

ARG Today

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Newsletter of the Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom

ARG UK represents over 50 local groups working for amphibian and reptile conservation in the British Isles



Amorous toads attempting to cross the Forth Bridge, photo by Jim Steele

Crossing the line

Peter Leach
Chair of Lothian ARG

It's probably not easy being a toad. There's all that time on your own, followed by a mad dash to the breeding pond to spend a couple of weeks fighting with your mates. Yes, probably not much fun - and what's all this about needing help to cross roads? If you're a toad living at South Queensferry, near Edinburgh you'll have a different worry. It isn't a road

you have to be concerned about, but the major railway line from all points south across the Forth Bridge with express trains every couple of minutes - the picture above shows a couple contemplating the big decision.

Although it's too late for this season, help may be at hand from liaison between Network Rail, the local branch of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Lothian ARG, with plans being made to provide access to spaces cleared below the rails.

Chytrid in the UK?

One of the biggest issues for amphibian surveyors this spring has been concerns about the spread of chytrid fungus in the UK. This fungus has had a devastating impact on amphibian populations in other parts of the world, however many basic questions about it remain unanswered. (For more information see the article from Eddie Brede on page 3.) Probably the questions of most relevance to us are "How widespread is chytrid in the UK?" and "What can we do about it?" To find the answers, a project has been initiated by Natural England and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).

To help answer the first question, "How widespread is chytrid in the UK?", volunteers have been collecting samples from all over Britain and once they've been analysed by the ZSL later in the autumn, we'll have a better idea of how widespread this disease is in the UK. Most of these samples have been collected by ARG volunteers, so a big thank you to all who've helped out!

In answer to the second question, "What can we do about it?", it's still too early to draw any conclusions from this year's research, so until further notice all surveyors are strongly advised by Natural England to adhere to bio-security measures when visiting ponds. More information on this can be found in ARG UK Advice Note 4: *Amphibian disease precautions: a guide for UK fieldworkers*, which is available as a free download from the ARG UK website.



Editorial

David Orchard
Editor of ARG Today

Welcome to the fourth edition of ARG Today! Since the last issue there's been plenty happening in the world of amphibian and reptile conservation in the UK. ARG Today aims to bring you some of the highlights, together with information of practical help to ARGs.

Once again, this newsletter wouldn't have been possible without articles from all over the country, so thanks to all those who've contributed - keep the articles coming in for Issue 5!

Like the ARG network, ARG Today is in a continual process of growth and development. To encourage this process your comments and suggestions will be welcome. What would you like us to include in future editions? What would you like to know more about? Who would you like to hear from? Please let us know and we'll do our best to oblige!

This issue launches two new and exciting developments for ARG UK - the Supporters Scheme and the 100% Fund.

- *The Supporters Scheme allows everyone to become involved in the ARG network - even those people who don't live near a local group!*
- *The 100% Fund will collect money on behalf of all ARGs which can be accessed by individual groups and used to fund practical conservation work. All proceeds of the Supporters Scheme will be donated to this fund and **nothing** will be deducted for administrative expenses. Projects funded by the 100% Fund will be publicised on the ARG UK website so that people can see exactly how their money is being spent. If you'd like to make a donation towards practical amphibian and reptile conservation in the UK, your support for the 100% fund will be put to good use!*

Also included in this issue is some information on research into the chytrid fungus. ARGs have been at the forefront of this research by working in partnership with Natural England and the Zoological Society of London. Without the help of volunteers from both within and beyond the ARG network, this important research would not have taken place. This illustrates that not only are ARGs a source of local expertise, but also key elements of a national network. Whether or not this research will continue in the same form next year will be decided later in the autumn.

Rather than take up any more space, I'll encourage you to read through the rest of the newsletter - I guarantee that somewhere you'll find articles that are both interesting and useful.

If you have any contributions for future editions of ARG Today, please send them to David Orchard at argsl@btinternet.com.

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Waving Goodbye to Our Amphibians?

Eddie Brede

Institute of Zoology, UK Chytridiomycosis Survey

Earlier this year we were treated to the incredible diversity of herpetofauna worldwide via the BBC natural history series *Life in Cold Blood*. On a more sombre note however, are the statistics from the key findings of the *Global Amphibian Assessment* (2006) on how threatened these animals are as a group. For those that have missed them they are as follows:

- *Nearly one third (32%) of the world's amphibian species are threatened (1,896 species), by comparison just 12% of all bird species and 23% of all mammal species are threatened*
- *As many as 165 amphibian species may already be extinct (34 known, 1 extinct in the wild, 130 not found in recent years).*
- *At least 43% of all species populations are declining with fewer than 1% showing increases, suggesting that the number of threatened species can be expected to rise in the future.*

Why does the future appear so grim? According to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2006) the threats to species worldwide appear to be taking five forms (overexploitation, pollution, invasive species, climate change and habitat loss). Although we are all aware of the effects that these threats may pose worldwide, it appears that many have been oblivious to a specific threat facing amphibians, that of chytridiomycosis

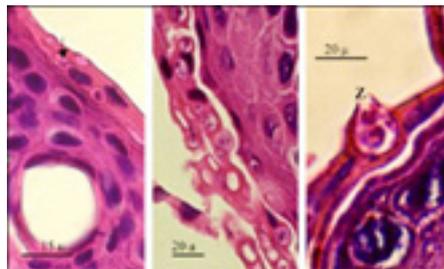
What is chytridiomycosis and how does it affect amphibians?

Chytridiomycosis is a disease caused by a fungus, *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (often abbreviated to Bd). It has been implicated in the catastrophic declines of some Australian, North American, Central American, South American and Caribbean species. *Life in Cold Blood* featured one such example, the 'waving' golden frog (*Atelopus zeteki*) from Panama, where the last surviving population of this once common frog has had to be 'saved' by being placed in captivity.

Within Europe, chytrid infection, although not threatening the extinction of a species (yet!), has been responsible for recent serious declines in some species in upland areas of Spain. Within the UK the picture is less clear due to a lack of data, but by 2007 chytrid had been found in eight sites (two in Kent, six in Cumbria). This paucity of data is currently being addressed through a Natural England/Institute of Zoology funded study of its presence (www.zsl.org/UKchytrid).

Research into chytridiomycosis (which was first discovered in 1998) is still in its infancy and whilst some aspects of its biology are now well understood others, such as why some species are apparently unaffected while others succumb rapidly, remain unknown. As regards mortality, currently there are two theories; the fungus may release a toxin or changes to the skin may interfere with the host's respiration, ionic balance and water uptake.

How did chytrid get here?



Infected skin as seen under a microscope, photo by L. Berger

Chytrid may have arrived via non-native amphibians. This transmission route could have been due to the deliberate release of non-natives such as North American bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) that have been kept as pets and are known carriers of Bd, through to the accidental release of amphibians that have gone unnoticed in the nursery or aquatic trade (European tree frogs *Hyla arborea* have been found in boxes of lettuce!). A further possibility is that the infection may have been transmitted via infected (but untreated) waste products from captive exotics such as water, materials or the contact of these with native amphibians.

What can we do?

Until such a time as we have better information about chytrid and its impacts in the UK, a precautionary

approach is advised. At this stage all we can do is raise awareness and implement biosecurity measures. The fungus can be transferred from place to place by the movement of infected amphibians, pond water or materials. Luckily some simple disinfection procedures reduce the risk of transferral between populations, with little cost and inconvenience to the fieldworker. Details of the recommended procedures can be found in the ARG UK Advice Note (*Amphibian disease precautions: a guide for UK fieldworkers*) available from www.zsl.org/UKchytrid or the ARG UK website. This note sets out simple disease control measures for anyone involved in amphibian work. Whilst focusing on chytridiomycosis, these precautions will be useful in controlling the spread of other diseases, invasive plants and animals.

This spring many ARGs have participated in the UK Chytridiomycosis Survey by swabbing samples of amphibians at sites around the country. Swabs have been returned to the Institute of Zoology where analysis is underway. Currently, swab samples collected early in the year appear to be free of chytrid. However, the full results of this programme, which should throw more light on the prevalence of chytrid around the UK, will not be available until later this year. These results should help to determine our future response to chytridiomycosis.



Some intrepid swabbers! Eddie Brede (left) with volunteers from North, East and West Yorkshire ARG

By taking part in the swabbing programme, or just making others aware of the threat that chytridiomycosis poses to UK amphibian fauna, you could be ensuring that we do not end up waving goodbye to our native amphibians.

Further Information on Chytridiomycosis and Disinfection Advice:

UK Chytridiomycosis Survey www.zsl.org/UKchytrid

Amphibian Ark web page www.amphibianark.org/chytrid.htm

References

Global Amphibian Assessment (2006) www.globalamphibians.org/summary.htm
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2006). *Global Biodiversity Outlook 2*, Montreal.

How cool is newt swabbing?

Emily and Charlotte
Form 11C, Rugby High School

On the 8 May, two Year 11 Biology classes were involved in a 'newt swabbing' exercise as part of a national survey to assess the distribution of amphibian chytrid fungus in England. The newt population at Rugby High School was chosen by the Institute of Zoology as a sample site and the swabbing took place with the help of Jan Clemons, chair of the Warwickshire Amphibian and reptile Team.



Swabbing for chytrid at Rugby High School, photo by Jan Clemons

First the swabbers had to net 30 animals which was surprisingly easy and really good fun. After putting the captured newts in buckets we were told how to handle them and take a swab of the skin on the inner leg, toes, lower abdomen and the base of the tail using bio-secure measures (wearing disposable gloves, disinfected sterile equipment etc.). We quickly became experts at very gentle newt handling because newts do not have a rib cage so we had to be very careful not to squash their internal organs during swabbing.

Each newt was swabbed to dislodge skin cells which could harbour the chytrid fungus. Each swab was put in a sterile tube, sealed and labelled. The samples were posted to the Institute of Zoology where they will be processed to see

ARG UK Supporters Scheme is launched!

This issue of *ARG Today* sees the development of another exciting initiative for ARG UK – the launch of the ARG UK Supporters Scheme.

Although there are over 40 Amphibian and Reptile Groups, not everyone lives within travelling distance of the area covered by a group. If you're one of these people, you can now support the valuable work being done by local ARGs through the ARG UK Supporters Scheme.

One of the key messages behind the scheme is that local groups **are** ARG UK. The Supporters Scheme has been established to find extra support for local groups and to engage people in areas not covered by ARGs. The priority is to encourage volunteers to join their local ARG and take part in the sort of practical activities that have achieved so much since the first groups were established over 20 years ago. However, if someone is unable to do this, becoming a supporter of ARG UK is the next best way of helping.

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 NARRS and the chytrid research. It may even encourage the establishment of new groups! Publicity about the Supporters Scheme will stress the importance of local groups, so if you're running an ARG, please ensure that your group's contact details are up to date on the website.

Money received via the Supporters Scheme will be paid into the ARG UK 100% Fund, where it will be available to help practical conservation projects (see the ARG UK website for further details). ARG projects are planned and run by some highly experienced volunteers, giving all donations unbeatable value for money!

If there's not an ARG near you and you're unable to join your local group, why not become a Supporter of ARG UK? Details can be found on the website at www.arguk.org.

Editors note: "ARG UK" is a collective, consisting of all the ARGs in Britain and Ireland. Its main function is to support local groups, for example by providing free insurance for all ARGs and it is co-ordinated by a panel consisting of regional representatives. People cannot "join" ARG UK, since it is in fact over 40 independent groups, not one single organisation.

if the chytrid fungus DNA is present. Further samples were taken in June by Year 12 Biologists as it is thought that the fungus grows better during the warmer summer months. Hopefully the newt population will be given a clean bill of health.

We thoroughly enjoyed the newt swabbing and comments included:

'I really like newts and it's a shame that amphibians are declining'

'Netting the newts as they came up for air was cool'

'I want a garden pond'

'To start with I was worried about handling the newts, but soon got the hang of it'

The ARG Today Interview:

John Wilkinson

Research and Monitoring Officer, The Herpetological Conservation Trust

It is likely that you will be hearing the name of John Wilkinson a lot over the coming months. John joined The HCT in May this year and jumped in at the deep end by coordinating this year's NARRS surveys. John is totally dedicated to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles and brings a wealth of experience and expertise that will be put to good use in his new role of Research and Monitoring Officer with HCT. ARG Today took the opportunity to find out more about John and his plans for the future.



John Wilkinson with trusty net in hand

What sort of conservation work have you been involved with prior to starting work with The HCT?

I have been lucky, really, in that every “proper” job I’ve had since leaving University (the first time!) could be categorised as “herpetological conservation research”! It started with a couple of research assistantships. The first was funded by the (then) MAFF looking at amphibians on organic farms and their potential role in pest control. I would have liked to develop this more but at the time the political will wasn’t really there and the trend towards environmentally friendly food hadn’t got off the ground. The second was working with Rob Oldham whilst he was researching the habitat factors that led eventually to the HSI for great crested newts (though I got to catch plenty of toads in that job too!). In 1996 I got a job with the Declining Amphibian

Populations Task Force at the Open University. I went to Milton Keynes for six months and accidentally stayed for eight years! Immediately prior to joining The HCT I was keeping occupied with toad crossing patrols in Shropshire and trying to persuade Telford & Wrekin Council not to build on a reptile (and other BAP species such as dingy skippers) site in the same road where I grew up. I’m still trying to do this, it’s a very interesting site with some good heathland on a post-industrial spoil/clay substrate.

What was the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force and what was your role in it?

The DAPTF was set up by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s Species Survival Commission with the aim of coordinating research into the phenomenon of amphibian declines around the world - in particular to discover whether or not it was a “real” global phenomenon (some people were initially very sceptical). I was the International Coordinator and responsible for producing the Froglog newsletter. The interesting thing about that job was the discovery that there wasn’t a giant smoking gun knocking off amphibian populations around the world but that many causes were responsible, sometimes in concert. An important result of the global research effort was the discovery of the chytrid fungus and its effects on frogs in Central America and Australia, as well as elsewhere, and now of course it is threatening UK amphibians too!

Given your role in the DAPTF and the state of the planet, are you an optimist or a pessimist when it comes to the future of amphibians and reptiles in Britain?

In many ways the planet is becoming a more difficult place to live in for all species, including humans. I have mixed feelings about the future for UK herpetofauna because, whilst on the one hand more species are now recognised as BAP priorities, on the other, pressures from developers and local authorities are

Personnel Change for NARRS

Chris Glead-Owen departed from The Herpetological Conservation Trust earlier this year to become a self employed consultant. During his time with the trust Chris established the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme that has been run for the last two years in partnership with ARG UK. This initiative has successfully collected data, trained hundreds of surveyors and motivated volunteers from all over the country. This leading role in UK amphibian and reptile conservation has been filled by John Wilkinson, who joined HCT in May this year. ARG UK looks forward to working with John as the recording scheme develops in the future.

Chris is still very much a part of ARG UK, so will continue to be involved in future projects as chair of the Dorset Amphibian and Reptile Network.

increasing dramatically and (critically, in my view) many of the places earmarked for development are precisely the sort of places that provide good habitat for amphibians and reptiles: “waste ground”, “brownfield sites”, “old allotments” etc. etc. The institutional view that has led to the loss of many of these sites is terribly short-sighted - I expect the planners and developers of today to be vilified for much of their current action by the (theoretical) enlightened society of tomorrow! The crux of the problem for conservation as a whole is that national, EU and global policy needs to be geared more towards long-term sustainability where the needs of wildlife (e.g. herp conservation) and the community (education, green gym, recreation etc.) are integrated to protect more semi-natural (and currently disregarded) areas.

For those who missed your presentation on the Jersey toad at the HWM 2007, how is this animal different from our familiar common toad?

You cannot separate UK and Jersey toads by looking at them - except that some Jersey animals have large orange spots that look like enamel paint! In places where there is good terrestrial

habitat some Jersey animals grow very large - I found one female in the south of the island 123 mm in length (of course I had no camera with me that day!). The real difference though is that they are restricted now to only a few "wild" sites and 95 % of toad populations in Jersey breed in small garden ponds. I thought it remarkable when one volunteer recorder reported toadspawn in a dish under a dripping tap measuring 23 by 9 cm, but that was beaten by a pair of toads observed spawning on some damp leaves! Of course these are exceptional but it is quite common for Jersey toads to spawn in tiny artificial ponds less than 1 m across. These populations are by necessity very small (small ponds support fewer tadpoles) and therefore have fewer breeding females making them more vulnerable to extinction (from road mortality, for example). The people of Jersey identify strongly with the toad, as an unofficial national animal, which is not found on the other Channel Islands. There is even a fine statue of a toad in the capital, St. Helier. People are therefore wonderfully enthusiastic about measures through which the species can be conserved.

Could you tell us something about the key findings of your research?

What drives the Jersey toads' strange breeding behaviour is really the history of Jersey as an island. They are adapted to using small ponds (because there weren't any really big ones) and to spawning very early in the year (often January) at about the same time as

HCT and BHS Joint Scientific Meeting in December 2008

The HCT and BHS will again be holding their scientific meeting in Bournemouth this December. These meetings have a reputation for being **the** best place to hear about the latest developments in amphibian and reptile research, so don't miss out and keep your eye on their websites at www.herpconstrust.org.uk or www.thebhs.org for further details. Places will be limited, so early booking is recommended!

toads in (much warmer!) southern Spain. I frequently caught toads in literally freezing water and on several occasions went out to do my fieldwork in a blizzard! This all makes sense, though: in Jersey's warm summers its small ponds dry rapidly so if breeding were any later there would be a failure of metamorphosis. However, the human population on the island has grown, making groundwater levels more erratic. This has probably led, in recent decades, to more local toad extinction events and incidences of metamorphosis failure, and in turn to the loss of populations in the high, agricultural centre of Jersey. It is also a fortunate irony of the toad's history in Jersey that means it has been able to hang on in small garden ponds! The species' conservation there now depends on creating connectivity between remaining populations, especially between a cluster of urban ones in the south-west and some natural ponds along the west coast. The process has already started with the deepening of a very temporary pond formed by car-park runoff which should now last long enough to allow metamorphosis – this has created a link population. Urban breeding ponds are also mapped and the data is available for consideration during planning applications (all herps in Jersey are fully protected!).

What sort of projects would you like to help The HCT to develop in the future?

I want to make it easier, simpler and more intuitive for people to join in with herp recording and monitoring in the UK. This will start with a revamp of procedures for contributing to NARRS, a simplification of the website and an overhaul of HCT's species database (oh, nothing major then, you'll be thinking...!). As a product of this, anyone who submits data should see faster evidence that their records have contributed to the database and thence to the state of knowledge on the UK's species. Critical to this will be all records submitted to NARRS and surveys and resurveys of individuals' random and priority squares - this will build a picture over the coming years of the Conservation Status of UK species and whether or not it is "favourable" (an important measure used to set conservation goals). We might expect to find that the conservation status of some species is not favourable - in which case continued

Send in your NARRS results!

Completed 2008 survey forms have already started to come in and we expect more to arrive as people finish their square visits. Remember – NARRS results can be submitted online or completed survey sheets can be sent to the HCT (address below). Almost 1500 individuals have Registered their interest in NARRS to date so we hope the number of completed surveys in 2008 will match (or exceed!) those received in 2007. Thanks again to all volunteer surveyors for making this project possible! Without your involvement there would be no NARRS – with it we can hope to provide critical information on the status of our reptiles and amphibians... an important step in their long term conservation!

monitoring will help determine the possible reasons why and help suggest agendas for action for the future. This needs to happen NOW before many of our best herp sites are lost!

I also hope to start new campaigns in 2009 focused on some of the new BAP priority species. For the long-term (and subject to licensing) I want to begin a genetics bank here at HCT where reptile sloughs (for example) can be kept and collated for use in molecular ecology studies (a great example of this would be to investigate the effects of isolation on a lizard population that has become cut off from others by housing developments, for example).

What are some of the big questions for amphibian and reptile conservation in Britain and what sort of research is needed to answer them? Could ARGs become involved in this?

I have mentioned many of the key issues above. The involvement of ARGs is critical to the whole process, I think. Many ARG members are contributing to the chytrid sampling currently taking place across the country and

still more will be doing NARRS squares or rare species monitoring. I am currently attempting to set out herpetofauna surveillance goals for the long term in consultation with other key stakeholders and, once these are clearer, the opportunities for ARGs in UK conservation will be further crystallized. There's no substitute for local knowledge and enthusiasm on the ground and without this folk like me can sit in Dorset thinking "how wonderful it would be to know if viviparous lizards are rarer than they used to be" until Christmas without really getting anywhere! Recent years have seen almost unprecedented cooperation in UK herpetofauna conservation - long may this continue in the pursuit of our common goal to protect the species we all think of so fondly!

What are the most useful and effective things that an ARG can do to help protect amphibians and reptiles in Britain?

ARGs are already in a great place to do this and I think the key thing is to keep on doing it – do it better and do it more! In a perfect world there would be a large, active ARG for every county or region with a complete knowledge of the herps of their area and where they can be found, and the status of species locally. A number of recent and excellent herp atlases are contributing to this knowledge and I know more are planned for the near future. Where resources are available, ARGs should also try to engage with local planners to ensure that herpetological interests are considered highly during any development process.

What is your favourite amphibian or reptile?

Well...I never met a herp I didn't like, to be honest, though I'm not keen on some of the awful, unnatural colour "morphs" produced by the pet industry! Bufonids (toads) are my favourites and good old *Bufo bufo* is difficult to beat for its character and interesting habits! The species I think of most fondly are really the ones I knew growing up, so as well as toads that would be viviparous lizards, grass snakes and adders. All these species were found on the site in Shropshire I mention above but previous "landscaping" there has already seen off most of the toads and all the adders (to my everlasting regret). I hope the lizards and snakes (and newts, probably) that remain can be still be saved! Perhaps if

there had been a local ARG there in the 70s and 80s the Council's plans for the site would now be different...

Section 41 Listing

Things you need to know

*John Baker,
HCT Widespread Species Officer*

On Biodiversity Day (22 May, in case you missed it!) Defra published the 'Section 41 list'. This is a list of species and habitats considered by the Secretary of State to be of 'principal importance for conserving biodiversity in England'. The government was committed to publish this under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and also given a duty to promote taking steps towards the conservation of the species and habitats listed on it.

The list includes 56 habitats and 941 species. All English species that were included in the new BAP list that was revised last year appear on the Section 41 list, with the addition of hen harrier. For herps this includes: great crested newt, natterjack toad, common toad, pool frog and all six native reptiles. It also lists two species of marine turtle (leatherback and loggerhead).

The Section 41 list will be used to guide decision-makers, especially public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing the biodiversity duty, as defined under section 40 of the NERC Act 2006. Notably Defra flags up the important roles of Regional and local planning bodies in biodiversity conservation and indicates the value of the list for prioritisation or for specific consideration in planning matters.

Section 40 (1) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

*Duty to conserve biodiversity:
Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.*

Defra is adopting a 'sectoral' approach in engaging public bodies. It has

produced lists of habitats and species of most relevance to seven public sectors, to assist relevant parties who may not be ecological experts. Species were identified for each sector either because they are widespread or because conservation actions targeted at them are likely to benefit other species. Herps feature in six pertinent sectors (the seventh is 'marine').

Herps identified within sectors

- *Land use planning: Slow-worm, common lizard, great crested newt, adder*
- *Regional and local government: Slow-worm, common toad, smooth snake, common lizard, great crested newt, adder*
- *Agriculture: Common toad, grass snake, great crested newt*
- *Freshwater: Common toad, grass snake, great crested newt*
- *Forestry: Adder*
- *Uplands: Common lizard, adder*

These sectoral listings should not limit biodiversity duty to the listed species – but rather provide a readily usable guide. Even the full Section 41 listing does not determine the limitations of the biodiversity duty – since the NERC Act refers to biodiversity in broad terms (though in reality it is expected that public bodies will refer to this list when complying with this duty to identify their priorities).

Section 41 listing raises the conservation standing of common toad, and the widespread reptile species, giving greater scope for their protection and proactive conservation.

The inclusion of pool frog in the listing presumably is intended to extend to the northern clade only, consistent with the recognition of this form as native to England and currently subject to a reintroduction programme.

Reference

Defra (2008). *Explanatory Note: Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 - Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England.*

News from the ARGs

JARG - Jersey Amphibian and Reptile Group

Nina Cornish
Jersey ARG volunteer

The group originally formed in 1993, as the Agile Frog Group, but was re-named in 2007 as the Jersey Amphibian and Reptile Group (JARG). The group's aims are to:

- Conserve through study and direct action, the native reptiles and amphibians of Jersey.
- Collect and collate herpetofauna records.
- Provide general advice on native reptiles and amphibians and their habitat management.
- Raise awareness amongst the general public about this special group of animals.

JARG works in partnership with the States of Jersey Environment Department, the Herpetology Department of Durrell Wildlife Preservation Trust, Société Jersiaise Zoology Section and other interested individuals. For example the Agile Frog Project is a collaborative programme between these bodies, initiated in the late 1980s, incorporating captive-breeding, reintroduction and habitat management. JARG is involved in a number of other projects.

National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS)

JARG is currently taking part in the scheme. Volunteers were allocated randomly-selected one-kilometre survey squares near to their homes. Training events were held during 2007 and February this year. Thirteen squares are currently being surveyed and we hope more volunteers will join. If you would like more information, or would like to join the scheme or report your sightings please contact Nina Cornish (n.cornish@gov.je, 01534 441624).

Exciting new projects

In 2006, the States of Jersey Environment Department established Biodiversity

Action Plans for threatened and protected species and habitats in Jersey, with Jersey's green lizard being one of them. Walker's law firm has signed up to be Jersey's first ever green lizard species' champion. They have given a three year commitment to help maintain the green lizard's existing habitats, raise money and encourage Islanders to get involved in its protection.



A green lizard in Jersey, photo by John Wilkinson

Walkers designed a toy to make people aware of the plight of our green lizards. When all the toys are sold, Walkers will have raised £1800 to fund the work of JARG.

As part of their commitment to the protection of the green lizard, Walkers are also launching a Green Lizard Project website www.greenlizard.org.je, which will provide a base for green lizard information.

Some of the actions Walkers are involved in require volunteers from their Jersey office to go out on site and carry out some practical habitat management at important sites for green lizards. So far they have been out gorse bashing and removing alien plant species.

To find out more about what we do please go to our website www.jarg.org.je.



If you'd like to support the Jersey green lizard project by purchasing one of these cuddly toys (£6 plus p&p) please get in touch with Nina Cornish

News from the North

Peter Leach

Things are generally different up here. Herpetofaunal stuff happens later, but usually with a greater sense of urgency when the opportunity arises.

Scottish Natural Heritage may have left itself open to accusations of untypical haste, with its very welcome support for amphibian habitat work in Lothian and Falkirk, under its, "Species Action Framework". Through local authorities, other countryside agencies and local ARGs, there has been a large-scale project of pond creation and maintenance over the last few months, aimed at known great crested newt sites that were under threat. The result has been the creation of some thirty or so new ponds, improvements to a number of existing sites and the inter-connection of a number of previously isolated populations. There's still work to be done on planting and monitoring, but it's a very good start.



Field trip to Caerlaverock, photo by Peter Leach

The other positive thing to report is progress with new ARGs in Scotland. I've previously reported the revitalisation of a group in Fife under the chairmanship of David Bell, (membership enquiries to david.ecos@btinternet.com) and the Lothian group is looking forward to joining them in a couple of weeks at one of their early excursions/training events. In recent days, there has also been an interest in forming groups in Falkirk (probably not unrelated to the SNH work mentioned above) and Dumfries and Galloway. The latter area in particular has huge potential for both amphibian and reptile recording and started things off with a meeting at Caerlaverock on 14 May.

Sun Lane Nature Reserve: Amphibi-tastic!

Gordon Haycock

Chair of North, East and West Yorkshire ARG

Background

Sun Lane Nature Reserve (SE 156467) is in Burley-in-Wharfedale, West Yorkshire. Burley-in-Wharfedale sits between the two main towns of Otley and Ilkley, but is a sizeable village in its own right. The reserve, a former refuse tip, now has a rich diversity of plants and is good habitat for a range of animals of conservation importance, mainly thanks to the hard work put in by the group of local volunteers who manage the site led by Peter Riley, President of Wharfedale Naturalists Society.

Aquatic habitats at the reserve consist of two streams, a number of reedbeds, a large lagoon and two recently created ponds along a ditch line. Amphibian surveys were carried out in 2007 and 2008. Access to the lagoon is restricted as it is deep and silty, however, it was possible to torch this water body, and there is a small area of willow carr with standing water adjacent to the lagoon which was also accessible to survey.

Of particular interest at this site are alpine newts *Triturus alpestris*. It is believed that they were introduced to the Wharfedale area via the local primary schools in the 1980s and 1990s.

At the time schools were keeping alpine newts for study purposes, and 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 (the herp 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 one pond in the village. They were recorded at Sun Lane Nature Reserve in 2003, 2005 and 2006.

March 2007

In March 2007 an ARG survey confirmed that a breeding population of alpine newts was still present at Sun Lane Nature Reserve. Gordon Haycock, Steve Joul and Brin and Amanda Best, James and Anne Mortimer and Sun Lane Nature Reserve volunteers undertook the survey. The lagoon was very busy with common toads *Bufo bufo*, and it was a job to walk around the carr without treading on them. We estimated upwards of 300 toads present. The lagoon is also home to fish, including some rather large ones!

We then torched the new ponds, and Amanda spotted a male alpine newt. Additionally the new ponds were

favoured by common frog *Rana temporaria*, with upwards of 15 clumps of frog spawn, one large female was also present in the ditch.

A further three male and one juvenile alpine newt and a single female smooth newt *Triturus vulgaris* were observed.

April 2008

In 2008 an amphibian training session was attended by eight ARG members at the reserve over the weekend 26-27 April. 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.

Numbers of newts recorded at Sun Lane Nature Reserve in 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

Thanks to all those involved, in particular to Peter Riley of Sun Lane Nature Reserve for allowing the survey to take place, and Steve Joul for bringing the torches!

Editors note: If you know of any alpine newt populations near you, please report them using the Alien Encounters website at www.aliencounters.org.uk.

Volunteer Researchers needed for Amphibian and Reptile Project in the Peruvian Amazon.

Do you care about the environment? Love nature? Have enthusiasm for participating in a project with a real purpose? If so, this could be a once in a lifetime opportunity to work with experts in tropical ecology and to make a long-term contribution towards wildlife conservation in the rainforests of Peru!

Fauna Forever Tambopata is a long-term wildlife and ecotourism monitoring project based in and around the Tambopata National Reserve and Bahuaja Sonene National Park in the Amazon rainforest of south-eastern Peru.

This region lies on the eastern edge of the Tropical Andes biodiversity hotspot, the richest and most diverse area on Earth. The Project is offering places to volunteer researchers to help carry out reptile and amphibian monitoring. No previous research experience is required, but volunteer researchers will be expected to make a contribution to costs associated with their travel, food and accommodation.

Project Dates

Phase 1: 6th July to 20th Sept 2009

Phase 3: 1st Feb to 18th April 2010

Phase 2: 5th Oct to 20th Dec 2009

Phase 4: 3rd May to 18th July 2010

For more information on how to join the Project please visit www.faunaforevertambopata.org or contact us at: mail@faunaforevertambopata.org

Fauna Forever Tambopata c/o TReeS - PO Box 33153, London NW3 4DR, UK

TReeS is a UK Charity No: 298054

ARG Conference Roundup

Herpetofauna Workers Meeting

The national ARG UK conference, Coventry 9-10th February 2008

John Poland
ARG UK South-east
Regional Representative

Herpetologists from far and wide attended the most important two-day event in the amphibian and reptile diary. For many, the event started on Friday night. However the vast majority of attendees, over 170 in total, assembled for conference registration on Saturday morning.

Following a welcome address from Jan Clemons, the chair of ARG UK, Saturday consisted of twelve presentations.

Chris Gleed-Owen (Herpetological Conservation Trust) updated us all on the progress of the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS). It was pleasantly surprising to see so many records from Scotland; a country with relatively few herpetologists. More information can be found at www.narrs.org.uk.

Chris Monk (Derbyshire ARG) spoke about his enthusiasm for the *Make the Adder Count* survey in the Peak District. Chris also highlighted the complexity of achieving large-scale sympathetic management in a National Park, to which it seems there are no easy solutions. **Raymond Creemers** (RAVON) talked of his organisation's survey work in the Netherlands and their remarkable interactive data entry website – visit www.telmee.nl to see for yourself. Perhaps our NBN could be encouraged to develop a similar system?

Jon Cranfield, a member of Essex and Hampshire ARG, outlined the significance of sea walls as a refuge for reptiles. Sea walls are undoubtedly important habitats and this clearly has repercussions, particularly with current concerns over how to manage existing sea defences. To complete the morning session, **Matt Ellis** (Countryside Council for Wales) spoke on the difficulties of delivering 'favourable conservation status' on Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated for great crested newts.

Following lunch, **Eddie Brede** from the Zoological Society of London (Institute of Zoology) gave a warning about chytridiomycosis (an infectious fungal disease) in the UK. Andrew appealed for volunteers to get involved in the national screening project. **Kylie Jones** from NE Wales Wildlife spoke about a further threat to ponds – invasion by New Zealand pigmyweed. Can anything be done about it? Not yet it seems. **John Pinel**, from the States of Jersey Environment Division, gave an informative talk on the Island's exotic herpetofauna and the conservation issues they face. Naturally, the agile frog received a prominent mention.

Jim Foster (Natural England) briefed the audience on the recent changes to the Habitat Regulations. Jim carefully explained these changes to the statute books, since they have serious implications for those working commercially with great crested newts and other European Protected Species.

Becca Cleaver (Pond Conservation) spoke of the work she had done in preparing a Habitat Action Plan for ponds, and unveiled plans of a 'Million Ponds Project'. There are currently about 440,000 ponds in the UK. With your help, it is hoped that by 2058 the magic million will have been reached! The final talks were from two research students at Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of Kent. **Amy Wright** talked about the colonisation of newly created small ponds by great crested newts whilst **James Webster** posed the question - do translocations work? A ten-year study of a translocated slow-worm population in Kent suggests not (or at least not as well as we would have hoped).

The Saturday night social provided a grand finale to a splendid day. After our evening meal, we were treated to a sneak preview of David Attenborough's *Life in Cold Blood*, presented by **Miles Barton** and **Paul Williams** of the BBC. Here we saw a global assortment of rare and remarkable herps. Particularly poignant was seeing the forlorn 'wave' of the golden frog as, since that footage was taken, the golden frog has been declared extinct in the wild.

On a brighter note, the film was followed by a surprise award to **Julia Wycherley** from Surrey ARG. The award recognises Julia's lifelong dedication to herp conservation, and complements her recent MBE for similar work. Well done Julia!



Julia Wycherley receiving an award from ARG UK in recognition of her lifelong dedication to herp conservation. The award was presented by Miles Barton, producer of the BBC *Life in Cold Blood* series, photo by Chris Gleed-Owen.

Jim Foster was our compère for the rest of the evening and, predictably, much hilarity ensued with his comical quiz. Amongst various feats, one of this year's challenges was for delegates to construct limericks from a given starter line (e.g. There was a slow-worm called Nick...). Regrettably, the best ones cannot be printed here. The evening concluded with a disco, with many toad-patrollers swamping the dance floor.



Some hard thinking taking place during Dorothy Wright's HSI workshop, photo by David Orchard

Sunday, far from being a day of rest, was a packed programme of workshops

on a wide range of topics. **Dorothy Wright**, from The HCT, explained the practicalities of employing the Habitat Suitability Index for her beloved great crested newts. It is likely that in future years this method may become an essential part of survey methods, so herp workers were well advised to have a refresher course. Meanwhile, **Lee Brady** (Kent RAG) delivered a workshop aimed at developing a similar suitability index for reptiles. Such an index may help to predict the presence of reptiles at sites which, at first glance, may seem unsuitable. **Tony Gent** (The HCT) and **John Baker**, the Widespread Species Conservation Officer for ARG UK/HCT led a workshop action planning for widespread species, particularly relevant since the widespread reptiles and toad are now on the UK Priority Species list.

Two workshops were based around Saturday's lectures and were no doubt popular with those who enjoy getting wet in ponds. Firstly *Amphibian chytridiomycosis: what you should know, and how you can help* led by Andrew Cunningham. Andrew showed participants, amongst other things, how to swab amphibians to collect samples for analysis by colleagues at the Zoological Society of London. Secondly, 'High Quality Ponds' was facilitated by Becca Cleaver and undoubtedly promoted Pond Conservation's worthy (but ambitious) *Million Ponds Project*.

Last, but not least, **Rachel Urwin** and myself (Hampshire ARG) led a workshop on Key Sites (collectively known as County Wildlife Sites). Our workshop explained the background to CWS designation and the herptile criteria which may be used. We presented three scenarios at the end, which resulted in much topical debate!

Sadly, the problem with running a workshop is that you cannot attend the others taking place at the same time, hence my rather poor reporting here (and I apologise for any errors)! Nonetheless, feedback from all the workshops was good - people expressed disappointment only at being unable to attend them all!

I hope this article accurately illustrates the weekend to the regular annual entourage, and whets the appetite of

those who are yet to attend. Thanks to all of ARG UK staff and volunteers for all their hard work. We greatly anticipate the 2009 Herp Workers Meeting, and hope even more ARG UK members will feel compelled to come along.

This article is adapted from HARG News (Spring 2008).

Inaugural North West Conference a Success

Margaret Keighley
ARG South Lancashire volunteer

Held at The Manchester Museum on February 23rd this year, the ARG UK North West Conference was a first for the region and it turned out to be a great success. Filled to capacity with 120 people including ARG volunteers, local authority staff and ecological consultants, the event showed that there's plenty of interest in amphibians and reptiles in this region.



For many people attending this event it was their first chance to see a live slow-worm, courtesy of the North West Slow-worm Hunt project, photo by David Orchard

Speakers included Tony Marshall, who gave an overview of herpetofauna in Cumbria and Lee Brady, who raised some interesting and original ideas about the development of an HSI for reptiles. PC Duncan Thomas, Wildlife Crime Officer for the Lancashire Constabulary, gave an entertaining and informative talk about his work within the county. However, it is disappointing to learn that Lancashire Police is now one of the few forces in the North West that actually has a Wildlife Crime Officer, perhaps an indication of the more general level of significance given to wildlife crime. Andy Harmer gave an entertaining and thought provoking talk about the Cheshire Amphibian Atlas, which he produced over several years of intensive recording

activity in conjunction with Jonathan Guest. This highlighted the difficulties of producing an atlas as it required the sharing of records, no easy task! On a positive note, it showed what can be achieved by a lot of hard work and dedication.

A range of other speakers including Jim Foster, who spoke about wildlife legislation, Eddie Brede, who explained the UK Chytridiomycosis Survey and Chris Gleed-Owen, who gave a summary of the sand lizard reintroduction project by The HCT, helped make it a most interesting and informative day. Andrew Gray from Manchester Museum gave a lucky few a tour of the Museum's vivarium, during which two live slow-worms, a species very uncommon in the north west, received plenty of interest and admiration.

The event was well over-subscribed which must be a testament to the line-up of excellent speakers! Thanks must go to all of them for generously giving up their time to support the event. Thanks also to volunteers from the Amphibian and Reptile Group of South Lancashire who organised the event and Manchester Museum who were incredibly supportive and helpful throughout.

Manchester event planned for this autumn

Following the success of the spring conference, another event is planned on October 18th at Manchester Museum. Details will be posted on the ARG UK website as soon as speakers are confirmed, so keep your eye on the events page for further details. The last conference sold out quickly, so early booking is recommended.

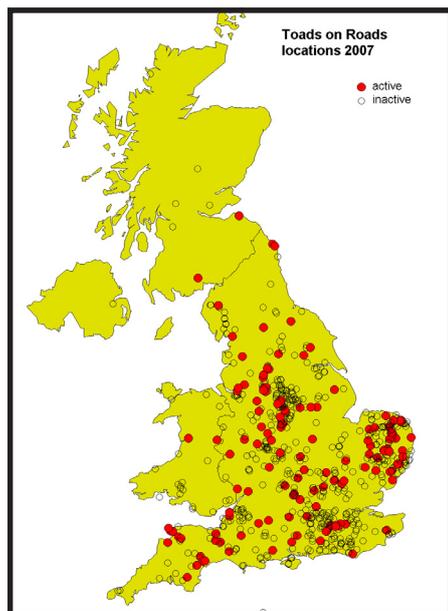
If you'd like to register your interest and receive advance notice of the event, please contact David Orchard at argsl@btinternet.com.

Toads on Roads Update

Lucy Benyon, Froglife

Thanks to support from ARG UK and some well-placed press releases, this year's *Toads on Roads* campaign was bigger and better than ever! Thank you to all of those ARG members who took part – it's really making a difference. Here's how the year went:

The *Toads on Roads* Campaign Centre on the Froglife website saw enquiries to our Information Service soaring, with people requesting more information about their nearest toad crossing accounting for around 25% of all Froglife email enquiries in January and February. The option to register new sites online and download a 'patrol pack' and information about active patrols also proved popular. So far, the campaign has re-established contact with 21 sites and nearly 30 new crossings have been registered bringing the total to 696 registered toad crossings nationally.



Toad crossing sites registered up to 2007, map produced by Chris Gleed-Owen

We now have updates on nearly a third of registered sites: over 180 are definitely active, but there is sure to be more information out there. If you helped out with a toad patrol this year or investigated an old migration site (listed as 'inactive' on the map) please get in touch and let us know what you found.

As far as count data goes, we have heard back from over 50 patrols in the last couple of months (with one Suffolk

patrol counting over 4,400 toads) but we are aware that many groups do not get round to processing their information until later in the season. Please do send this in as soon as possible!

Further highlights this year included establishing many ARG members as *Toads on Roads* County Organisers and the common toad featuring as one of the key species in BBC Radio 4's *World on the Move*, a novel series about animal migrations. *Toads on Roads* also featured on *The One Show* – North Devon's Croyde crossing being the location.

Over the summer, working with the ARG UK panel, we hope to gather feedback as to how this year went, so that we can get the most from the campaign in terms of common toad conservation efforts – please do let us know what you think. Individual ARGs are extremely well placed to give us the local viewpoints that we need for the project to be a success.

If you still have crossing data for this year or if you investigated a site and found it to be no longer used by toads, or you have suggestions for *Toads on Roads*, please contact me (lucybenyon@froglife.org, 01733 558960).

Plantlife's New Pond Education Pack

Suzanne Cooper
Plantlife

Plantlife Scotland has launched its new Pond Plant Education Pack aimed at 8-11-year-olds. It ties in with the national curriculum and provides activities for teachers, rangers and other environmental education staff to include in lessons, focusing on pond plants and their vital importance in the pond ecosystem. "Our new Pond Pack is unique," said Suzanne Cooper from Plantlife Scotland. "It aims to make it easy for educators to plan fun lessons based around a school or local pond. Through the activities and the notes we provide, pupils will be able to understand that it is plants that make up the vital habitats in which all other pond life - including insects, frogs and fish - can thrive."

The Pond Pack includes a CD-ROM of activities suitable for leaders working with groups in P4 to P7, which centre on pond plants and how they are an important part of the pond ecosystem.

With activities and teachers' notes to tie in with the national curriculum, teachers will find the CD-ROM ideal for helping them to plan great lessons with both indoor and outdoor components.

The activities and learning can contribute not just to Environmental Studies but also to art, language, mathematics and ICT curricular areas. It also comes with a stunning poster showing a year in the life of a pond with ideas on managing the pond, and plants and wildlife to look out for in each month of the year.

The Pond Pack and poster are available for free by phoning Plantlife Scotland on 01786 479382 or emailing: suzanne.cooper@plantlife.org.

Another exotic snake in Yorkshire!



This snake was photographed on a golf course near Halifax in June this year. It was estimated to be 3 ft long (the padlock on the photo is about 2-3 inches long) and was identified as either a pale phase specimen (likely to be one of the desert-adapted forms) of the wide ranging North American gopher snake *Pituophis catenifer* or a pine snake *Pituophis melanoleucus*. The distribution of *Pituophis* extends into Canada so such snakes would have reasonable chance of surviving our winter. They can also get to around 8 feet long and as thick as your arm, which would certainly scare a few golfers!

How to Photograph Snakes

Matt Clarke and Claire Purnell

Snakes are fascinating creatures if you manage to glimpse them in the wild, but what about catching their intrigue, mystery and beauty on camera?

Whether at home in the UK or abroad the first problem is to find a snake at all. Snakes are usually timid and elusive creatures; however, this only adds to the challenge of achieving a good snake photo. So be patient and search – search – search. It pays to know your subject and read up on different species before going out into the field. This will help you know where to look and so refine your search to key snakey spots.

With some 2900 species worldwide and each individual having its own temperament it is difficult to apply strict rules to photographing them, other than to never put yourself or the snake at risk. Do not get too close to any snake that you are not sure about. Even if you know that it is not venomous, getting too close may scare off your subject!

Snake Photography Tips

- **Choose the right lens and focal distance** Zoom lenses allow you to shoot at distance which means that you can get your shot without disturbing the animal and from beyond its striking range. Wide-angle lenses allow shots of snakes that include their habitat. However, you will need to get close to the animal so be careful of what species it is. Macro lenses can be used to gain high definition close ups, but again you need to get close to your subject and quite often when you are looking down a lens you do not always realise how close to the subject you really are. So keep looking up and checking where you are in relation to the animal.
- **Get low** Many shots taken from above are uninspiring and although this can provide a good identification photo it often lacks impact. Try to get at eye level with the snake.
- **Think about the framing** One of the biggest mistakes made in snake photography is to omit the tail from the frame. Snakes can be difficult subjects due to their shape so experiment with framing to see what works.



White lipped pit viper in Thailand, photo by Matt Clarke

- **Use artistic licence** Photography has no hard and fast rules, so why not experiment with different types of photos? Try looking for pattern such as photographing the snake's scales or its S-shaped curves.

- **Think about lighting** As with all photography lighting is everything, so experiment with flash even when it is sunny as this can often eliminate unwanted shadows.

- **Capture behaviour** Look for snake behaviour to exhibit movement and provide added interest. Try and capture the flicking of a tongue, the flaring of a cobra's hood, a rattle of a tail or even, if you are lucky enough, the dance of the adder.

- **Look at the snake's surroundings** The habitat and surroundings tell a story about where the animal lives. Try making these part of the photo.

- **Use a tripod** Although clumsy and not always practical to carry around, try to use a tripod wherever you can as this will greatly improve your results.

- **Focus on the eyes** Due to the shape of snakes and many other factors such as environmental conditions it can often be difficult to get the whole of the animal in focus. So, prioritise the eyes, as this usually gives a better effect.

- **Be patient and experiment with different techniques to see what works for you, but first and foremost have a good time.**

For us there is nothing more exciting than spending time observing a snake in its natural environment. An interesting photo captures a snap shot in time and provides a beautiful insight to the world of fascinating snakes. Why not give snake photography a shot?

Support for ARGs

Esmée Fairbairn funding for the Widespread Amphibian and Reptile Project (a partnership project between ARG UK and HCT) includes direct support for ARG UK. This support helps with the organisation and funding of the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting, support for local conferences and administration of the ARG UK insurance scheme and website.

However, subject to demand, there is also support for individual ARGs in the form of training and funding. This latter includes a small pot of money for survey equipment (e.g. torches and pond nets) and publications (e.g. local atlases). Please contact John Baker at The HCT for details john.baker@herpconstrust.org.uk.

ARG UK 100% Fund is launched!

This edition of *ARG Today* launches a small grants fund, designed to help ARGs with the small expenses that can make a big difference to a project. ARG UK appreciates that running a group can be challenging enough, without the need to constantly search for funding. ARG projects often fall outside the remit of most funding bodies and this is where the *100% Fund* can help, encouraging groups to think about new projects that may not otherwise get off the ground. The *100% Fund* will promote practical conservation work that will have direct and tangible benefits for amphibians and reptiles. Expenses relating to a particular project or ongoing work will be looked upon particularly favourably. Administrative and general running costs will not be covered by this fund.

Money in the *100% Fund* has been ring-fenced so that donations can go directly to local groups rather than be used to support the administrative costs of ARG UK. Currently, the fund holds over £700, much of which was collected during Jim Foster's *Have I Got Newts for You?* quiz at this year's Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting.

Donations to the ARG UK 100% fund are always welcome. If your group has money sitting in the bank that could be used towards herp conservation projects, perhaps you could consider contributing to the fund?

Since ARG activities are planned and carried out by volunteers, all projects supported by an ARG UK grant represent unbeatable value for money!

If your group is planning a project that is outside the scope of the *100% Fund*, help is on hand from John Baker, the ARG UK Widespread Species Support Officer. John is keen to see ARGs developing new projects, so if larger sums of money are required, John may be able to help and advise. Note that funds for survey equipment and publications may be available in addition to the *100% Fund*.

Details of the *100% Fund* and an application form are available from the ARG UK website www.arguk.org. For enquiries relating to the fund, please contact John Baker john.baker@herpconstrust.org.uk. Get those project ideas flowing!



ARG UK South East Regional Meeting



Saturday 15th November 2008

Marwell Zoological Park

near Winchester, Hampshire

COST £7

Booking essential

Light refreshments will be provided but please bring lunch

For further information or to book please contact Natalie Rogers;

tel 01489 774406
email natalier@hwt.org.uk
post Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Beechcroft House,
Vicarage Lane, Curdridge, Hampshire, SO30 2NS

Please make cheques payable to Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.



Illegal Aliens?

John Wilkinson

Research and Monitoring Officer, The HCT



Marsh frogs, photo by John Wilkinson

Hopefully ARG members are still keeping a lookout for alien invaders during the course of their herping, NARRSing or just moseying around...

Any reports of exotic species can be reported on-line at www.aliencounters.org.uk. Though the site focuses on pond aliens, reports of other species are also welcome. Many of the reports we get refer to green frogs and terrapins but there's always the chance that something more noxious is lurking in the British countryside that may cause problems if it becomes established. Recent reports of well-fed corn snakes from Jersey are causing concern that these pet escapes might become established in the wild in the islands' sultry climate – and the last thing a small island wants is yet another exotic predator! So remember, keep watching the ponds (sic) – the truth is out there...



Work in progress: new scrapes being dug on North Walney in December 2007, photo by Dave Coward

Bringing the Natterjack Back in Cumbria

John Buckley,
Amphibian Conservation Officer, The HCT

Bringing Back the Natterjack was an HCT project funded by Natural England's Countdown 2010 Biodiversity Action Fund. It targeted natterjack conservation in Cumbria, the home of the UK's largest natterjack populations. This conservation initiative is a good example of how species-led initiatives can drive habitat management and landscape-level thinking. The project worked at two levels. At the landscape level farmers and landowners were encouraged to enter into Higher Level Stewardship, an agri-environment scheme, which pays farmers to manage land in an environmentally sensitive way for target species such as the natterjack.

At the site level management work produced immediate benefits for natterjacks. The HCT's project officer, Dave Coward, engaged local contractors and volunteers in scrub control, excavation of natterjack breeding scrapes and, at one site, fencing for livestock control. Funding for this element of the work was

provided by the Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership's Wealth of Wildlife Project (WoW)

A conference, free to all interested individuals, got things underway in 2006 and another concluded the project in 2008. With talks and field visits these events generated plenty of discussion and, with the other project actions, raised the profile and conservation



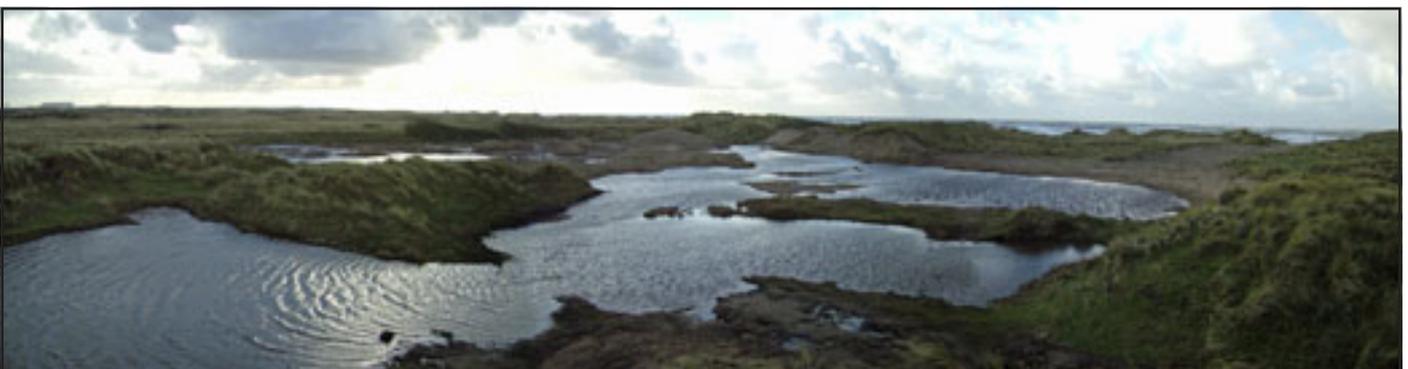
Jim Foster and Eddie Brede at the conclusion of the natterjack project event on April 12th, photo by David Orchard

status of natterjacks in Cumbria.

Natterjack conservation requires long-term commitment to develop and maintain sustainable management systems for individual sites. Sand-scale Haws National Nature Reserve, with

its abundance of natterjacks, is a good example of what can be achieved by a dedicated site manager, in this case the National Trust. However, *Bringing Back the Natterjack* was able to concentrate on sites in less good condition such as the nearby National Nature Reserve at North Walney. Shallow breeding pools were created where scrub had been cleared with WoW funding two years earlier. As the scrapes were being made the grazing regime was substantially improved to allow the terrestrial habitat to support the anticipated increase in the number of natterjacks. The final outcome of the 2008 breeding season is eagerly awaited.

Natural England continues to promote Higher Level Stewardship in natterjack areas and, although *Bringing Back the Natterjack* ended in March, WoW still supports habitat management work organised by the HCT. Hopefully it won't be too long before there's another project dedicated to linking small colonies and extending the natterjack toad's range in Cumbria.



After: the flooded pools in January 2008, photo by Dave Coward

Biodiversity Reporting for 2008

Dorothy Wright
Great Crested Newt Conservation Officer,
The Herpetological Conservation Trust



The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) undergoes a reporting and reviewing cycle every three years to determine progress towards the targets for the Species and Habitat Action Plans. The fourth review is due this year and we hope that Amphibian and Reptile Groups will play a significant role in this process.

Only the original SAPs and HAPs on the UK BAP list are being reviewed in 2008 (the revised listings of species and habitats will be reported on in the next round). So, for the terrestrial amphibian and reptile species, reporting this year covers great crested newt, natterjack toad, pool frog and sand lizard. Due to the widespread distribution of great crested newts, reporting for this species relies on major input from many individuals and organisations throughout the UK.

How does the process work?

The reporting is carried out on-line using the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) <http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk>, which supports the planning, monitoring and reporting

requirements of national and local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs).

LBAP practitioners across the UK will be entering habitat and species targets, actions and outcomes and locally held information on status and trends. ARGs are often highly involved with survey work and pond creation and management, and if you do not already feed the results of these activities to your LBAP officer, then now would be a great time to do so. Lead Partners then utilise the local reports, together with nationally held information, to provide the national picture for each Species or Habitat Action Plan.

Why feed into the UK BAP report?

The reporting round fulfils several functions:

- *It allows assessment of progress towards BAP targets and a review of successes and problems.*
- *Reporting on priority species and habitats, and on all LBAPs, enables each country to identify issues affecting plans and highlight where action at a policy level would be most effective.*
- *Some of the data included in this reporting round will be used to report on our European and international commitments. The 2010 target to achieve a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity was set at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002.*

What can my local ARG do?

If you have information to help with the assessment of the status and trends for great crested newts (and in some areas natterjack toads and sand lizards

too) then please inform your local contact, which in most cases will be your local BAP officer. Progress towards targets, such as pond creation and management work, should also be reported, as should any threats or constraints towards achieving conservation work for these species. If you are not sure what information is needed for your LBAP, then now is a good time to make contact with your local BAP officer

The deadline for LBAPs entering data on UK BAP priority species and habitats is the end of September.

Lead Partners will make their assessments by the end of November and the full 2008 report will be publicly available (on-line) in May 2009.

Useful weblinks

<http://www.ukbap.org.uk/LBAPContacts.aspx> - to find the contact details of the LBAP officer in your area.

<http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk>. For further information about the UK BAP Report and BARS

This article is based on *Lead Partner and LBAP Guidance Note, Biodiversity Reporting 2008* and information from the UKBAP website.

Editors note: There is some debate as to whether all species now included on the BAP list should have a SAP of their own. If this were to happen there would be 10 action plans for herp species instead of the existing 4. This would dramatically increase the administrative burden for everyone involved, so an alternative is to develop SAPs that cover several related species. (Many issues, such as the importance of recording and the fragmentation of populations are common to all species.)