

Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network

Newsletter Number 5
March 2001

Snakes Alive!

The reptile survey for Leicestershire and Rutland has run its first season, and the results have come in to Holly Hayes. The number of completed forms is not huge, but with multiple entries on some forms, they cover quite a large numbers of actual records.

As might be expected, the most frequent records in 2000 were of grass snakes. These were regularly seen at Watermead Park (in good numbers – up to 4 at a time), Northfield Park (Blaby), Carlton, Melton Mowbray, and particularly at Launde Abbey (with regular records from 12th May through to 23rd August). There were also odd sightings from other places, including one grass snake attracted to frogs and toads at a newly-created pond in Oakham.

For common lizards, there was what appears to be a good report from Carlton. The common lizards on Bardon Hill (reported in the last LARN newsletter) were also confirmed hibernating at the site by a Wildlife Trust work party in 1999. Lizards were also seen at Ulverscroft (see below).

A slow-worm was reported at Quorn, and there is also a record from Larch Spinney, Carlton, in 1999. Worryingly, no adders appear to have been reported during 2000, though there have been records in recent years from Ketton Quarry and Launde Abbey.

The overall picture is reasonable numbers

of grass snakes around the two counties, but few populations of the other reptiles. The "Snakes Alive" survey will continue into future years, so please do submit any records – survey forms are available from me or from Holly Hayes.

Amphibians

Now is the time to be looking for breeding amphibians again, and there is still a great need to find out where all our great crested newt sites are, in particular. Unfortunately, recording in the countryside is likely to be disrupted by foot and mouth disease bringing restrictions on movement. It may be best to concentrate on monitoring amphibian populations in garden and urban ponds this year – and hope for a return to normal in the future.

Ulverscroft Lizards

Steve Woodward reports that, on 7th January this year, a heathland restoration work party at Ulverscroft nature reserve turned over a stone and found eight

hibernating lizards. A ninth lizard was found nearby in bracken litter. This is the highest number of lizards Steve has seen in 20 years of working at Ulverscroft.

Events

LARN has been invited to have a presence at a couple of events this year. These are at Burbage Common on 13th May, and Watermead Country Park on 9th September. If anyone is interested in helping out on a stand at either of these, please let me know.

Herps Meeting

The 2001 Herpetofauna Workers Meeting took place on 3rd February at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The theme was on recording amphibians and reptiles, with examples ranging from Kent to Canada, and related topics including the role of volunteers and the developing National Biodiversity Network. The message is that there is still a lot to do – we need plenty more information on the distribution of even the common species.

Froglife, which organises the meeting, is looking for supporters – "Froglife Friends". For a payment of £20, Friends get a colourful newsletter at least twice a year and help fund projects on amphibians and reptiles in Britain and elsewhere. Details from Froglife, Mansion House, 27/28 Market Place, Halesworth, Suffolk IP19 8AY, tel. 01986-873733.

Temporary Ponds

A conference held in Birmingham on 23rd February looked at the importance of temporary ponds (those which dry up regularly or occasionally) in Europe. As well as supporting rare plants and invertebrates,

temporary ponds are also important for amphibians such as natterjack toads and even great crested newts. The secret of the ponds is that occasionally drying out means that populations of amphibian predators, such as fish, cannot build up. So please do not dismiss ponds as valueless just because they are sometimes completely dry.

Nature Reserve

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust is shortly to take on a new nature reserve – New Lount Local Nature Reserve, a former colliery site near Ashby de la Zouch, which will be leased from the County Council. Great crested newts, smooth newts, frogs and toads were all recorded here on one evening last year, and it is said to be a very good site for grass snakes.



Derbyshire

If you ever stray across the county border into Derbyshire, the Wildlife Trust is asking for records of reptiles, in order to inform the Derbyshire Biodiversity Action Plan. A postcard-sized recording card is available, with pictures of all four Derbyshire reptiles, from the Trust at Elvaston Castle, Derby DE72 3EP, or from the Whistletop Centre at Matlock Bath.

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