

# **DERBYSHIRE AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE NEWS**

*Issue No 12. December 2009*

This newsletter is produced for members of the Derbyshire Amphibian and Reptile Group and other interested persons on an occasional basis and includes news items, advice and information and results from toad crossing patrols. If you have any items that you wish to be included in future editions please e-mail them or post them to Secretary at the address on the back page.

## **POND NEWS**

### **WILD ABOUT PONDS**

This proposed three year Project in Derby City that was mentioned in the last newsletter has been successful in obtaining funding from the SITA Trust's Enriching Nature grant scheme. The work will include surveys and management plans for about 30 ponds in the city, undertaking management work on some ponds to improve their condition and the creation of new ponds. A Project Delivery Plan is being worked out and the Project should be starting in early 2010.

### **OPAL SURVEY IN 2010**

OPAL (It stands for Open Air Laboratories) is a Project being run by the Natural History Museum and several other partners including research being undertaken at various universities. One of the main aims is to involve members of the public to carry out surveys to find out more about the natural world than can be obtained from a few research projects. You may have heard of its soil & earthworm survey and the lichen survey into air quality in 2009, both of which were asking people to carry out the work in their back gardens or immediate neighbourhood.

Next May they will be launching a water survey to get people to look at their local lakes and ponds and return data. Part of the survey has been planned in conjunction with Pond Conservation who ran their own Big Pond Dip this summer where members of the public were invited to carry out surveys of what was in their garden ponds, looking particularly at key invertebrate groups. If you have a garden pond, why not give the survey a go next summer. Details will be on the OPAL website: [www.opalexplorenature.org](http://www.opalexplorenature.org). Pond Conservation's survey has provided some good results and hopefully this OPAL survey will help to show how garden ponds are vital for lots of wildlife, especially amphibians.

## **DERBYSHIRE AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE GROUP A MEMBER GROUP OF**



Amphibian and Reptile  
Groups of the UK

[www.arguk.org](http://www.arguk.org)

### **Derbyshire Group contacts:**

**Chair** - Helen Metcalfe

**Secretary** - Chris Monk

**Treasurer** - Jayne Thompson

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Bob Baker, Victoria Pope, Trevor Taylor

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### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next indoor meeting of the Group is on Saturday 16th January 2010 at 2.00pm at the DWT Whistlestop Centre Education Room, Matlock Bath (adjacent to the railway station). This will start with a talk on Slow-worms by Alan Shepherd of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and will be followed at 3pm by the AGM and general meeting of the Group.

Alan is recognised as a national expert on the species and will be able to inform us about both the animals themselves and how to survey for them. In Derbyshire we have very few records of slow-worms and they are widely scattered across the County. After this talk we will know more about them and hopefully be able to go out and find them, so that we can improve our knowledge of their distribution.

Everyone is welcome to come to this talk, even if they are not members of the Group.

## TOADS ON ROADS

### Results from 2009 crossing patrols in Derbyshire

Site Name	Toads Rescued	Toads dead on road	No of nights covered	Dates covered	Other amphibians	Other comments
CHAPEL EN LE FRITH Bowden,	3736	247	27	2.3.09 to 15.4.09	13 frogs	
BRETBY Repton Shrubs	401	31	16	30.3.09 to 14.4.09	1 frog, 92 newts	Overnight casualties estimated as 60
BUXWORTH BASIN	313	52	29	15.3.09 to 18.4.09	1 palmate newt	
COOMBS RESERVOIR	547	167	29	11.3.09 to 22.4.09	1 frog	62 toads leaving pond also moved off road
CRICH, Dimple Road						See article on next page
FOREMARK	132	17	22	12.3.09 to 7.4.09	7 frogs	
FURNESS VALE	336	37	7	16.3.09 to 1.4.09	2 frogs	
GRANGEMILL	50	7	1	10/04/09		
RODSLEY The Lane	49	5	1		Approx 24 Frogs seen around pond	Includes 9 toads rescued from road drain on 16 April
OVERSEAL Shortheath	614	62	27	11.3.09 to 15.4.09	2 newts	
WHALEY BRIDGE CPA pond	401	23	22	11.3.09 to 10.4.09		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6579</b>	<b>648</b>				
<i>2008 Totals</i>	<i>5523</i>	<i>517</i>				

### TOADS ON ROADS 2009 REPORT

The 2009 toad crossing season proved again to be a drawn out event with spells of cold or dry weather spreading movement over a long period and many evenings had no movement. Despite fewer crossings being operated the number of toads found was the highest since 2005, allowing for the fact that most of the movement at Grangemill was missed due to other commitments and not all the returns from Furness Vale were received, so the total there is an under-estimate.

Thanks are due to all the volunteers and co-ordinators who ensured another satisfactory incident free year.

After the spectacular success last year of the new patrol at Bowden Lane Chapel en le Frith last year, the number of toads found this year was more than double the numbers found in 2008. In fact Chapel accounted for more than half of the entire total for the county.

The population at Shortheath in Overseal also has increased with nearly double the numbers this year compared to 2008. This probably results from breeding success a few years ago when the wetland site at Barrett Mill has expanded following a few years of excessive disturbance and alteration of water levels.

Numbers at Whaley Bridge and Buxworth Basin were also higher than the last few years. Combs has remained relatively constant for several years and numbers are similar to those found when the crossing commenced in the early 1990's. There was a period of higher numbers from 1995 to 2000, probably representing a spell of improved breeding success and survival.

Whereas the decline in numbers at Breiby Repton Shrubs seems to have stabilised over the past three years, albeit at a fraction of the size of years past, the decline at Foremark has continued. It is hard to believe that as recently as 2006 over a thousand animals were found there and nearly four thousand recorded in the mid-1990's. The reason for the decline is unknown, whether it is changes in the lake at the school affecting breeding success, agricultural change affecting the surrounding terrestrial habitat used by the toads or possible disease is not known. When the A50 Derby southern bypass was opened there was a significant decrease in the amount of traffic using the road and with the effort of patrols there, road casualties have never been high.

At Dimple Lane Crich the toad road sign re-appeared again this spring, though it was not removed later and was still in position in December. However, DWT member Celia Richmond was alerted to the presence of toads in a large gully on the road and with help

managed to rescue around 200 toads, which were released in the adjacent field. It is planned to look at this problem in time for the 2010 season to see whether covering the grid with chicken wire, as happens at other crossings, will prevent the animals falling into the gully.

Unfortunately there still seems to be no resolution to the repair and management of the John O'Gaunts balancing pond at Belper, despite attempts by Groundwork to push the Council at the beginning of the year.

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO TOAD CROSSING DATA?**

Apart from your data being published in our newsletters, we have been supplying copies to Froglife (now part of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation) for their national Toads on Roads campaign and database. Details of volunteers are not passed on, only totals of toads rescued and killed on the road together with date ranges.

One of the research topics being looked at by the scientific community at present is the effect of the moon on amphibians. Not only the obvious effect of the amount of moonlight varying with phase but also gravitational and geomagnetism factors. Initial results suggest that the full moon can affect mass migrations of the common toad. However at present, this is based on small amounts of data.

As we have many years of toad data, including records of daily totals throughout the crossing season, this is being used to see whether it adds support to the lunar cycle theory. The project is being carried out at Oxford University as part of her studies by our member Holly Arnfield, a toad crossing volunteer at Furness Vale and at Buxworth Basin.

In future you may have to look at the phase of the moon as well, as consider the weather conditions, before setting off to do toad crossing patrols!

## ADDER SURVEYS

2009 was the fifth year of surveys carried out to count numbers of adders emerging at hibernation sites on the Peak District Moors to contribute towards the Make the Adder Count Survey run by the Herpetological Conservation Trust (now part of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation). This is a long term study across about one hundred locations to find out whether reported declines in the adder populations, especially in the Midlands and South East England are statistically significant. Since it started, we have supplied more survey results than any other group or individual across the country.

We now have a very good picture of the distribution of the adder across the Peak District Moors thanks to the dedicated team of surveyors. Each year we are finding new sites and following up other reports of adder sightings. Even though there are still many areas where we haven't visited, the results so far reveal the Peak District to be a nationally significant location for the species. It has also proved that in some areas bracken beds where they are dense enough to form raised banks are vitally important hibernation sites for adders.

Next spring the management of a group of the moors will be handed over by the Peak Park to be run jointly by the RSPB and the National Trust. We have already made preliminary contact with them so that the requirements of the adder can be incorporated in their plans. Hopefully we will be able to take several of the new team out on a survey day to show them some of the best locations.

## PROPOSED ACTIVITIES IN 2010

These will be discussed at the AGM in January but we have already been asked to assist at ELVASTON CASTLE COUNTRY PARK near Derby.

After several years with little nature conservation work having been undertaken in the Country Park, the last year has seen a concerted effort to update the records of the wildlife present there. This year we have benefited from Laura and James compiling a list of the grass snake sightings over the past few years.

One of the objectives that they have for next year is to survey the waterbodies in spring to find out what amphibians are present. At present we have some vague records of great crested newts in the Park, including a report that newts rescued from a development site in Derby about 25 years ago were released there. In addition there are occasional records of frogs and toads at the site.

If you could help with undertaking the survey on the site please contact the Secretary. We will probably make at least three visits to survey for frogs, toads and newts, starting when the frogs return to spawn in late February or early March, followed by the toads in late March and newts in April.

## ARG UK NEWSLETTER

The autumn 2009 edition of the newsletter ARG Today (Issue 6) for all Amphibian and Reptile Groups runs to 14 pages and can be downloaded from the publications page of the website at [www.arguk.org](http://www.arguk.org)

## GROUP WEBSITE

Don't forget to check the Group's website at [www.derbyshirearg.co.uk](http://www.derbyshirearg.co.uk)

Notices of meetings, events and other activities will be posted there and copies of the newsletter and recording forms can be downloaded

### GROUP CONTACT - Hon Secretary

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The views expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the Derbyshire Amphibian and Reptile Group. However, thanks are due to the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust for assistance in the distribution of the newsletter. For details of the Wildlife Trust, please contact them at East Mill, Bridgefoot, Belper, Derbyshire, DE56 1HX, Tel: 01773 881188.