

HERPETOFAUNA WORKERS MEETING 2024

Saturday 3rd – Sunday 4th February 2024

Provisional Conference Programme & Workshop Abstracts

Saturday 3rd February

9:15 - 9:45 Registration

Session one

9:45-10:00 Welcome address. **Tony Gent (CEO, ARC)**

10:00-10:20 Population genomics of isolated adder populations across fragmented habitats.
Ben Owens (Bangor University)

10:20-10:40 Smooth snake conservation: outcomes from the Snakes in the Heather project.
Ben Limburn, Owain Masters and Karen Haysom (ARC)

10:40-11:00 Investigating ophidiomycosis (snake fungal disease) in grass snakes in Great Britain.
Steve Allain (University of Kent; British Trust for Ornithology; Zoological Society of London)

11:00-11:30 Break

Session two:

11:30-13:00 Workshop Sessions (see below for workshop descriptions)

13:00-14:30 Lunch

Session three

14:30-14.50 Combining habitat suitability modelling with community science to conserve Northern Ireland's common lizards. **Ryan Montgomery (ARG UK)**

14:50-15:10 Alpine newt invasion in Ireland – an update and comparison with other introductions.
Éinne Ó Cathasaigh (Herpetological Society of Ireland)

15:10-15:30 Detection dogs, a viable method to locate great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* terrestrially?
Nikki Glover (Wessex Water; University of Salford)

15:30-16:00 Break

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Session four

- 16:00-16:20** Working in partnership for amphibians - a Scottish case study from Malls Mire Local Nature Reserve. **Nicole Digruber (Urban Roots)**
- 16:20-16:40** Ongoing, multi-decade decline of common toads in Britain. What next?
Silviu Petrovan (University of Cambridge; Froglife Trust), Helen Moor (SIAM; FE Biodiversität und Naturschutzbiologie) and Benedikt Schmidt (Info Fauna - CSCF & KARCH; University of Zurich)

Social evening

- 19:00-11:00** Gala Dinner to include 'Have I Got Newts For You?' Quiz & the ARG UK Raffle.

Sunday 4th February

- 9:30 – 10:00** Registration

Session one:

- 10:00-10:20** Improving Wildlife Fencing for Herpetofauna to Ensure Effective Implementation: An Analysis of Global Mitigation Case Studies. **Steve Béga (Animex International Inc)**
- 10:20-10:40** Evaluation of Natural England-led great crested newt District Level Licensing.
Duncan Brown (Natural England)
- 10:40-11:00** District Licensing for great crested newts – 5 Years In. **Andrew Buxton (NatureSpace)**
- 11:00-11:30** Break

Session two:

- 11:30-13:00** Workshop Sessions (see below for workshop descriptions)
- 13:00-14:30** Lunch

Session three:

- 14:30-14:50** Does it add up for adder conservation in England? A review of mitigation projects.
Jon Cranfield (Herpetologic Ltd)
- 14:50-15:10** "Suckers for amphibians" Investigating the occurrence of leech predation on amphibians in Southern England. **Angela Julian (ARG UK)**
- 15:10-15:30** Insights from mapping Hampshire's herps. **Nicholas Smith (Hampshire Amphibian and Reptile Recording Network)**
- 15:30-15:50** Should there be any sand lizards in the New Forest? **Paul Edgar (Natterjack Ecology)**
- 15:50-16:00** *Closing remarks*, **Chris Monk (Chair, ARG UK)**
- 16:00-16:30** *Refreshments and departures*

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Workshop abstracts

Workshop A

Small community projects - practical suggestions, lessons learnt and positive outcomes

Pete Gillatt and Pete West (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Amphibian and Reptile Group)

We often see negative comments on social media when some relatively minor event impacts herps. A grass snake squashed on the road, a crested newt handled by someone asking what it is, or a negative news article. We forget the vast majority of the population wouldn't be able to differentiate between our newts, and we regularly see grass snakes misidentified as adders. Our reactions can easily discourage "outsiders" from any further interest in herp conservation. Concerns about large fines for handling a great crested newt found under someones bin does nothing to improve their perception of newts. Instead of sweating the negative small stuff, how can we use that energy within our local communities to enhance their knowledge and encourage their involvement? Focussing on achievable activities that a handful of people can manage and which can improve herp conservation in bite-sized chunks can make a big impact over time. Let's talk about the types of small projects we have been involved in and the positive outcomes, discuss ideas that we might consider and share some of the challenges and highlights.

Workshop B

Improving verification of herpetofauna data across the UK recording landscape

Rob Ward (ARC) and Angela Julian (ARG UK)

UK amphibian and reptile records continue to be recorded in a variety of ways, and subsequently logged via a number of different portals and systems, depending on the experience and preference of the recorder. However, the journey of each record does not end after it has been submitted. It has great value in informing and supporting land management, planning and development, research projects, local, national and international distribution maps/Atlases, status assessments and more. Before records can be used for many of these purposes, we first need to understand the quality of those data. A key part of this process is verification, whereby an external person with significant expertise relating to the species and/or location of the record, assesses the available evidence to determine its accuracy. This process is often undertaken by volunteers, and can be both time-consuming and present challenges where evidence is lacking. For example, where there is no clear image, or a vague or absent description. This workshop will provide an overview of what constitutes verification of amphibian and reptile records, and through a series of group activities will explore the challenges related to verification and how they might be addressed. Prospective verifiers will have the opportunity to nominate themselves to contribute towards verification.

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Workshop C

Enforcing the legislation protecting amphibians and reptiles

Jim Foster (ARC) and Ian Guildford (National Wildlife Crime Unit)

There are various laws protecting amphibians and reptiles, but their enforcement is unfortunately rather complex. Practical information on enforcement is scarce. ARC's experience is that volunteers and professionals alike often have disappointing experiences with trying to ensure incidents are investigated and enforced effectively. Some changes to laws and procedures could help improve this situation, yet they are not widely known. This workshop will give participants the chance to learn, recap and discuss wildlife crime enforcement procedures, in an interactive and hopefully engaging format. The focus will be on what you can do to help get a positive outcome. We will touch on common problems in enforcement and how to overcome them. Note: the workshop will focus on enforcement in England, and whilst the general principles will be the same elsewhere in the UK, the details will differ. As the workshop focuses on enforcement, there won't be time to cover the laws themselves in depth, but sources for those wanting more information on the law will be provided.

Workshop D

Introduction to Biodiversity Net Gain & Reptile Habitat Suitability

Julia Baker (Mott MacDonald); Stuart Graham (Ecologyia Ltd); Ana Togridou (SYSTRA Ltd); Vicky Iggo (SYSTRA Ltd); Nicole King (SYSTRA Ltd)

While the Biodiversity Metric is a tool to quantify Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) outcomes, the way that the Metric uses habitat data means that BNG is, in practice, achieved by following the 'mitigation hierarchy', creating more habitats or enhancing existing habitats under a long-term management plan. The Metric is no substitute for the sound ecological and conservation principles that must underpin BNG designs, especially when BNG is to benefit certain species. There is no species-specific guidance for BNG designs that build on species mitigation and achieve BNG in ways that benefit species populations, that comply with the Metric and that are resilient to the effects of climate change. This workshop will introduce BNG to those not familiar with the principles, explain how the current Metric works, and present a methodology on how we can check and reconsider whether the habitats we are creating in BNG are suitable or detrimental for reptiles. Furthermore, the workshop will consult on how the suitability of habitats will change with climate change and discuss whether we should be designing habitats for today or under the prism of climate change.

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