

Newsletter

Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group

February 2014

SxARG

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A Note From The Chairman

By Pete King

So another year has begun and it is fair to say the weather has been a bit of a hindrance! However we at SxARG have been keeping busy planning for the coming year. At the AGM in November we decided to reintroduce membership fees which are £5 for a single of £8 for a family membership. However, we are looking at setting up surveys and habitat enhancement days across both East and West Sussex which members will be invited to attend and we certainly hope to be engaging more with our supporters over the coming months.

Recording wise, we have started our Toads on Roads project as part of Arun & Rother Connections and are looking for sightings of toad crossings across the whole of Sussex, more on this later. Everything else is being scheduled for when the ground begins to dry out and we can access sites with Knepp Castle, Beddingham and Groombridge surveys all being planned for the summer.

It is great to be seeing SxARG becoming more and more active again and hopefully by the next newsletter we will have managed to get out and about a bit more!



Common lizard © Nick Ellis

Toads On Roads

By Jess Price

It has certainly been a mild winter and on the 6th of February SxARG received its first report that toads were on the move in Sussex. Toads spend the majority of their lives on land, under rocks, in compost heaps and in vegetable patches. But like all amphibians they must return to water to breed.

Anytime between January and April common toads can start to migrate to their ancestral breeding ponds, with some individuals travelling over two km. The problem is that over the years barriers and obstacles such as roads, housing



estates and garden fences have been built across their path. Toads migrate at night and nothing will get in the way of their amorous intentions, even busy roads. Sadly this means that scores of toads are run over every year by drivers that don't see them until it's too late.

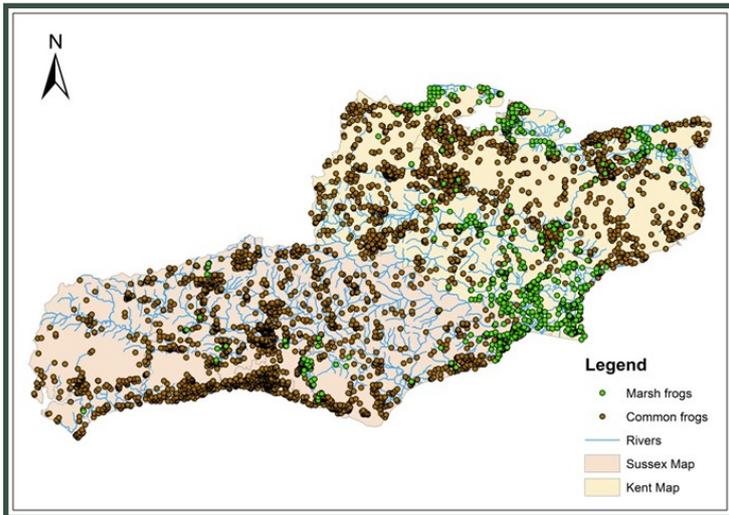
The disruption of migration routes, along with the loss of breeding ponds, is having a significant impact on the number of toads surviving in Sussex. To try to prevent these unnecessary deaths, SxARG has received funding through the Arun and Rother Connections partnership project to map crossing points, put up signs to warn road users and train volunteers to patrol the sites and help toads get across the road safely.

The project will last three years, but in the first year we will be concentrating on getting records in. We really want to know where toads are crossing roads and what ponds they are migrating to. SxARG will be organizing some events to help raise awareness of the project, but in the meantime we would love to hear from anyone who knows of a toad crossing point or sees one in the next few months. You'll definitely know a crossing if you see one – the road is likely to be covered in dead toads that have been squashed. So please fill in the recording form on website and help us to map migration in Sussex.

Marsh Frog Search Update

By Aidan Mackay

For those that missed my previous article I am a PhD student at the University of Kent. My research is investigating whether the introduced marsh frog is having an effect on the distribution of our native common frog. As part of this research I have been gathering together records of marsh frogs and common frogs in Kent and Sussex. I am therefore very grateful to everyone who has logged their marsh frog records at www.marshfrogsearch.co.uk or at any of the record centres in Kent and Sussex such as the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre. Thanks to you we now have a clearer picture of the distribution of marsh frogs and common frogs.



Distribution of marsh frogs and common frogs in Kent and Sussex

I have been able to do some provisional analysis of the marsh frog and common frog presence data for Kent using a species distribution model (SDM). A clear trend has become apparent - suitable habitat appears to be in almost completely opposite areas for the two species. This could be reflecting the differing habitat preference of common frogs and marsh frogs or it may be that the presence of marsh frogs in certain habitat conditions is influencing the distribution of common frogs. However, before conclusions can be drawn the suitability of the model needs to be considered because there may be bias in the collection of presence data.



Lucky sighting of marsh frog predation by a grass snake
© Aidan Mackay

Although it is too cold for marsh frogs at present I am still very keen to receive more records so come April or May please keep your eyes and ears open. My website's 'submit a record page' is functioning and any new records will be used in the final analysis. There are details of how to identify marsh frogs by behaviour, sight and sound on my website www.marshfrogsearch.co.uk. For anyone who would like to contact me about my research I can be reached at marshfrogsearch@gmail.com.

Newsletter Essentials

Become a Member

The membership fee for 2014 is £5 for a single membership or £8 for a family membership. A SxARG membership will not only go towards the conservation of local reptiles but give you a chance to engage in a number of surveys and special events

If you wish to join please contact Bev Wadge at talentyre@btinternet.com

Send Us Your Sightings

One of the key aims of SxARG is to better understand the distribution of amphibians and reptiles across Sussex. Unfortunately, we cannot do this alone and we rely heavily upon people sending in their sightings.

If you have seen any herptiles, be it past or present, we would love to know. Please fill in the recording form on our website at www.sussexarg.org.uk/send-us-your-sightings.html

Upcoming Events

This year's surveys and events are still being planned but please keep an eye on the events section of the website at www.sussexarg.org.uk/events.html for up-to-date information. This season's surveys will include visits to Knepp Castle Estate, Beddingham landfill and Groombridge Lagoons.

Contact Us

If you have any queries, are concerned about herpetile conservation in your area or just have an amusing story for the newsletter then we would love to hear from you.

Please contact us via the website at www.sussexarg.org.uk/contact.html



Sussex
Biodiversity
Record Centre

