

NATTERCHAT

Froglife Newsletter

Spring / Summer 2011

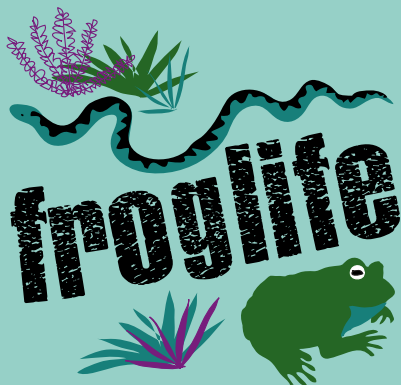
the adder issue...

- a beautiful reptile in decline
- conserving the Capital's adders
- adder bites - what's the risk?

plus... all the latest news : special book offer : toad talk

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from the ceo

Dear all,

An ongoing topic of discussion amongst Froglifers is how to promote species that are often viewed as unappealing, with fear and sometimes with contempt. The UK adder is by no means exempt from these perceptions and we have therefore chosen to feature them prominently in this issue of *Natterchat* in the hope that it will open up the debate and make people think about this very much unappreciated animal. Our adders are perhaps stigmatised by the perception of their more deadly counterparts. I hope you enjoy the positive stories and beautiful photographs.

My own thoughts turned to one of my earliest childhood memories. I grew up in South Africa and I recall as a very young child standing at the garden gate mesmerised by a snake slithering towards me. My mother spotted the snake and jumped into immediate action - or perhaps I should say she shouted at the gardener, who in turn jumped into immediate action - and killed it with a garden spade. I am sure my mother reacted in this way as she believed that all snakes are venomous, and although Africa has some of the most dangerous snakes in the world, the fact of the matter is only eight of the approximately 138 species found in Southern Africa are highly venomous. Of course my mother was not going to take any chances, and who can blame her? But this was a sad demise for a beautiful animal.

This leads me to a programme I watched on BBC2 which was part of the Natural World series. Snake expert Romulus Whitaker was investigating a report that claims India is in the middle of a snake bite epidemic; apparently over 950,000 people are bitten every year. Whitaker and his team journeyed around India to uncover the facts behind these chilling statistics and to see what can be done to help India's people and, ultimately, save its snakes. The project involved catching venomous snakes, milking their venom and sending it off to a laboratory for research into an anti-venom. Whitaker felt that being able

to treat a snake bite would improve the chances of survival for the snakes.

I am by no means advocating that we shouldn't have anti-venom but I am less optimistic that snake bite treatments do or will stop people harming or killing snakes. I suspect that the fact that there is anti-venom will make little difference to the level of persecution suffered by the snakes themselves. This persecution is driven by fear, and the fear of a snake bite will be just as great, with or without a treatment. The fact remains that most of us do not want to be bitten by anything, least of all by a venomous snake, and an anti-venom at the nearest medical centre (which as an aside is not always that near for those most in danger of snake bites) will make little difference to our perception of being bitten. And let's not undermine this fear; it is a perfectly justifiable fear in many parts of the world, when a snake bite will almost certainly mean long term illness and very often death. Snakes generally only bite humans as a defence when they perceive a threat, just as my mother lashed out at a snake when she felt I was threatened.

I believe that the only way we can resolve this conflict between humans and animals is to change human behaviour and priorities. The main threat facing our wildlife, be it mountain tigers, rhino or snakes, is our constant demand for more land, which leaves precious little space for their habitats. Wildlife has no alternative but to try to live alongside us. This in turn leads to disastrous circumstances for both people and wildlife. Until we accept that all life forms require their own space, including the unpopular snakes, and until we start to curb our land grab attitude, we will not resolve this matter and our wildlife will continue to decline at alarming rates.

Kathy

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news



Judy Goodlet



Tina Lindsay



Duane Hamlett

AN EVENING AT TOAD HALL: A TOAD-TAL SUCCESS!

On Saturday 2nd April Froglife held its first fundraising gala at the Orton Hall Hotel, Peterborough, in aid of the Tuppence a Toad campaign. Our special guests were: actress Nathalie Cox, as our master of ceremonies; ecologist and presenter Mike Dilger who gave an entertaining talk about how he first became interested in wildlife; and snooker legend Willie Thorne who was our star auctioneer. There were some furious bidding wars during the live auction and Willie did an excellent job of making sure that the most was made from each Lot. Later in the evening, guests had the opportunity to donate a few pennies to play some games. Meanwhile a silent auction was in progress with a host of other Lots up for grabs. The whole night was an amazing success and the grand total raised for the campaign was...drum roll please!... nearly £8,000! We'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone who came, everyone who donated an auction item or sponsored something on the night, and to everyone who helped make the evening so successful.

For more updates about the Tuppence a Toad campaign visit
www.froglife.org/tuppence.

WILDLIFE AMBASSADORS OFF TO A FLYING START

The first set of Wildlife Ambassadors recently completed their six-week group project, collectively working on a Toads on Roads exhibition for National Science and Engineering Week. After an outdoor session with a conservation specialist the group looked at ways to replicate a toad habitat using natural crafts and recycled objects. One of the Ambassadors, Graham Patton, explained, "We used recycled materials to create a pond out of fabric and a tree out of a hat stand and an umbrella! We worked as a team to design and create the habitat and it was great to see our work displayed in Peterborough city centre. The Wildlife Ambassadors have learnt such a lot about toads and other amphibians and reptiles, and have realised how much help these creatures need to survive."

The project is already counting its successes according to Project Officer Laura Brady: "We have an Ambassador back in college and another looking forward to volunteering with us in the future. All eight are keen to get started on their personal projects."

More at www.froglife.org/ambassadors and join the Ambassadors on Facebook at www.facebook.com/froglifewa



Photos: Laura Brady / Froglife

ROAD SALT IMPLICATED IN MASS MORTALITY OF GREAT CRESTED NEWTS

In late March 2010, approximately 75 great crested newt carcasses were found in a railway station car park in Cumbria; the newts appeared to have died during their spring migration from nearby hibernation sites on their way to a large breeding pond behind the station. Road salt had been laid in the car park two weeks previously, during an unusually late period of cold weather, and there was circumstantial evidence that residual road salt in the car park had caused these newt deaths. The incident was recently described in the *Veterinary Record**.

"There are a few anecdotal reports of UK amphibian mortality associated with road salting, and salt treatment of ponds," said Paul Duff of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. "As in this case, incidents tend to occur when an unusually late period of freezing weather is swiftly followed by much milder temperatures. We would like to raise awareness of the apparent potential for road salt to negatively impact amphibians, and recommend that judicious caution is exercised in the use of road salt near amphibian migration routes, particularly in March and April; road maintenance contractors should be aware of this risk."

*Duff, J. P., Colville, K., Foster, J., & Dumphreys, N. Mass mortality of great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) on ground treated with road salt. *Veterinary Record* 168 (10) p.282

Paul Duff (Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Penrith), Katie Colvile (Zoological Society of London) and Jim Foster (Natural England, Peterborough) would be interested to hear about any future incidents of suspected salt poisoning: please email amphibian@zsl.org if you have any information.



Katie Colvile

RESERVE NOTEBOOK

As ever the volunteer contribution to reserve management has been invaluable - without their efforts the site would simply revert to scrub and its wildlife value would plummet. Our growing team has been selectively removing scrub and willow, leaving the more infrequent hawthorns, dogwoods and wild roses; we've also created a series of scallops in the remaining scrub, improving its structure for our cold blooded species.

But one thing our volunteers can't do is clear out the 300+ ponds as they get more overgrown. That's why we're grateful to Natural England and Peterborough City Council for funding an exciting addition to the reserve - a 24 tonne digger! This monster machine, with its extra-long 18m-reach arm, is necessary for reaching all the way from the tops of the ridges to the bottom of the ponds.



We've been able to completely restore six ponds. Each has been stripped right down to bare clay and, space permitting, re-profiled to create the shallower gradients which are so important for wildlife. This work primarily focuses on regenerating the dwindling

bearded stonewort population but will also be of benefit to the unique assemblage of invertebrates which flourish in this very open habitat. Funding for this work continues for the next four years.

Most literature, including our own Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook, suggests that newts prefer well-vegetated ponds which offer plenty of cover and support larger numbers of invertebrate prey, so it is unusual to completely restore newt ponds. However, we have just completed a major evidence-based conservation project - Second Life for Ponds (funded by SITA) which looked at the effects of different pond restoration techniques across a wide range of species, including both bearded stoneworts and great crested newts. Amongst the conclusions we showed that complete restoration of ponds was the best technique for bearded stonewort and that, on Hampton at least, complete restoration of ponds does not seem to negatively effect the newts (as may be expected).

The full report, as well as a shorter executive summary are available to download from our website: www.froglife.org/hnr/secondlifeforponds.

Now, after a thoroughly enjoyable combination of volunteer sessions, digger work and science - bring on the longer days, wildlife spotting and newt surveys which summer heralds!

Paul Furnborough, Conservation Officer
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Hampton Nature Reserve is managed by Froglife on behalf of O&H Hampton Ltd. Photo: Daniel Piec.



ALL ABOUT ADDERS

Adders - what's the big deal? Well, for a start they're the UK's only venomous snake which surely makes them one of our most special species. But for years the adder has been unfairly persecuted and, combined with a drastic loss of habitat, numbers have dropped dramatically.

"The adder, or European common viper *Vipera berus* to give it its proper title, is among my favourite species of reptile, and I have been fascinated with them ever since I first encountered Britain's only venomous snake in the wild.

In fact, my first sighting of an adder was not a single specimen, but a group of eight males that were basking together shortly after having emerged from hibernation in Dorset! A pretty impressive sight. Since then, for the last ten years or so, I have spent a considerable amount of time looking for adders, and I have learnt many things through observing them for long hours in the field. Firstly, male adders emerge from hibernation before any other reptile, often in late February. They can bask in temperatures as low as 5°C! However, it is often not until late March or early April that the larger brown females can be seen (at least in the north of England). The preferred habitats of adders, close to where I live, consist of open moorland with some areas covered with heath and every adder colony I have ever seen has always been in relatively close proximity to a source of water, be it a lode or a tiny stream.

In 2009 I was very privileged to see an adder in northern Greece. This was so special because here they are very rare indeed - they're only found at a few isolated locations across the country, at high elevations above the tree line. These adders bare some differences to UK populations, most noticeably bar markings along the body instead of the traditional zig-zag.

In my opinion, a large female adder is the most beautiful reptile we have in the UK, and one of the most beautiful in Europe, and I only wish more people could learn to look beyond the bad press and see them for what they really are."



Matt Wilson, herpetologist and self-confessed adder-holic, shares his passion for these remarkable reptiles.

<http://mwilsonherps.wordpress.com/>



SNAKES and the CITY

Will Atkins of the London, Essex and Hertfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Trust (LEHART) talks adder conservation in London, and why there should always be space for the nation's only venomous snake in the nation's biggest city.

In a city of over eight million people, is there still room for adders? In spite of continued persecution and poor reputation, and the potentially dangerous consequences of a bite (a very rare event), the answer at present is a very definite yes. However, the current status of adders in London is 'rare', and their future is threatened by recent cuts to the conservation budget.

Adders were probably never common in the Capital, avoiding the clay soils which are widespread. But there are historical records from sandy and chalky areas, even as close to the centre as Hampstead Heath. Despite intensive survey efforts in the last decade, only four populations remain extant, and these are spread far and wide, with no chance of natural mixing. At one site, the population is so low that all the adults are individually known; at the other three, things are rather better, with counts of over thirty animals, following successful recent management.

Threats to London's adders are a microcosm of the national problem; fragmentation of habitat with resulting isolation of populations, each of which is subject to potential extinction through arson, persecution, lack of management and possible inbreeding. Much has been achieved in the last decade to enhance the status of adders at their remaining sites, through a combination of local expertise and volunteer effort, plus funding from SITA and Natural England. As part of a research report (number 666) commissioned in 2006 by English Nature (now Natural England), management briefs for each site were written and the necessary works carried out by specialists. Emergence counts in following years have shown substantial increases in the adder populations. However, the position is now unclear following a lack of further financial commitment for habitat management following recent cuts. At one of the sites, for example, a two year programme of heathland restoration in an area of secondary woodland has been halted in spite of a successful first year of works. Furthermore, introductions and reintroductions in London are unlikely, because of political implications and the issue of liability in releasing venomous animals in such a densely populated region, by contrast with more rural parts of the UK.

London lost most of its charismatic predators centuries ago; it would be a sad reflection of the state of wildlife conservation in the UK as a whole if we were to lose this survivor from a wilder time in the twenty first century in the Capital; conversely, if we can prove that humans can coexist with a venomous species of snake here, then this will act as an inspiration for adder (and other wildlife) conservation throughout Britain.

Reference: Evaluation of the Conservation Status of the Adder *Vipera berus* in Greater London (English Nature Research Report number 666, by Will Atkins, LEHART).



Above: One of London's female adders surveys her heathland habitat - something which provides cover and food for several of London's adder populations.

Below: Three (of a total of five in the entire population) male adders in combat (rather than the usual dance between two males) at a London adder site, April 2009.

Bottom: 'Adder and Admiral' - reptiles such as adders need the same public approval as butterflies if they are to survive in densely populated places like London.

Photos by Will Atkins





Adders have been in the news recently regarding their genetic diversity, what does it all mean?

It's all to do with populations becoming isolated due to loss of habitat. Adders are becoming a much rarer site in the British countryside than they used to be. In fact, a recent report from the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS) found that adders were recorded in just 7% of surveys. It's likely that their populations are at an all time low as a result of years of agricultural intensification, harmful management practices and habitat loss and fragmentation. All of these factors reduce the amount and quality of habitat available. So what about adders in small nature reserves and pockets of remaining habitat, their future is safe, isn't it? Well, maybe not and the reason is all down to genes. Research carried out in Sweden suggests that when a small number of adders become isolated, they are much more likely to breed with closely related individuals. This causes a loss of 'genetic diversity' and means the population is less able to adapt to changing conditions. Also, if 'bad' genes are present in the population it is possible that these will become concentrated when passed down from generation to generation - a process called 'inbreeding depression'; it can have serious consequences in small populations.

The Swedish study found that the 'inbred' population had fewer young and a higher proportion of stillborn and deformed offspring, all very bad news when you are a population close to extinction. However, it was found that by introducing new male adders to the population, thus bringing new genes and boosting genetic diversity, the population made a dramatic recovery. This study shows the great importance in keeping our green areas linked and not letting them become islands in a concrete jungle. Here in the UK, Natural England, the Zoological Society of London and Oxford University have recently joined forces to determine the current levels of genetic diversity within the UK's adder population; they'll be collecting samples from individuals this summer.

Why do adders have a zig-zag pattern?

Adders are beautiful snakes characterised by the striking zig-zag pattern along their back. It was first thought that the pattern was used as camouflage against predators but some biologists now think another use might be as a signal to predators to say 'I'm toxic!'. The study used plasticine snakes (see, even scientists like playdough!), some painted with a zig-zag and some without, to see if the pattern helped protect against predators. The model snakes were put outside on a white background

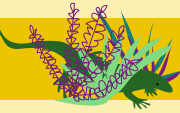
(to prevent the snakes with a zig-zag having any camouflage advantage) and left to be, well, attacked! The study showed that model snakes with a zig-zag were attacked significantly less than ones without the pattern, and thus the pattern may act as a warning signal as well as helping adders stay hidden.

Is it true adders can sometimes be completely black?

Yes. Biologists for a long time believed that black (or melanistic) adders are able to persist in wild populations because they absorb heat better than 'normal' adders. The theory was that better heat absorption allows black adders to have a higher metabolic rate and stay active longer, resulting in them growing to a larger size than their 'zig-zag' cousins. In the adder world bigger is better - big males are more likely to win a mate and big females can carry more young. Thus, despite 'black' adders suffering higher predation it was thought the compensation for this was that they were more successful in reproduction. Further studies did not all support this theory and biologists are still debating as to exactly why black adders persist in wild populations.

Rob Williams,
Living Water Project Officer.
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Whilst you might not be keen to encourage a venomous snake in to your garden you can still help by raising awareness about the extraordinary adder.

As adders become increasingly scarce it's becoming more and more obvious how much help they need. Whilst trying to encourage adders to reside in your back garden is not necessarily the answer, it's important that we spread the right messages about adders - the unlikelyhood of being bitten, the fact the bites are painful but rarely life-threatening, the alarming decline of the species in recent years - and that's where you come in. Help us spread the word: adders deserve respect and shouldn't be feared. Froglife's Sivi Sivanesan explains more:

HOW COMMON ARE ADDER BITES?

"While the effects of an envenomed adder bite may be more dangerous than, say, a bite from a dog, the probability of actually getting bitten by an adder is much much lower.

Adders are incredibly shy and tend to avoid areas of human disturbance - that adder you just saw in your garden is far more likely to have been a grass snake or a slow-worm. Adders can usually be found in or near woodland and heathland and are most common in southeast England. They're active between February and October, when they may be seen basking in early morning or late afternoon sunshine. They use their venom to kill small prey such as mice and lizards.

People do get bitten by adders every year but death from an adder bite is incredibly rare. Between 1876 and 2006 14 people's deaths were attributed to adders in the UK, but there has not been a death since 1975. In comparison, 27 people were killed by dogs in the ten years between 1999 and 2009."

WHAT TO DO IN THE CASE OF AN ADDER BITE:

"The first thing to do is to reassure the person who's been bitten - don't let them panic and get them to rest while you call for help; try not to move the bitten limb too much. If you can see the animal responsible (be it a snake or otherwise) try and get a photo, from a safe distance, as evidence. At the hospital explain that the person may have an adder bite so that anti-venom can be administered if necessary.

The effects of an adder bite can range from mild pain, if it's a 'dry bite' (no venom injected), to a variety of symptoms, including swelling of the immediate area/the whole limb, tingling and bruising; these can be followed by nausea, fever and feeling light-headed.

But remember - these are in no way exclusive to adder bites and similar symptoms can occur with insect stings. An allergic reaction (to anything) can cause anaphylaxis, which is extremely serious.

With appropriate treatment most people recover within a few days, though it can take several months depending on the amount of venom in the bite or if the person is particularly vulnerable e.g. very young, elderly or have an underlying medical condition such as problems with blood pressure."

SPOTTING ADDERS SAFELY - HOW TO AVOID AN ADDER BITE

The majority of adder bites occur after 'interference' with the snake - this includes deliberately picking up or aggravating the snake rather than leaving it alone. Cases are often reported in the press as 'adder attacks' when it's actually just the snake defending itself. If you deliberately go looking for them then you need to be careful, if you're not specifically looking then the chances of spotting adders are slim.

There are simple steps that can reduce the chances of a bite if you regularly visit or walk dogs in areas that adders inhabit:

1. **Know your species** - if you're not confident you can identify a snake you should keep your distance, NEVER handle a snake if you don't know what it is. Remember: grass snakes have a yellow/black collar and adders have a zig-zag down the back (see www.froglife.org/animals).
2. Wear proper **walking shoes**, rather than sandals, to protect feet.
3. Keep to existing, **well-used paths** where the vegetation is low.
4. **Move the person, not the snake.** Remember - children and dogs will not deliver a venomous bite if you try to pick them up! If you come across a snake, always move the person/pet who may be in danger rather than trying to grab the snake. Most snakes are easily scared away by noise and disturbance.
5. **Always keep your dogs on leads** in areas with adders (or any wildlife that could be disturbed).
6. If you're keen to go adder spotting then get **advice from an expert** - the nature reserve Ranger or a local ARG member may be willing to accompany you.

Sivi Sivanesan, London Great Crested Newt Project Officer.
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what you can do

TALES FROM YOUR WILD LIFE...

"As a child I spent hours in my wellies," explains new Frogflifer Jodie Coomber. "I vividly remember arriving home one day clutching my very own jam jar full of frogspawn. I was lucky to have the countryside as my back garden and the opportunity to explore."

These days there is growing concern that children do not have the same access to the outdoors that previous generations enjoyed. My Wild Life is an innovative project exploring how different generations experienced wildlife and wild places. Jodie will be running a series of fun reminiscence events bringing people together to share their memories. Those with interesting or unusual stories will be interviewed, creating an oral history record in the form of a DVD. It's hoped that the project will draw communities together, and that real-life stories will bring issues, such as biodiversity loss, to life so that young people are inspired to preserve our wildlife heritage.

"If you are involved with a group of either younger or older people in Peterborough, London or Glasgow, and would like to be involved in a reminiscence event, we would love to hear from you," says Jodie. "Or maybe you have a childhood memory you would like to share with us? We are compiling stories from all over the country, so get in touch to add yours to the collection."

To find out more about the My Wild Life project see www.froglife.org/mywildlife. Contact Jodie on 01733 425824 or jodie.coomber@froglife.org.

Other ways to get involved...



And now for something completely different...

MAMMALS ON ROADS

You may be clued up about Toads on Roads but did you know you can also help the UK's wildlife by counting mammals on roads? David Wembridge, of the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), explains more...

"The number of miles driven by cars collectively in Great Britain is over 400 *billion* - four, followed by a tyre-track of eleven noughts! - and their impact on wildlife is substantial.

Since 2001, PTES has run its Mammals on Roads survey, collecting records of mammals spotted by motorists from July to September. This is when many mammals, including ourselves, are particularly mobile. The survey aims to estimate trends in populations in the wider landscape from counts of road casualties, and for species such as hedgehog, badger and rabbit it may be a practical way to monitor numbers nationally.

As well as making a note of sightings, volunteers record information about their route: the start and end points, and waypoints along the journey, recording the nearest town or village and the road number. This allows routes and sightings to be assigned grid references, which means that counts can be expressed as so many sightings per distance driven and can be compared from year to year. With a measure of effort (the distance driven) it's possible to estimate a relative abundance across years and in different landscape types.

Not all journeys are included: those on motorways or dual-carriageways are excluded for safety reasons; and journeys in urban areas are not included as local authorities may be removing carcasses. In addition, a minimum journey length of 20 miles is specified. This makes the data easier to analyse and encourages surveyors to return records with positive counts.

Hedgehogs were the focus of the survey in its first year (as the *National Hedgehog Survey*). Between 2001 and 2004, counts fell by a quarter in the UK as a whole. Numbers have gone up since then but have fallen in the last two years that data is available (2008 and 2009) to close to their lowest value since the survey began.

The 400 billion road miles driven each year continues to go up and as road traffic increases so we would expect more animal road casualties annually. For this reason, increases in populations are harder to detect with the survey, and the indication of a decline in hedgehog counts, an even more worrying trend."

To take part in Mammals on Roads later this year contact david@ptes.org or visit www.ptes.org





As you will have read, we recently had a successful evening fundraising for the **Tuppence a Toad** campaign. One of the outcomes of the campaign is to have a 'Patrol Pot' of funds that Patrollers can dip in to if they need help purchasing high-vis jackets, buckets or even road signs. We're still finalising the details but when the process is in place we'll let you know how to apply!



After last year's unprecedented toad numbers, expectations were high for the 2011 migration. So what happened...?



Spring 2010 arrived with a bang and the sudden warm temperatures after a long cold winter brought the toads out in force. Record numbers of toads crossing roads came flooding in from all over the UK. The final total stood at over 76,000 toads! So expectations were pretty high as we patiently waited for spring 2011. But we waited and waited and seemingly nothing happened. Another long, cold winter gave way, oh so gradually, to a cool, extremely dry spring and this took its toll on the numbers of toads recorded by Patrollers. We've not had much data back so far but nearly every Patrol that has returned figures is showing a much lower number of toads than last year; Teresa Baker of the Ringwood Toad Patrol (Hampshire) reported seeing just 10% of the toads they would normally rescue. So should we be concerned? It's hard to say just yet, we need to wait for the rest of the data to make some firm conclusions, but hopefully there will be nothing to worry about. Rob Oldham, toad expert and Froglife Trustee, explained in the Spring/Summer 09 issue of Toad Talk how migration patterns can change dramatically with the weather and how toads may move at 'odd' times and therefore not be recorded by Patrollers. So keep that data coming in and we'll let you know how things are looking in the next issue.

You can now submit your data online, see:
www.froglife.org/toadsonroads/records.htm



FOCUS ON... LINDSAYFIELD, EAST KILBRIDE



PATROL ORGANISER:
Erik Paterson

LENGTH OF TIME SITE PATROLLED:
The site was first reported last year (after a new housing development was built) but this is the first year that the site has been monitored properly.

PATROL SIZE: Just me as far as I know. I'm on the lookout for volunteers...

SUPPORT: I'm a member of the local Amphibian and Reptile Group (Clyde ARG) and the local Council's Countryside Rangers have also been

very helpful. They were able to offer advice and support regarding the problem of toads falling in to drains; they compiled a report about for SNH about it last year. I managed to get a bit of publicity earlier in the year.

CURRENT TOAD POPULATIONS: Well, as this is the first year I can't comment factually but speculatively, and using information from another local breeding site which I check out, I would say the population is declining ever so slightly. As time passes we can establish more trends.

HIGHEST NUMBER OF TOADS HELPED IN ONE YEAR: 90 (2011)

HIGHEST NUMBER OF TOADS HELPED IN ONE NIGHT: 45 (36 males and 9 females)

MOST UNUSUAL ANIMAL HELPED ACROSS THE ROAD: At a 'toad crossing' I was surprised to see a frog!

HIGHLIGHT OF PATROLLING SO FAR: Finding the frog was a bit of a highlight actually as it was in amplexus with a toad at the time! The poor chap was holding on very tight - I'm not sure he was quite prepared to be hopping across the road rather than crawling.

Confused toad & frog! (Erik Paterson)



book review

by Roger Downie, University of Glasgow
(and Froglife Trustee)

Frogs and Toads by Chris Mattison

2011 Hardback, 192pp. Natural History Museum Publishing, London. RRP: £20.

Just released, *Frogs and Toads* explores every aspect of amphibian life. Drawing on the latest research, the book is also fully illustrated with striking photos throughout.

"Chris Mattison is a well-known herpetological author and photographer so, as expected, this is a clearly written, authoritative and beautifully illustrated book. *Frogs and Toads* is an update of Mattison's 1998 (and 2003) book on the same topic, amply justified by the recent revolution in amphibian taxonomy. There are now 49 anuran families where there were 21 in the 1980's and there are huge numbers of generic name changes; Mattison gives both old and new names, to help enthusiasts link their old knowledge to the new.

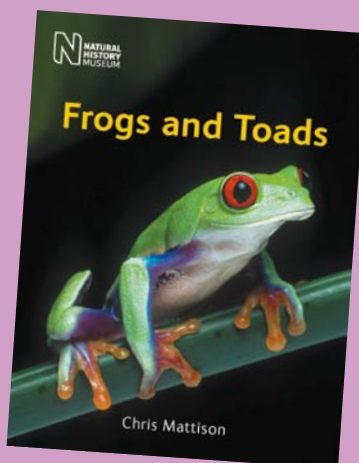
The book is organised into ten chapters on key aspects, starting with Origins and Classification and finishing with a substantial chapter describing each frog family in turn. As would be expected these days, as well as coverage of natural history topics such as life histories and ecology, the chapter on Frogs and Man contains an analysis of amphibian declines and their causes.

In addition to bringing anuran taxonomy up-to-date, Mattison emphasises that there remain uncertainties, instabilities and arguments over the current system, and points readers to websites where further information can be obtained. Sensibly for this sort of book, he does not go into technical aspects of the molecular phylogenetics that have produced the new taxonomies. However, I think there is a problem here: families are presented in the order they would appear in a phylogeny (which is completely non-alphabetical): without an explanation, this seems pretty random.

As is common in a book of this kind, the emphasis is on adults, rather than developmental stages. There is coverage of tadpoles but it is meagre and includes some misleading information (e.g. most kinds of tadpoles have lungs from an early stage, they don't develop them around the time of metamorphosis; and internal gills are not external gills that have been covered up). It is very surprising that the Further Information section omits McDiarmid and Altig's excellent *Tadpoles* (1999).

I detected a few other errors e.g. toads' poison glands are parotoid, not parotid; glucose in frozen frogs acts as a cryoprotectant, not an anti-freeze; *Pseudis paradoxa* (not *paradoxus*), *Phyllomedusa trinitatis* (not *trinitatus*), but these are minor in comparison to the large amount of accurate and clearly presented information.

This book will be greatly enjoyed by amphibian enthusiasts... at least until the next taxonomic revolution!"



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