

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Malvern Group 2.1.14

Alan Shepherd, Principal Ecologist of Worcestershire Wildlife Consultancy

### Amphibians of Worcestershire and Beyond

Sadly, amphibians in the UK are declining in numbers. Alan Shepherd explained that this is largely due to loss of suitable habitat, but there are also prevalent diseases, some of which have been introduced by non-British species, brought in by humans.

In certain areas however, there are still plenty of amphibians inhabiting our ponds. The common frog can still be found in most places, though it is not as common as it used to be. We are all familiar with their spawn and tadpoles; only a tiny percentage of these survive, as almost everything else eats them. The tree frog is probably extinct in Worcestershire now (there were some in the Wyre Forest up to 3 years ago). The common toad is an explosive breeder, laying its eggs in long strings, which are not eaten by fish, because they are toxic. Otters and mink have the knack of skinning the adult toads to avoid the poisons. Natterjack toads live in a few specialised UK sites, but none locally. There are three kinds of newt in the UK: smooth, palmate and great crested, and we were shown the detailed differences between the three. We are lucky to have many great crested in Worcestershire, and they are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

How can we help our amphibians? We can refrain from dumping our rubbish in or near ponds and streams. We can take more care over what we pour down the drains. We can dig and maintain ponds in our parks and gardens. Even a small one would soon be inhabited.

The next Malvern Group meeting will be held at the Lyttelton Rooms at 7.30 pm on February 6<sup>th</sup>. Rob Allen will talk about South Worcestershire Reserves, including Hollybed Farm Meadows.