

# **DERBYSHIRE AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE NEWS**

*Issue No 11. February 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 send them to Secretary at the address on the back page.

## **POND NEWS**

### **MILLION PONDS PROJECT**

February has seen the launch of a major new pond creation project across England - The Million Ponds Project. This is co-ordinated by Pond Conservation with funding by the Tubney Charitable Trust and aims to create 5,000 new clean water ponds in the next four years. This is just the start of a 50 year project to reverse a century of loss & decline in Britain's ponds so that once again there are a million ponds back in the countryside. Research has shown that making new ponds in locations where they will not be polluted by run-off from intensive farmland, roads & buildings or rivers will bring benefits for many species of plants and animals. The Million Ponds Project partnership includes wildlife organisations such as ARG-UK, The Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT), Buglife & the RSPB as well as official bodies including the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission & Natural England.

1,000 of the new ponds will be targeted specifically at the 80 or so Biodiversity Action Plan plant and animal species associated with ponds. The HCT have appointed a project officer to assist with delivering new ponds for great crested newts, common toads, natterjack toads, native pool frogs and the grass snake. He, together with Project Officers at Pond Conservation, will assist in finding grants from Landfill Tax credits and other funders to pay the costs of constructing new ponds. The Project website will contain plenty of information to assist in the creation of new clean water ponds, see [www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds](http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds).

### **GARDEN PONDS PROJECT**

Later this year Pond Conservation will also be launching a project encouraging owners to send in details of their garden ponds. This is intended to show what proportion of garden ponds are valuable for our native wildlife (as opposed to Koi carp!) and give advice for garden pond owners on how to make good ponds. Details will be available from the Pond Conservation website when it is launched.

Chris Monk  
Pond Conservation

## **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

**Committee Members** -

Bob Baker, Victoria Pope, Trevor Taylor

## **MORE POND NEWS WILD ABOUT PONDS**

### **- A proposed Derby City Ponds Project.**

Beverley Rhodes of Derby City Council is applying to The SITA Trust for funding for a three year project to restore 10 ponds, create 5 new ponds and maintain the 5 best in favourable condition within the City. Partners in the project include the Derby City Pond Wardens Association, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, BTCV and Groundwork. Further information will be available, if the application is successful.

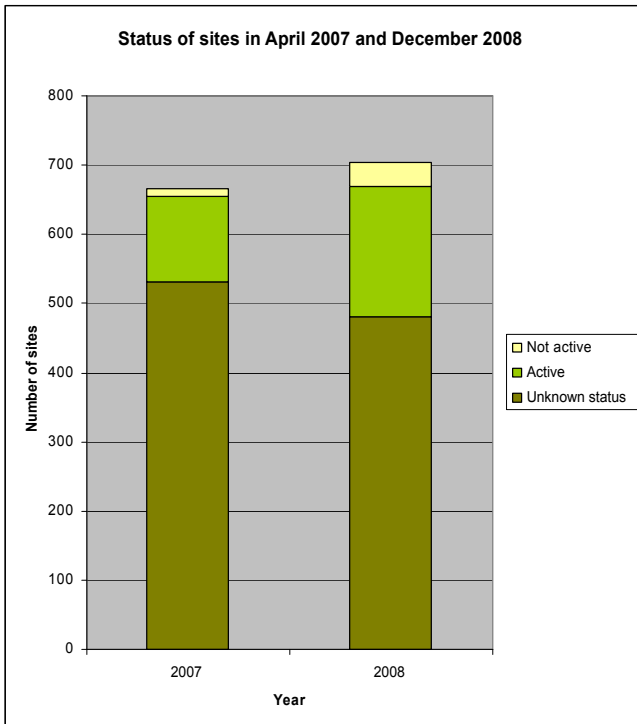
## **IT'S NOT ALL DOOM & GLOOM BUT.....**

At this year's Herpetofauna Recorders' Meeting in Blackpool, Andrew Cunningham gave the results on the 2008 survey looking for the presence of the chytrid fungus in the UK. This is the organism linked with widespread amphibian declines across the world, as mentioned in David Attenborough's "Life in Cold Blood" TV series last year.

4 sites were known where it was already present in the UK before the swabbing survey carried out across England at around 100 sites. Unfortunately 15% of the samples turned up positive for the fungus, with native species infected being natterjack & common toad and smooth newt. Association with released alien amphibians such as alpine newt or marsh frog was clearly shown, as their presence gave a 50% likelihood of the fungus being present.



### 1. Introduction:

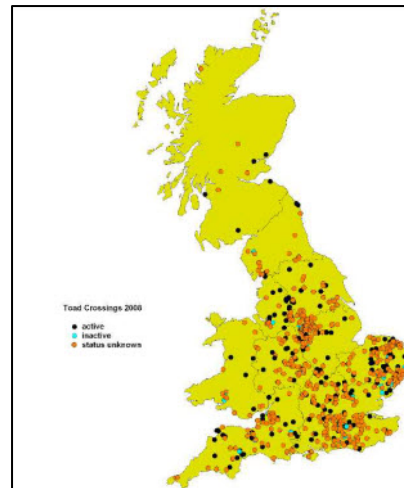


In total there were 36 new sites registered in 2008. Comparing the status of the Toads on Roads database in April 2007 to December 2008 shows not just an increase in the total number of sites (665 in 2007 to 704 in 2008) but also in the number of sites that we know the status of – 32% (224 of 704 sites) compared to 20% (134 of 665 sites).

There has been a 53% increase in sites we know to be active (190 from just 124) and the number of known inactive sites has more than trebled (34 from 10).

### 2. Summary statistics for 2008:

- Total number of sites:** 704
- New sites registered in 2008:** 36
- No. of enquiries:** Froglife received 41 requests for information on helping out at local toad crossings from the public.
- Returned data:** There is now crossing data available (one or more years) for over 50% of registered crossings.
- Number of amphibians helped in 2008:** From the 85 sites that returned crossing data in 2008, at least 35,183 toads have been helped across the road, together with over 2,000 frogs and newts. A further two sites reported toads using a pond (a total of around 500 toads) but they were no longer crossing a road to get there.
- Record number of toads helped this year:** Belstead Brook, Suffolk reported the highest number of toads in 2008: 4,401 toads lifted.



**Toads on Roads sites 2008**  
Thanks to John Wilkinson of The Herpetological Conservation Trust.



- **Reinvestigating old sites:** Number of sites re-established contact with since the end of 2007: 25
- **Most active English county:** Lancashire has the highest proportion of active crossings: 83% (five out of six).
- **A first for London:** After a gap of 15 years a new crossing was registered in Greater London in 2008 – on a business park in Chiswick (featured on ITV London Tonight).

### 3. Press Coverage

The media push in February resulted in quite a few publications picking up on the press release. The article was in The Times twice (one of which alongside HCT), and The Londoner. The Toads on Roads campaign also appeared twice more on Radio 4 in coming months through 'World on the Move' – a series about animal migrations that aired twice a week. ARG UK were mentioned on the World on the Move website and were mentioned on air alongside FrogLife.

In addition the campaign was featured on television, featuring on: London Tonight (Chiswick), Anglia News (Cambridge), Inside Out (BBC East Anglia – CPARG covered) and most recently on The One Show (North Devon). Sadly, many of these failed to cover Toad on Roads sites as part of a national scheme, rather choosing a more 'cutesy' angle. This issue needs addressing. One possibility could be that ARG contacts are more active in acting locally as toad experts – helping steer coverage towards conservation, rather than welfare.

At a county level coverage was encouraging. Coverage in local papers reported to FrogLife included: Northamptonshire Chronicle & Echo, Shropshire Star, Peterborough Evening Telegraph, Worcester News, Wiltshire News, Sheffield Star, BBC Hampshire and the Dorset Echo.

### 4. Developments for 2009

- **Google Earth** - we have just finished mapping all of the Toads on Roads sites and these will be available as a .kmz download from the FrogLife website in early February. This will enable website visitors to find information on their nearest sites using Google Earth. This might be of use to ARG members interested in local information on sites registered (e.g. status, 2008 count data etc.).
- **Research into alternatives to patrolling** - In 2008 Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (c/o Alan Sheppard) experimented with a fence and bucket system at two toad crossings. We would be interested in hearing from other suitable sites interested in trialling this technique.

## AMPHIBIANS AND ROADS

After the disastrous effect of the A6 Alvaston bypass on the great crested newt population that formerly lived on Stocker Flatt, another new road that affects amphibians was opened at the end of 2008. This was the A6096 Ilkeston to Awsworth link road that continues the earlier Awsworth bypass - a road that intersected a toad population's habitat beside the disused Nottingham Canal in Nottinghamshire. There permanent toad fencing and tunnels under the road were installed during construction but the fencing now looks semi-derelict in places with some sections broken down or missing.

In 2007, after the start of the construction of the Ilkeston to Awsworth link road great crested newts were discovered by Jane Southey, Scott Wilson's on site ecologist, despite the surveys carried out for the planning application 5 years previously by another consultancy not finding any. They were found on both sides of the railway line in shallow water bodies that were to be filled in to build an embankment for the new road to reach the bridge over the railway. The road scheme was known to affect water voles by the River Erewash, so a mitigation scheme for those was already included in the work plan and costings for the new road. The great crested newts and a large stand of Japanese knotweed near the River Erewash were unexpected discoveries for the main contractors and for Derbyshire County Council, who had to find extra money to deal with them both.

Work on this part of the road came to a halt in summer 2007, whilst surveys were organised and a mitigation scheme for the newts submitted to Natural England. Only low numbers of newts (around 12) were seen, though newt eggs were also found. Works were carried out adjacent to the road to create and enhance the habitat, including construction of a new pond, and a trapping exercise carried out to move the newts. In all 662 great crested newts together with many smooth newts were moved out of the way of the road, showing like at Alvaston that many more newts are present than just those counted by surveys in the pond. Grass snakes were also seen alongside the railway line by workmen on site.

Surveys carried out on the new pond between March and June 2008 found up to 28 great crested newts at a time together with many newt eggs. Smooth newts were also found and a grass snake was seen visiting the new pond.

*Thanks to Jane Southey of Scott Wilson for the data about the newt counts.*

## EQUIPMENT

It was agreed at the January Group meeting that the high power torches supplied by ARG-UK (funded by The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation) will be circulated for use at our toad crossings in the early spring and then for great crested newt surveys later in the spring.

In addition we have some high visibility reflective vests for sale to toad crossing volunteers at the cost price of £5.00. The jackets bear the wording "DARG TOAD PATROL" in reflective lettering across the back. If you would like to buy one, please contact the Secretary.

## ARG UK NEWSLETTER AND ANNUAL REPORT OF GROUPS

The winter 2008/2009 edition of the newsletter ARG Today (Issue 5) for all Amphibian and Reptile Groups runs to 13 pages and can be downloaded from the publications page of the website at [www.arguk.org](http://www.arguk.org) Warning - it is about 6MB in size.

Also available on their website are copies of the annual reports for the organisation and the affiliated groups across the country - including us- produced for this years Herpetofauna Recorders' Meeting & ARG-UK AGM held in January at Blackpool.

## DATES OF NEXT MEETING

The spring and summer programme for the Group will be circulated separately. Dates already fixed are: March 14th 2009 Adder training day - contact the Secretary.

June 6th 2009 Derby City Pond warden Association Day of Pondamania, Chaddesden Park, Derby from 10am.

June 27th ARG-UK Regional meeting for the Midlands. Details to follow, venue probably Rugby proposed talks on reptiles & their habitats, toad crossings, pond creation, support for local groups.

When the Group website goes live very shortly the events programme and issues of the newsletter will be available to download from the site.

**[www.derbyshirearg.co.uk](http://www.derbyshirearg.co.uk)**

In the meantime please contact:

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Tel: 01629 823136

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.