



Representing the
Amphibian & Reptile
Groups of the United
Kingdom

ARG REPORTS

February 2008

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ARG UK REPORT 2007

In the past three years ARG UK and the ARG Network have continued to grow and develop, making it the country's leading voluntary organisation for herpetofauna conservation.

Another successful HWM was held in Coventry at the start of the year but the definite highlight of 2007 was the creation of a Widespread Species Officer Post, managed by ARG UK and the HCT, after our joint application for funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Trust was granted. We appointed John Baker in July.

This three year post will be concentrating on the more widespread species and supporting the ARG Network. Already this professional support has made a large difference to the amount of work we can take on, for example our new improved web site, the refinement of the free insurance scheme and another excellent issue of our electronic newsletter 'ARG Today'. Improving the networking capacity of the ARG network is another priority and it is encouraging to see more regional meetings this year.

The ARG network is now organised in line with the nine government regions in England together with Scotland and Wales. Each region has one or two representatives (dependent on regional size) who sit on the ARG UK panel.

Once again ARG UK is extremely grateful to those ARG co-ordinators who sent their 2007 annual reports to their Regional Representatives as it provides an excellent opportunity to look at all the work you do for herpetofauna on a regional and national level.

A Herpetofauna Meeting held in Dundee in February 2007 provided the stimulus for reviving the ARG network in Scotland. Up to this time there had only been two active ARGs (Clyde & Lothian groups) but now there are new groups in Scottish Borders and Aberdeen & Grampian (status not yet known) and the Fife ARG has reformed.

From the 49 ARG groups whom we had contact details for, over 80% responded and the vast majority of these reported positively about the activities carried out in 2007. 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, even translocation projects.

There are still gaps to fill however and we are looking for someone to represent the London government region and there is still no contact for Hertfordshire.

ARG UK continues to work closely with the HCT and are currently working together with Froglife on the re- launch of 'Toads across Roads'. It is only by working together that herpetofauna conservation work can make a real impact at local, regional and national levels.

I would like to thank all the members of the ARG UK panel for all their help and support over the past year. Not only are we fortunate in having experienced herpetologists on the panel but people that are prepared to give up their spare time to support the ARG network.

Finally we cannot underestimate the work carried out by the individual groups that make up the ARG Network. Each group is different, with different strengths and weaknesses but recruiting new members is always an issue and the fact that some of our key co-ordinators wish to stand down and are looking to the next generation to take up the challenge.

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
Wales - Julian Whitehurst
East of England - John Baker
West Midlands - Will Watson
East Midlands - Andrew Heaton & Chris Monk
South West - Chris Gleed-Owen
South East - Jon Poland & Lee Brady
Yorkshire & Humber - John Newton

SCOTLAND

ARG UK regional representative Peter Leach

Lothian Amphibian & Reptile Group

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2007 proved to be a mixed year for LARG with plenty of good intentions but somewhat less achieved.

At the start of the year we organised two successful pond clearances with the Edinburgh and Midlothian Ranger Services at sites with good populations of frogs and toads. In the spring we provided amphibian and reptile training for members and volunteer Rangers from the Pentlands Park, followed by NARRS amphibian training, all of which were well attended.

Most importantly this year, LARG secured funding from SNH to create an additional pond at an existing GCN site. Part of this project also included excavating areas of the two ponds already there and clearing out some of the vegetation. Fencing was also erected in places to limit the access of the sheep which graze the surrounding land.

On a lighter note, LARG were also involved in creating a more suitable, existing amphibian pond at Gorgie City Farm. This involved a night out torching and netting with staff and volunteers from the farm at a pond which is under threat. A small number of palmate newts were caught and released at the new pond the following day, aided by local primary school children.

This year West Lothian got it's first Local Nature Reserve (Easter Inch Moss and Seafield Law). There are a number of ponds on the site, some of which are known GCN breeding ponds. These have been monitored by LARG members for several years and recommendations have been put forward on future management. It is hoped that during the winter months some pond clearance will be undertaken by LARG. Pond creation at this site is also being investigated, and hopefully some plans for next year will be approved soon.

This year's amphibian survey work proved to be a little disappointing. Of the twelve sites earmarked only seven were actually done, the weather being the major factor. The reptile survey work fared even worse, with very few surveys undertaken, once again the weather being the major reason.

On a positive note though, we did obtain two new GCN records. One is at an entirely new location on the border with South Lanarkshire, and the other at the edge of a known cluster of GCN ponds. Both these records were supplied by commercial contractors with whom we have good contacts.

Finally LARG continues to deal with a number of general enquiries from the public and to maintain contacts and links with conservation and government organisations, and private contractors.

Ian Mason
Chairman

Cairngorms Amphibian & Reptile Group

Stephen Corcoran, Cairngorms Biodiversity Officer, Grantown-on-Spey, PH26 3HG, 01479 870528, stephencorcoran@cairngorms.co.uk

2007 saw the first survey and identification training for amphibians and reptiles in the Cairngorms organised in conjunction with NARRS. 3 courses were run attracting around a dozen people at each course, and evening surveys undertaken. Great crest newts were recorded again at the only known site in the Cairngorms for this species (near Loch Vaa) and smooth newts were also recorded at this site which was unexpected as I had been led to believe by SNH that this species was not recorded from the area (or anywhere else in the Cairngorms). Subsequent liaison with SNH unearthed a 10 year old survey of the Loch Vaa site with smooth newts on the species list! There is no data on the population status of great crest newts at the Loch Vaa site – a possible action for 2008.

One of the NARRS training courses featured on Radio Scotland's "Out of Door" programme with live coverage of the smooth newt find.

Several training courses are planned for 2008 and a few field visits for those people who undertook training in 2007 to reignite their enthusiasm. This could lead to the formation of a proper ARG in the Cairngorms – I have managed to obtain some survey equipment and all that is needed now is the time to organise surveys.

Despite the publication of the Amphibians of the Cairngorms leaflet in the summer of 2006, very few records were submitted from the public in 2006 and 2007. Additional publicity will be needed.

The Cairngorms Biodiversity Grant Scheme funded the creation of 2 ponds in school grounds in 2007. Both ponds are in a semi-natural habitat and included planting of native species and a dipping platform.

Stephen Corcoran
Cairngorms Biodiversity Officer

Fife Amphibian and Reptile Group

David Bell, david.ecos@btinternet.com

The Fife Amphibian and Reptile Group has been inactive for some time but was re-formed at a meeting in November arranged by ARG-UK.

Despite a poor attendance (Glenrothes on a wet November night appears not to have many attractions) a working group was formed under the chairmanship of local ecologist David Bell, with participation by members of the Fife Countryside Ranger Service.

A number of people from Fife participated in the NARRS project in 2007, so their continued interest is likely to be a key factor in the success of the group in 2008.

A programme of activities will be produced shortly, including training, surveys and social activities, and the formal constitution of the group might be expected by the summer.

Let's hope that this report in 2008 contains information about sites and animals in Fife.

Clyde Amphibian & Reptile Group

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Habitat enhancement

In East Dunbartonshire CARG provided funding for 330 metres of fencing erected to provide protection for a new hedge at a GCN site.

12 volunteers took part in a CARG practical task day. They planted a hawthorn/blackthorn hedge inside the fenceline. The hedge will provide a link between an existing great crested newt pond and 2 newer ponds. The project was partly funded by CSV Action Earth.

In North Lanarkshire CARG displayed a pond creation exhibit as part of B in the Park at Dalzell Park in Motherwell and a grant from SNH provided 5 new ponds near Allanton.

1 new pond was excavated at Culzean Country Park in Ayrshire, close to an existing GCN pond. In Glasgow SWT volunteers dug five new ponds for amphibians as part of wetland enhancement work at Cardowan Moss.

Promotion

CARG banners were displayed at Mugdock Country Park in Stirling District and various other public events throughout North Lanarkshire. The CARG leaflet is almost ready to publish. One public event was held in East Dunbartonshire – Frogs and Toads, Hops and Croaks, it was fully booked and well received.

Training

Two reptile training courses for NARRS held with a total of 38 participants attending.

Amphibian Survey

In Renfrewshire torchlight surveys were carried out on 6 previously unrecorded ponds, mainly palmate newts were found. 39 torchlight pond surveys were carried out in East Dunbartonshire. 1 new GCN pond was discovered and 1 new smooth newt pond confirmed. 30 GCN adults were counted at Culzean in Ayrshire. In Glasgow a search of Commonhead Moss for adult amphibians revealed all four common species, mostly found under in-situ refugia.

Reptiles

In Glasgow a reptile survey was carried out on Commonhead Moss using refugia but none were found. In Renfrewshire a NARRS square near Loch Libo found no reptiles. In North Lanarkshire common lizards were recorded at Palacerigg Country, the first record for several years. One common lizard was also recorded at SWT reserve Loch Ardinning in Stirlingshire.

Scottish Borders Amphibian & Reptile Group

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Delivering key actions under national Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and Species Action Plans (SAPs) can often seem like a massive task and it is often assumed that any work would require significant financial input and a great deal of time

and effort, but this doesn't have to be the case. The following examples shows how with a modest input, work was carried out towards delivering significant conservation benefits towards the Species Action Plan for the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) within the Scottish Borders, in partnership between the Tweed Forum, local farmers and the Borders Amphibian and Reptile Group.



Great crested newts have suffered significant declines across the Scotland and Europe over the past 30 years as a result of the loss of breeding ponds through removal or degradation of water quality due to development or changes in agricultural practice, but also through natural succession, neglect or the introduction of fish which is almost always catastrophic. Of equal importance is the loss and fragmentation of terrestrial habitat.

The objective of the project in the Borders was to create appropriately sited new wetland habitat sites for great crested newts to improve, connect and expand the existing great crested newt meta-population(s) in the central Borders area. The new habitat areas were identified using a combination of the SNH 1996 great crested newt survey, species habitat requirements and local knowledge to site and build appropriate wetland habitats.

Once a clear geographical priority area had been defined around three existing breeding ponds, local landowners were contacted and given details of what the project was trying to achieve. The farmers were asked to consider allowing the new ponds to be built on existing boggy/wet areas, in the corners of fields or along the edges of shelter belts i.e. naturally wet areas, where they were not going to interfere with the productivity or management of the land.

The ponds were between 10m to 15m square in size and averaged 1m to 1.5m deep with a slightly deeper area in the middle to ensure the pond retains water in dryer summers. The ideal location had a Southerly aspect with close proximity to suitable terrestrial habitat such as scrub or woodland as great crested newts spend most of their lives living and feeding out of water, as well as hibernating under logs or in old stone dykes.



Blackthorn scrub growing over an old stone wall, giving way to an ash-elm woodland with plenty of fallen wood – ideal terrestrial habitat.

Within three days of construction the new pond was full of water.

Previously a naturally wet area (of low biodiversity value) as evidenced by the

In all, 13 new pond sites were created in a little over two months thanks to the support of the local Scottish Natural Heritage Office and the Scottish Environment Protection Agencies' Habitat Enhancement Initiative. In tandem with the physical works, members of the Borders Amphibian and Reptile Group underwent specialist identification and surveying training for great crested newts with Peter Leach and applied to Scottish Natural Heritage for a licence to carry out torch and net surveys. This team then set about surveying the new ponds for signs of newts as well as surveying known and suspected great crested newt breeding sites.



In the first year after construction many of the new ponds had already been colonised by a range of species including great crested newts and the Borders Amphibian and Reptile Group (part of ARG-UK) also identified a further number of newly recorded breeding pond sites. The project had two aspects, the construction of new ponds and the increased surveying efforts, however both also proved to have much wider benefits

beyond great crested newts both for biodiversity and biological recording in the Borders.

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WALES

ARG UK Regional Representative – Julian Whitehurst

North West Wales Amphibian & Reptile Group

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We hosted NARRS training in spring of 2007 with Chris from HCT. We soon hope to have a data agreement in place with Cofnod, our LRC covering North Wales.

We have not been very active in NWWARG for some months now, due to several people on the Committee having their 'plates' full right now.

There are about 30 members, who would be active if we were doing more. Many groups have ups and downs in the level of activity, and we hope this will be able to pick up soon. It is a matter of seeing when time and other considerations enable us to get going with some more activities again.

Brecknock Amphibian & Reptile Group

Cliff Bradley, Brecknock Amphibian & Reptile Group contact email bradleycj@tiscali.co.uk

The Brecknock group was started up again in November 2006 and we have since merged with Radnor. Still a fledgling group most of our activity has been in Brecknock this area. Nameless for many months, we seamlessly became BRARG.....!

There are currently 25 members of the group, of which about 20 are active herp workers and approx 10 active ARG members. As the majority of the active ARG members are from Brecknock, much of our activity is centred in vice county 42.

The joint group first met in November and began by looking at all herpetological records kept for the vice county of Brecknock. It became immediately obvious that not all records were kept in one available format and that previous records were few and far between. This is not because we believe that we are short of amphibians & reptiles, but because Brecknock and Radnor are sparsely populated rural counties and recording has been largely ad-hoc and mostly based near towns. This applies even to relatively common species such as the common frog, there are only 53 records for frogs throughout the whole of the Brecknock vice county!

As a group we therefore decided a good aim was to try and establish a clearer picture of the populations of all nine species in Brecknock and we have applied for a grant from CCW to support processing of the historic records by BIS.

NARRS PROJECT

As the BRARG were re-forming a new national survey was launching (NARRS) and we were asked to take part in a trial of a research project by the University of Kent. This is an amphibian occupancy modelling project to support the national recording scheme (NARRS) in detecting amphibian presence. The project followed the same formula as the national survey but involved five visits to the chosen pond, and four methods, including trapping. Approximately 15 ponds were surveyed in Brecknock and Radnor. This was a baptism by fire for most of the group who were relatively new to this - but the results were worth it. We

found all four 'common' species in most ponds and several new GCN sites. We are all looking forward to doing it all again next year.....and to David Sewell's report telling us what it all means!

TOADS ON ROADS

The sight of squashed toads on roads is unpleasant and this year BRARG received a number of reports ranging from a few toads squashed on back roads to hundreds of toads killed on main roads where the toads have no chance against frequent fast-travelling vehicles.

Members of the group have carried out toad patrols in areas where we have found problems this year and we are liaising with Powys County Council to find ways to remedy this problem, including erecting reconditioned toad signs.

The infamous toad patrol at Llandrindod Lake continues to be well supported.

SLOW WORM & ADDER RECORDS.

We made a plea for slow worm records via the local wildlife trust magazine, these have now been digitised and BIS have produced a map of their distribution.

PENLAN POND LITTER PICK

Penlan ponds (Brecon) are considered to be one of Brecknock's premier GCN sites sharing the site with the local leisure centre, high school and FE college. Following the installation of a new pond by Powys County Council a litter pick was carried out supported by the school and leisure centre. Seven full black bin bags of rubbish, most of which was small plastic drinks bottles, were quickly filled. Other more unusual items removed from the ponds included a chair, a golf umbrella, a lifebelt, a crate, half a compost bin and a bowling ball!! The High School have organised regular litter picks and the site is regularly cleared by an ARG member. However the litter problem perpetuates.....any suggestions?

POND RESTORATION

The ARG Xmas outing involved restoration of a local pond followed by hot tea, bangers and muffins – just the thing to encourage the youngsters to get involved!

NEXT YEAR.....

Membership is building up slowly – we need more interested/active members in Radnor. Also planned:

- A reptile monitoring project on a local nature reserve in Brecon in liaison with Brecon Beacons National Park.
- Further small-scale pond restoration projects.
- Analysing our newly computerised historical records.
- Identification of suitable sites to create ponds to strengthen and develop metapopulation structures around known GCN sites.

Northeast Wales Amphibian & Reptile Network

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North East Wales Amphibian and Reptile Network has maintained its usual high levels of organised activity in 2007, continuing with the on-going surveillance of GCN sites, reptile surveys, natterjack toad monitoring, etc.

As a result of this monitoring, the Maes Mynnan site now meets selection criteria for SSSI notification. One new 'exceptional' site was also identified (Rhosmor Quarry). It was noted that many key sites had low counts during April. This was attributed to the warm, very dry conditions during April. However, some good GCN counts were recorded later in the season during early May.

Mick Brummage contributed to the NARRS survey programme in respect of reptiles.

The weather conditions also served to encourage a second spawning of Natterjack toads. With persistent wet weather in late spring/early summer maintaining good water-levels within the breeding pools. It is hoped that this will have resulted in good natterjack larval recruitment in 2007.

NEWARN also participated in a number of well-attended and successful herpetile identification and survey training events held at various venues in North East Wales during 2007. Courses comprised of:

- 1 x Reptile course
- 1 x Basic Amphibian Course
- 1 x Advanced Amphibian Course
- 1 x Natterjack Course

It is planned that these events will be repeated in 2008.

Species Challenge Fund resulted in two herp-related projects led by NEWW and HCT ('Not Just Newts' and 'Worts and All'). A further non-native specific project has clear links with Herp biodiversity action

A Revised Section 42 list in Wales has been published. All reptiles and common toad have now been added. HCT/CCW/NEWW met for two days to discuss Welsh Herp matters. One of the likely outcomes of this meeting is a 'Herplink Cymru'.

NEWW have created 5 ponds on SAC sites specifically for GCN conservation this year.

Bridgend & Vale of Glamorgan Amphibian & Reptile Group

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ENGLAND

EAST OF ENGLAND REGION

ARG UK Regional Representative – John Baker

Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group

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1. Surveying, training, habitat management, special projects etc.

In 2007 Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group ran an adder survey training event and a NARRS pond survey course. Rob Dryden, Rosie Norton and Duncan Sweeting tackled three of our six priority NARRS squares.

SARG carried out a reptile survey for RSPB, of a recently purchased farmland site, some of which is destined to become reedbed habitat. The site proved to support an unusually high density of grass snakes. Recommendations were submitted with regard to reptile habitat management.

Duncan Sweeting has given talks to school groups, which have been very well received.

The group has commenced an atlas project, working with Suffolk Biological Records Centre (SBRC). The last major review of herps in the county was published in 1989 – SARG plans to produce a county atlas in 2009, twenty years on. A provisional atlas, primarily comprising distribution maps, has been produced as a download from SBRC's website, to encourage the submission of additional records over the course of 2008. These will be incorporated into the full atlas, which will be published the following year.

Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group benefits from working in a cooperative local conservation environment and is grateful to support from SBRC, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Forestry Commission and Mary Norden, Suffolk's BAP officer, in 2007.

The group is reviewing its potential for strategic involvement in the development planning process and to further natterjack conservation work, both of which would be new ventures for SARG.

2. Size of ARG and number of active members

SARG does not have a membership fee/scheme, but instead has a mailing list of 51. SARG participated in the ARG UK insurance scheme. To administer this the mailing list was divided into two categories. Twenty contacts were designated 'associates' (people who liaise with SARG, but who are unlikely to take part in the group's activities). The remaining thirty-one contacts were designated 'members'. Fourteen of these wanted full insurance cover (personal accident).

3. Any success stories or concerns

Recruitment of active volunteers remains an ongoing concern. Involvement with the development of the local BAP process is not as strong as it might be, simply due to the constraints of volunteer commitment and the time demands of a relatively bureaucratic and esoteric process.

John Baker (Chair)

Bedfordshire Reptile & Amphibian Team

herps*freeNet.co.uk

The Group

- Founded April 2000.
- At present 9 members 6 of whom are active in field work. The other three are representatives of local conservation organisations.
- The County Recorder doubles as Group recorder and is responsible for County records held on computer at the County WLT offices.
- Affiliated to Beds Natural History Society.
- Represented on the Greensand Ridge Heathland Forum.

Activities in 2007

Marston Vale GCN Survey

One new GCN breeding pond was found this year. Ownership is unclear but we hope to be able to undertake some remedial conservation work once this is clarified.

Maulden Adder Release

The second week in April saw intense courtship and mating activity. There is now a large reserve of photographs of individuals some of which are serviceable for identification. There are no plans for any further releases and our aim now is to monitor any spread in the population and ascertain whether there is any indication of one or more colonies forming.

Rowney Warren

Last year there was a reliable report of a female Adder at a site where adders were last seen twenty years ago. Unfortunately despite surveying this spring there were no repeat sightings though Lizards and Slow Worms were seen. An apparently reliable report, from a bird watcher, of Adders in another part of the Warren was received and we hope to check this next year.

Saxon Gate Toad Lift

Situation is unchanged from the 2006 report. There are other toad lifts in the county but the Group is not involved.

Conservation tasks

We have removed two fallen trees from a GCN pond.

Training.

We trained two members of local conservation organisations in GCN surveying, one of whom now holds a licence.

PR

We investigated a report of Grass Snake sightings at a Bedford allotment many of whose occupiers were of Indian origin. We found no snakes but talked to as many of the allotment holders as we could emphasising that the snakes were harmless and should be left alone. The response seemed quite favourable.

Midwife Toads

A survey carried out in 2006 showed that they still exist in the sites identified in the 1980s survey, with one exception. Most of the colonies have spread to cover a greater area than they did in the 1980s. Records now exist of numerous other sites outside the county. Publication of a study of the introduction and spread of the Midwife Toad is planned.

Cambridgeshire

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WEST MIDLANDS REGION

ARG UK Regional Representative – Will Watson

Worcestershire Reptile & Amphibian Group

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WRAG has continued to remain in temporary hibernation, due mainly to the lack of people who want to get involved in organising things. Once things have been organised there appears to be a demand to attend, which is obviously rather frustrating! The intention was to re-launch the group in 2008 but time is ticking away and this may not happen before the survey season begins. We really do need to address this and a meeting will be organised by the end of March.

We continue to be consulted on planning matters, mainly by Worcester City Council and occasionally by the District Councils. We also work with Worcestershire County Council on occasions.

Three volunteers came forward to undertake NARRS surveys and were referred directly to the HCT, although technically operating under the name of WRAG. To date we have not seen their results but hopefully this will be rectified shortly.

On a broader scale, we feel that a West Midlands Regional Conference is long overdue and in the absence of any other group to organise it we would like to put ourselves forward. The proposal is to hold it in October at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's centre at Lower Smite Farm. This was the venue for the last regional conference, it is a central location with reasonably good transport links and if any other West Midlands group would like to have an input then please feel free to contact us.

Herefordshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

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1. Surveying, training habitat management and special project

2007 has been another good year for HART. Our published book: Amphibians and Reptiles of Herefordshire – a fully illustrated 72-page book co-authored by Nigel Hand, Will Watson and Phyl King – has sold between 350 and 400 copies and is available through Amazon and the NHBS as well as local bookshops. Having completed three years of surveying in the Ponds and Newts project, this year has been dedicated to pond restoration (see 3 below) so pond and amphibian surveying has been rather ad hoc and limited.

On the reptiles' side, Nigel Hand has continued to be involved with the

Community Commons Project, looking at and monitoring local commons with community members. Two new commons will be surveyed in 2008 and the others will be monitored to see how populations are progressing. All four common reptile species were confirmed on one site.

The Make the Adder Count project revealed 4 new sites. Kington Golf course was one site where adders, common lizard and slow-worm were confirmed. Interestingly this is reckoned to be the highest 18 hole golf course in England at a height 391 metres. Populations on the majority of smaller sites do appear to be very low with poor breeding results! One adder site revealed two heavily scarred, elderly male snakes and on close inspection the scars were diagnosed as burns. Something to be said about gorse and heather burning early in spring or indeed any fire damage.

The wet summer made reptile recording challenging, but a recording event organized by Steve Roe, the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre Manager, still resulted in grass snakes, slow-worms and amphibian records at Bodenham for HART members.

Reptile habitat work parties have been active on the Community Commons and other reptile sites. HART managed to get funding for tools including two brush cutters; Nigel gained certificates in brush cutting and chainsaw use along with other Community Commons Project volunteers.

One notable habitat creation achievement was the opening up of commercial forestry to extend reptile habitat in the Mortimer Forest. This was achieved through the partnership of HART and the Forestry Commission along with Wildlife Ranger Brian Hicks and other Forestry Commission staff.

2. Current size of your ARG and number of active members

We currently have 88 members of whom about 30 are active to varying degrees. We're lucky to have such a supportive group.

3. Any success stories and concerns

Following on from the Ponds and Newts Project, we have successfully completed in 2007 the Pond Restoration and Celebration Project. The budget was around £60,000 and was again funded by LEADER+, with further funding from the SITA Trust. We restored 5 ponds from the LEADER+ area in Herefordshire, trained pond owners and managers in pond management techniques, and ran days to celebrate the biodiversity of ponds and hopefully inspired others to create and restore their own ponds. The unseasonable summer floods meant the project schedule suffered as the ponds were close to full when we wanted to de-silt! Fortunately the dry autumn allowed us to do the work later on.

One pond had become so infested with *Crassula Helmsii* that the only realistic management solution was to dredge it all out. But the Environment Agency (EA) regulations demanded that we disposed of it all at landfill sites and the cost of transportation of up to 100 tonnes was beyond our budget! We tried all manner of alternative options but none were feasible. We have written a report detailing all the issues which is available to anyone interested. The spread of *Crassula Helmsii* in the wild is of major concern and the EA are planning to do a research project in 2008 on methods of dealing with it. This could be of vital interest to many ARGs.

We have created an embryonic pond group to monitor and generally take a care of the restored ponds. HART will provide support for the 'Friends of Herefordshire's Ponds' and act as a point of contact for queries and help. We hope several local pond group will develop during 2008 and beyond.

We have a successful partnership with the local charity Caring for God's Acre. They are helping churches undertake surveying and conservation projects to look after their churchyards better for wildlife, and HART provides surveys and advises on best management for the reptiles.

Nigel Hand has continued to get the positive message across for snakes especially adders with recent coverage including Radio 4 and BBC1's The One Show. Richard and Phyl King were also filmed by the BBC about the creation of their beautiful wildlife pond.

4. Project requiring funding such as habitat creation surveys

We are very concerned about the decline of the Adder in the county, and have spent the year in consultation with partners and funders to determine a practical, sustainable and fundable project, supported by the various wildlife agencies and community groups. With all reptiles now given BAP status, the project must deliver on the BAP targets.

Our Adder Project will be looking to involve community groups in learning about the adder and other reptiles and going out to monitor key sites. The project will give training in identification and recorder skills, encourage more recorders and hence more records (to be held by the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre) and develop resources to promote awareness of the adder and other reptiles: leaflets, interpretation boards, talks and other events. The project also aims to develop liaisons with the land managers and will develop a second project to implement conservation management on some of the key sites.

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

Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

Jan Clemons, Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team, 34 Montalt Road , Cheylesmore, Coventry , Warwickshire CV3 5LU, 024 7650 6416, Janice.clemons*virgin.net

WART membership remains buoyant with 55 members as we celebrate our fifteenth birthday. We have about 15 active members.

Committee

Chair - Jan Clemons
Vice-Chair - Ian Jelley
Secretary - Natalie walker
Treasurer - Howard Eccles
Membership secretary/IT manager - Nigel Clemons
Newsletter Editor - Lucy Cash
Ordinary members - Serena Eccles, Ian Tanner, Becky May, Charlotte Lea

Becky May (Assistant Ecologist) joined the Committee to represent the Local Biological Recording Centre at Warwick Museum. Becky is taking over Jane O'Dell's role due to retirement. WART will always be grateful for Jane's input in setting up the system of reciprocal sharing of herpetofauna records between ourselves and the museum. Consequently both organizations are fully aware of sites of herpetological interest throughout the county. Charlotte Lea of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) has also joined the committee meaning we now have two Trust employees involved in our work.

Two training days for amphibians and reptiles respectively were undertaken in 2007. Both courses were fully booked and provided the opportunity for attendees to take part in NARRS. The presentations downloadable from NARRS were excellent and Natalie, Lucy & Ian provided the expertise as only professional herpetologists can. We were particularly lucky to see common lizards during the reptile field visit to a 'new' site in Nuneaton. Considering the site was a public open space next to a housing estate and its many resident cats and adolescent gangs, there seemed quite a sizeable colony (in Warwickshire terms) despite many lizards with missing tails. It makes you wonder just how many 'new' reptile sites remain to be found in the County. The locals of course know they are there but the information does not get passed on to the relevant organizations. The workshops produced four new recorders and WART members. We will be repeating the training days in partnership with WWT in 2008 as we had to turn people away this year.

WART have been involved in the review of the Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull's Biodiversity Action Plan for the adder and great crested newt. The latter is widespread throughout the county and our plan was to go back and visit 197 sites with records over 10 years old to see if crested newts and their ponds were still extant. Unfortunately with so little active members the logistics of doing this would take years. The elusive Warwickshire adder still has not turned up but we have until 2010 to find them. Network Rail reports sightings of adders on their land at Kenilworth Common but there is no photographic evidence for validation purposes. Next year we plan to visit all sites where post-1960+ records exist, to identify potential sites for restoration. Only after this can we plan two population restoration projects. The north of the county seems to support the majority of the County's reptile populations and there are several good adder populations in nearby Staffordshire. The question perhaps we should be asking ourselves is whether the adder was always rare in Warwickshire?

Ian Jelley has been busy promoting herpetofauna recording with volunteers on many WWT reserves which although being amphibian rich are reptile poor, with the exception of the grass snake. A plan to create grass snake egg laying heaps on WWT sites is also underway.

This amphibian rich/reptile poor trend was also mirrored by the NARRS squares visited. Our main problem in visiting the squares was time constraints and this year's strange weather which seemed to affect the natural biorhythms of many species, including herpetofauna. The Dunchurch Toad Survey showed that the toad migration was in two stages this year and very protracted.

Two newsletters were produced in 2007 and were posted onto the WART website.

Finally I would like to thank everyone who has been a member of the group and in particular those that have been actively involved in herpetofauna survey and conservation work. Next year we aim to get more members involved by ensuring that species records keep coming in (especially reptiles) and records for ponds that have been created or indeed restored (and the affect that this has had on amphibian populations), as well as those that have been lost or recently stocked with fish. During 2007 we purchased more survey equipment and are now able to make this available to our members in order to check new records of reptile and amphibian populations.

Jan Clemons
WART Chair

Shropshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Viv Geen, Shropshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, c/o Shropshire Wildlife Trust, 193 Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury SY2 6AH , 01743 284289, vivgeen@shropshirewt.cix.co.uk

Staffordshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Claire Waterson, Staffordshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, c/o Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, The Wolseley Centre, Wolseley Bridge, Stafford ST17 0WT, 01889 880121, sbap@staffs-wildlife.org.uk

West Midlands

Paul Wilkinson, 6 Bossgate Close, Wombourne, South Staffordshire WV5 0NJ, 07919552527, Plwilkinson1@sky.com

EAST MIDLANDS REGION

ARG UK Regional Representatives – Andrew Heaton & Chris Monk

Nottinghamshire Amphibian & Reptile group

Sheila Wright, Nottinghamshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, Nottinghamshire Natural History Museum, Wollaton Hall, Nottingham NG8 2AE, 01159 153905, sheilaw@ncmg.demon.co.uk

Herpetofauna records for Nottinghamshire continued to trickle in throughout 2007 with the occasional new 1km grid square able to be filled in for a species. Two new sites for Great Crested Newt were found during the year plus a third record that remains a mystery - an adult female discovered by a maintenance engineer floating on debris in a sewage pumping station tank in central Nottinghamshire. The newt had been carried in sometime during the heavy rains of summer, along with a Smooth Newt. At the time, this part of the county was a blank area for Cresties. Other known GCN sites were confirmed as still having a presence, and population studies were undertaken on at least two sites. This included the site of Nottinghamshire's largest known population, located near Southwell, where the estimate of the population size has been increased to c.3,000.

Our knowledge of the distribution of Common Lizard in Nottinghamshire has further improved with a number of new sites reported. Although there are concerns regarding some sites threatened with development, a number of heathland restoration projects continue to provide improved habitat and the Recorders are quite optimistic about the future for this species.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Adder as for the second consecutive year there have been no sightings at Nottinghamshire's only confirmed site. The only redeeming feature is that the habitat at the site has improved considerably over the last few years, thanks to the efforts of the landowners, and the Recorders are hoping that because more cover has been generated the Adders are now proving more difficult to spot. Certainly, food supply is not a problem at the site as the Common Lizard population is now thriving.

The number of Slow-worm sites in Nottinghamshire remains fairly static and a cause for concern, not helped by proposed development on the site of one of our largest known colonies in the north of the county. Representations have been made and it is hoped substantial mitigation measures will be forthcoming.

In 1995 a Slow-worm colony was translocated from the "Victoria Hole" in the centre of Nottingham (former site of Nottingham Victoria Station) to a site outside of Nottingham. Monitoring of the receptor site has continued over the last twenty years and it is pleasing to report the population is doing well, with regular breeding and a slight increase in the extent of the colony. A downside is now the threat of development in adjacent areas.

Land restoration continues at a number of former colliery sites in Nottinghamshire with work at others yet to start. With the higher profile herpetofauna now have in Nottinghamshire compared to years past, the inclusion of habitats to benefit them specifically, e.g. ponds and hibernacula, is now a matter of routine and before long we are hoping to start seeing the benefits.

John Osborne/Sheila Wright,
Co-Nottinghamshire Herptile Recorders
17th January, 2008

Derbyshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Chris Monk, Derbyshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, Hilburn, Chapel Lane, Middleton, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 4NF , 01629 823136/01629 580000, chris.monk@derbyshire.gov.uk

Group Organisation

After many years of ad-hoc organisation, the Group approved a constitution at its January meeting and the following committee was elected:

Chair – Helen Metcalfe

Secretary – Chris Monk

Treasurer – Jayne Thompson

Committee members – Bob Baker, Trevor Taylor, Philip Precey

After Philip Precey moved away to another job in late summer, Victoria Pope was co-opted onto the committee, particularly to develop a Group website.

Membership

At the end of the year there were 71 names on the membership list. 52 members have signed up to the ARG-UK insurance scheme to cover them when undertaking practical works for the Group, the majority participating in the toads on roads patrols but also those undertaking surveys for adders & great crested newts and practical pond work.

One issue of the Group's newsletter was published in August. It is hoped that the Group website will be on-line in early 2008.

Activities

- Toad Crossings

Patrols were carried out at 10 sites this year, although it turned out to be the worst year for toad numbers over the last 15 years for which we have detailed records. Although this was mainly due to very dry and cold weather conditions during the toad migration season, there has been a decline in numbers every year, apart from 2005, since 1998. Some official highway toad signs were purchased and erected at three of the sites.

- Adder surveys

A further training day was held for members & other volunteers for the Make the Adder Count Project. After the dreadful weather on the 2006 training days, the 2007 day started cloudy but rapidly brightened up and 24 adders were seen by the participants. Unfortunately, the cold, sunny but very dry and windy weather that set in after the training day reduced the number of counts later in the season as the adders could bask under cover at the bottom of the vegetation. By the end of the 2007 survey, ten surveyors had sent in 189 counts covering 29 hibernation sites, the majority of which now have three years of data.

- Great crested newts

A third season of great crested newt survey work was carried out for the Peak District National Park's Vision for Wildlife Project. In the autumn, a field visit was organised to the Vision Project Area for members of the Derby City Pond Wardens, during which they carried out mastic repairs and vegetation clearance on a leaking concrete dewpond.

Members also carried out great crested newts surveys on a nature reserve for the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, two Local Nature Reserves (LNR) – one with the Friends Group who will be monitoring the site in future and other locations in Derby and Derbyshire.

- Practical pond works

Advice was given to the Derby City Pond Wardens over maintenance work at ponds in the City, in addition to their practical restoration work in the Peak Park. A fourth season of pond work was carried out with the Friends Group on ponds on the Chellaston Brickworks LNR.

- Training days & Publicity

In addition to the Make the Adder Count Project training day mentioned above, members carried out additional training in pond surveys for the Derby City Pond Wardens and an amphibian training day for the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. Assistance was given to the South Yorkshire ARG's NARRS training day that was held in the Peak District. Members also attended Derby City Council's Day of Pondmania and talks were given to local members' groups of both the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Pleasley Pit Nature Study Group, NE Derbyshire Field Club and the North Notts Environmental Association.

Liaison with the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

Helen Perkins replaced Philip Precey at the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's Water for Wildlife Project and is now their contact with the Group. The Group is grateful to the Trust for assistance with mailings and accommodation for indoor meetings.

Chris Monk

Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network

Andrew Heaton, Leicestershire Amphibian & Reptile Network, 19 Rydal Gardens, Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire LE65 1FJ, 01530 467904, ahendon@ntlworld.com

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. LARN currently sends its newsletter out to around 45 addresses, though the number of active recorders is nearer a dozen.

This was quite a quiet year for the group, though it did run a NARRS amphibian training day, based at Coalville; this was attended by 9 people and led by Dr Rob Oldham and Andrew Heaton. Held on 17 March, the practical sessions at a local nature reserve turned up a number of great crested newts as well as frog, toad and smooth newt – all the common species for Leicestershire.

The group now has, not its own website, but a dedicated web page hosted by Leicestershire County Council, arranged through the Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre. This provides contacts and space to promote the "Snakes Alive" and "Spawn Spot" surveys.

The distributional data collected by the group has been used for many development Environmental Impact Assessments, the M1 widening study, Newtown Linford Village Design Statement (for probably our most herps-rich parish) and for drafting of the North-West Leicestershire Biodiversity Action Plan.

The M1 widening study turned up a number of interesting new records which were submitted to the group, including what is probably Leicestershire's largest toad population (1000 were counted) at Sawley Marina beside the Trent. There was an unfortunate incident in September when Rutland County Council, without consulting anyone with knowledge, put out a press release warning

people to look out for adders which were supposed to be multiplying all over the county. (In fact, there is only one definite site for adders in Rutland, at Ketton Quarry). Thanks to pressure from LARN members, the press release was later removed from the RCC website – though the damage may have been done.

Andrew Heaton

Northamptonshire – contact only

Brian Laney, Northamptonshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, 5 South Close, Long Buckby, Northamptonshire NN6 7PX , 01327 843847, 07899 987390, brian.laney@gmail.com

SOUTH WEST REGION

ARG UK Regional representative -Chris Gleed-Owen

Avon Reptile and Amphibian Group

Tim Corner, Avon Reptile and Amphibian Group, c/o Bristol Regional Environmental, Records Centre, Third Floor, Bristol Central Library, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TL, 0117 9349833, info@brerc.org.uk

As it stands we have 40 people on the Avon Reptile and Amphibian Group mailing list. Whilst some of these may not be essentially active it does show a good level of interest.

Until quite recently ARAG has been a bit quiet. Last year we used the opportunity of the NARRS to "re-launch" the group and are keen to use this spring's herpetofauna activity to continue this.

Specifically last year ARAG was involved in:

- NARRS training day
- ARAG Meeting

At the moment it is best to regard BRERC as the relevant ARG contact but it is hoped that as the group gets more active an individual/s will pick up this mantle. (from Nick Hudson)

Devon Reptile and Amphibian Group

Eleanor Knott, Devon Reptile & Amphibian Group, c/o Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, Shirehampton House, 35-37 St. Davids Hill, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4DA, 01392 279244, eknott@devonwildlifetrust.org

There is very little to report from Devon, as we don't really have a functioning ARG at the moment. If anyone would like to revitalise the group I would like to hear from them!

We are hoping to organise some more great crested newt surveys this year. (from Ellie Bremner)

Cornwall Reptile and Amphibian Group

Mark or Tricia Nicholson, Cornwall Reptile & Amphibian Group, contact via Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Five Acres, Allet, Truro , Cornwall TR4 9DJ , 01872 273939

Speaking as the CRAG Co-ordinator, what CRAG needs most of all is... a new CRAG Co-ordinator. Unless I have time to organise meetings and outings they just don't happen - which means that in the last couple of years CRAG has been virtually non-existent. Would anyone out there like to move down to Cornwall and take this on?! Or do you know anyone in Cornwall who might be interested? More positively, we still have a list of 40 or so people who are interested in herpetofauna to varying degrees. A few years ago some of us worked with the Cornwall Wildlife Trust's consultancy (CEC) on a large reptile mitigation project and, largely as a result of that work, the consultancy's interest, knowledge and activity in relation to reptiles has been consolidated.

In 2007 we organised two NARRS training days - one for amphibians and one for reptiles - which drew good attendances. Very few of those who attended went on to do surveys, as far as I can see, although some said they intended to do so. We will try to encourage them to take part in 2008.
(from Mark Nicholson)

Dorset Amphibian and Reptile Network

Chris Glead-Owen or Dorothy Wright, Dorset Amphibian & Reptile Network, c/o The Herpetological Conservation Trust, 655a Christchurch Rd., Boscombe, Bournemouth BH1 4AP, 01202 391319, chris.go*herpconstrust.org.uk

DARN continued to operate largely as a core of active people, and communicated informally rather than via formal meetings. Work pressures meant that, as ever, we didn't manage to do many of the things we'd aspired to, but this is mitigated by the fact that The HCT is based in Dorset and is very active here. Several DARN members carried out NARRS surveys in 2007. A NARRS training course was held in April, covering reptile and amphibian survey, with field sessions on HCT reserves. DARN members have also continued to carry out a lot of sand lizard and smooth snake monitoring in the southeast of the county, and monitoring the natterjack sites. We also did some great crested newt and other amphibian and reptile surveys across the county. Wall lizard and green lizard populations were also monitored. The HCT and BHS Joint Scientific Meeting was held in Bournemouth again, and as usual served as a good social occasion for DARN members and others.

(from Chris Glead-Owen)

Gloucestershire Amphibian and Reptile Group

Esther Collis took up the post of Great Crested Newt Project Officer/Biodiversity Action Plan Co-ordinator early in 2007. Once in post she took up the ARG mantle for Gloucestershire from Rosie Kelsall.

Esther was allocated five project areas in the county, each area was known to support great crested newts, but each site would benefit from improved management of both pond and terrestrial habitat.

Despite her late start date (early March) Esther did a sterling job in contacting landowners and other relevant people, mustering up enthusiastic volunteers (amateur and professional) to help in resurveying the ponds in the five areas. Having achieved the targets set for 2007 and the management plans in place for 2008, it is just a matter of ensuring that the plans are implemented over the next two years.

Two other great crested newt projects, which were outside the above allocated areas, were (1) Tetbury and (2) Tewkesbury.

1) A school in Tetbury had been given a pond for educational purposes. The pond was just the other side of the school boundary and one of the pupils discovered the presence of great crested newts. A visit to the pond in July confirmed the presence of great crested newts by netting numerous newt larvae. The dilemma now is how do you use a pond for educational purposes when it contains a protected species?!

2) On an industrial estate in Tewkesbury a local resident had found great crested newts on an undeveloped plot to which planning permission had been given. A visit to the site in October did confirm the presence of great crested newts together with numerous smooth newts and several common frogs and toads under an assortment of discarded material. Tewkesbury Borough Council was

promptly notified and now an Ecology Consultant has been asked to assess the site.

(from Colin Twissell)

Wiltshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Gemma Harding 07775 865630 wiltshirearg@hotmail.co.uk

Members - 10 people have actively contributed in 2007, although we have not set up a formal membership process as yet.

Activities in 2007

March-May – Reptile and Pond survey in Swindon

April – NAARS/ Introduction to WARG Training day in Swindon, 11 people attended. Deemed a successful event and found a good grass snake site in the process.

April-August - Monitoring of training site.

August – Rescued grass snake from a very distressed lady's compost bin Nr Devizes.

General WARG progress – provided advice and posted leaflets to people regarding GCNs and other concerns. Formed strong links with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and hope to try and secure Wildlife Sites for reptiles in 2008.

Planned events for 2008 – WARG will be giving a talk on Reptiles to a local Wildlife group and others in Swindon on March 28th.

Somerset Amphibian and Reptile Group

Paul Newman, Reptile & Amphibian Group for Somerset, Cary Cottage, Church Lane, East Lydford, Somerton TA11 7HD, 01963 240605

SOUTH EAST REGION

ARG UK Regional Representatives – Jon Poland & Lee Brady

Hampshire ARG (HARG) Annual Report 2007

Natalie Rogers - Species Groups - Hampshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Beechcroft House, Vicarage Lane, Curdridge, Hampshire SO32 2DP, 01489 774406, NatalieR@hwt.org.uk For toad crossings email Jon Cranfield jonathan.cranfield@btinternet.com

HARG enjoyed yet another busy year in 2007. At the end of 2007, HARG had 244 members. However, as last year, the number of active members is much lower (approximately 10%).

Excitingly, we received a substantial grant from Awards-for-All. The money has paid for survey equipment (such as torches) and will also help with volunteers' travel costs to survey the less well-recorded areas of Hampshire this spring. The records will go towards our County Atlas, still anticipated for 2010, as well as providing data to the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, with whom we

now have a data exchange agreement. The influx of records in 2007 was slower than predicted and it is hoped that this financial boost will go some way to correcting this. We would like to thank our Liaison Officer, Natalie Rogers, for her diligence in securing the grant.

HARG continues to lead on several county Species Action Plans, with great crested newt still perhaps having the most worrying decline. As good habitat management and accurate recording are of paramount importance to conservation, an event aimed specifically at landowners was organised by Rachel Urwin. Every landowner in Hampshire known to have great crested newts on their land was invited. The concept was simple; to inform and educate landowners of the importance of sympathetic management.

Education and awareness continues to be a key objective of our group and we led a number of field meetings during 2007. Talking to a younger audience at school was particularly well received – good to see such enthusiasm from both teachers and pupils and we will certainly be repeating this in the near future. Public participation in surveys, even at a local level, can be particularly rewarding. A slow-worm and frog survey was popular with residents and allotment holders in Eastleigh. The surveys, administered by Eastleigh Borough Council, formed a great basis for recording, encouraging non-herpetologists to boost about their wildlife. It is hoped that other local authorities may be persuaded to initiate or support similar schemes.

Looking ahead, HARG hopes to push its herpetile criteria for the selection of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (county wildlife sites) and have more qualifying sites designated by the end of 2008.

Please note two dates for your diary. The next ARG UK South-East Region Meeting will be hosted by HARG at Marwell Zoo on Saturday 15th November 2008. It is our AGM on Sunday 9th March at Testwood Lakes HWT Centre, where we will have a worthy selection of guest speakers. If anyone is living, visiting or working in Hampshire then do come along and meet us!

Finally, as always, I would to thank the remaining members of our dedicated committee who have helped make all of these achievements possible.

John Poland
HARG Chairman

Buckinghamshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Buckinghamshire Amphibian & Reptile Group coordinators Tony & Val Marshal, 49 Lodge Lane, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Bucks HP16 0QG 01494 864251 ecorocker@gmail.com or valmarshall@waitrose.com

The first year.

In **January** Tony & Val attended the national Herps Workers conference. This was a busy, stimulating, and lively weekend, and we made lots of contacts and a long to-do list. **February** saw the Inaugural Meeting in Great Missenden, when we met about 20 members, and were encouraged to arrange activities for the new group. We voted to affiliate to ARG-UK. Chris Bartlett agreed to join us to share planning and development of the society.

17th March 2007 NARRS training at Burnham Beeches The day was dull but promised sunshine later. 18 trainees gathered at Burnham Beeches classroom, plus Martin Hartup from the City of London Burnham Beeches centre, and Paul Holton from the Aylesbury Vale DC field studies centre. We started with a presentation from Chris Glead-Owen on the four reptiles of the area, their

identification, and potential habitats. Then we went out into the marshy and heathy areas of the wood to find them all, using Martin's refugia and field knowledge. We found all four, grass snake, common lizard, slow-worm and, most excitingly, adder. The sun was helpful in shining intermittently, and the cold weather held off. After a late packed lunch we heard from John Baker about amphibians. It was good to see the three newts closely, but separating smooth and palmate can be more difficult in the field, or pond. We visited ponds to search visually for eggs/spawn and try some netting in the vegetated parts. We saw mating toads and toad spawn. (Thanks to Wycombe Rangers for loaning nets). Then we walked to The Stag for a dinner, and back to the ponds for a final torching session. Here we saw more toads and a palmate newt. Thanks to Martin Hartup for hosting this training so efficiently and to NARRS's Chris and John for their energy in sharing their knowledge and expertise.

In **April** we ran workshops at the Bucks Recorders Conference and announced the launch of our website www.bucksarg.org.uk Thanks to Rupert Collins for his expertise and enthusiasm in producing this fine site.

14th April Visit to Deep Mill Ponds Two visits were made, one in the afternoon to carry out a visual survey and netting, the other at 8.30pm to use torching at a time when the newts were likely to be more active. We were grateful to Chiltern Hospital for allowing us access to the section of the River Misbourne within its grounds, where it is clearly divided into three sections. Starting from the hospital and moving eastwards, there is firstly a pond containing many carp. A weir prevents access by the fish to the second pond. The third stretch is a wide channel through trees. The first two ponds have their water levels artificially maintained, but the third only exists when there is water in the River Misbourne. At the time of the visit it had been dry for three years but had recently refilled. Although the water quality of the first pond was quite good, the presence of a large number of fish Canada geese and mallard, meant that it was unsuitable for amphibians. It was, however, in extensive use by grass snakes, and there was some variety, although no great abundance, of invertebrate life. The second pond had similar water quality and the lack of fish allowed colonisation by amphibians, of which both smooth and great crested newts and common frog tadpoles were present. The variety of invertebrate life was again low (although it included freshwater shrimp) and similar to the first pond. Although there were fewer plants, there were sufficient submerged leaves for the newts to be using these for egg-laying. This pond had a GCN Suitability Index of 0.75, which is a reasonably high score. The third stretch of water had no aquatic plants because of having been dry for several years. This had no invertebrate or amphibian life, although the water was clear. This would need several years of continual river flow to regain its wildlife interest. Like the first pond it had a low GCN SI. We left the Hospital grounds to inspect a much larger pond and saw many smooth newts in the daylight. Torching in the evening we found large numbers of GCN laying eggs here, probably resting out of reach of our nets in the daytime, and we also found GCN egg-laying in the second Hospital pond.

Haleacre Wood Field Trip 6 of us met to take a look at this private wood where common lizard (rare in the Chilterns) was seen 20 years ago. Unfortunately the weather was dull and cool and we saw not a single reptile of any kind throughout the morning. Recent management, prior to the current owner, may have allowed the wood to have become too dark and overgrown, but given the inauspicious conditions on the day we cannot rule out the presence of reptiles here.

The last quarter of the year since **October** has been spent consolidating membership, entering records, making links with other interested groups and of course, planning the year ahead. We now have an email list of 67 of whom 50% have signed up to work with us.

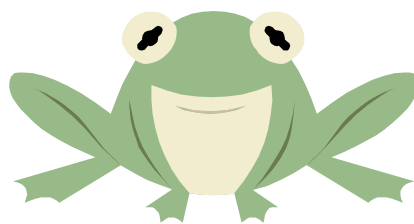
Recording Progress

We have put in 396 records to Bucks & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre this year. The resulting maps still tend to show the distribution of

recorders rather than of amphibians and reptiles, however. For instance, only 12% of all tetrads in the county have been recorded as having frogs since 2000. There must, surely, be frogs in every tetrad, so we are still not getting an adequate picture of their distribution.

Principal findings:-

- 176 frog records from 53 tetrads, mostly around Milton Keynes and Prestwood (where all 3 coordinators live!)
- 105 smooth newt records from 47 tetrads (11%), slightly more scattered but Prestwood again well represented
- 95 toad records from 36 tetrads (8%), heavily concentrated around Prestwood! (This is very misleading – they are probably less common there than in many other places.)
- 258 great crested newt records from 89 tetrads (21%) makes this our commonest amphibian! Massively concentrated around Milton Keynes and the Aylesbury-Bernwood region because of targeted surveys for this species in those areas.
- 5 palmate newt records from 5 tetrads (1%), almost certainly an underestimate, but this probably is our rarest amphibian.
- 71 grass snake records from 35 tetrads (8%), concentrated around Prestwood.
- 56 slow-worm records from 25 tetrads (6%), almost all in the southern half of the county.
- 28 common lizard records from 10 tetrads (2%), fairly scattered.
- 11 adder records from 5 tetrads (1%), surprisingly scattered.



Froggie would a-hiding go
Rana records slowly grow
One still needed for many an area
Go, get more tadpoles *temporaria*.

Chris Bartlett, Tony and Val Marshall

Berkshire Reptile and Amphibian Group

Andy Glencross, Berkshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, Wokingham Borough Council Countryside Office, Dinton Pasture Country Park, Davis Street, Hurst, Reading RG10 0TH, 0118 9342016, Andy.Glencross@wokingham.gov.uk

BRAG currently has 63 members. In 2007 BRAG trained a further 30 people to get their great crested newt licence as well as running NARRS training sessions for both reptiles and amphibians. The NARRS training really paid off as BRAG members signed to do 7 NARRS squares in 2007.

Survey wise BRAG continued to have success in finding new great crested newt ponds, across the county we surveyed 30 ponds identifying 8 new GCN populations, bringing the county great crested newt pond total to 95. The reptiles didn't fare so well in 2007 and we had very low counts on known adder sites and did not manage to add any new sites.

We worked with various Berkshire Unitary Authorities and the Berkshire Biodiversity co-ordinator to secure a total of £14,400 from Natural England to further great crested newt conservation within the county. Whilst £2400 was set aside to carry out further great crested newt surveys in some of the blank squares in West Berkshire, most of the money was spent on practical conservation. BRAG assisted in the creation of 8 new ponds and the restoration 3 existing great crested newt breeding ponds

Stuart Croft, BRAG Secretary

Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group

Richard Anstis, Surrey Amphibian & Reptile Group, 16 Burrows Close, Bookham, Surrey KT23 3HB , 01372 457222, rickenstis@aol.com

180 members on newsletter list; 40+ active members

SARG are pleased to report that the new website at <http://surrey-arg.org.uk/> created by Steve Langham has been a great success and has received many 'hits'... This site gives loads of information on our various activities as well as descriptions of our native A&R species. This latter section is still being extended. The species identification quiz has proved very popular indeed.

Habitat management of heathland and wetland sites continued through the winter months. A survey of the pond at East Surrey Hospital, created in 2006 to enhance this GCN site, demonstrated the presence of all life stages of GCN.

The NARRS training events for both amphibians and reptiles were very well attended and feedback from the attendees was most encouraging. Further training events are planned for 2008.

Members of the team gave talks and presentations to various groups and societies as well as supporting the many queries from the general public.

Planning requests were scrutinised and where appropriate commented upon.

Together with the Sussex ARG we had a twenty year celebration!! at the South-East Regional Conference. This event was well-attended and all appreciated the excellence of the speakers. The SARG founder and Chairman announced she would be retiring to the 'back benches'. We are pleased to announce that Gareth Matthes is taking on the Chairmanship for 2008/2009. Gareth's contact details are: garethmatthes@yahoo.co.uk (Tele: 01428 664473 / 07966 185308)

SARG is currently in negotiation or applying for grant/s in the hope to restore several ponds within the County

At the end of a busy year we were delighted to hear that our retiring Chairman, Dr. Julia Wycherley had been awarded the MBE in the 2008 New Years Honours List for 'services to Amphibian and Reptile Conservation'.

Sussex Amphibian & Reptile Group

Rowland Griffin, Sussex Amphibian & Reptile Group, 42 Stanmer Avenue, Saltdean, Brighton, BN2 8QL.
Mobile: 07717 205072 rowland_griffin@yahoo.co.uk

Committee Members

Jenny Bacon- Chair & Toad Crossing Coordinator
Roland Griffin – Secretary
Leila Simpson – Minutes Secretary
Alan Drummond – Treasurer
Barry Kemp – Surveys Officer
Linda Burnham – Events
Patrick Roper – Newsletter Editor
Zena Gibbs – Committee Member
Alf Simpson – Heathland Forum rep & advisory committee rep

SARG Website www.safari.com/reptile

SARG Weblog <http://sussexamphibianandreptilegroup.blogspot.com>

Sussex Amphibian & reptile Group was formed in 1986 with the aims of raising the profile and awareness of the amphibians & reptile species native to Sussex and to increase our understanding of them. We are affiliated to the Sussex Wildlife Trust & ARG UK.

Our Aims

- Collecting records & carrying out surveys to establish the distribution of native species.
- Protect important sites by providing advice to landowners and local authorities.
- Educate and inform the public through displays, talks and using the media.
- Organising field trips and volunteer conservation tasks.
- Producing a Newsletter three times a year.
- Coordinate volunteers to help toads cross the roads.
- Contributing records to conservation bodies analysing national population trends & contributing to national database.
- Rescuing animals in danger.
- Representing SARG's interests on the National Heathland Forum.
- Contribute to regional and national conference amphibian & reptile conservation.

We had a good start to 2007 with excellent figures for a second year running on two toad crossing where numbers had dropped in previous years. We continue with various surveys and conservation work along with talks to local groups raising awareness on both Amphibians & Reptiles. One of our members Clare Jeffers kindly offered to revamp our membership application form which was done in time for our conference and was much appreciated by all of us. The committee was kept busy this year as we were hosting the regional conference which was held in Crawley along with Surrey ARG who also joined us to celebrate 20 years in the business. The conference held in November was a great success providing an excellent days entertainment. The line up included excellent talks from Trevor Beebe on Natterjack Toads, Mark Amey a professional herpetologist on the evolution of venom, Denys Ovenden on reflection of a misspent life, Brain Banks on amphibians in Poland, Jan Clemons from ARG UK gave us an update and the afternoon was rounded off perfectly by an highly amusing talk by Tony Gent on Herp Conservation..... Why on earth do we bother?

2007 was a busy year of Sussex and as always we looking forward to the challenges of 2008.

KENT AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE GROUP

Dr. Rick Hodges, Hon. Secretary, Kent Reptile & Amphibian Group, c/o K&M BRC, Tyland Barn, Chatham Road, Sandling, Maidstone, Kent ME14 3BD, info*kentarg.org

Size of group : Membership – 89 total (30 active)

Committee members:

Chairman	Lee Brady
Secretary	Rick Hodges
Treasurer	Mike Phillips
For KWT	Fred Booth
For KMBRC	Irène Foliot
Newsletter Editor	Brett Lewis
Others	Ken Plume Bill Whitaker Sue Young

When established: 1988 (relaunched 1995)

Contact details:

Postal address	Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group c/o KMBRC Tyland barn Chatham Road Sandling Maidstone Kent ME14 3BD
e-mail	info@kentarg.org
web	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 full colour Newsletter twice yearly.

Current activities/projects:

The Group currently has two flagship projects:

1. 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.

2. 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.

OXFORDSHIRE AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE GROUP

Rod d'Ayala, Oxfordshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, c/o Pond Conservation, BMS, Oxford Brookes University, Gipsy Lane, Headington, Oxford OX3 0BP, 01865 483608, info@Oxfordshire-ARG.org.uk

Oxon ARG has been helping the local record centre to develop potential criteria for designating sites for herps using individual species or species assemblages based on a trawl of existing records for sites / species. In Oxon there are very few sites with three or four species of reptile (only one site with four known species and at most three others where four species may still hang on, and less than 10 with three known species). With regard to amphibians, there are five known sites with five species and four sites with four species (Palmate Newt is a rarity in Oxon, with a limited distribution because of the lack of acid habitats - Chilterns being the main exception).

Important combined sites with both reptiles and amphibians (defined at the moment as sites with at least six herps, of which at least three amphibians and three reptiles) are few and far between; there are only seven known sites in county.

Undoubtedly the best area for herps overall is the Chilterns, which seems to be the only area for recent reliable records for Adders. The three best herp sites in the county are in the South Oxfordshire Chilterns. However, this happens to be a better recorded area as well (where I have been active in the recent past) so there might some bias here, but there is a good mix of habitats and the Chilterns is relatively unintensively managed in comparison to the rest of the county; large areas of free draining soil (good for reptiles).

The trump card in Oxon is Adder, and I have received what I believe to be three real recent (late 1990's or early 2000's) records to go with the one known site. These will be checked in 2008.

It would be interesting to see how Oxon compared with other counties for species assemblages. For example Bucks is likely to be very similar (from my knowledge), but others?

Rod d'Ayala

YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER REGION

ARG UK Regional Representative – John Newton

North, East and West Yorkshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Gordon Haycock, NEW Yorkshire ARG, 01937 837800 ghaycock@golder.com

Co-ordinator – Gordon Haycock

What have we been up to this year?

The group currently has 52 members, and functions mainly as an email group with people contributing interesting snippets via the co-ordinator. This has led to some lively debates with respect to identifying oddities and odd requests (for reptile poo).

Members have been active, but its hard to get a handle on everything that everyone does – but here goes.

Meetings

We had a meeting on 5th March which was attended by about a dozen people. NARRS was a hot topic. A further meeting was held at the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust office in York on 15th Oct – with guest star John Baker! This meeting was well attended with 13 people coming (obviously lured in with tea and biscuits!).

Training

Gordon led some gcn training for NARRS vols at Newton-on-Ouse facilitated by Andrew Windrum of Natural England. Great turn-out, favourable weather and some good views of the critters.

Gordon led a training session at Sun Lane Nature Reserve, Burley-in-Wharfedale using bottle-trapping, torching and netting. Common toad, common frog, smooth, alpine and great crested newt were recorded, the emphasis was on an assessment of the alpine newt colony. Lower Wharfedale includes the northern reaches of Leeds and Bradford Districts and the south-eastern portion of Harrogate Borough. Burley-in-Wharfedale sits between the two main towns of Otley and Ilkley, but is a sizeable village in its own right. Alpine newts were first believed to have been introduced to Wharfedale via the local primary schools in the 1980s and 90s. At the time, primary schools were keeping alpine newts for study purposes, and then children were allowed to take the newts home over the holidays. By hook or by crook, alpine newts inevitably escaped or were 'set free' and released into garden ponds. Reference to the records held by Nevil Bowland (who is the herpetile Recorder for Wharfedale Naturalists Society) show that by spring 2001 alpine newts were known to be present in five garden ponds in Burley. Further records of good numbers exist for spring 2002, and in 2003 39 individuals were recorded from a pond in Burley and the first confirmed records of alpine newt at Sun Lane Nature Reserve appear (SE 156467). Alpine newt were then recorded at the Reserve in 2005 and 2006. From our survey undertaken in March 2007 it was confirmed that a breeding population of alpine newts occurs at Sun Lane Nature Reserve alongside smooth newt (breeding), great crested newt (one juvenile only), common toad (in abundance) and common frog (breeding). It has also been reported that alpine newt have co-existed in the village with palmate newts in a garden pond over a number of years.

Leeds Herpetile Season 2007

Kerry Fieldhouse, Leeds City Council

The Leeds Amphibian Surveys hopped back into the public eye in 2006 after a 4 year hibernation period, shortly after I was appointed as the Species Conservation Officer for Leeds City Council. In 2007 the Survey was an even

bigger success: a grand total of 43 garden ponds were surveyed, and with the help of 27 wonderful volunteers we managed to survey all 31 priority ponds across Leeds that I had identified as ponds where great crested newts might be lurking, as well as a number of other site ponds such as those at Rodley Nature Reserve, where habitat improvements have been coming on in leaps and bounds.

Volunteers are an amazing asset: as well as helping out with practical conservation projects and doing brilliant work through community groups, they can be our eyes and ears in local wildspaces. Reports of nature sightings can be a massive help to us when we're figuring out the best way to manage sites for people and wildlife. A huge survey like the Leeds Amphibian Survey would simply be impossible without the hard work of local volunteers. (As the only Species Conservation Officer, I cover the whole of the Leeds area and, much as I have tried, I can only be in one place at a time!) As time goes on, I'm learning how best to coordinate the Surveys so that the volunteers, the amphibians and the Countryside and Access team can benefit most from them, and the results from this year will really help us know where to direct our surveys next year. (Unfortunately it's a bit harder to account for the weather - this year the dry spring weather undoubtedly hindered amphibian movement to some ponds and meant some were stagnant, cloudy and hard to survey. Fingers crossed for wetter weather next year!)

Despite a soggy start to the Autumn, our new programme of Reptile Surveys were far more successful than expected, and yet more astounding volunteer effort was rewarded with sightings of common lizards at Adel Moor in North Leeds and on the Otley Chevin. These results have given us renewed enthusiasm for our planned habitat enhancement works at Adel Moor, and the juvenile common lizard at Otley is the first ever confirmed record at the Chevin!

Roll on 2008! If you'd like more information on the Leeds Garden Pond Survey, Leeds Amphibian Survey or reptile surveys in Leeds, please contact Kerry on (0113) 237 5326 or at kerry.fieldhouse@leeds.gov.uk.

Fylingdales Moor reptile surveys 2007

J. Mortimer & D. Pouget

Fylingdales Moor, which extends to approximately 16,000 hectares, is being managed for its wildlife by the Hawk and Owl Trust. A number of local naturalists have carried out a range of surveys (including those for birds and butterflies) on the moor to increase knowledge of species present and inform management decisions. James Mortimer and Delphine Pouget volunteered to carry out reptile surveys, with the aim of identifying populations of reptile on different parts of the moor. Other volunteers who helped with the survey were Shona Turnbull, Luigi Siciliani and Jonathan Mortimer.

In 2007, surveys were carried out in grid squares SE9002 and SE9102. The former was also a square selected for the NARRS survey (National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme). Two visits to the site were made – the first on 1st April and the second on 21st April. The weather was good on both days. The first visit revealed three adders in grid square SE9102, spotted basking on south-facing banks amongst heather and bracken. Several adders were also spotted on the second visit, along with a common lizard. These were all recorded in square SE9102. No reptiles were recorded in SE9002, despite apparently suitable habitat.

The aim is to continue the survey in 2008 and if time allows, expand the survey to include further squares within Fylingdales Moor.

NARRS

Lots of people have participated (or intended to participate) in NARRS. We had a round up at the autumn meeting (Mon 15th Oct), and it seems that people who had any data to report have sent it in. There is a question mark over sites where the pond / habitat is poor and no herps have been recorded. Will people want to re-visit these sites year on year to report negative results?

A NARRS experience

Clare Cheeseman and Andy McIlwraith

Being the nearest blue square to home, we allocated ourselves to NARRS square SE5208 close to Silkstone, Barnsley with great enthusiasm at the ARG UK conference early in the year. We initially undertook a recce visit to determine what the access was like to the pond and to determine if there were any areas suitable to conduct reptile work. Aerial photographs were also useful to evaluate the presence of the ponds and possible suitable reptile habitat within the square.

The pond was located within gated grounds of a large residential property and we had difficulty in determining whose land the pond was located within to arrange access. After not being able to speak to anyone on site on at least two visits to the properties, I eventually used the on-line land registry search to find out whose land it was and contacted the owner to seek permission that way. So, apart from being flashed at (by a torch I mean!) by local residents whilst out torching the pond we were successful in identifying the presence of great crested newts from the presence of eggs, smooth newts by torchlight survey and frogs from the presence of spawn. We both hold Natural England survey licences so did adapt the survey methodology to include some bottle trapping, mainly due to the reduced suitability of the pond to torching and netting given the presence of large amount of aquatic vegetation. I understand the reason behind not including bottle trapping as a standard to the NARRS methodology, however for some sites, and where surveyors do hold licences then this option should maybe become part of the survey approach next year?

Skipwith Common

James Mortimer has been surveying regularly at Skipwith Common finding good numbers of adder. Gcn, grass snake and common lizard are also present.

Other innumerable herptile happenings!

Many thanks to contributors to the report; James Mortimer, Clare Cheeseman, and Kerry Fieldhouse

South Yorkshire Reptile & Amphibian Group

John Newton, South Yorkshire ARG, 12 Cloonmore Drive, Norton, Sheffield S8 8JN, 0114 274 5464,
jrn_home@btopenworld.com

South Yorkshire Amphibian & Reptile Group currently has 32 members, with the majority of these being members of Sheffield Wildlife Trust, Sorby Natural History Society and the Doncaster Naturalists.

2007 has been a very active year for the Group, especially with regard to the NARRS training events, species training days, and Group survey days at a selection of Local Sites, as part of the site selection criteria.

The Group now has representation within the local Wildlife Trust activities, has given a presentation to the YWT, representation on the Yorkshire and Humber Biodiversity Group/Forum, representation with the Rotherham Local Sites panel,

including a significant contract to survey 121 amphibian sites in Spring 2008 for evidence of breeding.

The Group has also undertaken amphibian surveys of a quarry site near Doncaster for the owners as part of their own biodiversity project, and this is ongoing.

The Group is currently involved in a HLF/SITA funded South Yorkshire Ponds Project, with the Wildlife Trust, Rotherham, and Pond Conservation, and is also putting together a SITA funded bid jointly with NEW ARG, fronted by the YWT/YNU, for a Yorkshire Adder Project.

This is likely to be largely a habitat creation/enhancement type of project, and could well involve adder populations on Thorne/Hatfield moors (Natural England) who are very keen to support this type of project.

Last year also saw a small pond creation project on a Doncaster industrial estate, aided by three local primary schools that competed to provide the 'best' design and planting/habitat for the ponds.

A toads-on-road patrol was organised at a local site last Spring, and will be operated again this year.

Not surprisingly, the Group probably received requests for records from consultants on perhaps a weekly basis.

We also had a stand at the Sheffield Fayre in August, that was very well attended, and like the year before provided a number of interesting 'records' from urban Sheffield that we were not previously aware of – putting grass snakes within 1 mile of the city centre, and a concentration of slowworms at a site that was previously unrecorded.

Lincolnshire Amphibian and Reptile Group

Ashley Butterfield, Lincolnshire Amphibian & Reptile Group, ashley.butterfield@lincoln.gov.uk 07986 88 4445

Lincolnshire ARG has also had a busy year again with NARRS training. According to my best information, there are approximately 13 members in the Group, although this figure may need updating!

John Baker came up for a GCN training event at Kirby Moor in April, and Jackie Nicholson ran a training day there for reptiles, with good sightings of adder, common lizard and slowworm.

The Group is also active and represented within the Lincoln Biodiversity Group/Forum Partnership.

NORTH EAST REGION

Northumberland, Durham, Cleveland and Tees Valley - North East Amphibian & Reptile email group contact ian.bond105@ntlworld.com

NORTH WEST REGION

ARG UK Regional representative – Becca Cleaver

Cumbria Amphibian & Reptile Group

(contact only) Tony & Heather Marshall, Cumbria Amphibian & Reptile Group, Hillcrest, Lyth, Kendal , Cumbria LA8 8DJ , 01539 568304, tony*marshallecology.co.uk

There is no formal group but there is an email list of 11 expressions of interest. For the purposes of insurance, there are no members but probably four active individuals.

Activities: a talk and helped draft guidance notes for planners about reptiles and great crested newts.

Barriers to either forming a group or making the group more active: lack of people and size of area. Cumbria is like a donut – roads round the outside, tourists in the middle. It can take along time to cross the county.

South Lancashire Amphibian & Reptile Group

David Orchard, Amphibian and Reptile Group of South Lancashire, 106 Thicketford Road, Tonge Moor, Bolton, BL2 2LU, argsl*btinternet.com

12 paid up members, and probably 5 active members, but 2008 looks like it could increase with a new project.

Activities: 2 new sites surveyed in spring on behalf of GMEU (local record centre), NARRS training session held, preparation of slow-worm project and successful grant application, 2 residential weekends to north Wales to carry out management work for sand lizards and natterjack toads, 4 indoor meetings held, organisation of the NW conference in February.

Barriers: unwillingness for group members to take on roles, general apathy, difficulty of recruiting new members.

Cheshire and Wirral Amphibian and Reptile Group

Julian Whitehurst, Cheshire & Wirral Amphibian & Reptile Group, c/o Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Grebe House, Reaseheath, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6DA, 01829 770797, j.whitehurst*btinternet.com

CWARG has been kept busy throughout the year fielding numerous enquiries from the public over all things herptile; from how to build a wildlife pond to what to do with a stowaway gecko that turned up in a living room in Warrington (it is thought, after hitching a lift with a new kitchen from Spain)!

Leaflets and literature were sent out to accompany various responses to enquiries, thus providing interested parties with plenty of appropriate information on herptile and pond conservation.

The annual 'advanced amphibian training course' was run again in conjunction with North East Wales Amphibian and Reptile Network. This course was fully booked, with very favourable feedback given by participants.

A CWARG member has also been successful in obtaining a small grant from Cheshire Biodiversity Partnership to fund a series of educational visits to selected junior schools in Cheshire. The hope is that these visits will be the start of a lifetime's involvement with the natural world for many young children, who might otherwise have missed out on the opportunity to see newts and tadpoles in local ponds because of changes in lifestyle and today's more risk-averse culture. Discussions are on-going to source additional funding to expand this project to schools across the county

CWARG also participated in the NARRS survey, identifying a previously unrecorded population of GCNs. However, heavy rain and changeable weather during the 2007 survey season limited the number of survey windows available. CWARG members intend to participate again this year (and we hope for some better weather too!).

Merseyside

Peter Tipping, North Merseyside Amphibian & Reptile Group, 8 Greenacre Road , Woolton, Liverpool , Merseyside L25 0LH, 0151 2804869, patipping@hotmail.com