



*Representing the
Amphibian & Reptile
Groups of the United
Kingdom*

ARG REPORTS January 2009

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ARG UK REPORT 2008

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

We have been able to build on this success due to the creation of the Widespread Species Officer Post, managed by ARG UK and the HCT. This post (held by John Baker) is part of the HCT's Widespread Amphibian & Reptile Project, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Trust.

The key aims of the Widespread Amphibian and Reptile Project are to:

- > Promote the conservation of widespread species
- > Coordinate BAP process for widespread species
- > Promote species monitoring
- > Provide professional support for the volunteer ARG network
- > Improve the networking capacity of the ARG network

In the first year of the project, these aims have been achieved by:

- > Organisation of the ARG UK national conference in Coventry and other regional ARG conferences including a new area (North-west England).
- > Engaging the ARG network with a national chytrid screening project.
- > Development of training courses and delivery to volunteers and professionals.
- > Provision of insurance for volunteer groups.
- > Provision of administrative support for ARG UK
- > Representation of ARG UK in liaison with partners, NGOs and statutory bodies.

Provision of professional support for the volunteer ARG network

Training materials were developed to contribute to courses aimed at volunteers, professional consultants and land managers, dealing with great crested newt survey, reptile survey and reptile habitat management. John Baker was kept busy delivering these courses throughout the country.

The project's funding has paid for an insurance scheme to cover all ARGs. Although the activities of ARGs are relatively safe, insurance is an essential element of volunteer work and yet it can be prohibitively expensive for local groups. The Widespread Species Officer has administered the scheme.

Two advisory notes were produced to provide guidance for groups, particularly those newly established:

- > Insurance Arrangements for Amphibian and Reptile Groups
- > Establishing and Maintaining an Amphibian and Reptile Groups

The Widespread Species Officer has been able to liaise with other parties on behalf of The HCT and ARG UK and has met with the statutory agencies and other

NGOs. This has been particularly useful in developing partnership working specifically with:

- > Pond Conservation (input for funding bid for national pond creation project)
- > Natural England (chytrid screening project)
- > Institute of Zoology (chytrid screening project)
- > Froglife (input to and partnership working on Toads on Roads project)

Two electronic newsletters (ARG Today) were produced and distributed.

Improving the networking capacity of the ARG network

The project ran the ARGs' national conference (The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting), held in Coventry in February. Even though this conference is aimed at ARGs, it draws in participants from all areas of UK herpetofauna and is the key national event, allowing networking, training and exchange of information. The 2008 conference was particularly successful. It was supported by Natural England and linked the volunteer network with a national screening project for a fungus (chytrid), which has affected amphibians in several parts of the world. The Widespread Species Project has facilitated a working partnership between Natural England, The Institute of Zoology and ARG UK.



The Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting is a key event for amphibian and reptile conservation. Biosecurity protocols were developed through one of the conference workshops in 2008.

The ARG UK website (www.arguk.org) was overhauled and has been maintained. It provides a directory of local group contacts and advertises activities of their activities. ARG UK documents (annual reports, newsletters and Advice Notes) are available as downloads from the site. The presence of the site on the web not only increases networking capacity, but it also demonstrates that the local groups are part of a network.

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 2 excellent issues 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 UK *100% Fund* was launched in 2008 to provide small grants to ARGs involved in practical conservation work. ARG UK realised that ARG volunteers are often best placed to target money effectively for the benefit of amphibian and reptile conservation. Sometimes small amounts of money can make a big difference locally, but nevertheless can be hard to find. Examples of the sort of projects funded might include the creation of new ponds or the purchase of tools/materials to help with habitat management. The Fund is called '100%'

because all money donated goes into funding conservation projects – not on administration or overheads. The ARG UK 100% Fund is open only to groups affiliated to ARG UK.

The first two awards under this scheme have been agreed by the ARG UK panel and have been awarded to:

- Essex ARG for pond construction project in Brentwood.
- ARG of South Lancashire for excavation of three new ponds and one scrape, and management of an existing pond in Witton Park, Blackburn.

The ARG UK Supporters scheme was also established in 2008 and aimed at people not within travelling distance of a local ARG group or people who would like to make a donation to the amphibian and reptile conservation work being done by local ARGs. The Supporters scheme will keep people in touch with what's going on within the ARG network and encourage them to help out with national projects such as the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme and research into incidence of the chytrid fungus. It may even encourage the establishment of new groups.

Once again ARG UK is extremely grateful to those ARG co-ordinators who sent their 2008 annual reports to their Regional Representatives as it provides an excellent opportunity to look at all the work they do for herpetofauna on a regional and national level.

There are still gaps to fill however and we are looking for regional representatives for the North East and London. There is no longer an ARG group in Gloucestershire or Dyfed-Powys and in some counties only a contact. However this has been balanced by the creation of new groups in Fife, Dumfries and Galloway.

I would like to thank all the members of the ARG UK panel and advisors 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 wonderful work carried out by the individual groups that make up the ARG Network that is outlined in this annual report. All are written in their own individual style reflecting the diverse and growing commitment to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles in the UJK.

Jan Clemons
ARG UK Chair

THE ARG UK PANEL

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

Regional representatives:

Scotland - Peter Leach
Wales – Julian Whitehurst
Northern Ireland – Catherine Bertrand
East of England - John Baker
West Midlands - Will Watson & Nigel Hands
East Midlands - Andrew Heaton & Chris Monk
South West - Chris Gleed-Owen
South East - Jon Poland & Lee Brady
Yorkshire & Humber - John Newton
North West – Rebecca Cleaver

Advisors

Tony Gent, Herpetological Conservation Trust
Jim Foster, Natural England
Kathy Wormald, Froglife
Alan Shepherd, The Wildlife Trusts

SCOTLAND

ARG UK regional representative Peter Leach

Introduction

2008 has been a positive year for ARGs in Scotland, with two new groups being formed, Fife and Dumfries and Galloway. Summer activities may have been limited by the weather but funding from Scottish Natural Heritage has provided the opportunity for a substantial amount of pond creation and habitat management in Clyde, Lothian and Falkirk.

There are no formal Amphibian and Reptile Groups in Angus or the Cairngorm National Park but Trevor Rose and Steve Corcoran respectively maintain a link with ARG-UK and promote and contribute to activities in their areas.

Lothian Amphibian & Reptile Group

As in 2007, activities have been somewhat limited by the weather in 2008, but a number of things are worth mentioning:

A substantial pond creation project was completed by Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and Lothian ARG, with funding from SNH (thanks to John McKinnell). This saw the creation of some 40+ ponds, many in the vicinity of known and threatened GCN sites. Some aquatic planting has subsequently been completed by LARG and early evidence was found of the use of the new sites by frogs, toads and small newts. They will be the basis of our survey programme for 2009.

Survey visits were made to sites in Edinburgh, West Lothian, East Lothian and Midlothian and survey training provided at the National Trust for Scotland site at The Pineapple.

2008 saw the first joint meeting with the Clyde Group, referred to in their report. We hope this can be repeated and that other groups might find it worthwhile to organise similar activities.

An interesting and perhaps slightly worrying development in Edinburgh has been the discovery (in Holyrood Park) of a "new" site with Alpine newts. There are now more of these than GCN sites in this part of Lothian, and all seem to be inexplicably close to University properties!

Readers of ARG Today may have seen the reference to a railway toad crossing at South Queensferry – liaison with Network Rail continues and it is anticipated that by the time toads find 2009 warm enough for them to venture out, they will have a smart new underpass.

Steven Clark has put considerable effort this year into developing our website (lothian-arg), one of the results of which has been a flurry of new members. Because we are very relaxed about membership (no fee, no-one deleted unless they ask to be or eat Great crested newts) it's difficult to be exact about numbers, but at the last count we had some 15 active members (supplemented for 2009 by the new ones?), some 30 + corporate or associate members and some 20 whose long term intentions are unknown. One task for early 2009 is to tidy this up!

Peter Leach, Secretary 0131 551 4492 / pl.tss@btinternet.com

Dumfries and Galloway Amphibian and Reptile Group

2008 saw the birth (hatching?) of a new ARG in the southwest of Scotland. Back in 2007, the Scottish Herpetofauna Workers meeting organised by SNH proposed that the establishment of a new ARG in Dumfries and Galloway be investigated. In May 2008, the local records centre (Dumfries and Galloway Environmental Resources Centre - DGERC) organised a local meeting at WWT Caerlaverock on 14 May to discuss the formation of a new group. Peter Leach (ARG UK Scottish Rep.) kindly attended and gave a short presentation about getting a new group off the ground. Mark Pollitt of DGERC gave a short talk about chytrid fungus and its threat to amphibian populations. The meeting was well attended with over 30 people present, both amateur and professional and all were enthusiastic about the establishment of the new group. Sadly the Natterjacks failed to put on a show in the evening walk on the merse. Nonetheless a post-meeting press release got coverage in many of the local papers and even got top slot for a time on the regional section of the BBC News website (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/south_of_scotland/7385968.stm).

For the rest of the year the activities were low key, aimed at introducing less experienced members of the group to the different species present in the region. Site visits at Beattock, Drumlanrig and Sandhead gave people from the region's three vice-counties opportunities to visit local sites and see some of the local species without too much travelling.

Members have since been kept in touch through emails sent by DGERC, and a winter meeting is planned for early 2009 to discuss the group's activities in the coming year. There are opportunities to link up with the National Scenic Area Communities Rangers who are already involved in amphibian management work at some sites, and to expand involvement in local and national recording (e.g. through NARRS). Fingers crossed that 2009 sees the group build upon this year's promising start.

Mark Pollitt, Manager, DGERC, mpollitt@dgerc.org.uk

Cairngorms National Park

The only thing that has happened in Cairngorms this year was a successful training course for NARRS in April with 12 people involved.

I am still running the Cairngorms Amphibian Leaflet Survey but have only had a handful of leaflets returned with sightings. I ran a poster campaign and did a press piece in April but got very little from that (although it was very wintery here in March/April and into early May).

Steve Corcoran, stephencorcoran@cairngorms.co.uk

Fife Amphibian and Reptile Group

This new group was set up in 2008, is now fully constituted and has raised over £1000.00 for two pond creation projects due to take place in early 2009. Two practical tasks in Central and West Fife involved up to 10 volunteers carrying out pond management at two sites. A very successful Meet the Newts evening in May attracted 33 people and stands promoting amphibian and reptile conservation were displayed at two major wildlife events in Fife. Practical advice was given to EXXON for a site they manage and data provided to Glasgow University for a

Great Crested Newt Project. Further enquiries for assistance will be encouraged. For early 2009 there will be at least two practical conservation projects and two Great Crested Newt survey days. A recorder has been appointed and data collation underway. Late 2009 will see work begin on drafting an Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Strategy for Fife.

Contact: David Bell (Tel 01738 850227 or email david.ecos@btinterent.com).

Clyde Amphibian & Reptile Group

March - Joint CARG / LARG meet with site visit to Gartcosh GCN area followed by talk from Heritage Environmental about the development and management of this important GCN site.

April - NARRS training course – amphibians, fully booked 20 attended. Based at Mugdock Country Park with site visits within Mugdock and Lennox Forest

June – Natterjack visit to Caerlaverock in Dumfriesshire, unfortunately no toads were seen.

August – Site visit to Flanders Moss NNR, Stirlingshire, common lizard seen but no adder, followed by successful visit to Aberfoyle to see slowworm.

CARG purchased 20 corrugated bitumen roofing sheets for use as reptile refugia.

CARG were active in Renfrewshire, Glasgow City and East Dunbartonshire mainly carrying out amphibian surveys. There were 2 new records for great crested newt found in east Dunbartonshire.

Due to wider promotion of CARG mainly because of the NARRS training course and the Gartcosh event, membership of CARG increased substantially. CARG presently has 35 members, approximately 15 members are active, however many members are new therefore it is not known how active they plan to be.

CARG secretary
Maggie Ferguson rangers@mugdock.org
Group contact
Colin Dunlop dunlopc@northlan.gov.uk

Friends of Angus Herpetofauna

2008 was the second year of our existence and it proved to be a busy one. We are fast becoming the local point of reference for all things herpetological in Angus, due in part to our close liaison with Tayside Biodiversity Partnership and good contacts with the local media, and thanks are especially due to Catherine Lloyd of TBP and Gary Cooper of The Courier.

NARRS training was provided in April although attendance was lower this year; the amphibian day attracted 4 potential surveyors and the reptile day just 5 trainees. Our venues were better this year, however, and trainees on both days were able to find and identify the relevant species in the field, a marked improvement on year one!

Recording for NARRS continued although only two surveyors submitted records. We managed to cover three red squares and one blue, and in one case added a common lizard record to increase the species count this year. The particular sighting in question was at 656m, an unofficial altitude record for Angus.

We also involved ourselves in the nationwide amphibian swabbing survey for Chytridiomycosis. Two sites were identified as suitable for the purpose, at Capo Woods near Edzell and in Glen Lee on the edge of the Caingorms. Both proved to be clear of the dreaded disease. Interestingly, during one of the sessions a rare albino female palmate newt was found (and photographed). This find alone was a terrific reward for the considerable effort that went in to the swabbing activity, and I thank those who participated in this, particularly Suntaree Rose and Kayli Bathgate.

FAH had the honour of providing three talks in 2008; the first to present findings from the 2007 NARRS effort in Angus at the Tayside Recorder's Meeting, held in Perth in February; then "Tips on Creating Habitat to Encourage Amphibians & Reptiles" as part of a workshop for "Gardens, Greenspace and Graveyards for Biodiversity", also in Perth during March; and finally "Managing Verges, Paths and Wildlife Corridors for Amphibians & Reptiles" attended by representatives from local Councils as part of the Tayside Biodiversity Action Week in May. These events are an excellent way not only to educate on native herps but also to network with those who can actually make a difference when it comes to local biodiversity conservation.

During Tayside Biodiversity Action Week we organised two Adder Walks, even managing to overcome the problems of liability insurance! These were unfortunately poorly attended due to late and poor advertising of the week's scheduled events, but nevertheless the weather was in our favour and adders were found on both walks. Hopefully, if the event runs again in 2009 a better advertising campaign will result in a worthwhile attendance.

In the latter half of the year we have been working with Friends of the Forest, a local group formed to protect Montreathmont Forest near Brechin. The forest is the subject of a proposed windfarm development, with up to 19 of the largest type of turbine (125m to tip) due for installation if the development goes ahead. The forest is home to red squirrel, goshawk, capercaillie, crossbill and a host of other locally rare species. 30,000 pink-footed geese traverse the forest to forage in fields around its boundaries. It is also one of the few lowland refuges for common lizard in our area and has several pristine mesotrophic ponds with a dense population of palmate newt. A dozen larvae could be caught with each scoop of the net when I visited in September. Problems may arise for this population if construction work creates siltation and turbidity of the streams feeding the many waterways in the forest, as has been seen at similar developments. The common lizards inhabit the forest tracks and rides which will require widening and upgrading for site traffic, and will certainly perish with no means of escape. Neither of these species hold significant conservation status so it remains to be seen how effective our precognition will be, but the Public Inquiry in January 2009 will decide.

With just one active member and around 14 non-active members, we still have a long way to go in terms of establishing ourselves. However as our portfolio grows it is anticipated that we can continue to build on our efforts thus far and expect a full and busy calendar for 2009, with the hope that we can also attract more members to become involved in our activities.

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Scottish Borders Amphibian & Reptile Group (contact only) Ian Carle
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Badenoch & Strathspey (contact only) Gus Jones, Badenoch & Strathspey
Amphibian & Reptile Group, Fiodhag Nethybridge, Invernesshire PH25 3DL
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Western Isles (contact only) Mark Witherall, a1*mwitherrall.freereserve.co.uk

WALES

ARG UK Regional Representative – Julian Whitehurst

North East Wales Amphibian and Reptile Network

Northeast Wales Amphibian & Reptile Network, Matthew Ellis, c/o CCW, Victoria House, Grosvenor Street, Mold, Flintshire CH7 1EJ, 01352 706600, m.ellis@ccw.gov.uk plus NEW Wildlife, 10 Ridgeway Close, Connah's Quay, Flintshire CH5 4LZ, 01244 831725, [weo@newwildlife.org.uk](http://weo.newwildlife.org.uk)

Active members reported as 15. Non-active members reported as 25.

NEWARN reported their usual high levels of group activity in 2008, with a continuing programme of amphibian survey monitoring again being carried out at numerous sites across Northeast Wales. A significant number of these sites have produced counts of over 100 GCN; and over 240 natterjack toads were also counted at a single site, which is very encouraging. The monitoring programme is set to continue in 2009.

NEWARN members have also had active involvement in the Pondscapes Project, Chytrid Surveys, and the organisation of several reptile and amphibian training courses during the last year. The group is also actively involved in the GCN Favourable Conservation Status Steering Group, with a pioneer project being carried out in the county borough of Wrexham.

A programme of amphibian and reptile training events is planned for 2009, these events will be advertised on the website of North East Wales Wildlife (NEWW), who also help organise and host many of these events as part of their long-established involvement with NEWARN.

Bridgend and Vale of Glamorgan Amphibian and Reptile Group

Group contact name: Stephen Lowe, Bridgend and Vale of Glamorgan Amphibian and Reptile Group, 07771814865, stephenybontfaen@tesco.net.

Active members reported as 5. Non-active members reported as 2

BVGARG have never had a formal structure, so no membership subscription is paid or "official titles" are held as such. The ARG started 2008 with 5 active members and by March that was down to 2, due to new jobs/moves. The group also has a 'non-active' member in both County Councils, who can help with access details etc.

A pond improvement project has been carried out under the guise of the BVRG. The Group has also acted as one of the LBAP partners in both Counties. Despite low membership numbers, a number of tasks have been achieved in 2008. These included contributing towards the UK Chytrid survey, repeat visits to ponds to monitor pond works carried out in 2007 (4 pond restorations), a pond restoration project, ongoing monitoring of important GCN populations, site assessments / advice to members of the public, local schools, community groups, local authorities, etc.

It is hoped that 2009 will see the involvement of additional active members and some reptile survey activity is also proposed.

West Glamorgan Amphibian and Reptile Group

*Group contact name: Chaela Carrell, Community Wildlife Project Officer, Biodiversity Unit, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, The Quays, Brunel Way, Baglan Energy Park Neath, SA11 2GG, 01639 686168, enquiries*wgarg.co.uk*

West Glamorgan Amphibian & Reptile Group became officially affiliated as an ARG at the beginning of October 2008. On the 18th of October West Glamorgan ARG attended the Amphibian & Reptile Conservation in the North West Conference in Manchester, which presented an excellent opportunity to meet people that we had previously only spoken to via email from the HCT, BHS and other ARGs.

The constitution was finally finished and signed at the beginning of December. At the end of 2008 West Glamorgan ARG had 4 committee members but there are currently over 15 people ready and waiting to sign up. On the 7th of December, West Glamorgan ARG attended the HCT/BHS meeting in Bournemouth, this was another chance to strengthen connections and have a good chin wag with like minded individuals.

West Glamorgan ARG are working closely with Mentro Allan Neath Port Talbot, BTCV Cymru and NPTCBC Biodiversity unit and have undertaken pond and habitat creation at two sites in the local area. Much-needed funding was secured from the Countryside Council of Wales to drive the projects forward. There are plans for similar projects at a further three sites with funding also in place via CCW. Work is due to start at one of them imminently. During the summer West Glamorgan ARG had been monitoring the amphibian reptile populations in close proximity to all but one of the sites.

The first project based at Margam park started work on the 18th of December onwards, the area was cleared and several ponds excavated, in time for the approaching amphibian breeding season. The other site is situated in an allotment in Neath, which borders with a Park which holds a colony of grass snakes which has been under increasing pressure of late. On the 19th of December work began preparing the site, with pond excavation completed during the first week of January.

Dyfed-Powys Amphibian and Reptile Group

Sadly, it was reported that this group no longer exists.

Brecknock Amphibian and Reptile Group

*Contact: Cliff Bradley, Brecknock Amphibian & Reptile Group contact email bradleycj*tiscali.co.uk*

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group

*Matthew Harris, Gwent Amphibian & Reptile Group, 70 Upper Power Street , Newport , Gwent NP20 5FT, 01633 664662, gwentarg*hotmail.co.uk*

North West Wales Amphibian & Reptile Group

*Contact: David Cowley, North West Wales Amphibian & Reptile Group, Department of Planning & Environment, County Council Offices, Langefni, Anglesey LL57 7TW, 01248 750057 (switchboard), biodiversity*anglesey.gov.uk*

ENGLAND

EAST OF ENGLAND REGION

ARG UK Regional Representative – John Baker

Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group

*John Baker, Suffolk Amphibian & Reptile Group, 63a Thoroughfare, Halesworth, Suffolk IP19 8AR , 01986 872016, [JohninHalesworth*aol.com](mailto:JohninHalesworth@aol.com)*

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

Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group continued to monitor adders in Dunwich Forest. A conservation grazing scheme has been implemented in this area so the survey data will be useful to compare counts before and after the new management regime.

The group took on two chytrid swabbing sites and managed to capture and swab the requisite thirty amphibians in both the early and late sampling periods. This was a rewarding project to work on, as the effort required was within the scope of a small group and yet the data contributed to a larger project of national significance.

Work on the county atlas continued. This included publicity within the Wildlife Trust and Suffolk Naturalists' Society. The atlas will incorporate records generated over 2008, aiming for publication in 2009.

The group has become involved with natterjack conservation issues. This is a novel development. Previously natterjack work has been taken care of by professional bodies, apparently leaving little scope for the ARG. However, the group may have a role as a catalyst for natterjack habitat creation at a landscape level with an aim of restoring a functional metapopulation in East Suffolk.

Group members have been involved in toad patrolling, including a crossing at Bobbits Lane, on the outskirts of Ipswich. More than 4000 toads were counted. The site is threatened by development.

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. This includes 13 insured/active volunteers. The remainder are associates and uninsured members.

3. Any success stories or concerns

Recruitment of active volunteers remains an ongoing concern. The small active membership means that the group's administrative burden falls on a few individuals. To minimise this workload the group has agreed to reduce the number of indoor meetings to once a year to allow a greater proportion of volunteer input to be directed to field meetings. SARG's constitution has also been modified, paring it down to better reflect the capacity of a small group.

Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group benefits from working in a cooperative local conservation environment and is grateful to support from Martlesham Parish

Council, Suffolk BRC, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Forestry Commission and Suffolk County Council.

John Baker (Secretary)

Bedfordshire Reptile & Amphibian Team

herps*freeNet.co.uk

The Group

- Founded April 2000.
- At present 10 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 2008

Maulden adders.

Work this spring concentrated on the Maulden adder release site. At least one of the main hibernacula has now been identified.

The adders began congregating late in March in what has become their established mating area. Some spectacular courtship and 'dancing' was observed. As an experiment as many animals as possible were marked with drops of paint of different colours so individual movement could more easily be traced. This was easy to do after emergence from hibernation when they were still torpid. In some cases animals were marked again after the first slough. The results have still to be fully analysed but even at the time it was clear that the males were moving around far more than we expected.

Rowney Warren.

Unfortunately despite extensive monitoring no reliable adder sightings were made at Rowney Warren though the lizard and slow worm population turned out to be larger than thought.

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.

Clearing of reeds and dead trees was carried out at a GCN pond. A date has been fixed for restoring the brush heaps on the adder field. It is hoped to begin creating at least one new pond for GCN.

New Members.

Two active new members were recruited this year though lack of members remains a problem.

Local Government Reorganisation

Bedfordshire County Council has been abolished and replaced by two authorities: Luton and Mid-Beds. John Comont, the County Ecologist, who has been very supportive, has moved to the County WLT. It is not clear what, if any, conservation responsibilities the new authorities will adopt.

Cambridgeshire

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Essex

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

Essex Amphibian and Reptile Group members have monitored adder populations at Peldon, Mersea Island, Backwarden Nature Reserve and Hadleigh Castle Country Park.

Maximum counts from Hadleigh Castle Country Park have been sent into the Make the Adder Count Survey. Previous survey counts from other sites are being collated and will also be sent to the MTAC project in 2009.

Group members have been involved in toad patrolling; there are two registered crossings with the largest being patrolled by David Scott and his volunteer helpers. Writtle College has one of the largest toad populations in the county and is being monitored by Writtle College staff and EARG volunteers. NARRS surveys were undertaken by Peter West and the same 5 km squares were surveyed were surveyed in 2008. Other NARRS squares were not visited in 2008. It is hoped that NARRS squares will be surveyed in 2009.

Pond creation – The EARG have been involved in pond enhancement and creation projects in Brentwood, Basildon and Uttlesford. EARG have provided advice and survey information to local authorities for pond restoration plans. In Brentwood EARG part funded pond creation at Merrymeades where two new ponds were created. The EARG received funding from the ARG UK 100% fund for this work and have received nets & torches to help with the monitoring surveys in Brentwood. Dunmow Council have received expert opinion from EARG members. In January 2009 EARG have been working with Pearl Drainage to restore three ponds in Great Dunmow. A new pond has also been in this area for great crested newts. Monitoring surveys are planned for the spring 2009.

Other pond restoration works have been undertaken in Basildon following surveys and habitat assessments by EARG volunteers. The pond has recovered from the works and has developed into a very nice looking pond with plenty of interesting plants and hopefully more newts in the spring 2009.

EARG's partnership with the RSPB have continued over 2007 and 2008 with regular survey visits to the south Essex Marshes. Reports on reptile distribution and great crested newt breeding sites are submitted to the local RSPB management staff. EARG provided references to the local RSPB for a Natural England conservation license to restore an old field pond found at Bowers Marsh.

Funding from the Environment Agency has been received for a Conservation Review of the Great Crested Newt in Essex. This document is planned to be published in February 2009. An extreme backlog of records has been collated from searches on the internet and reviewing planning applications. The major development of Stansted Airport has provided the largest dataset on ponds surveyed in the county. Over 200 ponds have been surveyed and around 30% of these ponds were found to be populated by breeding great crested newts. Encouraging consultants to send in their survey results is an important task for consultants as their professional surveys often are the most detailed information for ponds in the county.

The EARG have funded two members to attend the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting this year. Each year it is hoped that the EARG can help other members to attend future HWM.

2. Size of ARG and number of active members

EARG does not have a membership fee/scheme but has a mailing list of over 100 people, organizations and groups. EARG raises funds through data searches where a donation to group funds is requested from professional consultants requiring information on study areas in the county. The new county recorder is Jon Cranfield as David Scott has stood down from the post in 2008. The funds generated through the data searches are split between the EARG and Essex Field Club. EARG are preparing to become a corporate member of the Field Club. EARG participated in the ARG UK insurance scheme. This includes 18 insured/active volunteers.

3. Any success stories or concerns

Concerns

The EARG has concerns over a major development in south Essex where reptiles have been moved over a very large distance of over 175miles! Thousands of reptiles have been moved to a Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve.

The EARG are writing to the client company of the project to request that they stop using the nature reserve in Wiltshire and use local release sites such as the site which is being used for the great crested newts which are being moved from the site. The EARG are awaiting a reply to this request. The EARG are writing to the ARG UK coordinating panel, through their regional representative, to enlist their support for the EARG campaign to stop the long distance translocation and to help prevent this occurring again in the future. EARG supports the publication of an ARG UK advice sheet on reptile mitigation and best practice.

Successes

The EARG would also like to thank the active members for all their hard work and dedication; Peter West, Andrew Woodhouse, John Wright, Duncan Fisher, Graham Hart, Laurence Jarvi and Claire Mennim, in 2007 & 2008.

New members have provided a much need push on activities on the ground in Essex. Despite the informal nature of the group successful projects have been undertaken including pond restoration, removal of exotic amphibians and surveys for reptiles and amphibians.

EARG member Laurence Jarvis presented a paper at the BHS scientific meeting which stemmed from his survey work and research in Epping Forest. A paper was also published in the Essex Field Club Journal the Essex Naturalist looking at the breeding newt populations at the Field Studies Centre at High Beech.

Ray Cranfield (Chairperson)

Norfolk

Louise Oliver, Norfolk and Suffolk Government Team, Natural England, 122a Thorpe Road, Norwich, NR1 1RN, 01603 674933, louise.oliver@naturalengland.org.uk

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

ARG UK Regional Representative – Will Watson

Worcestershire Reptile & Amphibian Group

Alan Shepherd, Worcestershire Reptile & Amphibian Group, c/o Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Lower Smite Farm, Hindlip, Worcester WR3 8SZ, 01905 754909, worsarg@googlemail.co.uk

Despite the intention to re-launch WRAG in 2008 the group remained in hibernation. As previously reported this is due mainly to the lack of people who want to get involved in organising things. It's clearly time that we do something about this and a meeting will definitely be organised by the end of March.

We also failed to get round to organising the long overdue Midlands Regional Conference and so in association with WART we will be. The proposal is to hold it in October, either at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's centre at Lower Smite Farm or Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Brandon Marsh centre. Both have been the venue for previous regional conferences, both are in a central location with reasonably good transport links.

Herefordshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Nigel Hand, 45 Albert Road, Ledbury, Hereford HR8 2DN, 01531 636033, editor@herefordhart.org

Chair: Richard King; County Recorders: Nigel Hand (Reptiles), Will Watson (Amphibians); Secretary: Val Bradley; Newsletter and Website: Phyl King

1. Surveying, training, habitat management and special projects

2008 has been a year of consolidation after completing our Ponds and Newts and Pond Restoration projects by end 2007. Despite efforts to get a regular pond surveying group going for the county, we have not yet been successful, and surveys just continue on an on demand basis. However, we do have two pond groups to look after the ponds restored last year, and one was particularly busy with careful replanting, and with maintenance throughout the year to keep the surrounding habitat in good condition. An attractive information board has also been erected for the general public. Surveys of the restored ponds have been undertaken to assess the impact of last year's work.

On the reptiles side, we won £50k funding from the Your Heritage Lottery Fund for a 2 year community reptile awareness, education and surveying project called 'What's that Snake?'. Up to 10 training events are planned, and 10 major reptile sites, especially for adders, targeted for surveying. This project started in October and will also include up to 40 visits to schools to teach them about snakes and lizards and promote the work of reptile conservation. Nigel Hand was selected as Project Officer.

Nigel has continued to work with the Community Commons Project on reptile recording and advising on habitat management for 6 sites.

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

Work parties continue to be organized each winter to improve habitat, especially

for the adder.

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

We currently have 66 member households (approx 96 members) of whom some 25 are active to varying degrees.

3. Any success stories and concerns

Our success this year has been to gain funding for the What's that Snake? Project. This took well over a year to get all the matched funding in place. This project will be a major contributor to the implementation of the Local BAP for the Adder in Herefordshire and contribute to BAP work for the other three reptiles present in the county.

We continue to work with a local charity Caring for God's Acre, providing surveys and advice for churchyard teams on best management for the reptiles. We have attended churchyard days with displays, live animals and leading guided reptile walks. We have been invited to a number of county events with our displays and these have been very popular.

4. Projects and BAP Work

The What's that Snake? Project is underway as described above. 4 training events are so far organized (with over 50 people already booked on) to improve identification and recorder skills. This should lead to more recorders in the field and hence more records. The project also aims to develop liaisons with the land managers and hence influence the land management to be more sympathetic to reptiles. Data collected will be passed to the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre and entered on the central database from which distribution maps and information will be published with a reptile status report. This project aims to deliver most of the targets of the local Adder BAP and contribute to the BAP's for the other reptiles too.

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 75 members as we celebrate our sixteenth 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

WART remains the one-stop shop for herpetofauna conservation in Warwickshire with important links with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT), the Biological Record Office, County Ecologist, Natural England and local Councils.

The committee met three times in 2008 and 2 newsletters were published. WART participated in 'Toads on Roads 2008' by checking the Dept of Transport sites to see if toads were still crossing here. Several of these sites are believed to be negative and there are two active sites- one on the DoT list and a new one at Meriden. Records have been sent to Froglife.

Three committee members were involved in the IOZ chytrid survey and it has been confirmed that the populations sampled have a clean bill of health.

Two training days in partnership with WWT for amphibians and reptiles respectively were undertaken in 2008 and thanks is given to the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for providing a venue for these training events at their offices at Brandon Marsh. These courses were specifically aimed at the non-professional and we asked for a £6.50 booking fee, which covered the cost of WART membership and refreshments. This strategy of course is guaranteed to increase WART membership and NARRS surveyors. Both workshops were well attended (*I don't have actual numbers*)

Amphibian emergence (in particular newts) was delayed by cold weather and few great crested newts were recorded in ponds before the middle of March. The amphibian workshop took place on the 15th March, which coincided (by accident) with the first period of rainfall since the start of February. The evening element of the workshop included a torch search of a cluster of great crested newt breeding ponds on the outskirts of Coventry.

A small number of newts were recorded within the ponds and the party were also rewarded for tolerating the wet conditions by witnessing the first strong wave of newts migrating back to the ponds. At least 30 great crested newts were recorded and at least a similar number of smooth newts migrating south towards the ponds. The group were also able to identify newts emerging from small crevices as well as identifying areas where migrating newts could become trapped on their return to the ponds.

The reptile workshop was similarly affected by cool weather conditions and the planned visit to a known common lizard site was replaced with an informative exploration of grass snake habitat at Brandon Marsh. No snakes were found but Ian Jelley was kind enough to bring some slowworms for the group to see and Natalie Walker had some adder and grass snake sloughs for the group to look at and compare.

Ian Jelley has been appointed as a conservation advisor to a Coventry school that has a cluster of great crested newt breeding ponds within its grounds. Ian wears two hats as part of his role, one is his involvement with WART and the other is his post as Reserves Officer with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. This appointment is driven by the BREEAM initiative and could be a very effective mechanism for ensuring continued conservation management following development work. Other groups may be interested in knowing more about this initiative or may have further experiences of the BREEAM process.

WART have been involved in the review of the Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull's Biodiversity Action Plan for the adder and great crested newt. The adder is on a

negative trend (extinct?) and crested newt status remains the same. We still hear of reports of adder sightings most of which turn out to be grass snakes. The search for a receptor site for two population restoration projects is a high priority for next year.

Following the sudden death of Nigel in August the committee realised how much he did for WART. He kept tabs on the membership, database, biological recording protocols with the BRC and looked after our website. Fortunately WWT are now looking after the membership and BRC will coordinate the amphibian & reptile records. At the time of writing we have yet to find a new database manager. Money raised in Nigel's memory will be used for herpetological conservation on WWT reserves.

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

1. Surveying, training, habitat management and special projects

The Shropshire Pond Project under the guidance of Frances Riding has continued to survey ponds focusing in the north of county in 2008. A number of ponds have been restored using volunteers (pers.com Jan McKelvey – Shropshire Wildlife Trust).

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

The ARG is presently not active and Viv Geen has resigned as its Chairman. A re-launch of the group is planned to coincide with the Great Crested Newt Training Day to be held at Preston Montford (Field Studies Council) this spring. The course will be run by John Wilkinson of the HCT.

3. Any success stories and concerns

Several quarry restorations within the county have provide new wetland sites.

4. Projects and BAP Work

A Habitat Action Plan for Ponds is being launched in 2009 through the BAP partnership. It is planned to assess the quality and numbers of ponds within Shropshire. The Partnership supports the re-launch of the Shropshire ARG group.

Staffordshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

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West Midlands

Paul Wilkinson, 6 Bossgate Close, Wombourne, South Staffordshire WV5 0NJ, 0791952527, 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*

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*

AGM

The AGM was held on the 19th January 2008 and the following committee was elected for the year:

Chair – Helen Metcalfe

Secretary – Chris Monk

Treasurer – Jayne Thompson

Committee members – Bob Baker, Trevor Taylor, Victoria Pope

Membership

At the end of 2008 there were 84 names on the membership list. 62 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.

Activities

- Toad Crossings

Patrols were carried out at 13 sites this year, three more than in the previous year. Some coverage was provided at Kinder for the first time since 2002 and new sites were covered at Bowden near Chapel-en-le Frith and at Shorth Heath near Overseal. Again there was a slow start, due to the weather, with most patrols not finding any toads until mid March and some patrols continuing until the end of April. The high point was the efficient organisation by Julia Gow of the patrol at Bowden with new volunteers and the largest number of toads (1648) moved across the road in 2008. The low point is the continuing deadlock between Amber Valley Borough Council and the former developer over the balancing lagoon at the John O'Gaunts site in Belper. With responsibility for maintenance now being argued over by their respective lawyers, nothing was done to restore the broken pipework under the base of the lagoon and the site remained dry. This resulted in the amphibians attempting to spawn in a flooded hollow underneath the outfall of one inlet and in a damp area where there is some seepage through the bank.

- Adder surveys

A further training day was held for members & other volunteers for the Make the Adder Count Project. The day in early March started sunny but clouded over and with a strong wind was rather cold, however 22 adders were seen by the participants. By the end of the 2008 survey ten regular surveyors had sent in counts covering 28 hibernation sites, the majority of which now have four years of data. Adders appeared to have deserted a couple of sites recorded in previous years but three new hibernation areas were discovered close to where casual records had been obtained in the recent past.

- Great crested newts

A fourth season of great crested newt survey work was carried out for the Peak District National Park visiting 172 pond sites across the White Peak. This year, as well as annual monitoring of many of the sites in the heart of the Vision Project area, work was carried out in areas that have had virtually no surveys in the past. Many new great crested newt ponds were located including several in the previously un-surveyed areas around Peak Forest and Foolow in the north of the White Peak and further records obtained at Haddon Fields. Several of the ponds restored in 2007, especially those near Lathkill Dale were immediately colonised by newts in 2008.

- Practical pond works

A maintenance day was organised in January for the Derby City Pond Wardens to clear out the Elvaston Lane pond, which was choked with vegetation. Mastic repairs were carried out to a concrete dewpond near Great Longstone.

- Events and training days

A talk on Bats was given by Tony Taylor after the AGM at the January meeting. In addition to the Make the Adder Count Project training day mentioned above, a joint training day on pond survey techniques was held with the Derby City Pond Wardens in June at West Park Meadows pond in Derby. Two training events were run for the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's Adult Education Programme; a reptile training course was held in Baslow followed by a site visit to observe adders on the Eastern Moors. An amphibian training course was held in Hilton and that included a torchlight survey at Hilton Gravel Pits Nature Reserve in the evening. Assistance was given to the Watch Group at the National Trust's Longshaw Estate for a pond dipping session. Members also attended the Derby City Day of Pondmania at Allestree Park and joined Derby City Pond Wardens for a site visit to Chartley Moss National Nature Reserve in Staffordshire. A workshop on reptiles was run for the joint Lowland Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire BAP Forum held in October at Pleasley.

- Publicity

One issue of the Group's newsletter was published in December. Further development of the Group's planned website was undertaken and it is hoped to be on-line in early 2009. A membership card was produced for members, whilst work was undertaken on a membership leaflet and also planning a Group display to take to events.

- Records and data consultations

The great crested newt layer on the Derbyshire Protected Species database was updated with records from 2007 and for the first time a new layer created for adders. The layers were circulated to Natural England, the Peak District National Park Authority, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, the County Ecologist and the Derby Museum BRC. Some assistance was also given to the compiling of all county reptile records by Nick Moyes at Derby Museum and these were added to the National Biodiversity Network Gateway (website address <http://data.nbn.org.uk>) Responses were made to requests from ecological consultants for herpetological records and comments and advice were made on planning proposals.

Liaison with the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

The Wildlife Trust's Water for Wildlife Project Officer is the contact between the Trust and the Group. The Group is grateful to the Trust for assistance with mailings and accommodation for indoor meetings.

Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network

Andrew Heaton, Leicestershire Amphibian and 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 50 addresses, though the number of active recorders is nearer a dozen.

The group was involved in a great crested newt survey, running parallel to NARRS, in North-West and East Leicestershire. For all known GCN sites in these areas, the next nearest pond was surveyed. Unfortunately, although various other amphibians were found to be present, no great crested newts were identified, indicating perhaps that there are few new GCN populations to be discovered in Leicestershire. In fact, a high proportion of the ponds looked at were unsuitable for amphibians for different reasons: fish, wildfowl, or because the pond had disappeared!

During the year, a Leicestershire MP, Andrew Robathan (MP for the constituency of Blaby) brought in a Ten Minute Rule bill to remove legal protection from great crested newts and bats. LARN wrote to him to express disapproval of the move, explaining why GCNs have the protection in this country that they do. The bill did not progress.

Records continued to come in from the County Council-backed "Snakes Alive" and "Spawn Spot" surveys, adding to our knowledge of herps in Leicestershire and Rutland.

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

Northampton does not currently have an established amphibian and reptile group but still there is a lot of work being carried out within the County. I have some involvement with the Wildlife Trust and associated record centre but we would benefit greatly from an established group and I will of course support anybody interested in setting up such a group. The following report is therefore simply an indication of the work that I have been undertaking in my capacity as County Recorder.

During April 2008 I undertook a survey for reptiles especially for the possible presence of adder along the A43 heading south from the well known populations around Fineshade and Wakerley crossroads in the north of the County. It was encouraging to find new records for adder over a two kilometre length of road. A number of adults of both sexes as well as a couple of juveniles were found. All the adders recorded were along the east side of the main road and I only found slowworm and common lizard on the west side of the main road

The north-east section of the County has always been regarded as our reptile stronghold with all four common species found in reasonably good numbers. However, whilst carrying out a botanical survey just north of Corby again on the A43 I did come across a number of grass snake as well as juvenile common lizard that previously had not been known from the area. Unfortunately no adders were sighted even though the verges looked suitable for the species. It seems possible that adders do not occur in this area and this is supported in that no adders were found during a reptile translocation of a nearby quarry during 2008. There was

however very good numbers of both grass snake and common lizard but slowworm like the adder here seemed absent.

Further south in the county at Long Buckby two known introduced populations of slowworm, one of which is in my own garden, bred successfully again for a second year and are now spreading up the street into neighboring gardens. The second population is at the local grassland and scrub Pocket Park. Mike Ivens who looks after the site tells me a number of slowworms were discovered when a plastic membrane was lifted up during path maintenance. The site also supports a strong grass snake population and so the management of the site seems to be of particular benefit to reptiles.

Since 2000 I have been involved with great crested newt ponds that have been adversely affected by urbanization. Although the Crick estate was built in the 1990s very little consideration was given to protected species and the position of gully pots next to steep kerbs cause an annual hazard for newts returning to the ponds. Weekly checks are made during the spring with as many as fifteen newts removed from the gully pots during each visit. Unfortunately, the numbers of newts found this way continue to drop and suggest that the populations are in decline.

I have placed small pieces of polystyrene in these gully pots during migration time to act as floats so the newt species can get out of the water. The first couple of years only the smooth newts were found but now great crested newts also make use them.

During 2009 it is hoped that we can convince the County Council to either modify the gully pots so that newts can no longer fall in, put drop kerbs where the gully pots occur or replace the gully pots with a more acceptable form of drainage system. Unfortunately it is unlikely that anything will be achieved before the spring.

Pond restoration work in the Long Buckby area appears to have been successful. One pond was in a severely poor condition due to the accumulation of silt and was cleared out in 2006. Monitoring work last season recorded 45 adult great crested newts and plenty of smooth newts. Another pond was also cleared out at the same time and although we know great crested newts still occur, turbidity resulting from agricultural runoff at the time of the survey limited the success of the monitoring visit. This will be repeated in 2009.

In January 2009 it is planned to restore a pond at Crick. The great crested newt population present here has declined quite sharply following a housing development in the 1990s. The pond was severely damaged by the inappropriate laying of a pond liner within an existing pond. Possible fluctuation of ground water led to air pockets forming under the pond liner, which then started to float to the surface of the pond (displacing the water from within the pond). Without any consideration for the possible presence of great crested newts, a load of 100mm stone cobble was then dumped into the pond to hold the liner down. It is hoped that the stone and liner can be removed and that the pond can be deepened so that it retains water until September to allow the great crested newt population to recover.

The Palmate Newt is Northamptonshire's rarest newt species but a few more new sites have come to light in the recent past. I discovered a new site in 2007 while leading a reptile course at King's Cliffe where we were checking refugia. The breeding pond where the newt came from has still not been identified. I have had reports of two sites near Burton Latimer which I need to follow up from this part

of the county as I have had a number of requests of reptile and amphibian records due to possible future development in the area.

Midwife Toad has been recorded calling from one area of Long Buckby since 2001 but no calling males were reported at all in 2008 even though weather conditions and habitat were favourable. This species has been recorded from two other areas in the county before and I have been told it is still present in one of them at Oundle where I last saw and heard the species there back in 2001.

During April 2008 I led a course for the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust on 'Beginning with Reptiles' based at King's Cliffe. It was a good turn out and everyone managed to get up and close to common lizard, slowworm and very close views of a freshly sloughed male adder. Luckily the weather was on our side on the day of the course. As usual, like every year I have done the course for the Trust, the grass snake has always been elusive on the day

In 2009 I have been asked to lead a course on amphibians for the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust which will be based at King's Cliffe and were we hope to see all three species of newt in the county as well as Common Frog and Toad. It also provides some potential to discuss the possibility of developing the training to include NAARS and hopefully encourage more people to carry out recording in the County.

Brian Laney

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*

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*

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

Dorset Amphibian and Reptile Network

*Chris Gleed-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*

It has been a quiet year for DARN, with no formal meetings or DARN led projects. We have re-visited our constitution, making it simpler and less restrictive, which should help the group to develop and grow. Activity in Dorset has mainly been through NARRS and other HCT led activities.

In 2009 we plan to encourage members to take part in NARRS, with a training event organised in March. We have also started to look into known toad migration sites, to determine whether these are still in existence, and if so, the practicalities of organising patrols for these sites. We also hope to attract new members, to help with the organisation of key ARG activities.

Dorothy Wright

Wiltshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

Gemma Harding 07775 865630 wiltshirearg@hotmail.co.uk

- March 8th - County Recorders AGM (yours truly has been given the role of County Recorder for herps) a chance to speak about WARG and link it into County Recording issues/ duties.
- March 28th - 2hr Presentation and talk to Swindon Wildlife Group and members of the public (talked through id and survey and about WARG and NARRS).
- April and June - Undertook swabbing for ZSL in a local pond (myself and two volunteers on each occasion)
- August 3rd - Invited to have a display at Wildlife Trust Reserve Opening to trust members and talk about reptiles and amphibians. This was a day event and parts of the reserve were surveyed for reptiles in the weeks leading up to the open day - and one slow worm was found! Local press we there (I hid from the camera but WARG got a mention).
- October 5th - ran a training event for people who had shown an interest at talks and presentations or via email. The training event was run at the wildlife reserve, unfortunately the weather was not on our side but 6 people did turn up and the talk and trainin went well despite no reptiles being found. Some of the volunteers were very keen and I am getting them all to fill in volunteer forms and we are arranging future events and surveys across Wiltshire.
- We have had a lot of interest for more talks to local wildlife groups in Wiltshire so these will happen in the future.
- A lot of general enquiries as usual regarding GCNs, adders etc which we have helped when possible
- I am still talking with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust about working together to get a Wildlife Site for Reptiles within Swindon - we just need a good plan before we approach the Council!

Gemma Harding

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*

At the end of 2008, HARG had 266 members. Of course, the majority can be considered 'armchair herpetologists' but it is hoped that at least some of the 28 new members will be keen to get actively involved in 2009.

We really do need volunteers. There are now 8,064 herptile records in our database and checking and validating this amount of data is a full-time job in itself. Generously, we have just received £2,500 from the Environment Agency in order to employ an assiduous short-term member of staff to authenticate great crested newt records alone. Committee member Rachel Hardy, who coordinates our great crested newt surveys within the county, was instrumental in helping us obtain this money. Additionally, The HCT kindly contributed £400 to assist with volunteers expenses for great crested newt surveys. This is gone a long way in contributing to our knowledge of great crested newts in Hampshire.

Regardless of the massive enthusiasm of HARG members, data capture and encouraging all members to send in records of widespread species still remains our major downfall. Natalie Rogers of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust has helped devise an online recording form which may go some way in combating this problem. See for yourself at www.hwt.org.uk/pages/hampshire-amphibian-reptile-group.html. We are still committed to publishing a county atlas (or 'herpetofauna') in 2010 but there is still plenty to do in the field. Let us hope for better weather this year!

Public awareness and education still forms a major part of our group activities. Despite the awful weather, we still managed four events last year (excluding the ones that were cancelled of course!). Particularly popular was an adder walk in April, which was attended primarily by members of the public. Many had never seen a real adder before (only on television or in books) so this was a real treat, especially for the younger herpetologists. Luckily, everyone was rewarded with at least a glimpse of an adder basking in the spring sunshine.

The ARG UK South-east Regional Meeting was held at Marwell Zoo in November. Over 70 delegates came to the event and the feedback indicated that the meeting was indeed a great success. Marwell Zoo carries out a substantial amount of conservation work through UK herptile projects. Consequently, it was felt apt that profits from the meeting should be donated to Marwell Zoo's sand lizard project.

Finally, I would to thank all members of our dedicated committee who continue to give up their time by running various aspects of the group. I look forward to an even more productive year in 2009.

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](http://valmarshall.waitrose.com)

(Membership 72)

On February 20 about 30 members gathered for the Annual Meeting. We enjoyed a lively account of the status and distribution of the Midwife Toad by Helen Muir-Howie.

Our contribution to the national amphibian chytrid fungus survey got underway on 17 March, with a visit by Philip Bowles to a pond in Marlow Bottom with Caroline Waddams and her daughter Kate. The net came up loaded with palmate newts. They easily swabbed the 30 needed, with newts to spare, and with three people to do the work, briefly broke a national record, completing the first survey within an hour. Philip visited the pond again on 14 June for a follow-up survey. Caroline conducted her own survey at a site in Aylesbury. The good news from this year's work is that our sites tested negative for chytrid in both survey periods.

On March 29 and April 26 Chris Bartlett arranged reptile and amphibian training sessions in Burnham Beeches and Aylesbury with the help of Martin Hartup and Paul Holtom.

On 14 April Chris Bartlett led a follow-up visit to Deep Mill, Great Missenden. We netted smooth newt from the water, but all other observations were on land, turning over logs etc, finding adults and young of all three native newt species. Torching was unproductive. The breeding period was obviously long over, which fitted well with other observations at nearby ponds where great crested newts were found breeding in large numbers in mid-January, when the air temperature was only a few degrees, and other ponds where advanced newt larvae were netted that were obviously born the previous year. Breeding periods seem to be rather more extended and unpredictable than previously thought, perhaps because of recent mild winters.

On May 3 Tony Marshall led a visit to Littleworth Common in S Bucks. Terrestrial searches uncovered grass snake, common toad, great crested newt and slow-worms, while netting produced common frog, more toads and palmate newt. Most of the great crested newts (16) were found in a road drain just beside the common (and outside a conveniently situated pub). After appropriate refreshment while waiting for darkness, we returned to torch the ponds, finding more great crested newts (at least seven) and a frog. As with the Deep Mill trip it was apparent that the breeding season was well past and young newts had already started their terrestrial career, with only young frogs and toads apparently remaining in the water.

Junior Springwatch was an event organised by Aylesbury Vale Out-of-School Network on 10 May 2008. Chris represented BucksARG at this event with a display board giving information about the British reptiles and amphibians and also about the group. We had on display of live slow-worms and a grass snake. Over the course of the day there was a large number of visitors and a great deal of interest from adults and children alike. The most popular exhibit was the grass snake and for many this was the first time they had seen one live.

The Greensand Trust rangers led our final field-trip to Stockgrove Country Park on 3 August. This was a bleak rainy day and expectations were low. We

concentrated on areas of Rammamere Heath where adders have been regularly seen and there are a few refugia. These yielded only a common toad and many slow-worms, but diligent searching as the skies began to clear brought sightings of two adders and six common lizards. Walking back to the entrance car park we passed a wooden fence that was now in the sun, and this was covered by basking lizards of all stages: we counted 22 but there must have been many more, a good ending to an unpromising day that nevertheless provided sufficient interest to keep everyone happy.

Our final activity in the 2008 season was in the County Museum as part of their Wildlife Day on October 5. Val Marshall and Chris manned the display, and took the opportunity to ask visitors to record whether they had seen a frog in their gardens this year. That way we got 5 new squares for frogs (where no frogs were previously reported) mainly centred in Aylesbury itself.

New records for the year are summarised in the following table:

Species	New records	New sites	New 1km squares
Common frog	54	37	15
Smooth newt	26	15	6
Common toad	22	16	10
GCN	19	11	9
Slow-worm	13	5	5
Common lizard	11	5	3
Palmate newt	10	8	8
Grass snake	9	6	4
Adder	3	1	0
Midwife toad	1	1	1

Tony & 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

In 2008 BRAG trained a further 25 people to get their great crested newt licence. The annual BRAG GCN course started in 2001, and to date we have trained 165 people.

Survey wise BRAG continued to have success in finding new great crested newt ponds, across the county we surveyed 10 ponds identifying 4 new GCN populations, bringing the county great crested newt pond total to around 100. In addition torch counts were undertaken at three of our known populations in Sonning, Winnersh and Bracknell and all three were notable for some very high torch counts in 2008. I am not sure why 2008 should have been a good year for GCN numbers, but would be interested in any theories?

Whilst adders again appeared to have a poor year in 2008, other reptiles seemed to be doing well, with over 100 slow-worms translocated from junction 11 of the M4. In addition BRAG members undertook surveys in 4 NARRS squares in 2008.

During 2008 works on the Berkshire Great Crested Newt Project (which was begun in 2007, aimed at creating 8 new GCN ponds and restoring 2 existing ponds) were completed and we managed to restore an additional 2 ponds with the funds we secured from Natural England. Wokingham Borough Council in partnership with BRAG has secured funding to create a further additional GCN breeding pond, works will be completed in early spring 2009.

The group has about 20 fully paid up and active members but 73 people are members of its yahoo group.

Andy Glencross, BRAG Chair

Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group

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

180 members on newsletter list; 40+ active members

- At the start of the year former chairperson and founder member of SARG, Julia Wycherley was awarded an MBE from Her Majesty the Queen and a special conservation award at the last Herp workers meeting, for her outstanding achievements to herp-conservation over last three decades.
- The SARG website has been upgraded and developed throughout the year, improving public involvement and underpinning survey organisation, reporting and data dissemination. (www.surrey-arg.org.uk)
- Initiated the SARG Rare Reptile Course, which aims to provide professional ecologists with training and experience for the survey of all native reptile species. The course lasts for the entire reptile season, and comprises a training day, mandatory surveys and an assessed survey. The course provides professionals with the opportunity to become actively involved in national and county-level conservation activities for reptile species.
- SARG established 20 core reptile sites across the county and have trained a well-organised reptile survey team which will ensure that high quality data is provided for the monitoring of these sites.
- SARG has initiated a ponds database of the county, and has identified 20 key ponds across Surrey with a view to regular and long-term monitoring.
- SARG has established restricted-access web pages for county land managers to highlight reptile distribution and sensitive management areas at their sites. Participants in the initiative include the HCT, the National Trust, Surrey Wildlife Trust and local borough councils.
- Current membership stands at 270, including honorary and ordinary members.
- Supported habitat management tasks through the provision of expert advice and experienced manpower. Coordinated habitat management

activities in partnership with the HCT, borough councils and local conservation groups.

- Created a new pond at Littlewick Common in partnership with Horsell Common Management Group, financed by a GCN grant from the HCT.
- Provided specialist herpetological training in support of both the NARRS scheme and the Surrey Wildlife Trust.
- Supported public involvement days for herpetofauna in partnership with the HCT.
- Undertook a number of narrated PowerPoint presentations to local groups.
- SARG has responded to many calls from the general public re herp issues- including the rescue of trapped snakes.
- SARG has 35 registered Toad Crossings that continue to be monitored.
- Supported the installation of a 'toad tunnel' at one of the key toad crossing sites. A project is underway to monitor tunnel usage by amphibians using an on-site video camera.
- In December Danial Winchester took on the role as chair for 2009 taking-over from Gareth Matthes, who stood-down as 2008 chairperson.

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

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 : 125 total (15 active)

Committee members:

Chairman -	Lee Brady
Secretary -	Rick Hodges
Treasurer	Mike Phillips
Education/Publicity	Jo Richards
Newsletter editor	Vacant
For KWT	Fred Booth
For K&MBRC	Hannah Cook
	Brett Lewis
	Bill Whitaker

When established: 1988 (relaunched 1995)

Contact details:

Postal address - Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group
c/o K&MBRC
Tyland barn
Chatham Road
Sandling
Maidstone

e-mail- Kent ME14 3BD
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. Searches of Krag records database can now be requested directly from the web site. Members receive a full colour Newsletter twice yearly.

Current activities/projects:

The Group currently has both amphibian and reptile flagship projects:

Getting Toads Out of a Hole (launched 2009) – the project aims to make amphibian recording accessible to all by:

- Promoting the recording of casual records by members of the public through a simple to use web based form on the Krag website
- Increasing the currently small number of known toad spawning sites
- Increasing the number of frog and toad sites in Kent. These are currently under recorded in comparison to newt species.
- Providing the opportunity for members of the public to become engaged in an amphibian monitoring project that does not require a large time commitment.

This project will be launched early in 2009 and will be accompanied by training workshops allowing participants to get involved as much as time allows. This could range from reporting on frog spawn seen in a garden pond to an evening search of local ponds for frogs, toads and spawn.

Great Crested Newt Monitoring Project (launched 2004) – This project is run in conjunction with BTCV Pond Wardens and is for those interested in surveying for all amphibian species and with more time to spare than is required for the Getting Toads Out of a Hole project. Volunteers survey Kent's ponds for this declining and strictly protected species. Krag has been able to undertake several training workshops and supply survey equipment to facilitate the project.

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

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

- Promoting sympathetic management.

Recently KRAG has won a project under the EC's Interreg programme entitled 'Cross border adder conservation action plan Kent/Northern France'. This will involve exchange visits between KRAG and its French partners and will lead to mutual learning, harmonisation of good practice and lay the foundations to longer term conservation collaboration for the adder. The project will commence in April 2009 and will bring KRAG's Adders in Decline project into sharp focus. The benefits of this will be shared at project completion with a final workshop in Kent during November 2010.

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*

YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER REGION

ARG UK Regional Representative – John Newton

North, East and West Yorkshire

Co-ordinator – Gordon.Haycock@thomsonecology.com

What have we been up to this year?

The group currently has 82 members, and functions mainly as an email group with people contributing interesting snippets, programmes for voluntary survey and training etc via the co-ordinator. This has led to some lively debates with respect to identifying oddities, who can claim the gcn population at the highest elevation in the region, discussions on designs for mitigation and various requests for help with research. Other topics included tubercles on palmate newts and the traditional competition for first frogspawn / basking adder. People have circulated some great photos of herps, and members have attended both national and regional conferences advertised via the group.

There was one indoor meeting in February where the various projects and happenings for the year were discussed. This was well attended, and we are grateful to Jacobs for the use of their meeting facilities.

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

Yorkshire Adder Project – Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

Following a number of meetings (including a nice meal at the Toby Carvery in Rothwell) between myself, John Newton, Richard Sunter, Nicky Rivers, Colin Howes, Caroline Essery and Terry Smithson, Terry put together a successful bid for SITA funding to fund a project officer to further habitat management works on five lowland adder sites in the Region. The project is run by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and Sam Jarrah Moon is the appointed officer. Heathland management commences in January 2009 at Strensall Common, Calley Heath and Allerthorpe Common; with further work planned at Thorne and Hatfield Moors. There will also be survey of the sites and habitat mapping to monitor the adder populations – including a Spring Equinox adder adventure at Allerthorpe Common. The aim is to enhance sites for adder, and reduce fragmentation of adder habitat at these lowland sites. Sam is keen to work with adjacent landowners to the 5 sites, to

help create corridors between these sites. In addition to that, it would be great if any sightings of adder anywhere in East Riding were reported to us at YWT so that a more accurate profile of distribution can be established, for the future. Sam has got this project off to a great start, and the ARG look forward to supporting the project in any way we can over the coming year.

Amphibian survey in Burley-in-Wharfedale
26/27 April 2008

An amphibian training session was attended by 8 ARG members at Sun Lane Nature Reserve, Burley-in-Wharfedale using bottle-trapping and torching over the weekend 26/27 April. Common toad, common frog, smooth, alpine and palmate 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, 2006 and in March 2007 an ARG survey confirmed that a breeding population of alpine newts occurs at Sun Lane Nature Reserve. This year we had excellent views of smooth newt, palmate newt, common toad and common frog. Additionally alpine newts were recorded in good numbers, far exceeding the population of smooth newt and palmate newt on the reserve. The following counts were recorded for 2008;

Alpine newt (male)	44
Alpine newt (female)	13
Smooth newt (male)	15
Smooth newt (female)	12
Palmate newt (male)	5
Palmate newt (female)	1

Leeds Herptile Season 2008

Kerry Fieldhouse, Leeds City Council

Continuing on from the re-launch of Amphibian Surveys in 2007, we decided to keep on with our public garden surveys this year but this time linked them to the NARRS Garden Pond Survey giving the results a more national focus. It was well received and despite having no real PR about it we have over a hundred garden pond survey results which is a 100% increase on last year!

Local volunteers also took to their sites for amphibian surveys with what we hope will continue to be long term data sets for Rodley Nature Reserve and Gallows Hill Nature Reserve as well as new results for Otley Chevin and Otley Wetland Nature Reserve. Gold stars go to all those folks in the North West of the District including

Otley Parish Scouts who took on training and surveys as part of a badge award. If anyone would like to see any amphibian data from Leeds do get in contact.

Gold stars also go to all those dedicated volunteers who spent chilly evenings dipping for amphibians at a pond near Lotherton Hall as part of the Chytrid fungal swabbing. We were able to contribute to the national survey and having gone to the 'Halting the Global Decline in Amphibians' conference in London last November I am all the more glad we took part in the survey and are taking bio-risks seriously – there are a lot of amphibians at serious risk of extinction due to Chytrid and I would hate to see our UK species added to that list. Maybe 2009 should be the year we really up our and the public's awareness of all amphibian diseases.

On a Reptile note the mats we put out at Otley Chevin (whilst proving popular with toads, mice and ants) did not yield any reptiles but we did see a couple of common lizards during a walk over survey and we are still very positive that next spring and autumn (which will be lovely and warm and dry...) will reveal many more.

As a final thought I will leave you with a couple of articles by primary school children in Scotland after they were visited by a poet and wordsmith who talked to them about the plight of amphibians world wide.

The Frog

Under water breather,
Rain lover,
Bug-eyed jumper,
Winter sleeper,
Awesome swimmer,
Cool leaper,
Hoarse croaker,
Clever camouflager,
Beach climber,
Tongue flicker,
Frog rarer.

*Cameron Campbell
Glenbarr Primary School, Argyll*



*Jordan McKenzie
Carradale Primary School, Argyll*

Roll on 2009! 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.

Chytrid swabbing – Sun Lane Nature Reserve, Burley-in-Wharfedale 17th March

A great evening was enjoyed by brightly clothed swabsters on 17th March at Sun Lane Nature Reserve, Burley-in-Wharfedale.

12 people attended led by Nevil Bowland of Wharfedale Naturalists and Gordon. Despite the cold weather, and a poor result at the biggest ponds, the ARG herpetologists showed resourcefulness and ingenuity in managing to bag 28 herps from watery situations. All were duly swabbed, their vital statistics recorded, and the swabs were put in the fridge waiting to be sent to Eddie Brede

of Zoological Society of London for DNA analysis. This event was part of the national sampling campaign to pin down the extent of Chytridiomycosis in the UK.

A subsequent event was held on 3rd June with Eddie Brede and his assistant joining a small but determined band at Sun Lane Nature Reserve., With few toads apparent, it was hard going collecting enough amphibians, however, the abundance of alpine newts at this site helped, and after 2 hours in rather inclement weather we managed to raise 30 amphibians for swabbing.

Many thanks to the members of Wharfedale Naturalists Society which made this possible.

NARRS Training – Skipwith Common Clare Cheeseman, Andy McIlwraith and Chris Kerfoot

20th April 2008

Following a very successful training day at Skipwith Common on Sunday (a total of around 16 people attended) I have several names and addresses of people that wish to apply for a HCT NARRS accredited licence under which to conduct the NARRS surveys. The weather was a bit dull and cold for reptile survey but Chris managed to find at least one common lizard. We had a few smooth and GCN individuals available in a tank (their holding conditions and habitat being monitored at all times) for participants to appreciate the ID features of the two species and sexes. Torching proved very successful with good numbers of both smooth and crested newts seen in the ponds on the Common. Most people present at the course had signed up to a square, those that hadn't were urged to do so.

Skipwith Village Hall was a good venue - the 40 year old projector screen did us proud and they did have the largest tea pot ever seen ... mind you we were in Yorkshire of course... the Drovers Arms was very good managing to feed most of us in the 1.5h or so between being out on the Common surveying for reptiles and going through the amphibian protocol prior to night time survey. There was a lot to get through on the NARRS Powerpoint presentation and what with people having full bellies and had a couple of sherbets may have had a couple snoozing off ... ?! All in all an excellent day and evening enjoyed by all.

Fylingdales Moor reptile surveys 2008

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. In 2007, 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. 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). The area revealed to be a very interesting site for adders and common lizard were also recorded.

In 2008, a single visit was carried out on 26 April with Steve Joul and his family joining James for this event. It was an eventful day with good views of adders, slow worms and common lizards.

James Mortimer is gone with his family to live in New Zealand. Delphine would be grateful if anyone would like to help her co-ordinate some visits to Fylingdales Moors during 2009.

Many thanks to contributors to the report;
Clare Cheeseman, Delphine Pouget, Kerry Fieldhouse, Sam Jarrah Moon.

South Yorkshire Amphibian & Reptile Group

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

- 15th March 2008 **NARRS/Adder Training Day**
Day out on local moorland, surveying for emergent adders and common lizards, particularly with regard to identifying hibernacula sites.
Survey techniques demonstrated/discussed, including data acquisition and recording into the NARRS National Reptile/Amphibian Database. This is an ongoing survey (4th year) for the 'Make the Adder Count' project.
- 19th April 2008 **NARRS/Amphibian Training Day**
Daytime pond visit to observe local amphibians, and their eggs/larvae. Daytime survey techniques were demonstrated/discussed, including data acquisition and recording into the NARRS National Reptile/Amphibian Database.
Evening visit to local pond to carry out torchlight survey
- May 3rd **Visit to Ainsdale Sand Dunes Local Nature Reserve**
Joint visit with the Sorby Reptile and Amphibian Group
Sand Lizard and Natterjack toads were recorded on what turned out to be an extremely successful field trip, with a record number of 45 Sand Lizards recorded in the frontal sand dunes.
- May 8th/9th 2007 **Great Crested Newt training**
A re-run of the same course held in 2007 at the Potteric Carr nature reserve. Dorothy Wright, GCN Officer from the Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT) provided training for approximately 25 attendees, and large numbers of GCN were observed in the reserve ponds.

Group projects in 2008

1. The Group is currently active within the Yorkshire & Humber Biodiversity Partnership, and regularly attends their meetings. As part of this, the Group is carrying out a reptile/amphibian survey at Doncaster Prison (ex RAF Lindholme), with specific focus on adder, that come into the prison grounds from the adjoining Hatfield Moors (NE) reserve. This is part of the Prison LBAP, and will continue over the next few years, tying in to some degree with the new Lowland Adder Project, habitat management based, details of which are given in the NEW ARG report.

2. Spring 2008 -surveying of Local Sites (Rotherham), specifically for data/records pertaining to breeding success of reptiles/amphibians was undertaken in a limited way, but was hampered by the resources available to survey all of the 121 reptile amphibian sites within the Rotherham LWS inventory.
3. Continuing involvement in the national NARRS surveys for Widespread Species

Lincolnshire Amphibian and Reptile Group

The Lincolnshire ARG has had a steady year throughout 2008. Our mailing list contains 23 members, producing reptile & amphibian records which are forwarded to the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre.

Since joining the newly formed Lincolnshire Biodiversity Partnership, we have attended all meetings, which gives us the opportunity to be part of the larger scale action for biodiversity in Lincolnshire.

We are planning further Reptile survey Training days in Spring 2009, with a commitment to raising awareness of the importance of recording reptiles and amphibians in Lincolnshire

Any questions or enquiries to

Ashley Butterfield – Lincolnshire ARG Co-ordinator
Lincolnshire County Recorder for Reptiles & Amphibians.

ashleybutterfield@btinternet.com

07984 66 5847

NORTH EAST REGION

Northumberland, Durham, Cleveland and Tees Valley - North East Amphibian & Reptile email group

Last year NERAG held two successful NARRS training days, one for amphibians at the National Trust property Gibside and the reptile training out at Muggleswick common in May. The group got the chance to see a beautiful female adder in the marshes.

We also did several frog swabs for chytridiomycosis again at Gibside in the walled garden pond and also at Rainton Meadows, the Durham Wildlife Trust reserve. We visited Shaftoe Craggs in Northumberland and Fontburn reservoir.

It is hoped that we can continue our surveying and checking up new records around the region.

John Grundy- Lilac Crescent, Burnopfield, Newcastle on Tyne, NE16 6QF, 01207 270704, bwananyoka@hotmail.co.uk

NORTH WEST REGION

ARG UK Regional representative – Rebecca 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

Volunteers helped with chytrid surveys, attended natterjack survey training days and assisted Natural England with the monitoring of a population of alpine newts in the county. The group also responded to several enquiries from consultants for data relating to a variety of proposed developments.

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

2008 has been a good year for ARGSL. An influx of new members has enabled the group to become more active and membership has now reached 30 (?) (each paying £6 to join the group). The highlights of the year have been:

- ARGSL has organised 2 regional conferences at Manchester Museum, in February and October 2008.
- The North West Slow-Worm Project has been completed. The project was funded by a *National Lottery Awards for All* grant and involved the collection of records from the public and a series of training events. The project also allowed the group to create its own website, enabling people to contribute records online as well as being an excellent way of keeping people in touch with group events.
- ARGSL has established its own records database, thanks to help and assistance from Lee Brady and the Kent RAG.
- A grant from the ARG UK 100% Fund has been used to create 3 new ponds and 4 new scrapes at Witton Park in Blackburn.

Other events have included 2 habitat management tasks and a NARRS training day.

ARGSL is planning to build on this work in 2009 with more emphasis on recording, the aim being to start mapping the distribution of widespread species which is impossible to do using the sparse information from local records centres. ARGSL will not be organising a regional conference this spring since the HWM 2009 is being held in Blackpool, but all being well there will be a NW conference in Manchester this October.

Cheshire and Wirral Amphibian and Reptile Group

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Active members reported as 5. Non-active members reported as 20

CWARG members remained busy during 2008 answering numerous enquiries from the public, and helping to defend a site against development by providing assistance to a residents' group during a Public Inquiry. CWARG has also been represented at Cheshire Ponds Group meetings (a BAP/HAP implementation group). CWARG members also assisted NEWARN with training events and helped extend the UK Chytrid testing programme into North Wales.

A CWARG member has been successful in obtaining another small grant from Cheshire Biodiversity Partnership to continue with a series of educational visits to selected junior schools in Cheshire. It is hoped 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.

CWARG is planning to hold a meeting in March '09 to encourage new members to join the group. A programme of activities including training, surveys, and practical tasks is also proposed. Anyone interested in attending this meeting and/or joining CWARG should contact the group via the details shown on the ARG UK website.

North Merseyside Amphibian and Reptile Group

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

Our group undertook more conservation tasks on the Sefton Coast during the Winter, involving four Sundays when an average of six members participated in scrub clearance and tree felling, in conjunction with the Sefton Coast Ranger Service. This was mainly for the benefit of Sand Lizards. In some locations, habitat piles were created, and these were soon occupied by lizards, as well as other wildlife.

In April, the group organised a NARRS reptile training day at Ainsdale, attended by 10 people, encouraging more participation in the NARRS surveys. The training day included a guided walk round the Ainsdale Local Nature Reserve and, at dusk, another walk, when we were able to observe breeding Natterjacks and Great Crested Newts.

Sand lizard monitoring continued apace in 2008. Despite the poor Summer, producing low numbers of hatchlings, we recorded about 300 Sand Lizards, including two sites where they had not been found for about 20 years. Based on the last three years Sand Lizard monitoring, the estimates of Sand Lizard population numbers in Merseyside have been considerably revised (upwards). The number of members involved in this monitoring increased to 6, and we were able to obtain more hand-held GPS instruments so essential for accurate site recording. An estimated 75 man-days were contributed to Sand Lizard monitoring in 2008.

Other reptile and amphibian populations were monitored, including a population of Slow Worms just outside our area. Natterjacks, unfortunately had a poor breeding year, due to the drying up of many pools before the tadpoles could metamorphose.

Mike Brown