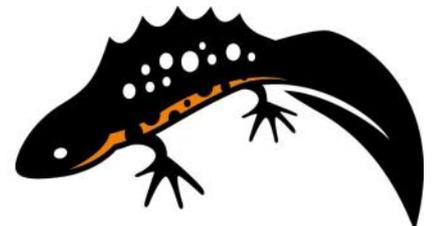


Hop Gossip!

Winter/ Spring 2013/14



amphibian and reptile
conservation





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



Working in partnership with
Amphibian & Reptile Groups
of the UK

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

Cover image: Front cover competition winner! Artwork by Neil Gange.

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!*

As a child I was a massive fan of all things wildlife on the telly, the 'Really Wild Show' being one of my favourites. This was where I first became aware of a man with blonde spikey hair called Chris Packham.

Twenty five or so years on, I didn't expect to be working alongside him to champion the cause of our native herpetofauna but, earlier this year, ARC was delighted to welcome Chris on board as a new Patron.

Hot on the heels of his Autumnwatch colleague, Welsh naturalist Iolo Williams is now our newest Patron and is tasked with a particular emphasis on raising awareness in Wales! At a time when funding is becoming harder to obtain, public figures such as Chris and Iolo are quite simply invaluable for promoting amphibians and reptiles across the UK and inspiring all ages to help do their bit for their conservation.

With Christmas just around the corner you might like to consider buying a gift from our shop. We have books for all ages and some great stocking fillers. Not only will you be treating the herp enthusiast in your life, you will be helping to conserve amphibians and reptiles across the country. As the weather turns, please spare a thought for our amphibians. Remember to clear the snow from the surface of your pond to let the light in and leave a ball at the waters edge. When it freezes you can remove it and other wildlife will have access to water.

Before we know it spring will be upon us and the spawn will start to appear. Please do let us know when you see the first signs – we'd love to know!

Merry Christmas Everyone!

Angela

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

Dr. Tony Gent



In my garage resides an old Land Rover – a short wheel base Series 2A for those interested in such things – the best part of 50 years old and something that, if we just looked at it financially, really cannot be justified. Its MOT is due and I anticipate another battering of the credit card before it is renewed. But its there because I like it; it's important to me, something I find inherently beautiful and, in its own way a part of British history. Despite and because of previous owners changes and alterations, it still retains the iconic shape and presence that has been part of our national road scape since the late 1940s. It's in far from perfect condition (you have to start with what you've got); for the next while at least it's down to me - it could just be left to decay or I could invest some effort to maintain, improve or restore it before, as will inevitably happen one day, it gets passed on to someone else. Across the country there are many others nurturing their own particular interest, be it a steam traction engine, Beatles memorabilia, a cluster of Iron Age barrows on their farm or a collection of tea pots, which makes them feel better and, in doing so, conserves parts of our heritage for future generations.

As it is with our love of natural history, and especially our interest in newts, frogs, toads, lizards and snakes. Beauty is very much in the eye of the beholders and for everyone who likes them there will be another who screws up their eyes and shudders with theatrical loathing. But of those who do not like them, many appreciate amphibians and reptiles for what they are and recognise they have their place in nature. At a time when we are increasingly asked to value things in pounds and pence to provide economic justification, it is worth remembering that not only should we conserve wildlife for its own sake but also because it is important to us.

The annual *Nature Check* report, which has just been produced by the Wildlife and Countryside Link (of which ARC is a member) is, in effect an MOT for the health of our wildlife and how it is being conserved. Sadly, its failed on many points and received 'Advisory Notices' on others. But whilst the headline messages may be grim, there are some powerful messages of hope. A clear message is that conservation action works given the right combination of action, partnership and funding, often with a dash of lateral thinking, our wildlife can respond, and respond very well. It is this that motivates us at ARC. By action on our network of nature reserves, by increasingly working with partner organisations and in our efforts to influence Government policy and legislation, we are making a positive difference for our herpetofauna. Of course, this all has costs - but it's not just about what appears on the credit card statement – it's about hearts and minds and the passion to conserve what we love. Nature is important in its own right and to all of us.

amphibian and reptile
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New Patron!

By John Buckley - Amphibian Conservation Officer

We are delighted to announce that Chris Packham, renowned naturalist, nature photographer, television presenter and author, has become a patron of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation! Chris, who grew up in Southampton and still lives locally, got to know the amphibians and reptiles in the area at an early age. Close encounters as a child helped foster his lifelong enthusiasm for the species.

Here's what Chris has to say:

"We don't have the richest range of reptiles and amphibians in the world but those that do grace our shores are some of the most exciting, enigmatic and attractive species that we have in the UK. They are often difficult to get to know, which makes them a challenge. Sadly most are under threat with declining populations, which means we need to work harder to protect them. Surprisingly their habits are still not fully known, which means more work must be done with increasing urgency. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation seeks to address these issues whilst bringing this fabulous guild of animals to wider public attention which is why I'm a very keen supporter and pleased to be a patron. That and the fact that grass snakes are one of my favourite animals on earth!"



Chris Packham observing pond activity.
Photo © John Buckley (ARC)

ARC is thrilled that Chris has joined us as a patron and we look forward to working with him in the future to help conserve our native amphibians and reptiles.



Dorset Urban Wildlink Update

By Gary Powell - Senior Reserves Manager

ARC are part of a consortium of organisations involved in a fundraising bid to purchase heathland nature reserves that are being sold off by the Canford Estate in Dorset. Some of these sites (Parley, Dunyeats, Ferndown, Lytchett and Corfe Hills) have been managed under lease for many years by ARC and form a solid core of urban sites important to herpetofauna. The success of this bid will ensure that these sites remain as sites for wildlife conservation in the long term while at the same time enabling the partnership to enhance site visitor experiences by providing improved signage and interpretation. We have been involved in a number of public consultation events and guided walks as we have been keen to explain our aims and enlist support for the project. We are hoping for significant Lottery funding and other forms of fundraising are taking place at the moment but there are still plenty of opportunities for involvement.



Please visit:

http://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/urban_wildlink.html

for further details or if you would like to help us raise funds and awareness. This ambitious partnership project gives us a real chance to secure a good future for sites that are both locally and internationally important for people and wildlife.

Dunyeats (above) and Ferndown Common (left) are two of the sites owned by the Canford Estate and are managed by ARC. Photos © Chris Dresh (ARC) & Ben Limburn.



A big welcome to Patron No. 2!

By Angela Reynolds - Editor

Just as we go to press I can bring you the breaking news that Iolo Williams (best known recently for being an established presenter as part of the Springwatch/Autumwatch Team) has agreed to become the latest Patron for ARC!

A former RSPB Officer, Iolo specialises in birds but is also passionate about wildlife conservation and supports a number of other charities such as Butterfly Conservation and Plantlife. He appears regularly on S4C and on the Radio and has made a number of programmes with the BBC.

Iolo is a leading advocate of wildlife in Wales and beyond! He will be a great ambassador for ARC's work in Wales and in promoting "Welsh Dragons" at all levels.

ARC is very excited about working with Iolo and together we hope to bring Amphibian and Reptile Conservation to the fore in Wales alongside our Welsh Officers Mark Barber and Peter Hill.

We will bring you more news on this in the next issue of *Hop Gossip!*



New GIS & Data Officer

By Angela Reynolds - Editor

David Fletcher joined us in September to take the place of Andy Arnell as our new GIS & Data Officer. David spent time with the Trust as a student both in the field and with the Science Team prior to becoming a member of staff. He made a great impression on all of us here at ARC.



David studied Biology and Management of Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems, Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Resource Management and is a self confessed geek when it comes to maps and numbers - hence the interest in GIS (Geographical Information Systems)! He has already been advancing ARC's work on spatial modelling using his skills in the statistical package "R" to speed up the process of mapping Welsh newts!



Sand lizards in the limelight

By Matt Dowse - Weald Field Officer & Volunteer Coordinator

Sand lizard reintroductions in the Weald received real star treatment this year! There is always a lot of media interest when we come to release the year's captive bred sand lizards in September, but this year was particularly busy!

As well as recording a short piece for ITV and a BBC local news programme at RSPB Farnham Heath, the One Show (with their wildlife presenter Mike Dilger) came along to film the release of sand lizards on to Hambledon Common.

It's surprising how hectic days with the media can be and I think at the end of it the hatchling lizards were happy to be released on to their new homes for a bit of peace and quiet. However, the opportunities to engage with the general public about herptiles and their conservation don't come around often, and the attention is certainly greatly received.



Matt & Volunteers with Mike Dilger during filming for the One Show. Photo © Dave Mayers.



Welsh toads are quick off-the-mark!

By Peter Hill - South Wales Habitat Creation Officer

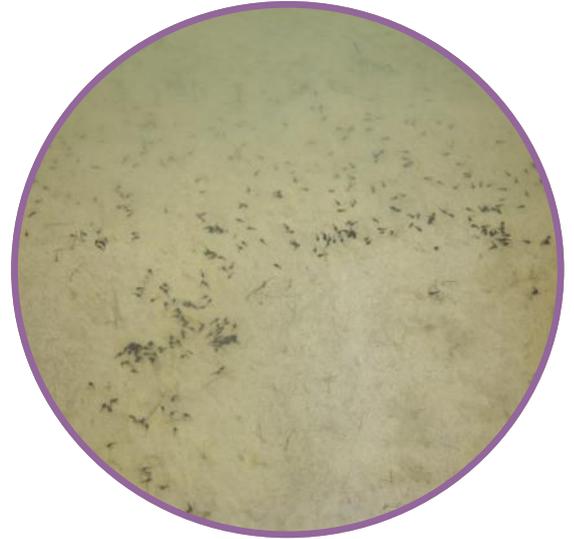
Back in February 2013 ARC's Reconnecting South Wales' Dragons project created a network of seven ponds at a privately owned site in Carmarthenshire. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority species targeted for this project are common toad and grass snake. Grass snakes in particular require undisturbed habitat, so where possible, working at privately owned sites that receive very little human traffic is a favoured tactic.

The aim of the project is to increase the amphibian population by creating a choice of breeding sites as well as a large log, brash and earth hibernacula. A cluster of three ponds were designed and created especially for toads with a second cluster of three also designed and created for frogs as well as a final seventh pond at the far west of the site. Ultimately, increased amphibian populations are likely to encourage colonisation by grass snakes. A south west facing bank was also created which runs the length of three of the large ponds designed for toads. Heaps of hay and manure are being developed at suitable undisturbed areas around the site to provide egg laying opportunities for grass snakes.

The pond creation works were completed on February 25th. We returned to the site three weeks later to place refugia at likely spots in order to monitor any grass snake activity. I was pleased to discover that all three of the "frog ponds" were literally teeming with well-developed frog tadpoles, and to my surprise, a few toad tadpoles also. We set off to check on the three toad ponds. I was again extremely surprised and very pleased to discover that toads had spawned in all three of the ponds that were specifically designed for them.

It is widely perceived that toads may take a few years to colonize new ponds. We discovered mid stage toad tadpoles at the site less than three months after the ponds had been created, which means that the toads would have spawned when the ponds were around 6 weeks old – a great demonstration of the fact that if ponds are created where they are desperately needed, then the animals will utilize them almost immediately.

I am looking forward to recording the first grass snake at the site. Reconnecting South Wales' Dragons will be creating more ponds in the near future at a site that is very close by, so watch this space!





News from Cumbria

By Ruth Popely - Cumbria Natterjack Officer

Late April's cold-snap, with impressive snowdrifts, caused common toads to delay spawning, but had little impact on the start of the natterjack season. Fresh spawn from of both species appeared in ponds at the same time and presented our monitors with quite an identification challenge, but thereafter it became easier.

Later, we enjoyed fabulous summer weather and monitoring was a complete joy! Plenty of suncream and a floppy sunhat was part of my uniform! Ten site monitors have reported a successful natterjack breeding season so far and more are expected. Particularly positive reports were received at the following sites:



Millom Iron Works (above): a tiny colony on a redundant industrial site bred successfully this year and received a major boost from up to 2000 new recruits.



Dunnerholme (left): the new Head Greenkeeper has started to manage the course organically and several thousand natterjacks were recruited this year.

Haverigg (below): tens of thousands of natterjack toadlets were seen around the salt marsh pools before unusually high summer tides washed the pools out. Hopefully some survived the ordeal.



After the breeding season comes to a close and autumn starts to bite, activity turns to scrape creation, part of our Higher Level Stewardship work (see photo below). Looking ahead, I have a list of new monitors who will need training up so I will be organising a workshop early next spring to welcome them into our happy group.



All photos Ruth Popely (ARC)



European Conference Report By Jim Foster - Conservation Director

ARC attended the 17th European Congress of Herpetology in Hungary this summer. These events are a fantastic opportunity to learn from overseas colleagues, as well as promoting ARC's work to a wider audience, as our Conservation Director, Jim Foster, explains.



Every two years the Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH) organises a conference. It is chiefly an academic meeting, with researchers explaining the fruits of their labours. Increasingly, though, there are presentations on or relevant to conservation.

Tony Gent, John Wilkinson and I represented ARC at the 2013 meeting, held in Veszprém, Hungary. You might ask why it's worth ARC attending these meetings. Whilst most of ARC's projects are in Britain, we're also active in other parts of Europe. For instance, Tony chairs the SEH Conservation Committee, we collaborate with other Non-Governmental Organisations across Europe, and we engage with the European Commission.

We gave presentations on conservation status mapping of great crested newts, and on invasive species issues in Britain. It was a fantastic opportunity to exchange ideas. After all, the species we have in Britain are all found on the continent, often facing similar challenges. All of this activity allows us to better influence the prospects for herps at home and abroad.

These meetings are always great for absorbing the latest discoveries. I was especially startled by the mass mortalities of fire salamanders in the Netherlands, apparently due to a newly discovered fungus. There has been a 96% drop in numbers in the space of five years. That's a scary statistic. Come to the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting in February to find out more.

Amongst other topics, we heard presentations on environmental DNA surveys; mitigating road impacts on amphibians; pesticide effects; and hibernation in frogs. We gathered plenty of useful advice and contacts to help with our work back home. Of course, sometimes the researchers flagged up problems that need not bother us too much, such as the lady who built artificial egg-laying sites for snakes in Poland... only to find that wild bison were prone to destroying them!



Photos: Top left: The conference began with a fine display of Hungarian folk dancing. Bottom right: Budapest Airport has a population of green lizards (*Lacerta viridis*), are used to disturbance because of the frequent passenger traffic. © J. Foster.



New ponds created in rural Lancashire

By David Orchard - Amphibian & Reptile Group of South Lancashire

Great crested newts are still relatively widespread in parts of mid Lancashire, mainly due to the high density of farm ponds. Unfortunately many of these ponds are now becoming silted up, filled by vegetation or shaded by trees.

In 2012, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and the Amphibian and Reptile Group of South Lancashire (ARGSL, the local ARG), decided to act. We applied to SITA for funding to manage and create ponds on a farm near Claughton-on-Brock in rural Lancashire. The resulting project is an excellent example of partnership working between ARC and a local ARG. SITA Trust provides funding through the Landfill Communities Fund which is available for projects that enhance communities and enrich nature.



1. This pond was too shady.



2. David during silt removal.

In 2011 the site had been surveyed for amphibians by ARGSL and all five species of widespread amphibian were recorded. Confirmation that these species were present was essential as without this information there was no evidence to show that work would benefit amphibians.

A supportive landowner is critical to getting the project off the ground and fortunately both the landowner and tenant farmer were enthusiastic about the proposed work. ARGSL supported the grant application by providing a match funding contribution of £600, an essential part of the process, and ARC developed and submitted the funding application.

SITA approved £4880 for this project in August 2012, but due to waterlogged ground pond creation work could not take place until June 2013. Upon completion: five new ponds had been created, four ponds had reduced shading from overhanging trees and two ponds had silt removed. In addition, four hibernacula were created near the existing ponds to further enhance the terrestrial habitat. The new ponds will be surveyed by ARGSL volunteers in 2014 and 2015 to monitor their use by amphibians.

This project highlights the value of the farmed landscape for great crested newts and other amphibians. It clearly demonstrates what can be achieved when a farmer, landowner, local ARG and ARC work together for the benefit of wildlife conservation.



3. Digging new pond.



4. The same pond in photo 1 after the work had been completed.

Jools Granville of SITA Trust said *"We are delighted to support this small project led by the nation's foremost amphibian and reptile conservation charity and involving local enthusiasts and experts."*

All photos: David Orchard.

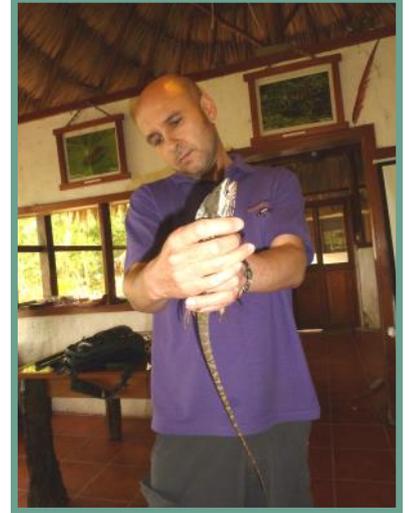


Project Chicchan By Gary Powell - Senior Reserves Manager



In May 2013 I set off for the Peten region of Guatemala to take part in the very first phase of an exciting new venture: Project Chicchan. The project has been set up by ex-ARC Community Officer, Rowland Griffin, with the intention of beginning a long term herpetofauna monitoring programme in this little-studied area and to promote the conservation of these species and their habitats.

There are a number of tours that offer wildlife experiences but i was looking for something hands on that would contribute in some way to promoting and conserving reptiles and amphibians. Project Chicchan aims to do exactly that; obtaining data for an area that has been only briefly surveyed before and building up a picture of the herpetofaunal assemblage of the area, as well as looking at the various impacts and pressures that may affect species in the region.



The expedition base is Estacion Biologicas Las Guacamayas , situated amongst the jungles and limestone outcrops alongside the Rio San Pedro in El Peten, Northern Guatemala, within the Laguna Del Tigre National Park. This first expedition consisted of 6 people as well as Rowland and with the full support and back up of the staff at Las Guacamayas.

It soon became clear that for a UK based herpetologist this expedition was going to be something special; we'd seen basilisks (*Basiliscus vittatus*) in the grounds of a restaurant while having breakfast before we had even left Flores (the last town before the drive into the jungle) and a good sized Morelet's crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*) basking on a fallen tree within a few minutes of jumping on a boat for the final leg of the journey.

The grounds of the station itself as well as the surrounding jungle were alive with lizards during the day (basilisks, ameivas and a few different anoles) and during the evening and night, the amphibians (Cane toads, Gulf Coast toads) and nocturnally active reptiles such as Banded geckos (*Coleonyx elegans*) and snakes such as the fer-de-lance (*Bothrops asper*) and Northern Cat Eyed snake (*Leptodeira septentrionalis*) took over. Over the 2 week period the weather gradually turned from roasting hot and dry to rainy and humid, and with this change it was possible to observe the altered activity patterns of various species: much more amphibian activity as expected as well as a corresponding increase in snake captures. In total we saw just under 40 species during our time out there, all but 2 of them new to me. Hard to pick favourites but the Speckled racers (*Drymobius margaritiferus*, see photo) were beautiful animals to handle and the Casquehead Treefrog (*Tripriorion petastatus*) was amazing.





Many elements of herpetology that I'd learned at ARC were of great help to me out in the jungle; although the habitat, climate and species were all very different, many of the aspects of the job are the same wherever we get involved in herp conservation. Obtaining baseline information on under recorded species, planning monitoring exercises, working with volunteer groups with a range of different levels of expertise, liaising with other organisations, providing training, adopting safe working practice, species identification and understanding of reptile and amphibian ecology – all these are relevant to the task regardless of location.

One of the main issues to look at in the Peten is how habitat alteration and other human activities affect populations of reptiles and amphibians, again a familiar subject wherever you do your herping.

For a more in-depth description of Project Chicchan and it's research, dates of future trips as well as my regular column of book reviews and expedition write-ups, see www.projectchicchan.com .

Photos: Previous page top right: Gary with a basilisk (*Basiliscus vittatus*) Middle: Northern cat eyed snake (*Leptodeira septentrionalis*) Bottom: Speckled racer (*Drymobius margaritiferus*). This page top: Morelet's crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*). Middle: Sheep frog (*Hypopachus variolosus*) Bottom: The expedition team. All photos: Gary Powell (ARC)





Fife ARG flocks to the Solway Firth By Dr Pete Minting - Scottish Project Officer

Our Scottish Project is well underway, following its official launch at Edinburgh in August. As one of our main aims is to get more people involved in amphibian and reptile conservation, we have been providing volunteers with opportunities to do practical work. In September a team of volunteers from Fife Amphibian and Reptile Group got stuck into some habitat management at natterjack toad sites near Dumfries. Natterjack toads are extremely rare in Scotland and are only found at a few sites on the Solway coast. Fife ARG had attended ARC's guided walk to see natterjacks at Southernness in 2012 and were keen to come back for more!



Scottish natterjack toad populations have declined significantly since the 1970s and are now struggling, with two particularly poor breeding years in 2012 and 2013. A very cold spring in 2012 meant early spawn failed to develop. In May 2013 an unusually high tide killed spawn at many of the coastal sites. At one of the Scottish natterjack's former strongholds, Caerlaverock WWT Reserve, spawn string counts have declined dramatically since 2005. The reasons for this are unclear but ARC is doing its best to help WWT revive its natterjack population.

We initially set Fife ARG's volunteers the challenge of clearing gorse from an area of the WWT Reserve which was previously good for natterjacks. Natterjacks need large areas of short grass on which to forage, so gorse can be a problem. Their efforts were impressive but

WWT reserve warden Joe Bilous soon had to halt proceedings, as a flock of endangered barnacle geese landed, having just migrated from the Arctic! The window of opportunity to complete work at these sites is short, between the end of the natterjack breeding season in August and the arrival of the geese.

Undeterred, Fife ARG's dynamic leader Dave Bell called his team back to the car park and we came up with a new plan – dig some new ponds for natterjacks near Powfoot, at the eastern end of the Priestsie Merse. The landowner and Scottish Natural Heritage had provided permission for this work to go ahead in an area which is slightly higher than an existing pool, where spawn has often been killed by high tides. The Fife team also cleared vegetation from a natterjack pond at Southernness before returning to their campsite for a well-deserved curry. Many thanks to everyone who took part! We will let you know if the natterjacks use the new ponds.



Friends Day 2013 - Impressions of an ARC newbie!

By Robin Bassett - Weald Seasonal Field Officer

They came from far and wide, from Surrey, Hampshire, Sussex, Hertfordshire and Suffolk! ARC supporters and volunteers making their way to the Witley Centre for the annual ARC Friends Day!

This was my first 'Friends' day, having started with ARC only two weeks earlier and it was an opportunity for me to meet some of my fellow 'friends' and the Trust's most devoted supporters. We all came together to share a lovely day with ARC luminaries Jim Foster, Rob Free, Matt Dowse and John Buckley plus a stellar cast of reptiles and amphibians!

Jim opened up proceedings with an enlightening introduction, followed by Rob who gave an overview of the work undertaken by the Weald team at its thirty plus reserves for species including sand lizards, smooth snakes and natterjack toads, whilst Matt detailed the success of the team's sand lizard re-introduction programme that has seen the number of sites in the region that support our largest native lizard increase from three to twenty.



John's talk on the work of ARC at Woolmer Forest highlighted the significance of the Ministry of Defence owned area for natterjack toads. Woolmer represents the only native site for natterjacks in Southern Britain and is also the best studied location for the species in Europe.

The morning's talks were concluded by Jim with the story of the Pool Frog and how a 'lost' native is making a comeback to prove that, 'extinction doesn't have to be forever!'

A fine collection of amphibians and reptiles were on display for all to marvel at during the lunch-break and in the afternoon we were treated to the sight of adder, smooth snake, slow-worm and common frog on the ARC reserve at Witley Common. Most remarkable of which were two sets of juvenile smooth snakes! This included five fresh beauties found in the open by Dominik Reynolds. In fact the number of young reptiles across the site was encouraging and shows that conditions are good not only for a population of reptiles and amphibians, but for a thriving breeding population too.



As ever on days such as these the supporting cast of wildlife was impressive and Rob and Matt discovered bog bush crickets, long winged cone-heads, mottled and field grasshoppers, fox moth caterpillars, as well as the sand wolf spider, labyrinth spider, nursery web spider and the web of the purse web spider. All of which demonstrated the richness and diversity of well maintained lowland heathland, which makes it the wonderful habitat that it is.

Thank you to all who contributed to a memorable day, especially to Rob, Matt, Jim and John for sharing their experiences and expertise, and to the friends for their passion for and interest in amphibians and reptiles.

Photo top right: Meeting the amphibians & reptiles over lunch. Middle: Looking under tins for reptiles. Bottom left: Smooth snake. Matt Dowse (ARC).



The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2014 By Angela Reynolds - Editor



The Herp Workers' Meeting is THE event of the year for anyone interested in conserving amphibians and reptiles. Each year, a lively throng of herpetologists gathers to exchange ideas, debate hot topics, soak up inspiration and catch up with old friends. What better way to spend a weekend, just before the field season?

In 2014 we will be at Bristol Zoo. The programme is exciting, with talks and workshops to cater for all interests. Delegates will be learning about the latest research to stop roadside drains harming toads, results of a Europe-wide study of amphibian disease, what volunteers have discovered from surveying Sefton's sand lizards and Dudley's amphibians, the latest developments in aquatic newt trapping and of course we'll be laying on a social evening, with Gala Dinner, raffle and quiz.



Delegates at the 2013 Gala Dinner & Quiz. Photo: © Jon Cranfield.

During breaks, delegates will be free to enjoy the zoo, which has a fantastic track record in native species work and makes a wonderful visit. The 2014 Meeting has already been hugely popular and was completely sold out within a record thirteen days! You can read all about it in the next issue of *Hop Gossip!*

ARC & ARG UK would like to thank the following sponsors for their help with funding the meeting.



(All sponsors correct at time of going to print)

ToadSize Project 2013 - Results coming soon!

Road mortality is one of several factors believed to be harming common toad populations in the UK. Toads are particularly vulnerable during annual migrations to breeding ponds. As well as the obvious impacts of deaths caused by road traffic, this form of mortality may also be affecting the body size of toads in impacted populations (they may be killed before they grow to full size).



Measuring a toad. Photo: © Dr John Wilkinson (ARC)

Body size is an important factor in the lives of amphibians (in general 'bigger is better') so, in Spring this year, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and ARG UK embarked on an investigation on the impacts of traffic on the size of common toads. Following on from the success of chytrid screening in 2008 and 2011, we asked toad patrollers across the country for their assistance in obtaining records. It was important to collect the following data from sites where mortality rates were high and also low to make a comparison.

1. Body lengths of 10 to 20 male toads per night, for several nights during a crossing period.
2. Count or estimate the number of toads moved by patrollers on each sample night.
3. Count or estimate the number of toads killed by traffic on each sample night.
4. Measure traffic volume at the crossing.

With the data collected, ARC's Dr John Wilkinson and ARG UK's Dr Angela Julian set about analysing it and have come up with some interesting results. These will be shared at the up coming Herp Workers Meeting and in the next edition of *Hop Gossip!* Thank you to all the dedicated patrollers who contributed to the project. We couldn't do it without you!

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. It's really easy to use. Find out more at

<http://recordpool.org.uk/>



A first for ARC and the Pondweed Leafhopper (*Erotettix cyanae*) By John Buckley - Amphibian Conservation Officer.

In August, colleagues Richie Johnson and Chris Dresh reported the discovery of a colony of Pondweed Leafhoppers at one of ARC's larger reserves in Purbeck. Entomologists only knew the species in Sussex and Surrey so I was keen to check it out for myself and secure some specimens.

Full of anticipation I arrived with nets and specimen tubes. This large sheltered pond with its great crested newts, common toad and medicinal leeches is used by ARC staff to train volunteers in springtime but it is rarely visited thereafter. Along the edge, I saw reed beetles slink under *Potamogeton* leaves in their characteristic manner, but no tiny 4.5mm leafhoppers. I spotted blue green rhododendron leafhoppers in the marginal vegetation, so could this all have been a case of mistaken identity?



Thankfully my doubts disappeared as I "got my eye in". I could see tiny powder blue leafhoppers sitting on *Potamogeton natans* leaves, some singly and some in pairs. When disturbed, they flew low over the water to another resting place and I could tell that it wasn't going to be easy to catch them.

I soon got a specimen in my pond net but before it could be tubed it flew away. Several attempts with a butterfly net, met with the same result. More drastic action was required. The water was too deep for my boots. I then tried to sink a few specimens and pick them off the water surface but, they simply bobbed up again and flew away. Eventually persistence paid off and I finally secured a couple of specimens for reference purposes.

Back at home the two specimens nicely fitted with the description in the Royal Entomological Society's handbook and with a hand lens I could clearly see the diagnostic facial markings used in Walter Le Quesne's key.

A later visit with chest waders to accurately estimate of the population wasn't possible, but we all agreed it was certainly in the 100s. Next year ARC intends to re-survey nearby ponds, where the broad leaved pondweed is abundant, and make a better estimate of the population at Leg of Mutton Pond.



Species Profile

Pool Frog (*Pelophylax lessonae*)



Male pool frog (Northern clade). Photo: Jim Foster (ARC)

Behaviour

- Much more aquatic than common frog.
- Basks in the sun on banks of pond or aquatic vegetation.
- Less wary than all other water frogs.
- Call is a series of loud croaks interspersed with a longer purring call, can be heard between May and July.
- Hibernates on land close to their breeding ponds between September and March.



Female pool frog (Northern clade). Photo: Jim Foster (ARC)

Breeding

- Breeding starts in May.
- Prolonged breeding season often with a second spawning in June.
- Males engage in highly charged vocal interactions to attract the females.
- Spawn is laid in several clumps attached to aquatic vegetation in the sun.
- Tadpoles grow very quickly and once fully grown become very secretive.

Fact: The Latin word *Pelophylax* translated means 'Mud Guardian.'

Habitat and History

- Presumed extinct in the wild in England by 1995 before native status was determined.
- First reintroduced to a single site in Norfolk in 2005 as part of a long term on-going programme.
- Prefer groups of unshaded ponds in open woodland.
- Due to a long history of unmanaged introductions, other races of the pool frog may be encountered in other parts of the country.



Tadpole. Photo: Howard Inns

Appearance/ colour

- Adults are 6 - 7 cms
- Pointed snout with eyes close together.
- Hind legs are shorter than the other water frogs. When sitting, the heels don't touch behind the body.
- Both sexes of Northern clade are similar colours, typically shades of brown with yellow and black markings.
- Light brown dorso-lateral folds and darker spots on the flanks.
- The southern clade of pool frog is typically green on the back and flanks (see photo below).
- Back legs are light brown with dark cross stripes.
- Males are often yellow around the eyes and on the head which become more intense in breeding season.
- Males have a white vocal sac near each corner of the mouth (see photos below).
- Spawn clumps contain small brown eggs with a white or cream underside surrounded by jelly.
- Tadpoles are brown to olive-green.

Below. Southern clade pool frogs (non native) Photo: Howard Inns



Above. Northern clade Vocal sacs. Photo: Jim Foster (ARC)

Important dates

Here are all of our confirmed winter dates for events and volunteer tasks. We will be adding more events as time goes on so please do check our website for further details: www.arc-trust.org/get-involved/events.

Volunteer tasks usually run from 10:00 - 15:00. Tea and biscuits are provided but please bring suitable footwear and a packed lunch. For more details on the Dorset tasks please contact Richard Sharp at richard.sharp@arc-trust.org or 07810 770 565.

For details of the Wealden midweek tasks please contact Matt Dowse at matthew.dowse@arc-trust.org or 07810 770 566.

Wealden Sunday task venues may be subject to change, new volunteers should therefore check before attending by calling Jon Webster 01903 245 125 or 07973 212 747 or Rob Free 07810 184 503.

KEY

	Weald Volunteer task
	Dorset Volunteer task
	Conference
	Event

Date	Event/Site	Venue/Meeting Place/Grid Ref
05.01.14	Crosswater Lane	DZ Public Car Park, Truxford Lane Grid 894012
05.01.14	Parley Common	Car park on Barrack Rd SZ 094 995
08.01.14	St Catherine's Hill	Gun Club entrance off Sandy Lane SZ 145 950
15.01.14	St Catherine's Hill	Gun Club entrance off Sandy Lane SZ 145 950
22.01.14	Parley Common	Heatherland Centre/ SU 090 006
26.01.14	Broxhead	Lay-by on left third mile south of Broxhead/Linford Road, B3004. Grid 804377
29.01.14	Ferndown Common	Pompeys Lane/ SZ 064 997
01.02.14 02.02.14	The Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2014	The Clifton Pavillion, Bristol Zoo Gardens. Please see page 14 for details.
02.02.14	Parley Common	Car park on Barrack Rd SZ 094 995
05.02.14	Parley Common	Heatherlands Centre/ SU 090 006
12.02.14	Dunyeats	Gravel Hill South Gate/ SZ015 964
16.02.14	Crooksbury	Meet forestry gate, end Turners Lane opposite Donkey PH Elstead/ Farnham Road. Grid 890451
19.02.14	Ferndown Common	Wimborne Rd/ SU 065 006
26.02.14	Parley Common	Heatherlands Centre/ SU 090 006
02.03.14	Parley Common	Car park on Barrack Rd SZ 094 995
05.03.14	Dunyeats	Gravel Hill South Gate/ SZ015 964
09.03.14	Gong Hill	Lay-by opposite site on Old Frensham Road Grid 853437
12.03.14	Parley Common	Heatherlands Centre/ SU 090 006
15.03.14	Amphibian ID workshop	10:00am Bournemouth Natural Science Society, 39 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 3NS
19.03.14	Ramsdown	By Brickfield Cottages off Avon Causeway/ SZ 133 974
26.03.14	Parley Common	Heatherlands Centre/ SU 090 006



TAIL-ENDERS



Set A - Set of 8 cards with 4 designs by Leon Hills. £4.50.

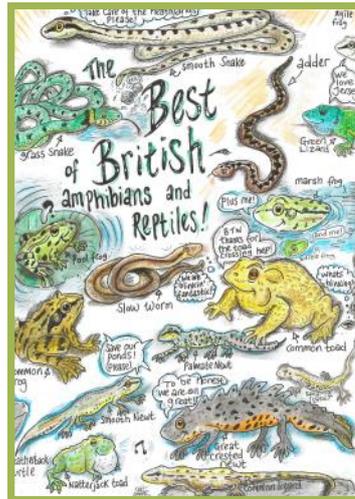


Set B - Set of 5 cards with a design by ARC's Dr John Wilkinson. £3.50.



Set C - Set of 8 cards with 4 designs by Leon Hills. £4.50.

COMPETITION WINNER!

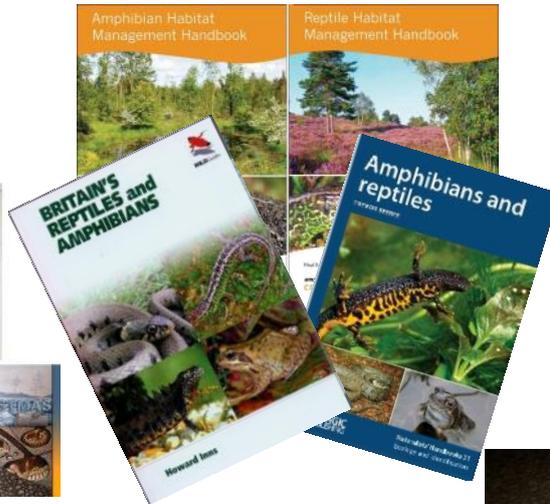


Congratulations to Neil Gange who designed the front cover for this issue of *Hop Gossip!* We had some really great entries so a big thank you to everyone who entered. Neil has received a years free Friendship and a goody bag including a copy of *Reptiles and Amphibians* by Trevor Beebee and also *Britain's Reptiles and Amphibians* by Howard Inns. Both books are signed by the authors and Chris Packham who wrote the dedications to both.



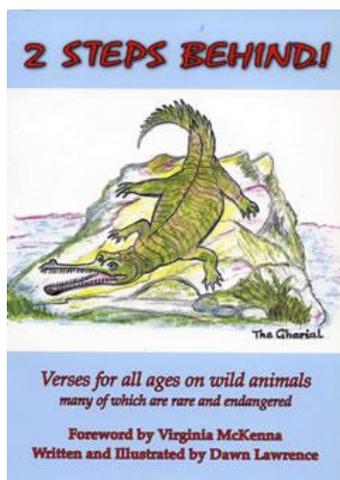
Christmas gift ideas

So, what do you buy the herp enthusiast in your life for Christmas? Perhaps you would like to treat yourself? How about sending some herp related cards out this year? All of these items are available for purchase from our website or if you would like to phone up to purchase these items please contact Kim on 01202 391319. All prices include P&P.



Amphibian & Reptile Habitat Management Handbooks £9.00 each or £15.00 for 2.
Britain's Reptiles and Amphibians by Howard Inns £18.95.
Amphibians and Reptiles by Trevor Beebee £15.99.

Christmas Bundle (Pin badge, Lanyard & Cotton Bag) £7.00.

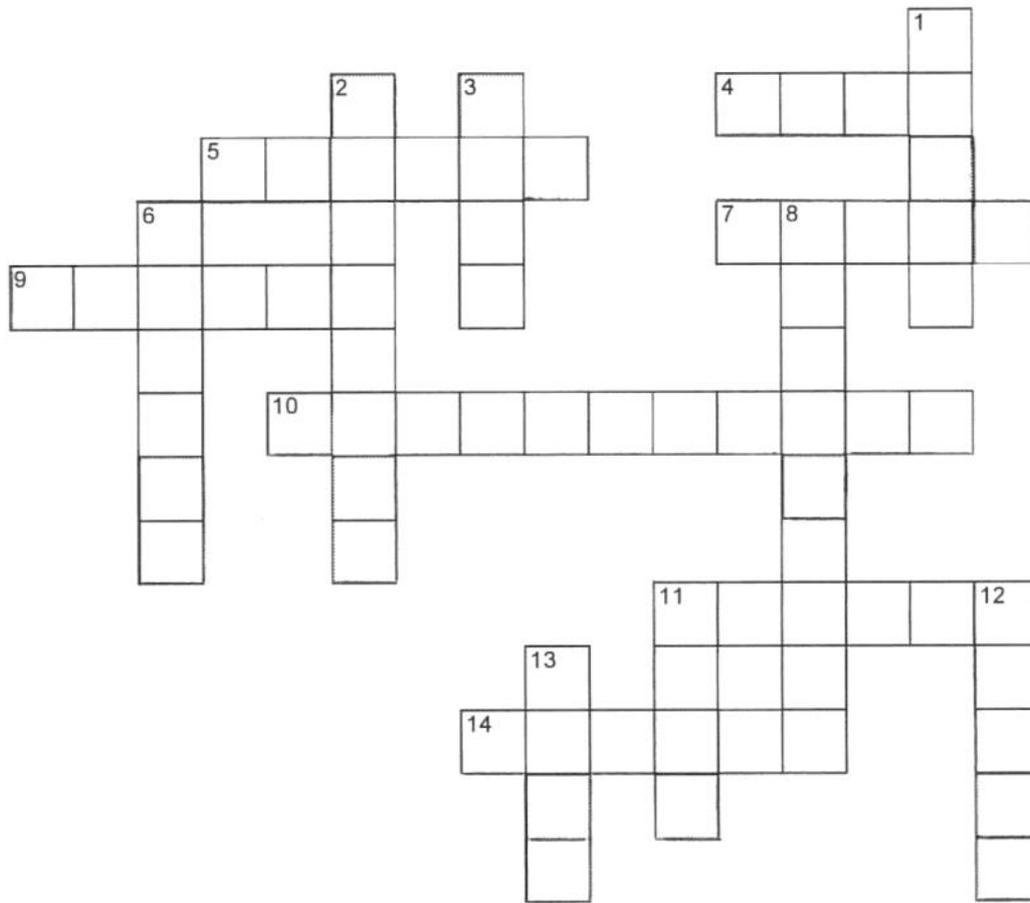


NEW! 2 Steps Behind! By Dawn Lawrence £8.95.
How Very Very Nice! By Leon Hills £5.25.
And After That He Ate Them! By Leon Hills Hardback £9.00, Paperback £7.50.

For full descriptions please see our shop on the website.
www.arc-trust.org/support-us/shop

CROSSWORD

Perfect for coffee breaks or wintery evenings by the fire!



ACROSS

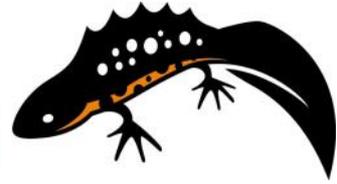
4. You should build one of these in your garden (4)
5. You find this on a grass snake (6)
7. How many kinds of newt do we have (5)
9. The colour of a natterjack toads stripe (6)
10. You might find grass snakes here! (7) (4)
11. Reptiles have these, but not amphibians (6)
14. Colour of a great crested newts belly (6)

DOWN

1. Our only venomous snake (5)
2. Legless lizard (4) (4)
3. Reptiles do this on sunny days (4)
6. To shed skin (6)
8. What amphibians and reptiles do in winter (9)
11. One of our lizards needs this to lay its eggs (4)
12. Frogs and toads lay this (5)
13. Could turn in to a prince (4)

Answers will be revealed in the Summer/ Autumn 2014 edition of *Hop Gossip!*

amphibian and reptile conservation



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

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

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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)