



TRITURUS ALPESTRIS IN BRITAIN

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IT is well known that there are established colonies of introduced Alpine Newts in Britain. Recently, whilst reading through some old field notes, I realised that I had recorded a colony which has, I believe, not been referred to in literature.

The Fourth Baron Lilford of Lilford Park in Northamptonshire was well known for his interest in zoology, especially birds. He was one of the group of people instrumental in the introduction of the Little Owl, *Athene noctua*, into the British Isles (Blackwell, 1972). He also maintained an aviary complex of captive birds, and enclosures of other animals within the park. The Fifth Lady Lilford, being a keen botanist, established the extensive Rock Garden complex within the park in the early 1900s. This complex contains a group of elongate pools, which are linked when the water table is high, and it is in these pools that the Alpine Newts exist.

Throughout the time the Lilford family occupied the estate, meticulous records of the animals introduced to the collection or released into the wild were kept. Yet no reference to these newts appears in the records. On discovering this I began asking older members of the estate staff what they knew of the newts, and immediately received the unanimous reply that they were introduced during the Second World War by an American serviceman. During this time, the

headquarters of the USAAF regional hospital was based in the park, and facilities for up to 2000 casualties built.

But why would an American serviceman, recently returned from mainland Europe, release newts into the Rock Garden? I can only speculate, as a herpetologist, that the serviceman believed he was being sent back to the USA, and decided to take some Alpine Newts with him, perhaps for a friend. On recovery and learning that he was to return to Europe, he saw no reason for keeping the animals any longer. Whatever the circumstances, the introduction was successful, and to my knowledge a viable population existed into the 1980s, and since the Rock Garden is listed, I imagine still exists. The Lilford Park estate is no longer occupied by the Lilford family but by a tenant, and the park no longer open to the public, the animal collection having been dispersed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REFERENCE

Blackwell, K. (1972). *The Little Owl*. Northamptonshire Bird Report.