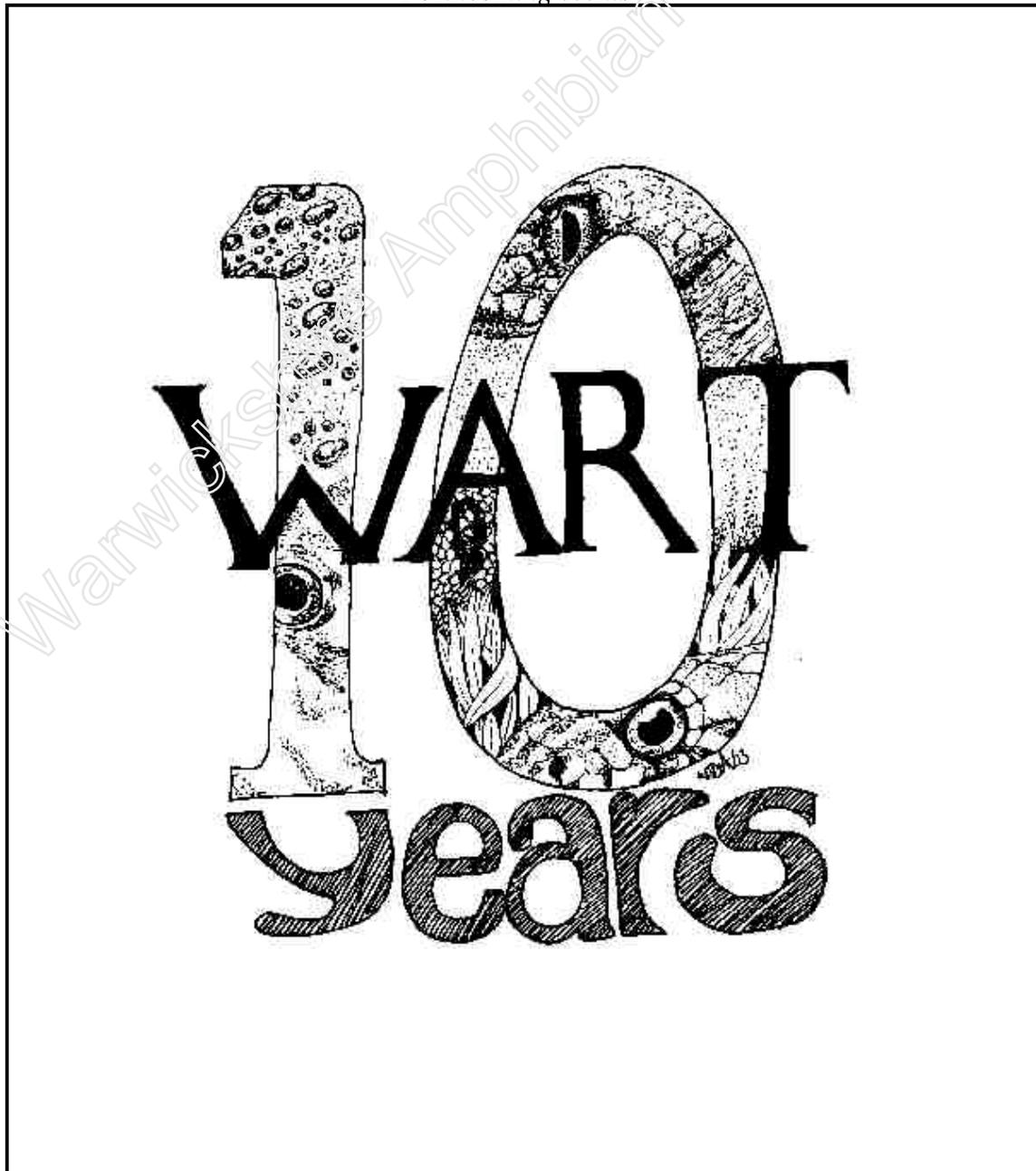
Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

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

WART NEWSLETTER: ISSUE NO. 32 SPRING 2003

Forthcoming events



WART's 10th birthday trip to Cannock Chase.

Sun 27 April 4pm to 10pm

This is a wonderful chance to visit the site where Natterjack Toads were translocated before the Wildlife and Countryside Act came into being. The site also supports Great-crested Newts, Smooth Newts, Palmate Newts, Common toads and frogs. In fact all six species of British amphibian. As well as these, three species of reptile also visit the site. We will search for herpetofauna before dusk falls and retire to a local hostelry, returning later when it is dark to hear the Natterjacks calling.

This event has been very well supported and only four places are left. If you would like to reserve a place please phone/e-mail Jan ASAP.

Report on the WART Annual General Meeting

Brandon Marsh Nature Centre Thursday 16 Jan 2003 7.30pm

The current committee members were all re-elected, and also David Cole joined the committee.

Jan gave a talk on her experiences in the tropical rainforests of Costa Rica as an Earthwatch Fellow, with some impressive slides. The large variety of wildlife present would tempt any wildlife enthusiast, but Jan says you need to wear a hat as it rains insect droppings! Part of Jan's job while she was there involved separating the different types of insect droppings to determine the levels of populations.

The WART Committee

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

Contacts

Jan and Nigel Clemons, Chairman and Membership Secretary / Database Manager, 34 Montalt Road, Cheylesmore, Coventry, CV3 5LU. Tel 024 7650 6416, email janclemons@wartsoc.co.uk or nigelclemons@freenetname.co.uk

Howard Eccles, Treasurer, 42 Moseley Road, Kenilworth CV8 2AQ. Tel 01926 858378.

Helen Newell, Newsletter Editor, 90 Arthur Street, Kenilworth, CV8 2HG. Tel 01926 513073, email helen@newell42.freeserve.co.uk

Andi Wolf, Secretary, 104 Cedars Avenue, Coundon, Coventry, CV6 1DN. Tel 024 7612 3771, email Andi.wolf@virgin.net

Membership Survey

Please complete the attached membership survey to help us gain an idea of your interests and activities you may wish to be involved with.

Warwickshire RINGS

Warwickshire RINGS (Research, Recording and Recreation in Nature Groups) is a network of groups, organisations and individuals with an enthusiasm for any aspect of wildlife in the Warwickshire, Solihull and Coventry sub-region. The RINGS Newsletter attempts to be a comprehensive directory for all local natural history groups, sources of expertise and activities that we are aware of.

To keep up to date with what's happening in the countryside, we publish a free monthly newsletter called "UK Safari News". It tells you what to look for in the British countryside each month, and shows you the best places to find wildlife.

If members are interested Nigel Clemons can supply via **email only** the RINGS and UK Safari Newsletters. All you have to do is email him at nigelclemons@freenetname.co.uk stating which you would like.

He has the January 2003 issues of the above.

Report of the Wart Adder Training Day - Sat 29 March

The WART Adder Group is now firmly established and we have 20 trained volunteers to survey the 18 Warks sites we have records for. The training day looked at the Adder Species Action plan and why the time for a new survey is long overdue. We need to know the current status of the adder in the county and set the record straight. The adder is definitely Wark's rarest reptile and the survey will further go towards the case for its conservation & protection.

After a session on reptile identification and survey guidelines we looked at each site and discussed the issues. Records for 8 sites are more than 20 years old and six sites also have grass snakes records. On the bright side we know that adders are definitely at Kenilworth Common & are doing well at Sutton Park. Not an easy task but volunteers signed up for every site so we have total coverage. A session on the practicalities of visiting sites & contacting the site owners followed together with demonstrations on using GPS & laying refugia.

It is so encouraging to know we have the interest and enthusiasm within WART to carry out this survey. No doubt there will be negative records but it is vital to know Warks adder status before it is too late.

We will keep you informed about the progress of the WART adder group in future newsletters.

Many thanks to WART members

Bob & Jenny Beaufoy

Chris & Andrea Hartfield

Sylvia & Tom Hall- Randle

Simon Clark

Lee Miles

Serena & Howard Eccles

David Cole

Steve Lane

Alan Preece

Helen Newell

Ivan Lewis

David Porter

Andi & Kirsty Wolfe

Also Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for letting us hold the training day at Brandon Marsh Nature Centre.

WART have just purchased two GPS's using the money donated two years ago for IT development. We intend to use them during the forthcoming WART Adder Survey and as the price comes down even further hopefully we can increase our stock. Using 10 satellites the GPS gives not only your position to within 10 metres but also acts as a handy compass. All records can be downloaded to a computer. Many cars have GPS and the new generation of cell phones. The facility I liked best is that if you are scared of getting lost, the GPS will track your route and tell you exactly how to return along it!

Jan Clemons

Chairman's Report for 2002

Recording activity - This has been a very good year for the Great Crested Newt. WART members Jonathon Easton and Lyndsey Yates were employed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust from April – August to survey a 10km square just north of Coventry. Funding for the survey was part of a mitigation package from Prologis & Safeway. A new distribution centre has been built on the site of the old Coventry Colliery. Great crested newt habitat within the site has also been enhanced and not a single newt has been lost. The results for this survey are published in "*Pond Survey 2002 the distribution and status of ponds in north Coventry and Bedworth (SP38)*". A total of 120 ponds were surveyed between April & June plus a further 104 ponds were identified, but could not be surveyed due to other factors. Of the 120 ponds surveyed 22% were found to support great crested newts and 39% had never been surveyed before. Analysing the GCN data with AditMap shows up some very nice metapopulations. The ongoing system for exchanging herpetological records with the local BRC is quick and easy, and updates are passed on a regular basis. A big thank you for all those WART members that sent us records last year and there is the facility to complete recording forms online or by downloading from the WART web site. These online forms have been used during the year, but the submissions have all been from non-WART members.

Key Sites – Last year's best herpetofauna site in Warwickshire was Sutton Park, which boasts all 4 species of reptile and all 4 species of amphibian. This came to light after receiving a large amount of records from the warden Stepfan Bodnor.

Volunteer interest & ARG status – WART membership has now risen to an all-time high of sixty. Again, the vast majority of members remain non-active but supportive. During 2002 we published 3 newsletters and organised 3 field meetings. WART members also undertook management work at Kenilworth Common. This included a most successful day in July when over fifty Year 10 volunteers from Rugby High School embarked on their ‘Conservation in Action’ day. WART continue to be recognised as the local authority on herpetological conservation by English Nature, Local Authorities, DEFRA and other conservation organisations

Training, Education & Publicity – The WART chairman participated in the Radio 4 Country File programme in March which neatly coincided with the first frog spawnings in the county. WART held an Amphibian Identification & Monitoring Training Day in April at the County Trust’s Visitor’s Centre. Attendance was good (20) and we surveyed several ponds during the day and delegates were given plenty of opportunities to distinguish crested from smooth newts. The WART web site www.wartsoc.co.uk managed by Nigel Clemons, received over 900 visits to the site in 2002. The web site contains information about amphibians and reptiles found in the county, relevant publications, details about the WART database, the current newsletter, survey and membership forms to download and contacts and links to other herpetological and conservation sites.

Key issues – The WART Chairman has submitted draft biodiversity action plans for the great crested newt and adder. The WART committee has put a lot of time and effort into getting as many members as possible actively involved. Progress to date includes two new enthusiastic committee members and at the time of writing, 14 volunteers for the 2003 Adder survey which forms part of the local species action plan.

Chairman’s comments

Finally a big thank you to all my fellow committee members, without whose help WART would fail to function. It’s hard to believe that WART is ten years old on 29 April 2003, it only seems like yesterday when WART had its inaugural meeting. WART are particularly grateful to Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for all their support and help, especially in accommodating our meetings. Unfortunately Andrew Thompson has had to stand down due to all his airport work for the Wildlife Trusts. Fortunately, Trust employee Alan Preece has boldly stepped into Andrew’s shoes and is also an experienced amphibian biologist. Our links with the Biological Recording Centre at Warwick Museum continues to flourish mainly due to the efforts of Nigel Clemons who has enabled us to reciprocate survey data electronically. Helen Newell continues to produce interesting and informative newsletters. The number of ‘hits’ after the newsletter has been posted onto the WART web site is impressive, which goes to show its distribution goes a lot further than Warwickshire. It is also good to report that David Cole has been elected onto the WART committee. The enclosed Treasurer’s report is encouraging and I am pleased to report that membership will remain at £3.50 per annum. However, to streamline the speed at which we communicate with our members WART are now having to pay for the copying and postage of newsletters and information sheets.

I do hope that we hear more off our members this year and please complete the enclosed questionnaire (it will only take a few minutes) which will help us plan for future events and indicate what directions we should be going in.

Jan Clemons
March 2003

Membership Report for 2002

The membership seems to be holding at approximately 50, although 13 new members joined in 2002. Why the stasis in membership? We have been hanging onto a number of members that have made no contact since 1998, although I have made numerous efforts to obtain a response from them. At the March 2003 committee meeting it was voted that, as these members are no longer interested in the group they should be removed from the membership list.

If you have not yet paid your 2003 WART subscription (it's still only £3.50 pa), included with your newsletter will be a reminder note and 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 herpetofauna - please continue your membership to WART. If you can introduce any new potential members to the group, all the better!

Thank you to all members for your continuing support of the group. Enclosed with this newsletter you will find a copy of "*The environment in your pocket*", key facts and figures on the environment of the United Kingdom.

Nigel Clemons

Treasurers Report

Receipts and Payments Account for period 1/10/2001 to 30/12/2002

Receipts	2001/2	2001	Payments	2001/2	2001
Bal. as @ 30/9/01					
Bank 1121.30					
Cash 16.60	1137.90	764.30	BTCV Membership & ins.	-	55.00
Subscriptions	196.50	66.50	Postage & Stationery	43.63	12.15
Donations for survey work	-	55.00	Herpetofauna Workers Meeting costs	-	59.00
Donations - other	3.00	425.00	Purchases:		
Sales	36.50	15.75	Publications	-	62.50
Refund of ins. premium	3.34	-	Software packages	136.44	
			Website tools	20.00	
			Loss on Dorset trip	4.00	-
			Bal. as @ 31/12/02		
			Bank 1156.57		
			Cash 16.60	1173.17	1137.90
	1377.24	1326.55		1377.24	1326.55

Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2003

The following are brief(ish) notes taken at the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting in Edinburgh – February 2003. The programme included workshops and presentations.

Workshop 1 – Wildlife Sites: Developing herpetological site selection criteria

The role of local Wildlife Sites in the conservation of herps. The value of these sites and how they can be identified, and criteria for selection.

Legislative background

Non-statutory sites of substantive nature conservation value rather than national/international sites (i.e. SSSIs, SACs)

Need for local Wildlife Sites:

- SSSIs do not cover all important sites.
- Provide protection for locally important sites.
- Help to target funding/resources to most important sites.
- Enhance quality of life.
- Meet UK BAP targets.
- Important information systems.

Criteria for selection

Varies from county to county.

Possible criteria:

- Any site containing strictly protected species e.g. Great Crested Newt, Sand Lizard, Smooth Snake.
- Any reptile site if it has a 'good population' of species (definition of 'good population' needed - use of scoring systems suggested).
- Outstanding populations of non-protected amphibians (again needs definition).
- Habitat of high quality likely to support amphibians and reptiles.

Problems.

Need sufficient survey information for selection of sites and definition of boundaries.

Workshop 2 - Law enforcement

Workshop aims:

- To enhance understanding of practical law enforcement issues for herps, including:
- Summary of main legislation relevant to conservation.
- Organisation roles.
- Enforcement procedures.

Can threats to herp conservation status be tackled by legislation?

Threats:

- Habitat loss/modification/fragmentation; development, agricultural intensification, neglect, habitat management.
- Persecution/collection.
- Invasive species.
- Pollution.

Answer: some threats much easier to address through legislation than others. Certainly the current legislation alone will not suffice.

Legal protection

- Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA).
- Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994.
- Welfare legislation (various).

Legislation provides varying degree of protection for herps. Offences may be absolute, intentional, reckless (inserted by CRoW) or deliberate.

Site designation and protection.

The WCA and Conservation Regs give a duty to designate sites of particular importance for herps: SSSIs and SACs.

Getting the best outcome for herp conservation

An allegation of an offence can lead to a number of possible courses of action. A prosecution is often the most sought after, but not always the most desirable or likely outcome. Need to concentrate on the endpoint – what will achieve the best outcome for herp conservation.

Practical enforcement points

- Start investigation early; waiting can mean loss of evidence
- Take notes: dates, times, species, locations etc record as much as possible. Precision important. Date and sign all notes, ask other witnesses to sign and date. Remember that your notes may not be disclosed.
- Notify police ASAP.
- Seizing evidence (corpses etc) best to allow police to do this, but in emergency: careful labelling, give to police ASAP.

Workshop 3 - Data protection and copyright for ARGs and Recorders

All recorders, custodians and users of biological and personal data need to be acutely aware of the onus placed on them by current DP/IPR legislation.

Data protection Act 1998

- Protects the rights of the 'data subjects'.
- Requires data controllers to be open about their use of personal information.
- Includes manual records (not included in DPA 1984).
- Applies to staff, volunteers, recorders etc can be personally liable for a breach of the Act.

BRCs should register with the Data Processing Commissioner at the Data Processing Information Commission (cost about £40 p.a.) ARGs can become an affiliated body to LRCs therefore avoiding registration charge.

Important considerations

- Need to inform trustees in charge of the group that they are liable. One person has to register their name as the data controller.
- Local herp groups can become a public limited company where members become shareholders and pay a fee (minimum £1) – this limits liability (NBN have advice on their website).
- Advisable to have a firewall on computer to ensure it can not be hacked. Paper data should be kept in a locked room.

Intellectual Property Rights (copyright is the only aspect that really relates to BRCs) Copyright

- A bundle of economic and moral rights.
- Anything produced by someone has copyright.
- Moral rights – normally stays with the creator (must acknowledge the author when copied etc).
- Economic rights – can be sold, transferred.

Who owns biological data?

- No test cases so no legal precedents yet.
- Copyright belongs to creator of the record, i.e. the recorder (unless agreed otherwise in a contract).
- Unknown authorship – requires ‘reasonable inquiry’ to establish ownership with old records, (advertising in a local newspaper may count as ‘reasonable effort’. Also good idea to take a few sample records and attempt to track the recorders (important that you record your efforts to track them down).
- Negative record is still a copyrighted entity.
- Records received verbally – arguably not owned until recorded, then copyright resides with ‘recorder’ i.e. the person who receives the message and writes it down.

Presentations

1. Reptiles and brownfield sites

Dr Jenny Jones, Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC).

Brownfield sites generally have a much higher biodiversity than Greenfield sites. An analysis of records at the HBRC showed that 81% of slowworm, 77% of common lizard and 50 % of grass snake sites could be described as brown field sites. Fifty percent of allotment sites surveyed supported reptiles.

In 1998 the government announced a national target of at least 60% of new homes to be built on brown field sites by 2008. The presentation outlined procedures in the planning process to help protect vulnerable sites.

Planners have a remit to protect biodiversity:

SINCs (in Hertfordshire SINCs considered to be ‘critical natural capital’)
PPG9 – protected species

2. Landscaping, SUDs and herps

Diffuse pollution is a significant cause of reduced water quality. Major sources include run off from roads, industrial estates, and car parks but also rubbish from bins, dog excrement etc. The effect is cumulative and there is often a time lapse before impact is made.

SUDs very important in helping to control urban diffuse pollution but can only work if there is a limit to the input of toxic materials.

SUDs can benefit herps in two main ways: they are not a barrier to amphibian movement and; in some schemes they provide breeding ponds

Retention ponds are generally designed without ecological input. Therefore considerable scope for improved design, including landscaping for land around SUDs, to increase ecological value.

3. Reptiles on road verges

Cresswell Associates are currently drafting an Advice Note on reptiles for inclusion within the Highways Agencies Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. Fieldwork (principally on parts of the A417/419 northwest of Cirencester, and a section of the A31 in the New Forest) focused on the use of ‘soft estate’ (road verges and adjacent land) by reptiles, the apparent value of road verge habitat for

reptiles, the distribution of reptiles across parts of the trunk road and the likely impacts, particularly associated with habitat fragmentation, of roads on reptiles.

Project conclusions

Road verges can provide good habitat for reptiles with smooth snake, grass snake, adder, common lizard, and slow worm all recorded during the project.

However, roads appear to be a barrier to movement with few animals crossing the road successfully (the occasional smooth snake, one lizard but no slow worms).

However, road verges appear to provide important linear habitat (with movement along road verges recorded) especially where the adjacent land is unsuitable for reptiles (e.g. intensive agriculture).

4. Estimating slow worm numbers during translocation exercises

Slow worm is probably most common reptile on brownfield sites.

It is useful to predict slow worm numbers during translocation exercises, so that work can be planned and the maximum catch of animals ensured. Removal methods (depletion projects) use mathematical models (e.g. CAPTURE a DOS based program, available free on net.) that make assumptions about real situations as opposed to capture/recapture method.

Survey data from three sites was used to test mathematical models. The rate of capture at two sites agreed well with the CAPTURE model, providing population estimates for males, females and juveniles that were very close to the actual numbers caught.

Factors affecting accuracy of model included: trapping effort/intensity - the higher number of animals caught at any one visit, the better the estimate of population size; seasonal variations - rate of capture of males, females and juveniles can vary significantly at different times of the year; numbers caught can also be affected by the level of disturbance on site.

Tentative conclusions

Mathematical models can be a useful tool for predicting population sizes provided; the sex, age and season are taken into account; area is small with intensive trapping effort; population closed with little disturbance.

5. Salt Marsh and agricultural habitat management for natterjacks

When the wildfowl refuge at WWT Caerlaverock in Dumfries was established, borrow pits were created at the margins of the agricultural pastures when the screen banks were constructed. Natterjack toads colonised this linear system of ponds from natural pools at the landward edge of saltmarsh or merse habitat. These pools are often inundated during the winter and spring high tides, and can dry rapidly in the summer. They thus form a marginal and unreliable habitat for toads. This natural situation has therefore been supplemented by the pools created in the fields and also by pool creation and deepening in the merse. In the early 1990s it was apparent that successional processes had rendered many pools unusable by the toads and so a scheme of rotational management was set in place. This includes the fitting of pipes to control water levels in the agricultural area, the scraping out of excess vegetation and sediment, controlled access to grazing through fencing, and the provision of refugia. This management programme has been successful in reinstating and maintaining the earlier breeding success of the toads.

Louise Slack
David Cole

Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to Helen Newell.
Copy deadline for next issue: 30th June 2003.

Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

Membership Survey

This survey is aimed at you the member, to try and find out what you would be interested in seeing happen and may support if they were organised. So please complete this form and post it back to the address below. Thank you for your continued support. (Note: Please complete in blank ink or type).

1. Would you be interested in a programme of talks/slide shows. Yes No

2. Preferable venue for talks. Coventry
 - Leamington Spa
 - Kenilworth
 - Warwick
 - Nuneaton
 - Stratford-upon-Avon
 - Other (please specify) _____

3. Are you interested in any of the subjects listed below for a theme for a talk/slide show (please tick as many as you like to indicate your preference).
 - Amphibians
 - Reptiles
 - Newts
 - Frogs/Toads
 - Snakes
 - Lizards
 - Conservation
 - Amphibians/Reptiles at home
 - Amphibians/Reptiles abroad
 - Other (please specify) _____

4. Are you aware of working parties at Trust reserves throughout the year? Yes No

5. Are you interested in getting involved with monitoring/recording (training would be given). Yes
 No

6. Would you be interested in receiving the Newsletter/other correspondence via email? Yes No
If yes please supply your email address: _____

7. Would you mind if we contacted you about this survey? Yes No
If yes please supply your name and telephone number

Name: _____

Telephone No: _____

Return completed form to:
The Membership Secretary, 34 Montalt Road, Cheylesmore, Coventry, CV3 5LU.