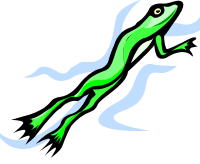


Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network



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Snakes Alive

Over the last five years, the “Snakes Alive” survey has added enormously to our knowledge of reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland. They may be few in number – just two snakes and two lizards – but they are a source of fascination for many people, who have helped to clarify their distribution in the two counties.

Grass snakes are much the commonest reptile in our area. A species which inhabits wetlands, feeding principally on amphibians and fish, the distribution map shows grass snakes to be found along the river valleys (especially the Wreake), in the canals (Ashby Canal and the Grand Union are obvious on the map) and around Rutland Water.

In sharp contrast, our other snake, the adder, is the rarest reptile in the two counties. There only appear to be three established populations: around the Bradgate Park area, at Ketton Quarry in the east of Rutland, and near Launde Abbey – this last record only came to light as a result of “Snakes Alive”.

Of the two lizards, the common or viviparous lizard appears to be the most widespread, occurring more frequently than might have been guessed at previously. Its strongholds are the heaths and dry grasslands of Charnwood Forest and east Rutland, but there are isolated records elsewhere.

The slow-worm, the legless lizard which looks like a snake, also has a concentration of records in Charnwood, with other odd records scattered around the two counties. Surprisingly, there have been no records of slow-worms from Leicester; this is generally an urban species, often found in gardens and allotments, and it may well be under-recorded in our area.

So, apart from the grass snake, reptiles are rather thinly distributed in Leicestershire and Rutland, but “Snakes Alive” has helped to pinpoint the critical areas for them. Reptiles are a warmth-loving group of animals; it may be one group for which global warming actually brings benefits. It is important to continue looking for reptiles in the future, to assess whether their distribution is changing with the climate.

This article was originally produced for Branchline.

Spawn Spot

Records from 2005 which came in to Holly Hayes as a result of the Spawn Spot survey have now been analysed. 55 records were received from all districts in the two

counties, with a predominance from the western half of Leicestershire, and from around the city.

There was a decline in frog enquiries and advice requests to Holly Hayes in 2005. This may have been associated with low temperatures in early spring leading to widespread instances of frozen frogspawn.

If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to send in frogspawn records for 2006, to add to the information being gathered through Spawn Spot.

NARRS

The National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme is now in its planning stages. As part of the scoping exercise, Froglife is undertaking a skills, knowledge and experience audit of potential volunteers. If you might be interested in taking part in this national survey, you can find a questionnaire on the Froglife website (or contact me if you want a paper copy). There is no commitment at this stage; Froglife are simply assessing what training may be necessary.

www.froglife.org/bulletin.htm

Recent Records

Ian Merrill was amazed to see, on 29th January at Timberwood Hill, Charnwood Lodge, a small lizard – partly because of the time of year, and also because it appears to be the first record in the area.

A record of a slow-worm at Birstall on 29th March is a good sighting of an uncommon species.

Also on 29th March, Neill Talbot led a recording party to Nature Alive, Coalville. The amphibian count was 88 great crested newts, 19 smooth newts, 30 frogs (and 9 clumps of frogspawn) and one toad.

Frogwatch 2005

The results of Froglife's "Frogwatch 2005" survey are now available to download from www.froglife.org

They confirm that garden ponds continue to be a prime habitat for frogs, with records of up to 100 clumps of frogspawn in a pond. Frogs appear to be doing well, with frog populations apparently having risen in the past five years, in all regions except South-east England.

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

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