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### What is Amphibian and Reptile Conservation?

Amphibian and Reptile conservation is a national charity that specialises in conserving our native amphibians and reptiles.

We have our main offices in Boscombe, Dorset.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation owns, leases, or formally manages over 80 nature reserves across the UK, including 45 sites in Dorset.

**These sites are important areas for rare reptiles and amphibians.**

### How you can help

You can get involved with practical conservation work, surveying and monitoring, volunteer wardening, or becoming a friend of your local site.

Getting involved with training, habitat management techniques and rare species handling can provide excellent experience for a future career in conservation.

**For more information visit our website, or contact the office.**

# VOLUNTEER NEWS



*Male Natterjack Toad (Bufo calamita)* ▲

Photo: Howard Inns

### In this Edition:

- Your new DRCO
- It's not just Herps!
- Summer Events
- Wonderful Slow Worms

**amphibian and reptile**  
**conservation** 

Dorset | April 2011



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**conservation** 

# Introducing your new Dorset Reserves Community Officer.



**My name is Stuart Handyside and I have taken over from Rowland Griffin as the new Dorset Community Reserves Officer. Rowland has left ARC to pursue his passions for herpetofauna and travel by leading herpetological adventures around the world. I know you will all join me in wishing him every success for the future.**

I began volunteering with ARC in April 2007 and became a Volunteer Task Leader in September 2008, by becoming an ARC volunteer I could combine my fascination with Herpetology with my enthusiasm for our fantastic Dorset Heathland.

Most of you who volunteer regularly will already know me and would have worked with me on various tasks and surveys. I hope to meet more of our volunteers over the next few months

either on volunteer tasks or at some of the various events we will be attending throughout the summer. All tasks and training courses will continue as before and my appointment as DCRO should provide a smooth transition within the role for volunteers and staff.

I feel very proud to be working for ARC, I believe our volunteers are an important asset to the trust and make a valuable contribution helping to safeguard the future of our Reptiles and Amphibians.

*Stuart Handyside*

Dorset Reserves Community Officer



## It's Spring at last!

**Spring has arrived and by now all our native amphibians and reptiles will have emerged from hibernation and like us will probably be hoping for some favourable weather. While it is possibly the busiest time of year for herps the start of spring brings an end to another winter season of successful volunteer tasks.**

Over the last six months we have targeted our efforts on four main reserves, Town Common, Ferndown, Parley and Dunyeats. On all of these

sites our volunteers have made good progress and managed to clear large areas of pine and birch scrub. I would like to thank everyone who came along and helped, your efforts have really improved these habitats.

I would also like to say a special thank to our Volunteer Task Leaders, Amy, Jade, Karl, Jon and Sarah together with Brian Klinger and his team, for making our tasks so successful and providing great biscuits!



▲ **Common Frogs can start spring early and begin mating and spawning in January.**

Photo: Tony Gent

## It's not just Herps on our heaths!

As well as providing an important refuge for reptiles and amphibians our Dorset heaths are a vital habitat for many rare species of butterflies and dragonflies.

But which species are actually present on our reserves? And are they thriving or in a state of decline?

The simple answer is we don't know, so to help us find out we have linked up with the Dorset Dragonfly Group and Butterfly Conservation.

Together we would like to learn more about the species that inhabit our reserves, to do this we will need volunteers to conduct surveys on various reserves throughout the summer. We are planning to hold a one day Dragonfly/Damselfly training course, which will be held on a week day possibly in the first week of June. The venue for the course is the Furzebrook Village Hall, close to our

Creech reserve. The day will consist of a morning classroom based identification session followed by an afternoon session out on Creech Heath testing our new skills.

The course will be free of charge but is only available to ARC volunteers.

To book your place for the training day or if you would like more information please contact me as soon as possible, as I need to pre book the venue.

We don't currently have any training for butterfly surveys but Stuart Woodley, who is one of our volunteers, has very kindly prepared a species profile on the Silver studded-blue butterfly. The Silver studded-blue is a rare and beautiful butterfly that mainly inhabits heathlands and we are very lucky to have this rare creature on many of our ARC reserves. I'm sure Stuart's article will be very useful to anyone wishing to see this special butterfly during the summer.

*Stuart Handyside*

### Common blue

Photo: Ben Limburn



### Scarce chaser

Photo: Chris Dresh

## SPECIES PROFILE

by Stuart Goodley

Male ▶  
Photo:  
Stuart Woodley



## Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus argus*)

### Range:

- Colonies are mostly found in central southern England (Dorset and Hampshire), with scattered colonies elsewhere in south-west England, eastern England and Wales

### Appearance:

- Wingspan 26-32 mm
- The male has deep blue forewings with a black border that is much wider than on other 'blue' butterflies, fringed with clear white edges. The male's silver underwings are particularly distinctive with a broad band of orange near the edge of the hindwing adjoining the black eyespots, each usually with a metallic blue 'stud', which gives the butterfly its name
- The female has dark brown forewings that often have orange on the hindwings and are sometimes tinged with blue. The underwings are similar to the male but on a deep brown background

### Habitat:

- Lowland heathland (the most widely used)
- Calcareous grasslands (e.g. Isle of Portland, Dorset, and Great Orme, N. Wales)
- Sand dunes (e.g. in Cornwall)
- Requires short or sparse vegetation, such as recently burnt heathland or eroding soils (for example old quarries and coasts) In the far south of England it is less demanding and is often associated with shorter areas of wet heath dominated by Cross-leaved heath

### Behaviour:

- Adults can be seen flying low over heather even on cloudy days
- Adults nectar primarily on Heather especially Erica species

- Larval foodplants include Cross-leaved heath, Bell heather and Ling, but also Gorse, Bird's-foot trefoil, Common Rock-rose and Horseshoe vetch
- Larva, pupa and newly emerged adults are often attended by black ants of the Lasius genus which offer them some protection from predators

### Status:

- Have undergone a severe decline in range this century, estimated at 80%.
- Fragmentation of habitat has resulted in colonies becoming isolated. This increases the chances of any individual population becoming extinct as re-colonization from nearby colonies cannot occur. Gene exchange between colonies is also prevented which further increases the chances of extinction
- Habitat deterioration through inappropriate management such as a lack of grazing, overgrazing, or uncontrolled burning reduces the amount of habitat useable by the species and so reduces the size of the population that can be supported
- Listed as a priority species on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan
- The silver studded blue is protected under Schedule 5 of Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) prohibiting sale.

### Male and female mating ▶

Photo: Stuart Woodley



## You can help with ARC Summer Events!

The winter season of practical management work may be over but that doesn't mean we can all sit back and have a rest! The summer season may not be quite so busy but we still need your help please!

This year ARC will again be attending various countryside shows and conservation events. By attending these events we can reach a wider audience and engaging with the public in this way is very important if we are to increase awareness of our British Amphibians and Reptiles.

As a volunteer you are very welcome to help out at any of these events. There will always be members of staff on hand and for weekend events you don't have to stay for both days.

Date	Event	Where
08.05.11	Nature Sunday	Moors Valley Country Park, Dorset
30.05.11	Meet A Reptile Day	Avon Heath Country Park, Dorset
18/19.06.11	Freshwater Festival	Moors Valley Country Park, Dorset
27.08.11	Stock Gaylard Oak Fair	Stock Gaylard Estate, Sturminster Newton, Dorset
03/04.09.11	Dorset County Show	Dorchester, Dorset

## Volunteer Summer Practical Tasks

Even though our winter schedule of tasks is over there will be some practical work to keep us busy during the summer months. This is likely to be either restoring sand lizard scrapes or conducting maintenance and repair work on footpaths and fencing, I hope to arrange some reptile surveys as well.

I will email dates when I have them or you can contact me on **01202 391319**.

## Reptile Rambles

Date	Site	Meeting point	Grid Ref
16.04.11	Parley	Lone Pine Drive	SZ 086 991
04.05.11	Creech	Opposite Blue Pool entrance (park on grass verge)	SY 393 835
07.05.11	Great Ovens	Morden Road Car Park	SY 923 903
17.05.11	Town Common	Opposite Avon Causeway Pub	SZ 137 976

All Reptile Rambles start at 10:00am, are open to everyone and are free of charge!

For more information or help at any of the events above please contact:

Stuart Handyside on **01202 391319** or email [stuart.handyside@arc-trust.org](mailto:stuart.handyside@arc-trust.org)



Slow worm  
(*Anguis fragilis*)

Photo: Fred Holmes

## The Humble Slow worm

**Have you ever lifted a piece of tin or roofing felt and been slightly disappointed to find just a humble slow worm?**

Well perhaps it's time to reconsider the humble slow worm and appreciate just how remarkable this animal really is, remember the slow worm is a "legless lizard" and that fact alone should be enough to provoke our curiosity.

Two very important lizard characteristics are speed and agility which can only be achieved by having legs, surely if a lizard is to successfully hunt for prey and be capable of escaping from predators it has to have legs? Or does it?

The absence of legs has allowed slow worms to adapt to a mainly subterranean existence and their sleek body shape is excellent for burrowing through soft soil, sand and loose vegetation. Not only does this type of habitat provide slow worms with good cover and protection from predators it is also ideal for finding slow moving prey like earth worms, slugs and snails.

Unlike our other native lizards, Slow worms are rarely seen basking in the open and rely instead on obtaining heat from their environment, heat produced by decomposing organic matter like uncovered garden compost heaps provide ideal habitat for Slow worms. They are also far more tolerant of shaded habitats than our other lizard species and can happily inhabit wooded areas which receive very little direct sunlight. Slow worms sometimes retreat underground for long periods of time, outside of hibernation, and very little is known about this side of their behaviour.

Even though slow worms are arguably one the most un-lizard like lizards, they are undeniably one of our most successful British reptiles and can be found across a wide range of habitats throughout the British Isles and Europe.

Slow worms may not have the same 'Wow Factor' as other reptiles but they are equally as fascinating and if you're lucky enough to see a blue spotted or melanistic variant I'm sure you'll agree they're actually quite wonderful.