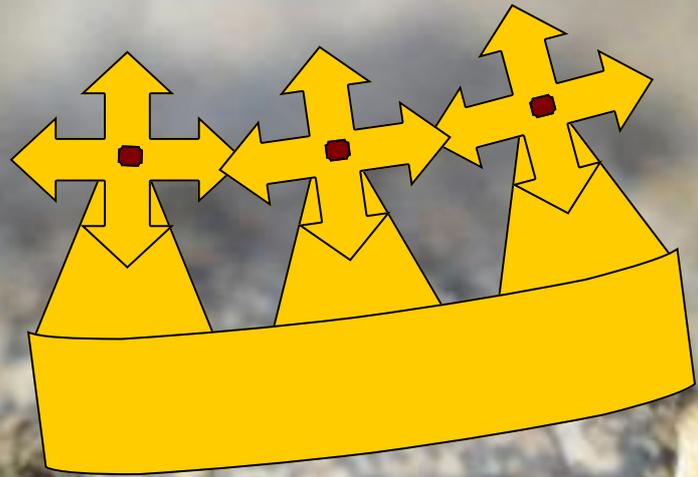


HopGossip!

Queen's Jubilee **Edition!**

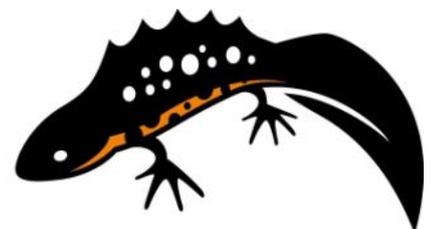
Summer/Autumn 2012



In this issue ...

Adder hysteria in the media
ARG UK Record Pool
Special offer for Friends
& The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2012!

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

Get in touch...

Bournemouth - Head Office

655a Christchurch Road,
Boscombe,
Bournemouth,
Dorset
BH1 4AP

Telephone 01202 391319

Email enquiries@arc-trust.org

www.arc-trust.org

Patrons: Earl of Malmesbury
Hon. Vincent Weir

Chair of Trustees: Jonathan Webster
Chief Executive Officer: Dr Tony Gent

Administration & Finance Officer: Helen Wraight
Administrative Support Officer: Angela Reynolds
Amphibian Conservation Officer: John Buckley
CLARE Project Officer: Sophie Hinton
Cumbria Natterjack Officer: Bill Shaw
Dorset Field Officer/Health & Safety Officer: Richard Sharp
Dorset Field Officer: Richie Johnson
Dorset Field Officer: Tamlyn Blasdale-Holmes
GCN Conservation Officer/ Species Coordinator: Dorothy Driver
GIS & Data Assistant: Ben Limburn
GIS & Data Officer: Andy Arnell
Ponds Project Officer: David Orchard
Reptile Conservation Officer: Nick Moulton
Research & Monitoring Officer: Dr John Wilkinson
Senior Dorset Field Officer: Chris Dresh
Senior Reserves Manager: Gary Powell
Weald Field Officer: John Gaughan
Weald Field Officer: Matthew Dowse
Weald Reserves Manager: Rob Free

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

Contents

- 4 Hop off the Press**
ARC News.
- 6 In the field**
Ladybird Spiders & Special offer for Friends!
- 8 Million Ponds Project - in the North West**
News from the North West.
- 9 Science & Books**
Whether the weather..? and Ali Sparkes.
- 10 Feature**
Adder hysteria in the media.
- 12 Volunteers**
Wealden Mid-week Volunteers.
- 13 Cumbria**
The halfway point of the Heritage Lottery funded Cumbria post and Cockerham Marsh - a natterjack reintroduction project.
- 14 Amphibian & Reptile Groups**
ARG UK Record Pool & SWWARG three-peaks-challenge!
- 15 The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2012**
Read all about the conference held in Telford earlier this year.
- 16 Species Profile**
Common frog (*Rana temporaria*).
- 17 Events**
Come and meet some native reptiles in 2012!
- 18 Tail Enders**
Fun for all ages!

Cover image: Smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*). Chris Dresh (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 Conservation but those of the authors.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation is a Registered Charity.
Charity number 1130188.



From the Editors desk

Welcome to the latest edition of Hop Gossip!

I hope you like our Jubilee Special packed full of stories, Spot the difference *and* a special offer for Friends of ARC!

I must say a big congratulations to David Orchard our Ponds Officer who got married in the Spring! Our third ARC wedding in 12 months! I had a busy winter organising the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2012 with our special guest Nick Baker and you can read about it on page 15.

Our feature is on the hysteria surrounding adders in the media. They seem to be getting a lot of media attention these days. Sadly, it isn't always positive. Often adders are branded as 'evil' and 'ferocious' and unfortunately they get this bad reputation through general lack of public awareness and education. These great creatures aren't to be feared but respected. We here at ARC will always be here doing our bit to champion our only venomous snake. Find out on pages 10-11 how you can do your bit.

This September we are holding our first Friends day out where I really hope to get to meet some of you! Find out more about this special offer on page 7. Whatever you decide to do over the summer months, have a brilliant time! Don't forget to use the ARG UK Record Pool (see page 14) if you come across any amphibians and reptiles! Maybe we will see you out and about at an event near you!

With best wishes,

Angela



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

C.E.O.'s Corner

Dr. Tony Gent



Who knows what the weather will be doing as you are reading this, but as we contemplate what must be the wettest drought on record we are constantly reminded of the vagaries of our weather and our dependence on water. Despite the recent deluges some areas are still effected by drought due to the continuing low ground water levels which shows just how perilous the position regarding our water supply had got. For the Amphibian Surveyor this was all too apparent – those early 'warm wet nights' that often start the migration of toads were few and far between. Many of the ponds were low or dry and the fate of the tadpoles of those amphibians that did manage to spawn looked quite bleak. So while the weather reporters were bemoaning the 'bad weather', the onset of the rains has brought a welcome relief for much of our wildlife. Ironically, though, the flooding in some areas may have brought with it its own problems for amphibians – completely submerging some ponds and making them unsuitable for tadpole survival or causing fish to enter into ponds with great crested newts. Meanwhile groundwater levels have not been restored everywhere with many still lower than in 1976 and unlikely to return to normal levels before winter, and concerns that drought may persist if we have yet another dry winter. So true in many ways is the old saying "It never rains but it pours!"

We've spent a pretty active spring time working alongside other nature conservation organisations to defend the legislation and policies that lie at the heart of the conservation of amphibians and reptiles. A review of the way in which the European 'Habitats Directive' is implemented in England and the creation of a new National Planning Policy Framework had been announced in a particularly 'combative' way by Government suggesting that many of the measures that are so important for wildlife conservation could be swept aside to ease the 'pro-growth' agenda. In the end the final recommendations were altogether better than we feared that they may have been, offering scope for real improvements. However our work is not finished, we now need to keep working with Government to ensure that the opportunities that have been identified bear fruit and we use these to make things better for amphibians and reptiles.

Just as we go to press we are in a position to announce that we have secured funding from the Countryside Council for Wales and Welsh Government for a project officer based in Wales and have appointed Mark Barber. The project will increase community involvement in the conservation of reptiles and amphibians by working with Amphibian and Reptile Groups in Wales in particular. It will also help improve the knowledge about the distribution of amphibians and reptiles in Wales. Although initially it is funded for only one year we will be fundraising to run the project for a further two years. As ARC has been active in Wales on a number of other projects and has long recognised the importance of a post based in the country to really take herpetofauna conservation forwards. We hope this is the beginnings of an expanding role in the country for many years to come.

amphibian and reptile
conservation



ARC's iphone app!

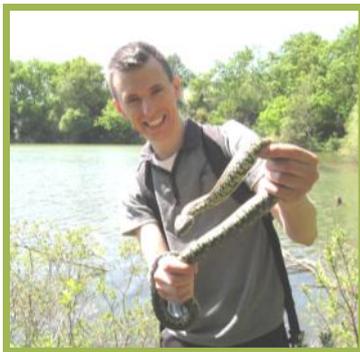


In Autumn last year Amphibian and Reptile Conservation staff worked with popular smartphone and tablet app developers Isoperla and ARG-UK to develop a new app for iPhone and iPad platforms. Based on Isoperla's successful "HerptileId" (which came number 3 in BBC Countryfile's top 10 apps), the new app contains even more ID photos and updated information that will enable users to explore and identify the amphibians and reptiles of the British Isles.

Users can keep a log of reptile and amphibian sightings using the app and take photographs too. Reptile and amphibian sightings provide important conservation data which can be sent in real time to the ARG-UK Record Pool database automatically from the app. This information will be used to help the conservation of our native species. We hope that this exciting collaboration will lead to a greater appreciation and understanding of amphibians and reptiles, and will help ARC to deliver conservation gains.

To find the app, type "Isoperla" or "HerptileId" into the search box in iTunes or the Apple App Store. Existing users can upgrade to the new app for free!

You can also use a QR scanner on your smartphone to scan the image to the right and go straight to the Apple App Store now!



Ben with a large grass snake.
Photo: Ben Limburn (ARC)

Meet our new GIS & Data Assistant - Ben Limburn!

I graduated recently with a degree in Ecology and Wildlife Conservation from Bournemouth University where I focused much of my studies on herpetology and Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Since a young lad I have been involved in reptile and amphibian conservation and have regularly assisted ARC with various activities. In February this year, with funding from Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee I became ARC's GIS and Data Assistant. I am also a member and regular volunteer at the Bournemouth Natural Science Society (BNSS).

The BNSS, formed in 1903, promotes the study of all branches of Science and Natural History. For more than a hundred years, the Society has educated and inspired both its members and the general public by providing a varied programme of lectures, field trips, study groups and exhibitions. Within the BNSS museum collections can be found many specimens from around the world relating to herpetology. Specimens preserved in formaldehyde, include several of our native reptile species such as the adder (*Vipera berus*) and smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*). There are also a number of glass photographic slides featuring snakes and lizards, dating from before 1940. Many of the specimens and slides in the BNSS collections have useful information attached relating to the species, location and date they were found.



Specimen jars from the BNSS.
Photo: Ben Limburn (ARC)

The ARC Rare Species Database holds a large archive of field data relating to all of the UK's amphibian and reptile species and to the management of their habitats. In addition to extensive data collected with targeted survey effort over the last 30 years, the database also contains many historical records. This database allows ARC to monitor species and habitat status in order to inform its conservation efforts. I have recently added data to the ARC Rare Species Database relating to information on the native species held in the BNSS collections. Historical records are important in order to compare the past and present distributions of species and examine change that has occurred in their traditional ranges over time. During my time here at ARC I will be working on a special project called 'Important Herp Areas' which will help identify designated areas most important for herpetofauna conservation and reveal any hotspots outside of protected areas.

A voice for amphibians & reptiles

In chancellor George Osborne's Autumn statement it was announced that a review of the implementation of the Habitats Directive for England was to take place and the development of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

At their initiation the reviews looked ominous and fell far short of anything appropriate to a Government aspiring to be the 'Greenest Government Ever'. This view was shared by many countryside and environment campaigners and ARC was amongst those who provided input both directly and through the Wildlife and Countryside Link with some degree of success.



The Habitats Directive is European Union law that is taken forward in England through domestic legislation and supported by policy measures and processes run by statutory agencies. Despite claims to be contrary to it, the review showed that it did not place a huge and unnecessary burden on industry. DEFRA ministers confirmed the importance of the Directives and that the review would not detract from the need to deliver the goals of this legislation – it just needed to be done more effectively. The focus of the review is very much on the mechanisms of implementation and has advocated a new Major Infrastructure Environment Unit to help Government Departments avoid damaging protected species and habitats; the need for better data and information and new guidance on over-riding public interest. The conclusions were announced on Thursday 22nd March and the report can be seen on DEFRA's website

The new NPPF has been greeted warmly by most conservation bodies and does look towards the planning system providing positive gains for the environment. Green belts are recognised as important but with the drive to preferentially develop 'brownfield sites' we need to ensure that amphibians and reptiles are properly taken into account as the guidance does recognise that some of these are of high ecological value. This document now replaces previous planning guidance including Planning Policy Statement no. 9 (2005) which provided guidance on biodiversity and geological conservation.

The effectiveness of these policies will depend on how they are implemented – there's plenty more that needs to be done before we really see the benefits for wildlife. We'll be doing what we can to make sure the implementation of policy is as good as it can be.

ARC Royal

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation was invited to many of the Queen's Jubilee events to be held all over the country. ARC was pleased to attend events in Yeovil, Somerset and at Richmond Park in London. Not only did it give us the opportunity to honour the 60 year reign of Queen Elizabeth II, but also it gave us the chance to speak to the huge numbers of people who flocked to see the Queen. We took along some native amphibians and reptiles which were as usual tremendously popular with the crowds!



Did you know that there is a link between the Queen and smooth snakes?



The Latin name for the smooth snake is *Coronella austriaca*. Coronella means 'little crown.'

Photo left. Queen Elizabeth II. Above. Gary Powell with a smooth snake at the Yeovil Queen's Jubilee. Both Photos: John Buckley (ARC)

Hop off the Press!



Ladybird Spiders

By Richie Johnson - Dorset Field Officer

Arguably the rarest and cutest heathland invertebrate, the Ladybird spider *Eresus sandaliatus* has been established on one of our Ministry of Defence reserves. The spiders were introduced in 1999 as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. *Eresus* was originally discovered on the Hampshire Dorset Border in 1816. Just seven others were recorded in the next 90 years and then two males were found in 1979 and a female in 1980. Conservation work began in earnest and the colony consisted of about 60 spiders in the early 1990's.

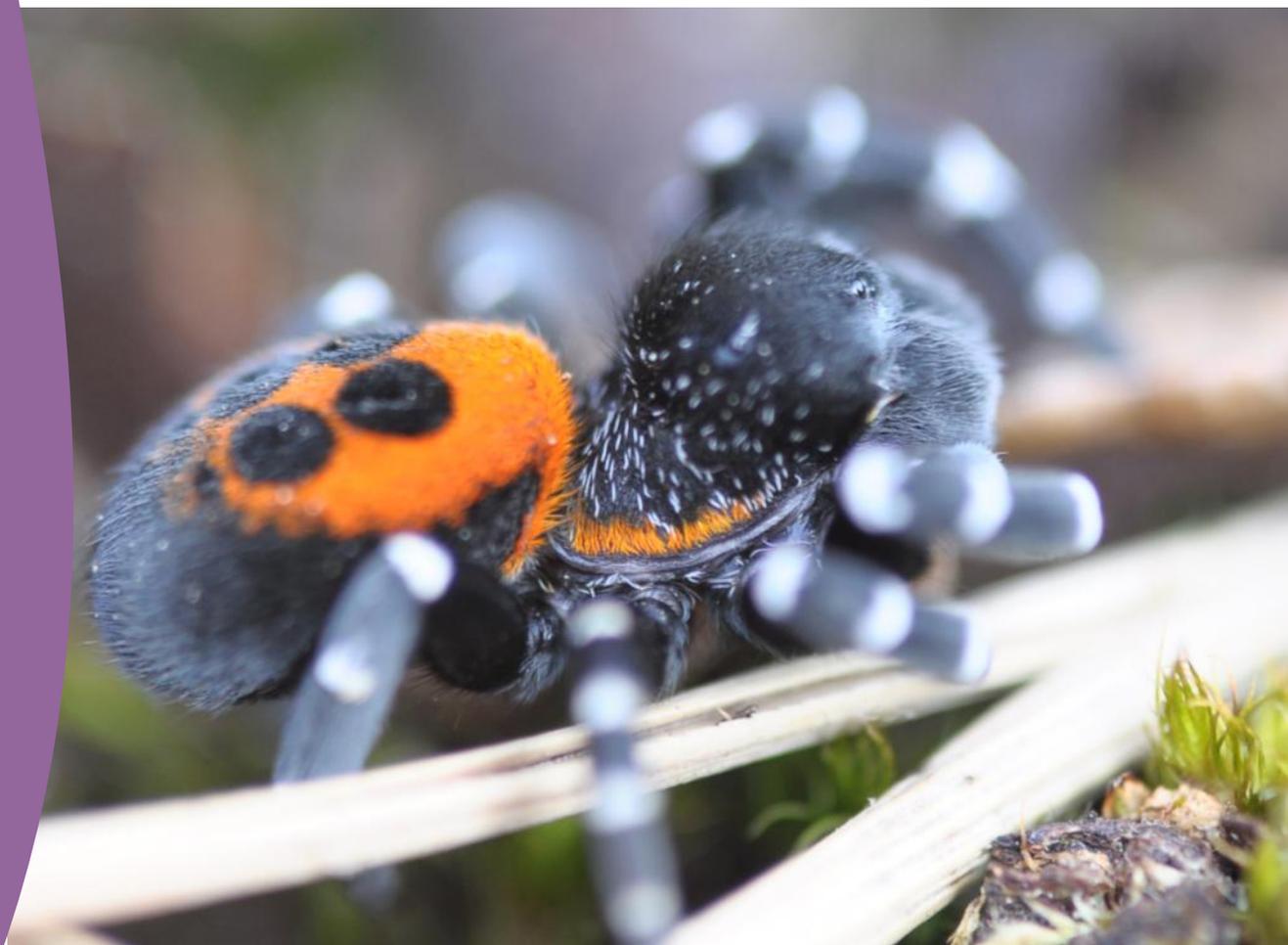
Mature males can be seen above ground searching for females only on hot spring afternoons. A few males might be seen again in the autumn. Otherwise they live hidden in a vertical burrow up to 10cm deep, lined with silk. The entrance is concealed by a small silk canopy, craftily disguised with lichen, perfect for ambushing passing beetles and ants from.

Only adult males sport the ladybird colour scheme, others are velvety black. Females, at a portly 15-20mm are among the UKs heaviest spiders. They live about 4 years but the 10mm male matures and dies within 2 years.

Females rear up to 80 spiderlings, feeding them regurgitated fluids, they then disperse the following summer after eating her. They do not disperse far however, being too large to float on gossamer and having a strong inclination to make a canopy and burrow. This lack of ambition ensures a good number of young spiders survive in a small habitat patch but it is hopeless to expect natural re-colonisation if isolated populations become extinct.

As with amphibians and reptiles, reintroductions provide a magic stepping-stone directly to suitable habitats which are unreachable naturally. The chances of seeing this great looking but reclusive spider on Dorset heaths are now just about zero but that is a significant improvement!

This male was seen in the warm March sun. Photo: © Chris Dresh (ARC)



SPECIAL OFFER FOR ARC FRIENDS!

Come and spend the day with us in Dorset to meet some of the ARC team, learn about our native amphibians and reptiles and get a tour around one of our reserves to see them in the wild!

The day will start with a general introduction to ARC and will be followed by presentations on habitat management, amphibians and reptiles. After a break for lunch we will venture out on to one of our reserves to show you around and go reptile spotting! Live animals will be present for you to meet on the day along with experts to answer any questions you might have.

Friends of ARC can come for free and family and friends of members for £5 per person. Places are limited so book now to avoid disappointment!

For more information and to book your place please email Angela *before Friday 6th August* at angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org.

**Saturday 15th September 2012
The Heatherlands Centre
Parley Common
Dorset**

You could come across any one of these heathland favourites!



Smooth snake, adder & common Lizard. Photos: Chris Dresh (ARC)



Million ponds project - In the North West By David Orchard - Ponds Project Officer

In early spring this year nine amphibian ponds were created to the west of Blackpool, funded by the Million Ponds Project and Biffaward.

The new ponds were created for great crested newts but they will also benefit frogs, toads and smooth newts, which are widespread in the area. There are lots of ponds in and around Blackpool so it's a great place for amphibians generally. Many of these ponds are however unsuitable for great crested newts and due to increasing pressure from development, connectivity between existing populations is likely to become an increasing problem.



Common Toads will benefit.
Photo: Neal Armour-Chelu



Work in progress with an 8 ton excavator
Photo: David Orchard (ARC).

The new ponds will provide excellent breeding sites for great crested newts and other amphibians. They will also increase the diversity of ponds in the landscape and benefit wetland plants and aquatic invertebrates. Many ponds around Blackpool are large, deep, or in a late stage of succession and by creating new ponds we are providing a habitat for early colonisers such as some dragonfly species.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation has been a major partner in phase 1 of the Million Ponds Project (2008-2012) which has created networks of high quality ponds in England and Wales.

A huge resource of pond-related materials is now free to download from the Million Ponds Project website at: <http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds>.



A 13 ton excavator. Photo: David Orchard (ARC)



Whether the Weather..?

By Dr John Wilkinson - Research & Monitoring Officer

As one NARRS surveyor said to me “I keep finding toads and great crested newts under my survey tins but there’s nowhere for them to breed...” He later found the pond where they had previously bred but there was no water in it, hence their hanging around under some reptile tins! This was, of course, a few weeks ago... Since then, most of the UK has been deluged with enormous quantities of rain and ARC Central has had lots of media enquiries as to how the current weather patterns are affecting our amphibians and reptiles.

This is, of course, a tricky question to answer. The past two years have seen cold winters and warm springs, which have seen most of our herpetofauna get off to a good start, followed by dreary, cool summers – which have been rather less good. The 2011-12 winter, however, was relatively warm and most of the spring was dry. Recent research suggests that warmer winters are bad for our herpetofauna – they use up more of their fat reserves when the winter temperature is higher. With a dryer start to spring too, this has left some amphibians with nowhere to breed and no energy to do it anyway!!! The good news is that, for those amphibians that have managed to find their way back to their ponds, the high rainfall and resulting increase in water levels is likely to mean that many ponds will persist longer into the summer, meaning tadpoles should have more time to complete their life-cycles. For species like the great crested newt (which is very susceptible to aquatic predators like fish and diving beetles) starting out in a dry pond may even mean that there are fewer of these predators – so breeding success could even be improved on the last few years!



One of the lucky ones – a male toad awaits females during a 2012 spring shower at a pond in Verwood, Dorset.

Photo: John Wilkinson (ARC)



ARC assists Ali Sparkes

By Claire Buckley

ARC’s been doing some entertaining work recently. Former teacher John Buckley was delighted to receive a phone call from ex-student Ali Sparkes, the well-known children’s author. She is currently writing her series, SWITCH (Serum Which Instigates Total Cellular Hijack). Yes, they’re fantasy books, in which the characters temporarily metamorphose into animals, but Ali and her publishers, Oxford University Press, are scrupulous about verifying the scientific details. So, when she started writing about amphibians and reptiles, where did Ali look for expertise? To her old biology teacher and his colleagues, Tony Gent and Dorothy Driver.

The trio saw an opportunity to reach a wider audience of youngsters as part of ARC’s educational role, which is managed by the Education Project Board within the Trust. As professionals, they recommended various alterations to Ali’s text; for example, clarifying the difference between a poisonous snake (which may affect someone who eats it) and a venomous snake (which will inject venom with its bite). Turning to Ross Collins’ illustrations, ARC suggested more modifications; for instance, clearly showing the markings and ridges of the leatherback turtle (see photo).



A recent promotional photo shoot for the launch of ‘Turtle Terror.’ Thanks to the Marine Conservation Society for letting us borrow the turtle! Angela Reynolds, Tony Gent, John Buckley & Ali Sparkes. Photo: © Ali Sparkes.

John remembers Ali from Bitterne Park Comprehensive School, Southampton, where she was a hard-working pupil fascinated by the small critters found in the local woods and fields. Another of her interests was playing with words: as a response to history homework (set by me) Ali would produce well-penned poems, and as a hobby she created illustrated tales in the style of the Famous Five. She became first a journalist, then the author of over 30 books and winner of the Blue Peter Award for Children’s Fiction. Have a look on the website www.switch-books.co.uk, which features such inviting titles as *Frog Freak Out!* and *Newt Nemesis*.

Adder hysteria in the media

By Dr Chris Glead-Owen - Director & Principle Ecologist at CGO Ecology

The media always enjoys inducing a good bout of public hysteria, and in the last week or two we have seen the same old story peddled out: adders are dangerous, and the public should be warned! What's more, people should stop enjoying their holidays and countryside walks, and start panicking about adder bites instead!

So what caused the current/recent media storm? Believe it or not, it was a press release from, the Health Protection Agency (HPA) entitled "County walking? Think snakes..." (issued 23/5/12). Yes, a government agency sought to whip up public concern, based on the flawed premise that it might protect people. A cynical observer might argue that they did it for its newsworthiness, rather than its high priority on the list of dangers to humans. The media began to pick up on the 'story' almost immediately, including national newspapers and BBC Radio 2's Jeremy Vine Show (24/5/12). I have to say that I was actually quite pleasantly surprised by the treatment that adders got on Jeremy Vine's show; and not being a fan personally, I was braced for the worst.

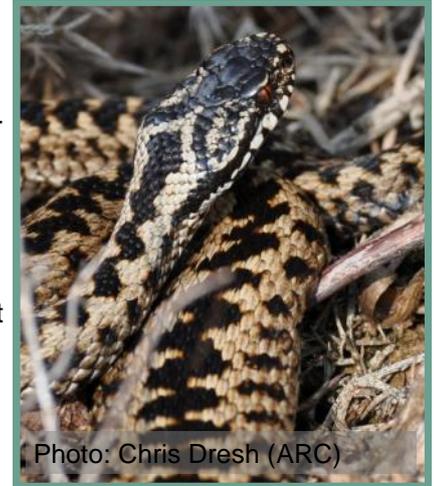


Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)



Photo: Fred Holmes (ARC)

Several listeners called in with their personal stories of adder bites, including one old man recalling his sister's death by adder bite on D-Day (1944). Another lady recounted her 16-year old son bringing home a baby adder, which then bit him; and having to take him to casualty with a swollen arm. She was remarkably philosophical about it, and rather blamed her son for bothering the adder. Her husband even took the baby adder back to the woods whence it came, and released it!

Of course not everyone will be so sanguine or sympathetic upon hearing or reading this latest media story from the HPA. Indeed, it is media campaigns like this that tend to precipitate a tidal wave of persecution from

the public. At a time when adders are apparently suffering declines in many parts of Britain, this is not good news for them. Adders are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which forbids killing or injury. Nevertheless, many countryside land managers still tend to treat them with contempt. Most of us would hope that dead adders hanging from fence-posts are a thing of the past, but each time media hysteria is whipped up, the risk is renewed.

It hasn't all been bad press for adders this year though. At the tail end of 2012, there was a spot of media attention brought on by the excellent conference run by Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group. The ensuing media attention even precipitated a parliamentary question from Labour MP Fiona O'Donnell to the Environment Secretary, Caroline Spelman.

Junior Minister and Conservative MP Richard Benyon responded: "Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales are supporting the work of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and local amphibian and reptile groups to assess adder populations. Early results of a national reptile survey [NARRS] show that adders were recorded in only 7% of the sample plots studied. If the final report confirms a worrying decline in this species, the three agencies will build on



Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)

existing work with partner organisations and volunteers to enhance strategies to address it." (Hansard) This led to a Natural England-funded project led by Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, to assess the status of adders across England. The 'Adder Status Project' (ASP) sought to determine how adders are faring now, and how we ought to monitor them and conserve them in the future. I co-authored the resulting report with Steve Langham of Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group, and ARC will be publishing it in the very near future.

A common thread picked up from many sources is that adders are not most threatened by 'traditional' factors like urbanisation, afforestation or agriculture; it's often well-intended conservation practices - such as indiscriminate flailing of gorse - that are to blame for local adders deaths and population declines. ASP used recent and historical records to map the distribution of adders across England. Steve constructed a digital mapping system that attempts to predict where adders are now, and where they were in the past. This gives us a 'condition assessment': a basis for recommending remedial action. ASP is a work in progress, but current estimates suggest that adders are present in only about 7% of monads (1km squares) in England, having undergone significant declines. (This matches the preliminary NARRS results remarkably well). Local survey volunteers consistently reported rapid adder declines in many parts of the country, and they have become extinct in several counties. This is by no means a universal picture though; some upland areas still have very healthy adder populations. But with declines evident in many areas, the overall picture is a distinct cause for concern.

So what on earth has gone wrong? Why are adders doing so badly on some nature reserves? Nature conservation is a complex challenge, and reserve managers are often under intense pressure to follow a specific management regime. This might involve scrub clearance or intensive grazing - both potentially harmful to adder populations. Clearly the best way forward is to strike a balance between all interests. Ideally, adders should feature in management plans alongside their furry and feathery cousins and also plants; but they rarely do. A more realistic goal is to talk to individual land managers, raising awareness about sensitive adder hibernation areas. This is where local adder-friendly volunteers come in.

A project called 'Make The Adder Count' (www.maketheaddercount.org) encourages volunteers to raise awareness about adder hibernation areas, and to count adders when they emerge from hibernation each spring. Around 100 sites are being monitored this way each year, to build a picture of population trends. A more informal survey is the 'Add an Adder' website (www.adder.org.uk). Anyone can submit records to it, and it simply asks you to recount your adder anecdotes, whether recent or a distant childhood memory. Well over 4,000 records have been submitted so far, and it is remarkable how many fascinating accounts they have brought to light. Several of the local amphibian and reptile groups (ARGs) have adder conservation and recording projects too. Find your local groups on the ARG UK website (www.arguk.org).



Photo: Fred Holmes (ARC)

Volunteers



Wealden Mid-Week Volunteers By Matt Dowse - Wealden Field Officer

The Weald mid-week volunteer group has been running since January, meeting every Thursday to carry out practical conservation tasks on our reserves in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire. To date, the group has carried out 15 tasks – ranging from scrub clearance and pine pulling, to fencing, pond maintenance and creating sandy traces – and has contributed an impressive 335 voluntary hours towards the Trust’s work.

But it hasn’t been all sweat and hard labour! As well as sharing (well deserved) cups of tea and biscuits around the fire at break times, the group has also had the opportunity to talk about the habitats being managed, and look for some of the rare animals being protected and conserved. Hopefully this has improved everyone’s ability to find and identify reptiles.

All of the group’s tasks have taken place on exceptionally important sites for amphibians and reptiles. For example Hankley Gomez, which has indigenous populations of all six native terrestrial reptile species, and Woolmer Forest, which supports the last indigenous population of natterjack toads in the south.

Volunteers are vital to the work ARC carries out. If you are interested in volunteering with ARC in Surrey, contact Matthew Dowse, Wealden Field Officer at matthew.dowse@arc-trust.org or **07810 770566**.

Above right: Volunteers at work. Below: Matt with some of his volunteers. Photos: Matt Dowse (ARC)





Promoting Cumbria's Natterjack Heritage

By Bill Shaw - Cumbria Natterjack Officer

This one year Heritage Lottery funded project is now half way through and is progressing well. Project activities include:

1. Seven volunteer work parties have taken place at natterjack sites. The main job involved on these was clearing scrub. This is more favourable to common toads, and if left unchecked will encroach on to the bare ground or short vegetation that natterjacks require.
2. Two Natterjack Ecology and Conservation training courses have been held for Natural England staff and environmental consultants.
3. A newsletter, called 'Natterings' has been produced. An on-line system for recording natterjacks has been developed and two training courses are to be held for site monitors.
4. A national survey has been organised – Natterjacks Calling – in an attempt to identify hitherto undiscovered natterjack sites. To take part see the ARC website <http://www.arc-trust.org/cumbria/calling-natterjacks.php>.
5. The first of a series of eight guided walks has been held at Haverigg in south Cumbria. The natterjacks were in fine voice and were also seen in their burrows.

Cockerham Marsh - A natterjack reintroduction Project

A small area of land at Cockerham Marsh in north Lancashire was formerly a long standing site for natterjacks. It had a stable population in the 1970's, but it declined and became extinct within ten years of the construction of a sea-wall. A reintroduction project that took place between 2002 and 2004 enjoyed short term success but now, unfortunately, it has to be concluded that natterjacks are again extinct on the site.

Since then the land management system in the area has changed dramatically as the key farm in the area, Braides Farm, has entered into the Governments Environmental Stewardship scheme, primarily to benefit breeding wading birds. The current agricultural practices of pasture fields and haymeadows is linked in with changes in the land drainage system, which keeps the water on the fields into the early summer. This has greatly improved the suitability of the habitat, not only for birds, but also natterjacks.



The work party at Cockerham. Photo: Bill Shaw (ARC)

After discussions with the landowner, and staff from Natural England and ARC, it has been agreed that the time is right to have another attempt at reintroducing natterjacks. Some preparation work is currently being undertaken: Some of the gorse scrub is being removed, seven breeding pools will be dug over the summer and the field is being grazed by Belted Galloway cattle, which are doing a great job controlling the rush growth. The plan is to start the reintroduction, using natterjack stock from Sandscale Haws in south Cumbria, in the spring of 2013.

Have you seen any amphibians or reptiles in the UK?
Put them in the ARG UK Record Pool!



ARG UK has been busy developing an online recording system for local ARGs and other interested parties to record sightings from around the UK. The Record Pool is a national web based amphibian and reptile recording database and used as a resource to collect data through the UK in the interest of monitoring native populations for the purposes of conservation and ecology.



Great crested newt . Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)

In the beginning the record pool page contained a basic sightings card and links to identification guides and ID apps for iPhones and iPads.

Now, the second phase is finished and the next generation of data recording is available to use. This is in the form of a survey sheet designed for recording multiple records from a single site over a period of time or multiple sites.

The data collected through the record pool will be sent to the relevant local recorders and local record centres. Consultants will be encouraged to use these sheets to record newt survey, translocation and monitoring data. All data recorded remains the copyright of the holder.

So, if you are recording an *ad hoc* sighting of the frog in your back garden or you are a professional recorder visit the record pool and give it a go!

Three-peaks-challenge!

By Stuart Graham - South West Wales Amphibian & Reptile Group

At 2pm on the 4th of May Garry Smith, Lee Bagnall, Adam Barker and myself stood at the foot of Ben Nevis for the start of our 24 hour challenge. The aim was then to go on to Scafell Pike and end by conquering Snowdon. Finally, on Saturday 5th May, after 27 hours and 56 minutes, three of the four man team finally finished the three-peaks-challenge. All in all everything went to plan; except running over the 24 hours and Garry having an accident near the top of Ben Nevis, twisting his knee and rendering him out of Scafell Pike and Snowdon!

We have to date raised just under £1000 for the Make-A-Wish-Foundation-UK; which grants magical wishes to children and young people fighting life threatening conditions. We are also expecting more donations to come in over the next couple of weeks.

Just a quick and appreciative thank you to all those who have sponsored us in our challenge and for those that would still like to donate; our page is <http://www.justgiving.com/Three-Peaks-Challenge-make-a-wish>



Right: The team during their challenge! Lee Bagnall, Adam Barker, Stuart Graham & Garry Smith. Photo: Garry Smith.

New chair for ARG UK!

Congratulations to Chris Monk from Derbyshire ARG who is the newly appointed chair of ARG UK. We wish you all the best in your new role! ARC's David Orchard stood down at the AGM, after two years as chairman, at the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting back in January.

Take a look at the ARG UK website to see what's going on in your local area and all over the country. Perhaps you would like to join your local ARG or start up a group if you live in an area that doesn't already have one. <http://www.arguk.org/>



The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2012

By Angela Reynolds - HWM 2012 Team/ Editor

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and ARG UK were proud to host this year's Herpetofauna Workers Meeting at the Telford International Centre in Shropshire where a fun time was had by all. There was a lot of anticipation with the return of the now infamous herpetological quiz – 'Have I got newts for you?' and our special guest keynote speaker - naturalist, author and broadcaster Nick Baker! On top of this we had a weekend packed full of presentations and workshops.

There was plenty to keep delegates busy at break times whilst they tucked in to tea and biscuits as ARG UK, ARC, Pond Conservation, the British Herpetological Society and Wildcare had stalls armed with lots of goodies and information.

The presentations were very varied and included genetics in UK adder conservation, the pool frog reintroduction update, the UK sand lizard captive breeding and reintroduction programme and an update on chytrid in the UK, all with lots of talking points. The workshops were equally engaging with lots of ideas and lively discussions taking place.

The gala dinner was very good fun with a three course meal, a few drinks and great company, not to mention the entertainment we all got from the quiz hosted by our very own Dr John Wilkinson! "This is the best quiz I have ever been to!" Nick Baker exclaimed! Shortly afterwards Nick drew the raffle, which raised more than £400 for the ARG UK 100% fund. <http://www.arguk.org/100-fund>

Sunday seemed to fly by in much the same way as the first day – even for those with sore heads from the night before! Nick Baker ended the conference with his presentation 'Tales of scales – Beyond the pond. The trials and adventures of an amateur herpetologist' He left us with an important message which was to keep doing what we are doing but do it **LOUDER!**

Before we knew it the conference was over for another year. Everybody leaves feeling the same way, totally shattered but enthused and inspired for the season ahead. New things learned and discovered, ideas and thoughts exchanged, new friendships and contacts gained. The weekend was a success! Thank you to all of our sponsors and to all who helped out with the organising. We couldn't do it without you!

If you would like to read more you can find the write up along with the programme and footage of Nick Baker on the website at <http://www.arc-trust.org/events/HWM.php>



Nick Baker during his keynote speech. Photo: Jon Cranfield (ARG UK)



Nick Baker with ARC staff. From top left: Dr Tony Gent, Gary Powell, Matthew Dowse, David Orchard, Richard Sharp, Andy Arnell and Dr John Wilkinson. From front left: Dorothy Driver, Helen Wraight, Angela Reynolds & Sophie Hinton. Photo: Angela Reynolds (ARC)

Species Profile

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)



Juvenile common frog. Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)

Behaviour

- Hibernate in damp conditions close to water or submerged in mud at the bottom of a pond between October and February.
- Unlike most water frogs, common frogs don't bask in the sun.
- Outside of breeding season adults are secretive and hide in damp vegetation but will return to ponds during dry spells.
- Can change colour in response to variations in light and temperature.



An extreme colour variation. Photo: Fred Holmes (ARC)

Breeding

- Breed in water from February to April.
- Mating is frantic and when spawning is over most adults disperse.
- Spawn is laid in shallow sunny areas of ponds in clumps containing up to 2,000 eggs. These are black and surrounded by a clear jelly.
- Tadpoles hatch within two weeks and froglets leave the pond surrounds in damp weather from June to September.

Habitat

Wide ranging throughout Britain which includes

- Damp grassland.
- Marshes.
- Moorland.
- Woodland.
- Gardens.
- Hedgerows.
- Parks.
- Upland habitats up to 1,000 metres.
- Use ponds, lake edges, ditches, puddles or slow flowing water.



Tadpole. Photo: Howard Inns (ARC)

Appearance/ colour

- Adults are 6 - 9 cms
- Smooth skin.
- Round snout.
- Dark patch behind each eye.
- Breeding males are grey with a light blue throat. Males also have a 'nuptial pad' on their thumbs, which is a breeding gland triggered by hormones, and helps them grip on to females.
- Females are similar but flanks often have areas of yellow or red dotted with 'pearly' rough spots .
- Both sexes have an off white underside.
- Irregular dark banding on back legs and long webbed toes.
- Highly variable colours and markings including grey, olive or brown often with hints of red or purple. Extreme variants including red, yellow, orange or albino aren't infrequent.
- Tadpoles are brown with hints of green, speckled with tiny gold or copper spots and have a pointed tail tip.

Below. Frogs in amplexus (mating)
Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)



Above
Frog spawn.
Photo: Chris Dresh (ARC)

We have a number of events planned for this year up and down the country. Come and visit us at our brightly coloured stand and meet some of our native species of reptile.

Events enable us an opportunity to reach a variety of people and answer a wide range of questions. We can give out literature and provide advice on identification. The opportunity for people to see our native species live quashes the myth that snakes are slimy and scary creatures!



June

- 17th **Milland Fair** - Milland Recreation Field, Milland, West Sussex - 11:00am - 17:00pm
- 19th **Guided walk** - Grune Peninsular, Solway Coast Discovery Centre, Liddell Street, Silloth, Cumbria - 13: 00pm Please email william.shaw@arc-trust.org

July

- 15th **Purbeck Heathland Awareness Day** - Knoll Beach car park and Discovery Centre, Studland, Dorset - 11:00am - 15:00pm
- 29th **Avon Heath Wild Sunday** - Avon Heath Country Park, Birch road, Ringwood, BH24 2DA. 01425 478082
- 29th **Rustic Sunday** - Rural Life Centre, Tilford, Surrey, GU10 2DL - 10:00 am - 17:00pm.

August

- 1st **Reptile Safari** - Iping Common - 14:00pm - 16:30pm Please email rob.free@arc-trust.org for further information.
- 25th **Stock Gaylard Oak Fair** - Sturminster Newton, Dorset, DT10 2BG (Tickets needed) 10:00am
- 27th **Peaslake Fair** - Peaslake, Surrey (off the A25 by Gomshall) - 13:00pm - 17:00pm

September

- 8th - 9th **Thames Festival** - Blue ribbon Village, Mallside, Oxo Tower Wharf, Bargehouse Street, London, SE1 9PH www.thamesfestival.org (to be confirmed)

October

- 14th **Blackmoor Apple Day** - Blackmoor Estate, Blackmoor, Liss, Hampshire, GU33 6BS - 10:00am - 16:30pm
- 20th - 21st **Wildlife Expo** - Alexandra Palace, Haringie, London (to be confirmed)

Don't forget to check out our website for any additional events <http://www.arc-trust.org/events/>

Top right: Meet some reptiles! Below left: Have a go at our quiz! Photos: Angela Reynolds (ARC) Below right: Thames Festival 2011. Photo: Sophie Hinton (ARC)



Tail-Enders



Our very own in-house artist Tamlyn Blasdale-Holmes has been working very hard to produce the Tail-Enders for this special issue of Hop Gossip and here is his story. We've had a lot of fun playing Spot the difference - great entertainment for all ages and our younger members might also like to colour in the adder below!



Working as part of the ARC Field Team I have been lucky enough to see first hand some of the amazing creatures our heathland has to offer, so naturally my passion for our native reptiles and amphibians has only grown over the last four years.

In between carrying out the myriad of day to day tasks which are presented to the Field Team, and a busy family life, I try to find the time for another passion close to my heart, drawing. For most of my life I have been a keen artist and I have undertaken a number of commissions and over the years have had many exhibitions.

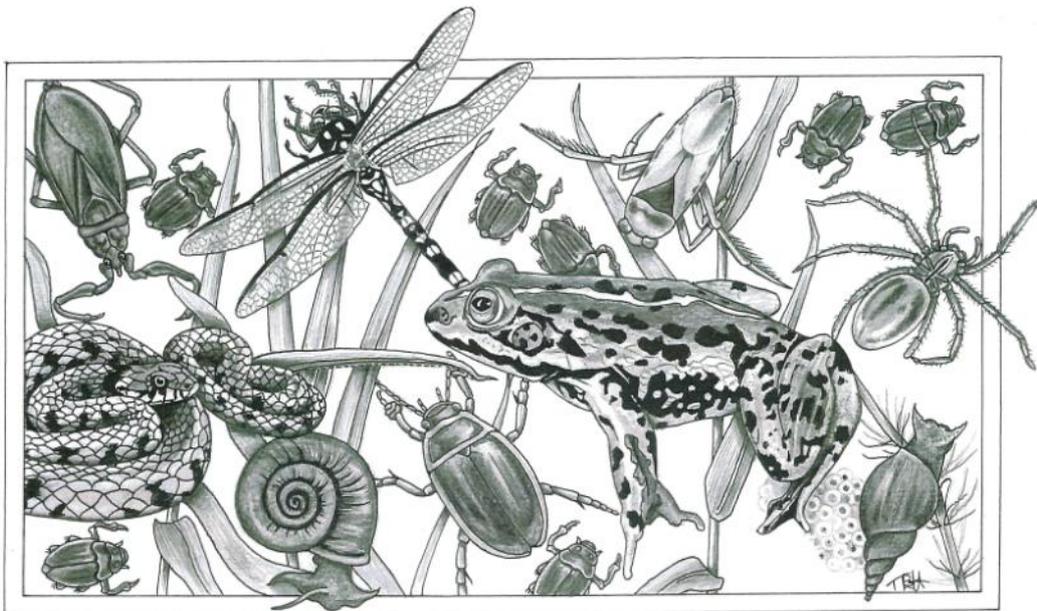
Now I've taken a new step with my artwork and am trying to capture the wildlife I'm seeing every day, this poses new challenges with the techniques I use. I enjoy exploring ways of bringing to life the structures, tones and intricate patterns that are familiar with reptiles and amphibians. The techniques I already use lend themselves well to this new work.



Tail-Enders

Spot the difference - There are 13 to find, Good Luck!

Artwork by
Tamlyn Blasdale-Holmes



Did you spot
the tiny froglet
in the last
issue?

Photo kindly provided
by Florie May.

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:

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
655A Christchurch Road
Boscombe
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH1 4AP
Tel: 01202 391319
Fax: 01202 392785
Email: enquiries@arc-trust.org

www.arc-trust.org

follow us on Twitter - http://www.twitter.com/ARC_bytes

Find us on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/#!/ARCTrust>

Become a Friend!

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)