In this issue:

Due to the enormous success of SINNG educational resources this issue of the newsletter will be a little different.

Our focus will be on our invasive species education packs. We will also have an update on our school workshops and alpine newt project.

Don’t forget to check out the diary of events & let me know which you are able to help with. SINNG continues its work through the summer so join us when you can.

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SINNG’s Rinky Dink & Alien Invaders Go National!

SINNG is in its 4th year at Cornwall College Newquay creating action and awareness of invasive non-native species (INNS, aka alien invasive species). Now its award-winning innovative approach is reaching a national audience. Thanks to hard work by project coordinator Nicola Morris, aided by several SINNG volunteers and intern Suzie Kenny, and in collaboration with the Cumbria INNS local action group (CFINNS), the Alien Detective Challenge is going national.

Beginning in Cornwall and Cumbria, Guides, Scouts and schools can undertake a series of activities and tasks that make up the challenge. Successful completion for Guiding and Scouting units means the award of the Alien Detective Challenge badge. This cloth badge was designed by former SINNG member and FdSc Zoological Conservation graduate Matt Dennis. It features a SINNG character - Rinky Dink (the stinky mink) – based on the invasive American mink Neovison vison that has helped to wipe out our native water vole Arvicola amphibious in much of the UK. The Alien Detective Challenge is supported by a 40-page pack of resources produced by the SINNG team with funding from Cumbria and input from local firm PJ Print.

Much of the material was piloted with the “Saplings” after school STEM club run by FdSc Wildlife Education Media students and SINNG at the Atlantic Centre, Newquay. The Alien Detective Challenge will be launched in Cornwall later in June and schools will fill a wall chart with native species to replace the invasive plants and animals in the “river”. St Breward Primary will be the first school in the country to complete the challenge. When the print run has been distributed, a downloadable version will be made available through SINNG’s website and also the website of the national Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS, a part of the Food & Environment Research Agency base near York).

SINNG are expecting a lot of interest in their activities at STEM events such as Greenpower South West and Big Bang South West, so their materials seem destined to reach an ever wider audience.

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Alien Invaders!

There is also national distribution of Alien Invaders – a Top Trumps-style card game that was one of SINNG’s first ideas for material to raise awareness and stimulate action on INNS.

NNSS has collaborated with SINNG to develop the game and has funded a production run by PJ Print of 1,000 packs. These packs are being used in NNSS awareness-raising campaigns and have been distributed to local action groups in the UK. (Although SINNG is the only student local action group in the UK, and was to have been called that until we saw the acronym, there are many other action groups in the country.)

Stalwart SINNG volunteer and BSc Applied Zoology student Tracey Twomey (pictured right!) developed a pilot version of Alien Invaders for her Communicating Zoology module assignment. The design was modified after trials during SINNG workshops with local school groups, but Tracey’s prototype was good enough for Olaf Booy of NNSS to realise its potential and to work with SINNG on the version for national release.

The packs, alongside our Invasive Species Games Compendium, are now being used as training tools for international organisations and there are plans for a Welsh version and interests from other countries including Germany and South Africa.

Well done Tracey. A great addition to your CV. Tracey has been a highly valued member of the SINNG team over the last 3 years and I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge THANK YOU. We wish her every success as she graduates and embarks on the next stage of her career.

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Schools across Cornwall have been continuing to engage with SINNG. Elaine Roll has led the team of enthusiastic SINNG volunteers, all STEM ambassadors, and had great fun whilst educating about the impacts of INNS.

Right; Wadebridge Academy pupils clamour to check out what’s under the microscopes.

Schools who have enjoyed our workshops this year include; Wadebridge Academy, St Breward Primary, St Teath Primary, St Columb Minor Academy (Blue School), Sir James Smiths School, Penryn Community College, Fowey Community College, Trevislas College.

Blue School welcomed us into year five classes with 56 children enjoying hands on activities.

After a brief introduction to SINNG the children were taken out of the classroom for a flatworm hunt in the school grounds. The children learnt about the possible impacts that flatworms can have on native earthworms and the wider ecosystem and found both earthworms and a flatworm. The worms were then identified using dichotomous keys and the class submitted their sighting of the invasive flatworm on the SINNG website.

The SINNG team also set up indoor activities which the children took part in. In this session they had a go at identifying pond plants and invertebrates using keys provided by SINNG. While identifying the pond plants the children had to decide which plants were native and which were invasive based on the keys and information given to them.

Both sessions were big successes. The children were very interested and engaged with the information and activities SINNG gave them and were brilliantly behaved throughout!

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Royal Society Enables Partnership with Fowey River Academy

Fowey River Academy has once again engaged with SINNG’s activities and joined forces on the hunt for alien invaders in their neighbourhood. They report on the field trip which was part of a series of workshops over the last term which has been enabled with the help of a Royal Society Partnership Grant. Here’s what they had to say.

Year 8 Science students took part in a data collection exercise on 7th May with local action group, the Student Invasive Non-Native Group (SINNG). The students visited the pond at nearby Penhale Farm to look for evidence of the invasive Alpine Newt species. The Alpine Newt is a non-native species which has thrived in the county to the detriment of the Palmate Newt.

Tristan says: “The most interesting part of the day was pulling out the bottle trap and finding the newts. There were six newts in total and five were the non-native species.” Working with experts from SINNG, the students took samples and analysed these against charts to determine the prevalence of a range of species. They documented their findings with photos.

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Internships and work experience

Please join us for our regular volunteering activities to learn new skills, make contacts and make a difference! SINNG works all year round so why not have your work experience hours can be signed off before the new term starts.

SINNG also offers internships to a small number of people each year. If you would like to find out more about the programme or to apply please email nicola.morris@cornwall.ac.uk

Alpine newt update

SINNG has been conducting research on the invasive alpine newt (*Ichthyosaura alpestris*) for the last 2.5 years and a number of students have been working alongside Nicola Morris and her associates at Institute of Zoology (IoZ) based at the London Zoo (ZSL). One student studying the FdSc Applied Ecology course had this to say about his experiences.

"Before the field trip I knew to expect some alpine newts but had no idea exactly how many. I was amazed at how many we caught in just one night (including the netting) and it's worrying that, by rights, they should all have been our native palmate newts. It still seemed a shame to remove them, though, as they are very nice animals and it was especially sad to remove the gravid female that we found. Unfortunately, this is a difficulty with removing invasive non-native animals: balancing the welfare of the individuals of non-native origin with the welfare of the populations of our own species."

Phil Maund

This is a classic case of lovely species, wrong location. As Phil expressed, it can be a difficult job balancing conservation issues with passion for wildlife in general. However, the purpose of removing alpines is to increase the population of our beautiful endemic newts. Alpine newts are known to be vectors of chytrid fungus and to prey upon native UK amphibians. The alpine newts which have been removed from our research sites are kept in secure holding facilities where they are given the best care ensuring that welfare is not compromised despite them being removed from their ponds. Some of the alpines have been to taken to IoZ where work is ongoing to answer questions about the impacts of chytrid. This disease is one of the factors responsible for mass mortalities of amphibians worldwide.

A recently completed report for AHVLA¹ by SINNG has documented the removal efforts in Cornwall as a contribution to developing best practice nationally for taking action on invasive non-native amphibians. SINNG’s work with alpine newts will continue, to establish the impacts of this invasive amphibian.

Images courtesy of SINNG. Left; The invasive alpine newt. Right; The endemic palmate newt.

¹ Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratory Agency

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The SINNG mailing list will soon be updated so if you would like to continue receiving updates please email me.

Those of you who are graduating will not have access to your college emails soon so please forward another email address to contact you on.

See you soon!

Diary of events

Those in **GREEN** are for SINNG volunteers who are STEM ambassadors. Those in **BLUE** are for all SINNG volunteers. A Red **P** indicates a public event.

**June**
11\(^{th}\) – Balsam bash at St Breward 10am-4pm
14\(^{th}\) – Boscastle Balsam Bash at the Rocky Valley 10am-4pm Join us for the day or even a couple of hours **P**
15\(^{th}\) – Boscastle Balsam Bash at the Valency Valley 10am-4pm Join us for the day or even a couple of hours **P**
16\(^{th}\) – Balsam bash at St Breward 10am-4pm
18\(^{th}\) + 19\(^{th}\) – SINNG Roadshow stand at Greenpower South West @ Newquay airport
19\(^{th}\) + 20\(^{th}\) – Pond clearance & balsam bashing at Bude 10am-4pm
26\(^{th}\) – Big Bang South West. SINNG roadshow @ Exeter Uni

**July**
3\(^{rd}\) – SINNG workshops with Beaver scouts and Cub scouts 5.30 – 8.30
4\(^{th}\) – SINNG stand at Ecoripple event at Treviglas School
6\(^{th}\) – Balsam bash on the Camel Trail with Friends of the Camel Trail. 10am-4pm **P**
8\(^{th}\) – Primary school workshop at St Breward 9.30-12.30
13\(^{th}\) – Practical clearance work with CRAG at Breney Common nature reserve 10am-4pm **P**
18\(^{th}\) – STEM ambassador induction Please register first at www.stemnet.org.uk 5-7pm

**August**
5\(^{th}\) - SINNG stand at Newquay Zoo. Exotic pet awareness event with SINNG, RSPCA & Newquay Zoo **P**
26\(^{th}\) - SINNG stand at Newquay Zoo. Exotic pet awareness event with SINNG, RSPCA & Newquay Zoo **P**

Email Nicola for details of transport which is provided for some events & remember even a few hours will make a HUGE difference.

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