

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 6th May 2010



MINUTES

1. ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 Matt Harris, (Chair), Melanie Sutherland (now Mrs Dodd), (Secretary), Andy Wilkinson, Rebecca East (Cttee member), Abbey Lee (Cttee member), Sarah Simons (Cttee member), Carys Solman, Lindsay Bamforth, Craig Leitch, Paul Davies
- 1.2 *Apologies received from: Sue Price, Kath Cooper, Ade Williams, Peter Sturgess, Liz Stewart, Mathew Bevan, Sinead Lynch (Treasurer), Aislinn Blackmore and Claire Pooley (Cttee member)*
- 1.3 It was agreed that £25.00 from membership subscriptions received at the meeting would be used to pay for the sandwiches and food provided.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

- 2.1 Minutes were agreed.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING

- Old Hafodian Pond near Blaina – Mel to check with Claire Pooley whether GCN surveys have taken place here.
- Dorothy Wright may come back across to Wales to run a workshop on the new UK species action plans. Matt hasn't received a response as yet. Other options are to invite John Wilkinson or John Baker to come to future meetings as guest speakers.
- GARG recording form – Mel to circulate to group members. Lindsay Bamforth offered to help members with data input. All records should be sent to Lindsay and copied to Matt Harris.
- Next NARRS grid square visit in Caerleon is planned for 16th May 2010.
- Paul Davies reported that he is surveying a NARRS square at Llwyn Onn reservoir.
- Mel reported that Maggie Iles is surveying a NARRS square for reptiles in Deri near Bargoed (Caerphilly LBAP area).
- GCN surveys – not heard from Sinead in Newport about their surveys; ongoing surveys in Blaenau-Gwent (Mel and Claire Pooley), Caerphilly (Mel and Maggie Iles) and Cardiff (Matt). Mel reported that there would be an opportunity to gain experience bottle trapping at Tredomen on 11/12th May.
- Matt is liaising with James Tinney, the new Forestry Commission contact for Trellech monitoring project, as he is keen to join in with the surveys.
- Caerleon NARRS square has been surveyed this year. Matt will follow up on the Abergavenny priority square and speak to landowners.

Action 1: Mel to email recording form to members.

Action 2: Members to contact Lindsay Bamforth for help and advice about recording and data input as necessary.

Action 3: All records to be sent to Lindsay Bamforth and copied to Matt Harris.

Please email to: lindsay.bamforth@sewbrec.org.uk and
MBHarris@cardiff.gov.uk or gwentarg@hotmail.co.uk

4. Update on Toad Patrols for 2010

- 4.1 Matt reported that over 7,000 toads were rescued on Bulmore Road and Cat's Ash Road near the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport this year. A meeting was held with Newport CC Highways dept to look at opportunities to erect fencing near the Celtic Manor, as the roads get very busy, it can't be closed and it can be dangerous for toad patrol volunteers. Highways Officer put forward a few suggestions for fencing to funnel toads to specific point. Other options were explored (e.g. temporary or permanent fencing) and identified costs involved. Katie Godrey is following this up with the highways dept through ongoing talks in readiness for next season. GARG need to continue to liaise to find out progress – action for Matt and Sinead.

Action 4: Matt and Sinead to liaise to find out progress with the toad patrols in Newport and report back to the group.

- 4.2 Matt reported that Andy and Charmaine Pimblett (ex-members) are the local toad patrollers and they are keen to set up a meeting to discuss improving the coordination of patrols. Andy suggested setting up a regional meeting to gather willing volunteers and explore the methods of increasing the number of volunteers. Perhaps need a guest speaker, e.g. John Wilkinson, to come to give a talk and discuss the issues; what's involved in setting up a patrol, health and safety, etc.

Action 5: Matt to organise a regional meeting to discuss toad patrols in South Wales with other ARGs with representation from ARC with assistance from Mel and Andy over the winter period.

5. Group Membership and AGMs (February meetings)

- 5.1 Mel explained about GARG Committee members, who they are, what areas they cover and what they do. Group membership is going up year on year. Speakers were discussed for future meetings.
- 5.2 It was agreed that February meetings should include the AGM to elect officers (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer).

Action 6: Mel and Matt to ensure that an AGM is incorporated to the February 2011 meeting.

**Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 6th May 2010**

6. Surveys, Monitoring and Training Provision

- 6.1 Caerphilly Common – Andy Wilkinson reported on his site meeting with a Cardiff University PhD student to locate his reptile tins and discuss his findings, which could continue to be used to monitor the site by GARG. 3 areas of the common with about 40 tins in each were located. The PhD examined slow worm faeces, but numbers and species seen were not recorded. However, there are a lot of tins for the group to utilise. Other plans for the site include digging out the existing pond and creating adder hibernacula. Caerphilly CBC has some funding to carry out the work. Reptile fencing alongside the new junction needs to be maintained as well. Matt agreed that long term site monitoring for adders is crucial. Andy suggested that a future GARG meeting should be held at the site to look at suitable adder hibernation sites. Need to map tin locations and decide on which tins are best to keep and perhaps get rid of the rest to use on other sites. Andy volunteered to coordinate this project, including the practical conservation work days for members. Andy will arrange the next GARG meeting in August and then an action day in September on site. It was agreed to hold the next GARG meeting on 24th August on site.

Action 7: Andy to organise the next GARG meeting at Caerphilly Common to incorporate a pre-meeting site visit with assistance from Mel on 24th August.

- 6.2 Parc Penallta – Andy also reported that some reptile hibernacula were created by Rhys Jones as part of his new TV series “*Rhys to the Rescue*” at Parc Penallta near Ystrad Mynach. The exact locations of these needs to be obtained as a record. Also feeds into the LBAP action plan for Caerphilly.
- 6.3 Cefn Fforest Eco-Park – Mel reported on ongoing reptile survey of this site in Cefn Fforest near Blackwood for Groundwork Caerphilly and plans to develop and manage the site for reptiles and amphibians. Aislinn Blackmore will be coordinating survey visits this year. Contact details included in events calendar circulated to group.
- 6.4 Trellech – Matt reported on records to date for this ongoing monitoring project in Trellech near Monmouth. 13 adders were recorded in one visit; 3 grass snakes seen so far (only 1 in previous years); and slow worms are being seen in new places indicating that they are colonising across the sites. Matt will continue to liaise with the Forestry Commission (James Tinney) for habitat management plans, e.g. not ploughing over hibernation sites, creating grass snake areas and scrub clearance. Amphibian surveys were undertaken of the 4 ponds on site this year; no GCN found, but palmate newts, frogs and toads were present.

7. Education, Event Literature and Display Boards

- 7.1 Reptile Talk – Sarah Simons reported that there would be an event at Greenmeadow Community Farm in Torfaen on 5th June as part of a week-long series of biodiversity events for Wales Biodiversity Week with a different animal theme each day. Sarah and Rhys Jones had walked around the site

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting Thursday 6th May 2010

and Rhys would be doing his reptile safari to introduce groups of children to reptiles. Linked with the adjacent local nature reserve. There would be a GARG display stand and pond dipping would be run by the farm staff. Rhys was also giving a talk in the evening "*An Introduction to Welsh Reptiles*". Sarah asked for volunteers to help on the GARG stand and would email around the group.

Action 8: Sarah to email the group to ask for volunteers for the Greenmeadow Community Farm event on 5th June 2010.

- 7.2 Bio-Blitz on 15th May at Fourteen Locks, Rogerstone, Newport – including moth trapping, bat survey and amphibian survey. Matt Harris and Sue Price will be attending. Lindsay and Craig also volunteered to assist.
- 7.3 Biodiversity Roadshow on 11th June in Caerphilly town centre – Mel and Andy will be attending.
- 7.4 Go Wild! at Bryn Bach Park on 12th June – Mel, Matt and Sarah.
- 7.5 Llancaiach Fawr have asked the group to attend an event in Nelson on 2/3/4 June, but no one has volunteered as yet and this week in June is becoming very busy, so looking for additional volunteers.

Action 9: Volunteers for a Llancaiach Fawr event on 2nd/3rd/4th June to contact Matt.

- 7.6 Carys Solman reported on an event she is organising for 13th June in Merthyr, for which they are looking for volunteers to run pond-dipping activity.

Action 10: Volunteers to run a pond-dipping activity on behalf of Merthyr Tydfi CBC on 13th June to contact Carys Solman.

- 7.7 Duffryn School, Newport "Creepy Crawly" event on 7th July – Matt has agreed to attend but would like additional volunteers to assist. Sinead has volunteered to attend.
- 7.8 In general, Matt reported that several schools had been in touch to ask GARG to run workshops on reptiles and amphibians, but if we do them, it sets a precedent to other schools doing similar projects, so the group needs to consider charging or asking for a donation towards the group to cover expenses and volunteer time involved. Another option may be selling literature.
- 7.9 Matt found a supplier for display boards and has found lightweight aluminium stand with headers and a storage bag for £199.00. These are from "Discount Displays" (graphic panel display systems trade show). It was agreed that the display stand should be purchased using group funds. It was also agreed that the published, glossy leaflets from Froglife / ARC should also be bought in so that they could be sold at events.

**Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 6th May 2010**

Action 11: Matt to purchase display boards for £199.00 from Discount Displays.

8. Other Projects (e.g. Million Ponds)

8.1 Million Ponds Project – if anyone has created new ponds created, especially those for GCN, please let GARG know so that the records can be kept up to date. Andy Wilkinson advised that in general, a digger and driver for pond creation should cost around £200/day for 2 days and also to consider using natural alternatives to liners if possible.

Action 12: All group members that have created new ponds should let Mel know their location, number, size and purpose (e.g. for GCN) for the group's records.

8.2 No other projects were reported.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Craig reported that he works at Parc Taff Bargoed in Bedlinog, Treharris (Merthyr Tydfil) and would like to put it forward as a site for future surveys by GARG. This was agreed – Craig to arrange future surveys and to request GARG involvement.

Action 13: Craig to email details of the surveys he would like to be undertaken at Parc Taff Bargoed to Mel so that a request for volunteers can be circulated and survey dates arranged – spring/summer 2011.

9.2 Andy Wilkinson reported that a professional wildlife photographer has recently moved to Caerphilly, who would like to photograph adders at a good site. GARG would be able to use the photos for free if the group help him with this request. Andy agreed to put the photographer in touch with Matt.

Action 14: Andy to pass Matt Harris' contact details to Andy Rouse, wildlife photographer, so that they can arrange to visit adder sites.

9.3 Andy also reported that if anyone was interested, a place called Forest View in the New Forest where visitors go to watch Goshawks was also a really good place to see adders (north of Park End), particularly around the edges of the public car park.

10. Date and Venue for Next Meeting

10.1 Next meeting will be held on Tuesday 24th August 2010 at Caerphilly Common (specific venue to be confirmed) incorporating a pre-meeting site visit to look around the site and potential future habitat management and adder hibernacula creation from 6:30pm.