



Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team

Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry CV3 3GW. Tel (01203) 302912 Fax (01203) 639556
Affiliated to the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (Registered Charity Number 209200)
and the British Herpetological Society (Registered Charity Number 205666)

Patron: Ken Livingstone

WART NEWSLETTER: ISSUE NO. 25 WINTER 2000-2001

Forthcoming events

Stratford Butterfly Farm



Sunday 18 March

2.00pm

We have had a report of a possible edible frog here, as well as common frogs and newts, and of course we should see some butterflies! Richard Lamb will give us a guided tour.

Special group rate for WARTers, adult £3.50, senior citizens and students £2.95, children £2.50.



More events inside....

Surveys

The amphibian breeding season is fast approaching, and Jan has been busy arranging several surveying events. Please join us for some of them, if you can.

Surveys can yield surprises, you never quite know what you'll find (although anacondas are unlikely!). Investigating "new territory" with fellow enthusiasts can be an entertaining experience, and these events will also serve as training workshops from basic to advanced techniques.

Another event for the future is the HGBI Regional Conference which will be held in late Sept/early Oct, more details to follow later.

"Old Milverton pondscape" 2 pm Saturday 21 April

We are going to conduct an amphibian survey at Milverton near Leamington Spa. The aim is to survey a complex of ponds that may represent a newt metapopulation. Learn about basic amphibian surveying skills & remember to bring your wellies. Meet in the church car park (OS map ref SP297674).

Joint WART/WRAG survey at Long Marston & Pebworth Sunday 29 April

Another opportunity to hone your amphibian surveying skills. Again a complex of ponds that straddle the Warks/Worcs border that have never (to our knowledge) been surveyed before.

Meet 10.30 am in the public carpark in Bidford-on-Avon (OS SP099516). The survey will be in two parts with a visit to a local pub for lunch. Alternatively bring sandwiches etc.

Leam Valley Nature Reserve, Leamington Spa 7 pm Saturday evening 12 May

The reserve contains a series of ponds that support smooth & great crested newts. Meet at 7pm in the Swimming Pool car park, Newbold Common (OS SP330658).

WART will be given a guided tour of the reserve by the reserve warden & then as it gets dark we will monitor the ponds for newts using torches and lay newt traps if needed. Come & learn about more quantitative amphibian surveying techniques that can be used to assess the status of amphibian populations. A good torch is essential.

Membership

It's that time of year again! Please continue to support WART; membership is still a bargain at £3.50 per household. A form is attached to this newsletter.

Early "birds"?

Nicola Angell, our long-distance WARTer (in Cornwall), saw her first frog of the year a few weeks ago; she thinks it was encouraged to hop about by the pouring rain. Jan says there were smooth newts in her pond on 12 Feb (the earliest for her newt pond ever!) and frogs in her friend's small garden pond as well. Considering that we've had some cold weather this winter, you might not expect spawning dates to be early, but we shall see.

WART AGM: *Tuesday 16 Jan at 7.30pm*

Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust headquarters. The current Committee members were all happy to be re-elected and are listed below.

The WART Committee

Chair	Jan Ciemons
Vice-Chair	Andrew Thompson
Secretary	Andi Wolf
Membership Secretary /Treasurer	Howard Eccles
Newsletter Editor	Helen Newell
Ordinary members	Jane O'Dell, Serena Eccles

Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team

Receipts and Payments Account for period 1/10/99 – 30/9/00

RECEIPTS	2000	1999	PAYMENTS	2000	1999
Bal. as at 30/9/99			BTCV membership+ins.	55.00	55.00
Bank 890.41			Printing + Postage	-	115.27
Cash 9.60	900.01	700.63	HGBI AGM 1997	-	5.00
Subscriptions	50.50	105.00	Purchase of materials	19.96	207.85
Donations received	60.00	48.00	HGBI Regional Meeting	50.00	-
Dickens Heath survey	-	500.00	Herpetofauna Workers Meeting 2000	46.00	-
Sale of FSC guides	6.75	-	HGBI Course costs	-	70.50
			Donation given	50.00	-
			Purchase of FSC guides	32.00	-
			Balance as at 30/9/00		
			Bank	751.20	
			Cash	13.10	764.30
				764.30	900.01
	1017.26	1353.63		1017.26	1353.63

Froglife Friends

Froglife, based in Halesworth, Suffolk is a non-profit making organisation concerned with herpetofauna conservation and provides the secretariat for Herpetofauna Groups of Britain & Ireland (HGBI). WART is part of this HGBI network and some of you may have received the first issue of 'Froglife News' containing information about the Froglife Friends scheme. If you have not received this newsletter and would like to know more please contact Froglife at:

Mansion House
27/28 Market Place
Halesworth
Suffolk
IP19 9AY
Tel 01986 873733

Froglife hope to establish a much greater level of action and activities in herpetofauna conservation and establish a permanent base for its work to improve the world for amphibians and reptiles.

Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team Review 2000

Recording activity - an encouraging number of reptile sightings were recorded this year and five 'new' sites were discovered. It seems as if the mild Warwickshire spring and summer resulted in our 'best ever' reptile recording season, the quantity of records sent in this year being atypical for this county. Most were of grass snakes but two new slow-worm colonies and one common lizard colony have been identified (see below). The system for exchanging herpetological records with the local Biological Records Centre is quick and easy in this electronic age. The WART database is searched regularly in response to queries from conservation organisations and ecologists usually prior to ecological surveys. A big thank you for all those WART members that sent us records last year and in case you have not got round to this yet the recording form can be downloaded from the WART web page.

Key Sites – no sites (to our knowledge) were lost in 2000. However there have been at least four planning applications where herpetofauna could be threatened (two slow-worm and two crested newt). There are a lot of small housing estates being built in Warwickshire, especially on the edges of towns, villages and brownfield sites in urban areas. One slow-worm site was a narrow strip of land next to a railway line in Solihull. However 20 dwellings for the + fifties age group could be fitted into such a small area defies description. The other slow-worm site consists of old orchards and allotments at Alcester, together with bats and badgers. One of the crested newt sites is an old nursery where the tenant (a wildlife enthusiast) has been evicted. In all cases mitigation measures have been included to include a 'conservation area' within the development but what about the pets that come with the house owners? Cats are predators of herpetofauna and dogs need to be taken for daily walks. The best reptile site at Kenilworth Common only boasts lizards in the adjacent railway embankments and gardens due to pressure from the public, their dogs and their mountain bikes. On the positive side we have confirmed the presence of common lizards at a County Trust reserve after visiting the site (Goldicote Cuttings) more than three years running and finding nothing.

Volunteer interest & ARG status – WART membership remains around 50, the vast majority of which remain non-active but supportive. During 2000 we published 3 newsletters and organised 3 field meetings. WART members also undertook management work at Kenilworth Common. This included a most successful day in July when over fifty Year 10 volunteers from Rugby High School embarked on their ‘Conservation in Action’ day. WART continue to be recognised as the local authority on herpetological conservation by English Nature, Local Authorities, the Environment Agency and other conservation organizations.

Training, Education & Publicity – WART held an Open Day in April at the County Trust’s Visitor’s Centre. A lot of interest was generated by the common amphibians and slow-worms we exhibited and the WART posters. Despite a poor attendance, two new members were recruited and new records were forthcoming. The new WART web site www.wartsoc.co.uk was set up in April and over 200 visits to the site were made in 2000. A cook at a Warwickshire hotel found a dying lizard in his kitchen in November, logged onto the internet and sent me an e-mail. Within two hours of finding the animal I managed to ring him, only to find out the animal was dead. We hope to make a site visit next season to try and find other lizards. This is just one way in which the web site can contribute to ARG education and publicity. The web site contains information about amphibians and reptiles found in the county, relevant publications, details about the WART database, the current newsletter, survey and membership forms to download and contacts and links to other herpetological and conservation sites. Workshops on amphibian surveying techniques were given to voluntary wardens at two different County Trust wildlife reserves, enabling them to record the amphibians for themselves in the future.

Key issues – the main issue of threats from development have already been discussed but the other main issue is getting WART members onto the committee. We are presently short of at least one other committee member, as founder member Irena Kruszona has moved to Pembroke and all her efforts are greatly missed.

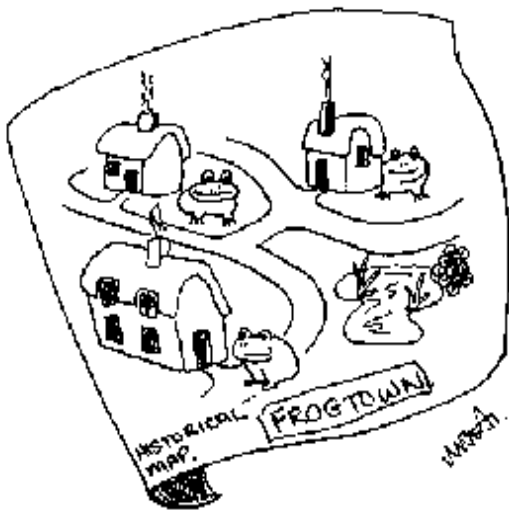
Finally I would like to thank the other WART committee members for all their hard work and it is reassuring that all of them are happy to continue serving on the committee. As you can see from our provisional programme of events we have plenty of activities lined up for 2001 and I hope that you can come along to at least one of these.

Jan Clemons
January 2001

2001 Herpetofauna Workers Meeting

Sat 3 Feb, University of London

This annual meeting was only one day this year and concentrated on surveying, monitoring and recording. In the morning were the formal talks followed in the afternoon by workshop sessions. Unfortunately there wasn't enough time to catch up on all the gossip (ie. socialising) but I liked the way the meeting just focused on one issue.



David Green, a Canadian herpetologist spoke about amphibian surveying in the vastness of Canada using volunteers. Almost every province has set up an amphibian survey scheme, with varying levels of success. Surveying in Canada is very different from over here. Not only is Canada sparsely populated by humans but they have a lot more species. Ironically, the distribution maps show a correlation with the main cities and major highways with little data from the wilderness regions. Sometimes I think all distribution atlases do is show where the surveyers are!

Jim Foster, now working at English Nature spoke on what do we know about the status of Britain's herpetofauna. The answer is surprisingly little. National recording up to now has been based on spot records and not targeted at assessing status (see Leam Valley Visit). Jim stressed that local recording is progressing well, especially following the establishment of Amphibian & Reptile Groups but that local efforts should be better integrated with a national scheme (the developing National Biodiversity Network?). Jim concluded that we need an active recording and surveillance system, with directed surveys based on a carefully selected sampling framework and linked to an assessment of habitat. With this in mind WART have arranged a series of fieldwork activities that will enable you to do just what is needed in the surveying business.

Deborah Proctor from JNCC spoke about the development of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). This initiative resulted in the formation of the NBN Trust in 2000. It brings together the statutory conservation agencies and other governmental organisations, NGO's and volunteers with shared interests in the collection, management and use of records, habitats and sites. This is an ambitious undertaking and I recommend you visit their web site www.nbn.org.uk to find out more. For a glimpse of how access to biological records via the internet may work visit the pilot 'NBN Gateway' www.searchnbn.net

Other talks spoke about promoting recording in local groups, using the Kent group as a case study and the best practice approach and the role of volunteers in bird monitoring. Unfortunately this speaker didn't say a lot about herpetology but some of the techniques could be adapted if we had the number of recorders the BTO & RSPB have got! A great crested newt monitoring project has been launched, relying on volunteer surveyors to collect field data from a randomly selected sample of ponds in 1km² survey squares in Hampshire, Sussex and Kent. I believe funding to cover basic volunteer expenses has been provided by government agencies. The results will be used to compile a report that can be used to justify and fundraise for a long-term national monitoring programme.

The workshops I attended were worthwhile. Jim Foster and Tony Gent led the workshop titled 'Towards a national recording and monitoring programme' and gave us a chance to discuss how this should proceed and how can we assess amphibian status. We tried to get to grips with the esoteric phrase from the EC habitats & species Directive 'favourable conservation status'. My offering was that ideally it should be more animals/sites but no lower than it presently is! My group had to develop a national & a local recording programme for the natterjack toad and I'm pleased my group didn't get the common frog.

The other workshop wasn't really a workshop but a demonstration of software recording systems. The only system which the WART database manager could use and give his eyeteeth for was the GIS (Geographical Information System) called ArcView. At around £700 we will have to put this on the WART wishlist I guess!



It was good to see WART-er Richard Marsh at the meeting. Why not put a date in your diary for the first Saturday in February for 2002 and come and see for yourself what a good day it can be.

Jan Clemons

Contributions for the newsletter should be sent to Helen Newell.
Copy deadline for next issue: 30th March 2001.

I/We would like to renew my/our WART membership, and enclose a cheque for £3.50 made payable to Warwickshire Amphibian and Reptile Team
(Membership £3.50 per household)

NAME

ADDRESS

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TEL. NO.

e-mail

Please send completed form and cheque to Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry CV3 3GW