

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 29th October 2009



DRAFT MINUTES

1. ATTENDANCE

Matt Harris, (Chair), Melanie Sutherland, (Secretary), Claire Pooley (Cttee member), Liz Stewart, Natalie Waller, Katie Godfrey, Sinead Lynch, Abbey Sanders (Cttee member), Rebecca East (Cttee member), Stephen Lowe (South and West Wales ARG), Chaela Carrell (South and West Wales ARG), Sue Price, Kerry Murton, Angharad Owen, Paul Davies

Apologies received from: Peter Sturgess Sarah Simons, Kath Cooper, Geri Thomas, Ian Smith, Neville Davies, Erica Dixon, Sorrel Jones, Stuart Craxford, Aislinn Blackmore, Maggie Iles, Mathew Bevan

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Minutes were agreed.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING

Melanie went through the action points of the last meeting.

- | |
|---|
| <p>ACTION 1: No anomalies in the GCN data set have been received.</p> <p>ACTION 2: No resolution required as no further anomalies identified.</p> <p>ACTION 3: SEWBReC data has not changed, records need to be submitted.</p> <p>ACTION 4: No photos available, Capita did not sponsor the Ruperra toad patrol.</p> <p>ACTION 5: Mel and Maggie Iles have discussed setting up a toad patrol on Gelligaer Common. No other progress to date.</p> <p>ACTION 6: Mel has emailed Rolf Brown to enquire about sponsorship for toad patrols on Gelligaer and Merthyr Common.</p> <p>ACTION 7: Matt needs to speak to Sinead Lynch in Newport CC to follow up the installation of toad tunnels.</p> <p>ACTION 8: Mel circulated dates for Great crested newt surveys at Halt Pond.</p> <p>ACTION 9: Volunteers came forward for surveys at Halt Pond.</p> <p>ACTION 10: Mel has contacted Lindsay Bamforth to invite her onto the committee as 'Records and Website Officer'.</p> <p>ACTION 11: Matt has researched GPS products and costs and will purchase a unit for a reduced price of around £140.00.</p> <p>ACTION 12: Mel has emailed Sinead Lynch, Lindsay Bamforth and Rebecca Davies. Sinead and Lindsay have agreed to become committee members.</p> <p>ACTION 13: Mel has written to postal address list to encourage them to join. This is the second and last time.</p> <p>ACTION 14: GCN survey training session went ahead in May with HCT and Gwent Wildlife Trust in Rudry, near Caerphilly.</p> <p>ACTION 15: A site near Pentyrch, Cardiff was selected for Holly Lewis' research project into bottle trapping for GCNs. Matt asked for a copy of Holly's final report on this as it would be useful for future group surveys.</p> |
|---|

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 29th October 2009

- ACTION 16:** Mel emailed Mike Wilson and Tim Rich to find out about pond surveys undertaken in some LA areas. Information is brief and concentrates mainly on plants. **A list of these ponds should be obtained.**
- ACTION 17:** No update available.
- ACTION 18/19:** Trellech monitoring dates were not circulated, although volunteers were asked to coordinate visits with Matt.
- ACTION 20:** Adrian Thomas is no longer the FC contact for the Trellech project and there is a new contact.
- ACTION 21/22:** Mel emailed the group to ascertain demand and then a NARRS training day was arranged at the Babington Centre in Trellech in April.
- ACTION 23:** No follow-up visits to priority NARRS squares in Caerleon were organised this year.
- ACTION 24:** Some members have emailed photographs of reptiles/amphibians for use in promotional material – thanks very much. Reminded members to send good photos to Mel/Matt.
- ACTION 25:** Mel emailed Stephen Lowe twice about the future of the Bridgend/Vale ARG but had not received a response.
- ACTION 26:** Mel emailed Fay Robinson to ask for CCW support in hosting an All-Wales ARG meeting in South Wales. A lukewarm response was received from CCW.
- ACTION 27:** No evening talk event was arranged for June this year.
- ACTION 28/29:** Mel emailed Matt about organising a field trip to Wentwood, but no date was selected and this will be postponed until next year.
- ACTION 30/31:** No talk was organised for this meeting.

4. NEWS REPORTS

- 4.1 Melanie reported that current membership totalled 26 members, which was on a par with last year (*3 new members joined at the meeting bringing the total to 29*).
- 4.2 Melanie led surveys for great crested newts in Blaenau-Gwent with Claire Pooley and other local volunteers, but the results from these need to be fed into SEWBReC.

ACTION 1: Mel and Claire to write up survey results for Blaenau-Gwent GCN surveys and submit them to SEWBReC.

- 4.3 Matt reported on recent events, including the formation of the new Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) Trust, which is the result of a merger between Froglife and Herpetological Conservation Trust.
- 4.4 The Joint Scientific Meeting programme has been published, a copy of which was available at the meeting if members were interested. Melanie had circulated details to the members by email.
- 4.5 There will be a Wales conference entitled "*The Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles in Wales*" at Swansea University on 28th November, which has been organised by the SWWARG. Stephen Lowe offered to circulate the recently published programme by email to GARG members.

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 29th October 2009

ACTION 2: Stephen to circulate the *Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles in Wales* conference programme to GARG members.

- 4.6 There has been a call for papers for the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting on 29/30th January 2010 in Coventry.
- 4.7 A new book has been published called "*Reptiles and Amphibians – a field guide*" which costs £17.95.
- 4.8 ARG Today newsletter is available on the ARC Trust website.
- 4.9 ARC have produced new UK Species Action Plans for Widespread Reptiles, GCN and Common toad, which were published in August.

5. TRELLECH MONITORING PROJECT

GARG have a contract with the Forestry Commission to monitor reptiles (and amphibians) at 2 sites near Trellech in Monmouthshire as part of a heathland restoration project on land previously planted as coniferous woodland. The project has been going for 5 years and reptiles are usually seen in the same places around the periphery of the sites each year. Matt has found reptiles and amphibians in new places this year indicating that they are expanding their range into the clear-felled areas. Common lizard, Common toad, Smooth and Palmate newts have expanded into these areas, so they must be finding it more suitable as the habitat develops. The same transect route is walked each time, so the spread of these species can be monitored. Dates for surveys need to be circulated early in the season for volunteers to get involved, so Matt will ensure that they is implemented next year.

ACTION 3: Matt to circulate dates for Trellech Monitoring in 2010.

6. ATTENDANCE AT SHOWS AND EVENTS

GARG attend wildlife-themed events during the year, as invited by the organisers. 9 events were attended this year so far, and Matt thanked all the volunteers that attended and assisted with these events.

Committee members need to get together to look at buying display boards for the group. Ideas for designs or display materials should be sent to Mel.

ACTION 4: GARG committee to meet to agree the design and purchase of display boards for use at events.

ACTION 5: GARG members to send ideas, designs or photos to Mel for use on the display boards.

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 29th October 2009

7. TALKS AND EVENTS FOR 2010

Go Wild! will be taking place in Blaenau-Gwent next year, either on 5th or 12th June 2010. Claire Pooley will confirm the date once it has been selected and GARG will be formally invited to attend.

Ideas for speakers at meetings or for evening talks should be passed on to Matt and Melanie. John Baker and Dorothy Wright from ARC have already offered to give a talk about the new reptile and GCN Species Action Plans in December or February. For these talks, it was suggested that other people could be invited to come along from outside GARG, who would be interested in hearing about the new plans (e.g. Biodiversity Officers). There would be a pre-GARG meeting and then the talks afterwards.

It is open to all members of the group to give presentations or talks on something they are involved in or of interest. All volunteers for this should email Melanie to put themselves forward to give a talk.

Matt offered to check with John and Dorothy from ARC on the length of their talks to see if they can give both of them on the same date in February 2010.

ACTION 6: Matt to contact John Baker and Dorothy Wright to ask them both to give talks at the next GARG meeting in February 2010 and to confirm a date.

In order to spread the workload out among the committee, Melanie suggested that the organisation of events could be passed on to the LA representatives. Melanie is the rep for Caerphilly, Matt for Cardiff, Sarah Simons for Torfaen, Abbey for Monmouthshire, Claire for Blaenau-Gwent and Sinead for Newport. This was agreed. Melanie would act as the initial point of contact and then she would pass it on to the relevant LA rep from the committee to organise or to assist with the organisation.

If LAs would like GARG help for GCN surveys, then they should come to the February meeting with a list of sites/ponds. Melanie will email the local authority ecologists and biodiversity officers to remind them.

8. ACCOUNTS AND TREASURER

8.1 Matt gave an update on the group's bank account. The latest statement was dated March 2009 and the balance was £1,704.05. Approx. £70.00 had been paid since then to the Babington Centre for the NARRS training day in April. Funds were also received from the GCN survey trainees in May and £25.00 was paid out to hire Rudry Village Hall.

8.1 8.2 Sinead agreed to become the group's Treasurer and Matt passed over the entire account information, chequebooks and cash card. Sinead took payment from several new members present at the meeting – Liz Stewart, Natalie Waller and Katie Godfrey.

ACTION 7: Sinead to keep the group's accounts and report back at future meetings.

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 29th October 2009

9. SOUTH WALES REGION ARGS

- 9.1 Chaela Carrell was present at the meeting as the Secretary from the newly formed South and West Wales ARG (SWWARG). She was recently nominated as the ARG-UK South Wales Regional Representative, which is to be agreed at the next ARG-UK AGM. Matt had received apologies from Jan Clements, ARG-UK Chairperson, for not including GARG in the consultation on this, or giving GARG an opportunity to nominate someone. However, GARG is supportive of Chaela's nomination.
- 9.2 Matt passed over to Chaela to explain about her role as regional rep. Chaela reported that there is no definite role as such, that she is not going to worry about boundaries and that she will support GARG as much as possible. If anyone has any issues or questions that they would like to raise at the ARG-UK meetings, or if they have any projects that they would like 100% funding from ARG, then get in touch and she may be able to help. GARG need to keep her informed of projects, issues, etc. The ARG-UK website has more information.
- 9.3 Matt reported that GARG currently have group insurance with ARG-UK, which covers volunteers participating in surveys, practical work and events, etc.
- 9.4 There was a subsequent discussion about geographical boundaries of groups in South Wales. It is not territorial, but it is important that all areas have the opportunity to have the help and advice of an ARG. GARG currently covers 6 local authority areas – Blaenau-Gwent, Cardiff, Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Torfaen. Stephen Lowe was previously part of the Bridgend and the Vale ARG, which was unofficial and concentrated on specific surveys and projects. This has now become part SWWARG with Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Ceredigion. There is currently no group covering the Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil local authority areas. 3 possible options were considered:
- A South West Wales ARG and a South East Wales ARG
 - GARG, South West Wales and a mid-regional group covering Bridgend, Vale, RCT and Merthyr
 - GARG (expanded to cover RCT and Merthyr) and SWWARG
- 9.5 Stephen reported that SWWARG covers a large area, but the group acts as an "umbrella" to help feed information to members, which may then be willing to take on ponds or surveys. It raises awareness in different areas with a few new members in different places, spreading the word and increasing membership, which could result in smaller ARGs being set up in local areas underneath the larger umbrella of SWWARG at some stage in the future.
- 9.6 Melanie reported that she had already emailed RCT and Merthyr to confirm the viewpoint of the local authority ecologists and biodiversity officers. Carys Solman from Merthyr, and Richard Wistow and Liz Dean from RCT, responded and would prefer to join up with GARG, as they are already

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting Thursday 29th October 2009

working with Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent on a Wildlife Sites project. The RCT LBAP Partnership was also supportive of this way forward.

- 9.7 Matt mentioned the name issue of SWWARG, which implies that it covers the whole of South Wales. Chaela reported that various options were put forward as names for the new group to ARG-UK, and that SWWARG was chosen through consultation. Again, although GARG have received an apology from ARG-UK, the group have not been consulted in any of these recent developments. The name could perhaps be changed to South West Wales ARG and then GARG could become South East Wales ARG. It was agreed that GARG would expand to take on the RCT and Merthyr areas, and then see how it goes and possibly consider changing the group's name at a later stage. Mel agreed to contact Richard, Liz, Carys and Rolf to let them know and to ask for their full support.

ACTION 8: Mel to contact RCT and Merthyr to confirm that GARG would like to expand to include these areas and to ask for their full support.

- 9.8 Matt suggested hosting our next GARG meeting in RCT or Merthyr to start the ball rolling in raising awareness and recruiting new members. Mel agreed to sort this out.

ACTION 9: Mel to arrange the next meeting of the group in RCT / Merthyr in February 2010 (with facilities for John Baker and Dorothy Wright's talks).

10. DATA RECORDING

- 10.1 Matt reported that there is a backlog of records to be inputted. He has received a copy of Recorder 6 from SEWBReC, although he hasn't managed to work it yet.
- 10.2 The submission of records was discussed. GARG have a data exchange agreement with SEWBReC, but no records have been passed back to GARG since this was signed. Matt suggested it was convenient to have a database of records within the group for easy reference rather than going to SEWBReC every time. Matt passes all consultancy data enquiries to SEWBReC at the moment. Lindsay Bamforth agreed to put together a reptiles and amphibians recording form for use by GARG with specific information relating to habitats and features to observe and record in conjunction with Matt and Melanie.

ACTION 10: Lindsay, Mel and Matt to produce a group recording form.

- 10.3 Melanie and Claire need to submit their GCN survey records from Blaenau-Gwent for this year. Sinead reported that records also need to be submitted from Newport CC, although no GCNs were found this year.

ACTION 11: All to submit reptile and amphibian records to SEWBReC and Matt Harris using the group's recording form.

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 29th October 2009

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 11.1 Million Ponds Project – a new round of applications has been opened up for the creation of new ponds in the UK. ARG-UK has produced guidance for ARGs looking to make applications. David Orchard is the contact. There have been a few MPP projects in West Wales, e.g. Margam Park.
- 11.2 NARRS – Matt reported that he failed to survey his priority grid squares again this year. Matt has spoken to John Wilkinson from ARC recently, who has revealed that ARC are not getting enough results back from priority squares to make the scheme worthwhile. ARC is hoping that each ARG in the UK will be able to do at least 2 squares per year. Matt will programme field visits for the next survey season to ensure that they go ahead. Matt suggested that GARG could run more NARRS training days next year if there were enough demand. Also applicable to hosting another GCN survey training day next year. It was suggested that this could be arranged in March/April in either RCT or Merthyr. Mel agreed to follow this up.

ACTION 12: Matt to circulate a programme of survey dates to the group for NARRS priority square surveys next season.

ACTION 13: Mel to arrange NARRS and/or GCN survey training dates for March/April 2010 in RCT or Merthyr.

- 11.3 Toad Patrols – Matt reported on previous work undertaken by Dolores Byrne in Newport looking at the possible installation of toad tunnels before she left the local authority. Dolores was going to set up a working group to look at the problem in the Cat's Ash and Bulmore Road area of Newport near the Celtic Manor Resort. 1000's of toads cross the roads during the migration period and local residents have reported that it can be quite dangerous. Sinead agreed to follow this up with Newport CC's highways dept and to get in touch with Dolores Byrne, and report back at the next meeting. Toad patrolling weather will probably start next March and Matt will email the group to request volunteers as usual.

ACTION 14: Matt to circulate information on toad patrols to the group.

- 11.4 Update from Newport - Sinead reported that the current council newsletter, which is distributed to all households in the county, included an article on reptiles. There has been only 1 response so far from a lady wanting to get grass snakes out of her garden. The next newsletter will contain an article about recording and will include information on GARG. Sinead agreed to pass a copy of the newsletter to Matt and Melanie.

ACTION 15: Sinead to send a copy of the Newport CC Newsletter to Matt and Mel.

- 11.5 Sinead also reported that there would be a Biodiversity Xmas Social on Friday 4th December 2009, which is open to everyone involved with biodiversity work to attend from 6pm onwards. For details, please contact Sinead.

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 29th October 2009

11.6 Abbey asked about amphibian disease, as some had been noted in the Trellech area. There was a discussion about this issue. It was noted that it was important to implement bio-security measures, guidance on which is available on the ARC / ARG-UK websites.

12. NEXT MEETING

12.1 Next meeting will be organised for February 2010 with talks by John Baker and Dorothy Wright. Date to be confirmed. Invitations will be made to GARG members and a wider audience including local authority ecologists and biodiversity officers, and SWWARG. Mel will circulate the confirmed date and venue.

ACTION 16: Mel to circulate date, time and location of next meeting to the group.