



Representing the

Amphibian & Reptile
Groups of the United
Kingdom

ARG REPORTS

January 2007

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ARG UK REPORT 2006

The past year has seen ARG UK and the ARG network revitalised and rapidly developing into the country's leading voluntary organisation for herpetofauna conservation.

We are very fortunate to have a very knowledgeable and diligent ARG UK panel (see listing) that have put hours of their own time and an enormous amount of effort into achieving real progress. The panel is fortunate to have such experienced herpetologists and it is hard to believe we have achieved so much in the last twelve months working in our spare time.

Provision of a comprehensive insurance scheme was undertaken and offered to every ARG in the UK free of charge, thanks to the efforts of David Orchard. We hope that more ARGs will take up this opportunity of free insurance for the next surveying season.

The ARG UK web site has been very successful and since its appearance on the worldwide web in April 2006 it has had thousands of visitors. Many thanks must go to our web site manager John Cranfield who has also been instrumental in spreading the word about the ARG network. The website offers a wonderful opportunity for ARGs to post news about events they have planned and I urge you all to send details to the web site manager.

ARG UK produced the first issue of the electronic newsletter 'ARG Today' edited by David Orchard in October 2006 with the potential to reach every ARG member in the country. A second issue is planned prior to this year's surveying season.

During 2006 ARG UK representatives have been members of the NARRS steering group and many ARGs volunteered to trial the pilot surveys for both amphibians and reptiles. It is encouraging to see that the NARRS roll-out will be happening soon and we need as many ARG groups as possible to get involved in this nationwide survey initiative, in order to gain a better grasp of amphibian and reptile distribution and status within the UK.

In November 2006 ARG UK published our first advice note titled 'Engaging with the Planning System' based on a workshop run at last year's HWM. There are plans to produce further advice notes in 2007.

The past year has also seen the formation of several new ARG groups and keeping up this momentum is central to ARG UK's aims to make the network even bigger and better. To these ends, John Baker and Chris Gleed-Owen and I have put in hours of work with the aim of securing an ARG UK Support Post. At the time of writing we are applying jointly with the HCT to seek the necessary funding for a Widespread Species Project which will incorporate the ARG UK post.

ARG UK is grateful to the HCT for all their support over the past year and that a mutualistic relationship between our two organisations is now firmly established.

The efforts of the ARG UK regional representatives cannot be underestimated. Apart from nurturing involvement in their own regions they are vital to the ARG UK panel in the wealth of knowledge and experience they offer to a variety of ARG UK activities.

ARG UK is extremely grateful for all the ARG reports in this publication and those ARG co-ordinators that took the time and trouble to prepare them. The ARGs were asked to produce a brief report outlining the current status of their ARG including the number of active members and any work carried out during the last year such as surveying, training, habitat management and special projects. Any success stories or concerns together with any projects needing funding was also requested.

From the 47 ARG groups whom we had contact details for, over 75% responded and 89% of these reported positively about the activities carried out in 2006. Common themes include survey work and training, toad crossings, involvement in NARRS and 'Make the adder count', habitat management and creation, production of newsletters, atlases and websites. From these reports it is clear that a tremendous amount of work for herpetological conservation is being carried out throughout the UK. However there are still a few gaps where ARGs have yet to be established such as London, Hertfordshire and Tyne and Wear. There are also vacancies for a Wales and North East England regional representative.

Finally the ARG UK panel are responsible for the running of the annual Herpetofauna Worker's meeting. This involves getting a topical and relevant programme of talks and workshops together, organising a venue and taking the bookings. It is hoped that HWM 2007 will be the biggest and most successful meeting to date.

Jan Clemons
ARG UK Chair

THE ARG UK PANEL

Chair – Jan Clemons
Vice-Chair – David Orchard
Treasurer – Chris Gleed-Owen
Secretary - John Baker
Website Manager – Jon Cranfield

Regional representatives:

Scotland - Peter Leach
East of England – John Baker
West Midlands – Will Watson
East Midlands – Andrew Heaton
South West – Chris Gleed – Owen
South East – Jon Poland & Lee Brady
Yorkshire & Humber – John Newton
North West – Julian Whitehurst & David Orchard

AVON ARG

ARAG has not been an active group this year due to a lack of resources to coordinate or run the group. However we at BRERC have been putting in some preparatory work for next year. We have been working closely with the Wildlife Trust to develop a project around Public Access Ponds in Avon called "Pond Ways". This has received notification of funding and a project officer will take up her position in January. A keystone to this project is the reinvigoration of ARAG and the group's activities for the next two years will be delivered primarily through this project. BRERC has designed a pond survey form which has combined HSI data capture from the NARRS form and data capture for the Pond Conservation Network's Pond Inventory form. The project data will also be fed into NARRS. We have recently had a flurry of interest from new volunteers who would like to get involved with ARAG and will be having our first group meeting for two years in early January. Therefore things are looking more positive for our ARG for 2007.

Jo Illsley

BEDFORDSHIRE ARG

Unfortunately there is nothing much to report about the Beds ARG this year. We have been totally pre-occupied with a massive GCN survey for a developer and in our absence, nothing much has seemed to happen. In addition two of our most active members could contribute little as one was plagued with ill health and the other with job pressures. We hope that there may be more to report next year.
Sue and Marcus Philips

Berkshire Reptile and Amphibian Group 2006 Report

Since it's inception in 2003 BRAG has for the most part focused on amphibian surveys and in 2006 we decided to shift the emphasis and start work on the counties reptiles. With this in mind the group joined in with the Make the Adder Count project and managed to survey 9 sites, 6 of which contained snakes. In order to encourage members to survey sites for reptiles we are hoping to run a reptile survey training course at Greenham Common in March/April 2007. This is in addition to our usual GCN training course, which we will be running again in May 2007.

BRAG also just agreed a new constitution, which will enable us to open a bank account. It is hoped that in the future we can work with our local Authorities on joint practical pond creation projects. As a voluntary organisation we are eligible for funding pots that local authorities are not. We already have one potential project in the pipeline, excavating 3 new ponds adjacent to an established GCN population.

Andy Glencross

Brecknock Reptile and Amphibian Group

The group, originally formed in 1986, was re-launched this year and still does not have an agreed new name!

Despite our re-launch meeting coinciding with the European Football Cup Final during atrocious weather, several staunch 'new' members turned up, followed by a healthy response via the local Wildlife Trust newsletter which has swelled numbers to over 20.

The original aim of the group was to raise the profile of herpetofauna in the area and to provide a focus – and in this we have been successful.

Plans for next year include:

- Find a name!
- a slow worm/compost project
- support and promotion of the Add an Adder project
- review of known GCN sites (inc GCN training)
- support for NARRS method evaluation project
- developing links with County Highways department to promote recording of sightings
- series of open field meetings throughout the herpetofauna calendar

Valerie & Cliff Bradley (ARG contact)
bradleycj@tiscali.co.uk

Bridgend and Vale Amphibian and Reptile Group

The Bridgend and Vale Amphibian and Reptile Group was established at the start of 2005. We decided to cover two neighbouring counties in South Wales consisting of Bridgend County Borough and the Vale of Glamorgan. We also decided to concentrate primarily on amphibian species until the group is more established when we hope to expand and carry out some reptile work.

The group currently has one member licensed to handle Great Crested Newts. This allowed us to develop the groups surveying skills in the first season by learning how to survey and ID all our local species of amphibian. Several members of the group also took part in a training course focusing on the identification and survey methods for Great Crested Newts. Three further members of our group are hoping to have a CCW license in place for the start of this season to allow the group to expand its activities.

In spring 2006 the group set up its first proper survey project. We picked an area and looked on an OS map and marked every pond within that area and utilised data from the Bridgend Pond Survey. We then set about contacting all the relevant landowners to get permission to access the ponds. We surveyed all the ponds we were allowed access to, for all amphibian species and took note of plant species and invertebrates found. This project highlighted a good metapopulation of Great Crested Newts within our area. We were then able to pass this information on to the Local Authority's Countryside section and to our Local Record Centre.

The group learnt a lot of lessons from this exercise. One of which is to contact landowners in the autumn/winter season so that surveying can begin as soon as spring begins. We have now also created simple sheets to record survey findings on site.

This season we are hoping to continue with the work we started last year as we still have a few ponds to survey in the area. Additionally, our surveys have highlighted several ponds in need of maintenance work. We are currently applying for a license to carry out works on one of these ponds this year which holds Great Crested Newts. We are also working on getting permission to clear the other ponds highlighted during the survey. As a group this work is important to us, as we don't just want to monitor the decline of amphibian species in our area but also to protect their habitat.

Additionally, a local group interested in keeping reptiles has recently approached us. They would like us to do a presentation for them and are coming along on a pond dipping exercise to learn more about amphibians in the area. We hope that this will raise the profile of our group and increase interest in the area. We also hope that through carrying out presentations when requested we may attract further members to our group.

One of the main problems we face is one experienced by all volunteer groups. We struggle to get enough committed members to carry out the work we would like to do. We have recently lost two members due to them moving from the area. This has put more pressure on the people still in the group to carry out more work. We only have a small

number of members who are prepared to commit to the surveying project meaning that we have to keep our aims fairly low key. This aside though, the group is still going strong and we are looking forward to lots of amphibian work in 2007.

Lisa Kirby

CAIRNGORMS (potential) ARG

This year I produced an information leaflet on "Amphibians of the Cairngorms" for the general public that included a tear-off section to record amphibian sightings. This went out in the late summer so I have not had many records back. Through the Cairngorms Biodiversity Grant Scheme we have funded a school wildlife garden incorporating a small pond, the creation of a new pond at a Community woodland near Laggan, restored a farm pond at a community meadow at Insh, created a new pond adjacent to a school near Nethy Bridge, and the restoration of a defunct curling pond at another community woodland near Grantown. Amphibian conservation was not the primary factor for these pond projects but all will have benefits for local amphibian populations. We have also produced a leaflet on non-native species ("Warning Alien Invasion") that raises awareness about introducing species including amphibians. Both the leaflets are on the LBAP project web pages

http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/parkauthority/projects/projects.php?project_id=11

There is no functioning ARG at the moment in the Cairngorms but I have a small core of interested members (around 12 or so) that I hope can form a Local ARG next year. We have not carried out any training or surveys yet.

When we set up an ARG a key requirement will be to organise some survey training for early spring 2007, and also to purchase some equipment

Stephen Corcoran
Cairngorms Biodiversity Officer

Report on activities of Cheshire and Wirral ARG 2006.

CWARG remained active in 2006, although mainly via e-mail and telephone. Unfortunately, two previous recruitment drives have failed to generate any new membership at the meetings, despite apparent keen interest by e-mail enquirers. This has resulted in a few core members keeping the group going.

A new recruitment drive is planned for 2007 and two new active (hopefully) members have already been 'signed up'. A meeting is planned for February 2007, and the possibility of organising a North West Regional ARG is being discussed with our neighbouring ARG group NEWARN.

Whilst some limited voluntary amphibian survey work took place, the majority of CWARG's work last year centred on providing help and advice to the public via phone and e-mail on a wide variety of amphibian and reptile conservation issues.

A significant result for CWARG, represented by Cheshire Wildlife Trust's consultancy arm (CES), was the successful defence of a great crested newt and reptile site at public inquiry. A copy of the decision notice is available to other ARG groups upon request.

CWARG also worked in conjunction with NEWARN and NEWW in North Wales to run another successful advanced amphibian training event. A similar event is planned in 2007.

Ongoing reptile monitoring was also carried out by a CWARG member on one of the few sites in Cheshire known to support a slow worm colony, with records being forwarded to the local record centre.

Anyone wishing to join CWARG or attend the proposed meeting in February should contact j.whitehurst@virgin.net for further details.

Cumbria ARG

Cumbria Amphibian & Reptile Group remains in hibernation. I try to deal with enquiries when they come to the Group and to enthuse people to be active in herpetofauna conservation.

There are few people with time to be active but fortunately for the amphibians and reptiles they are widespread around the county. This has the disadvantage that with the size of the county it is a long way for people to travel to get together. We are trying to form an email circulation list to try and keep people more in touch with activities on the ground and nationally.

Two training courses "Newts for Novices" and "Basic newt identification and survey techniques" were run to familiarize people with the different species of newts and how to survey them. Both were fully booked and several of those attending are now helping with surveys.

The vast majority of newt surveys in the county are being done by consultants to accompany proposed planning applications.

Tony Marshall

Cumbria Amphibian & Reptile Group

Derbyshire Amphibian & Reptile Group – 2006 report

Membership of the Group remained stable throughout the year with about 20 active members out of the 35 or so on the mailing list. In addition there are many local volunteers that just assist with the “Toads on Roads” crossing patrols, with a publicity drive for the Furness Vale toad crossing resulting in enough new volunteers for some of them to be passed onto the organisers of two other crossings. A sub-committee was set up during the year to draft a constitution to be adopted in 2007. The ARG is affiliated to the BTCV and their local group’s insurance scheme covered the Group’s members.

Two training days for members were organised on surveying for snakes. Unfortunately, both days on successive weekends in March were badly affected by the weather. Seven members attended a cold, dull, windy day at the National Forest’s Forestry Centre to be shown survey techniques and areas where both grass snakes, and reputedly adders, were present. 2006 turned out to be a poor year for sightings at the site, with very few records being obtained even from Centre staff. Nine people attended the adder training day in persistent rain and thick hill fog on the Peak District Moors. This was to demonstrate techniques for the “Make the Adder Count” hibernation emergence survey and despite the weather two adders were seen on the day. Seven of the participants subsequently participated in the survey, by the end of which nine surveyors had sent in 162 counts covering 29 hibernation sites. Some additional training was held for individuals on great crested newt surveying methods.

In addition to the Adder survey, toad crossings remained the mainstay of the Group’s activities over the year with 8 sites being covered. Survey work for great crested newts was carried out for the Peak National Park, principally for its biodiversity Vision Project, and for the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust at several of its nature reserves. A member completed the two-year Derby City Pond Survey for the City Council, which won a Gold Award in the national Green Apple Awards in the autumn. Pond creation work was carried out for the third year running at a Local Nature Reserve in Derby City and help given to restoration tasks at three concrete dewponds in the Peak District Vision Project area. As the county protected species GIS-linked database produced for English Nature and the Local Authorities has not been updated since December 2003, a temporary update for great crested newts was produced by the Amphibian Recorder and circulated to the County Council, Peak Park and Natural England in December 2006. With the assistance of the Derby City Council & English Nature, the Highways Agency was brought back to deal with a failed great crested newt mitigation scheme that has effectively wiped out the largest population of the species in the City due to the replacement ponds not holding water since it was completed in 2002.

The main concerns of the Group are still the lack of any support by the County’s Highways Division for highway signage of toad crossings - this is a high priority for those sites where volunteers are carrying out patrols. Letters written to the County produced the response that there were no crossings in Derbyshire registered with the Dept of Transport, when in fact there are approximately 50 crossings that have been registered. Finance to provide our own highway standard signs is being pursued. The continuing lack

of a dedicated Police Wildlife Liaison officer in the County worries many conservation groups including the ARG as no effective action is being taken on wildlife crime - nothing has happened from the bulldozing of a great crested newt pond's surroundings in the summer despite being reported directly to the Police.

Chris Monk.

Dorset Amphibian and Reptile Network – 2006 report

DARN was formed in 2005, and acts as a communication network for herpetologists and other interested individuals in the county. Membership is via an email group of around 65 people at present. We have a constitution, and the group's activities are overseen by a committee.

The committee comprises:

Secretary – Dorothy Wright

Amphibian Coordinator – Philip Temple

Reptile Coordinator & Chair – Chris Gleed-Owen

Recorder – Jonathan McGowan

In April 2006, DARN ran a training day in reptile identification and survey. This took place on the HCT reserve at Parley Common, and was attended by 15 people. Thankfully the weather was beautiful and we encountered plenty of reptiles, including smooth snake and sand lizard. The opportunity to handle smooth snakes is important in sexing, measuring and photographing them, but also for giving surveyors the experience needed for licensing purposes. Some of the attendees were professionals from local authorities, who expressed the need to have a 'refresher' like this once in a while.

This was a relatively very quiet year for Amphibian surveys, and only 36 ponds were added to the pond database. Work has been initiated to restore a viable meta-population in the Lydlinch area, with excellent cooperation from the owner. Philip Temple provided great crested newt training to a few DARN members at several sites, with follow-up at one site by Dorothy Wright. The on-site training found a cluster of great crested newt ponds within 700m of isolated ones on an HCT reserve, giving encouragement to an on-going long-needed blanket survey.

Most DARN members are licensed under the HCT's organisational survey licence, and the HCT collates, manages and disseminates records from many DARN members. Volunteers in Dorset carry out a lot of rare reptile monitoring as part of the programmes coordinated by the HCT.

In 2007, we plan to direct effort into the following activities:

- NARRS – encouraging members to take part in the *National Amphibian Survey* and *National Reptile Survey*, as well as continuing the existing rare species schemes.
- Great crested newt survey of the area east of the north Dorset town of Gillingham – the one under-surveyed area for this species left in Dorset.

- Follow-up monitoring of one great crested newt SAC site.
- Grass snake survey of the Avon Valley – to investigate the suspected importance of this river valley to grass snakes.

Chris Glead-Owen, Philip Temple & Dorothy Wright, January 2007



EARG Report

Chair – Ray Cranfield, Treasurer – Meryvn Cottenden, Secretary – vacant, Planning Officer – Debbie Bryce, Recorder – David Scott, Project Coordinator – Jon Cranfield.

Active members – 18 Supportive members – 30 to 40 (various individuals, organisations & local authorities)

The Essex ARG and its members have been hard at work during 2006. Various projects have been established within the county which include survey work, school visits, toad patrol activities, habitat creation, attending exhibitions and other public events.

The most active toad patrol in the county is currently run by the county recorder for amphibians and reptiles David Scott. Near his home in Little Leigh a massive migration of toads are helped across a small country lane on their way to their breeding site which happens to be a large fishing lake. The patrol is in its third year and it has seen the number of toads rescued increase from 700 to over 2,000 in 2006.

The patrol is supported by the Essex Amphibian & Reptile Group who helped with the acquisition of the toad crossing signs from the Highways department. David has also supplied all his volunteers with high visibility vests to ensure the safety of the toad patrollers. In 2007 it is hoped that all the toad patrollers will become members of the Essex ARG and will be covered by the insurance offered by the ARG UK.

The Essex ARG has also been working with various organisations and private landowners within the county. The most significant being the RSPB who have given permission for Essex ARG members to help survey their land holdings in the South of the county for amphibians and reptiles. The Essex Wildlife Trust has also benefited from the help of the Essex ARG who helped wardens with surveys at Chafford Gorges, a new Essex Wildlife Trust Reserve, for great crested newts. On other Essex Wildlife Trust sites

the Essex ARG has applied for special permits to carry out reptile and amphibian surveys on many of their reserves. The Essex ARG as volunteers will hopefully be given permission to carry out these surveys in 2007. In the meantime the Essex ARG has been invited to help with habitat management works on various reserves in the North East of the county.

The Essex ARG has also developed a good working relationship with various councils and private land owners who have welcomed the Essex ARG onto their land to carry out reptile and amphibian surveys. Essex County Council for instance continues to carry out sympathetic management work on their country parks thanks to the survey input of the Essex ARG. The Essex Ranger Service has, with the help of the Essex ARG, carried out survey training workshops and habitat management events for local volunteers.

Several private land owners have been very welcoming for the Essex ARG to come onto their land to help carry out amphibian and reptile surveys with the help of DEFRA RDS and English Nature (now Natural England). A recent project in Peldon has enabled local volunteers to learn how to carry out reptile surveys by participating in a reptile monitoring project. The project is now in its third year and hopefully it will be extended for a further two years which will provide vital funding for the EARG to provide expenses for volunteer travel and equipment.

It looks like a busy year ahead in 2007 with plenty of winter management works and survey projects which will be keeping our volunteers busy. At the end of 2007 it is likely that the EARG will be hosting the ARG UK East Anglia Regional Conference which will coincide with the publication of the updated provisional atlas for Herpetofauna in Essex. This publication will be funded partly by the ARG along with some other local partners which may include the Essex Field Club and others yet to be determined. If anyone would like to contribute to the atlas then please email essex_arg@hotmail.com or phone the chair 01702 540600

Ray Cranfield
EARG

FIFE

For a variety of reasons the Fife ARG has been relatively inactive in recent years with myself being mainly a FERN contact to check out new records,

Tom Gray

Hampshire ARG (HARG) enjoyed a busy year in 2006. The ARG UK Southern Region Meeting was held at Marwell Zoo and was a splendid event attended by herpetologists of all ages (more details can be found in the last *ARG Today* newsletter).

At the end of 2006, HARG had 247 members. As expected, the number of active members is much lower (about 10%!). However, if everyone sent in **one** record, maybe just a slow-worm or common frog from their garden, then an accurate picture of the distribution of our commoner species would surely emerge. With the recent upsurge in the popularity of wildlife gardening, we hope to encourage a change from armchair herpetologists to (at least) garden herpetologists!

Possibly our most exciting venture was to lay the foundations to a new County Atlas, with Nick Smith appointed as the editor. This hopes to provide a real basis for our recording, and encourage more members to get out there and see what's on their doorstep. A countywide great crested newt survey was a large focus of our recording year. The project was co-ordinated by Rachel Urwin, with even more ambitious surveys planned for this year. Is there anyone living, or working, in Hampshire who would like to help? There must be innumerable consultants who would at least send their records back to HARG if they only knew how essential they are!

Education and awareness also continues to be a main objective of our group with many public events, field meetings and indoor lectures. Talks to community groups and other organisations help raise awareness of amphibians and reptiles to a generally non-herpetological audience. However the downside is that their enthusiasm is often short-lived – how can we maintain it?

HARG, like many (if not all) county ARG's, welcomes funding and donations to aid with our projects. Neighbouring ARG's have also stressed that time and money are limiting factors in what their groups can achieve. We are extremely fortunate that the Hampshire Wildlife Trust continues to provide staff time to administer the paperwork in running the group. Nevertheless, even small donations can buy necessary equipment (such as torches) and can help with volunteers' travel costs to survey the less well-recorded areas of Hampshire. This is likely to become even more critical as our Atlas approaches its 2010 deadline.

Finally I wish to thank the remaining members of our indefatigable committee, along with everyone who submitted records or attended any of our events.

John Poland
HARG Chairman

Herefordshire ARG UK Report 2006

2006 has been a momentous year for HART with the completion of the Herefordshire Ponds and Newts Project and the production of the Herefordshire Amphibian and Reptile Atlas – a fully illustrated 72-page book co-authored by Nigel Hand, Will Watson and Phyl King.

Details about the atlas are on the HART, ARG UK, HCT, and Froglife websites and copies will be available for sale at the Herpetofauna Workers' Conference in Coventry.

The 3-year Herefordshire Ponds and Newts Project, with Will Watson as Project Consultant, has surveyed 286 ponds within Herefordshire Rivers Area which covers 880 square kilometers (approximately one third of the county) in the process gathering over 600 amphibian and reptile records. Twelve training courses were run and 124 people were trained. We found that 46% of all ponds visited were found to support the specially protected great crested newt. 48% of ponds supported smooth newt and 29% of ponds supported palmate newt. 30 ponds supported all three species of newt representing 11% of all ponds. In addition, 49% of ponds supported common frog, 32% of ponds supported common toad and two ponds were found to support the introduced marsh frog.

On the reptile side, Nigel Hand has been involved with the Community Commons Project, looking at and monitoring local commons with community members, training in reptile recording and advising on habitat management for 6 sites. Of the six commons, adders were found on two, grass snake on two, common lizard and slow-worm on three. A Spring count of adders in the county were submitted for Make The Adder Count. Of the sixteen sites looked at in 2006 four had no adders recorded. There are two good sites in the county, but the majority appear to have low populations on small sites, which is worrying for future long term survival of the species.

Nigel is also on the Malvern Hills wildlife panel providing habitat advice.

Habitat work parties have been organized in partnership with the Nature Trust's Woolhope Dome Project this winter.

We currently have 80 members of whom about 30 are active to varying degrees. We're lucky to have such a supportive group.

Major successes are the Atlas and HPN Project. We have also just secured around £55,000 funding for a further Pond Restoration and Celebration Project which will restore 5 ponds from the LEADER+ area in Herefordshire, train pond owners and managers in pond management techniques, and run days to celebrate the biodiversity of ponds and hopefully inspire others to create and restore their own ponds.

We are very concerned about the decline of the Adder in the county, and are working on putting together funding applications for an Adder Monitoring project leading to habitat conservation work and improved public awareness. Recorded data for the common lizard is also low. This is apparent in the atlas, illustrating the need for more people recording this species in Herefordshire.

Finally, a nice surprise in the form of a group of approximately fourteen grass snakes were observed on a saw-dust pile. Luckily the landowner is very sympathetic and happy to manage their habitat in collaboration with HART.

Also after running such a successful project (Ponds and Newts) we are looking into ways of how to sustain interest amongst all the trained volunteers. To this end we hope to recruit Pond Stewards: committed individuals who will look after and manage their ponds. Through the Project a great deal of interest has been generated but it won't be possible to offer them anything like to support we provided over the last three years.

We have a successful partnership with a local charity Caring for God's Acre. They are helping churches look after their churchyards better for wildlife, and HART is providing surveys and advice for churchyard teams on best management for the reptiles.

The Adder Project will be looking to involve community groups in learning about the adder and going out to monitor the adder sites. Training will be provided to improve identification and recorder skills, with the additional aim of recruiting more recorders and hence more records. The project aims to promote the adder and awareness through producing and publishing leaflets, interpretation boards, talks and other events. The project also aims to develop liaisons with the land managers and hence influence the land management to be more sympathetic to reptiles. Data collected will be passed to the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre and entered on the central database from which distribution maps and information will be published with an Adder Status Report.

Will Watson, Nigel Hand, Richard King
HART (Herefordshire Amphibian and Reptile Team)

Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group

Size of group : Membership – 69

Committee members:

Chairman -	Lee Brady
Secretary -	Rick Hodges
Treasurer	Mike Phillips
For KWT	Fred Booth
For K&MBRC	Ruth Childs
Others	Brett Lewis
	Ken Plume
	Bill Whitaker
	Sue Young

When established: 1988 (relaunched 1995)

Contact details:

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info@kentarg.org
www.kentarg.org

General description:

The Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group promotes reptile and amphibian conservation by:

- Collecting and collating herpetofauna records. All records go to the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC) and are available to any other interested party. Krag builds up long-term records for key sites in an attempt to safeguard them from development or mismanagement.
- Providing general advice on reptiles and amphibians and their habitat management to relevant organisations and the general public.
- Raising awareness amongst the general public by participation in wildlife events around the county.

More information can be found on the Krag website at <http://www.kentarg.org>, where it is possible to submit records on-line, get the latest information on the Group from the 'News' page and find out what's coming up soon on the 'Events' page. There are also pages devoted to the fauna of Kent. Members receive a Newsletter either once or twice a year.

Current activities/projects:

The Group currently has two flagship projects:

Great Crested Newt Monitoring Project (launched 2004) – This project is run in conjunction with BTCV Pond Wardens. Volunteers survey Kent's ponds for this declining and strictly protected species. Krag has been able to undertake several training workshops and supply survey equipment to facilitate the project.

Adders in Decline (launched 2003) - the project aims to promote pro-active conservation of adder by:

- Recording the distribution of adder in Kent - in particular, through identifying key sites and important habitat components within each site (e.g. hibernacula).
- Monitoring important populations.
- Raising awareness and publicising apparent declines - by running reptile survey training events, publishing habitat management leaflets etc.
- Promoting sympathetic management.

Lancashire & Greater Manchester ARG Report for 2006

2006 started well with a great crested newt survey training session for ARGSL volunteers. Some of these volunteers went on to survey nearby ponds over the next few months, though obtaining landowners permission was a major obstacle to further work.

The highlights of the year came in March and November with two weekends of practical work on the coastal dunes at Presthaven Sands in north Wales. Groups of ten then fifteen volunteers worked on the SSSI of Gronant Dunes and Talacre Warren, near Prestatyn. The site management plan requires the removal of scrub from the dunes which is of benefit to both sand lizards and natterjack toads. ARGSL volunteers did this with great enthusiasm and the rangers were well pleased with the work. Sand lizards have been successfully reintroduced into this area by HCT, who are also involved with ongoing management work in the area.

The weekends were arranged in conjunction with rangers from Flintshire Countryside Service and were a great success. The volunteers had a great time and a return visit is planned for March 2007.

ARGSL has a number of ideas for 2007, among which is a more formalised membership structure with a membership fee of £6 to help cover running costs for the group.

David Orchard, 1.1.07

Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network 2006

LARN is an informal grouping of people who are interested in amphibians and reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland, brought together by a regular newsletter. Its principal aim is to encourage recording of the local herpetofauna so as to build up a comprehensive picture of distribution in the two counties.

As well as coordinating recording directly, LARN has been involved with the Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre in developing surveys aimed at the general public. There are now two of these – “Snakes Alive” (gathering records of all reptiles) and “Spawn Spot”, for recording frog and toad spawning sites. With recording forms widely available, backed up by websites, these have been successful in getting records in from the public.

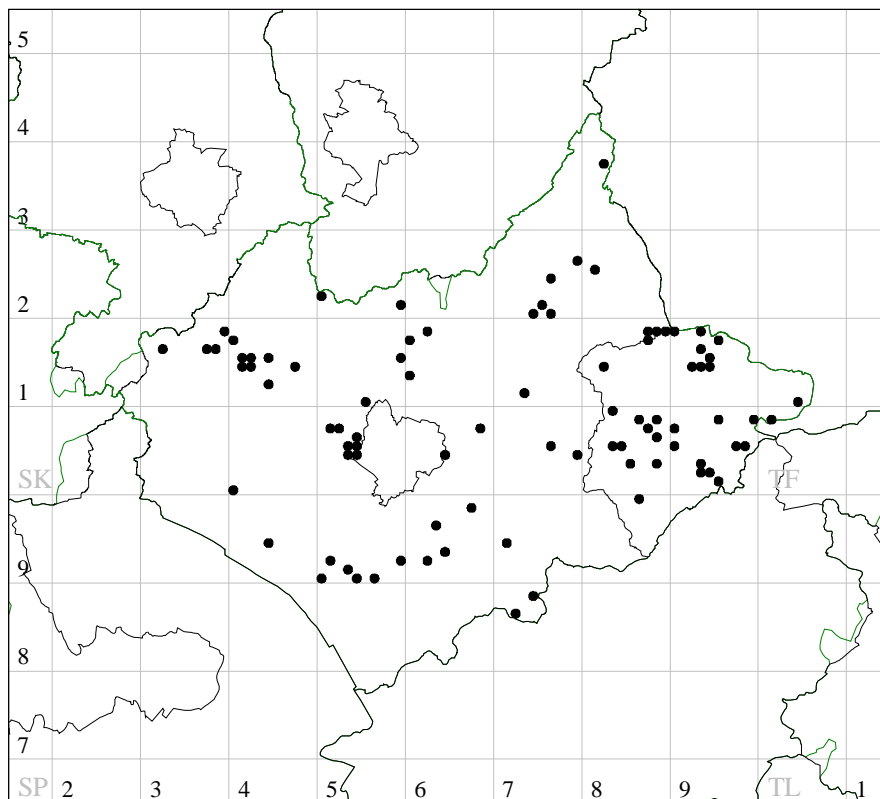
LARN currently sends its newsletter out to around 30 addresses, though the number of active recorders is rather less than this (around half a dozen).

Recent recording activity has shown the common lizard to be more widespread than previously thought. On the more negative side, a number of records for non-native species are turning up: terrapins, and at least two sites for Alpine newts.

The principal need for Leicestershire and Rutland is a comprehensive great crested newt survey – we know that the GCN is reasonably widespread, with some good populations especially in North-West Leicestershire, but there are probably many more sites to be discovered.

Andrew Heaton

Warty Newt / Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)



Lincolnshire ARG 2006 Report.

Co-ordinator : Mr Ashley Butterfield

Since Hannah Powell replied to my email of 6th July 2006 saying that she would be happy for me to take the Lead in developing a Lincolnshire ARG. I have set the following objectives:

- **Planning & Infrastructure.**

1. Development of a local plan, to involve local Lincolnshire people in surveying for amphibian & reptile distribution and populations.
 2. Open up lines of communication for the group by phone, email and post.
 3. Development of a survey form for volunteer surveyors to use.
- **Recruitment of volunteer surveyors.**
To set up email and postal contact with interested volunteer surveyors.
 - **Training.**
 1. Co-ordinating Newt survey training for Lincolnshire volunteer surveyors with the involvement of the experienced ARG UK John Baker
 2. Through my position as Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union Programme Secretary
 3. I will be co-ordinating an illustrated talk by Dr Arnie Cooke on "The Long term surveillance & conservation of Amphibian populations."
 - **Storage and dissemination of volunteer surveyor's records.**
 1. The utilisation of computer based storage system for records.
 2. To maintain contact with the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre.
 3. To send records (once compiled to ARG UK



LOTHIAN AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE GROUP

Secretary: Peter Leach, 4 Grierson Road, Edinburgh, EH5 2BQ

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Activities Report 2006

2006 was a funny old year.

An encouraging flurry of new members, taking us up to about 45, was a good sign, but survey activities were limited by the unavailability of some of the "old hands" to lead them and weather which was either very cold or very hot.

We had very high numbers of amphibian records but this was largely due to a comprehensive survey of a proposed development area in the vicinity of some of our Great crested newt ponds. In general amphibian survey numbers were down on 2005.

A leaflet we produced in conjunction with Edinburgh Zoo in 2004, encouraging the public to record reptile sightings, has produced a number of good records, both in Lothian and further afield in Scotland. We weren't able to follow these up in the way we would

have liked because of the weather constraint, but as some of them are in areas where reptiles were last recorded some 80 years ago, 2007 will probably be soon enough.

We have a couple of pond creation projects in mind, but access difficulties have meant that they aren't yet certain and it's rather frustrating not to be able to get on with projects which will be of significant conservation benefit.

Regular monitoring of a number of amphibian sites over the last few years have built up a picture of the health of the animal populations present. Although many ponds with common species are flourishing, we are concerned about a number of Great crested newt sites where things appear to be less satisfactory. We hope that our growing cooperation with SNH Area Officers will allow this to be addressed.

Well, what for 2007? Training for members, more surveys, access to areas for pond management and a follow up of the new reptile records, but we are doubtful about the sand lizard in East Lothian and the Natterjack in West Lothian!

Peter Leach

Merseyside ARG Report for 2006

The Merseyside ARG largely concentrated its efforts on Sand Lizard Monitoring in 2006, focusing on the coastal dunes at Ainsdale in Merseyside. Two members attempted constant effort monitoring in a limited number of sites in order to establish population trends and this proved to be successful. 170 animals were recorded with a healthy population of both juveniles and yearlings that showed good breeding and survival rates for both this and last year.

Many of the lizards were photographed for recording and individual identification purposes as it is possible to distinguish between each animal via markings. This was useful as often 3 or 4 adults lived in close proximity and when moving about could easily have been counted as one individual only.

By such intensive monitoring we were able to work out an estimated population for our study area of roughly 500 animals. It is likely therefore that the Merseyside area as a whole carries a population into four figures, considerably higher than previous estimates. With sensitive management and careful protection of this species we hope to continue our work through HCT and help ensure a secure future for this species in our area.

For further information about the work of the Merseyside ARG, follow the link from www.merseysidebiodiversity.org.uk
David Hardaker.

Report on activities of North East Wales Amphibian & Reptile Network (NEWARN) and its component members (principally CCW, Denbighshire CC, Wrexham CBC, Flintshire CC and NEWW).

1. Survey and Monitoring

1.2 Amphibians

1.2.1 GCN surveys

All statutory sites notified for their amphibian interest have been subject to survey by component organizations of NEWARN, ie North East Wales Wildlife (NEWW), Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council and CCW.

Two further sites where exceptional populations are known were also surveyed: Maes Mynnan by CCW and St Asaph by Welsh Assembly Government and NEWW.

NEWW is the new name for Deeside Urban wildlife Group. They have land interests in 4 statutory sites. NEWW and HCT are jointly leading a Species Challenge fund project for NE Wales.

1.2.2 Natterjacks

FCC BHP Billiton and Bourne Leisure undertook natterjack surveillance in 2006.

2. Training.

2.1 On behalf of NEWARN, NEWW delivered three herp training courses in 2006. These were basic and advanced amphibian survey; and reptile survey.

2.2 John Buckley (HCT) delivered one natterjack training course at Talacre during 2006.

3. Conservation Action

3.1 Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Denbighshire CC, HCT and NEWW undertook nature conservation action on key herp sites.

3.2 Resources for enabling this action were provided by DEFRA, CCW, EAW, Welsh Assembly Government, Mersey Waste Holdings Limited, AD Waste Limited, and a number of commercial developers.

Matthew Ellis

North West Wales ARG Report

The Group ran training days on Reptile Survey and GCN Survey (the latter with support from Dorothy Wright of HCT), as well as a guided walk to see amphibians. Some important recording matters were worked on, establishing a draft agreement for sharing of data with Cofnod - the recently established North Wales local records centre. The Group's membership continues at around 50, though we are still not charging a formal fee for membership because of the large base of University of Wales Bangor students.

Other commitments by some committee members (myself as Chairman very much included) have meant that the Group ran less events in 2006. We hope to hold some talks in 2007, as well as running two training days.

David Cowley,
Chairman, NWWARG

Nottinghamshire Herpetofauna Report 2006

Nottinghamshire herptile sightings have continued to be fed into the recorders from the local Wildlife Trust, field workers and other individuals, with new 1km grid square records being added during the year. Re-surveying of great crested newt sites where records are more than five years old has begun, albeit at a low level, in the county in order to check that they still meet the criteria for county Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) status. However, a lack of resources (both financial and manpower) could restrict this work in the future.

At the site of Nottinghamshire's largest great crested newt colony at Brackenhurst Agricultural College, the population continues to be monitored, and is the subject of several student projects. Habitat enhancement, covering the majority of the agricultural land associated with the college, has been instigated under Countryside Stewardship and the work will include the creation of a number of new ponds that will benefit the newts and also grass snakes.

Elsewhere in Nottinghamshire, the toad migration route across Beanford Lane, Oxton to the breeding site at Oxton Bogs, was protected by road closure for the month of March for the seventh year in succession and it is estimated that well over a thousand toads have now been saved from being run over since this operation was started in 1999. The problem of toads falling into roadside gully pots on their migration has again been highlighted at several sites in the County and Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust are getting together in an attempt to resolve the situation.

Plans are in preparation for restoration work on the former colliery site at Gedling Colliery, near Nottingham. This site was surveyed in 2005 and found to meet the criteria for designation as a SINC on the grounds of its significance for amphibia. Preliminary work has already included some enhancement to ponds on the site and consultations have taken place that will see further ponds, migration routes and structured vegetation installed as part of future habitat creation and enhancement on the site.

A number of visits were made in 2006 to the site of Nottinghamshire's only remaining verified adder colony, but no sightings were made. The Recorders are not unduly concerned as this situation has occurred before, and in addition - habitat enhancement initiated two to three years ago has resulted in more cover, making the snakes much more difficult to spot. Coupled with this, the hot summer meant that the adders only needed to be out basking for very short periods, if at all, and could easily be missed. Reports of

adders at other sites continued to be received with both a road kill specimen and photographs of “definite adders” submitted as proof. However, on examination all proved to be grass snakes!

An alien snake, identified as a Rat Snake, was captured at Holme Lock, near Nottingham in July after first being sighted there at the end of May.

Sales of “Frogs and Friends”, the Notts Herpetofauna atlas, have continued steadily, raising more money to be used for practical conservation projects to benefit amphibians and reptile sin the county.

John Osborne and Sheila Wright
Notts Herpetofauna Recorders
January, 2007

Oxfordshire ARG

Oxon ARG continues to consist of a small group of individuals as with a lack of central co-ordination and no easy means to support individuals to help them carry out surveys and other work is problematical. The lack of opportunity and time on the part of the ARG founder has been a major problem, as again there has been no newsletter or promotion of other ARG related issues. Subsequently there has been a drop off in the number of "casual" records received from ARG contacts. For the moment at least what is needed are a few individuals who can work independently. If they could also do a bit of local co-ordination and help other enthusiastic but less informed people out, that would be a bonus. In time a more formal group may then develop. However, please keep records coming in as they are used and appreciated.

There may be some help through the Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre (TVERC), who aim to support recording and recorders. The Oxon ARG organiser has been in discussion with TVERC about producing a local herptile atlas (the last Oxfordshire atlas was produce in the early 1980's) and this project could help people to get involved in herpetofauna work. The lack of records is not helped by poor identification skills of many general public recorders. If there is to be a better representation for herpetofauna in Oxfordshire we do need a more active group of people and some kind of properly promoted and coordinated activities.

In 2005 a herpetofauna survey was carried out for a few sites in Oxford City with the survey report produced in early 2006. The results are limited by the number and type of sites covered and amount of time available for each site, but overall indicate that herptiles are not doing that well. A brief summary follows. Great Crested Newts were found but only in known historic sites. Toads were hardly recorded at all, backing up the perceived decline of this species. Common Lizards were confirmed on their one known site, but not seen anywhere else despite the apparent suitability of habitats. Grass Snakes seemed to be equally scarce. The survey included several allotments and slow-worms were found on some but not all sites. Why not is an interesting question. The general scarcity and low

population sizes of even "common" species means that all populations of herptiles in Oxford should be classed as important and be treated as such during planning discussions.

A student has carried out a study of reptiles, especially Adders, at what is believed to be the best reptile site in Oxfordshire (the only known site with regular records for all 4 "common and widespread species"). Although Adders probably breed every year here, they only do so in small numbers, and in many years new young are never seen. All other county reports of suspected Adder records (including the report of a dog being bitten in Oxford) remain unconfirmed.

As part of my work with Pond Conservation, we have been promoting a simple pond survey in Oxon and Bucks. This is principally designed to tell us about the actual presence of a pond, its physical structure and location. However, the form also has a tick box for species including common amphibians. Over the last two years over 400 forms (mostly for Oxfordshire) have been received, some of which include amphibian records. Once compiled, they will provide useful data for Oxfordshire and beyond.

Finally, some good news, the Palmate Newt (our rarest amphibian) has been found in a few ponds in the South Oxfordshire Chilterns area, suggesting (as suspected) that locally at least it is not as rare as current records would suggest.

Rod d'Ayala, Pond Conservation, Founder Oxon ARG.

Shropshire ARG Annual Report 2006

Shropshire ARG is an informal group and we work very much on a reactive survey basis. We gave talks to Montgomery Field Society on Amphibians and to Llanymynech local community as part of the Llanymynech lime kiln restoration project. We held a pond dipping event at Llyncllys Nature Reserve and Great Crested Newts and Palmate Newts (one with a very strange affliction) were recorded. Over 800 toads were rescued and helped to cross the road at a site in Telford in April 2006. A presentation to Telford and Wrekin planning officers about great crested newts was also given.

An article on adders featured in the 'Shropshire magazine' and several new adder sites were confirmed in the County. The Adder is now a Shropshire BAP species.

A new LNR in Ironbridge, Telford is under consideration following surveys including a reptile survey. It is a good site for grass snake and slow worm.

The Forestry Commission funded a survey of ponds on their sites in Shropshire. They have also created more ponds on a woodland site with an existing great crested newt

pond with the help of the EA. This existing pond was surveyed in 2006 and areas of the pond will be de-silted this year.

We intend to launch an Atlas of Reptiles for Shropshire in May 2007 through the FSC Biodiversity Project. We also want to launch a 'Ponds in Shropshire' mapping project in 2007. Funding ideas needed please!

Viv Geen
Shropshire ARG

Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group Report 2006

SARG has a mailing list of 53. Of these, ten can be considered 'active members' (although SARG does not have a membership fee/scheme).

In 2006 Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group ran several field/training events focusing on snakes. In the springtime SARG ran a series of adder survey training events, working with small groups and individual surveyors. Volunteers were invited to take part in adder surveys, aimed at locating aggregation areas.

Later in the year, in August, Duncan Sweeting led a training day focusing on grass snakes. Duncan has produced excellent display materials including sloughs and a mock-up of a grass snake egg-laying site. Duncan was able to use these in the field as part of his mobile classroom. The training day was held at Alton Reservoir, where Anglian Water has created a series of grass snake egg laying sites.

SARG has provided support to Suffolk Wildlife Trust by carrying out site visits to identify or rescue native snakes or deal with concerns about 'adders'.

SARG members staffed a stand at a local green fair (Green Living Days, Ipswich).

Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group benefits from working in a cooperative local conservation environment and is grateful to Anglian Water, the Forestry Commission and Suffolk Wildlife Trust for hosting field events and meetings in 2006.

An ongoing area of concern is recruitment of volunteer surveyors. Training days are usually well attended and received, but such events only infrequently translate into the recruitment of new surveyors.

As a small group, SARG does not undertake habitat management work, but rather focuses on survey, awareness raising and provision of local expertise. SARG operates on a minimal budget. However, funds to produce publications (information and publicity leaflets) would be welcome.

John Baker

Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group

Report for 2006

SARG are pleased to publicise the new website at <http://surrey-arg.org.uk/> created by Steve Langham. This site gives loads of information on our activities as well as all our native A&R species.

We have concentrated on heathland management tasks at Reigate Heath, Chobham Common and the Ockham and Wisley Commons. By combining our efforts with the local Rangers and Conservation Volunteers the group work has been more effective.

Reigate Heath had deteriorated due to lack of appropriate management over many years despite being designated an SSSI. However work carried out by the local RACV has begun to address the situation by clearance of pine and invading birch. As areas of heather returned SARG has targeted the heathland for special reptile surveys. Initial results indicate an increase in range for slowworms and common lizards. New shelter areas and hibernacula have also been constructed. Still no adders have been recorded but we are hopeful that they will spread from adjacent areas. Surveying will continue in 2007/8. New management plans for this heathland were set up in 2006.

SARG has created one new pond in the grounds of the East Surrey Hospital as part of a mitigation agreement. This summer it was already colonised by common newts as well as a single GCN!! The ancient hospital pond, which had a small historic population of GCN, suffered from water input problems. However we have negotiated that water will be directed to this pond from adjacent roofs and that the overflow ditches will be restored at the same time. We do not want to risk flooding the wards!!!

Work parties have carried out various management tasks on both these ponds which are also regularly surveyed.

Finally, SARG members have given generously of their time to give talks, take calls from the general public and respond by visits were necessary.

Julia Wycherley

SUSSEX AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE GROUP ARG UK REPORT

The first event in 2006 was the annual toad migration which got off to a late start as the weather was such that the frogs and toad refused to leave the comfort of their winter beds, however, the wait was well worth it & it finally happen in the second half of March 2006, and the numbers seen were phenomenal, the best we have seen since helping out on

the crossing since 1994. Mallard Drive, in Uckfield recorded toad numbers of over 800 with the number of frogs dropping off significantly and the newt numbers remaining about the same. We also had excellent results at both Newhaven and Litlington crossings.

The Pond at Mallard Drive in Uckfield seem to have gone full circle, this was a traditional farm pond with only toads and fish living there in 1994, over the next few years the fish were removed and the toad numbers started to drop but we found that the frog and newt numbers started to increase in such a rate that we now had far more frogs than toads. This was all happening as the number of houses being built on the estate increased. However, in the past few years all the building works had been completed but we did have reports of gold fish being seen in the pond. In 2004 & 2005 we found that frogs, toads & newts numbers were decreasing at such a rate the crossing would not be necessary any more, until spring 2006 when we had a Toad population explosion.

Not knowing this the National press contacted us before migration started wanting to do a piece on why people do Toad patrols. Anyway the reporter arrived from the Sunday Telegraph one cool Friday night and every where we looked we found toads looking back at us, and none of the toads were camera shy that night. So after years of numbers decreasing we have three good sites on the up, which is all an amphibian & reptile group could ask for.

Our AGM was again held at Arlington reservoir where we continue to offer advice and information to our members however, it rained persistently all day and the event passed unnoticed. Our thanks to SE Water for letting us host this event and our committee meetings at the Reservoir.

We try to continue to attend events each year such as Bishopstone fair and David Harris represented us in June at Stamner Park in Brighton.

Ongoing projects continue

We are still consulted with regards to the South Downs national Park and our thanks go to Janet Claydon who has spent many an hour completing questionnaires they have sent to us. Work continues at the powder Mill trust and survey work at Chailey common would not continue with the dedication and support of both Janet Claydon and David Harris. As a group we were involved with the Ouse Estuary Project as concerns were made with the management of the site, we are yet to receive any proposals from Alex Tait at ESCC. On a more pleasant note Barry Kemp arranged for the group to spend a lovely day scrub clearing at Southern Waters disused lagoons site near Tunbridge Wells which sounds like a contradiction in its self, but we spent the day clearing brambles which will now enable the reptiles to enjoy basking in the summer sun with our having to fight through a thicket of brambles. The site is no longer used and has proved to be a perfect haven for wildlife including many amphibians and reptiles.

As ever the Sarg committee and members continue to keep busy although this year we hit crisis point with the group under threat and all hope of finding new recruits dwindling we held an extraordinary general meeting one damp night and much to our delight members came forward and the group could continue. We would like to say a big thank you to both David Harris and Sue Pitcher who have left the committee for all of their help in the past. We appreciate that everyone including the committee leads such busy lives but without our members help, the group would not exist!

SARG has two items on its wish list for 2007, in this order.

1. We have two project that are causing concern, both toad crossings the first is near Lewes at Offham, this has been a crossing for many years although only in the last few have toads have returned . For the past 3 years ESCC has paid for temporary fencing to be erected and removed each year but the funding has now been removed and therefore we need to do something long term here. The temporary fencing cost £1000.00 pa but we would like to put something more permanent in place which will be much safer for toads and patrols.
2. The second project we have is with another site in West Sussex Wiston which has a tunnel in place funded many years ago by SARG I believe but the perimeter fencing is failing and is in desperate need of repair to ensure the toads use the tunnel and not the road.

Membership

SARG currently has 150 current members, 20 or so of which are active members.

Finally, many thanks to everyone who has helped and supported Sarg in the past 12 months.

Jenny Bacon – Chair

Rowland Griffin – Hon. Secretary

Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team 2006 Report



WART is now entering its fourteenth year and continues to thrive and prosper. We now have 67 paid up members, which is the highest number ever. Membership was increased

to £5 per year per household and this covers newsletter printing and postal charges, but as over 75% of members now receive the newsletter electronically it has enabled us to buy more survey equipment such as powerful torches.

The committee has been revitalised by the addition of four new members. Lucy Cash (newsletter editor) and Natalie Walker (secretary) are both experienced herpetologists together with ordinary member Ian Tanner. Ian Jellie is our new Wildlife Trust representative, doubling up as the WART vice-chair and relationships between the Trust and WART have never been better. Howard Eccles continues to be our excellent treasurer and keeps us all on our toes and Jane O'Dell and David Cole from Warwick Museum enable our reciprocal data transfer to be maintained. Finally many thanks must go to Nigel Clemons who continues to manage the WART data base and web site in addition to dealing with the numerous queries from members of the public, meaning I only have to basically chair our committee meetings and write the annual report as running ARG UK takes up a lot of my time.

The Great Crested Newt Training Day in April was a great success and generated over 25 volunteers to undertake one 10km square in the county to check GCN records over 10 years old as part of the crested newt biodiversity species action plan. The event also generated over 18 new members which has swelled the number of active surveyors in our ARG. This also gave us the opportunity to trial the NARRS amphibian survey forms for HCT. On the whole this GCN hunt was a good exercise to set many old records straight and to pilot the new NARRS initiative. Several of us also piloted the NARRS reptile survey protocol despite being sent randomly to potato fields and the periphery of chav estates. WART also took advantage of the free insurance from ARG UK which has saved us a lot of money.

The downside is we have yet to find the elusive Warwickshire adder and we are now concentrating on just four sites (Corley Moor, Sutton Park, Kineton MOD & Kenilworth Common).

We intend to hold amphibian & reptile survey courses in partnership with Warks Wildlife Trust in 2007 as this seems to be the best mechanism to recruit new and more importantly, active members.

Jan Clemons

WESTERN ISLES ARG

Things are still pretty low key here in the Western Isles. I have just been gathering records this year with the help of birdwatchers and other interested people. I also have records from RSPB and SNH. I have not compiled a report or data base yet but intend to do this over the winter.

As far as members go, there are a few people who report records regularly but that's as far as it goes.

The distribution of Common Frog appears to be expanding with reports from several locations well away from Stornoway, although with little previous data it is difficult to be certain if this really is the case. It may be that nobody has really looked or reported them before.

Mark Witherall

WEST MIDLANDS AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE PROJECT

Projects include:

- Production of the Birmingham & Black Country Atlas of Reptiles & Amphibians
- A survey of FensPools SAC, in which we observed GCN in all the new ponds and an increase in the population size.
- A survey at Cannock Chase but no Natterjack Toads were seen but the site has undergone some management and pond creation.
- Mitigation work has been successful with GCNs breeding and metamorphosing young for the first time in 5 years.
- A survey of over 30 ponds.
- A comprehensive adder & reptile survey at Kinver edge and another at Cannock Chase SSSI with Staffordshire ARG
- 5 new Grass snake hibernation piles created
- 2 new ponds created.
- Training events and presentations to 5 groups.
- Mentoring of 2 trainee GCN surveyors.
- Lots of consultancy work.

Plans for 2007:

- GCN training - licences, mitigation and habitat enhancement
- Reptile training & habitat management.
- Repeat of the Cannock Chase reptile survey with Staffordshire ARG
- Creation of a Hiberniculum for Grass snakes
- Creation of a website.

Paul Wilkinson

Wiltshire ARG is still in very early stages as it was only formed in late summer 2006. Since then we have managed to conduct a brief reptile survey on a Wiltshire Wildlife Trust site in Swindon where we found what seems to be a substantial population of grass

snakes and possibly an over-wintering site which we will hopefully be able to confirm in the spring.

I have attended two Wildlife Trust events to promote WARG, at one of which I gave brief chat and Q & A session to Wildlife Trust volunteers and took them around the survey site.

Unfortunately membership is still only approx four members. We have a training day organised for April 20th 2007 in association with the Wildlife Trust. I am taking the opportunity to conduct a survey on another of the trusts sites in Swindon, inform people about recording, species ID and surveying and hopefully gain some keen members. Dorothy Wright also talked about providing some GCN training in the county next year. WARG have also received a number of emails regarding queries on newts and lizards - I have replied offering advice and have kept a note of the records.

As for funding, I will receive some money from the Wildlife Trust training course (£30) which will cover costs for some survey equipment. Further money would be extremely useful to purchase more survey materials.

The only other cost we occur at the moment is attending sites. I have received the occasional call asking me for advice on their pond management etc. I also attended an incident where a newt pond was being trashed - but the lady who reported it was nowhere to be found when I arrived (and she never answered her phone!). I am happy to attend these situations and those in Swindon which I can easily attend. Areas further afield in Wiltshire obviously come with costs. I generally offer what advice I can by phone/email and refer them to HCT if I can help no more (what is expected of the ARG's in these situations?).

Gemma Harding
Wiltshire ARG

Worcestershire ARG

WRAG remains in a state of dormancy due to lack of people with time to organise meetings (particularly field trips) and the general lack of people who turn out for events. We could attract 100 people to see an adder - which is obviously far too many to avoid disturbing the snake - but about 3 people to survey a pond.

We continue to be consulted by planners over issues relating to GCNs and Slow-worms. We recently gave advice on a purported slow-worm mitigation to a District Council official that resulted in a victory at a Public Enquiry with the consultant being made to look very silly indeed.

We are hoping for a re-launch in 2007 (or failing that 2008) and once again we are intending to organise a West Midlands Regional Conference in the autumn at

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's headquarters. We maintain a good relationship with the Wildlife Trust and use their address for admin purposes, aided by the fact that Alan Shepherd works for them and is also the national Herpetofauna Co-ordinator for The Wildlife Trusts.

Alan Shepherd

North, East and West Yorkshire ARG Annual Report

At the ARG conference in Coventry, I was puzzled to see Yorkshire as a black hole for adder records, as I know there to be many sites where adders are found. Furthermore, I also know that there is no lack of adder and other herptile recording going on in Yorkshire, so it seemed that a Yorkshire group was needed to fill this black hole in the ARG world, and the NEWYARG came into being early in 2006! Yorkshire is a huge county (extending from the North Sea to the Lakes, and Teesside to the M62), and this has given us logistical problems in that meetings would involve long trips (of several hours in some cases) to reach anywhere central. Additionally I was aware that an awful lot of recording and herptile action is already ongoing and people might be wary of taking on another commitment. Consequently the group is really about putting people in touch with each other, a communications portal to allow people to get to know what's happening and allow people to join in, learn and appreciate herptiles through the already abundant activities going on in Yorkshire.

There are currently 39 members, all of whom are active in the world of conservation. We have members who work for Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, eight Local Authorities, York College, Natural England, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Dales NP, BTCV, various consultancies and interested individuals. Overall, we aim to capture most herptile happenings in the three counties!

2006 has been a bit of a blur, as by the time we got the group going the survey season was well under way. We held a series of three great crested newt survey training sessions at a village pond in North Yorkshire which has assisted the Pond Conservation Trust in their work with the Parish Council to re-habilitate this village pond. Other happenings circulated through the group and involving group members included an Amphibian Survey and 'Ribbetting' evenings run by Kerry Fieldhouse in Leeds and a re-survey of ponds for the MoD at Ripon Parks run by Dan McAndrew in Harrogate District.

As well as physically getting out there, the group has served as an information portal for all herpetofauna activists. Students wishing to undertake research have been put in touch with the relevant reserve managers and there was a lively debate over the status (and sounds) of mid-wife toads in Yorkshire and a whole host of information sharing.

There has been a lot of interest in training, and there are a number of experienced herptile recorders within the group. One of our aims is to pass on expertise and give people experience in surveying for amphibians and reptiles, with a view to enabling people to

make records and feed these into the wider records community, both through the Yorkshire Naturalists Union Herptile Recorder and the Records Centre in York. This will provide data which can be used to promote and direct herptile conservation in Yorkshire. Consequently, the emphasis next year will be to put less experienced people in touch with others undertaking survey, so that they can assist and learn. A series of ARG training events is also planned.

The ARG is currently an association of herpetologists throughout Yorkshire who participate in each others events. When putting on ARG training we come under the ARG insurance umbrella which is great, but otherwise we don't require much funding input presently (although a time-expansion device would be useful!). We are still in the first year of NEW Yorks ARG, and plans are already forming for 2007 - all ideas welcome!

GHaycock

South Yorkshire Amphibian & Reptile Group (SYARG)

Group Activities 2006

Following inauguration of the South Yorkshire ARG on the 4th April 2006, the Group is becoming increasing involved in local activities.

These can be split into two categories, the first being public exhibitions/events to raise awareness of the Group and secondly to take on-board all records, sightings and information that the public are able to give.

BBC Springwatch event, Temple Newsam Park, Leeds on 3rd June 2006

The group set up a display stand at the BBC Springwatch event, including live exhibits of local herps. This generated a huge amount of interest in the group activities, albeit the event took place in East Yorkshire rather than the South Yorkshire area. A PowerPoint presentation on local herps was given during the afternoon, following a well-attended pond-dipping session. The event earned a £100 donation to the Group from the BBC – a good start to its first public event.

Sheffield Fayre, 27th/28th August 2006

A similar exhibition set-up to the Springwatch event was organised for the Sheffield Fayre, which again attracted a huge amount of attention from the public. A significant number of local herp records were obtained, including several new sites for adder and slowworm, and grass snake records from within ½ mile of the city centre !!

Sheffield City Council Rangers, Shirebrook Valley Autumn Festival

Yet again an extremely well attended local event with many wood and field crafts on display. Even more local herp records coming from the public, and an extended discussion with the Lord Mayor and Mayoress who attended the event – followed by a good press write-up.

Other areas of Group involvement have been in relation to **local government and wildlife advisory organisations and wildlife trusts**, who are now able to take full advantage of Group participation in their activities and management plans. These included:

- Shirebrook Valley management plan re. herps.
- Management proposals and facilitation meetings for the Blackamoor reserve
- A Wetlands course (Amphibians & Fish) in conjunction with the Sheffield Wildlife Trust – lecture, presentation, fieldwork.
- A Ponds Conservation meeting, and pond wardening scheme with the Sheffield Wildlife Trust, Pond Conservation Trust, and Rotherham Ecology Unit. Funding for the project will hopefully be forthcoming from HLF and SITA.
- Local Wildlife Advisory Group panel for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Liaison with the Peak Park re. moorland management/heather stripping, specifically in relation to adder communities and hibernacula
- Management proposals and pond creation scheme for local woodland where grass snake breeding is now on the increase in the sawdust heaps from the on-site saw mill (Sheffield City Council)

Finally, local developers have come across the ARG site on the Internet and as a result, the Group is now active in pond creation schemes on an industrial estate near Doncaster, with involvement from three local primary schools.

John Newton
 Secretary
 South Yorkshire Amphibian & Reptile Group (SYARG)

Website News - Report for 2006/07

The ARG UK website has been up and running since April 2006. I am learning as I go with the website and so if there are any problems then please drop me an email Jcranfield@arg-uk.org.uk

I would like to provide a brief report on the activity surrounding the ARG UK website. Through our domain hosting package we can keep a track of what is going on with our website and here is the read out from April to December 2006.

The web hosting is donated to the ARG UK from Herpetologic Ltd who proudly sponsors the ARG UK website and it's Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting in 2007.

Month	Number of Hits	Number of visitors	Top three referrers
April	6343	1197	Froglife, RAUK, Wartsoc

May	5260	1177	Froglife, RAUK, Add an Adder
June	5464	1185	RAUK, Froglife, Add an Adder
July	4599	1269	Froglife, RAUK, NARRS
August	5484	1368	Froglife, RAUK, NARRS
September	9904	2284	Stumble upon, Froglife, RAUK
October	10311	2126	Stumble upon, RAUK, Froglife
November	13184	2604	Stumble upon, Froglife, RAUK
December	12731	2577	Stumble upon, Froglife, RAUK
Totals	73280	15787	

The table shows how many hits were made through our website and the number of visitors each month to our website. The top three referring websites are also shown the main referrer to our website is Froglife. Other websites are not featuring more often in the top three and it is hoped that this can be tracked in future years.

Other referrers

www.ieem.org.uk, www.bbc.co.uk, Essex Field Club, Calumma Ecological Services, everyclick.com, farmwildlife, Devon wildlife trust, Wild about Britain and www.venomdoc.com .

The number of visitors and the use of our website are gradually rising each month. If anyone would like to exchange links to and from our respective websites please email details to Jcranfield@arg-uk.org.uk

New ARG news

London	The London ARG is at the beginning of its re-establishment with the help of Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL) and other supporters in London. At the moment opinion is being canvassed with the existing wildlife organisations which currently are part of the London Biodiversity Partnership and the steering group of GIGL. There are several new contacts in London who are keen to help form the new group. Hopefully the new group will be formed in time for the spring surveying season in 2007.
Hertfordshire	A few people have contacted the ARG UK to get involved with the Hertfordshire Amphibian & Reptile Group. It is possible that the

	HARG will be established later in 2007.....
Cornwall	A brief visit to Cornwall this year gave me the opportunity to catch up with CARG Member Cathy Turtle. Plans for 2007 are shaping up for various surveys including Make the adder count, grass snake, toad and palmate newt surveys are all being planned for 2007. A training event for CARG members will be organised this March or April to help volunteers in Cornwall contribute to NARRS
Isle of Man	A new contact for the Isle of Man has been added to the ARG UK website in the form of the Manx Wildlife Trust and its Director Duncan Bridges. The Isle of Man has a limited number of herpetofauna species with only the common frog, viviparous lizard and maybe the odd stray leatherback turtle but Duncan has agreed to become the point of contact for people on the Island who would like to learn more about Manx herpetofauna.
Jersey	<p>A field trip to Jersey was undertaken by ARG members Todd Lewis and Jon Cranfield to survey for reptiles (see 'In search of the Jersey Grass snake' ARG Today issue 2). Contact was made with the States of Jersey Environment Department who gave permission and licensed the survey over the four days we were there. A new contact has been added to the ARG UK website John Pinel.</p> <p>There are plans for further surveys by ARG UK members and a potential affiliation of the Agile Frog Group to ARG UK is also being discussed.</p> <p>A several field trips are being planned for 2007 if anyone is interested in going to Jersey then please contact Jcranfield@arg-uk.org.uk for further details.</p>
Alderney	The Alderney Wildlife Trust is planning to launch an island slowworm survey and is very keen to establish a contact with the ARG UK. The Wildlife trust's ecologist, Louise Soanes, is very keen to set up the Alderney Amphibian & Reptile Group. The Wildlife Trust has kindly offered support to ARG UK for an ARG member to come over to provide survey training in amphibian and reptile survey on the Island.

Jon Cranfield