

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.

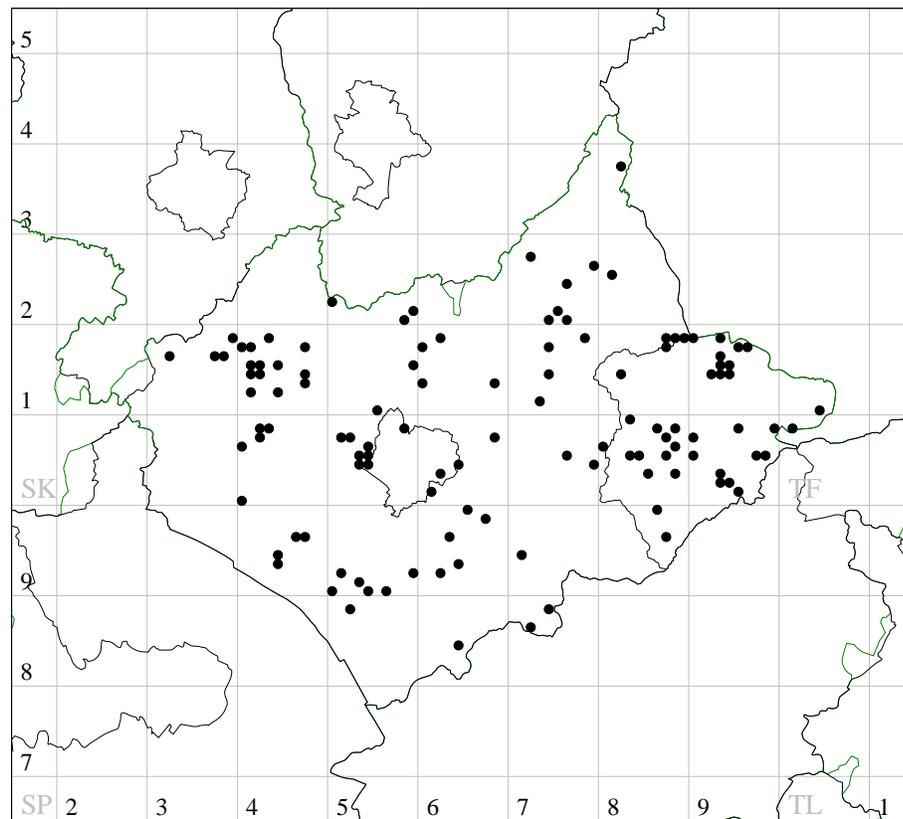
More Gaps in the Map

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.

Warty Newt / Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)



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 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.

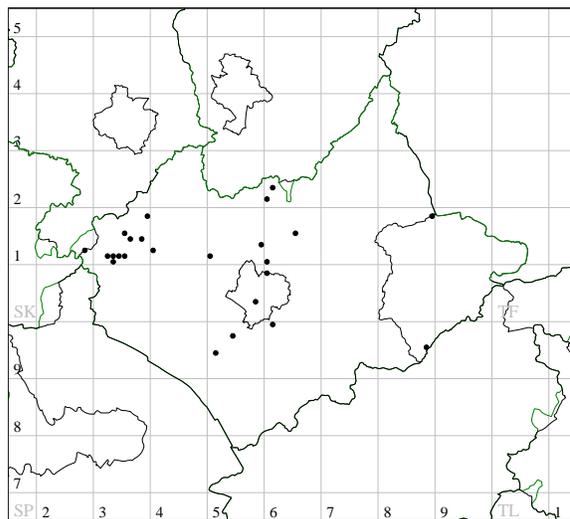
Corrigendum

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).

Three-spined Stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*)



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

Andrew Heaton, 19 Rydal Gardens, Ashby de la Zouch, Leics LE65 1FJ

Tel. 01530-467904

aheaton@ntlworld.com

