Introductory Pack:

Leicestershire and Rutland Amphibians and Reptiles

Contents:

* Vice-County Checklist
* Atlas
* References
* Places to Visit
* Contacts
* Identification Tips
* Sample LARN Newsletter

Compiled by Andrew Heaton,

County Recorder for Amphibians and Reptiles, March 2014

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**Checklist of Amphibians and Reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland**

As at May 2013.

[ ] = not currently present or no evidence for presence

Amphibians

**Common Frog** *Rana temporaria*

Native. Widespread and common; populations stable.

[**Pool Frog** *Pelophylax lessonae*]

Native (though probably not in Leicestershire). Reported but no firm evidence.

**Marsh Frog** *Pelophylax ridibundus*

Introduction. One population at Lakeview fishery near Melton Mowbray.

[**European Tree Frog** *Hyla arborea*]

Introduction. One record in Leicester in 1985.

[**American Bullfrog** *Lithobates catesbeianus*]

Introduction. Reported but no firm evidence.

**Common Toad** *Bufo bufo*

Native. Widespread and common; no apparent decline in recent times (as there has been elsewhere in the Midlands). RDB species.

[**Natterjack** *Epidalea calamita*]

Native (but probably not in Leicestershire). Introduced, before 1889, to the Leicester Museum grounds.

**Smooth Newt** *Lissotriton vulgaris*

Native. Widespread and common; populations stable.

**Palmate Newt** *Lissotriton helveticus*

Native. Rare; apparently only one definite current site (Beacon Hill) though it has been reported elsewhere, and has been lost recently from a number of sites. RDB species

**Great Crested Newt** *Triturus cristatus*

Native. Fairly widespread, though nowhere common; some large populations lost to development in recent years. RDB species

**Alpine Newt** *Icthyosaura alpestris*

Introduction. Two populations recorded: two gardens in Leicester (possibly also in the University of Leicester Botanic Garden) and at Kirby Muxloe.

Reptiles

**Slow-worm** *Anguis fragilis*

Native. Uncommon; few scattered records in Charnwood, West Leicestershire and Rutland. Possibly under-recorded rather than rare. RDB species

**Common Lizard** *Zootoca vivipara*

Native. Uncommon; records concentrated in Charnwood Forest, East Rutland and the Moira area of North West Leicestershire; odd records elsewhere, and new sites keep turning up. RDB species

[**Sand Lizard** *Lacerta agilis*]

Native (but probably not in Leicestershire). Reported as formerly present in the Victoria County History 1907, but no firm evidence given.

**Grass Snake** *Natrix natrix*

Native. Widespread and fairly common, recorded particularly in river valleys (especially the Soar and Wreake), along canals (Ashby, Grand Union) and around Rutland Water. RDB species

**Adder** *Vipera berus*

Native. Rare; only two definite populations (Bradgate and Ketton); occasional reports from elsewhere are often misidentifications, though there are suggestions of small populations at Oadby, Launde and Shawell. RDB species

[**Kingsnake** *Lampropeltis sp*.]

Introduction. One record from a garden in Wing in 1995.

**Red-eared Terrapin** *Trachemys scripta elegans*

Introduction. Occasional records, mainly of single animals (eg Cossington, Ashby Canal, Blackbrook Reservoir, Eyebrook Reservoir) and larger numbers of up to 5 (Groby Pool).

[**Alligator** *Alligator mississippiensis*]

Introduction. Press reports in 1964 of two canal-dwelling alligators in Leicester may be an exaggeration.

**HERPETOFAUNA ATLAS OF LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND**

**AMPHIBIANS IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND (2012)**



Frogs are widespread, even in small ponds in gardens (where they may be more common than out in the countryside).



Toads are apparently almost as widespread as frogs, though they are more demanding in their requirements, needing larger, deeper ponds to breed in.



This gives an exaggerated picture of the distribution: in recent years, palmate newts have only definitely been found at Beacon Hill and perhaps three other sites. Now named *Lissotriton helveticus*.



Smooth newts are a widespread species, even within the city, and they will breed in the smallest ponds. This is another species likely to be found in gardens. Now named *Lissotriton vulgaris*.



Great crested newts, a protected species, are widely but fairly sparsely scattered across Leicestershire and Rutland, with the largest populations in North-West Leicestershire.

**REPTILES IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND (2012)**



Adders are now rare, found only in very few widely spread populations – the Bradgate area, Ketton Quarry and possibly one/two other sites.



Grass snakes are widespread, with concentrations of records especially in river valleys (the Soar and Wreake), along canals (Ashby Canal and Grand Union Canal) and around Rutland Water.



Records of slow-worms are rather sparse and widely scattered, with apparently the main concentration in Charnwood Forest. They may be under-recorded.



Common lizards show concentrations in the heathy areas of Charnwood and Moira and drier habitats in east Rutland. Elsewhere they are rather scarce. Now named *Zootoca vivipara*.

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**PLACES TO VISIT**

Beacon Hill

Heathland/woodland. Leicestershire County Council. Grid Ref SK510148

Frog, Palmate newt, Smooth newt, Common Lizard, Slow-worm, Adder(?)

Bradgate Park

Heathland. Bradgate Park Trust. SK530110

Frog, Toad, Palmate newt, Smooth newt, Common Lizard, Slow-worm, Grass Snake, Adder

Charnwood Lodge

Heath grassland, woodland. Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. SK458155

Frog, Toad, Great Crested Newt, (Palmate Newt), Smooth Newt, Common Lizard

Hicks Lodge/Newfield Colliery

Woodland, heathland, grassland. Forestry Commission. SK319155

Frog, Toad, Smooth Newt, Common Lizard

Holwell Reserves

Woodland, bare rock, grassland. Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. SK741234

Frog, Great Crested Newt? Palmate Newt? Smooth Newt, Common Lizard, Grass Snake, Adder?

Ketton Quarry

Limestone quarry, grassland, scrub. Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. SK979053

Common Lizard, Grass snake, Adder

Lucas Marsh

Reedbed. Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. SP620998

Frog, Toad, (Great Crested Newt), (Palmate Newt), Smooth Newt, Grass Snake

Merry’s Meadows

Grassland. Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. SK937157

Frog, Toad, Great Crested Newt, Smooth Newt, Slow-worm

New Lount

Grassland, scrub. Leicestershire County Council. SK398184

Frog, Toad, Great Crested Newt, Smooth Newt, Grass snake

Rutland Water

Reservoir. Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. SK879071

Frog, Toad, Great Crested Newt, Smooth Newt, Slow-worm, Grass snake

Ulverscroft

Heathland., woodland. Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. SK489124

Frog, Toad, Smooth Newt, Common Lizard, Slow-worm

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Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network

* Covering all aspects of amphibians and reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland, through the medium of a regular newsletter (see sample copy)
* Contact: Andrew Heaton (as above)

**USEFUL WEBSITES**

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation: [www.arc-trust.org](http://www.arc-trust.org)

Froglife: [www.**froglife**.org](http://www.froglife.org)

Amphibian and Reptile Groups UK: [www.**arguk**.org](http://www.arguk.org)

National Amphibian and Reptile

Recording Scheme: [www.narrs.org.uk](http://www.narrs.org.uk)

Naturespot: [www.naturespot.org.uk](http://www.naturespot.org.uk)

**IDENTIFICATION TIPS – LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES**

**A. Amphibians**

* Wetland habitats
* Moist skin

**A.1 Tail-less amphibians**

* **Frog**

Powerful back legs; moves by jumping

Black stripe behind the eye

Smooth, moist skin

Wetlands, small ponds; eggs in clumps

* **Toad**

Small back legs, moves by walking

Dry bumpy skin

Large, deep ponds; eggs in strings

**A.2 Tailed Amphibians**

* **Smooth Newt**

Small, pale

Male in breeding season has wavy crest

Throat orange with black spots

Small ponds; eggs greyish, laid singly on water plants

* **Palmate newt**

Small, pale

Male has webbed hind feet, filament at tip of tail

Throat pale, unspotted

Small ponds; eggs greyish, laid singly on water plants

* **Great Crested Newt**

Large, dark, bumpy skin

Male in breeding season has jagged crest, white stripe on tail

Throat completely dark

Larger ponds; eggs white, laid singly on water plants

**A.3 Tadpoles**

Frog – brown colouration with gold spots; tail-tip pointed

Toad – black colouration, tail-tip rounded

Smooth Newt/Palmate Newt – small, delicate, prominent external gills

Great Crested Newt – large, black-spotted, prominent external gills

**B. Reptiles**

- Generally drier habitats

- Dry scaly skin

**B.1 Snakes**

* **Grass snake**

Olive green colour with dark bars on sides

Yellow collar behind head

Large, up to 1 metre

Wetland habitats; will readily swim

* **Adder**

Smaller, shorter, up to 80 cm

Males grey, females brown

Zig-zag marking along back

V shape on head

Dry habitats (heath, grassland, open woodland)

**B.2 Lizards**

* **Common Lizard**

Typical lizard shape; pointed snout

Brownish colour

Dry habitats (heath, grassland)

* **Slow-worm**

Legless snake-like body

Pencil-thick, cylindrical

Bronze colour (juveniles gold)

Often urban (gardens, allotments)

**LARN NEWSLETTER – SAMPLE COPY**

an01441_Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network

*Newsletter No. 21*

*January 2013*

Exotic Species

The occurrence of alien species, with various impacts on the native fauna and flora – competition, predation, disease – is now seen as one of the major threats to the conservation of biodiversity. Exotic amphibians and reptiles are appearing in Leicestershire and Rutland, and there is the potential for further harmful species to invade.

Of the amphibians, there is an enigmatic 1985 record of a European tree frog found in the centre of Leicester. There is no suggestion that this was part of a breeding population – it was probably an individual that escaped from a herptile keeper. Tree frogs are found on the other side of the Channel in France but could not have got here unaided.

Again, there have been two fairly recent (2006) records of Alpine newts in Leicestershire. Two were found in a garden pond in Leicester, whilst several were spotted in a ditch beside the M1 near Kirby Muxloe. They may also be present in the University Botanic Gardens in Oadby. Alpine newts are imported for the aquarium/pond trade, a trade which has the potential to bring other species in.

Less well documented are recent records, requiring confirmation, of pool frog, marsh frogs and bullfrogs in Leicestershire. Most worrying of these, if it were to be confirmed in our area, would be the American bullfrog – a major concern due to its large size and predation of native species.

Regarding exotic reptiles, the only one confirmed to be present in the two counties is the red-eared terrapin. Another North American species, its appearance in Britain is as a result of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles craze of the 1990s – many were sold and some were released when they grew too big. Single terrapins (most probably this species) have been seen at Cossington Meadows (most recently in May 2011), Blackbrook Reservoir (2006), Eye Brook Reservoir (2004), Ashby Canal near Sutton Cheney (2004), whilst up to five have been seen at Groby Pool (1999).

Of other reptiles, odd snakes are reported from time to time and could be exotic escapes from collections – for example, the North American corn snake has cropped up occasionally in other parts of the country as an escape from collections (though not yet definitely in Leicestershire nor Rutland). Generally, though, these “exotics” turn out to be grass snakes or slow-worms. The odd alien specimen is probably of no great concern – problems arise when a breeding population is established.

Get Out There!

Very shortly, frogs will be spearheading the reappearance of herpetofauna in the two counties. Now is the time to plan survey strategies for the coming season – or just to begin noting casual records of herps. Any data - the more the better – will be welcome.

Conservation Manifesto

As mentioned in the last newsletter, I have drafted a conservation manifesto for amphibians and reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland. This is intended to highlight the conservation action required and whose responsibility it is. The document consists of five sections:

* Aims
* General conservation principles
* Species conservation measures
* Roles of organisations
* Priority actions

There are also three annexes: distribution maps, herpetofauna recorded in protected sites, and management guidance. If anyone wants to see, and comment on, this draft document, let me know and I will send it through.

More Gaps in the Map

Of all the 100-kilometre squares (10x10 km) which cover Leicestershire and Rutland, only two stand out as being predominantly in Leicestershire but having a complete absence of great crested newt records. One is the square SK30, marked out by Appleby Magna, Newton Burgoland, Sheepy Magna and Shenton, and with Twycross in the centre. The other is SK42, a tongue of land bounded by the Trent and Soar to their confluence and reaching as far south as Worthington and Shepshed.

As it is an aim of the GCN Biodiversity Action Plan to increase the number of 100-km squares that GCNs are confirmed in, it would be good to establish their presence in these squares and be able to tick off a couple more. If you have any GCN records for SK30, or could carry out a survey there, do let me know. I will be targeting it for survey myself. There would seem to be a number of possibilities for finding GCN populations: Newton Burgoland Marshes, wetlands associated with the River Sence, ponds at Gopsall Park, Twycross Zoo and Bosworth Water Park.

Similarly, GCN records for SK42 would be very welcome. In this instance, there are possibilities for finding GCNs in ponds along the Trent created by gravel extraction, and in wetland areas near the Trent-Soar confluence.



Kibworth Golf Club

Kibworth Golf Club at Kibworth Beauchamp, has reported that they have adders on their course. Indeed, there have apparently been two instances of people being bitten by adders and needing hospital treatment (though it seems that one of these, at least, was the result of a horsefly bite). The golf club is of course, concerned about the situation and has produced a very reasonable Safety Notice warning golfers about adders and the areas where they are most likely to be found. They have asked me for advice; I will be putting down some “tins” in the spring to see if I can confirm the record. If correct, the club should perhaps be pleased to be host to a rare species for Leicestershire in a new part of the county. Meanwhile, if anyone has any information on adders on or near this site, I would be grateful to receive it.

Botanic Gardens

Dr Sue Hitchings sends through some information on amphibian populations at the University of Leicester Botanic Gardens in Oadby. Of particular interest is a population of great crested newts to be found in the Sandstone Garden, in a very narrow, short canal. There are concerns over the management of the area, which regularly dries out (not necessarily a bad thing as it helps to keep down predators such as fish) and is heavily overgrown by trees.

Whilst the Limestone Pond has no trace of amphibians, another pond by Hastings House has reasonable breeding populations of frogs and toads, and smooth newts are also in the area. Unfortunately, there are suggestions that Alpine newts are also present – this is close to another site where they have been recorded on the edge of Leicester.

In the large pond making up the Water Garden, there used to be a significant toad population, until a few years ago when it sprang a leak and stood empty for some time. Now it is full of Koi carp and eutrophic due to their feed. A few toads have returned to breed on plant tubs which edge the structure. Hornwort looks set to take over the open water.

All in all, there is plenty besides plants to look for in the Botanic Gardens.

High Counts

I have been looking at the highest counts from records which have been made known to me and which I hold on my county database, for each of the native species. I am sure that I am not aware of all the largest populations, and there must be higher counts from these or other sites.

The largest counts I know of for our individual species are as follows:

* Frog – 1000, Woodhouse Eaves
* Toad – 1000, Rothley, Sawley (2 sites)
* Great Crested Newt – 130, Coalville
* Smooth Newt – 100, Coalville
* Palmate Newt – 21, Beacon Hill
* Grass snake – 30, Great Easton, Moira, Wing (3 sites)
* Common Lizard – 30, Ketton Quarry
* Slow-worm – 14, Ratby
* Adder – 6, Ketton Quarry

If you are aware of any higher counts than these, please do let me know.

Recorders Meeting

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust has organised this year’s wildlife recording conference. It is to be held on Saturday 16th February at the Rothley Centre, Mountsorrel Lane, Rothley. It covers a wide range of wildlife recording issues: bats, hoverflies, lichens, dragonflies and birds as well as general presentations on recording matters. The event is free but it is necessary to book a place: speak to Nathalie Cossa at LRWT by email [rc@lrwt.org.uk](mailto:rc@lrwt.org.uk) or phone 0116 2728853.

Wildlife Trust Reserves

The next LARN newsletter will feature a review of amphibians and reptiles on Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust nature reserves. If you have any outstanding records of herps on LRWT reserves, I would be pleased to receive them (as would the Trust).

Important! Did You Want This Newsletter?

Thank you to all those who replied to the questionnaire in LARN Newsletter no. 20, asking whether you wanted to continue to receive the newsletter in electronic form. Whilst not all those on the mailing list replied, those that did seemed to find the newsletter useful. I will continue to send it out to all who want it; please let me know if you would prefer a PDF to a Word version.

Corrigendum

Steve Woodward points out that, in the last LARN newsletter, I spelled the scientific name of the toadfly incorrectly – it should be *Lucilia bufonivora*. Apologies.

Fish Records, Please

As well as being County Recorder for reptiles and amphibians, I also hold that position for fish in the two counties. If you identify any fish whilst surveying ponds for amphibians – sticklebacks are the most likely but other still-water species are possible – I would be pleased to have the details to add to the county database (held, like the herps records, on a Mapmate system capable of generating distribution maps – but the fish database is far less well developed).



*If you have any news for the next edition of this newsletter, do let me know.*

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