



Scottish Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) Records Needed!



Grass snakes (*Natrix natrix*) have recently been confirmed to be present in Scotland and we need your records to help understand their distribution and conservation status! Until recently, it was generally believed that wild grass snakes do not occur in Scotland, although they are sparsely distributed in both northern Cumbria and Northumberland.

While undertaking great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) surveys on behalf of ARC, as part of a predictive habitat modelling project for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on 10th May 2010, Chris Cathrine recorded a grass snake in Dumfries & Galloway. The grass snake was flushed during newt egg searches, and Chris had excellent views of the distinctive pale neck collar as it swam into the pond, confirming the identification. The pond in which the grass snake was recorded was far from any population centres, and located at the border of semi-natural mixed woodland and agricultural land, meaning it cannot be readily explained as an escaped pet, and is likely to be wild or feral. It is interesting to note that grass snakes had previously been reported at this location, but had been dismissed out of hand without further investigation as they were not believed to be present in Scotland.

This find encouraged Caledonian Conservation Ltd. to research other grass snake records in Scotland in partnership with Clyde Amphibian & Reptile Group (CARG) and Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG UK). This research has demonstrated that grass snakes are present in Scotland – with the limited data available suggesting a core range of Dumfries & Galloway and part of the Scottish Borders. Provisional distribution maps and further details of Scottish grass snake research to date can be found at www.caledonianconservation.co.uk/publications.

In order to better understand the distribution of grass snakes in Scotland, their origins and current conservation status, we need your records – old or new. The best way to record these is to enter them on the Scottish Grass Snake Recording Scheme Record Pool site at www.scottishgrasssnakes.org. Please keep your eyes open for grass snakes while undertaking NARRS surveys, and always keep your ears tuned in to anyone who mentions having seen one in Scotland. These records will be invaluable for helping understand and protect Scotland's rarest reptile.

Contact: chris.cathrine@caledonianconservation.co.uk



New NARRS WEBSITE GOES LIVE!

Have a look at www.narrs.org.uk and let us know what you think! The new site is simpler and we hope it will be easier to find the resources you need. **New on-line reporting pages coming soon!**

A Call for Marsh Frog Sightings...

by Aidan Mackay, University of Kent

For all those frog fans who find March is still a bit cold to start surveying, the marsh frog (*Pelophylax ridibundus*) may be the frog to look for. Marsh frogs are a non-native species that was introduced into Romney in Kent in 1935 and which has spread very successfully along waterways. Populations have also been found other parts of England particularly in the South East. They have not been considered a threat to our native amphibians; however there is some evidence that the presence of marsh frogs may be reducing the numbers of common frogs (*Rana temporaria*) in areas of high pond density. My research will be trying to determine if this is the case but I need the locations of as many sightings of marsh frogs as possible.

Marsh frogs are larger than our native frogs and can be a more vivid green but often the best ways of identifying them are either by their call or behaviour. A recording of the call along with more information on identification can be found on the Alien Encounters website: <http://alienencounters.narrs.org.uk/marshfrog.html>. Unlike our native frogs and toads, marsh frogs stay in or around water all year and sunbathe on the banks of ponds from April to September. If you see a frog doing this (or more likely you hear the plop of a frog as it hops in the water), or hear its call please could you record the location of your sighting at <http://alienencounters.narrs.org.uk/reporting.php>



...and Call the Midwife!

by Debbie Fieldsend

Midwife toads have been on our shores and working their way around them (with a little help) for more than 100 years, but what do we know about their interactions with our native amphibians? Next to nothing. On the continent, midwife toads are common and live alongside many of our native amphibians, but there is research which suggests that all is not as amicable as first thought. Common toads, which are themselves in decline, were found to avoid breeding in ponds containing midwife toads. So, is this non-native putting pressure on our native amphibians or are they just another harmless member of the community? This is what I want to find out and this is where I need help: Firstly, to locate ponds which contain midwife toads and another within a kilometer which doesn't have them, and secondly, a surveyor/surveyors willing to survey them. If you have a pond with midwives or they live nearby, or if you want to help survey, please email me at DJE117@bham.ac.uk.

This is an MSc Dissertation project and all organisations and independent individuals taking part will be duly credited, if published, alongside the following supporting institutions; University of Birmingham, Manchester Metropolitan University, the Field Studies Council and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.



Midwife toad © Hannah Powell

Early Easter Newt Hunting!

Easter falls at the end of March in 2013 and the Great Easter Newt Hunt website (<http://newthunt.org/>) will be live again to record sightings of (especially) smooth and palmate newts in your garden ponds. Hunt for newts any time throughout April and report your counts at the website. This is the third year of Newt Hunt so there will be a report on the findings later on in 2013!

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