

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES 2017

Dr CH Gallimore

Frog and toad numbers do not seem to have changed much compared to recent years and both newt species numbers were up on last year, when no survey of Rutland Water had been done. There were no Slow Worm records for the second successive year, but other reptiles were reported in fairly normal numbers. The Rutland Water Reptile Survey was disappointing however as the shelters became swamped by vegetation.

In a strangely unscientific and indeed rather political article[§] in the *Herpetological Bulletin* two German scientists have decided that the Grass Snake, which we have hitherto called *Natrix natrix*, is in fact the Barred Grass Snake – a newly recognised species *Natrix helvetica*. It seems that five or so of the 15 subspecies of *Natrix natrix* have been transferred to *Natrix helvetica* as a result of analyses of mitochondrial DNA sequences and 13 microsatellite markers. The *Principle of Priority* apparently decrees that our Grass Snake is not what we thought it was at all but a Barred Grass Snake.

I have only been herpetological recorder for 30 or so years but 37.5% of my eight species have had their scientific name changed in that time (*Triturus vulgaris* to *Lissotriton vulgaris*, *Lacerta vivipara* to *Zootoca vivipara* and now *Natrix natrix* to *Natrix helvetica*), not to mention Common Frog becoming Grass Frog! As *helveticus* is the specific name for another herp that occurs in Leicestershire, although not in Rutland, saddling us with *helvetica* is not especially helpful.

Many of these changes seem, to the more cynical amongst us, not necessarily to be in the interests of greater understanding and better communication between “experts” and common hoi polloi.

[§] U Fritz & C Kindler (2017) A very European tale – Britain still has only three snake species, but its grass snake is now assigned to another species (*Natrix helvetica*).
The Herpetological Bulletin **141**, 2017: 44-45

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*

Common Frogs were recorded from 17 sites in 10 parishes (Barrowden, Egleton, Exton, Leighfield, Little Casterton, Oakham, Wing, Braunston, Greetham and Langham). Evidence of breeding was found at 8 sites in 7 of those parishes (all except the last three). The first spawn was found in Barrowden on 22 February. This is the earliest date for 10 years. Elsewhere spawn was laid throughout March. The last frog of the year was recorded on 21 October, when “a frog dropped from the sky” onto the lap of a Barrowden resident, who was sitting in a garden chair. (The circumstances that led to this are not clear. Had it leapt? or been dropped by a bird (or bat)? or thrown by a small boy? or was it a new biblical plague?)

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

Common Toads were recorded at 17 sites in 6 parishes (Hambleton, Ketton, Leighfield, Little Casterton, Uppingham and Wing). Evidence of breeding was only found at two sites – Leighfield and Little Casterton. The first toad of the year was observed crossing a road in Wing on 2 February and the last live toad was found under a plank in a Wing garden on 9 October. There were 22 dead toads recorded through the year equally divided between Leighfield and Wing. All the Wing corpses appeared to be the result of motor vehicles with three on 21 February and five in October. The Leighfield corpses were found by a track on 17 March.

A record from Uppingham was the first from that parish for 25 years.

Smooth Newt *Triturus/Lissotriton vulgaris*

Smooth Newts were recorded at 17 sites in 5 parishes (Egleton, Hambleton, Langham, Uppingham and Wing). They were found in 8 ponds at Rutland Water Nature Reserve. The first record was on 2 February in the recorder's cellar in Wing, and the first pond record was two days later. The last record was from the same cellar on 13 November, although there was a garden record on 10 October.

A record from Uppingham was the first from that parish for 17 years.

Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*

Great Crested Newts were found at 8 sites in 4 parishes (Egleton, Hambleton, Langham and Wing). They were found in 3 ponds in Rutland Water Nature Reserve. The first record of the year was on 1 January from the Recorder's cellar. A dead newt was found on 21 February on a road in Wing, although 15 live newts were located in the Recorder's pond that evening. The last newt of the year was found in the Recorder's cellar on 20 December, the last non-cellar sighting was a road casualty seen in Wing on 1 October. However the last living non-cellar newt was on 23 May in Wing.

The sighting from Langham parish was a 'first'.

Viviparous Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*

Lizards were recorded from 5 sites in 4 parishes (Clipsham, Ketton, Tickencote and Wing). All observations were of single individuals, usually basking, although one was observed climbing a yew tree at Clipsham. The first sighting was on 13 March at Ketton, and the last was at Bloody Oaks on 23 September.

Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*

As in 2016, there were no reports of Slow Worms in 2017.

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix/Natrix helvetica*

Grass Snakes were recorded at 18 locations in 7 parishes (Barrow, Exton, Greetham, Hambleton, Leighfield, Ridlington and Wing). The first record was on 7 April at Rutland Water Nature Reserve and the last – a dead specimen – at Leighfield on 6 December. The survey of reptiles at Rutland Water was even less rewarding than 2016 and only 8 Grass Snakes were found.

A record from Barrow was a 'first'.

Adder *Vipera berus*

Adders were seen on three occasions at Ketton Quarry between 14 March ~ 9 April.

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