

**Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Monday 8th February 2010**



AGREED MINUTES

1. ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 Matt Harris, (Chair), Melanie Sutherland, (Secretary), Andy Wilkinson, Claire Pooley (Cttee member), Peter Sturgess, Paul Davies, Kath Cooper, Sarah Simons (Cttee member), Rebecca East (Cttee member), Mathew Bevan, Ade Williams, Liz Stewart, Abbey Sanders (Cttee member), Lisbeth Nash, Natalie Waller
- 1.2 *Apologies received from: Geri Thomas, Ian Smith, Neville Davies, Sorrel Jones, Aislinn Blackmore, Maggie Iles, Sue Price, Mike Hogan, Sinead Lynch, Katie Godfrey, Lindsay Bamforth*
- 1.3 Matt Harris welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised that arrangements had changed at the last minute, as Dorothy Wright had cancelled the evening talk on the UK Species Action Plans. Dorothy has agreed to give a talk at a later date. This GARG meeting will therefore go ahead as planned and focus on getting a programme of events, surveys and field visits, etc together for this year. Introductions were made around the table.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

- 2.1 Minutes were agreed with some minor amendments.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING

Action 1: Mel and Claire are writing up records from GCN surveys in Blaenau-Gwent last year and Claire will send these to SEWBReC.
Action 2: Stephen Lowe circulated the conference programme.
Actions 3 – 5 ongoing
Action 6: Talk arranged
Action 7: no update
Action 8: RCT and Merthyr contacted and have become part of the GARG area
Action 9: this meeting took place in RCT
Action 10: a draft recording form for use by the group passed around at the meeting – Mel to circulate to members by email for comment.
Action 11: ongoing
Action 12: dates for NARRS surveys to be included in 2010 calendar
Action 13: on agenda
Action 14: pending
Action 15: no update available
Action 16: completed

Action 1: Mel to circulate draft recording form to group for comment.

Action 2: Group to send comments on the draft recording form to Mel asap.

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4. Training

- 4.1 Matt is aware that there is some interest for GCN survey training in Monmouthshire CC. He suggested that GARG could provide training if there is enough demand, otherwise, interested volunteers should accompany licensed surveyors (and be added to the licence as Assistants) for experience this season and then seek to obtain training next year for a licence application. Liz Stewart is interested in training.

Action 3: Mel to circulate an email to the group (for wider distribution) to ascertain level of demand for a training event.

Action 4: Matt and Mel to arrange and lead a training event in March/April 2010, if there is enough demand.

5. Surveys and Monitoring

- 5.1 Matt reported that GARG usually approach local authority Ecologists / LBAP Officers for a list of sites where they would like assistance with GCN surveys each year. Mel reported that GCN surveys will be undertaken this year in Caerphilly and that Maggie Iles will be organising these, including monitoring the 3 new ponds in Rudry, near Caerphilly. Sites and dates will be submitted for inclusion on the group's calendar.
- 5.2 Mel reported that she will continue surveying in Blaenau-Gwent and is interested in doing some surveys in the south of RCT, particularly re-visiting existing records for GCNs that have not been surveyed since 2004. Claire and Mel to submit sites and dates for surveys for inclusion in the calendar.
- 5.3 Natalie Waller reported that Newport will be doing some GCN surveys this year and will let GARG know what sites and dates so that volunteers can get involved.
- 5.4 Matt reported that he would be surveying a few sites in Cardiff. Sarah reported that there is a new GCN record near Blaenavon and she will contact Steve Williams (Torfaen CBC Ecologist) to find out more.
- 5.5 Matt reported that Monmouthshire surveys should include the 2 ponds at the Trellech monitoring project site, which have not been surveyed for amphibians yet, and Kath suggested following up on recent GCN records found in Raglan.

Action 5: Mel to email the group and the LA ecologists/biodiversity officers for sites so that dates can be included in the calendar for April, May and June.

- 5.6 This will be the group's 5th year of monitoring for reptiles at the two sites near Trellech on behalf of the Forestry Commission. FC contact has recently changed and the new officer is keen. Need to liaise with him to seek more habitat management for reptiles other than horse grazing. Volunteers for surveys should liaise with Matt to avoid duplication of effort. Matt reported that the season has started, as he had seen his first frog spawn already this year.

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Matt suggested dates for the Trellech monitoring visits this year as follows: Sunday 7th March, 21st March, Tuesday 6th April, Sunday 18th April, 9th May, 23rd May, 13th June, 4th July, 15th August, 5th September, 26th September and 10th October. Matt will also liaise with the FC contact about putting down more reptile 'tins' and look into the possibility of creating grass snake egg-laying sites with piles of manure.

Action 6: Matt to liaise with the FC about habitat management, reptile tins and grass snake egg-laying sites at the Trellech monitoring sites.

Action 7: Volunteers to let Mel know if they would like to attend a survey date at Trellech with Matt or to survey the site by themselves on another date.

6. Field Visits (including NARRS)

- 6.1 Matt reported that at the Herpetofauna Workers Meeting in January, the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS) was reported as having been relatively successful. More amphibian results than reptiles have been submitted to date. There are 2 priority squares in the old GARG area (need to check for Merthyr and RCT), which the group have agreed to survey as a group activity. One is in Caerleon, Newport and the other is near Abergavenny. Matt briefed the group on the methodology. Suggested that the Abergavenny was surveyed this year, as it will require at least 5 visits, one to liaise with landowner, one to lay down reptile tins and 3 surveys. Matt suggested the following dates: 28th February (meet landowner and lay down tins), 28th March, 11th April and 16th May. Matt will follow up on the Caerleon priority square with Natalie Waller. Matt asked the group if there were any other NARRS squares being covered. Mel reported that she was planning to survey Maggie Iles' square in Deri for reptiles this year. Matt is aware of one other square being surveyed near the Blorenges.

Action 8: Volunteers for NARRS priority square surveys to contact Matt.

Action 9: Matt to organise visits to NARRS priority square in Abergavenny with volunteers on 28th February, 28th March, 11th April and 16th May. (Mel to include dates on groups' calendar).

Action 10: Matt to follow up on the Caerleon NARRS priority square with Natalie Waller and Mel to include dates for surveys in the group's calendar.

7. Events

- 7.1 Matt reported that GARG have been asked to attend some events already this year. The Caerphilly Garden Centre wildlife weekend on 27/28 February 2010 is too early in the season and no animals are around to take to show people, so Mel and Matt decided to politely decline attendance. However, Mel will contact them to find out if they are planning any other wildlife events during the spring and summer months.

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- 7.2 Go Wild will be taking place on Saturday 12th June 2010 in Bryn Bach Park. Newport Wetlands Open Day is on Sunday 18th July 2010.
- 7.3 There was a general discussion about attendance at events, which ones to prioritise, what the group's aims and reasons are for attending events, volunteer time and other issues. The group agreed that it was important to attend events to raise awareness and promote the conservation of reptiles and amphibians, as one of the group's core aims. However, it was also agreed that there should be a limit to the number of events the group takes on each year. Matt suggested doing one Caerphilly Garden Centre wildlife weekend, Go Wild, Newport Wetlands, Magor Marsh and possibly 1 or 2 others, totalling in 6 events a year.
- 7.4 There was a discussion about resources, including the need for group display boards, other literature and photographs; and the possibility of producing education resources, such as surveys for outdoor classrooms. It was agreed that this was a project that the group should progress, perhaps concentrating on one or two species at a time, e.g. Common frog and Common toad.
- 7.5 Mathew suggested that Bosch might have some equipment that the group could have, as they were closing down; he agreed to follow this up.
- 7.6 Sarah Simons offered some educational resources from Capita Symonds, which she would pursue on behalf of the group.

Action 11: All to send ideas and suggestions for display boards to Mel asap.

Action 12: Volunteers for events to contact Mel.

Action 13: Education, event literature and display boards to be discussed in more detail at the next group meeting.

- 7.7 The number and timing of group meetings was also discussed. First meeting usually in February, second in May, third in August and last in October/November. Next meeting agreed as Thursday 6th May 2010, possibly in Merthyr. There was a discussion about suitable venues, particularly informal ones. Carys agreed to look for suitable informal venues in Merthyr for the next meeting. All were asked to submit ideas for venues for future meetings, so that enquiries can be made about costs, etc.

Action 14: Carys to confirm venue for next meeting with Mel.

Action 15: All to put forward ideas for informal venues for future meetings, so Mel and Matt can make enquiries.

Action 16: Mel to put together a group calendar and circulate with the minutes.

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8. Any other business

- 8.1 Matt reported on toad patrols in the GARG area. Season will start in mid-March depending on temperature and weather conditions. Matt to progress Newport toad patrol issues with Sinead Lynch. All volunteers for toad patrols should contact Matt with mobile numbers to enable coordination at short notice.

Action 17: All volunteers for toad patrols in Newport to contact Matt with mobile contact number to enable coordination.

- 8.2 Mel reported on a potential project on Caerphilly Common to manage habitat, create habitat and monitor the site for reptiles and amphibians. There have been 2 attempts at meeting on site with a PhD student from Cardiff University, so that GARG can take over the monitoring of his reptile tins. A meeting will be arranged and a project established at this site, particularly as it has all 4 reptile species present. Mel to report back on this at next meeting.

Action 18: Mel, Matt and Andy Wilkinson to meet at Caerphilly Common with PhD student and report on project at next meeting.

- 8.3 Matt reported that he would be organising a field visit to Wentwood to look at habitat management issues, as this is another important reptile site, particularly for adders, on Sunday 25th April 2010. Members of the group welcome to attend.

Action 19: Members who would like to attend the Wentwood field trip on 25th April to contact Matt.

Action 20: Matt to follow up a request for information from a consultant on a reptile translocation scheme in Newport with Rhys Jones.

- 8.4 Matt made a call for information on ponds created as part of the Million Ponds Project, so that the details of new ponds could be recorded. Carys reported that Merthyr are planning pond surveys to follow up on those carried out by the National Museum in 1999 and that there are GCN records for the area.

9. Next meeting

- 9.1 Thursday 6th May 2010, time and venue tbc