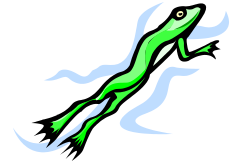


# Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network



*Newsletter No. 20  
September 2012*

## Midlands ARG Conference

The Midlands regional Amphibian and Reptile Group meeting, for the East and West Midlands ARGs, took place on Saturday 22nd September, at the National Forest's Conkers Centre at Moira.

The day started with an introduction to the National Forest by ranger Tony Smith. Amy Rogers, Nottingham University, stepped in at the last minute to describe the OPAL (Open Air Laboratory) projects, including studies of water quality and heathlands. Nigel Hand then spoke on recent adder research. Next, Rob Oldham gave a fascinating account of 30 years study of the toad population at Coleorton.

After a very impressive lunch, Jon Cranfield spoke on a new herps recording scheme, the Record Pool. Stuart Robinson described patterns of distribution of melanistic snakes, and possible advantages of the condition. Jan Clemons gave an entertaining account of the World Congress of Herpetology held in Vancouver. Chris Monk spoke on dewpond restoration in the Peak District, and Andrew Heaton put forward some thoughts on climate change impacts on lower vertebrates.

There were also reports from each of the county ARG groups. Despite some problems with a lack of blackout for the projector, it was a good day, much appreciated by those who attended. Thanks go to Chris Monk and his team for organising the day. It will be worth supporting future such conferences.

## Frogspawn Over 13 Years

I dug a pond in my garden in Ashby de la Zouch in 1998 and two years later it was colonised by breeding frogs producing clumps of frogspawn. Since then I have kept accurate records of the date of first laying, the date when the last frogspawn appeared and the maximum count of numbers of clumps.

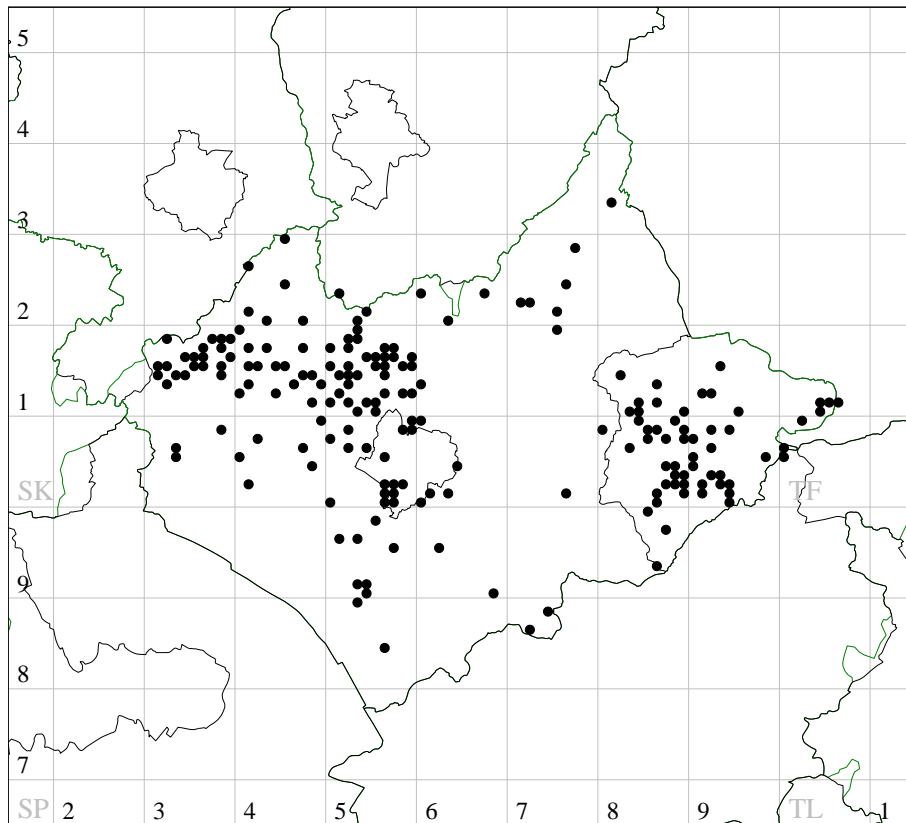
The average date of appearance of the first clump is 6<sup>th</sup> March – generally a single clump though up to 10 clumps have appeared overnight on two occasions. Though usually appearing in early March, there has been one unusually early laying on 2<sup>nd</sup> February in 2007. The final dates of laying cluster around 19<sup>th</sup> March, though in 2004 the last clumps

appeared on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. Numbers have never been large, rising steadily from one in the first year, 2000, to a maximum of 30 in 2005 and dropping back to 5 this year (2012).

This shows, in a small way, the information that can be gained from long term data sets. The value of continuing the collection of data over long time periods is obvious. If anyone has similar information that they would like to analyse, I would be pleased to publish it.

## Gaps in the Map

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)



The map above, of frogs in the two counties, shows a pattern common to any distribution map that you might look at – a lack of records in Melton Mowbray, Market Harborough and Hinckley and Bosworth. If there is anyone recording in those areas, their records are not getting through to the central datasets. It would be nice to see a special effort to fill in these gaps.



## Strange Records

Steve Woodward has been working to clean up the amphibian and reptile records on the species database held at County Hall, sorting out anomalies/mistakes. Amongst the reptile records which he had to reject were records for a flatworm and adder's tongue!

## Palmate Newts

On 10<sup>th</sup> April 2012, Helen Ikin and Steve Woodward confirmed healthy populations of palmate newts in two ponds at Beacon Hill. There are also recent records of palmate newts at Bradgate Park and an indication, to be confirmed, that they are also to be found at Moira.

## Melanism in Snakes

There is a study, reported by Stuart Robinson at the Midlands ARG conference, of melanism in snakes in Britain. Melanism is a condition whereby, through the expression of a recessive gene, an organism takes on a black colouration instead of its normal colours. If you have seen any black-coloured individuals, of snakes or other herptiles, please let me know.

## Blanket Weed

Paul Brown of Brooke in Rutland has a pond with a good population of Great Crested Newts. This year he has had a major problem with blanket weed (as have I in my garden pond). Is this a problem for newts? Yes - they need clear water for their courtship displays. How best to get rid of it? Alternatives are dragging it out, chemical treatments and straw bales but none of them are necessarily successful. Any ideas would be welcomed.

## Toadfly

There has been a recent (August 2012) record of the impact of toadflies on a population of toads in Ashby de la Zouch, where 3 out of 15 toads were found to have bloody excavations around the nostrils.

The toadfly is a type of blowfly (*Lucilia bufonivora*) which lays its eggs on the skin at the entrance to the nostrils (or around the eyes) of common toads (and occasionally other toads and frogs). On hatching, the larvae feed on the tissues of the nostrils, burrowing into the nasal cavity and then into other tissues. When the toad dies, the larvae totally consume the tissues, move into the soil and pupate.

As well as the Ashby record, toadflies have been recorded affecting the populations of toads at Coleorton and there are reports from elsewhere in Leicestershire.

## R&D/Investigations

I have been asked by Kate Hiseman for possible herps projects in Rutland. It may be useful to set out ideas for others who might be planning research / investigations. The general principles are that all survey is good, even of common species, whilst monitoring of populations, producing long term datasets, is particularly useful. There are also other fields of interest which could be investigated by small-scale ecological studies.

Ideas for our individual species are as follows:

- Great Crested Newt – survey for new sites.
- Toad – monitor good populations.
- Palmate Newt – surveys / any records.
- Lizard – surveys / any records – habitat / population studies.
- Slow-worm – surveys / any records – habitat / population studies.
- Adder – study population size, feeding etc. – this is a specialist activity!
- Grass snake – monitor populations, study feeding.
- Frog, smooth newt – fill in gaps in maps.

## Conservation Manifesto

I am attempting to put together a Conservation Manifesto for herps in the two counties, which would set out the conservation responsibilities for all the key players. This would include:

the Wildlife Trust (nature reserves, BAP);

LARN (recording, publicity);

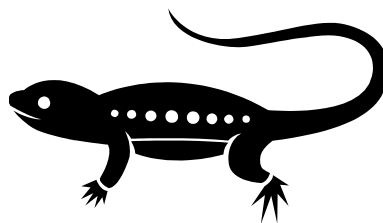
Leicestershire County Council and the other LAs (database, planning, site management);

National Forest (BAP);

Natural England (GCN protection, SSSIs);

others (landowners, EA, etc).

I would welcome comments and any input to this initiative. The intention is to identify the priority actions needed to secure the conservation of amphibians and reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland.



## Important! Do You Want This Newsletter?

Whilst until now I have been producing some paper copies of the LARN newsletter, in future it will be produced solely in electronic form to be distributed by email. I would be grateful if you would return the answers to the following questions to me. If I do not hear from you, I may remove you from the mailing list.

1. Name: ?
2. I wish to continue to receive the LARN newsletter: YES/NO
3. Email address: ?
4. Preferred format: Word 7/pdf/Word 97/other
5. For organisations: the best contact is: name/email
6. Suggestions for future articles: ?

Please respond to this questionnaire before the end of the year. I would welcome any comments on LARN and on the newsletter.

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

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