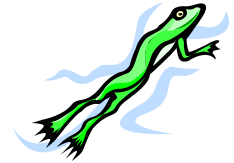


# Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network



*Newsletter No. 22  
September 2013*

## Checklist

I have drawn up a county checklist of amphibians and reptiles found in Leicestershire and Rutland. This is attached as an annex (last two pages) to this newsletter. Any comments would be welcome.

## Herpetofauna on Wildlife Trust Reserves

The nine native amphibians and reptiles found in Leicestershire and Rutland are well represented on Wildlife Trust nature reserves. Of the 32 reserves, 25 have amphibian and/or reptile records. Seven reserves only have amphibians, three have just reptiles, whilst 15 support representatives of both groups.

The highest numbers found on a reserve come from Rutland Water and the Holwell Reserves, both of which had six species recorded, though the Holwell total includes records of palmate newt and adder which are probably historic rather than current. Charnwood Lodge, Lucas Marsh and Cossington Meadows all have five species noted, though Lucas Marsh includes a possibly dubious record of palmate newt, and one of Cossington's reptiles is the introduced red-eared terrapin. Both the Rutland Water and Holwell totals include four Red Data Book species – but then, all the native amphibians and reptiles except frog and smooth newt are highlighted in the latest revision of the RDB.

The most commonly recorded species are frog (found at 20 sites), toad and grass snake (13 each) and smooth newt (11). Common lizards are surprisingly well represented, being found at 9 sites. It is pleasing that 6 Trust reserves support the fully protected great crested newt. Least well represented is the slow-worm, found only at Rutland Water. Of the two county rarities, adders are noted at two sites (definitely found at Ketton, probably no longer present at Holwell), whilst all three records of palmate newt (Charnwood Lodge, Holwell, Lucas Marsh) are doubtful – palmate newt is probably the only locally-present amphibian or reptile not to be found any longer on a Trust reserve – an argument for a reintroduction, perhaps? This just emphasises the role that the Wildlife Trust has to play in relation to conservation of our local herpetofauna.

## Bad News On the Toads of Coleorton!

The following note came from Dr Rob Oldham regarding the population of toads which he has been studying at Coleorton:

“In over 30 years of observation at this site I have not come across a similar situation. The month of March had no minimum night temperature above 5°C and ended with heavy snow. Once the snow had gone there was no rain until April 11th. On the first evening of known toad activity, April 10<sup>th</sup>, I observed only three males (along a 1km stretch of minor road) ... one of them appeared normal (with normal mass and body condition for the time of year) ... another was sluggish and exuding fluid; it died subsequently ... the third was dead; initially I assumed road kill, but it showed no sign of injury. The ventrum of both these toads was unusually red.

On April 11<sup>th</sup>, there were 37 sightings of which a staggering 11 were dead or nearly so, showing symptoms similar to the two from the previous evening.

On April 12<sup>th</sup>, the count went up to 112, but of these only 4 were in trouble (other than obvious road kills).

From April 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> there were only 2 unexplained deaths from 244 sightings, and after that none at all.

I attach three pictures showing the red colouration, emaciation and swollen body.

I contacted *The Institute of Zoology at the Zoological Society of London* and forwarded specimens & photographs. They responded promptly, with a detailed analysis of two of the specimens.

Interestingly both showed evidence of recent feeding, which I found surprising given their relatively moribund condition at the time of capture.

I copy their findings on one of the toads below:

*This adult common toad was thin. However, it had eaten recently. There was evidence of intestinal parasitism but it is unlikely that a single worm would have contributed to this toad's death.*

*The skin lesion was focal and mild. However it may represent a bacterial, fungal or viral infection that contributed to the toad's demise.*

*This toad's body condition may have been due to post-winter mortality (as a result of restricted resources) or it may have been a result of some other lesion or disability.*

Subsequently I received further information:

*We received the PCR testing for ranavirus today and one of the toads you submitted was positive.*

*It is highly likely that the other was also infected however the test is not 100% accurate.*

They attached an information sheet on ranavirus infection, including the following:

*Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to 'treat' the amphibians. But there is a lot that can be done to prevent further spread.*

*Keeping a close watch for further deaths will enable you to remove the bodies as soon as possible to prevent further spread of the infection. Obviously, you don't want to be transferring any pond water, plants, amphibians or tadpoles from the site with the infection.*

*The most important point is to bury the bodies close to the site of suspected infection so that there is no further spread. Disposing of the bodies in rubbish collection can be problematic for local councils and may contribute to the spread of the disease.*

It will be interesting to see how things develop. Don't our toads have a rough time these days ... climate change, new roads, disease!!"



## Documents

The conservation Manifesto for amphibians and reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland, mentioned in the last newsletter, was discussed by the LRWT Conservation Committee. With the addition of a further annex on legislation and information on herps on WT sites and surveys needed, the Trust agreed to take the document to LCC and Natural England.

The Trust has produced a series of conservation narratives, each relating to a District of Leicestershire, setting out key sites and species and conservation needs. I am drafting a lower vertebrates (reptiles, amphibians, fish) interpretation of the North West Leicestershire narrative – to see whether it is useful and whether something similar could be produced for the other Districts. If anyone wants to see and comment on this, please let me know.

## Gaps in the Map

In the last LARN newsletter, I pointed out that GCN records seemed to be lacking from two significant 100-km squares, SK30 and SK42. These gaps have been plugged by some records held by LCC. For SK30, there is a record from 2008 of GCNs near Market Bosworth. In SK42, GCNs were recorded near Castle Donington. There just remains a few part-squares around the fringes of the counties which seem to lack GCN records. Records from these – SP48, SP57, SK20, SK21, SK43, SK74, SK84 – would be welcome.

## Leicestershire and Rutland Recorder

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust has published edition no. 9 of Leicestershire and Rutland Recorder, a fascinating natural history journal for L&R, featuring articles on bats, caddisflies, beetles, fungi, fleas, birds and much more, including herps. Recorder costs £3 plus postage - speak to Nathalie Cossa at LRWT by email [rc@lrwt.org.uk](mailto:rc@lrwt.org.uk) or phone 0116 2728853.

## Adders, Adders, Everywhere

Despite my insistence that there is only one population of adders in each of our counties (Leics – Bradgate; Rutland – Ketton), records have been coming in from around our area, in places where there is no history of adders, but which sound like good records – based on convincing descriptions but, as yet, no photographs.

My attention was drawn, by Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team, to an ecological survey done in 2006 as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment, during which the consultants came across a dead adder near Shawell. Unfortunately, they did not recognise the significance of it (that adders are so rare in Leicestershire) and did not even photograph it.

LARN newsletter 21 had a story about adders at Kibworth Golf Club – I have not been able to confirm this, despite putting down mats for a short time, but a grass snake has been photographed at the 6<sup>th</sup> hole on the course.

Help has also been sought by Heather Parish Council following the appearance of snakes on the village recreation ground. Some people are convinced they are adders, but Phil Cureton, heritage warden, has been putting a lot of effort into communications and detective work, and the photos which have been supplied are all grass snakes – it is much more grass snake habitat than adder country.

At Stathern, a local woman sought advice when a snake, convincingly described as a female adder, was driven into her garden by flash floods on the surrounding land. Finally, has anyone got a recent record of adder at Beacon Hill?

## High Counts

In the last Newsletter, I listed the highest counts from records which I hold on my county database, for each of the native species. Neill Talbot has sent me the following additional impressive figures:

- Great Crested Newt – well over 100, Nailstone Colliery/Wiggs, 2007
- Great Crested Newt – over 200, Lounge site near Ashby de la Zouch (and there is talk of 1000s here)

These are both sites affected by developments (and hence surveyed). The same goes for two other large populations of GCN in north-west Leicestershire, where the coming developments meant that translocations were attempted, at Bosworth battlefield and Stephenson College, Coalville. Apparently, similar was done at the Minorca Mine near Measham. There seems to be no firm evidence of the translocations having been very successful. This illustrates the pressures on populations of what is nominally our best-protected species.

## Wildlife Trust Surveys

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust have started reptile surveys at Bradgate Park to address concerns over the possible impact of bracken rolling on adders and other features such as ground-nesting birds. The Trust is also intending to undertake reptile survey at Ketton Quarry (the other site which definitely has adders) by setting up a transect next spring.

## Vertebrate Animals

Montague Browne's "The Vertebrate Animals of Leicestershire and Rutland", published in 1889, provided the basis for the Amphibians and Reptiles (or 'Batrachians') section in the Victoria County History. As well as the expected species, Browne also lists the natterjack toad ("I introduced some of these pretty little toads...about the Museum grounds") and the sand lizard (referring back to records made by another, earlier writer). He does not mention the palmate newt, which previously had not been distinguished from the smooth newt. He does, though, include fossil specimens found in the two counties. As Michael Jeeves says, Browne 1889 "needs interpreting with care".

## Marsh Frogs

A new alien species has cropped up in Leicestershire. In May 2013, whilst photographing fish at Lakeview fishery near Melton Mowbray, Jack Perks was able to also photograph small numbers of marsh frogs, which he had first seen at the site the previous year. Marsh frogs, a European species not native to Britain, nevertheless occur numerously in the South East eg Romney Marsh, though rarely, if at all, in the Midlands. This new population will require monitoring to ensure it is not impacting on native species.

## HS2

The High-Speed train proposed route from Birmingham to Leeds runs right through North West Leicestershire, skirting five SSSIs, some with herps populations, eg Lockington Marshes. Five GCN breeding sites fall within 1 km of the line, including one, Railway Pond near Ashby de la Zouch, right on the line of the route: this site has a good GCN population and has been monitored over some time by Dr Rob Oldham. Common amphibians are present along the route, including good toad numbers at Stanny Pond and frogs at Diseworth. No significant reptile sites occur along the route, though grass snakes may be present in the river valleys.



## Herpetofauna Workers Conference

The 2014 Herpetofauna Workers Meeting will take place over the weekend of February 1-2 at Bristol Zoo – further details to follow.

## Spring of 2013

2013 saw a very strange spring season – long-lasting poor weather meant that many things were very late. In my garden pond, frogspawn appeared exactly one month after the average date, and then only one clump was laid. If anyone else has stories of the late spring, do let me know.

## Interesting Records

In May, Anne Heaton spotted a common lizard at Donisthorpe Woodland Park – a new and unexpected site for the species, being a newly created site, part of the National Forest. On the last day of April, Helen Ikin recorded mating adders at Bradgate in Hallgates Spinney.

My NARRS amphibian site this year happened, randomly, to be ponds in the grounds of Champneys Springs Spa near Measham; they support a good population of toads as well as frogs, and the staff reported GCNs, though I didn't see any newts.

## I'm Adamant

My local free newspaper, the Ashby Mail, recently featured an interesting article on its front page. As the Mail's strap line is "Proud to be part of the Leicester Mercury family", I imagine the same story ran in the Mercury as well.

Entitled "Large Snake Found in Pond", the story relates how Christine McAdam of Aylestone, Leicester, found a big snake trapped in the netting covering her garden pond. She was quoted as saying "It's about two foot long and it's certainly not a grass snake or anything you would expect to find in this country."

The accompanying colour photograph shows Christine holding a fine specimen of a grass snake.

She added "It's in a plastic box at the bottom of my garden for the moment. I'm keeping it out of the sun."



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*Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network (LARN) is an informal grouping of people interested in the status and distribution of these two lower vertebrate groups in Leicestershire and Rutland. The group is held together by a newsletter produced on an irregular basis – generally twice a year. The aims of the group are to encourage recording of herpetofauna in the two counties, and to use this data to support conservation initiatives. Anyone wanting to join the group should contact the coordinator, Andrew Heaton, as below.*

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

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

As at September 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).

#### **[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 three definite current sites (Beacon Hill, Bradgate Park, Markfield) though it has been reported elsewhere, and has been lost recently from a number of sites.

#### **Great Crested Newt** *Triturus cristatus*

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

#### **Alpine Newt** *Mesotriton alpestris*

Introduction. Two populations recorded, at Leicester and Kirby Muxloe; possibly also in the University of Leicester Botanic Garden.



## Reptiles

### **Slow-worm** *Anguis fragilis*

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

### **Common Lizard** *Lacerta 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.

### [**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.

### **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 Launde and Shawell.

### [**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.