

UK Activities and Initiatives on the Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles – 26.07.23

Sarah Scot – Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)

Tony Gent - Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC)

- Due to the devolved nature of the UK, amphibian and reptile conservation initiatives across the four countries have evolved to cater for the different policy and legislative requirements and species in each country. There are however some activities that can apply across Great Britain or the United Kingdom as a whole.
- At the UK or GB level:
 - A revision of the herpetofauna chapter in the GB guidelines for designating Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) was published in 2022.
 - The Red listing report published by ARC in 2021 has provided focus for prioritisation in England, Scotland & Wales.
 - A project has been initiated to develop criteria and a preliminary list of Important Herpetofauna Areas for amphibians and reptiles. The project is looking to guide prioritisation for area-based conservation measures and identification of priority areas for protection in the UK's commitment to '30x30'.
 - Several National Monitoring programmes are also being further developed by ARC through the National Amphibian & Reptile Monitoring Programme
- For England:
 - There are new funding schemes being developed driven by recent legislative and policy change, notably the Environment Act (2021) and publication of the Environment Improvement Plan (Jan 2023). Initiatives arising from these for reptiles and amphibians include:
 - Piloting Species Conservation Strategies
 - Exploring opportunities for green finance and Biodiversity Net Gain to enhance the built environment.
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategies to identify areas to create and restore habitat.
 - Several projects are working on defining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) – designed to help define conservation objectives for amphibians and reptiles at different spatial scales.
 - Natural England are developing habitat suitability and risk assessment mapping for Amphibians and Reptiles.
 - 'Snakes in the Heather' is a four-year programme in its final year and focuses on conservation, surveys and education around reptiles.
 - There are new and on-going Recovery Programmes for a range of species, including pool frogs, natterjack toads, sand lizards and great crested newts.
- In Northern Ireland:
 - The 'Dragons in Hills' survey for the three species of amphibian and reptile native to Northern Ireland entered its final year in 2022 and training and outreach work will continue.
 - Northern Ireland has a confirmed breeding population of non-native Alpine newts in County Antrim and there are plans to conduct further surveys to see if they have expanded beyond that. Genetic testing has confirmed they are not carrying B.sal at the moment.
- In Scotland:

- The Coastal Treasures project is focusing on securing the future of the Scottish Solway natterjack toad population, working with landowners, volunteers and local communities.
- NatureScot and partners are undertaking a 2-year Scotland-wide survey of adders, involving a combination of a questionnaire survey of landowners and some targeted fieldwork
- Through ARC's Education work in Scotland, they have launched a programme called Champhibians, to encourage schools to champion amphibian conservation.
- In Wales:
 - Natur am Byth is a green recovery project to save species from extinction. This includes a focus on sand lizards in Swansea and work on adders across Wales is due to start shortly.
 - 'Connecting the Dragons' is a four-year programme in south Wales, involving habitat management and public engagement for the more widespread amphibian and reptile species in south Wales.
 - Natural Resources Wales along with the Welsh Record Centres have developed their records management systems to encourage the collection and access to increasing amounts of data for amphibian and reptile species.