

Minutes of the Clyde Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting

Autumn Meeting: 21st November 2013, 19:00-21:30, Buchanan House, Glasgow.

Present: Brian Beck (BB), David Chatterton (DC), Susie Coyle (SC), Maggie Ferguson (MF), John Fowbert (JF), David Garner (DG), Paul Hoskisson (PH), Ewan Kane (EK), Peter Minting (PM), Gillian Neil (GN), Erik Paterson (EP), James Stead (JS), John Sweeney (JJS), Liam Templeton (LT), Richard Weddle (RW).

Apologies: Chris Cathrine (CC), Roger Downie (RD), Chris McInerny (CM).

1. Matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.

- JJS asked if news had come from the volunteers managing the toad patrol at Kirkintilloch as there had been development of the primary habitat, no news had been received in this regard.
- JJS Asked if Forestry Commission Scotland's Forestry management strategy had been passed to CARG for comment as part of consultation, EK fed back that this had not been received.
- JJS stated that toads in drains would be covered later in the meeting.
- It was noted that for the Spring 2013 AGM, the minutes did not reflect the agreement for Maggie Ferguson to remain as treasurer for the group.

2. News.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation's Scottish Project – Peter Minting.

Further to the minutes of the previous meeting, ARC has had their new Scottish Project Officer in post since May '13, the four-year Scotland-wide Project will:

- Provide training events for N.A.R.R.S. In Spring 2014 as a means of increasing participation in this important national survey;
- Seek to survey for rare species (Natterjack Toads and Great Crested Newts);
- Provide agri-environment scheme training;
- Undertake targeted surveys of under-recorded areas;
- Promote the undertaking of citizen science projects such as the amphibians in drains project;
- Organize symposia in the Autumn annually;
- Undertake practical habitat management work including GCN pond creation and restoration;
- Generate publications on identifying Scottish herpetofauna including Gaelic versions;
- Organize education events for both children and adults;
- And generate a Scottish Herp atlas with the assistance of the ARG-UK Record Pool.

Froglife's Scottish Dragon Finder Project – James Stead.

Froglife has appointed two staff members to deliver their 4.5 year Heritage Lottery Funded Scottish Dragon Finder Project. In addition to the two current paid roles, there will be two paid apprenticeships that would be suited to university graduates or others with limited fieldwork experience. The Froglife project's aims and aspirations are to:

- Create and restore habitats for herpetofauna using volunteers;
- Engage with the communities through several projects such as “Dragon tails” for Youth Groups and Schools, “Dragons in your Garden” to promote conservation and recording of herps for gardeners, “Dragons in the Hills” to promote recording by hill-walkers and “Swimming with Dragons” wherein young children are encouraged to swim with blow-up floats of British herpetofauna;
- Work on 63 sites totalling 12 hectares within 14 local government boundaries;
- Train volunteers and engage communities who would otherwise not be as interested;
- Generate an additional 38,000 records through the use of a mobile phone app;
- Work with 240 partners to deliver the project;
- and Generate a Herp Atlas for all of Scotland (independently from the similar ARC project).

ARG-UK News – Erik Paterson on behalf of Chris Cathrine.

Scottish ARC Project was developed actively with ARG-UK.

CC reported (via EP) that he had spent a lot of voluntary time helping Froglife develop their Scottish Dragon Finder Project, including providing information and contacts. Froglife has however, declined to work with ARG-UK and have said that they will not do so and so ARG-UK feels unable to support this project. Although Froglife declined to collaborate with ARG-UK, this does not mean that they will not work with individual ARGs necessarily. Following a short discussion on the difficulties between the two organisations at a national level, the Group felt there was no good reason not to support/publicise the Scottish Dragon Finder project at the local level. CC commented that “the staff on the ground are often really great” and that he supports Clyde ARG working with Froglife remarking that “It’s great that we now have two national herp projects in Scotland and [he is] sure they will both benefit the conservation of reptiles and amphibians in the country”.

3. Reports.

Toads on Roads – Ewan Kane.

More information was collected this spring on the amphibian mortality due to cars and drains, at Lindsayfied Road, East Kilbride. Toads were noted to be breeding, both in the SUDS pond and in the slow-moving burn into which it flows. Toads were coming from all directions and it was expected there may be multiple populations crossing paths. Hundreds of animals were noted again this year and a large bulk were noted in four drains closest to the SUDS pond. No real mitigation was put in place this season with the exception of the placement of small pieces of wood in to the flooded drains as rafts to prevent drowning. One new volunteer was gained during these surveys.

East Kilbride Amphibian Surveys – Erik Paterson.

Surveys have been undertaken of ponds in East Kilbride, South Lanarkshire for the last two years. In 2012, these surveys were designed to locate and generate population size data of the Common Frog, around 650 clumps of spawn were noted in just over 30 ponds. EP decided to undertake a larger scale survey in 2013 seeking to generate data on all species located within the town, only around 20 ponds were surveyed and not all four times as would be required due to difficulty in finding additional surveyors. Common Frog spawn counts were over 800 in the 2013 season. Two ponds were found to contain Smooth Newt populations, a record for this area. This was theorized to be due to introduction as perceived Great Crested Newts to stop contested developments near to the ponds on opposite sides of the town. A call was put out seeking volunteers to assist with survey work next season. The reports for these surveys can be found on the Caledonian Conservation Ltd. Website and will be linked to from the CARG Blog.

Lochwinnoch Bioblitz – Ewan Kane.

This event took place in May and went well – EK and EP were present netting the ponds during the day with visitors, Palmate newts were found alongside numerous other aquatic species. In the evening there was bat surveys followed by torching the ponds for newts, the visitors appeared to be quite enthralled and enthusiastic about seeing large quantities of displaying Palmates.

Cochno and Cleddans Ponds – Brian Beck.

BB showed a short power point presentation describing his spring surveys of approximately two dozen ponds in the Cochno and Cleddans burns catchment (West Dunbartonshire). The Cleddans area is usually made up of fewer, much larger water bodies due to natural confluence. A number of these ponds, alongside the A82, were found to be full of rubbish and quite heavily polluted. Despite the poor water quality of some of these ponds the area is rich with wildlife, a large number of Common Frogs and a huge area of spawn mat being found in the ponds and surrounding countryside, with frogs even spawning in small puddles. There was a certain amount of desiccation earlier in the spring which resulted in terminal or partial failure of several spawn mats. These ponds could benefit from some management for the benefit of amphibians.

Alpine newts in Livingston – Brian Beck.

BB showed some slides describing the discovery of a small population of Alpine Newts near Livingston, at the site of a new rail development. due to the rail infrastructure being secured from unauthorised public access / trespass. New SUDS ponds installed here recently seem to have allowed the newts to colonise this site from a known colony at a nearby quarry to this site. With Alpine Newt being an Invasive Non Native Species, Brian contacted SNH for advicetold that the newts could be left because they

would be likely to re-colonize from the nearby quarry anyway.

Save the Frogs Day, Coylton – John Sweeney. 31/08/13

EP was contacted by a vet, Lorna Lazenby, at the veterinary surgery in Coylton, Ayrshire earlier in the year and asked if CARG could attend a “save the frogs day” event. EP and JJS represented CARG at the event held in the Vet surgery itself. About a dozen or so families came attended the event, being shown information posters and live amphibians. EP and JJS provided information and answered questions on the Common Toads, tadpoles (frog and newt) and Palmate Newts on show, and supervised the careful handling of these by the children. EP and JJS were surprised at the number of adults and children present who had never actually seen a live toad, frog or newt. JJS suggested that this sort of event is something CARG could potentially host with the addition of an evening demonstration of torchlight surveys.

East Dunbartonshire Great Crested newt Surveys – Maggie Ferguson.

18 regular sites were surveyed, all of which were found to still contain Great Crested Newts however, no new sites were noted in 2013. Maggie and the volunteers took eDNA samples which involved collecting 20 samples of water from various regions of each pond which had to be silt free – it was reported that collecting silt-free samples for eDNA analysis was incredibly challenging. The 2013 survey effort attracted three new volunteers.

4. Upcoming Events and Training.

EP noted that it would be beneficial for several ponds within the East Kilbride area to receive maintenance including litter picking and vegetation clearance, this may be suitable for the 2014/'15 Winter.

JJS suggested that MF may have need of volunteers at Mugdock Country Park and wider Dunbartonshire however MF noted that she did not struggle to get volunteers through the Ranger Service but had not received much practical involvement from CARG.

DG called for volunteers to assist with Glasgow City Council's annual frog spawn census. Now that Froglife's Living Waters project has been disbanded, Glasgow City Council would like to see the continuation of frog spawn monitoring. JJS suggested that two lists be compiled of ponds and their locations, a “priority sites” list and a list of all sites, these could be circulated to CARG members. Training may be given by CARG on determining spawn clump number from spawn mat resulting in CARG assisting with meeting the aims of this project. Dave will email these lists to JJS.

5. Communications.

JJS and EP called for content for the CARG Blog, e.g. images or short reports from surveys. It was felt important to regularly update the blog so that the website generates more interest. John post some information regarding the toads in drains project to the blog.

EP noted that Gary Hovell, secretary of Lothian ARG had created a Facebook group for Scottish Amphibian and Reptile Groups and asked whether a CARG Facebook page would be beneficial. The group felt that a Facebook page may be helpful as a means of quickly disseminating news, since content would be updated straight to people's timelines. EP agreed to generate a CARG Facebook page and trial whether this would be a worthwhile idea.

6. Meeting Venues.

The group agreed that the Network Rail Office was perfectly suitable for the meetings being both comfortable and well connected for transport links and it was agreed future meetings would be held there.

7. Any Other Business.

RW stated that records are only coming in from a few volunteers and that it would be beneficial to receive more records for the area. RW will email EP recording forms to pass around the group and place on the website to assist with record gathering.

EK updated us on the Network for Newts project in Renfrewshire, the 27 shallow ponds and scrapes are flourishing with newts and frogs noted to be breeding in the first year. Interpretation panels have now been installed and a printout of the graphic was passed around the group to read.

£2 was given to MF by EP, these were from membership fees – the membership forms collected will be passed to CC for filing.

JJS gave a short power-point presentation detailing plans for a Toads in Drains project. The presentation outlined the work done thus far (identifying potential risk-sites) and the potential work to be done in the future. The aims of this project are to identify sites where road and in-drain amphibian death are an issue with a view to potentially influencing management decisions with these results. JJS suggested a plan of action which would see volunteers checking sites throughout the winter to assess whether these seemed to be at-risk. The results of this will be discussed during the Spring meeting and further action will be taken in the spring of 2014. JJS suggested that it would be sensible to buy equipment such as hi-vis vests, torches and nets, JJS has priced this at roughly £85. This could be taken from the CARG bank alternatively it was suggested by GN that a CSV Action Earth Community Grant of £250 could be applied for for equipment, alternatively an ARG-UK 100% Fund Application could be made for this. JJS will liaise with MF and GN to discuss CSV fund applications and will generate a recording form for Toads in Drains, this will be circulated around the core group for comment and approval prior to field work being undertaken.

8. Date of the next Meeting.

The next meeting is to be held on Thursday 20th February 2014 at 7pm within Buchanan House, Glasgow.

9. Thanks.

BB was thanked for organizing the venue and providing the tea, coffee and cakes for this meeting.