

# HopGossip!

Summer/ Autumn 2013



In this issue ...

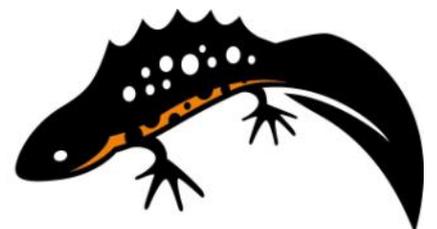
Helping hibernating adders

Huglekultur

The State of Nature Report

& Observations from a Nottinghamshire toad patroller

**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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Cover image: Huglekultur mound.  
Illustration supplied by Cutzero Designs.  
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.

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## From the Editors desk

Welcome to the latest edition of *Hop Gossip*!

We've all been keeping very busy since the last issue and have a packed newsletter for you enjoy. There's something for everybody from hibernating adders to huglekultur to a board game.

The State of Nature report has been a big focus for us this year. Published by RSPB, it draws on data from 25 of the UK's leading wildlife groups, including ARC. The report is the first of its kind and gives the clearest picture yet of the state of the UK's wildlife. The picture is disturbing - nature is in trouble and wildlife is being lost at an alarming rate. The threats are not going to simply go away and the partnership of 25 will be challenging all decision makers to think and act differently. We all have a responsibility to play our part We encourage you to get out and do your bit for nature in whatever ways you can, not just for our amphibians and reptiles but for all species and their habitats.

It's time to get creative in our latest competition to design the front cover of the next *Hop Gossip* - find out how to enter on page 18. I'm really looking forward to seeing what you can come up with.

Following the success of the last Friends Day we have decided to hold the next one in Surrey. Please see the enclosed flyer for more details. I hope to see you there!

Have a very happy summer and don't forget to add your amphibian & reptile sightings to the Record Pool (see page 14).

With best wishes,

Angela

Angela Reynolds  
Hop Gossip Editor  
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## C.E.O.'s Corner

Dr. Tony Gent



ARC staff are active members of the European Herpetological Society (Societas Europaea Herpetologica [SEH]) working in particular through the society's conservation committee. August will see SEH's 17th European Congress of Herpetology in Veszprém, Hungary. The conference is dedicated to the memory of Olivér György Dely, the great Hungarian herpetologist, curator of Herpetology Collection of the Hungarian Natural History Museum for more than 50 years who died in 2003. It is not uncommon for 'learned societies' to dedicate meetings or volumes of their journals to eminent scientists or practitioners who have made a mark in their field, and that got me thinking – what makes a great herpetologist?

Traditionally many of the great names in European herpetology have worked in museums, collecting, identifying, naming and curating large numbers of specimens of amphibians and reptiles from around the World. In ARC, while appreciating the importance of the work of these individuals, we would tend to look more to those who have made a difference for the conservation of European herpetofauna for offering our own personal accolades.

It wasn't until In the late 1960s a dedicated Conservation Committee was established in the British Herpetological Society. Since then many people have argued, charmed, educated, convinced and on occasions beaten home the message to see the profile of herpetofauna raised and their conservation needs met. Through the campaigning work of Dr Keith Corbett & Tom Langton, the gentle, enthusiastic persuasion of the late Dr Julia Wycherley; the scientific rigor of Professor Trevor Beebee, media champions such as Steve Backshall and Nick Baker and even politicians like Ken Livingstone broaden the appeal of the species. Gains have been made and all deserve a place on our list of people who have made a difference.

By listing individuals though, we tend to underplay the significance of the contribution that everybody else makes. Throughout the country there are many active volunteers, land managers, scientists and conservation professionals all playing their parts in recording, protecting and conserving these species. We also have many, many more people who are interested and passionate about these reptiles and amphibians for their own sakes. Ultimately it is this collective strength that will make a positive difference to the future of these animals in the World.

By fighting the corner for our frogs, newts, lizards and snakes in whatever way you can, you make a great contribution to herpetology too.

amphibian and reptile  
conservation



## New Cumbria & Scotland Officers



Dr Pete Minting has been appointed to lead ARC's new Scottish Project, based at the offices of Caledonian Conservation in Hamilton. ARC recently secured three years of funding for the project from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Scotland has a surprising variety of amphibians and reptiles, with all native UK mainland species present (except the smooth snake and pool frog). Grass snakes have been recorded in Dumfriesshire and there is an introduced population of sand lizards on the island of Coll.

The main aim of the project is to get more people interested and involved in the conservation of reptiles and amphibians in Scotland. ARC is keen to support existing amphibian and reptile groups (ARGs), encourage new Citizen Science projects and increase the level of monitoring which takes place, via schemes such as the National Amphibian & Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS). Research undertaken by ARC has shown that for many species, a high level of monitoring is necessary in order to detect population change. Scotland hosts large populations of species which are often regarded as common (such as the common toad and adder) but appear to be declining in other parts of the UK. ARC also hopes to improve habitat conditions for species which are already rare in Scotland, such as the natterjack toad and great crested newt, with the aid of agricultural subsidy schemes. Surveys completed with the help of a network of volunteers at Scottish natterjack sites in 2011-2012 have highlighted areas which could benefit from habitat work. Much of this work could be completed by teams of volunteers.

Pete Minting has previously worked for ARC in Scotland during 2012 and completed his PhD on the effects of chytrid fungus on natterjack toad populations in Cumbria. He said: "I can't wait to get started, there's loads of potential here to do good work for wildlife and people. There are many health benefits to being outdoors and taking an interest in wildlife." Welcome on board Pete!

Hello! I'm Ruth and am thrilled to be officially joining ARC's team by becoming Cumbria's new Natterjack Officer.

Born in Africa and with my mum's passion for wildlife, I grew up in a menagerie of exotic orphans, including night apes (small bush baby), duikers (small antelope) and a jackal! Perhaps not surprising, starting with playmates like those my fascination for all living creatures has continued to flourish. Initially I studied Ecology and Conservation at Myerscough College. Later I graduated with a Bachelor Honours degree, in Environmental Management from the University of Central Lancashire.

I have been involved with ARC, and The HCT before then, since 2004. I oversaw a couple of paid projects to aid natterjack survival and also monitored a couple of local breeding sites, in and around Millom. More recently I worked for Natural England in the Land Management division, before being enticed away by ARC!

Since starting in April, my feet haven't touched the ground! I have been out and about and already met some of our incredibly dedicated and invaluable recorders and volunteers. I thoroughly enjoy meeting each and every one, being shown the sites, hearing their history and discussing new possibilities.

My main aim is to build on Bill's excellent work, continue to engage with landowners and Natural England to increase connectivity for natterjacks along Cumbria's coastline. I plan to co-ordinate, encourage and support recorders and volunteers, increase usage of our online database "Living Record" and monitor a number of sites myself. Trying to squeeze all of that into my contracted, 24 hours a week is proving to be a challenge!

### In other staff news...

In January little Betty was born to very proud parents Rob Free and his wife Maggie. Welcome to the world Betty!

Kim Newman married Alex Boughey in a fabulous green/eco themed wedding and tipi reception. It was a beautiful sunny wedding in a wonderful location. Congratulations!

Sadly we are losing our GIS and Data Officer Andy Arnell in June. Andy is an extremely popular member of the team and we wish him all the best in his new role at the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge.



Andy Arnell, Kim Boughey (was Newman), Alex Boughey, Angela Reynolds and Richie Johnson. Photo by Tim Burdon



## Dominik's Wildlife Fund

By Angela Reynolds - Editor

On 22nd March Amphibian & Reptile Conservation staff had the pleasure of attending the launch night of Dominik's Wildlife Fund at the Colbury Memorial Hall near Southampton.



Dominik Reynolds, who has just turned 13, has worked as a volunteer for the RSPB for the last four years. We were introduced at our ARC Friends Day held last year where he made an impression on all of us. He also wrote the feature article in the last issue of *Hop Gossip!* I have never met such a passionate young person as Dom who lives and breathes wildlife and conservation. Dom has been making a name for himself all over the country by speaking at conferences, on the radio, writing articles and representing the RSPB at 10 Downing Street. By spreading the conservation message he is becoming a voice for young conservationists in the UK. Dom set up his Wildlife Fund to raise money for deserving charities and conservation groups over future years. In 2013 the two charities he has decided to spend a year fundraising for are RSPB and ARC.

The launch night barn dance was the first of the fundraisers to take place and an entertaining night was had by all! Our CEO Dr Tony Gent and his wife Jenny enjoyed barn dancing the night away to the band Murphy's Lore who were great at getting everyone up to their feet and teaching them the dances. The raffle was popular and the prizes included days out, wildlife themed gifts and pictures donated by Chris Packham who inspired Dom to set the fund up.



I would like to thank Dominik and his Mum Kerry who put so much hard work and energy in to the evening which was a great success and raised a total of £310. Well done!

**Search Dominik's Wildlife Fund on Facebook for more information.**

Photo (above): Dominik (left) Richie Johnson, Gary Powell, Angela Reynolds & Dr Tony Gent with Kerry and Dominik Reynolds. © Angela Reynolds ARC)



## State of Nature Report

By Tony Gent - CEO

On 22<sup>nd</sup> May ARC attended the launch of the State of Nature Report at the Natural History Museum in London with Sir David Attenborough. For the first time ever, 25 of the UK's leading wildlife organisations, led and coordinated by RSPB, have joined forces to undertake a health check on nature. The result has provided a better insight into the condition of wildlife in the UK and the UK's overseas territories and ARC is pleased to be the voice for amphibians and reptiles in this partnership.



Of the species assessed 60% have declined over recent decades and 30% have declined very strongly. This is just the latest part of an historical pattern of decline in the UK and nature is in trouble – the threats it faces are not going to go away. There is some cause for optimism. We *can* turn things around - through conservation initiatives, community projects, public campaigns and individuals doing their bit, we *can* bring nature back.

The importance of volunteers in collecting the data was recognised in the report. It was great that the ARGs were represented reflecting the particular relationship of the county based groups and ARC. Central to the project is the power of the partnership. While we need specialist non-governmental organisations (NGOs), it is important that we are standing shoulder to shoulder and, backed by millions of members of the public, together we can make a difference. This is a new era in nature conservation and just the first of what we hope will be many partnership projects between ARC and the other nature conservation NGOs.

[www.rspb.org.uk/stateofnature](http://www.rspb.org.uk/stateofnature)



## Archaeological Features & Historical Monuments - The archaeology of St Catherine's Hill, Christchurch, Dorset By Richard Sharp - Dorset Field & Health & Safety Officer

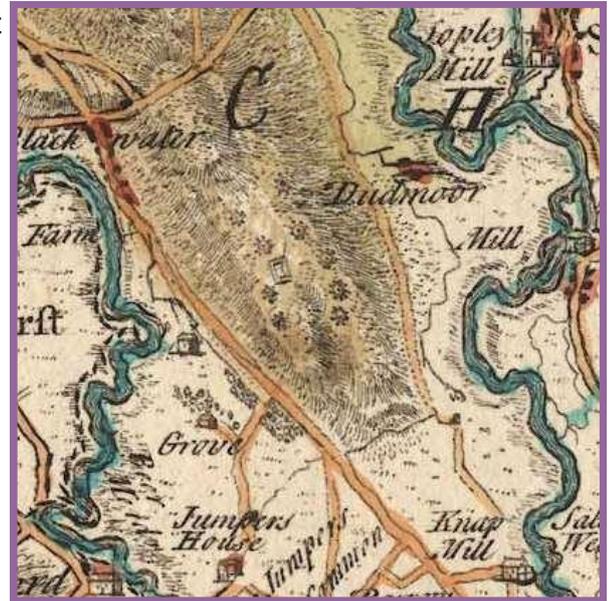
Linked by geology and social use to one of Britain's most important archaeological sites, Hengistbury Head, St Catherine's Hill has really been hiding its light under a bushel for decades. Three ARC sites make up this ridge; St Catherine's Hill itself, Town Common and Ramsdown bounded by the Rivers Avon on the east and Stour on the west. There are 13 individual scheduled monuments over the three sites dating from the Bronze Age to the post medieval period with some individual finds of hand axes taking the story even further back in time. The more modern archaeological features tend to be linked to various periods of warfare from the Napoleonic to WW2.

Archaeological features can be very important for our herpetofauna especially by creating diversity in soils and topography but can also be prone to vandalism and erosion themselves. Last summer English Heritage asked ARC to undertake a survey of the present state of the known monuments and the potential for further archaeological discoveries on the site.

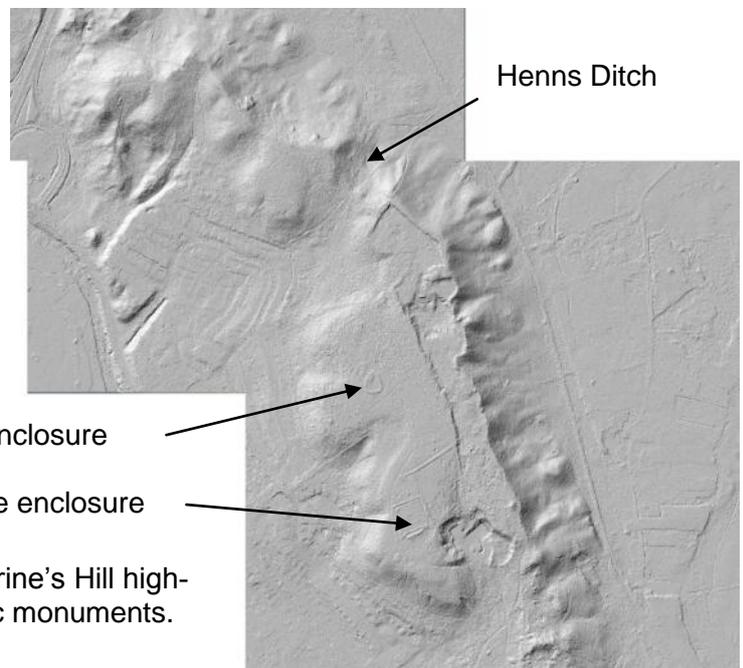
The project involved using old maps and aerial photos going as far back as the 1600's to track visible archaeological features and also changes in development, tree cover and industrial use through time. A survey day with help from members of Christchurch Antiquarians allowed me to plot, photograph and describe over thirty individual archaeological features, making a full assessment of the Hill possible.

One of the most striking products of the survey was the creation from Lidar (light detection and ranging) data of a detailed topographic map of the site. This image shows not only the extent of the quarrying but also many of the bigger monuments such as the square (medieval) and oval (pre-historic) enclosures and the Hennis Ditch which runs east to west across the middle of the image and may well be Iron Age in date.

Thankfully 99% of the features were in good condition despite vast areas of quarrying with only five monuments being lost since the 1600's. Most had not changed since the last report in 1974 but with habitat management work planned on site over the next management plan period some features will need close monitoring.



1792 Isaac Taylor Map of St Catherine's Hill In Christchurch, Dorset.



Right: A Lidar image of St Catherine's Hill highlighting medieval and pre-historic monuments.



## Heathland re-creation on Sunningdale

By Rob Free - Weald Reserves Manager



Sometimes restoring an area of heathland reptile habitat can be fairly easy; we descend in winter with power tools and loppers, burn a few calories, remove some Christmas tree sized pines or maybe sapling silver birch and, hey presto, glorious heather heath is revealed beneath as we stand back sipping our tea. Of course there will be many thousands of seeds ready to germinate in the spring and three years later you often wouldn't know we had been there, but that's all par for the course. Other times you look at an area of one of our reserves and think 'there's an awful lot of work needed to get that area back to heath'. Fortunately, with the advent of Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship grant scheme the money has been available to contemplate some of the more challenging areas for restoration work. One such area is on the eastern side of our Sunningdale reserve which was, and partly still

is, covered in extensive scrubby secondary woodland. It could be a very good area for reptiles and other heathland species if clothed in heather once again.

This winter contractors finally descended on said area of Sunningdale. After only two week's work the birch and pine were all gone and glorious (albeit slightly muddy due to its extreme conditions), open vistas were revealed over 8 hectares. The elderly local dog walkers seemed on-side and interestingly pointed out the remains of a Second World War US Army base revealed by the clearance.

Phase 2 of the job will be completed next winter and the prospect of a wonderful expanse of heather makes the effort and cost well worth it. So here's hoping that the soon-to-be defunct Higher Level Stewardship grant will be replaced with something equally as good in the future. Thanks Natural England for making this work possible .



Photo: The phase 1 end result. Above right: Woodchip leaving the site. Above left: Work in progress. Rob Free (ARC)



## Helping hibernating adders

By Jim Foster - Conservation Director

In the last *Hop Gossip* we mentioned a new ARC project aimed at conserving adder hibernation areas. Thanks to support from Natural England, at the end of last year we consulted keen adder watchers about priorities for conserving these critical habitat features. Adders need to spend the winter away from extreme cold, just like other UK snakes and lizards. Even more so than our other reptiles, for adders it seems that particular parts of a site, often rather small areas, support most of the hibernating snakes. Yet this crucial aspect of their lives remains frustratingly elusive: there are very few scientific studies of adders during hibernation, or the areas they choose to over-winter. We do know the basics: that adders over-winter from around October to March. In fact, dates vary widely according to location.



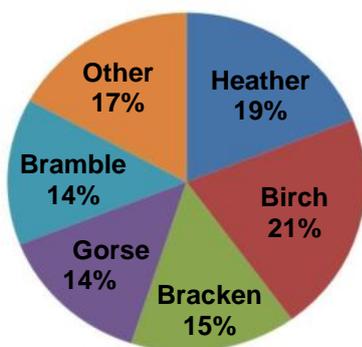
Adders emerging from hibernation. Photo: Jim Foster (ARC)

At ARC we've been concerned at increasing reports from volunteer and professional surveyors highlighting hibernation problems. There are two broad areas of concern: harm to or disturbance of individual snakes at and around the hibernation period, and damage to hibernation habitat. Building on some initial work done by Chris Glead-Owen and Steve Langham, we set out this year to get some figures and firm recommendations by consulting the experts: the surveyors who spend hours on end seeking out serpents.

We ran an adder hibernation workshop at the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting in Edinburgh this January, garnering some instructive conclusions. Consistent with ARC's own observations, there was a consensus that wildlife photography is a real threat at some sites. Several volunteers and site managers reported regular problems with photographers disturbing adders as they emerge from hibernation, or trampling vegetation in doing so. As paradoxical as it may seem, some "herpetologists" may be a threat themselves! We think that there are two aggravating factors here: the rise of the digital camera, and herp information on the internet. Needless to say, there was also a recognition that without surveyors and photographers, we'd know less about adders and have fewer images to help with their conservation. So the workshop identified a clear need for guidance on how to manage photography at adder sites, something that ARC will be working on shortly.

Another workshop outcome was the need for better guidance for site managers on identifying adder hibernation areas. Whilst there were some excellent examples of management helping to improve hibernation sites, a worrying number of people reported inadvertent harm to hibernation habitat. This was often due to the site manager simply being unaware of its existence. Workshopers felt that a standalone leaflet would be useful. We will report on other workshop conclusions another time.

ARC also ran an online survey this year. We asked surveyors to tell us where they regularly see adders on emergence. We were delighted to get results from just over 90 hibernation areas, demonstrating the remarkable knowledge and dedication of herpetologists working with ARC. Here's a quick summary of key findings.



Percentage of vegetation cover at hibernation sites

- **Almost two-thirds of the sites were protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).**
- **34% of sites had a management plan that mentioned adders, with specific actions for them at a further 13%.**
- **The actual location where adders spent the winter wasn't always known, since this can be difficult to observe, there was a clear preference for holes or crevices in the ground associated with tree or scrub roots.**

Much of the above won't be a big surprise to seasoned adder watchers, yet it has important implications for how sites are managed and how ARC and others provide guidance. Having these results will help evidence-based conservation. The findings above are a ringing endorsement for maintaining good scrub cover on adder sites, for example. Putting them into practice at the site level, with multiple objectives and constraints, is of course another matter, but we feel this is a sound step in the right direction.



## Ireland's amphibians

By John Buckley - Amphibian Conservation Officer

**Ireland is special in having so few native amphibians: just three, the common frog, smooth newt and natterjack toad .**

Ireland is possibly the best country in Europe for the common frog, which is widespread and well suited to the mild climate, ample rainfall and plenty of un-drained habitats. The frog flourishes in the ponds pools and ditches of agricultural landscapes and on the edges of freshwater marshes, lakes, river margins even pools on mountain summits and also on blanket bogs and raised bogs.



From mid-February onwards they are the first amphibian to breed. The females are more productive than in mainland Europe laying about 1300 eggs in shallow water as a single clump. Most of the eggs hatch but only a few tadpoles survive long enough to become froglets that leave the pond to feed and grow.

The common frog is considered to be widespread in Ireland and less vulnerable than in the rest of Europe. Threats to the species include the drainage of wetlands, destruction of bogs, intensification of agriculture and water pollution. The recent report to Europe on the status of frogs in Ireland was particularly thorough and worthwhile. In 2011 the population was estimated to be 196,000,000.



Smooth newts look quite like lizards outside the breeding season when you see them on land, but in fact they have no scales over the body, just a smooth skin. They hide away from birds in the daytime and few people come across them. However, after dark during the breeding season, April to May, you can watch both males and females by torchlight in shallow water at the edge of their ponds. Males develop a dorsal crest and the dark markings of both sexes become more distinct for breeding. Females lay their eggs singly folded into the leaf of a water plant. Surveys show that the newt has a patchy distribution in Ireland and favour small, undisturbed ponds with plenty of water weed and about neutral pH.

Ireland's third amphibian is the natterjack toad easily identified by its distinct yellow stripe running along the middle of the back. These toads have relatively short legs so they can easily hunt invertebrates. Written records of this species being found at coastal sites in Co Kerry date back to 1805. Whether they are native or not has been debated for sometime but genetical studies have now confirmed that natterjacks are indeed native to Ireland, having arrived thousands of years ago at the end of the last glaciation when western Britain was also colonised.

Photo Top: Natterjack toad Aurélie Aubry. Above left: Smooth newt. Below: Common frog Fred Holmes (ARC)





## Huglekultur

By Peter Hill - South Wales Habitat Creation Officer



Peter Hill has just come to the end of his hugely successful one year project Reconnecting South Wales' Dragons. The project focused on grass-roots proactive habitat creation and was funded through the Welsh Government's Ecosystem Resilience and Diversity Fund administered by the Countryside Council for Wales (now known as Natural Resources Wales). In particular, the project aimed to address colony isolation, linking populations by creating further suitable habitat, linking NGOs and other groups in herpetofauna activities raising the profile of amphibians and reptiles and so reconnecting South Wales' Dragons! Part of Peters work included creating huglekulturs and you can find out how to make your own below. We are hoping to obtain funding to keep Peter in post after July 2013 to continue the valuable work he is doing in Wales.

What is Huglekultur? Huglekulture is a German word meaning "mound culture". Put simply, a huglekultur mound is a large pile of wood buried under layers of soil and humus...and why would you want to do that? Well, a hugle heap offers a number of benefits to growing plants and provides habitat for a host of wildlife including amphibians.

### Huglekultur step by step guide - growing food in an ecosystem

First dig a shallow pit the size that you want it to be. If you can, situate your hugle bed so that it runs from east to west. This will mean that the bed will have a south facing side for sun loving plant species and a north facing side for shade tolerant species. Pile up chunky organic material; for example - logs and buttress roots and form in to a mound.



Add a thick layer of less bulky material such as brush - then cover (with the upside down turf) and soil from the original trench.

For the plants the buried wood provides an on-going supply of slow release nutrients, stored in the wood that is made available by fungi and other microorganisms during the decomposition process. Hugle heaps also produce -

- Self tilling soil. As the roots and logs decay they move, aerating the soil.
- Huglekultur provides a greater growing space for the area used. The piles are best made tall and

the angled sides of the heap increase the growing area.

- A south side for light loving plants with the added thermal momentum of the angled side of the heap and north side for shade loving plants or edible fungi.
- A warmer soil, and therefore a longer growing season due to the heat given off during decomposition.

Ideally, situate your hugle mound/ mounds close to a pond. If both pond and hugle heap are created at the same time, then the topsoil from the pond excavation can be utilised on the hugle heap. Light will reflect from the water's surface onto the hugle heap, combining with the pond side humidity to create a microclimate ideal for growing. Grow a mixture of edibles such as fruit bushes, vegetables and wildflowers to attract pollinators and beneficial insects to increase your yields. Amphibians will breed in the pond and set up home in the hugle heap - ideally placed to feast upon slugs and snails.

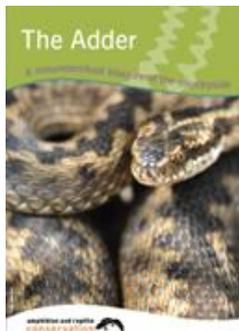
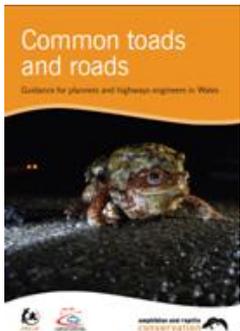


I hope you all now feel inspired to build your own huglekultur! We'd love to see photos of your own creations. Please email them to [angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org](mailto:angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org).

Illustrations supplied by Cutzero Designs.

We are very proud of our work in Wales. Here are just some of the other things that we have done over the past year.

### Produced two leaflets



### Sand lizard releases



### Attended various shows



The creation of an online Welsh Amphibian & Reptile Atlas ([arc.cofnod.org.uk](http://arc.cofnod.org.uk)) The aim is to display all amphibian and reptile sightings we have in Wales, and hopefully encourage you to fill in the gaps!

These records are an essential resource for conserving these wonderful creatures. We can build up a picture of species' distribution that will show where they are doing well, and not so well, which can inform conservation decisions and practical conservation on the ground.



### Training & Partnership Working



All photos: © Mark Barber ARC

# Volunteers

One of the ways you can help our native species is to get involved in 'on the ground conservation' work. We run management tasks throughout the year. 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.

Joe Parkinson has been volunteering in the Weald and has written a testimonial for us. He hopes this will inspire more people to come out and have some fun with us!

Last Summer, I decided that instead of going to university I would take a year out in order to do some voluntary conservation work. I hoped that this time would help me to build up my confidence as well as give me some experience of working in an environment that is completely different from an educational one.

However I have gained so much more than that. Even before I started, Matthew kept me up to date with the tasks that they were doing at the time via e-mail; which made me feel welcome. The group is made up of a wide variety of ages, and we are all able to get along incredibly well together. I've also found it a great opportunity to mix with people who are older than me, and what's more I was pleasantly surprised to find that people seemed to be interested in me as an individual; several have even encouraged and helped me towards my future university course. I hope I have been able to contribute something to the group as well.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the work we have completed together, and it has been nice to know that you are making a positive difference to the environment. This thought even got me through the time we had to break ice to stand in freezing water! Through my volunteering here, I have learnt a great deal about the reptiles and amphibians that are protected by the Trust, and I very much look forward to meeting them in the Summer, when more of them come out of hibernation. I should also point out that the work that we do is a great way of staying fit and healthy; I have not had a single cold this year!

So far, I have had an absolutely brilliant time volunteering with the ARC, and I strongly encourage anyone who has a bit of spare time to join us on the tasks.



The end of a successful task! Jake Williams, Joe Parkinson, Scott Davis, Gillian da Costa, Jack Irwin, Phil Le Fanu, Sarah Jones and Dave Meyers. Photo: Matt Dowse (ARC)



## Observations from a Nottinghamshire toad patroller

By Dorothy Driver - GCN Conservation Officer & Species Coordinator

Increasingly it seems there is no such thing as a 'typical year' for weather; last year we saw a drought followed by a deluge and this year the amphibian survey season has been characterised by long periods of cold weather. So what is this doing to the amphibians.. and the people who look after them?

When did spring arrive this year? For me, at least, spring doesn't arrive until I've seen some toads (!) and I had a longer wait this year than usual to see these beloved animals.

Spring officially arrives on 20<sup>th</sup> March in the Northern Hemisphere, but this year, according to the Meteorological Office, 'This was one of the coldest March's in the historical series...', with particularly low temperatures in the second half of the month and the cold weather continued into April. Typically toads are active when it's wet and mild, particularly when they are emerging for the first time; this year the low temperatures were compounded by a lot of dry weather in March and a drier than average April.



Reports from Nottinghamshire Toad Crossing sites, including one site just 500 metres (0.3 miles) from the edge of Nottingham City, show that common toad migrations started in earnest on 13<sup>th</sup> April. The first sighting of amphibian activity at the Nottingham toad crossing site occurred on the evening of Friday 12<sup>th</sup> April, with a report of 60 frogs crossing. Toads made their appearance the following evening, in fairly high numbers for their first night (with relatively high number of frogs again, too). The next night too, despite being dry and cold, with a strong wind, we had large numbers of toads crossing with an unusually high proportion (up to 50%) of toads paired up (in amplexus). By the following Wednesday (17<sup>th</sup>), female toads were determinedly leaving the pond in high numbers to return to

the terrestrial habitat, and by Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April the majority of the activity was over. In Nottingham, the prolonged cold weather appears to have concentrated activity, with frogs and toads arriving just a day apart, and for migrations to occur in far from ideal circumstances.

Across the UK, migration tends to be staggered, with activity starting earlier in the milder south west and occurring sequentially later moving northward and eastwards. Although in a few places we did see breeding starting in the short milder spell in late February and middle of March, the following sustained cold period curtailed this early breeding activity and, over much of the country, delayed it. When the warmer weather finally came we saw a sudden and concentrated period of activity across Britain.

There are of course some advantages to this delayed start; the warmer weather arrived after the clocks had gone forward, with the associated longer evenings, which meant that amphibian migration should have missed the peak of the commuter rush hour. This will have allowed a greater number of amphibians to travel to and from their breeding sites safely.



Photo above left: Common frog with spawn. Tony Gent (ARC) Photos above & top right: Toads in amplexus. Fred Holmes (ARC)

## The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2013 By Angie Julian - ARG UK Secretariat



Running for over 25 years, the annual Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting forms the mainstay of the herpetological calendar and attracts enthusiastic herpetologists from all over Great Britain and Ireland. Our 2013 meeting in Edinburgh attracted delegates from Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland, with a lively programme of presentations and workshops, and plenty of opportunities for informal discussion, between sessions and during the social functions.

The meeting opened with an overview of the current conservation picture for our native herpetofauna in England and Scotland followed by the impact Hoglekultur is having in Wales, which gave a firm grounding for the talks to follow. Many excellent projects and research topics were presented, and speakers included Freya Smith on her work with chytrid with the Zoological Society of London, Rob Gandola (Herpetological Society of Ireland) on chytrid surveying in Ireland and Daniele Muir highlighted the menace presented by drain pots for amphibians and small mammals, and her investigations into this in the Perth and Kinross area. On the reptile side Chris Gleed-Owen (CGO Ecology/DARN) presented his latest findings on the current status of adders, and Chris Catherine (Caledonian Conservation) provided an expose of Scotland's rarest reptile the Scottish grass snake.



Flying lizard condition assessment!  
Photo: © Jon Cranfield (ARG UK)

Various interactive workshops were also on offer across both days. A very popular workshop on Managing Adder Hibernacula was held by Jim Foster (ARC), Paul Edgar introduced a new NE initiative assessing SSSI status for herps, Nigel Hand and Angie Julian developed citizen science projects with four 'super ARGS', and Mark Barber and Jon Cranfield put sterling work into developing an ARG resource pack.

No herpetofauna workers' meeting would be complete without a full programme of social activities. On Friday various members of the party celebrated Burn's night in style, which included Kaleigh dancing from some of our more energetic herpers, and 'balancing a pint glass' in the union bar by the less energetic. On Saturday night we had a welcome re-run of Jim Foster's 'Have I Got Newts for You', which outed various curiosities including the meaning of Puddock's Cruddles, the peccadilloes of *Rhinella proboscadia*, and just what is so unique about the Chinese Soft-Shelled Turtle? This was followed by a lot of apparently random paper lizard throwing, and our very own herp-themed raffle, which raised £370 for the 100% fund, which provides small grant funding for ARGs undertaking practical conservation projects. Interest was somewhat divided between the curious wooden carving presented by Nick Baker, a bottle of 18 year-old malt, and a bundle of NHM reptile bags, but we think that everybody went home satisfied!

We would like to thank all of our sponsors, without whom the meeting would not have been possible,: Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural England, Caledonian Conservation, Friends of Angus Herpetofauna, Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group, Hesketh Ecology, Habitat Aid, and a special thank you to The Glenmorangie Company, who provided a small bottle of single malt for all our delegates.

### News from around the country

Daniele Muir from Tayside ARG has just won a prestigious 'Securing the Future' Gold award from Perth & Kinross Council for the ground-breaking work she has been doing on amphibians in drains. Well Done Daniele!

Aiden Mackay from Sussex ARG is appealing for records of sightings and calls of marsh frogs. The non-native population is thought to have spread from Kent using the waterways. Aiden plans to base his PhD on the effect they are having on common frogs. Find out more at <http://marshfrogsearch.blogspot.co.uk>

ARGSL has recently received a grant of £750 from Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) to improve its capacity to collect records for the Lancashire Amphibian and Reptile Atlas Project (LARA). The grant will provide IT equipment which is needed to process records more efficiently.

### RECORD POOL

Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK  
VOLUNTEERS WORKING FOR THE CONSERVATION OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Don't forget to use the Record Pool to record your amphibian & reptile sightings this year. Its really easy to use. Find out more at <http://recordpool.org.uk/>

#### In other news...

Congratulations to ARC's very own Mark Barber who was voted in as the new Vice Chair of ARG UK at the Herp Workers Meeting in January. He takes over from Jon Cranfield.

To find your local ARG visit [www.arguk.org/local-groups](http://www.arguk.org/local-groups)

## My walk at Crooksbury Common - a very fun day for my family & I By Tabitha Sunderland, 9 years old.



Crooksbury Common is a Nature Reserve which backs on to my Grandparent's garden. It is a very important site for sand lizards as they have lost a lot of their natural habitats and are now only native in Surrey, Dorset, Hampshire and Lancashire.



The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC) asked my grandparents if they could cut down a few of the trees in their garden as they were shading a sandy bank where the sand lizards like to nest and mate. Lizards need the sunshine as they are cold blooded.

My grandparents said "yes" and in return a man called Mr Rob Free took us on a tour of the Common to hunt for some of the reptiles and amphibians that can be found. Crooksbury Common is near Elstead where smooth snakes were discovered by ARC. Now it is almost 20 hectares of protected heathland habitat where ARC has re-introduced sand lizards and natterjack toads.



Rob showed us around and taught us how to look for reptiles and amphibians. He showed us how to carefully catch and release them. We found a slow-worm under a log, spiders, snakes, birds and lots of red ants! Rob had also brought along sand lizards, Natterjack toads a huge common toad, smooth and grass snakes, common lizards and a slow-worm for us to hold.

My favourite reptile was the slow worm because it was scaly but smooth and very wriggly!

Thanks for your story Tabitha! I would love to make this a regular page in the newsletter so if any of our Juniors would like to write about their experiences with amphibians and reptiles or just tell us why you think they are great we would love to hear from you! Please contact Angela at [angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org](mailto:angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org).

Photos below & top left: Examining the pond, Top right: Common toad, Above left: Tabitha's favourite reptile the slow-worm. ©Sir John Sunderland.



# Species Profile

## Great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*)



### Appearance / Colour

- Rough, warty appearance.
- Black or dark brown back and flanks.
- Underside bright orange with irregular black blotches present.
- Head and lower flanks are dark and adorned with white speckles.
- Adult males develop a large ragged crest that runs along the length of their body during the breeding season. They lose their crest during the terrestrial phase.
- Females do not have this crest.
- Females have an orange stripe along lower edge of the tail.

### Behaviour / Migration

- The great crested newt's diet consists primarily of invertebrates including insects, worms, water snails, larvae and tadpoles.
- Adult newts normally move from their winter hibernation sites between February and April.
- The migration of great crested newt populations to breeding ponds is normally phased, with some adults not reaching the pond until May or later.
- Migration dates are often later to the north and east of Britain, as they also are for frogs and other amphibians.



Photo above: Egg. Fred Holmes (ARC)  
Photo top: Male GCN Chris Dresh (ARC)

### Habitat

- Great crested newts need both aquatic and terrestrial habitat.
- Great crested newt breeding ponds should support aquatic vegetation for egg laying.
- They are normally found in a wide range of lowland river valley or spring line ponds generally with a neutral pH.
- Great crested newt populations are found in a variety of pond sizes. In larger ponds or small lakes, very large populations can develop. However, they can breed in much smaller ponds and ditches including garden ponds.
- Terrestrial habitat is very important, deciduous woodland, matured hedgerows and undisturbed grassland are favoured.

### Breeding

- Adults assemble in March to breed.
- Courtship and mating takes place at night.
- The female lays 200 - 300 eggs on aquatic plants.
- Females lay each egg in a single leaf and wrap it using their back feet.
- Eggs hatch within three weeks.
- Young newts leave the water in August and look similar to adults.



Photo Left. Underbelly. Fred Holmes (ARC)

Photo above: Female GCN Fred Holmes (ARC)

## Important dates

Here are those all important dates for your diaries, from events to task dates you can find them here!

Date	Event/ Venue	Place/Meeting Point	Further information
Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> June	Parley Common Walk - Dorset Volunteer task	Car park on Barrack Rd SZ 094 995	For more details contact Richard Sharp richard.sharp@arc-trust.org or phone 07810770565. Please wear sensible clothing and bring lunch. 10:00am – 15:00pm
Saturday 29 <sup>th</sup> June	Bioblitz	Rhose Point, Vale of Glamorgan	<a href="http://www.sewbrec.org.uk/event/events-calendar/rhose-point-bioblitz.page">http://www.sewbrec.org.uk/event/events-calendar/rhose-point-bioblitz.page</a>
Sunday 30 <sup>th</sup> June	Big British Wildlife Revival	London Wetlands Centre, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust	TBC
Wednesday 10 <sup>th</sup> July	St Catherine's Hill Revetment - Dorset Volunteer task	Gun Club entrance off Sandy Lane SZ 145 950	For more details contact Richard Sharp richard.sharp@arc-trust.org. or phone 07810770565. Please wear sensible clothing and bring lunch. 10:00am – 15:00pm
Saturday 13 <sup>th</sup> July	Big Nature Day	Natural History Museum, London	11:00am – 17:30pm
Wednesday 24 <sup>th</sup> July	Dunyeats Walk - Dorset Volunteer task	Merrifield Avenue SZ 009 963	For more details contact Richard Sharp richard.sharp@arc-trust.org. or phone 07810770565. Please wear sensible clothing and bring lunch. 10:00am – 15:00pm
Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup> July	Rustic Sunday	Rustic Life Centre, Tilford	10:00am – 17:00pm Free Parking
Wednesday 7 <sup>th</sup> August	Corfe Hills Pond creation Dorset Volunteer task	Layby opposite Corfe Hills School, Higher Blandford Road SY 998 966	For more details contact Richard Sharp richard.sharp@arc-trust.org. or phone 07810770565. Please wear sensible clothing and bring lunch. 10:00am – 15:00pm
Monday 26 <sup>th</sup> August	Peaslake Fair	Peaslake, Surrey	From 13:00pm
Wednesday 28 <sup>th</sup> August	Ferndown Common. Pond Maintenance - Dorset Volunteer task	Pompeys Lane SZ 064 997	For more details contact Richard Sharp richard.sharp@arc-trust.org. or phone 07810770565. Please wear sensible clothing and bring lunch. 10:00am – 15:00am
Saturday 31 <sup>st</sup> August – Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> September	Heathland through the ages	Petersfield Heath, South Downs National Park, Hampshire	Free entry
Saturday 21 <sup>st</sup> September	ARC Friends Day	The Witley Centre, Witley, Godalming, Surrey GU8 5QA	Please email <a href="mailto:angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org">angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org</a> or phone 01202 727981 to register by 7th September. Free to ARC Friends and £5 to non ARC Friends.
Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> September	History Day	St. Catherine's Hill, Christchurch, Dorset	10:30am – 16:00pm Free entry

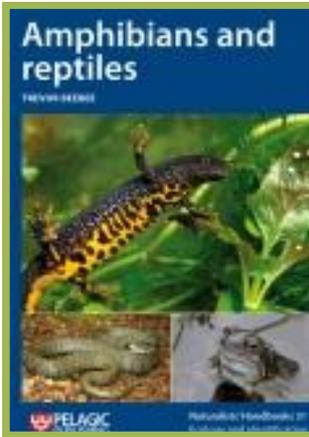
The Wealden volunteer task dates will be released shortly so please remember to check our website or contact Matt Dowse on [matthew.dowse@arc-trust.org](mailto:matthew.dowse@arc-trust.org). Tasks take place fortnightly in the Summer and weekly in the Autumn.

We are likely to add more dates over the summer. You can check these on the events pages on the website. Hope to see you out and about at an event near you!



## Snakes & Toad Tunnels Game!

For 2 or more players and based on the popular Snakes & Ladders game. You climb UP the toad tunnels and DOWN the snakes. The aim is to get Mystic Toad to his breeding pond to get best pick of the females avoiding danger and distraction along the way! Good Luck!



**New book release! Amphibians and reptiles -** by Trevor J C Beebee. Available from 1st August 2013

Amphibians and reptiles is a comprehensive guide to the native and non-native species of amphibian and reptile found in the British Isles. ARC Trustee Professor Trevor Beebee covers the biology, ecology, conservation and identification. Distribution maps are included for all species, and the book is illustrated throughout with colour photographs and figures.

The goal of this book is to encourage readers to develop their own ecological studies, to this end, the author summarises the current state of knowledge of reptile and amphibian biology, including behaviour, breeding, habitat selection, migration and development, and offers ideas for research projects that could be undertaken to further what is known.

Available from Pelagic Publishing for £19.99 [www.pelagicpublishing.com/amphibians-and-reptiles.html](http://www.pelagicpublishing.com/amphibians-and-reptiles.html)

Author royalties from this book have been donated to Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

## COMPETITION TIME - Design the next Front Cover!

For this competition we are asking you to design the front cover of the next *Hop Gossip!* The winner will see their design on the front cover of the Winter/ Spring edition and receive a star prize. There will be goodie bags for 2nd, 3rd and 4th places too.



Open to any age.

Can be anything relating to amphibians or reptiles or both.

Can be a photo, drawing, painting or montage - just be creative!

Art work should be A4 sized and portrait.

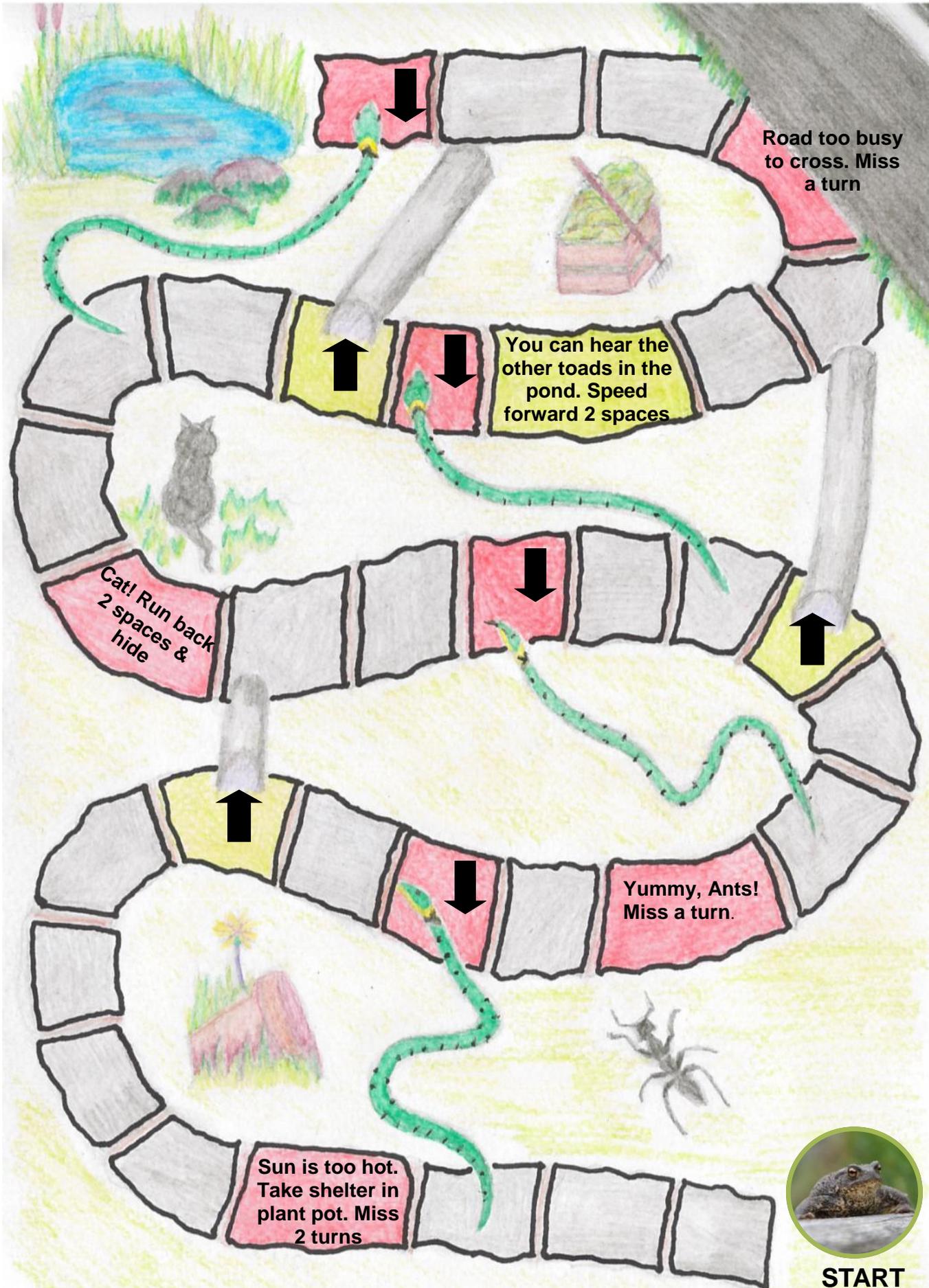
Please **email any photos to [angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org](mailto:angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org)** and post your artwork to **Hop Gossip - Front Cover Competition, Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, 655A Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 4AP**. Don't forget to give us your name and contact details. We are unable to return any artwork unless a SAE is provided. The closing date for all entries is Friday 18th October 2013.

Here are the answers to last issue's quizword - Did you get them all?

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

Solution: Ladybird Spider

# Snakes & Toad Tunnels!



# 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](mailto:enquiries@arc-trust.org)

[www.arc-trust.org](http://www.arc-trust.org)

follow us on Twitter - [http://www.twitter.com/ARC\\_bytes](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](http://www.arc-trust.org/support)

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

**ARC Friends Day 2013  
Saturday 21st September**



**Amphibian & Reptile Conservation - Surrey Office  
The Witley Centre, Godalming, Surrey.**



Come and join us for a meet and greet with some amphibians and reptiles and a guided walk.

This is a free event for ARC Friends and £5 each for everyone else.

Drinks and biscuits are provided but please bring your own lunches with you. It is advisable to bring waterproof clothing just in case and some appropriate footwear for walking over uneven terrain.



Please contact Angela to register  
by Friday 6th September.  
[angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org](mailto:angela.reynolds@arc-trust.org)  
Direct phone: 01202 727 981

# Repair costs making your eyes bulge?

If you have an old car that you no longer need, why not put it to good use? We will collect it from you and either sell it at auction or scrap it, giving the proceeds to your favourite charity. To find out more, call us on 0207 736 4242.

## amphibian and reptile conservation



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