

DERBYSHIRE AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE NEWS

Issue No 10. October 2008

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.

PROLIFERATING PONDS IN THE PEAK PARK

After several years of successful pond restoration in the Peak District National Park organised by the Vision Project, the National Park Authority has been awarded further funding by the SITA Trust early this year. This will allow them to restore and carry out management works on a further 40 sites over two years, spread over a wider area of the White Peak.

Since 2004 the Project has been working mainly on the dewponds of the area with restoration having been carried out by several methods. Contractors have been used to rebuild dry or damaged clay and stone sett dewponds with either a new clay layer or a geotextile liner before replacing the stone setts. Concrete dewponds that are badly cracked or where the concrete has deteriorated and become porous have been relined by a contractor using a glassfibre and resin method which gives a flexible yet water-tight seal on the top of the concrete. When used in industry to reline concrete tanks this method carries a 50 year guarantee so hopefully these will be very long-lasting repairs. Volunteer working parties have repaired several concrete dewponds where it has been easy to fill the cracks with ordinary mastic that you can buy to seal gaps around windows, baths etc in your own house. It was thought that this might only work for a few years but an owner in Stoney Middleton repaired a concrete dewpond in her paddock by this method in 1991 and it was still full of water when surveyed by us in 2007. Ponds choked with vegetation or completely silted up have also been restored by either volunteer working groups or contractors.



DERBYSHIRE AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE GROUP A MEMBER GROUP OF



Amphibian and Reptile
Groups of the UK

www.arguk.org

Derbyshire Group contacts:

Chair - Helen Metcalfe

Secretary - Chris Monk

Treasurer - Jayne Thompson

Committee Members -

Bob Baker, Victoria Pope, Trevor Taylor

As well as the restorations, 2008 was the fourth year of great crested newt surveys carried out to monitor populations and re-colonisation of restored ponds by the newts and other amphibians. Not only has there been a high rate of colonisation of restored ponds by great crested newts but also in some areas there has been significant use of the new ponds by toads. By the end of 2007 great crested newts had been recorded in 85 sites, many of which had been restored or had management works carried out on them. Many further new great crested newt sites were found in the 2008 surveys, as well as confirming their survival in some ponds where they had last been recorded more than ten years previously. In the last two seasons work has also concentrated on the previous un-recorded areas around Wardlow, Foolow, Great Hucklow and Peak Forest and this has resulted in the locating of several new great crested newt populations.

Thanks are due to all those who have helped me with the surveys and particularly to Paul Townsend and Norman Jones for the surveys around Haddon Fields, Peak Forest, Little Hucklow and Sheldon

Chris Monk, September 2008.

Photo left - Concrete dewpond near Great Longstone restored by glassfibre method in Autumn 2007.

Toads on Roads
Results for 2008 Crossing patrols

Site Name	Toads Rescued	Toads dead on road	No of nights covered	Dates covered	Other amphibians	Other comments
BELPER John O'Gaunts Way				March and April 2008	Many frogs	No water in the pond
CHAPEL Bowden Lane	1648	41	15	14.3.2008 to 23.4.2008		New site patrol in 2008
BRETBY Repton Shrubs	318	90	16	15.3.2008 to 30.4.2008	52 frogs and 83 smooth	
BUXWORTH BASIN	192	78	17	15.3.2008 to 27.4.2008	1 frog	
COMBS RESERVOIR	550	144	20	11.3.2008 to 28.4.2008	4 frogs	
FOREMARK	251	30	11	8.3.2008 to 21.4.2008	26 frogs and 2 newts	
FURNESS VALE	778	67	14	28.3.2008 to 10.4.2008	4 frogs and 27 newts	
GRANGEMILL	268	80	5	15.3.2008 to 3.4.2008	5 smooth newts	More toads seen moving
KINDER Bowden Bridge	300	12	3	April 2008		3 visits by Bill & Sue Anderson
OVERSEAL Shortheath	309	54	17	8.3.2008 to 29.4.2008	7 frogs	New site patrol in 2008
RADBOURNE	527	31	7	3.4.2008 to 25.4.2008		
RODSLEY The Lane	114	4	3	14.3.2008 to 21.3.2008	Several frogs	
WHALEY BRIDGE CPA Pond	268	8	7	15.3.2008 to 4.4.2008	7 frogs	
TOTALS	5523	639				
<i>2007 total</i>	<i>3359</i>	<i>517</i>	<i>from 10 sites with counts</i>			

TOADS ON ROADS 2008 REPORT

This year has seen a few new developments on the toad crossing front.

On the good news side two new crossings have been organised at Bowden Lane, Chapel en le Frith and at Shortheath at Overseal. Bowden Lane has been a registered toad crossing site for many years but this was the first year that a patrol was organised and we are grateful for Julia Gow for such an efficient project, with her group of volunteers accounting for nearly a third of the toads moved this year. At Shortheath the toad population seems to have grown following changes to water levels at a nearby site and whereas only a few toads were seen in previous years, several hundred were present this year. As it was situated outside Bob & Cynthia Baker's house, it meant that when they returned from carrying out their patrols at Bretby & Foremark they were then joining other local residents down their road.

Following reports last year of carnage at Kinder where there is no longer an organised toad patrol, Bill & Sue Anderson from the Combs crossing site paid three visits in April and helped about 300 toads across to the pond. There was very little traffic, so few casualties, and on a couple of the visits some campers at the nearby site came out to help.

At Kinder and also at Dimple Lane, Crich although there are no current organised patrols, someone at each site is still installing the toad crossing highway signs that were obtained by the Wildlife Trust for our toad patrols in the mid-1990's. Also after several years of inactivity Froglife has made a sustained attempt to revitalise the Toads on Roads campaign nationally. They are providing helpful information, publicity and collating records. All our records from this year were passed onto Lucy Benyon, their Wildlife Information Officer, this summer.

Unfortunately there has also been some bad news. Over the last few years the weather seems to have played havoc with the toad crossing season so that movement is often haphazard and spread out over a long time with many blank days (evenings) putting off new volunteers who go out only to see and do nothing. It does also mean that by mid April it can be confusing with those toads that made it to the breeding pond early, having spawned and then attempting to return to their terrestrial habitat mixing on the roads with later animals still making their way to the pond. In addition at several of the sites, notably Bretby and Foremark, toad numbers are still declining despite constant effort by the patrols. This decline in toads has been most noticeable in the south east of England but may now be spreading

further afield and affecting Derbyshire. One possible cause is thought to be milder winters causing toads not to be in a deep hibernation and therefore using up more of the fat reserves so that they either die or emerge from hibernation in a poor body condition. It is one of the reasons that toads were made a priority Biodiversity Action Plan species last year.

A major problem has developed at Belper where the balancing pond is now permanently dry. After a few years of being drained down by Amber Valley Borough Council, usually just after the amphibians have all spawned, the Council has now decided that the site was never formally handed over to them and is the responsibility of the original developers of the housing estate. The developers have said that as the Council has done some maintenance in the past few years then the Council has accepted responsibility. It is now being argued out by lawyers on both sides so could go on for years. Whilst this happens the culverts that run under the pond have collapsed in a couple of places meaning that it stays in a drained down state. It also means that no one will talk to us about creating a small area of permanent water in the base for the amphibians to successfully breed. This year they were trying to spawn in a couple of shallow puddles in the bottom of the site that dried out in early May.

Attempts last year to persuade the County Council, as Highway Authority, to install recognised toad crossing signs on the roads have also not produced results. Even if we buy and put up and take down signs, in many places there are no posts to mount them on. Only the County Council can install the posts on highway verges and they charge £130.00 + VAT per post ! We have suggested to Froglife that this is an issue that they should take up with recalcitrant local authorities.

GROUP WEBSITE

Plans are advanced for the launch of the Group's website. The website domain name has already been registered so that no-one else can use it. Our "webmaster" Victoria Pope is working to hopefully get it up and running this autumn at
www.derbyshirearg.co.uk

(We are can't use the shorter www.darg.co.uk as that is in use by Darg Engineering of Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire.)

REPTILE NEWS

At the beginning of the year a concerted effort was made to bring all the reptile records in the County up to date at Derby Museum. Our reptile records and survey results were added onto the system at the Museum as were those obtained by the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. Nick Moyes at the Museum has now arranged for these records to be placed on the National Biodiversity Network's website, as previously there were only a very few old records for Derbyshire, supplied by the Records Centre at Monks Wood in Cambridgeshire.

BLACK GRASS SNAKES

A few more sightings of black grass snakes have been reported this year, again in the Clay Cross to Chesterfield area. It definitely seems that there is a genetic trait causing such a concentration of melanistic grass snakes in this part of Derbyshire.

ADDER COUNTS - 2008 SURVEY

2008 was the fourth year of surveys carried out to count numbers of adders emerging at hibernation sites on the Peak District Moors to contribute towards the Herpetological Conservation Trust's Make the Adder Count Survey. In addition reports of other adder sightings were also followed up and investigated across Derbyshire.

Another successful training day was held in the spring with several new surveyors taking part this year. With the number of counts higher than the previous year yet again, it looks as though for the fourth year running more returns will be submitted from Derbyshire than from any other area of the country.

EQUIPMENT

The Group has recently been provided with a set of pond dipping nets and some high power torches for great crested newt surveying and toad crossings thanks to ARG-UK.

In addition we have arranged for the manufacture of some high visibility reflective vests for the Group. The jackets bear the wording "DARG TOAD PATROL" in reflective lettering across the back. If there is enough demand, we can order some more and pass them onto our volunteers at cost price - which is the same as blank vests can be bought in Derby Market (£5.00)

A6 ALVASTON BYPASS PONDS

A second year of monitoring was carried out by Trevor Taylor of the two mitigation ponds that were eventually made watertight in 2006 by AMScott after being effectively dry since the year they were built in 2001. Like last year, it again revealed literally a handful of newts returning to the pond. Of the 286 great crested and 1940 smooth newts moved from the original pond on the road line, no more than 3 great crested newts and 1 smooth newt were seen this spring. The ponds have vegetated up considerably since last year, so conditions for a torchlight survey were not as good. Unfortunately again some fish appeared to be present in the ponds, which is bad news for great crested newts.

The nearby Elvaston Lane pond was partially cleared out of vegetation by a Derby City Pond Wardens working party early in 2008 after being completely choked last year. A clump of frog spawn was recorded and up to 3 smooth newts seen this spring. It remains to be seen whether the surveys being carried out by AmScotts ecological team recorded greater numbers but it is obvious that this licensed mitigation scheme has almost exterminated both the great crested and smooth newt populations in this area.

ARG UK NEWSLETTER

The summer 2008 edition of the newsletter ARG Today (Issue 4) for all Amphibian and Reptile Groups runs to 16 pages and can be downloaded from the publications page of the website at www.arguk.org

DATES OF NEXT MEETING

The next indoor meeting of the Group is planned for Saturday 17th January 2009 at 2.00pm at the DWT Whistlestop Centre Education Room, Matlock Bath (adjacent to the railway station). This will include the start with a talk (details to be announced later) and the AGM.

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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.