



ARG *today*

www.arg-uk.org.uk

Newsletter of the Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom

Autumn 2006

What is ARG UK?

Jan Clemons
Chair of ARG UK

ARG UK represents the national network of voluntary Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs), which exist for the conservation, recording and appreciation of amphibians and reptiles in the United Kingdom. Individual ARGs have developed separately over the last 20 years and were, until 2005, known collectively as the Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland (HGBI). However, by 2005 they had little direction and in October of that year, a new co-ordinating panel was elected and took up the challenge of revitalising the ARG network and making it a more effective conservation body. The newly branded organisation changed its name from HGBI to ARG UK, and its aims are to:

1. Act as an independent co-ordinating body for the ARG network, maximising its contribution to herpetofauna conservation in the UK.
2. Represent the interests of ARGs.
3. Act as an independent forum to bring together all volunteers involved in the conservation of herpetofauna.
4. Encourage the ARG network by promoting communication and partnerships on a regional and national level.
5. Be a source of specialist advice, guidance and best practice to ARGs and other similar organisations.

The dynamic ARG UK co-ordinating panel consists of a chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, web site manager and six regional representatives. The panel meets at least twice a year and in the interim keep in contact by email and telephone. Key advisors from the Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT), English Nature and the Wildlife Trusts also attend ARG UK meetings. Every member of the panel works in a voluntary capacity.



Grass snake - photo by Jon Cranfield

The ARG network currently consists of 49 groups, the majority of which (37) are in England, 6 are in Scotland and 7 in Wales. ARG UK has a contact point in Northern Ireland but no groups and there are still significant areas in Britain with no groups. ARG UK collectively has around 8-900 members.

During 2006, ARG UK has been able to offer a free insurance policy for ARGs which (sponsorship permitting) will be offered again in 2007.

Despite the fact that the new ARG UK panel has been active for less than a year, considerable progress has been made on several fronts. Several new groups have been created, (including North Yorkshire and South Yorkshire). Sometimes a little advice and encouragement is enough to bring together enthusiastic volunteers who previously did not have a mechanism for getting together.

ARG UK also organised the national herpetofauna conference in 2006,

the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting (HWM) held at the Coventry University. The theme was 'Revitalising the ARG Network' and was attended by 140 delegates. Feedback was extremely positive and many people were clearly inspired by the experience.

Date for the diary!

January 27-28th 2007 will be the national Herpetofauna Workers Meeting, (the ARG UK annual conference), to be held again in Coventry. Speakers will include Jim Foster of Natural England and Dr. Stephen Head of Ponds Conservation. Dr. Jonathan Houghton, who gave a brilliant talk at the last HWM, will be entertaining us at the Saturday night social.

Keep an eye on the ARG UK website for further details and book early to avoid disappointment!

Who is ARG today for?

David Orchard

Editor of ARG Today

Hello and welcome to the first edition of *ARG today*, an exciting new publication produced for those involved with the conservation of our native reptiles and amphibians. *ARG today* is here to support the network of 49 Amphibian and Reptile Groups, (ARGs), throughout Britain, helping them to work more effectively for the conservation of our native species.

The aims of *ARG today* are to:

- share experience and update people about what's going on in the world of reptile and amphibian conservation.
- offer some advice on the challenges of running an ARG.
- promote communication and personal contacts between groups.

ARG today is here to help those who wish to protect our amphibians and reptiles by doing something practical. If you have ideas on how we could improve *ARG today*, or any items for publication, please get in touch and let us know by e-mailing argsl@btinternet.com. Please submit items for publication by December 22nd.

To keep costs to a minimum and do our bit for the environment, *ARG today* is published as an e-journal only. This makes it easy to produce and distribute, (it's copyright-free), so please feel free to forward this to anyone who may wish to receive it.

Make the adder count

John Baker

The Herpetological Conservation Trust

The status of the adder has become a concern among herp conservationists. Even though the adder's range is throughout much of mainland Britain, within this its abundance is patchy. This is partly due to its specific habitat requirements – which are a little more exacting than those of our other widespread reptiles. As in other reptile species, it needs a mixture of sunny areas for basking, and cover to avoid over-heating and to escape predators. However, the adder is typically a species of relatively wild or undisturbed habitat,

usually confined to areas of scrub, heath, moor, dune, chalk grassland and forestry.

Examination of historical accounts, and a series of national questionnaire surveys, all point towards a general decline in abundance and distribution. This is particularly so in the English

To remedy this, The Herpetological Conservation Trust has been running two initiatives. It has been appealing for records from the public beyond the traditional biological recording community, via a website *Add an Adder* - www.adder.org.uk



Adder - photo by John Newton

Midlands, an area where the species has been historically scarce but its remaining populations have become fewer still. As well as the usual suspects – habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, the adder is perceived to be subject to other threats, including inappropriate habitat management – ironically, sometimes the result of conservation-orientated initiatives. Historically, the adder, as our only venomous snake, has undoubtedly suffered deliberate persecution from humans. Though this has abated, at least to a certain extent, adder observers repeatedly report a more subtle threat – that of disturbance. The fear is that, even if habitat is left in tact, disturbance, presumably from human recreational use, can render an area unsuitable for the adder.

A constraint to the development of national conservation strategy for the adder is the lack of quantitative data. Although the collective opinion of those concerned with adder populations is that there is an ongoing national decline, this is largely subjective, with only a few observations based on long-term data.

It has also established *Make the Adder Count*.

Make the Adder Count is a monitoring programme in which participants survey adders during the springtime when adult snakes can be seen 'lying out' between emergence from hibernation up until dispersal after mating (a period spanning February to April). As well as being a relatively easy way of monitoring local populations, the survey also emphasises the importance of locating aggregation areas. These may be communal hibernation sites or locations where adders gather prior to mating. Mapping these locations can help protect them during site management activities. For example, Suffolk Amphibian and Reptile Group has been searching for adder hibernation sites within the Sandlings' forestry areas. Not only does this allow some monitoring of local populations, but the locations of hibernation sites can then be relayed to the Forestry Commission to ensure their protection during winter felling and management work.

The winter is a quiet time for herp surveys – but the adder emerges early in the spring, with first sightings being made in February in many areas. So, now is a good time to plan ahead – liaising with site managers who may welcome survey input, or even locating potential aggregation areas. Adders tend to use a particularly favourable hibernation site over many years. So, past records of several adders at the same location may indicate a traditional hibernation site or aggregation area. A site visit during the winter may also help to identify survey areas within known adder habitat. Sunny, south-facing banks are often a good bet.

If you want to get involved, please contact the Herpetological Conservation Trust for survey forms. *Make the Adder Count* is part of the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme - www.narrs.org.uk.

For further information please contact John Baker at The Herpetological Conservation Trust on 01202 391319, addercount@herpconstrust.org.uk www.herpconstrust.org.uk

Homing toads and BBC Midlands Today



Common toad - photo by Chris Gleed-Owen

Jan Clemons
Chair of WART

You've heard of homing pigeons, what about homing toads?

In Warwickshire the local Wildlife Trust does a great job of dealing with the more straightforward amphibian and reptile queries but usually send the more difficult ones to Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team (WART).

At 11am on 30 September, a researcher from BBC Midlands Today rang to ask if I'd ever heard of a toad taking up residence in a semi-detached house, to which I confessed I had not. Evidently

the animal whose favourite haunts were on top of a plug socket and the washing basket had been taken some distance away on two occasions, only to return to its 'home' within a few days.

The toad's landlady was worried about its safety and well-being and had made a public appeal for help. This was when 'expert' advice was sought, providing an excellent PR opportunity to raise public awareness.

After speaking to her producer it was decided that the BBC would send an outside broadcast van to my house that afternoon which resulted not in dashing down to the hairdresser, but searching under refugia in my garden for toads.

Doing a live TV interview when trying to hold a toad is not easy but I managed to explain that providing the toad with a home in her garden was the best option, using a piece of guttering and a flower pot as props. I also had the chance to mention ARG UK and WART plus how to tell the difference between a frog and a toad all in 90 nerve-racking seconds.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect was the technology and methodology involved in creating a smooth running local news programme.

Midwife toads in Mid Wales



Midwife Toad - photo by Fred Slater

Fred Slater
Chair of Dyfed - Powys ARG

After hearing tiny whistles from a pond in mid Powys for several seasons, in late September this year diligent efforts with a net succeeded in capturing a midwife toad which was subsequently photographed. Its origin is not known but similar whistles have been heard

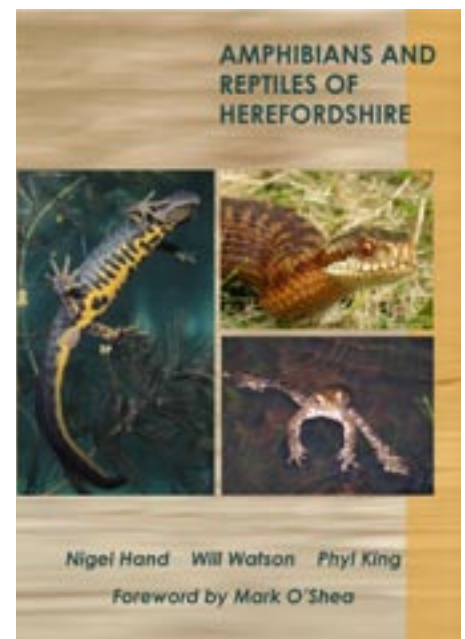
from a pond near a garden centre a few kilometres away - so who knows what else we might find in the wilds of mid-Wales additional to the red-eared terrapins in Llandrindod Wells lake!

Herefordshire's Landmark Pond Project and Atlas

Will Watson
West Midlands ARG Regional Rep

Amphibians and Reptiles of Herefordshire is a new illustrated guide to the amphibians and reptiles of the county and their status, to be published in Autumn 2006.

The atlas is based on the results of the three year Ponds and Newts Project, as well as other surveys for reptiles and amphibians. It includes background to the geology of the county, history of ponds and recording, conservation in the garden and in the countryside together with detailed species accounts and distribution maps. Price £6.99 Plus £2.00 for p&p



To obtain your copy: Send your cheque, made payable to Herefordshire Council, and your contact details, including email, to Steve Roe, Herefordshire Biological Records Centre, P.O. Box 144, Hereford, HR1 2YH. The atlas can also be bought from the Biological Records Centre in the Town Hall in Hereford and will be available at next year's Herpetofauna Workers Meeting for £6.99.

Herpetofauna and the law

Tony Gent
The Herpetological Conservation Trust

“Newts versus jobs” – a headline that appears every so often, when a strictly protected amphibian species is found in the way of a new development that is “urgently needed for local regeneration or employment”. There’s usually then a flurry of passionate activity on ‘both sides’ and the development goes ahead accompanied by miles of plastic newt barrier fencing. And the reason for this? Wildlife legislation.

We are fortunate that all of our native reptiles and amphibians receive at least some level of protection; despite frequent comment that some species are ‘over protected’ or ‘too abundant and are always causing a problem’, without statutory protection we would see even greater losses of species. In many cases these species are still declining despite the protection of the law. But what is the law? Why is it there, and, why despite this protection, do habitats still get destroyed?

Regrettably our wildlife laws are not simple. Acts that were passed some time ago, and their ‘Schedules’ (for example lists of protected species) will be amended piecemeal by subsequent legislative measures – and so you won’t find everything all bound together between one set of covers; and these changes seem to be happening all the time. Our wildlife legislation is effectively being driven by domestic needs and interest on the one hand, and by European and international requirements on the other. Devolution has meant that some, but not all, wildlife legislation is different in the four countries of the United Kingdom. Added to this is the complexity of legal wording and the need for interpretation by the courts!

In essence, though, we have five main pillars of legislation relating to amphibians and reptiles.

- The ‘Bern Convention’ on the conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979), a convention through the Council of Europe that required signatories to protect their wildlife through domestic legislation and policies

- The national legislation, based around the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in England, Scotland and Wales, and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
- The European Community ‘Directive on the conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora’ (1992) also known as the ‘Habitats Directive’; implemented by national regulations (e.g. the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations 1994, in England and Wales)
- The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992 – one of a series of Conventions that came from the ‘Earth Summit’ in Rio in 1992 that called for national plans and programmes to conserve biodiversity
- Trade legislation based around the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) 1973, now implemented through an EC Regulation

Some of these measures have been implemented, and others amended, through recent legislation, such as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. We also need to be aware that various planning legislation and animal welfare legislation, also offers protection for reptiles and amphibians.

On the ground, this legislation provides protection for the species and the

means to designate and protect (and require positive management for) sites. It ensures consideration of biodiversity by all public bodies when undertaking their statutory functions. It also prohibits the release of non-native species.

Penalties for offences can potentially be severe, with a fine up to £5,000 per offence (for example, each newt killed/ disturbed could count as a separate offence), plus six months imprisonment and the confiscation of equipment/ machinery, etc, used in the offence.

However as well as determining the level and nature of protection, the legislation also determines ‘exceptions’ to these rules and provides mechanisms such as ‘licences’ and ‘legal defences’ to allow them. The most frequently encountered examples are licences that allow a range of activities that would otherwise be illegal. Survey, that involves handling or disturbance, can be permitted by a licence, and so can development.

Notably, the European Commission has argued on a number of occasions that the UK’s implementation of the ‘Habitats Directive’ has been insufficient or incorrect, and the Government has been challenged in the European Court of Justice. As a result of a recent EC judgement, the UK has undertaken a review of the regulations that implement the directive for European Protected

Country	Species	What is illegal?
England, Scotland & Wales	Natterjack toad*, Great crested newt*, Sand lizard*, Smooth snake*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Killing, injuring, capturing • Keeping • Selling, trade, etc • Damage or destroying their habitat
	Viviparous lizard, Slow-worm, Grass snake, Adder,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Killing, injuring, • Selling, trade, etc
	Smooth newt, Palmate newt, Common frog, Common toad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling, trade, etc
Northern Ireland	Smooth newt, Viviparous lizard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Killing, injuring, capturing • Keeping • Selling, trade, etc • Damage or destroying their habitat
	Common frog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling, trade, etc

The levels of protection are as shown above. Those species marked * are separately listed in both national and European legislation, i.e. the so called ‘European Protected Species’, and are protected by two parallel pieces of legislation in the countries of the UK (i.e. ‘Wildlife and Countryside Act’ and the ‘Habitats Regulations’)

Species (with separate consultations for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland taking place over the Summer of 2006). There is also considerable pressure from within the EU for the legislation to be made easier to implement. These are likely to lead to significant changes to this legislation and the licensing regime that it requires.

So although not the most riveting subject, legislation remains important to herpetofauna conservation and for those who are active in it. It will continue to adapt and evolve, and the HCT will continue to argue for better and more effective legislation (and the 'consolidation' of different laws to make it more easily accessible and understandable). We will endeavour to keep you up to date with these changes through this newsletter.

The Arkendale great crested newt experience

Gordon Haycock
Chair of North, East and West Yorkshire ARG
(NEW ARG)



Gordon experiencing the wonders of nature for himself
- photo by David Orchard

Hugh Roberts of Ponds Conservation in Leeds asked NEW ARG to undertake a great crested newt survey at a village pond called The Mar in Arkendale, near Knaresborough in North Yorkshire.

I left Otley on the evening of 9th April despite the cold weather (it was snowing at the time!). The night was clear and sunny at Arkendale as a small posse of Yorkshire ARG enthusiasts gathered. It was 3.5°C on arrival and I wasn't very hopeful of great crested newts being active - especially as we inspected their usual terrestrial haunts to no avail (one common toad). However, some netting produced a fine male which

galvanised us into some pretty intense torching. Eventually 11 females and 6 males were observed, including a female which appeared to be egg laying with two males in attendance (Hugh's observation). Smooth newt eggs were found by Sylvia Jay (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust), and toads and hatched frog spawn were also present - the pond only needs palmate newts to have the big five! In a moment of enthusiasm it was decided to lay bottle traps, although the max/min thermometer showed zero degrees for the overnight temperature and nothing was in the bottle traps on the morning of the 10th.

At a subsequent session on 7th May group members recorded great crested newt eggs, netted 2 females (plus male and female smooth newts), and spotted 27 male and 33 female great crested newts during the torch survey (plus 4 male and 8 female smooth newts). A fabulous evening of great crested newt viewing! During this survey an interested local came down, and talked to us about the fact that he had lived within sight of the pond for 70 plus years and informed us that we were wasting our time as great crested newts did not exist in this pond. Hugh was able to amaze him by producing a nice male within seconds, and guess what - he'd never seen one before! One further visit was made on June 18th, but all the adults had vacated leaving great crested newt larval soup.

The parish council and local residents are thrilled with the results, and Hugh is working with them to formulate a management plan for the pond and surrounding habitats. Overall it is a fascinating site, ARG members enjoyed the experience, useful data was gathered, and we managed to educate a Yorkshireman (no mean feat!).

Free insurance cover for ARGs!

David Orchard
Vice Chair of ARG UK

Insurance is a word that doesn't excite many people. Unfortunately though it's one of things that every volunteer group needs to be on top of before organising activities that we're all interested in.

Fortunately, a FREE insurance policy is available for all ARGs affiliated to ARG UK. The current insurance policy covers:

- *Public liability insurance (for claims arising from the public)*
- *Member to member cover (for claims arising from other ARG members)*
- *Personal accident insurance (for injury sustained on an official ARG event)*

To ensure you're covered by the policy you need to visit the ARG UK website and download the necessary paperwork. ARGs need to state in their constitution that they are affiliated to ARG UK and members need to complete a "personal details" sheet and return a copy to ARG UK in order to be covered. No money is required, as this year the policy has been provided thanks to support from the Environment Agency and HCT.

Please ensure that your ARG does in fact have insurance cover in place; if you think your group is covered by someone else's policy ask the insurer to put this in writing. An unwritten understanding may be insufficient in the event that anything were to go wrong. If you have any queries please e-mail me at argsl@btinternet.com

The ARG UK interview

The Editor interviews Jan Clemons

Jan Clemons became the first chair of ARG UK in 2005 and has played a leading role in the development of the newly branded organisation. But who is Jan Clemons and what sort of person does ARG UK have at its helm? In this interview we find out a bit more about what makes our leader tick.



Jan Clemons, chair of ARG UK

So Jan, when did you first take an interest in amphibians and reptiles?

"As a small child I can remember being fascinated with the natural world and used to collect frogspawn and newts from a local pond and bring them home in jam jars to the consternation of my mother who would tell me to take them back."

Is your day job related to reptiles or amphibians?

“Quite early on in my teaching career at Rugby High School I was given a garter snake and two house geckos by a pupil whose Dad would no longer let him keep them in a shoe box under his bed. After researching their requirements I became fascinated by reptiles and my classroom collection grew and grew. One day when I was questioning my sanity in doing this I wondered why I was keeping ‘pets’ when our own native herpetofauna needed all the help it could get. Today the school grounds support populations of frog, toad, smooth and crested newts, common lizard and slow-worm. It’s one of the best places in Warwickshire to see amphibians and reptiles. Another aspect of my job is to raise awareness of our native herpetofauna with the next generation of herpetologists.”

Have you been involved with other herp groups over the years?

“I joined the BHS and was greatly influenced by Geoff Haslewood, Trevor Beebee and Keith Corbett to name just a few of the herpetologist friends I made over the years. I worked with John Baker on the Education committee and moved 20 tons of Dorset heathland with resident lizards destined for landfill and created a conservation area in the school grounds.

In the early nineties I chaired the BHS Conservation Committee and honed

my skills in surveying rare species such as the sand lizard, smooth snake and natterjack toad. I also had to deal with the politics of herpetology and learnt a lot about the planning process and working with government organizations.

Around this time Tom Langton had set up HGBI and the idea of groups working for the conservation of reptiles and amphibians at a local level seemed a great idea. WART (Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team) had its inaugural meeting and is still going strong after 13 years.

In 2004 I was delighted to take on the Chair of HGBI which was subsequently named ARG UK because I think that local ARGs are the only way we can safeguard the future of the so-called widespread species in this country.”

Have you been to any exotic places in search of herps and where was your most memorable herp experience?

“I was lucky enough to travel to Central America on various expeditions and remember doing fer-de-lance work with Paul Edgar (now with HCT) in Belize. (*The fer-de-lance is the most dangerous snake of Central and South America.*) I arrived late and it was only in the morning that I realized I’d been sleeping next to a bag of these highly venomous snakes waiting to be PIT-tagged. In Honduras last year I was summoned to remove a Godwin’s viper from the cook’s tent in a camp 10 hours trek from

the nearest evacuation point. The snake in question behaved beautifully.”

What do you think is the most useful role that ARG volunteers can play in the conservation of British herps?

“To get out and find where the animals are. Distribution maps often show big gaps because no recorder has gone there. It doesn’t mean herps are definitely not there.”

Which of the British herps do you feel have been most neglected and are in need of most help from ARGs?

“Definitely the adder. After a three year survey we don’t think they’re in Warwickshire any more. Compared with the more abundant grass snake they have a slow recruitment rate and a more pronounced decline especially in the West Midlands.”

What do you think are the biggest challenges faced by most ARGs?

“Getting the members active. In WART we have 60 members but only a handful go out and survey. However they will always put their hands in their pockets if we have to raise funds. We have to accept that people lead busy lifestyles but want to be supportive.”

How do you see ARG UK developing and what sort of things are ARG UK hoping to achieve in the future?

“I’d like to see an active ARG group in every county in the country. This will take time and its encouraging to see



Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2007

Amphibian & Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom annual conference

Coventry,

Saturday 27 – Sunday 28 January 2007

Details coming soon at www.arg-uk.org.uk

that over the last year several new groups have formed. I would also like to see more regional events such as the SE regional meeting and have regional representatives from all 10 government regions in England with strong representation from Scotland and Wales on the ARG UK Coordinating panel. An ARG UK post is needed to carry out some of this work and we need to create such a post as soon as possible."

What do you see as the biggest achievements of ARG UK so far?

"Revitalising the ARG network, running the best HWM ever and providing free insurance cover for ARGs. This will continue."

What's your favourite British reptile/ amphibian?

"I like them all - reptiles particularly!"

Scientific paper review

Trevor Beebee
Professor, University of Sussex

Evaluation of translocation as a tool for mitigating development threats to great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) in England, 1990-2001. P.W. Edgar, R.A. Griffiths and J. Foster. *Biological Conservation* **122**, 45-52 (2005).

This paper reports on an important subject long overdue for critical analysis: how useful are crested newt translocations? The study was based on licence returns and questionnaires, and documents the dramatic increase in crested newt "rescues", from around 10 per year to more than 80 per year by 2000. Evidently translocations in this period resulted in no net loss of pond numbers, but the new sites (to which the newts were moved) had less total area than those from which they originated. Furthermore, a major issue remains unresolved. Although evidence of breeding was often obtained one year after translocation, there are still virtually no data on long-term sustainability of the new populations. This information is urgently needed now crested newt translocations are so common.

Effect of patch occupancy on immigration in the common lizard. J.F. Le Galliard, R. Ferrier and J. Clobert. *Journal of Animal Ecology* **74**, 241-249 (2005).

This experimental study looked at what influences the colonisation of new habitat patches by common lizards. Lizards settled in new habitats whether conspecifics were present or not, but stayed longer if the new patch was "empty". Juveniles moving to previously empty patches grew and matured faster than juveniles moving into already occupied patches, or than juveniles already present in occupied patches. This faster growth in previously vacant patches resulted in early reproduction, and thus higher population growth than in the already occupied sites. These effects were seen only with juveniles, not yearlings or adults, suggesting that effective dispersal in common lizards is mainly mediated by hatchlings. This work therefore gives some interesting clues about lizard population dynamics that could be useful for site managers.

Review of the ARG UK Southern Region Meeting, 22nd April 2006

John Poland
ARG Regional Rep

Marwell Zoo was the venue for the first ever ARG UK (Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK) Southern Region Meeting hosted by HARG. Over 70 people turned out on a glorious spring day, not to mention all the reptiles and amphibians brought along to 'help' with the afternoon workshops.

The series of morning lectures opened with David Glover of the 'Friends of Popley Pond' talking about the recent developments at Popley. The proposed housing development adjacent to Popley Pond, one of Hampshire's largest great crested newt populations, has always been a contentious issue. Sadly, the conservationists lost this battle with building work commencing last year. However, David has liaised with the developers and their ecologists and is kept fully briefed on the newt mitigation progress. David pointed out that there are still a few important lessons to be learnt. Firstly, the misconception that arable land is unsuitable for newt foraging and should be ignored. Over 3,000 great crested newts were translocated from arable fields alone! This may have not become common knowledge but for the work of 'Friends

of Popley Pond'. We nervously wait to hear about the effectiveness of the new amphibian underpasses...

Paul Edgar, of 'The Herpetological Conservation Trust' (HCT) gave an informative and stimulating talk entitled 'Rustles in Brussels' on the otherwise incomprehensible subject of European legislation. Paul's remarks were most encouraging, giving evidence that legislation has finally filtered down to grass-roots level, promoting active conservation management for our rarer amphibians and reptiles. John Buckley, also from The HCT, gave a talk about pool frogs. John, as always, injected a little dry humour into his presentation stating his fascination with amphibians started as a Norfolk youngster collecting pool frogs as pets. However John assures us that he wasn't the reason they went extinct! The re-introduction of 'northern clade' pool frogs to a new site in Norfolk, carried out with military precision, is expected to be a great success.

Emma Hutchins, former Conservation Officer for Marwell Zoo, talked about Marwell's long term sand lizard and natterjack captive breeding programme. To supplement her talk with more than just pictures, Emma skipped lunch and kindly escorted everyone around the private captive breeding enclosure. We were indeed fortunate with the weather and visitors had amazing views of glitzy sand lizards basking out in the sunshine, not to mention the more humble natterjacks! Emma's talk highlighted that positive partnerships between herpetological conservation and zoological parks can occur.

Finally, Nick Smith, editor of our forthcoming County Atlas, gave a presentation on the Atlas progress to date. As always, people rarely realise that recording starts at home so Nick's message was simply to make sure you keep recording, even if you never leave the garden!

The afternoon session consisted of workshops, culminating in a friendly quiz assisted by experienced herpetologists. The presence of live animals made the workshops especially enjoyable for the younger members, many of whom had never before seen a slow-worm. Most of the British native species were present, along with a few exotics to test the veteran herpetologist.

The workshops were designed to give people the ability to record our more widespread species with confidence. We also had reptile sloughs for identification as well – sometimes that's all you'll see! As well as the workshops, there were poster displays including the 'Hampshire Great Crested Newt Survey' appeal and the 'Make the Adder Count' project. It was hoped these would give budding herpetologists a focus if they wished to get involved in any local projects.

Thanks to everyone involved, the day turned out to be a huge success and the feedback was most positive. Proceeds from the day were donated to Marwell, as an essential contribution to their ongoing sand lizard and natterjack projects which enthralled us all during the day.

Finally, in addition to the above speakers, I would also like to thank those who helped on the day, brought animals or worked behind the scenes, chiefly Tim Woodfine from Marwell Zoo, Kirsten Knap, Dorothy Wright, Rachel Urwin, Jon Cranfield, Martin Noble and Rachel Green.

So thanks for attending and look forward to seeing you all soon!

Does your ARG hibernate over winter?

David Orchard
Vice Chair of ARG UK

Autumn and winter is not the time to be out surveying for reptiles and amphibians - which is what most ARGs do best. Nevertheless there's plenty of other things that a group can do to keep its members interested over the long cold winter months.

For example it's a great time to review progress of the last year and to be planning the year ahead. "How will the group will use its skills to best effect?" is a good question to ask. Maybe events that don't appeal to the members could be dropped from the programme and substituted by others.

The winter is also a good time to decide what sort of projects the groups wants to start or get involved with, what resources will be needed and whether help is required. It's a good time to hold training events and for the more ambitious ARGs, it could be a the time to be putting together grant applications.

Caption competition



- photo by David Orchard

If you can think of a suitable caption for this photo, please let us know and we'll print the best ones in the next edition of ARG Today.

Sponsorship of HWM 2007

*If you or your company would like to support the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2007, offers of sponsorship would be very welcome. The event will be attended by some of the national experts in reptile and amphibian conservation as well as many consultants and local authority representatives. It's **the** most important national amphibian and reptile conservation conference and an excellent event to be associated with! Any support will be acknowledged on event publicity. For an informal discussion about the options available please contact Jan Clemons at janlemons@wartsoc.co.uk*

For groups thinking about survey work in spring, it could be a good time to obtain landowners permission and collect habitat data for the sites to be surveyed.

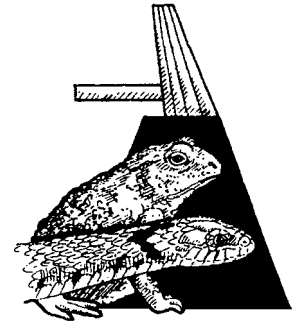
Winter is also a great time to be doing practical management tasks and this could be a good opportunity to work together with other groups of conservation volunteers. Over the next few months, other wildlife groups in your area could be contacted with a view to taking on joint projects.

Please use ARG today to share your ideas and experiences as it could inspire other groups! If you'd like extra publicity for your activities then please ask us to include details on the ARG UK website.

Herpetofauna website

If you want to find out more about amphibians and reptiles, why not take a look at www.herpetofauna.co.uk? It's a website dedicated to reptiles and amphibians and holds a wealth of useful information and contacts.

SE Amphibian & Reptile Groups of the UK, Conference 2006



This year's theme will be:
"Positive contributions made to Conservation"

- Hosted by: Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group
- Venue: The Ward Room, Chatham Maritime Campus, University of Greenwich.
- Date: Saturday, 11th November 2006
- Cost: £10 for individuals, £20 per person for organisations (except ARG members)

Places are limited so please book early to avoid disappointment. For more information please contact the treasurer at treasurer@kentarg.org

Please book me a place at the SEARGUK Conference on 11th November 2006. Full details and a map will be sent nearer the day.

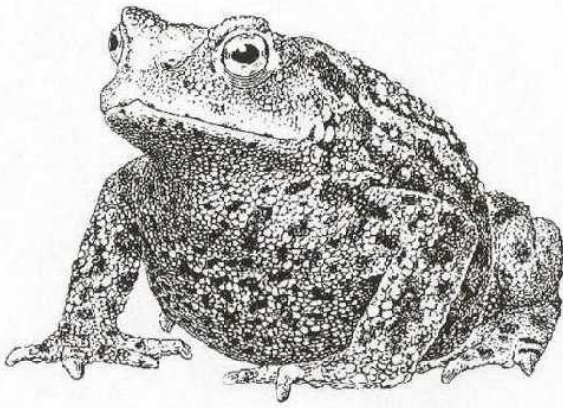
Name..... Organisation.....

Address.....

..... Dietary requirements

Telephone E-mail

I enclose a cheque made payable to Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group
Please send completed forms to: **The Treasurer, KRAG, c/o 43 Kent St,
Whitstable, Kent, CT5 4HS**



**THE HERPETOLOGICAL
CONSERVATION TRUST**



***The Herpetological Conservation Trust and
the British Herpetological Society
Joint Scientific Meeting:***

**Amphibian and reptile biology,
ecology and conservation**

**Saturday 16 December 2006, 0930-1700
Lecture Hall, Bournemouth Natural Science Society,
39 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth**

- 0930-1000** **Registration, coffee**
1000-1005 *Welcome address*
1005-1030 Inga Zeisset – Amphibians, diseases and genetics: MHC class II loci in *Rana temporaria*
1030-1055 Barry Hill – Evidence for *Ranavirus* implication in amphibian mortalities
1055-1120 Chris Reading – Linking global warming to amphibian declines
- 1120-1200** **Coffee**
1205-1230 Tony Gent – Add an Adder: a web-based survey of adder status in Britain
1230-1255 Richard Griffiths - A comparison of tins and felt and their associated microclimates as artificial refugia for reptiles
1255-1320 John Baker – Sampling design for the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme
- 1320-1450** **Lunch**
1455-1520 Kevin Watts – Using GIS to model opportunities for great crested newt metapopulation connectivity at the landscape level
1520-1545 Eddie Brede – When is a spade not a spade? A study of population structure and genetic diversity in two similar sympatric anurans (*Bufo bufo* and *Rana temporaria*).
1545-1610 Neil D’Cruze – Resource partitioning of sympatric *Norops* (*Beta Anolis*) in a subtropical mainland community in Belize.
- 1610-1700** **Coffee and depart**

Registration including lunch and refreshments is £10 to ARG/BHS members, students and concessions (£25 to all others). Send contact details with cheque payable to “The Herpetological Conservation Trust” to 655a Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth, BH1 4AP, UK. The Bournemouth Natural Science Society venue (www.bnss.org.uk) is a treasure trove of natural history curiosities. The venue is on a major bus route, with central Bournemouth, the pier, beaches and gardens within 20 minutes’ walk. Bournemouth bus and train stations are 15 minutes’ walk away. There is limited parking at the venue, and free parking on streets nearby. From the venue, the clifftop is about 10 minutes’ walk away, with a panoramic view from the Isle of Wight to the Isle of Purbeck (weather-permitting!); it’s then a short walk down to the beach. The wonderful Russell-Coates Art Gallery and Museum is also close by on the clifftop; admission is free and it’s open Tue-Sun. There will be a gathering on the Friday night for food, drinks and catch up with new and old friends. Contact Chris Glead-Owen for more details (chris.go@herpconstrust.org.uk). Accommodation in the area starts at about £20 a night (see list attached).

Hotel list for HCT & BHS Scientific Meeting

Saturday 16 December 2006

This is a list of hotels and B&Bs in the East Cliff area of Bournemouth, within walking distance from the conference venue (the Bournemouth Natural Science Society, 39 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth).

Within 5-10 minutes' walk from the venue

Freshfields Hotel, 55 Christchurch Road, 01202 394023, from £25 per person

Travelodge, 43 Christchurch Road, 0870 191 1758, from £26 *per room*

Abbotcliff House Bed & Breakfast, 14 St Swithun's Road, 01202 556074, from £20 per person

The Haven Bed & Breakfast, 16 St Swithun's Road, 01202 556071, from £25 per person

Rosscourt Hotel, 6 St John's Road, 01202 397537, from £30 per person

The Carrington House Hotel, 31 Knyveton Road, 01202 369988, from £55

East Cliff seafront (10-20 minutes' walk from the venue)

Marsham Court Hotel, Russell Cotes Road, 01202 552111, from £50 per person

Suncliff hotel, 29 East Overcliff Drive, 01202 291711, from £45 per person

Cumberland Hotel, East Overcliff Drive, 01202 290722, from £45 per person

East Cliff Court Hotel, East Overcliff Drive, 01202 554545, from £55 per person

Carlton Hotel, East Overcliff Drive, 01202 552011, from £55 per person

Hotel Miramar, East Overcliff Drive, 01202 556581, from £50 per person

Tourist information accommodation booking service

If you want to consider a wider selection of accommodation across the whole of Bournemouth, please phone the *Bournemouth Visitor Information Bureau* on 01202 454800. They can book accommodation for you. Bournemouth is well connected with bus services, and most places are within walking distance from the conference venue, including the town centre, pier, central gardens, seafront and beaches.

HCT & BHS websites

The HCT: www.herpconstrust.org.uk, www.narrs.org.uk, www.adder.org.uk

The BHS: www.thebhs.org