Finding Sanctuary

 2021 Cumbria County Project



 Introduction

In many urban locations small green sites exist, this can include churchyards and burial grounds (allotments, golf courses, parks, commons and school grounds). These areas can represent some of the few remaining peaceful havens for wildlife and people in an increasingly busy world. Even in the countryside, much of our biodiversity has been lost to intensive agriculture and infrastructure development.

These locations may then also provide a welcome respite for many of our native creatures including birds, wildflowers, fungi and lichens, mammals and invertebrates. These areas are often overlooked and can be an important home for our native amphibians and reptiles, which are often residing in the damp corners that so often characterise old churchyards for example.

We often have reports of common frogs and toads, newts, slow-worms, common lizards, grass snakes, and in some exceptionally special places even our most vulnerable native snake, the adder.

However, many reports are anecdotal, and whilst many churchyards and subsequent green areas have a ‘wild area’, this is often simply left and little is done to map the wildlife using it, or to target habitat improvement for specific species.

This project aims to focus on our forgotten creatures, those that inhabit the forgotten areas.

Activities will be coordinated through our county-based network of volunteer amphibian and reptile groups (ARGs).

Cumbria ARG will work with its local diocese, and other faiths, and local communities to identify burial grounds and green spaces that may be of greatest importance to wildlife, based on their location, existing habitat or habitat connectivity, and the passion and interest of the local community.



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Outcomes of the project:

1. **Finding out more** – we will survey and map burial grounds and green spaces of interest across Cumbria, identifying and highlighting locations that are especially important for amphibians and reptiles.
2. **Winning hearts and minds** – Within a community setting this could lead to us running a series of local community training events, with the church and or the wider community, including schools and community groups, to inspire and improve local knowledge and understanding of amphibians and reptiles in churchyards, burial grounds and other local areas of interest. Events could be included and would be as inclusive as possible, encouraging local communities to join in through a series of engaging and fun activities, including mini safaris and bioblitzes, art and craft activities, competitions etc. ideal for those with limited mobility, or reduced access to travel, and may provide an opportunity for someone who is unable to get out into the wider countryside, to experience and enjoy the wildlife on their doorstep.
3. **Safeguarding our biodiversity for the future** – we will work alongside the teams (volunteers and professionals) that maintain churchyards, burial grounds and our local green spaces to improve the habitat for amphibians and reptiles alongside the other taxa and species. Simple interventions could include highlighting areas within the plot of special importance for more sympathetic maintenance (e.g. using hand tools), and suggesting lower impact maintenance such as: reduced use of chemical pesticides, altering mowing and grass cutting regimes, creation of hibernacula and other over-wintering structures and, where possible, creation of ponds.
4. **Telling the world** - we will develop a media and communications pack that will outlive the project, so that we can continue to support these areas within our county network by providing opportunities for recording and other activities, and simple ‘how to help wildlife’ sheets for those maintaining them.

Step by Step Guide

2.Membership is required for insurance purposes

This includes

Voluntary Workers Agreement

Health and Safety

Risk Assessment

Lone Workers Agreement

ARGWEB access

Training, support and equipment

1.Explore Your Local Area………..

Churchyards

Burial grounds

Allotments

Golf courses

Schools

Parks

-

3.Seek permission

Email to land owners

5.Equipment

Use of equipment required to carry out survey work

4.Habitat Plan

A map of the area including vegetation present

6.Training

7.Online tutorials to learn about our native species, their Identification and ecology

9.We will support the writing of a report and guidance on maintenance of grounds for amphibians and reptiles

8.Online tutorials

Survey techniques and placement of ACO (Artificial Covering Objects)

Survey protocol for presence or likely absence

Setting the survey up on ARGWEB

Visiting the site

Collection of data

Input of data into ARGWEB

10.We can expand into a community project (church grounds primarily) which will be fully supported by CARG

Crafts and activities, information boards, wildlife safaris, biobliztes

To be uploaded onto ARGWEB

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Member |  |
| Membership number |  |
| Name of site and grid reference |  |
| Owner of site |  |
| Permission granted  |  |

Habitat Plan

This can include hand drawn, google earth, photos and video with description

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| --- | --- |
| Equipment Borrowed  |  |
| Tick list  |  |
| Species identification module |  |
| Species ecology module |  |
| Survey techniques and placement of ACO  |  |
| Survey protocol for presence or likely absence  |  |
| Setting the survey up on ARGWEB |  |
| Visiting the siteCollection of data Risk Assessment  |  |
| Input of data into ARGWEB |  |
| Follow on report  |  |
| Comments |  |

ACO Placement (Grid ref) To Be uploaded on to ARGWEB

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Prior to commencing survey work an email must be sent to the landowner requesting permission

Attach CC cumbria.arg@gmail.com in all correspondence

I am emailing you about SITE NAME Site, in TOWN/AREA. I live in TOWN/AREA and like many people recently, I have been exploring my local spaces more. The site looks like it might be good habitat for amphibians and or reptiles such as slow worm, common lizard, common frog and toad. I am a member of Cumbria Amphibian and Reptile Group (CARG) and I would be interested in conducting a reptile and or amphibian presence/absence survey on the site. This would involve placing artificial reptile refuges (roofing felt mats or corrugated metal tins), on the site for a period of roughly 6 weeks between April - June 2021. During this period, I would check the refuges on 7 visits to see if any reptiles were basking on top of them or sheltering underneath them. The information gained from the survey would inform our knowledge of reptile and amphibian populations in TOWN/AREA and could be used to assist in management of the site. All the records generated would be submitted to CARG, Cumbria Biodiversity Record Centre and supplied to yourselves.

I am contacting you as owner of the site, so that I can discuss permission to survey. I have cc'd in Suzanne Collinson the chairperson of CARG into this email. I am happy to answer any questions you might have in regard to my credentials, further details on what the survey would entail and any health and safety concerns. If you wish to discuss this over the phone I can be contacted TELEPHONE NUMBER.

Kind regards

NAME

Example record sheet all data to be uploaded to ARGweb

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NOTES AND COMMENTS