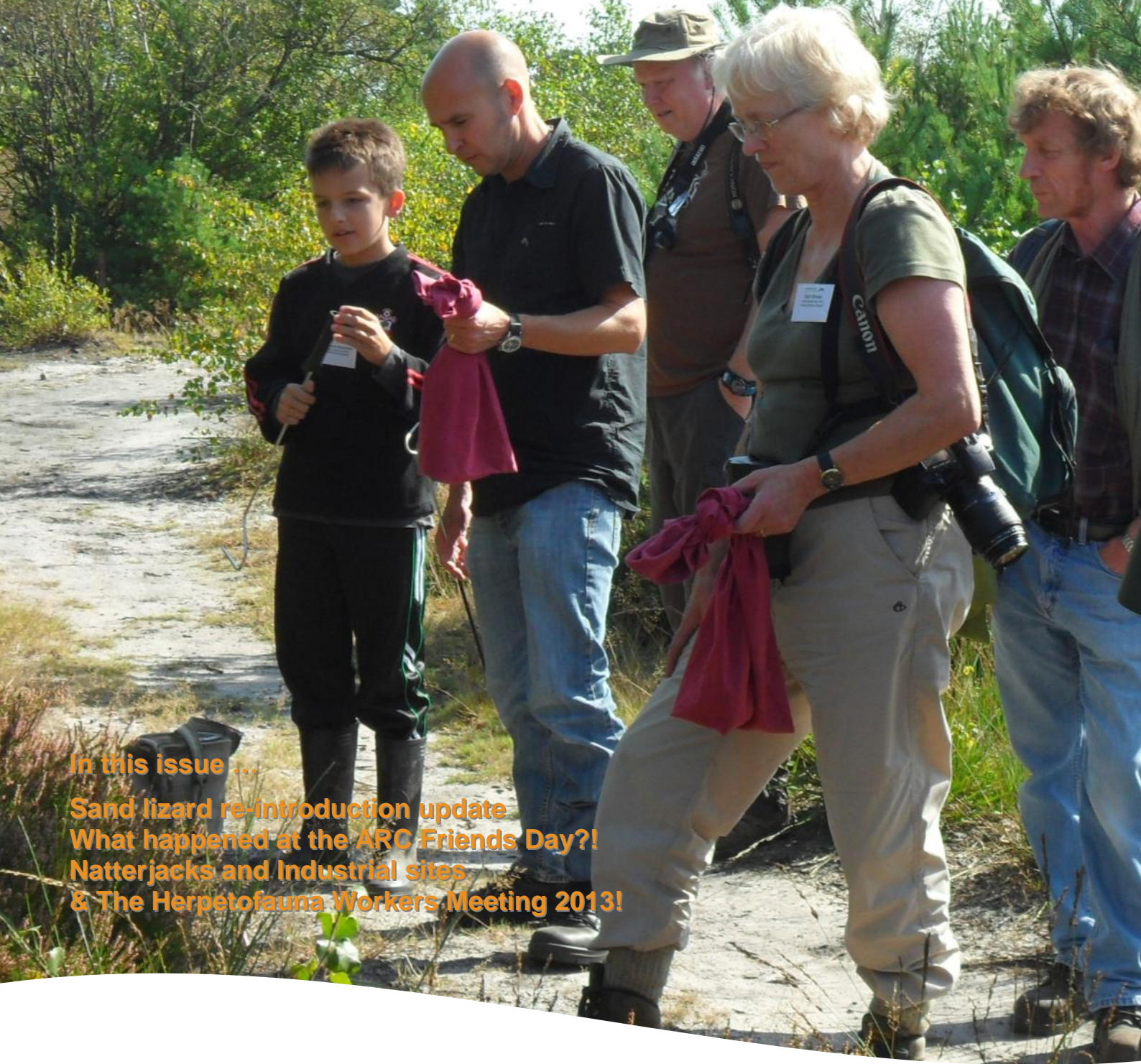


HopGossip!

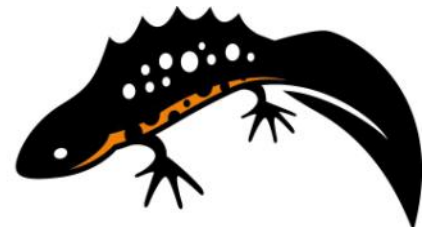
Winter/Spring 2012/13



In this issue ...

Sand lizard re-introduction update
What happened at the ARC Friends Day?!
Natterjacks and Industrial sites
& The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2013!

amphibian and reptile
conservation





Amphibian and Reptile Conservation is a national wildlife charity committed to conserving amphibians and reptiles and the habitats on which they depend.



Working in partnership with
Amphibian & Reptile Groups
of the UK

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If you would like to contribute to the next edition please contact Angela Reynolds at angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org



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Cover image: Gary Powell and ARC
Friends at the Friends day.
Photo: Angela Reynolds (ARC)
Hop Gossip is edited and designed by
Angela Reynolds

Please note: the views expressed in
this newsletter are not necessarily the
views of Amphibian & Reptile Conser-
vation but those of the authors.

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From the Editors desk

Welcome to the latest edition of Hop Gossip!

We've had an extremely busy year in 2012 and continue to get busier! Since the last issue, we have taken on eight new members of staff (which includes four winter seasonals) and said goodbye to Sophie Hinton and David Orchard. Thank you both for all your hard work! You can read about our Welsh Officers on page 15 and our new Conservation Director on page 5.

I would also like to welcome Kim Newman who, after more than a year and a half volunteering in the office, has been employed part time to work on our Friends database and our new upcoming website which will be up and running by Christmas!



Congratulations to Richard and Lisa Sharp who welcomed Samuel David Peter Sharp into the world in October.



I'd like to thank all of the Friends who attended our Friends day in September. It was great to meet you all! I hope you all enjoyed yourselves. You can read all about it as part of our feature on pages 10 - 11.

The date has been confirmed for the annual ARG UK and ARC Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting 2013. If you only go to one herp event this year I can highly recommend this one! Friends get the discounted rate and details are on page 14.

And finally, If you are wondering what to get the herp enthusiast in your life for Christmas, check out our stocking fillers on page 18. I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!

With best wishes,

Angela

Angela Reynolds
Hop Gossip Editor
angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org



C.E.O.'s Corner

Dr. Tony Gent



Herpetologists are used to annual cycles – with the nights drawing in we're packing away our nets and GPS units (depending on your level of technical interest and ability), and settling down to a quiet period without amphibians and reptiles to see – but often with records to write up. Soon, following the festivities, we'll be getting reports of the first amphibians and then reptiles and the 'season' will have started again. With the cycles of the animals' activity come the cycles of conservation activity – winter means 'scrub management' for both our professional and volunteer teams and we'd hope that by the end of the 'management season' that we'll have made some significant improvements to our own nature reserves and to amphibian and reptile habitats elsewhere. It is often seen as something of a paradox that, as nature conservationists, we actually cut down trees and in part that is due to oversimplification of nature conservation messages. Given what I've just said, it may also seem strange that we are strong advocates of the proposals to increase Britain's woodland cover – but we do want to see this planted in the right place and make sure that, while this is happening, that good habitats are created alongside for amphibians and reptiles.

As well as seasonal cycles, we are also aware of cycles in the popularity of nature conservation in political circles. The financial situation, and fears about fuel and food, have shifted public and political interest away from the environment and 'well-being' to a much more utilitarian concern about safety and security. Many environmentalists now feel that we're now back at the point of the cycle where the conservation of wildlife is being given little regard. It is therefore useful that, coincidentally with this, we are seeing an increase in the arguments in favour of 'ecosystems services'. This places human values on wildlife and their habitats in terms of the contribution that these make to our society and to our economy. People have quantified values in economic terms of the health benefits of having access to nature; they have measured the contribution that wildlife gives to the economy and the greater levels of happiness in communities with access to green spaces. 'Ecosystems services' therefore provides a new language to help put the environment on par with safety and security, and identify the importance to the nation in a way that is comparable to measuring the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)! It brings on board new audiences – and importantly these are the guys that hold the purse strings.

For all the timeliness and the political expediency in promoting this approach, for many of us it doesn't feel quite right. It risks undervaluing the inherent worth of our wildlife and suggests that everything must have an economic value. It also risks creating inappropriate objectives – allowing the loss of habitats and species that are somehow less valuable than others. At ARC, we are closely involved with many discussions about such topics. We argue strongly for to make sure that we have clear conservation objectives based around wildlife to drive our activities, and to make sure that we are creating situations that benefit amphibians and reptiles. Identification of 'ecosystems services' provides another valuable tool to help us conserve wildlife and reach new audiences; we must not let the choice of tool produce the wrong outcomes.

amphibian and reptile
conservation





ARC at the World Congress of Herpetology By Claire Buckley

The seventh congress was the largest ever: 1700 delegates from around the world. The University of British Columbia proved a fine location, its campus forty minutes from downtown Vancouver with views of mountains and the Pacific. The welcome social was held in a marquee, the closing banquet in the grounds of the Museum of Anthropology alongside totem poles featuring, among others, carvings of frogs and serpents.

Harry Greene, President of the Society for the Study of Reptiles and Amphibians, opened the conference by emphasising the intrinsic beauty of many species, the sublime perfection of a few. The next five days were filled with lectures, 15 in parallel at any one time, and poster sessions, generating a total of more than 2800 abstracts provided on memory sticks for all. Talks were grouped into specific themes and allotted particular parts of the campus; amphibian sessions, for example, took place in the Buchanan building (handily encompassing a shady quad for break-time coffee, fruit and cakes).



Talks were strictly limited to 15 minutes including questions, but ARC's contingent responded to the challenge. Trustee Trevor Beebee outlined the long-term monitoring and conservation of British natterjacks. Informed by research, habitat management has succeeded in halting the decline of the species although not reversing it. Evidence suggests the most successful results are achieved through increasing pond numbers and keeping terrestrial habitat open by livestock grazing. John Buckley, ARC's Amphibian Conservation Officer, described the results of the pool frog re-introduction project; a small population is maintaining itself and action being taken to enable future growth.

Jim Foster, ARC's Conservation Director, and Trustees Jan Clemons and Richard Griffiths all gave presentations on 'Citizen Science,' which helps inform conservation decision-making. To this end, ARC works with volunteers, particularly ARGs, who offer local knowledge and enthusiasm and are supported by training and feedback on national recordings schemes. Richard Griffiths also gave a lecture on the use of Population Viability Analysis (PVA), a computer modelling tool to predict population survival. Field study results fed into the PVA show that, in fragmented landscapes, a viable newt population requires 16 sub-populations of 50 newts or 4-8 sub-populations of at least 100 newts. On this basis, current mitigation action in the UK is insufficient. He concluded his talk in familiar vein: 'I'd like to thank all our funders.' Then, standing before a blank slide, he added: 'That is, no-one.' Laughter and applause.

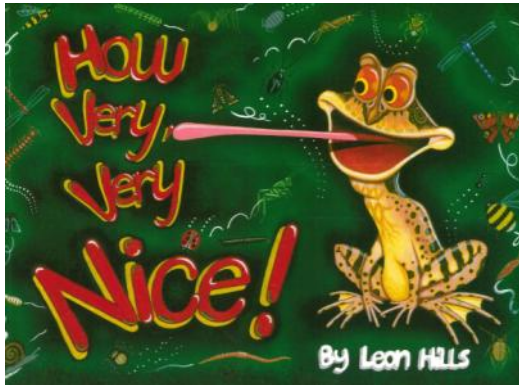


Top left: John Buckley during his presentation. Middle left: Jim Foster, Trevor Beebee - ARC Trustee, John Buckley & Maggie Beebee. Above: Margaret Bray, Richard Griffiths - ARC Trustee, Jan Clemons - ARC Trustee and Claire Buckley

How Very, Very Nice!

Leon Hills has worked closely with ARC over the years, illustrating our Christmas cards and informative conservation leaflets and has recently had two books published by Langford Press www.langford-press.co.uk. Disheartened by the number of children (not to mention adults!) who do not know the difference between a centipede and a millipede, or a bug and a beetle, Leon was inspired to write and illustrate these educational books.

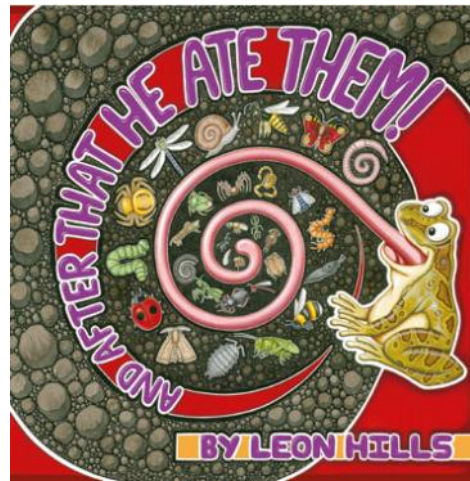
Both were written with the aim of teaching children how to identify insects, and other invertebrates, they may find in the UK. Each illustration compares two similar insects met by a frog, such as a wasp and a bee, a dragonfly and a damselfly, or a butterfly and a moth. The picture pages have tiny insects hidden within for children to spot and the story has a humorous twist. The text has a repetitive rhythm, holding a child's attention & soon has them joining in with the words. Its true, we tried and tested this on Richard Sharps' little boy Rueben!



How Very, Very Nice! - This is the smaller book: aimed at a younger audience, there are less pages, simpler text, & fewer hidden insects to find. A great way to introduce children to the wonders of wildlife & identify the nature in their own gardens.

And After That He Ate Them! - This is the larger book: aimed at older children, the story line is exactly the same but there are more pages, more lavish illustrations, longer text, more hidden insects, & further activity pages at the end of the story.

Both of these books are available to purchase from ARC. Please see page 18 For details.



Meet our new Conservation Director Jim Foster!

Jim is very well known on the herpetology circuit. He worked on the Froglife Common Species Project from 1994-1999. That post supported the emerging Amphibian and Reptile Groups movement, and provided guidance for herp workers across a range of sectors.

From 1999 to 2011 Jim was the national amphibian and reptile specialist at Natural England. There he worked on a range of conservation issues including legislation, surveillance and species recovery – often in collaboration with partners such as ARC. After taking voluntary redundancy last year, he's been doing consultancy and supporting local conservation projects. He's looking forward to being a passionate advocate for herps, working in co-operation with landowners, volunteers, recorders, scientists, government agencies and other conservation organisations.



As Conservation Director, Jim hopes to expand ARC's capacity to deliver major gains for herps. *"It's an exciting time to join the ARC team,"* he says. *"There are plenty of changes afoot: some major shifts in the way government works on biodiversity, and a hefty review of wildlife legislation, to name but two. ARC is well-positioned to influence all these initiatives, so I'm delighted to be helping with that. And of course, it's fantastic to be working with site management colleagues who keep herp hotspots in top condition."*



Sand lizard re-introductions in the Weald By Rob Free - Weald Reserves Manager.

Below: Mike Preston - sand lizard captive breeder with press. Photo: Rob Free (ARC)

2012 wasn't a great year for reptiles. Cool, wet weather early in the season caused the Wealden sand lizards held in the captive breeding programme to lay several weeks later than normal and then no second clutches were produced as has been the norm in recent years. Fortunately nearly all the eggs that were produced turned out to be viable so that around 140 hatchling sand lizards were successfully reared as opposed to 200-250 in a good year. Mike Preston, ARC's breeder of the Weald race lizards had managed to save the day. Some of these hatchlings were shown at local events attended by ARC prior to their release and attracted a great deal of attention from supporters. It was very encouraging to hear people universally referring to the young lizards as 'cute' and not the usual stereotypical epithets reserved for herptiles that we still occasionally encounter.



The 140 sand lizard hatchlings were divided amongst three re-introduction sites all located in Surrey (Hambledon, Mare Hill and Farnham Heath) with releases provisionally programmed for the 13th and 17th September. It can be an anxious time as the weather needs to be favourable on the day earmarked for their release and ideally for a good while thereafter until they have fully acclimatised to their new home (after spending their entire lives on sterile reptile substrate with food supplied on demand). In the event the release days were warm and sunny and the hatchlings were all successfully released to their new homes. The landowners of the three sites, RSPB, Waverley Borough Council and Mr Stephen Dean all attended the releases and the local press took particular interest in the RSPB Farnham Heath release with two reporters and a photographer closely following proceedings. But for me the icing on the cake was a quiet moment during the release on Mr Dean's land as we watched a hatchling find its bearings in its new surroundings. After a few hesitant steps around the sandy area between heather plants where we set it free, the young animal spied a small *pardosa* spider stalking across the sand, ran it down and ate it. The sand lizards had definitely arrived!



Female sand lizard burrowing. Photo Nick Moulton (ARC)



Protected Sites & Conservation Projects

By Jim Foster - Conservation Director

Town Common Nature Reserve in Dorset has SSSI status. Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)

Britain's amphibians and reptiles need targeted projects to help with their recovery. ARC's new Conservation Director, Jim Foster, explains how we are working with Natural England to do just that.

Picture the best spot you know for finding grass snakes. Is it a protected site? Should it be? These sorts of questions are currently taxing ARC's team of species experts. We've been asked by Natural England, the government's wildlife conservation agency in England, to work on a range of projects focusing on SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest). These sites – designed to represent the country's best wildlife sites – collectively support many important populations of amphibians and reptiles. Indeed, the vast majority of sand lizard, smooth snake and natterjack toad populations can be found on SSSIs. This status affords substantial protection to the populations, and means there is support for habitat management and monitoring. The sites are clearly marked on planning maps, and are the focus of conservation efforts, with attempts to join up SSSIs also happening in some areas.



Areas can be designated as SSSIs by virtue of important populations of native species, or "assemblages" of different species. Yet the guidance for deciding which sites make the grade is now over 20 years old, and many feel a revision is overdue. The criteria for deciding on important populations could benefit from a re-think. Should we look at protecting populations in certain parts of the country, or in certain habitats, for example? Should we think about many small sites or just a few large ones? Perhaps climate change should prompt us to think differently about protected sites? There are many questions here, and ARC is in a great position to be asked by Natural England for views based on our years of experience.

The condition of SSSIs is monitored periodically, and another part of our agreement with Natural England this year is to assess what's been achieved to date through on-going assessments. Without that information, it would be hard to assess the value of the sites, and how the populations they support contribute to conservation status at a national level. So over this year, ARC is collating information and conducting surveys to check on species status on SSSIs. We'll also be producing a plan for how this work could be done in the future, since to date it not been co-ordinated nationally.

Other projects that we're working on with Natural England include development of plans to monitor common toads. This species has suffered from serious declines over the last 20 years or so, and the reasons are not yet entirely clear – although traffic mortality is certainly a problem at some well-known sites. On the reptile front, we'll be developing a project to help people identify communal hibernation sites for adders, and giving guidance on how to safeguard and manage them in the long term. The adder is another species that, like the common toad, has generally been viewed as "widespread and doing ok," when in fact it has been faring badly in some parts of England. Hibernation sites where many adders gather are critical for conserving populations, and so this is a timely project. Another project will investigate helping zoos and other wildlife collections to put on displays of native amphibians and reptiles. We feel there's a great opportunity here – most public wildlife collections don't include native species, yet those that do report a lot of interest. Watch out for future editions of *Hop Gossip* for updates on these projects!

Million Ponds Project - First Phase Completed!

The first phase of the Million Ponds Project, funded by the Tubney Trust and Biffaward, has reached a successful conclusion. The project, coordinated by Pond Conservation and involving Amphibian and Reptile Conservation as a lead partner, has helped to create over 1000 ponds to benefit Biodiversity Action Plan species across England and Wales.

Over the past four years the project has:

- Focused attention on the variety of freshwater habitats needed by these species
- Highlighted the importance of pond design
- Raised awareness of the value of temporary ponds

A wide variety of water bodies has been created by the Million Ponds Project, from large ponds designed for water voles, to shallow temporary pools on sand dunes, designed for the natterjack toad.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation's role in the project has been to help create ponds for the natterjack toad, common toad, great crested newt and grass snake. This has been a great success, with over 467 ponds created for the great crested newt and 47 for the natterjack toad. This is perhaps one of the most successful efforts to create such ponds in recent years.

David Orchard said, *"We know that amphibians need good terrestrial habitats, but without suitable breeding ponds they are unable to survive. The Million Ponds Project has been an opportunity to support amphibian populations across England and Wales in a very practical way."*

Another important achievement of the project has been to increase general understanding of the importance of clean water, the essential component of good quality ponds. (Clean water is that which is not contaminated by runoff from roads or agriculture, or excessively disturbed, for example by artificially high numbers of birds.)

The project has produced a huge range of material which is free to download from the Pond Conservation website. <http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds/pondcreationtoolkit>.

The Million Ponds Project is a fifty year vision with the aim of ensuring the UK has at least one million ponds in the landscape, approximately the same number that existed in 1900. Work over the past four years has been the first step towards this ambitious target, providing a firm foundation for the future.





The CLARE Project final report

By Helen Wraight - Administration & Finance Officer

It seems like only yesterday that we were telling you about our exciting new project, Connecting London's Amphibian and Reptile Environments, but the project has now been completed.

It has been a great project, working in partnership with London Wildlife Trust (LWT), GiGL (Greenspace information for Greater London) and the London Amphibian and Reptile Group and has exceeded its original ambitions. The Project Officer, Sophie Hinton, was enthusiastic and dedicated to the project and she will be greatly missed from the ARC staff.

Throughout the project, over 50 LWT staff and volunteers have been trained in amphibian and reptile conservation management and in return they have provided ARC with the sites to monitor to establish long term goals for the conservation of amphibians and reptiles - which will be reflected in future LWT management plans.

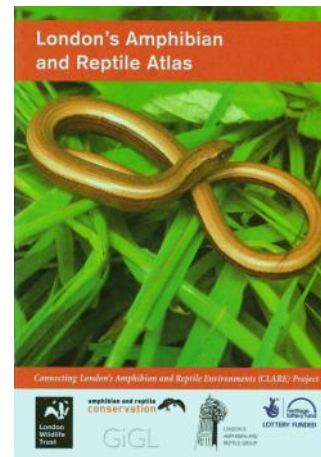


Training. Photo: Sophie Hinton.

There are significant areas in Greater London for which there is very little or virtually no data on amphibians and reptiles. The CLARE project has established a good starting point for a more focused and continued effort for survey and monitoring in London and we hope that the Atlas will inspire more people to get involved to help us assess the status of London's amphibian and reptile populations. If you are interested in surveying please get in touch with London Amphibian and Reptile Group by email at londonarg@hotmail.co.uk or via their website <http://groups.arguk.org/larg>

Project Successes

- Over 50 LWT staff and volunteers trained in habitat management
- 5 major events attended including the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebration of 'Wild London' at Richmond Park – reaching tens of thousands of people over the life of the project.
- Held 19 events and information days aimed at raising the profile of amphibians and reptiles including reptile rambles, workshops and talks and presentations to organisations and members of the public.
- Given out 4-5,000 copies of our leaflet 'Scaling the City' with an identification guide and a detachable species sighting form culminating in 1,100 new records.
- Produced London's first publicly accessible amphibian and reptile atlas.
- Held 4 training sessions on both habitat management for herps and survey techniques, with over 45 people being trained and leading to attendees holding their own follow-on survey and ID course for local groups of volunteers.
- Recruited 72 enthusiastic volunteers who have helped with survey, management and events – a thank you party was held for all those involved with the project following the launch of the Atlas on Friday 20th July 2012.



Working with GiGL the project has provided an easy to use online recording system for the public and helped encourage wildlife recording in London. A major thrust of the project has been the training element, both in habitat management and in survey, to ensure that the conservation needs of species can be built in to future plans. The recording has culminated in the production of the first ever online 'London Atlas' for herps. The Atlas shows not only records of each species but also indicates suitable habitats where they may be found. It is available in a paper format from ARC, London Wildlife Trust or GiGL and online at www.gigl.org.uk or www.arc-trust.org/CLARE. You can submit your amphibian and reptile sightings to be included in the Atlas via the GiGL website www.gigl.org.uk



Thames Festival 2011.
Photo: Sophie Hinton.

Feature

Fun with Friends!

By Dominik Reynolds - ARC Friend aged 12

I find it hard to understand why some people dislike reptiles and amphibians, snakes in particular. They are such incredible animals, all in their own subtle ways. The ARC Friends Day really proved this to me. I work as a volunteer for the R.S.P.B at the Reptile Centre (for 4 years now), so have some knowledge about reptiles and amphibians already, but the fascinating talks, awesome animal handling and brilliant guided walk taught me so much more. I only hope that I didn't drive Gary crazy with my continuous questions and stories!

The talks were all focused on different topics and were all special in their own ways. After an introduction by Dr Tony Gent, the Chief Executive, we had a talk on reptiles by Gary Powell, then amphibians by John Buckley and lastly a talk on managing heathlands. After all those it was time for lunch... but I was too busy with the animal handling. Getting up so close and personal with those fascinating animals was awesome!



Dr Tony Gent's Introduction to ARC. Photo: Angela Reynolds (ARC) Above: Dominik with a grass snake. Photo: Kerry Reynolds.

I loved the guided walk. Parley Common was a fabulous reserve with excitement around every tree, or under every log. The anticipation that built up as we were approaching every tin was huge, with our paint roller snake hooks. We released the reptiles we had been handling over lunch and went on a hunt. Bushes, scrub and the tin sheets!! One memorable tin also happened to be one the most successful tins, for under it was a grass snake. Earlier in the day, Gary had told us that when grass snakes are caught, they can release a VERY foul stench. Luckily the one we handled was nice to us.... different story with the tin dweller. Halfway through his speech, Gary suddenly cried out, "Oh, I think it's about to...". His hand was then squirted by a yellow goo, which he generously offered to share. It was vile!!! We even found three rare plant species; Sundew (lots of that), Marsh Gentian and Bog Asphodel.

Over all, it was such a fabulous day. Some of the Friends had come miles. Everything was perfect, and I only hope that they are able to make it a yearly thing.

Thank you to all of the ARC team for such a good day meeting scaled and human new friends.

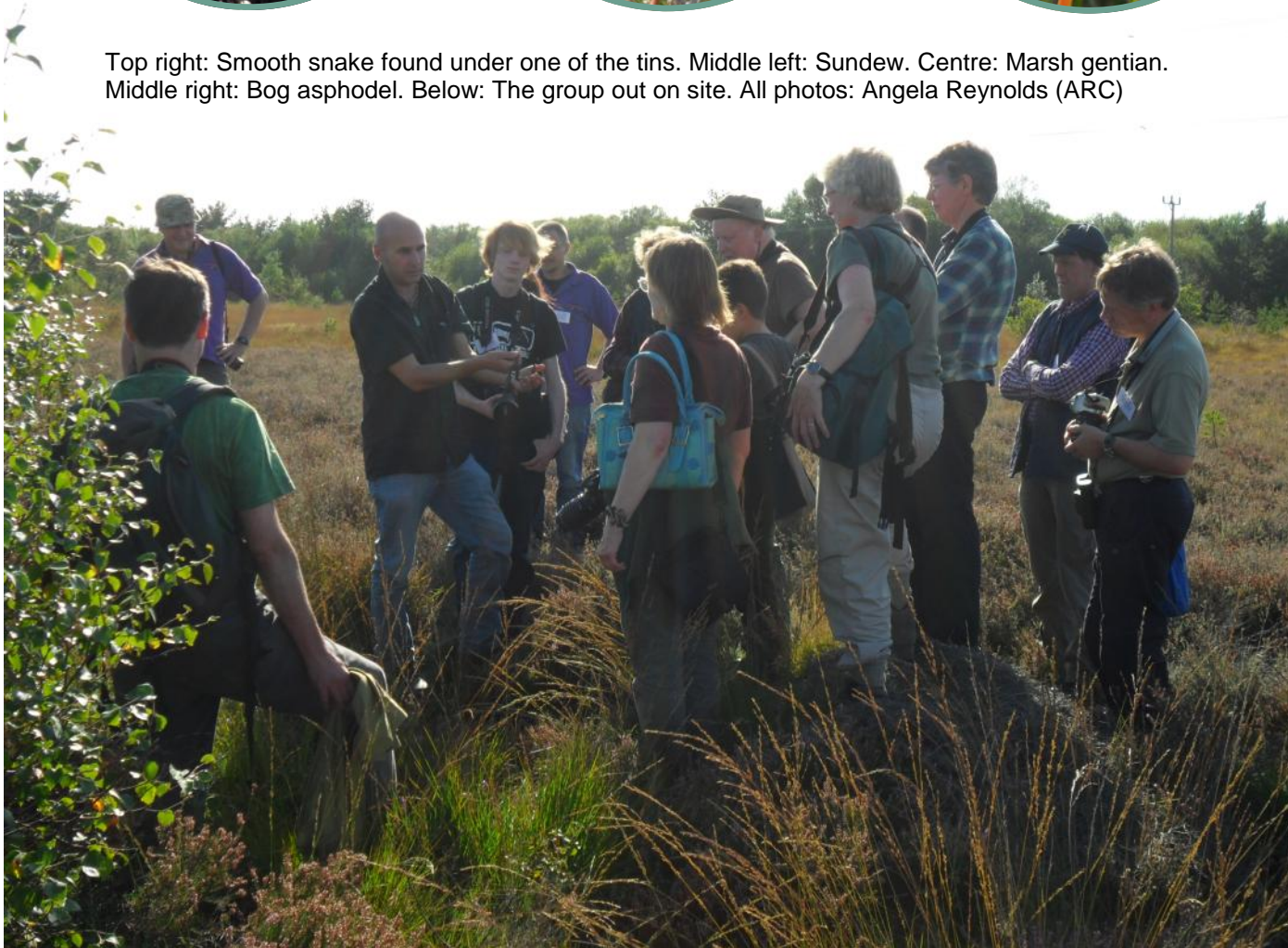
Thank you Dominik! Its always great to see the younger generation so inspired by nature and I predict that Dominik will have a long and successful career in conservation and public speaking (another big interest - supported by one of his biggest fans TV's Kate Humble!)

A write up of the Friends day can be found on our website along with a short video. <http://www.arc-trust.org/news/latest.php#friends2012>

We hope to be able to hold more days like this in the future and will be sure to let you know when we do.



Top right: Smooth snake found under one of the tins. Middle left: Sundew. Centre: Marsh gentian. Middle right: Bog asphodel. Below: The group out on site. All photos: Angela Reynolds (ARC)



Volunteers

One of the ways you can help our native species is to get involved in 'on the ground conservation' work. We run regular winter management tasks throughout the winter season and below you can find details and dates for tasks coming up. It's a great way to get out there and get some fresh air, exercise and meet new people as well as creating and maintaining suitable habitat for amphibians and reptiles for the coming season and generations to come.

KEY

	Tuesday task
	Wednesday task
	Sunday task

Weald Task Dates

Date	Site	Meeting Place/Grid Ref
04.12.12	Hurtwood	Witley Centre, Haslemere Road, Witley nr Godalming, GU8 5QA
11.12.12	Hankley Common	Witley Centre, Haslemere Road, Witley nr Godalming, GU8 5QA
18.12.12	Hankley Common	Witley Centre, Haslemere Road, Witley nr Godalming, GU8 5QA
06.01.13	Broxhead	Lay-by on left third mile south of Broxhead/Linford Road, B3004 Grid 804377
20.01.13	Kintail	DZ Public Car Park, Truxford Lane Grid 894012
10.02.13	Hankley Gomez	DZ Public Car Park, Truxford Lane Grid 894012
24.02.13	Crosswater Lane	DZ Public Car Park, Truxford Lane Grid 894012
10.03.13	Gong Hill	Lay-by opposite site on Old Frensham Road Grid 853437

Meeting times are 10:00am. Task venues may be subject to change, new volunteers should therefore check venues with Jon Webster prior to attending on **01903245125** or **07973212747** or Rob Free on **01483304016** or **07810184503**. Please ensure you bring a packed lunch, sensible footwear and warm waterproof clothing.



Dorset Task Dates

Dorset Volunteers. Photos: Debbie Clothier

Date	Site	Meeting Place/Grid Ref
02.12.12	Parley Common - Small Pine	Heatherlands Centre/ SU 090 006
05.12.12	Town Common - Small Pine	Avon Causeway/ SZ 137 96
19.12.12	Noon Hill - Small Pine	Noon Hill Road/ SU 099 088

If you would like to join in with a Dorset task or get more details and directions to the sites please contact Richard Sharp on **01202727983** or **07810770565** alternatively you can email him at richard.sharp@arc-trust.org.

All tools, equipment, tea and biscuits are provided. Please wear suitable clothing and footwear and bring your own lunch. Tasks usually run between 10:00am - 15:00pm.



Natterjacks and Industrial sites

By Bill Shaw - Cumbria Natterjack Officer

Most people wouldn't consider an operating steelworks or an active sand and gravel quarry to be a good wildlife habitat but for one species these places can be a real 'Des Res' – the natterjack toad!

Six such sites are home to natterjacks in Cumbria, and the Lottery funded project 'Promoting Cumbria's Natterjack Heritage' is undertaking some research on them. All were buoyant natterjack sites when in operation and they still support them, but it has taken a lot of management effort to keep them afloat after they went in to decline when operations ceased.

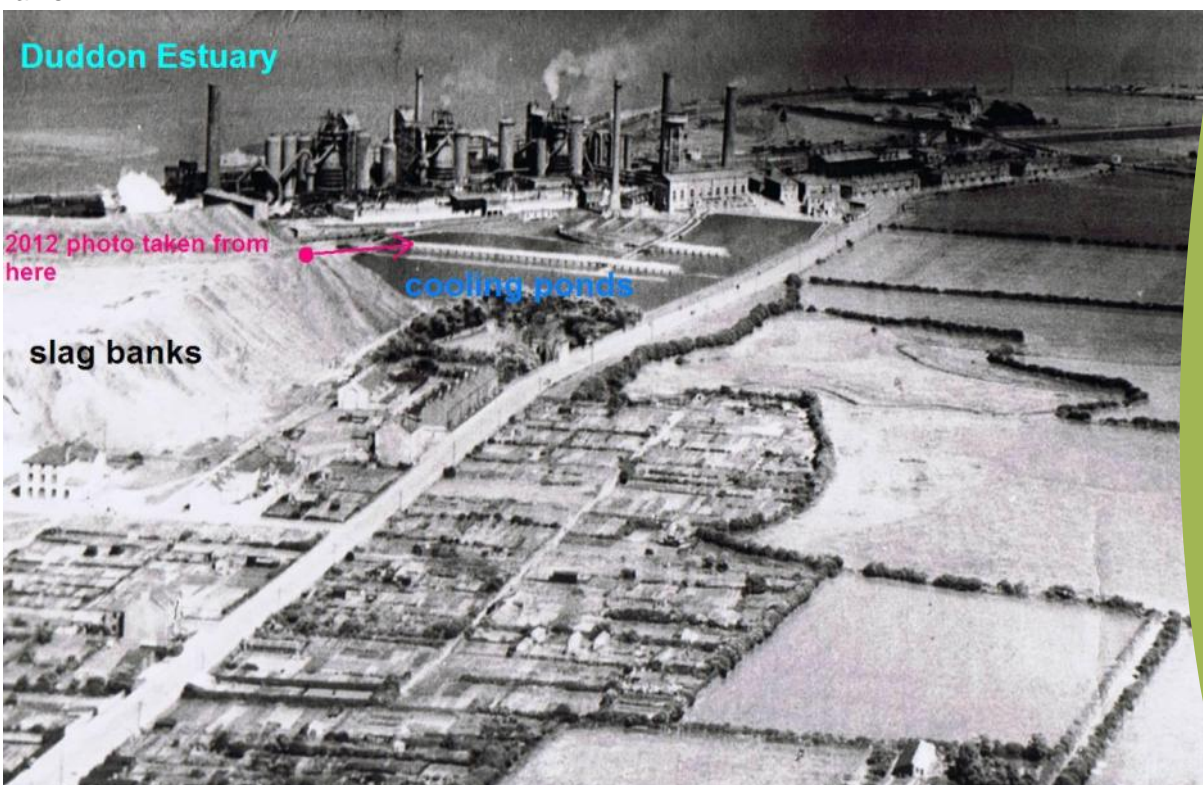


In ecological terms the natterjack is a pioneer species. These hardy species are the first to colonise open and sometimes disturbed habitats. Over time the inexorable process of ecological succession leads to a closed more diverse system from which the pioneers are steadily squeezed out.

A steelworks or sand quarry definitely falls into the 'disturbed habitat' category providing ideal conditions for natterjacks – lots of open, bare ground for foraging, mounds of sand/spoil for hibernation and a variety of unvegetated, unshaded ephemeral (temporary) pools for breeding. Inevitably some natterjacks are killed but the overall result is good recruitment to the population.

I am trying to find old photos of when the sites were in operation and compare this to what they

look like now. I'm also hoping to talk to former employees about how the sites were operated and their memories of natterjacks. Tracking down old photos is proving tricky and a number of lines of enquiry have led to dead ends but perseverance is the key! The photograph below of Millom Iron Works from 1941 shows the many blast furnaces and chimneys of the works which was situated on the edge of Duddon Estuary. Cooling ponds which cover about a hectare are inland of the works and part of the large slag bank remains to this day. Natterjacks too are part of its heritage and legacy. They bred very well in the warm waters of the cooling ponds, where tadpole development must have been super fast! Sadly the works were shut down in 1968. The photo above looks across the site of the old cooling ponds to where the last blast furnace stood. Natterjacks still breed here. All of the iron work buildings have been removed and the site is now a Local Nature Reserve, for its natterjacks, limestone grassland and skylarks.



Millom Iron Works

1941

Photo from Millom Discovery Centre

The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2013



Details for the upcoming Herpetofauna Workers Meeting (#HWM2013) have now been released! 2013 is the Year of the Snake and the start of The Year of Natural Scotland 2013, we can't think of a better way to start the year off than to come along to Edinburgh and celebrate with us!

This annual meeting has been established now for over 25 years and is extremely popular with a wide range of talks and workshops to suit all ages and abilities. This year it is to be held at the Heriot Watt University Edinburgh Conference Centre on **Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th of January**. Presentations will include The impact of chytrid - in the UK and overseas, Scottish frogs in a changing climate, Solving the problems of amphibians in drains and Life on the edge? - Current status of UK adders.

We have a special Burns Night gala dinner on the Saturday night and Jim Foster will be returning to the podium for the superb quiz 'Have I got newts for you' (#HIGNewtsFY)! If you are an ARC Friend, ARG member, BHS member or student you can attend for as little as £70.00 for both days at the early bird day delegate rate. So what are you waiting for..?!

For more information please visit our webpage for the programme and booking form www.arc-trust.org/events or email angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org.



Delegates sit down for lunch at last years' conference.
Photo: Angela Reynolds (ARC)

ARC and ARG UK would like to thank the following sponsors.

(please note: sponsors correct at the time of print)



Hesketh Ecology



Welcome to the new Gloucestershire Amphibian & Reptile Group!

In June this year Scott Passmore and Robin Ward founded Gloucestershire ARG (GlosARG). There has never been a group in this area and Scott and Robin hope to raise awareness and get Gloucestershire recognised as a place for herp conservation. They will be organising walks, talks and training for survey. They also hope to recruit an army of regular volunteers to help manage existing habitats and create new habitats to try and achieve protection status for them.

If you'd like to get involved you can contact the group in various ways.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GlosARG>

Email: info@glosarg.org

Twitter: [@GlosARG](https://twitter.com/GlosARG)

Website: <http://www.glosarg.org/>



To find your local ARG
visit www.arguk.org/local-groups



Wales Amphibian & Reptile Symposium

By Mark Barber - Wales Project Officer

On the 3rd of November the Welsh Symposium, organised by Mark Barber, Wales Project Officer, took place. It was extremely popular with a high turnout and really great feedback. Well done to Mark for organising such a successful event!

This event was organised through ARC's Community Engagement in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Across Wales Project, funded by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). Seventeen speakers and seventy five attendees were present at the Media Resource Centre in Llandrindod Wells from a wide range of backgrounds including; Amphibian and Reptile Group members (ARGs), Ecological Consultants, County Council Ecologists and academics. The presentations included reptile refugia study, Welsh great crested newt modelling and Aesculapian snakes in Wales. The aim of the Symposium was to encourage further action for the conservation of Welsh herpetofauna and to inspire and boost ARG activity and the creation of new ARG groups.



Delegates during presentations. Both photos: © Mark Barber (ARC)

Mark is one of two new Welsh Officers employed by ARC. You might remember him from last year when his bid to the Vodafone World of Difference award was successful and he received funding for a short term post in Wales. His current project aims to encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility for Welsh biodiversity and provide opportunities for people to engage with amphibians and reptiles as part of the shared natural heritage in Wales.

Our second Officer, Peter Hill, started his post as South Wales Habitat Creation Officer in August. This project focuses on grass-roots proactive habitat creation and is funded through the Welsh Government's Ecosystem Resilience and Diversity Fund, which is administered by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). In particular, the project aims to address colony isolation, linking populations by creating further suitable habitat and so reconnecting South Wales' Dragons! Peter will also be working in collaboration with Mark and aims to work at a strategic level, linking NGOs and other groups in herpetofauna conservation activities and raising the profile of Wales' amphibians and reptiles.

For more information on both projects please see our webpage <http://arc-trust.org/welshdragons/>. If you would like to get involved, you can contact Mark at mark.barber@arc-trust.org and Peter at peter.hill@arc-trust.org.

Species Profile

Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)



Female common lizard. Photo: Howard Inns (ARC)

Behaviour

- Bask readily on logs, rocks and fence posts close to dense vegetation, especially in spring.
- Once warmed up they disperse into vegetation to feed, mainly on small insects and spiders.
- Although easily disturbed while basking, common lizards return to exactly the same spot within a few minutes.
- Hibernate underground or in deep litter, usually alone.



Lizards Mating. Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)

Breeding

- Breeding activities start after emergence in February or early March.
- This can involve chases and occasional fights between males.
- After mating, females become noticeably swollen with developing young.
- Females give birth to live young in clutches of 5-9 during July and August.

Habitat

Prefer open, undisturbed habitats with good exposure to the sun, for example:

- Heathlands
- Commons
- Sea cliffs
- Sand dunes
- Railway and road embankments
- Chalk downland
- Open woodland and forest rides
- Moors
- Bogs



Male common lizard. Photo: Howard Inns (ARC)

Appearance / Colour

- Adults are 10-15 cms (from nose to tip of tail)
- Pointed snout
- Both sexes similar in general appearance.
- Usually brown to tan above, often with thin, lighter brown dorso-lateral lines and darker brown flanks.
- Common lizards occur in a variety of colours, with shades of grey, ginger and dull green being common and, melanistic individuals sometimes seen.
- Males are typically patterned with lines of fine black and white flecks, slightly darker flanks and an orange underside.
- Females are notably fatter than the males and generally have a pale back with dark markings and a dark vertebral line, containing dark flecks, and a yellow underside.
- When intact, the tail is long with a rough appearance, though many individuals that have a tail that has been lost and has re-grown shorter and darker.
- Hatchlings are jet black and around an inch long at birth.
- Juveniles turn a copper colour with a very faint hint of adult patterns prior to first hibernation.

Below. Juvenile. Photo: Fred Holmes (ARC)



Above Baby. Photo: Fred Holmes (ARC)

Each year Amphibian and Reptile Conservation accommodates school work placements. The positions are usually well sought after and students undertake an interview in person or over the phone to establish their enthusiasm and suitability for the placement. During their placements students get to work with various members of staff both inside and outside of the office and get to experience a wide range of activities. This year Josh and Dom were selected and here they write about their experience with the Trust.

Josh Parr - Wales

This March I needed to find a work experience placement, for most people this would have been a straightforward task. However, I was interested in herpetology. Being from Wales it was initially a laborious and lugubrious task to find such a placement, but soon I found ARC. When I contacted them they were friendly, supportive and we were soon able to come to an agreement for a placement.

I stayed with ARC for one week from the 9th to the 14th of July. During this time we completed a number of tasks ranging from, protecting natterjack toad tadpoles from swarms of shelducks to surveying heathland for the six native species of reptile. As well as allowing me to participate in these surveys ARC allowed me to handle the animals, taught me about them and the habitat they came from. The habitat was a very important part of the experience as I was shown how it was managed to provide optimum conditions for the reptiles and amphibians without compromising any other species ideal conditions. This is good conservation. This work experience has shown me the two sides of conservation the hands on surveying and monitoring as well as the more formal office management of the operation.

This gave you a true insight into conservation and its workings. By the end of the week I had learnt about and seen most of the reptiles and amphibians in Britain, this includes the non-indigenous species such as green lizards and wall lizards that they were monitoring.

It was a truly remarkable work experience and I would recommend it to anybody. My only problem was that I could not have stayed longer. Thank you ARC!

Right: Natterjack toad at Vitower. Photo: Josh Parr



Dom Wright - Dorset

During my two week placement I had a variety of experiences and learnt a range of skills on quite different tasks. During the first week I saw grass-snakes and sand lizards while out with the field team. When with the field team we did things such as pond maintenance, putting up posts, and also we did tree surgery/felling. I felt very relaxed and comfortable at ARC and doing these things made me realise how important but fun it can be to get involved in conservation work. Everybody here at ARC has been very friendly and helpful and it has definitely made me feel like I made a good choice for my work experience placement.

During the second week I helped with things such as surveying for reptiles, putting up bridleway signs to ensure that horses don't disturb the sand lizard's eggs, and learning about the different habitats that the animals prefer and how to find them in the wild (or at least try to!). In the future I hope to do more work for ARC and help with conservation.

Tail-Enders



How about treating the herpetofauna enthusiast in your life to one of our lovely gifts and help support ARC's work at the same time?

Pin badge - £1.50 + £1.00 P&P

Lanyard - £2.00 + £1.00 P&P

100% Fairtrade cotton bag (37.5cms x 43cms) £2.50 + £1.50 P&P



SPECIAL OFFER!

If you buy all three we will give you a special discounted price of £5.00 (plus £1.50 P&P) for the whole bundle!

Children's books by Leon Hills - see page 4

How Very, Very Nice! – Paperback £4.50 + P&P (1st class - £1.00, 2nd class - £1.25)

And After That He Ate Them! – Paperback £6.00 + P&P (1st class £2.50, 2nd class £2.00)

Hardback - £7.50 + P&P (1st class £2.50, 2nd class £2.00)

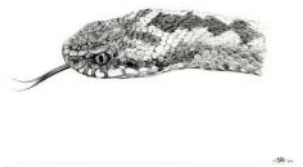
If you haven't bought your christmas cards yet ARC has a set of eight cards with four different designs by artist and author Leon Hills for £3.50 + £1.00 P&P for a set of five cards by our Research & Monitoring Officer Dr John Wilkinson for £2.50 +£1.00 P&P

Blank cards – by our in-house artist Dorset Field Officer Tamlyn Blasdale-Holmes.

Lizard (15.5cms x 15.5cms) £1.50 + 50p P&P

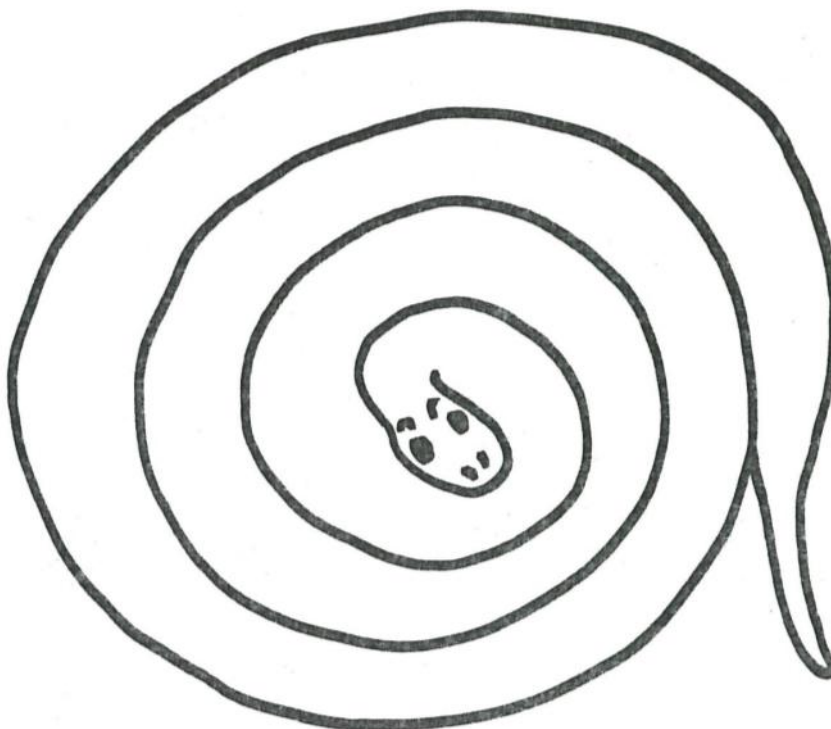
Adder (23cms x 16.3cms) £2.00 +50p P&P

Discounted postage on multiple orders. Please enquire using the details below.



To order any of these items please email enquiries@arc-trust.org or phone the office on **01202391319**. For payment you can send a cheque made payable to Amphibian & Reptile Conservation along with your order, name and address to the Bournemouth office or you can pay by card over the phone.

Tail Enders



For our younger Friends - Is it a grass snake, adder, smooth snake or even a slow-worm? Its up to you! Time to get those colouring pencils out!

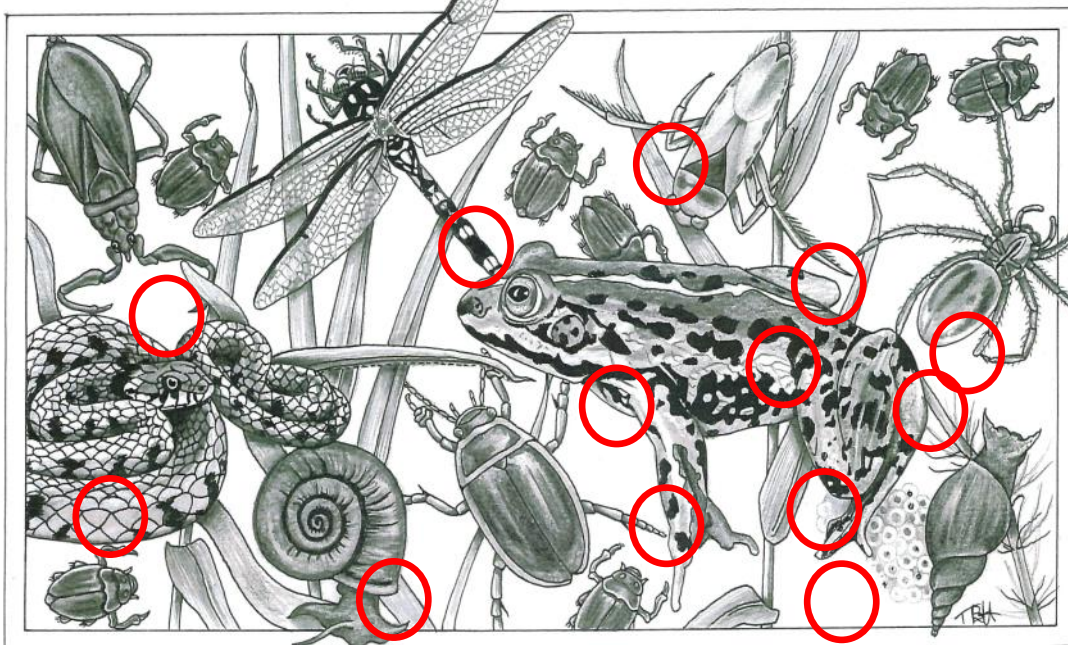
Mystic Toad's Quizword

Fill in the answers below then **rearrange** the **first** letters of each answer to find the name of a very rare invertebrate inhabitant of Dorset heathlands! Here's a clue, it featured in the Jubilee edition of Hop Gossip!

1. Alternative name for grass snake? (6)
2. Frogs' legs can be this. (6)
3. A six-sided European snake??? (4)
4. Compost heaps do this to grass snake eggs. (8)
5. Generic name for larger lizards. (7)
6. Herp of Welsh mythology and heraldry? (6)
7. _____ bellied toad (a few introduced populations in UK).
8. Clue 7's generic name? (7)
9. Generic name of wall lizard group. (8)
10. Warty newts are not this? (6)
11. Generic name for brown or grass frogs. (4)
12. Specific name of Jersey's agile frog. (9)
13. Generic name of slow-worm. (6)
14. Might hybridize with great crested newts? (7,7,4)

The answers will be revealed in the next issue - Good Luck!

Here's the answers to last issues spot the difference - There were 13 to find, Did you get them all?



amphibian and reptile conservation



Amphibian and Reptile Conservation is a national wildlife charity striving for a world where amphibians and reptiles are safeguarded for future generations. With over 20 years experience in the wildlife sector we are committed to the conservation of frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards and the habitats on which they depend.

To find out more or to support Amphibian and Reptile Conservation contact:

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Join Amphibian and Reptile Conservation today and help us give a voice to the UK's amphibians and reptiles - saving species, improving habitats and enhancing lives in the process. It costs as little as £15 a year.

Join online:
www.arc-trust.org/support

Or call **01202 391319**
(9:00am - 5:00pm, Monday - Friday)