

Gwent Amphibian and Reptile Group Meeting
Thursday 26th February 2009



DRAFT MINUTES

1. ATTENDANCE

Matt Harris (Chair)
Melanie Sutherland (Secretary)
Sarah Simons (Cttee member)
Abbey Sanders (Cttee member)
Geri Thomas
Peter Sturgess
Holly Lewis
Fay Robinson

Apologies

Katherine Cooper, Rebecca East, Ian Smith, Ade Williams, Sue Price, Maggie Iles, Lindsay Bamforth and Lisbeth Nash

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Minutes were agreed.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING

- 3.1 (2) Great crested newt data – species distribution maps and individual records need to be checked for anomalies – some have already been identified, and this information needs to be fed back to SEWBRc. Mel agreed to collate anomalies and liaise with SEWBRc.

ACTION 1: All to send identified anomalies in Great crested newt records to Mel.

ACTION 2: Mel to collate anomalies and liaise with SEWBRc to resolve.

- 3.2 Matt reported that all Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) records from 2007-2008 are now on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway and that there are some in the GARG area that he did not know about. Mel suggested obtaining a second data trawl from SEWBRc for Great crested newt records to update the group.

ACTION 3: Mel to ask SEWBRc for current species records and distribution maps for great crested newt as part of the GARG Service Level Agreement.

- 3.3 There was a brief discussion about the problem with obtaining ecological consultant's records when the work is undertaken for a private client, including for planning applications. Geri was concerned that there are numerous species records that are not passed on for the benefit of conservation. Mel reported that this is an issue that is being dealt with nationally by the Local Record Centres and that there had been a recent meeting of the Wales Group

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of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) to look at this issue with consultants and SEWBReC.

- 3.4 (3) Mel had not sent Sarah photos of the toad patrol in Draethen and would contact Sue Price to request any photos of volunteer toad patrollers from last year for the Capita (sponsors) and GARG websites.

ACTION 4: **Mel** to contact Sue Price for photos and send them on to Sarah and SEWBReC for the website.

- 3.5 Matt reported that the organisation of toad patrols needs to be sorted out. Volunteers that are willing to assist need to supply their mobile phone numbers, so that they can be contacted quickly when the toads are on the move. There was a discussion about locations in need of patrols, including Gelligaer Common. Mel agreed to speak to Maggie Iles about possibly organising a local toad patrol from the area and the LBAP Partnership. It was also suggested that Merthyr CBC could be approached for potential collaboration and sponsorship. Mel agreed to email Rolf Brown to investigate.

ACTION 5: **Mel** to speak to Maggie Iles about organising a toad patrol on Gelligaer Common north of Deri with local volunteers and the LBAP Partnership.

ACTION 6: **Mel** to email Rolf Brown to investigate possible collaboration and sponsorship for toad patrols on Gelligaer and Merthyr Common.

- 3.6 Matt reported that since Dolores Byrne had left Newport City Council, nothing had been done to install toad tunnels, which she had been researching. Matt agreed to contact Sinead Lynch in Newport CC to follow this up.

ACTION 7: **Matt** to contact Sinead Lynch in Newport CC to follow up the installation of toad tunnels.

- 3.7 (4) Mel reported that monitoring of the 3 new ponds adjacent to Halt Pond in Rudry would continue this season, as no evidence of Great crested newts was found last year, and another year's monitoring is required for the GARG (Species Challenge Fund) project. Survey dates would be open to GARG volunteers and circulated by email.

ACTION 8: **Mel** to circulate dates for Great crested newt surveys at Halt Pond to the group.

ACTION 9: **All** to contact Mel if you would like to volunteer for surveys at Halt Pond.

- 3.8 (8) Rebecca Johnson left SEWBReC for a new job in Oxford shortly after our last meeting and is therefore no longer a member of the group. Mel reported that Lindsay Bamforth is the new SEWBReC contact for the GARG website. Mel agreed to ask Lindsay if she was interested in stepping into Rebecca's

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shoes as a committee member with responsibility for records, as well as the website.

ACTION 10: **Mel** to contact Lindsay to invite her onto the GARG committee as the 'Records and Website Officer'.

- 3.9 (10) It was agreed that a GPS unit should be purchased for the group to use on surveys, in particular the Trellech Monitoring Project, but also for other sites. Matt agreed to undertake research into what products are available and costs, and report back at the next meeting.

ACTION 11: **Matt** to research GPS products and costs and report back for a decision at the next meeting.

4. CHAIR'S REVIEW OF 2008

- 4.1 Matt reported that the current balance in the group's bank account is approximately £1,800.00. Matt gave a brief overview of the previous year.

5. MEMBERSHIP AND COMMITTEE 2009

- 5.1 Mel gave a brief overview of membership for the previous year. There were a total of 29 members and membership subscriptions had brought in a total of £142.00. This was a fairly good number.
- 5.2 It was agreed that as Peter and Holly had only just joined the group in January their membership subscription would be rolled into 2009.
- 5.3 It was agreed to keep membership subscription at £5.00 and concessions at £3.00 for this year.
- 5.4 Mel reported on the committee. There are currently 5 members on the committee and 3 vacant positions: Matt (Chair and Cardiff area rep.), Mel (Secretary and Caerphilly area rep.), Sarah (Torfaen and Blaenau-Gwent area rep.), Abbey Sanders (Monmouthshire area rep.) and Rebecca East. The vacant positions are Records/Website Coordinator (possibly to be filled by Lindsay Bamforth), Treasurer and Newport area rep.
- 5.5 Claire Pooley volunteered to join and become a committee member as the Blaenau-Gwent area rep.
- 5.6 Mel agreed to invite Sinead Lynch from Newport CC to become a member and join the committee as the Newport area rep.
- 5.7 Mel also agreed to invite Lindsay Bamforth (as before) and Rebecca Davies from SEWBReC to join.

ACTION 12: **Mel** to contact Sinead Lynch, Lindsay Bamforth and Rebecca Davies about becoming members and taking on a role with the committee.

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- 5.8 Mel also reported that only one person had responded to her letter about membership by post last year (March 2008). It was agreed to give it another try this year. Mel agreed to write a letter to those listed on the mailing list by post to formally join the group.

ACTION 13: Mel to write to the existing postal address list to ask if they would like to join this year.

- 5.9 Mel circulated the new membership form for 2009 around those present. This would be added to the website. All members need to complete the form (at least name and signature, if all other details are the same) to join the group for this year – March 2009 – March 2010.
- 5.10 Geri Thomas paid for himself and Mike Hogan, and Claire Pooley paid, to join the group at the meeting. £15.00 in cash was received.

6. GREAT CRESTED NEWT SURVEYS AND TRAINING

- 6.1 Mel reported on plans to hold a training day for GARG members and other local volunteers with the Herpetological Conservation Trust. Mel has emailed Dorothy Wright from the HCT to request her availability to run the training course. Gwent Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers, Merthyr CBC volunteers and a couple of volunteers from the Vale of Glamorgan were also interested in training. Mel will follow this up with Dorothy Wright and circulate the information to the group and other local volunteers.

ACTION 14: Mel to organise a GCN survey training day with Dorothy Wright from HCT and circulate the details to the group and other local volunteers.

- 6.2 Sarah reported that Holly was currently working with Capita on a year placement and was carrying out a research project to compare 2 techniques (CCW and Natural England) for bottle trapping surveys. She needs to undertake 10 visits of 2 nights consecutively for 2 ponds. Holly has already been in touch with Mel and Maggie in Caerphilly and Mel reported that she would be added to their survey licences to accompany them on surveys. Possible sites for Holly's research project were discussed. Sarah reported that it needs to be 2 ponds in close proximity / adjacent to each other with confirmed evidence of Great crested newts. Some suggestions were made at the meeting, but no sites were suitable. GARG members are therefore asked to put forward sites, preferably in the Cardiff or southern part of the GARG area for this project.

ACTION 15: All to put forward sites with at least 2 ponds and confirmed evidence of Great crested newts to Mel to pass onto Sarah and Holly.

- 6.3 A discussion about surveying for Great crested newts within the GARG area ensued. Matt reported that a list of ponds is usually obtained from each local authority and then as many of these are surveyed as possible. Matt reported

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that there was a site near Raglan that he hoped to survey for the landowner this year. Fay Robinson volunteered to assist.

- 6.4 Claire reported that 30 individual ponds and 4 pond groups have been identified and surveyed in Blaenau-Gwent for SINC designation. A few of these could be prioritised for Great crested newt surveys. Mel and Geri volunteered to assist with these.
- 6.5 Mel reported that it was likely that less ponds would be surveyed in Caerphilly this year, concentrating on Halt Pond and a couple of other sites that have not yet been surveyed. Mel will therefore have more time to give to assist with surveys in other areas and is licensed for the whole of the GARG area.
- 6.6 Sarah reported that only 1 pond was surveyed in Torfaen last year and more ponds need to be identified and put forward for surveys, as Blaenau-Gwent has done. Mel suggested that the up-to-date SEWBReC species distribution data might help with this. Abbey mentioned the pond surveys that were carried out by the Museum a few years ago, as these could form the basis of identifying ponds. Mel agreed to contact Mike Wilson and Tim Rich in the Museum to find out more about these surveys and look into the potential for the Torfaen area. Sarah agreed to contact Torfaen CBC for a list of ponds.

ACTION 16: Mel to contact Mike Wilson and Tim Rich in the Museum to find out about the pond surveys.

ACTION 17: Sarah to contact Steve Williams, Kris Roberts and Leyton Williams – Davies for a list of ponds in the Torfaen CBC area.

7. TRELLECH REPTILE MONITORING PROJECT

- 7.1 Matt reported on the project so far. This is an ongoing monitoring project, which is going to be very long term, as reptiles start to colonise the clear fell areas. There are 2 transect routes across the site and Matt has maps of these for volunteers to use. There are a few reptile tins as well at suitable locations along the transects. With time, as heather and gorse etc start to colonise the site, it will become more suitable for reptiles. At the moment, reptiles are only seen at the fringes of the site. Ideally, the monitoring would comprise 1 or 2 visits per month from spring – early summer and then in early autumn. Matt has visited the site so far on an ad-hoc basis, but volunteers are welcome to go along with him and then carry out the survey in their own time once they are sure of the route and methodology. Travelling expenses will be paid at 25p per mile, although no-one has yet claimed for this. Matt has a few dates in mind for March – April and May, usually on Fridays and Sundays.

ACTION 18: Matt to send dates for Trellech Monitoring to Mel to circulate around the group for volunteers to assist with and/or carry out surveys.

- 7.2 Matt asked that all volunteers should coordinate with him when they are planning to visit the site to carry out surveys, to avoid duplication of effort

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(clashing dates with other surveyors). Otherwise, volunteers are welcome to visit the site whenever they like.

ACTION 19: **Survey volunteers** to coordinate visiting the site with Matt Harris to avoid clashing with other surveys.

- 7.3 An amphibian survey was also undertaken of the ponds at the site with frog and toad spawn seen. These ponds are also still evolving, as they are relatively newly created.
- 7.4 Matt reported that he has not heard from Adrian Thomas of the Forestry Commission, but that he was happy for the group to continue monitoring the site. Matt will email him dates when the group are visiting the site.

ACTION 20: **Matt** to email Adrian Thomas with dates of surveys.

8. NARRS

- 8.1 Matt checked that those present knew what NARRS was all about. It's the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme. Mel reported that Lisbeth Nash had emailed her apologies and asked about NARRS training, as she has taken on a grid square this year and the South Wales training course was full. Mel agreed to email the group to find out whether there was any interest in running an extra NARRS training day. If there were enough people, then Matt and Mel agreed to run a training day, and the Babington Centre, Trellech was suggested as a possible venue, as it worked well in 2007.

ACTION 21: **Mel** to email the group to ascertain demand for an extra NARRS training day in the GARG area.

- 8.2 Geri suggested holding field trips as GARG events, for members to get a feel for NARRS surveying techniques. Matt reported that he has not yet managed to survey his 2 priority NARRS grid squares, and put them forward as good ones to do this year as field trips. Mel, Fay, Geri, Maggie and possibly, Rebecca East, have all signed up to NARRS.
- 8.3 It was agreed that if there was enough interest, a training day should be organised in Trellech for a weekend date, either 18th/19th April or 25th/26th April 2009. Matt agreed to check on the availability of the Babington Centre and arrange a follow-up visit to his priority NARRS square in Caerleon.

ACTION 22: **Matt** to check the availability of the Babington Centre in Trellech for NARRS training in April.

ACTION 23: **Matt** to organise a follow-up visit to his priority NARRS square in Caerleon.

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9. EVENTS

- 9.1 Matt reported that the group have been invited to attend the Newport Wetlands Centre 1st Anniversary celebration event on Sunday 8th March 2009. Although this is short notice, Matt would like to attend and asked for volunteers to help out.
- 9.2 Geri reported that he is contacted by the Caerphilly Garden Centre as the local Glamorgan Bird Club representative to attend their wildlife weekends. He suggested that this would be a good event for GARG to attend in future. Mel agreed to contact Stephanie Seward at the garden centre on behalf of the group.
- 9.3 The group have been invited to the Go Wild! event in Pontllanfraith (Caerphilly CBC) on Saturday 6th June 2009 and Matt usually attends the Newport Wetlands Open Day, which is normally in July.
- 9.4 Matt mentioned the need for the group to purchase its own display boards, leaflet holders, table and tablecloth, etc. for events. The options are to have either display boards that posters can be stuck onto or a professional exhibition stand, which would cost more. The costs for need to be researched. Geri reported that he has a graphic designer contact if necessary. The lack of good photos to use on displays was also discussed. Matt offered to collate photos if members would send them to him for use by the group. Mel offered some Great crested newt photos that were taken from Halt Pond in Rudry by a professional wildlife photographer and can be used for biodiversity purposes for free.

ACTION 24: **All** to email photos of reptiles and amphibians to Matt to collate on behalf of the group, for use on the website and on display materials.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 10.1 Geri mentioned that the geographical coverage of GARG should be reviewed, as a West Glamorgan ARG had been recently set up, but there is no coverage for Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taf, and the Bridgend and Vale of Glamorgan group relies only on one person. Matt suggested that, if necessary, the Bridgend and Vale group could consider merging with the newly formed West Glamorgan group. Mel agreed to contact Stephen Lowe (Bridgend and Vale ARG) to find out his point of view and report back at the next meeting.

ACTION 25: **Mel** to discuss the future of the Bridgend and Vale ARG with Stephen Lowe and report back at the next meeting.

- 10.2 It was suggested that an All-Wales meeting of ARGs could be organised to discuss common issues with speakers from other areas of Wales or England (e.g. Froglife or HCT). Geri asked whether the All-Wales meeting would be something CCW could support. Fay reported that she would take this up with

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her colleagues and asked Mel to email her on behalf of the group, so that she could follow it up.

ACTION 26: Mel to email Fay Robinson for CCW support of an All-Wales ARG meeting to be held in South Wales.

10.3 Sarah suggested holding another evening talk like last year for members and other interested people to attend. Geri suggested inviting the local authority Biodiversity Champions. Sarah agreed to look into organising a talk and to invite potential speakers. Matt suggested speakers from HCT for example on Smooth snake, Natterjack toad or Sand lizard, which would be of interest.

ACTION 27: Sarah to organise an evening talk event.

10.5 There was a general discussion about meetings and events. Matt reported that the group normally have quarterly meetings and that a talk was a good thing to offer to the membership. Sarah thought that the talk last year worked well as it was opened up to the public and a few local councillors were present. Geri pointed out that field trips and training were also important for the group, as a chance to meet up as well as learn. Mel agreed and that, although the group did not have a 4th meeting last year, suggested that meetings should take place in Jan/Feb (main meeting or "AGM"), June (with a public evening talk, September to report survey results and possibly one over the winter period with a talk for members only.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

11.1 The next meeting will be arranged in June with a talk to follow. Mel suggested that it could be during Wales Biodiversity Week as last year, as the talk would be advertised via the Wales Biodiversity Partnership and BBC Breathing Places websites. Mel suggested a speaker from another ARG to give the talk. Matt reported that the nearest were probably Herefordshire and Bristol/Avon.

11.2 Peter Sturgess suggested another possibility of members attending the meeting to bring along photos or stories for an informal discussion about what species have been seen and where, etc. Geri agreed with this idea, as the Glamorgan Bird Club meetings include a "Members Zone".

11.3 Matt suggested a field visit to Wentwood near Newport as well and requested that Mel email him to remind him to confirm a date.

ACTION 28: Mel to email Matt to confirm a date for a field trip to Wentwood.

ACTION 29: Matt to organise a field visit to Wentwood for members.

11.4 Peter reported that one good find he had last year was 24 slow worms under a single tin!

11.5 Sarah offered to organise the next meeting's talk.

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ACTION 30: **Sarah** to organise the next meeting's talk.

ACTION 31: **Mel** to arrange the next meeting in coordination with Sarah.