



Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

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WART NEWSLETTER: ISSUE No. 41 AUTUMN 2005

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EDITORIAL

The ARG UK **Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting 2006**

Friday 3 – Sunday 5 February 2006

Coventry University Technocentre

Due to the lack of a newsletter editor we apologise for this hastily put together one. There is a lot happening in the herp community so we need to tell what is going on. The main forthcoming event is the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting, which this year is being held at Coventry University Techcentre. This will not only provide the opportunity to catch up on recent developments in the herpetological world but a chance to meet other workers. We hope to see you there and ask you to fill in the attendance slip ASAP.

Nigel
November 2005

Forthcoming Events

Annual General Meeting
Thursday 26th January 2006

All WART members are invited to the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Tuesday 26th January 2006 at 7.30pm in the Brandon Marsh Nature Centre. Some of the current committee members are intending to change roles, Why not come along and see what WART gets up to? Your support would be appreciated.

The proposed Committee:

Chair	Jan Clemons?
Vice-Chair	Jon Easton
Secretary	Vacant
Membership Secretary/Database Manager	Nigel Clemons
Treasurer	Howard Eccles
Newsletter Editor	Vacant
Insurance & Training Officer	Vacant
Ordinary members	Jane O'Dell, Serena Eccles, David Cole, Lucy Cash, Natalie Walker

Dunchurch Toads

Late February early March 2006

If anyone would like to assist in this regular survey, please contact Jan Clemons. (I've been on this survey myself and been amazed at how many toads can be heading for the pond on some evenings – it's quite an experience!). That was a quote from when we first started surveying this pond, the peak count this year was 119 animals.

Dates to be confirmed.

Great Crested Newt Training Day

Sunday 30th April 2006

WART are planning a GCN survey of over 200 ponds in the county starting next year. We need your help. We will supply training if you promise to survey some ponds!!

Details to follow in next newsletter.

Contact Jon Easton or Jan Clemons

BREAKING NEWS

This article has been sent to every ARG in the UK.

Update on the HGBI Coordinating Panel

I would like to introduce myself as the new chair of the panel and take the opportunity to explain and clarify the current situation regarding the HGBI network.

At our last meeting on 15 October the panel discussed the need to revitalise the HGBI and make it a more effective organisation within the UK herpetofauna conservation community. It was felt that a fully independent body to represent the interests of the voluntary network (the ARGs) was needed. It was therefore agreed to

change our name from HGBI to Amphibian & Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom. ARG UK is not a new organisation, just a re-branded HGBI.

The panel also agreed on the following broad objectives of ARG UK:

1. To act as an independent coordinating body for the UK ARG voluntary network, to maximise their contribution to herpetofauna conservation in the UK.
2. To ensure the interests of ARGs are represented by an independent body
3. To act as a focal point and an independent forum to bring together all those involved in the conservation of herpetofauna.
4. To encourage the ARG UK network by promoting communication and developing working partnerships on a national and regional level
5. To be a source of sound specialist advice to ARGs and other organisations on new projects and legislation

As ARG UK Chair I can assure you that things are definitely moving forward starting with a new dynamic committee with key advisors and a new constitution. ARG UK will be having the UK ARG National Meeting on February 4th and 5th 2006 as part of the national Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting to be held at a Coventry University Technocentre. The main theme of the meeting will be 'Defining the way forward for the voluntary sector', details of which will be forwarded soon.

As well as organising the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting, ARG UK are also in the process of establishing a communication network for the herpetofauna conservation community and we aim to launch an ARG UK website early next year.

ARG UK (formerly HGBI) will continue to represent the ARG network through the regional representatives and individual ARGs.

We greatly value your support in this new initiative and would also appreciate any comments or suggestions from your ARG as to how the ARG UK coordinating panel can help you. A good example would be to sort out comprehensive insurance cover for ARG activities.

Jan Clemons
ARG UK Chair

Meeting Notes from HGBI West Midlands Regional Amphibian and Reptile Meeting

**Organised by Worcestershire Amphibian and Reptile Group
and held at Lower Smite Farm, Worcestershire 04.09.05**

This was sent to us by Natalie Walker who represented WART at the meeting. We thought notes would be of interest so we've copied them below.

Discussions

Ruth Carey – Developments and changes at Froglife

- Work ongoing at the Froglife Reserve Hampton Nature Reserve an old clay brick pits site home to 30,000 great crested newts. They are currently monitoring 40 ponds a year and are happy for volunteers to go a help with the newt counts- Contact Froglife.
- They have been forming links with Earthwatch (a ecological travel company that identifies ecological research projects conducted in many countries all over the world for anyone to apply for and provide their help) and are currently setting up an Earthwatch Project on their Hampton Nature Reserve site.
- With the help of consultants they have produced a Five Year Strategy which is being reviewed over the next few weeks.
- Froglife are offering website space on their website for any Amphibian and Reptile Groups without a website to add their pictures, contact details, events, recording forms etc.
- They recently conducted a survey of Allotments on London, handing out questionnaires to allotment owners which proved hard work but well worth the effort, and can be replicated in any area.

- They have produced a pond pack for schools, community groups and community service projects, which contains a good range of educational skills (English, maths – to work out pond liner sizes, and ecological information) for people to learn how to build a good pond and to understand its ecological benefits.
- Froglife are currently in dialogue with the Prisons Service who are major UK landholders and are providing reptile and amphibian advice.
- They are building up a picture of the crossing sites for toads in the UK under their Toads on Roads Project.
- They are currently organising training courses to be held next year
- Jules Howard has been promoted to Conservation and Sites Officer.

John Baker – Making the Adder Count

- Project was launched at National HGBI Conference in February this year, was kept fairly low profile to ensure that the project was conducted in a sensitive and valid way.
- Adder have a widespread distribution in England, Scotland and Wales but populations have known to be in decline, this is not a new concept and had been noted in historical nature writings over 100 years ago.
- The survey is proposed to be a standardised way of collecting information about adders and may help to inform the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS - which was discussed at the National HGBI meeting). This was proposed due to the decline of adder populations and the difficulty with surveying for adder, which meant that if there were difficulties with this project then it may highlight potential problems for NARRS
- John had replies from 22 people, but if anyone has results still to hand in he would be happy to receive them – even negative results are useful. He would prefer to have results from 40 people, so a repeat of the survey next year is likely.
- Results revealed that of the sites surveyed, 51 sites contained four or fewer adders over three or more survey visits
- The number of survey visits to establish likely absence at a site was a cause for further discussion, many people conducting the adder survey over more than the three visits stated.
- On one occasion a site had been recorded twice independently, but the survey results were comparable one surveyor reporting 11 and the other counting 13 adder as the maximum count.

Questions and discussion

- One hibernation site with a approximate population of 15 adders that John had been studying (but had no monitoring data for) and had advised as to the method and timing for the heathland restoration work to take place in this area had been accidentally removed during the winter time during the restoration work, a return of adder were noted in the spring. However, with the lack of monitoring data it is impossible to tell how much of an effect to the population this had. New hibernacula have now been constructed at this site.
- Reports of damage to adder hibernacula sites from hang gliders, leaping from ledges.
- Sylvia reported that the majority of adder sites she was aware of were now using the conifer plantations instead of more traditional sites such as verges, meadows etc. and has concerns for the national drive of returning coniferous forests back to broad-leaved plantations.
- John had found grass snake during his surveys travelling over a bed of pine needles in a conifer forest and suspects they have selected that area for use as a hibernation site either within the woodland or at the edges.

Will Watson – HART Great Crested Newt project

- The Hereford ponds project is now in its second year and proving very successful, results will be in the form of a county pond database and a Reptile and Amphibian Atlas for Herefordshire.
- They have been working with FWAG in Environmental Stewardship as there has been a rise in potato and strawberry farming which is identified as bad amphibian habitat.
- They have been raising the community awareness of wildlife and heritage value of ponds.
- They have surveyed over 200 ponds, and have identified 75 new great crested newt sites – a two fold increase from existing records and have trained 100 surveyors. In addition to the great crested newt and other amphibian records collated to date during this survey, they have provided over 1000 aquatic plant records and 75 aquatic invertebrate records and in the process have discovered water vole sites, sites with pillwort, a new site for medicinal leech and a new site with fairy shrimp! Will did bring some live fairy shrimp in for us all to see.

Moccas Estate NNR – common frog, common toad, great crested newt, palmate newt and smooth newt. This is a known medicinal and horse leech site.

Stanton on Wye – together with Andrew Nixon, found a new site here for medicinal leech, three were found in total and the medicinal leech cocoons were also found. Medicinal leech and their habitats are protected under European and UK legislation. Note: Roughly 18 sites within the UK have medicinal leech populations.

Lillas Pond, Moccas Estate – 30 great crested newt were recorded in the water and 30 recorded under logs at the pond edges.

Hampton Court – no great crested newts but over 30 species of water beetle were recorded and due to the weather conditions 100+ common frog and common toad were recorded on one evening on the move together.

Note: these two species usually have a slightly displaced migration period, but the weather conditions meant both species were seen on the move at the same time this year.

The Grove Centre - Will and his team found Pennyroyal a plant listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Madeley - Will had had reports of water vole, which they were able to confirm one evening and identified water vole burrows, and formed information for the Environment Agency Biodiversity Recovery project.

Waterloo Reserve - frog, common toad, great crested newt and smooth newt. Also had a population of sticklebacks. The pond had a good structure, with many aquatic plants and had 70 species of water beetle.

Hergest Ridge, part of the Croft Estate – Pond is very shallow and transient drying out completely in dry periods (usually wet for about the first two months of the year and then dries, but this year it was a wet June and it had refilled, when Will and his team visited on the 6th August they found fairy shrimp. This species does not tolerate predation by newts and during Will's surveys only frogspawn was noted and no newts were recorded from this pond.

Note: Fairy shrimp and their habitats are protected under European and UK legislation.

Humber Marsh, Stoke Prior – good great crested newt site but had to count adults due to duckweed invasion.

- For 2005 and beyond they have identified 300 ponds to survey and have eight training days planned. Will has even had the time to become expert at water beetles during his surveys – he apparently got bored of looking at great crested newts!

Chris Monk – Great Crested Newts in the Wider Landscape

- There is a drive within Derbyshire to provide bigger areas for wildlife by linking existing areas of value and providing habitat enhancement/creation between these areas, rather than protect small isolated areas with wildlife interest. This is especially important for reptiles and amphibians.
- The Peak National Park has a White Peak Vision Project which is aiming to identify conservation areas and to enhance existing areas of wildlife value within habitats which include hay meadows, lead rakes, dew ponds, limestone heath, limestone grasslands and pastures. Almost all of the National Park is in private ownership, except Cressbrook Dale which has habitats of heath over limestone.
- The area is not typical great crested newt habitat, but the existing dew ponds support breeding great crested newt. Many of these dew ponds were lost after the Second World War when most of the settlements in the dales were put onto mains water supply, these are now being restored.
- The limestone plateau has no surface drainage and the dew ponds are widely distributed, there are no real settlements within the limestone hills, so there was no need for dew ponds to this area. Many of the existing dew ponds are cracked and are losing water, with many already dry. Limestone dew ponds have been repaired by Chris, his team and a fair few schoolchildren using mastic (sealant), this is better than using clay which may crack in dry years and can be done at a cost of around £20 per dewpond. Some of the other dewponds have been fixed using an industrial process of filling cracks with mastic and then re-lining the dew ponds with glass fibre and epoxy resin – an industrial process used to line containers to keep them watertight. This comes at a high cost of around £7000 per dew pond. Other measures include using Rawlmat – a bentonite mix.
- The work has been funded through the aggregates levy and National Park funding, to date five dew ponds have been conserved and six have been restored, with six and seven respectively planned for 2005-2006 period.
- Other projects for the White Peak have included awareness raising, providing plant guardians for important plant species and in the following habitats management work including: Pastures - tree felling, scrub control and ragweed and thistle control, wetland restoration - pond and meander restoration and Indian Balsam control, Ash woodlands – selective felling to thin woodland, and restoration of mineral and quarry workings, heathland and limestone grassland. This project has involved landowners, contractors, in-house staff (DCC), other agencies and local naturalists.
- Pond surveys and baseline data identified 50 plus ponds with scattered great crested newt records, through survey work and at a recently repaired (using mastic) dew pond at Stanhill Dale a torch survey revealed 117 great crested newt, 140 smooth newts and 1 common toad.
- The restoration work has been good for the pond network in this area, by reconnecting habitats and corridors for dispersal and movement of great crested newt and other amphibians and is a way of achieving Biodiversity Action Plan targets. Through this work Chris and his team have achieved the ten year Biodiversity Action Plan target for the whole of Derbyshire!

- Rebekah Newman is the Vision Project Officer and at present there is one more year of funding.

Local group reports

Derbyshire

Toads on roads project, still the main focus for the group.
Continuation of White Peak project

Birmingham and the Black Country

Funding for Amphibian and Reptile Atlas
Adder records from Sutton Park
Various other adder records around the area, Paul is currently checking these out.

Warwickshire

Jan has been made chair of HGBI!!

Worcestershire

No meeting were held last year. It is still a small group of Alan, Mike, Sylvia and Alonzo.

Gloucestershire

Colin and Ingrid only have a small group, they are the main people conducting work. They have recently been studying a site with slow-worm, adder and common lizard.

Herefordshire

HART great crested newt project for Herefordshire Atlas ongoing, many training events are planned for next year.

AOB:

- Bi-annual regional meeting suggested to be held September 2007, so mid-way between national meetings.
- Use of the Froglife website offer to advertise the work of the West Midlands Groups
- Still problem of small groups for Gloucs and Worcs, some linkage needed with other groups. Suggestion that a regional newsletter could be produced, possibly when HGBI has been re-organised.

Natalie Walker

WART Contacts

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Illustrations by Nicola Angell.

Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to Nigel Clemons
Copy deadline for next issue: 31st December 2005