

natterchat

Froglife's newsletter - amphibians, reptiles & nature news
autumn/winter 2016

the toads issue

Celebrating 50 years
of Toads on Roads
& our findings from
30 years of
patrol data

Photo: Ben Killick

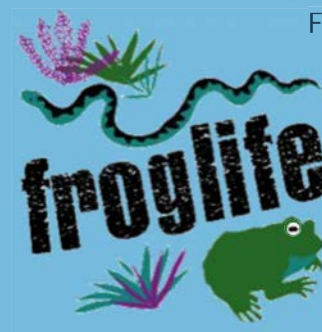
Plus... Your toad memories - Book reviews - Tadpole diary - Dragonflies

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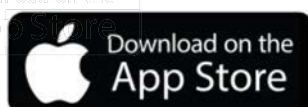
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Kathy Wormald, CEO
Kathy.Wormald@froglife.org

Our focus for this edition of Natterchat is the common toad. Froglife has for many years co-ordinated the Toads on Roads project. Dedicated volunteers have, year after year, gone out during the spring months and helped millions of toads across busy roads. These same volunteers have diligently collected data on the number of toads rescued and killed, along with other essential data such as additional amphibians rescued or killed and the number of volunteers assisting. This volunteer-collected data, along with data collected in a similar way in Switzerland since the 1970s, has been used to assess national and regional trends for the common toad (*Bufo bufo*). Dr Silviu Petrovan, Froglife's Conservation Coordinator explains further on page 6.

Froglife has been concerned for a long time about the suspected declines in toad populations but without quantifiable evidence it has proved difficult to take concrete action. This research has provided us with the much needed evidence that our common toads are in danger of no longer being so common. Froglife is known for being an organisation that does not sit around wringing our hands and discussing a problem, but instead for taking action, and this is exactly what we are doing now. We have launched our National Toad Campaign **Year of the Toad** and we will be undertaking various activities to support our struggling toad populations. We have also developed two major projects focusing exclusively on toads and their habitats, which are currently pending funding. Fingers crossed that this can be secured as it will enable us to undertake an extensive habitat creation and restoration programme benefiting the common toad, but of course also a range of other aquatic species.

On other fronts we have been delighted to receive funding from a family for Froglife to build a pond in memory of their mother, more about this on page 23. I was invited by the River Nene Dragon Finder team to go on the final boat tour for this season. It was a dusk tour along the River Nene, setting out from Ferry Meadows visitor centre and sailing down the river towards Castor. It was a glorious evening, and although unfortunately we did not see

any amphibians or reptiles, we did see a lot of other wildlife, including bats, and the rising moon was absolutely stunning. Our London Dragon Finder project has entered its final year but we have no intention, after our long association with Londoners, of leaving the city and we are currently developing a new project, so watch this space.

Unfortunately we were unable to secure ongoing funding for our Glasgow Green Pathways Scheme, this is largely due to a change in the funders' guidance which states that activities with struggling young people can no longer take place during school hours. We are in the process of reviewing how we deliver our sessions so that they can take place outside of school hours and we are optimistic that we will soon be able to continue to deliver this extremely successful project. The project has, since 2014, worked with 3,506 vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and I think it is fitting to end with some lovely quotes about the young people who benefited from the project.

"Dylan has commented to his parents about what he does with Froglife and they said this is the most they ever get from him about school." She also said, "he is now more interested in looking after the school grounds and more motivated to participate in class discussions".

"Robbie has generally been less disruptive in class and cooperates with peers and staff members much better, particularly when he knows Froglife are coming to deliver an activity!"

"... fantastic experience, children loved it. Each and every child came back enthused and began to look at what is commonly known as "The Jakey park" in a whole new light. Children began to appreciate their surroundings and realise their responsibility in taking care of the environment. Each session was informative, challenging and fun."

STOP PRESS: Thanks to grants from The Robertson Trust, The MacRobert Trust, The Gannochy Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage we can report that Glasgow Green Pathways will shortly be up and running again!

Toad memories

by Jenny Tse-Leon Learning Coordinator



Toads are mysterious, magical creatures that evoke all sorts of feelings in people, and divide us almost as strongly as Marmite into lovers and haters.

In this special issue, focusing on toads and their current plight, we'd like to share some of the memories that have been told to us through our My Wildlife Project and Dragon Finder Memory Benches.

We hope you enjoy them and invite you to share your wildlife memories with us through Facebook, Twitter or our Dragon Finder website.

'At a friend's house (maybe when I was 5 years old) there were a load of tiny toadlets all crossing the garden at the same time. I remember being amazed by how small they were – loved amphibians ever since!'

Katie Garrett, London

'Finding a toad in our garden when I was 3 and practically drowning the poor thing with a watering can because I thought it would dry up.'

Buffy Smith, London

'Going on an adventure to find autumn leaves and bugs I saw a toad in my sandpit.'

Rigas Lamb

'Growing up on a farm with access to a wealth of wildlife, but most enjoyable was 'adopting' toads found in a drain outside the back door!'

Janet, Somerset

'The infant/junior school I went to in Nottingham had a pond as part of the grounds. We spent hours pond dipping catching frogs and toads as part of our school day.'

Emma Duvel

'When I was 10 there was a brickyard near me. They had a large pond in which I saw adders, grass snakes, great crested newts and common newts, frogs, toads and from then on it was "wow!"'

Paul, Nottingham

'One day when walking down to the park, there is a mile long tarmac road leading down to the lake. The whole road was covered in newly emerged toadlets, there must have been tens of thousands.'

Adam Wilson

'Going into a friend's air-raid shelter to look for a reported 'monster' to find it was really a common toad.'

Matt, Nottingham

'I remember collecting Caterpillars and keeping them in the garden whilst watching what leaves they liked to eat, and I also used to rescue little frogs and toads from the front garden before cutting the grass and running them back to the canal!'

Karina Theseira, London



“The Book of the Toad”

Published by: Lutterworth Press

ISBN: 0-7188-2841-0

This is fun. From Indian Ink Midwife Toad frauds, to the social implications of a pondfull of toadson, *The Book of the Toad* is more a cultural history than a natural history. This isn't the book for the reader wanting to understand toad biology, but is great if you do want that sense of the many ways toads have hopped in and out of our lives through the centuries. Here boundaries dissolve and discussions of bufotenine slide effortlessly into its possible role in prehistoric shamanism. That in turn becomes a discussion about the power of toad imagery: from creative, life-renewing roles in central and south America to more unpleasant roles in oriental and western mythology and recent historical traditions. A single sentence sadly dates this book: written in 1991 it talks about “the beautiful golden toads of Costa Rica now surviving only in a few square miles” - but never seen since.

This book is a rewarding read but is also a reminder that toads have been handy scapegoats for centuries. From medieval witchcraft trials to descriptions of hell,

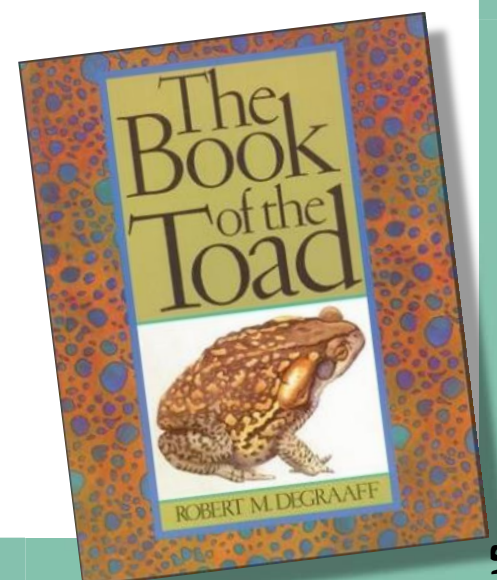
our warty friends have been implicated in all sorts of wickedness and depravity. Even when someone recognised the beauty of those golden eyes, this must suggest an alchemical transformation process and the toadstone is revealed, becoming another excuse for more brutality (which could range from overexciting the toad by setting him on a scarlet cloth so that he vomits this precious gem, to nailing her down and heating her over charcoal).

This book reminds me that the world needs a nudge on how it looks at toads. Some poetry celebrates but with other work, poets seem to have got trapped in unpleasantness and judgemental imagery: seeing soft, warty, baggy skin as ugly, and a calm manner as suspicious. Once in a while those golden eyes again call a pause and a sense of wonder but for a toad to be truly handsome he (or she) needs to be transformed. The toad must become the prince before he is acceptable.

I'm a toad-lover and unashamedly biased, but I feel a lot of this book is a sad reflection of just how

destructive our imagery inspired by the world can be, and how little we appreciate the world around us: from the brutality of folkmagic, to the use of the toad as a metaphor for all that is unpleasant. Thank goodness, then, for the artists who drew toads. There are wonderful pictures all through *The Book of the Toad*: simple, accurate, heart-warming observation that reveals beauty and provides an encouraging counterpoint to the text: some people appreciate the toad.

I enjoyed this book when I first read it. I still enjoy it 25 years later. It is rich and provocative and a reminder that whatever we do, however much we vilify them or exalt them, we cannot avoid them. Toads are still creeping along beside us through the complexities of our 21st century lives.



30 years of Toads on Roads

data from the UK

by Dr Silviu Petrovan
Conservation Coordinator



Across the globe, conservation efforts tend to focus overwhelmingly on rare and threatened species. While this is understandable as those are the species most at risk from immediate extinction, this has meant that previously widespread and even abundant species have in some cases declined unnoticed until they have become rare themselves. Recent declines of common species have affected moths, butterflies and numerous bird species including, for example, starlings and house sparrows. Almost half a billion birds, mostly common and widespread species, appear to have disappeared from Europe in the past few decades. Such declines are

particularly important as common species often have a disproportionately large impact in providing vital ecosystem functions due to their sheer numbers and biomass and the fact that they can represent very important links in the predator-prey system. For common amphibians such as toads there is a general lack of long term monitoring data. However, in several European countries Toads on Roads projects have existed for decades and have collected huge amounts of information over very large spatial scales and, very importantly, over long periods of time. Traditionally this data has been difficult to analyse as the varying effort

levels between years make it difficult to standardise, but modern statistical methods can overcome such problems.

Together with Dr. Benedikt Schmidt from Zurich University and Karch NGO, we have used volunteer-collected data as part of Toads on Roads projects in the UK and Switzerland, since the 1970s, to assess national and regional trends for one of Europe's most abundant amphibian species, the common toad. During this period, millions of toads have been carried across busy roads by thousands of volunteers in an effort to protect them from road traffic.



For Switzerland, where other amphibian species are also moved by volunteers in large numbers, we additionally included common frogs, a similarly widespread and common amphibian species. To account for the variability in amphibian population abundance between years we included only populations with at least 5 years of data; 153 populations for the UK and 141 for Switzerland.

Troublingly, our results show that in both the UK and Switzerland, common toads declined continuously in each decade since the 1980s. By contrast common frogs mostly were stable over that period. Given the declines, the common toad almost qualifies for red-listing over this period despite substantial volunteer conservation efforts. South-East England appeared to suffer the worst declines of all UK regions while the West, including Wales, Cornwall and Somerset seemed to fare the best, with an apparent recovery in the last decade.

The reasons for the national scale declines remain unknown but most likely include unsustainable road traffic mortality, plus widespread deterioration of their habitats, similar to the situation for other species such as hedgehogs. For toads however, this is further complicated by the fact that

both aquatic and terrestrial habitats are involved and also the migration corridors between them. Additionally, climate change with mild winters, and diseases such as ranavirus might also contribute to these large scale declines.

The fact that toads continued to decline, even at sites with long term rescue efforts by volunteers, is a big cause of concern but might be explained by the fact that toad patrols only rescue adults in spring while the small juveniles that migrate away from the ponds in summer remain highly vulnerable to road traffic. However, the effort of volunteers most likely significantly slows down such declines and reduces the chances for local extinctions which is critical as it can give time to identify and implement a different solution. Also, toad patrols provide vital datasets that can be used to assess long-term abundance for this species.

While the general picture is very worrying we are hopeful that now that it is clear that toads are facing very serious declines we can actively look at implementing measures to reverse this situation. For sites with large-scale road migrations, amphibian road tunnels most likely represent the best solution and Froglife

has been intensely studying the functionality of such tunnels, particularly for juveniles. Also, very large toad populations should be protected as important parts of our biodiversity and their habitats should be carefully taken into account in any development plans. Translocations of thousands of adult toads for mitigation often fail and should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances. Finally, targeted habitat improvements, both in relation to creation of large ponds for breeding and better management of terrestrial habitats, potentially through agri-environment schemes, represent vital steps forward. Froglife will work very actively to try and implement a range of measures in order to protect toads as an integral and fascinating part of our natural heritage.

The full publication is available on PLOS ONE: <http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0161943>



Survival against the odds

by Jules Howard
Froglife Patron



One of the things I rather like about toads is that, as long as one is kind and careful, many toads don't appear to mind being held in human hands for short periods. Whilst holding them gently, one can marvel at their tough rubbery skin with its warty texture; those bright orange eyes and the stubborn demeanour that toads often assume courtesy of a rotund skeleton that has been built for walking.

Toads have come a long way on those legs. As a family, their history lies in a dinosaur-laden South America where this once tiny family evolved from frogs. Just as fossils tell us Africa is the cradle of humanity, South America appears to be the toads' (although they might even have evolved in a pre-frozen Antarctica, to which South America was once linked). Regardless of where they came from, however, toads are survivors.

Fossils tell us that, in the last days of the dinosaurs in the era just before the meteorite hit- toads weren't just making do, they were spreading. They were moving out. They were colonising new places and hitching lifts upon continents that split like icebergs. The secret of their success is simple: toads, on the whole, are less restricted to wet places. They prospered with their tough waterproof skin (among a host of adaptations) filling the remoter insect-eating niches that frogs couldn't fill. Toads are rather like amphibian astronauts, therefore. (Or perhaps *terranaut* is a better word?).

Holding a toad is like coming face-to-face with what it takes to rule and succeed for millions of years on Earth. Sturdiness. Strength. Energy-efficiency. Athleticism. These are winning traits for toads. But longevity stands for nothing in a world where new things are always evolving. Arguably, the worst thing that ever happened to toads is when they met humans, a tech-minded upright African ape with an unarguable appetite for removing ponds and paving over forests and grasslands the world over.

Froglife's latest research into common toad (*Bufo bufo*) declines makes sobering reading. Their paper (in the respected science journal, PLOS ONE) called '*Volunteer Conservation Action Data Reveals Large-Scale and Long-Term Negative Population Trends of a Widespread Amphibian, the Common Toad*', shows that, across most of the UK, the toad is disappearing at an alarming rate. Using data acquired over three decades by thousands of national toad surveyors (Britain's famously charismatic 'toad patrollers') we are looking at a species likely to require serious conservation action in the next two decades, unless we do more to protect their breeding ponds and foraging grounds now. Bit-by-bit, pond-by-pond, toads are disappearing. And this makes me very sad. (Did I tell you I like toads?).

Background photo: www.fallsoftheohio.org

Froglife's paper is important. After all, this is what it looks like when widespread species dwindle. This is what happens before the extinction-burn hits. This is what it looks like when animals are closer to being lost forever to the fossil record. Death by a thousand cuts, in only a few tens of the thousands of years of our co-existence with them. (As with so many creatures, the widespread declines of the once common toad say all that needs to be said about humans; the fossils will tell the story of us, through their disappearance, very ably).

Don't be glum, though. There isn't time for sour regret. Yes, the common toad is sliding slowly toward extinction, but it's not gone yet. The good news is that now we know about its demise before it is too late. Now we have a better idea of their plight we can do more to help, before the moment has passed. It's cheaper and more effective to step in with conservation actions now, before the animal is almost gone; before all those wildlife licences and special conservation measures have to be considered. It's easier now, before we have to resort to all the red tape.

After all, this is why, as conservationists, we monitor species. This is exactly why we measure declines, isn't it? It's so we can act earlier, to more effectively deliver conservation solutions. For toads, the alarm is now sounding, so I hope many people (politicians are people, right?) take note.

The future of toads (and so many other wild animals) is in our hands now, but I hope that one day we can let them get on with their business of survival again without our assistance. For survival without us is a craft many, including toads, have honed for many millions of years. And, when this day comes and toads are doing well once again, you will have to forgive me if I still pick the occasional one up in my hands. Old habits die hard, after all, but reflected in that toad's hardy athletic weather-beaten body is a story we share. Survival against the odds. Migrations from our own personal cradles of life. World colonisers. Geological superstars. May we both, somehow, last.

Photo: Mel Holley



Tom and Catherine Langton founded Froglife in the late 1980's, but before that, Tom's childhood experiences and voluntary conservation efforts lead to one of the earliest amphibian conservation projects, called simply 'Toads on Roads'; Tom recalls those early days:



50 years ago! Toads on Roads: when we first hopped to it

Toads were an early passion for me. There were three huge old toads living in a Victorian basement well next door. Much to my mum's concern I used to clamber down and check them now and again amongst the humid moss and ferns, their cold bellies overlapping my cupped hands, golden eyes and lightly pulsing chins, a special kind of moment in this green damp dell. Aged 6, and for another ten years, it seemed my annual duty also to rescue hundreds of toadlets crossing a narrow lane outside our house near Parliament Hill fields in Camden, north London. My first rescue was during the World

Cup Finals in 1966. The large Highgate ponds produced an annual black summer carpet of many thousands of tiny, excited, hopping toadlets. These spilled haplessly beyond the grassy embankments and woodland into the local gardens before vanishing into the flowerbeds, rockeries and garden pond edges, to fatten up.

In 1983, with a long apprenticeship from the British Herpetological Society Conservation Committee and an ecology degree, I was appointed as the first formal UK conservation officer for amphibians. It was unpaid, but was a 'dream job' to develop. It seemed so natural to try to bring together the dozens of toad enthusiasts, already out there doing their bit locally around the country to protect and preserve toad breeding sites, to see what could be done to reduce what appeared to be highly threatening amphibian losses on roads, down drains and from other human hazards. In truth it would be twenty years before the science caught

up with our gut-feeling that loss of juveniles and adult amphibians was often population threatening.

Plans for a project were encouraged upon meeting with experienced conservation experts from Europe organised by Keith Corbett in Ostende. Information on similar work in Holland was provided by the experienced Dutch conservationists Anton Stumpel and Henk Strijbosch. The UK project initially covered mainly England and Wales and offered advice, each spring, to volunteers wanting to help reduce vehicle deaths of common toad, in particular, but also frogs and newts on busy roads. The science and message behind the project was that the scale of the impacts of road mortality on amphibians was unknown and the paucity of scientific interest was itself a problem. The fragmentation effect of roads and vehicles on wildlife populations was something that vehicle users should be more aware of, and about which more should be done.



I set about establishing the 'Toads on Roads' project from my new office in South Kensington. This involved negotiating with the Department of Transport to adopt a road warning sign, with the image of a toad of a type used in Holland, for use on highways in Britain. All we had to do was to reverse the image due to UK drivers being on the left hand side not the right, so



the toad pointed towards the road. The aim was to alert drivers to amphibian crossings so they could slow down, watch out for toad rescuers, take another route and generally avoid running toads and people over. Also included was a UK toad recording system, a new

leaflet showing buckets and temporary fencing, basic 'rules', and a sticker awareness campaign using images from German road signs. The press loved it, with dozens of TV and radio appearances we had huge exposure – it seemed to really fit with the rapidly growing new environmental awareness in the public of the 1980s.

Small grants from WWF UK and from Nature Conservancy Council (thanks to Arnie Cooke) gave modest support to help instigate the project. Six pairs of road signs were made up for use as part of a trial, working with Borough and County Highways, while Department of Transport laboratories considered adopting the signs formally for use on roads in 1985. Soon the Ministry had given its blessing and delivering the signs to the first sites is a great early memory. We were on our way.

The work coincided with some initial studies by Fred Slater and Paul Gittins following a temporary road diversion around Llandrindod lake in Wales. This was an ancient toad breeding site with a home-made

amphibian warning sign.

The project moved with me to Fauna & Flora International (then FFPS) the next year and then to its permanent home with Froglife a few years later. With further small grants the number of registered sites rapidly grew, particularly after massive publicity following the installation of a first toad tunnel. A first battle to give common species conservation equal weight to that of rare species had been won but it would be many years before this would be widely recognised.

Toads were there at the beginning and many other toad projects since have helped toad conservation. Today, toads still, in fact perhaps more than ever, need help due to habitat loss, degradation, fragmentation and pollution. But we are better placed than ever to know how to help them. Now new generations of 'toad people' coordinated by Froglife and elsewhere, are doing a fabulous job to make new things happen for our precious watery world and for me one of its greatest star attractions.



After reading Tom Langton's history of how Toads on Roads began, you may be wondering 'what has happened since?' - we hear from two 'toad people', in Derbyshire and Norfolk, about toad patrolling in their areas:

Toads on Roads in Derbyshire

by Chris Monk Derbyshire Patrol Co-ordinator and Chair of Trustees, ARG UK

In Derbyshire, a few people and organisations responded to the request by Tom for details of where toads were crossing and being killed on roads, which led to the first county listing of sites around 1985. At that time about 20 sites were listed, which led the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) Conservation Officer, Pat Brassley, to try to co-ordinate and support the people carrying out the patrols. Bob Shaw, a DWT volunteer, compiled the first list of the numbers of toads being rescued by patrols in 1988, and also listed other locations where toads had been reported but needed checking. However, at that time there were still other sites, like Wingerworth, where local residents carrying out a toad rescue had not yet been contacted. Pat set up annual Toad Save Group meetings for volunteers from the various sites to meet and discuss their needs. This enabled the Trust to organise publicity and obtain materials like reflective jackets, road signs,

flashing lights, etc. to distribute to volunteers.

By 1991 the number of toad crossing sites known in Derbyshire had expanded to 45 and by 1998 this had risen to 79, though the majority of sites had no patrol. The high point in numbers of patrols in this early phase was in 1998 when we knew of 20 sites operating, but this declined to only 6 in 2004. Since then numbers of sites have risen again and in 2016 there were patrols at 21 sites in the county, at a further 3 sites, warning signs were erected but there were no volunteers to carry out patrols. By the end of the 2015 season, over the 28 years since our records began in 1988, the group's volunteers had saved well over 210,000 toads, but unfortunately also recorded around 21,000 casualties in this time.

The DWT Toad Save Group changed to being the DWT Amphibian Group in 1991 to take account of the other amphibians and local

projects relating to ponds and great crested newts. In 1998 it became the Amphibian and Reptile Group, which after a change in policy by the then DWT Chief Executive, became independent of the Trust. However, even today the vast majority of the active members of the group are Toads on Roads volunteers.

Challenges

During the time that toad crossings have been co-ordinated in Derbyshire, there has been consistent change of the sites covered. To run a crossing needs organisation and that is best done by someone who is local, or has a connection with the site and who is prepared to liaise with the general volunteers, recruit new helpers, be a point of contact, sort out insurance cover proposal forms and give out our guidance.



People like this have been key to our operations but unfortunately people do move away, become too elderly or ill to continue, or occasionally just give up for personal reasons. In some cases a replacement has been found, either a single person, or at some sites, a group of people / friends prepared to work together. It

is perhaps significant that only 3 of the 9 crossings in operation in 1988 are still running today and only 2 have been continuous

throughout that time, due to successful hand overs.

One of those

sites has had only two coordinators, and the other just three over the 28 years.

The biggest challenge is to ensure that the enthusiasm of new Toads on Roads volunteers is not lost after they start. In recent years we have had significant weather disruptions when migration has been interrupted by spells of cold, or extremely dry conditions that stop the toads moving, so that the patrols can drag on for several weeks. Therefore it is important that new volunteers are made aware of this and don't become

disillusioned by being sent out on evenings when they are not needed and won't see a single toad. In these days of electronic communications it is easy to inform volunteers, so if the weather seems unsuitable then they can be stood down or wait until someone has checked the site to see if people need to be called out. Recognising what volunteers' capabilities and commitments are is important, so at one of our sites a couple are prepared to set out and collect the toad crossing warning signs but the actual patrols are carried out by others.

Sometimes it takes years to start or re-start a toad crossing, but it is important not to give up trying. At Wingerworth, near Chesterfield, the toad crossing was run for many years by the residents of a road at the side of the breeding pond, but they eventually all gave up or moved away. This left the only people doing the crossing as a family group from the other side of Chesterfield, who gave up due to ill health in 2002, leaving the site abandoned apart from random visits by one of our committee members. Later we had a few people who expressed interest in helping and together with possible volunteers from the local

nature reserve group, we set up a meeting in the church hall for them. Everyone had been emailed and an article placed in the local paper about the meeting but no one turned up, apart from a student who was interested in helping at another crossing near Ripley and wanted to find out what it involved. Eventually in 2013 we at last got several volunteers to effectively re-start the patrol and this has mushroomed as word has spread. In 2016 there were so many volunteers that a group of them discovered a new crossing a couple of miles away that no one knew about. They started covering that site, finding great crested newts as well as toads on the road. Another family group from a long distance away asked about their local village site that had been last patrolled in 1995, so diverted there and got their friends to help. So restarting one crossing patrol took time, but now has resulted in three sites being covered.

The message clearly is that with the threats to toads of increased traffic on the roads, habitat loss, climate change and disease, then volunteers can play a key role in their conservation by reducing the rates of mortality on the roads during the toads' migration to their breeding ponds.



Colin, a Norfolk volunteer
Photo: Anne Edwards

Toad Patrolling in Norfolk

by John Heaser Norfolk Patrol Co-ordinator

I've been doing toad patrol for over ten years and I've learnt that toad patrol is not just about the animals. I can't think of any other situation where the species under threat is being killed outside our own homes by our friends and neighbours. As a consequence, toad patrollers are often drawn from outside of the traditional pool of wildlife enthusiasts - which I think provides a good opportunity to get the message about habitat loss and other problems across to a wider audience. In my own village the relentless drive to 'improve' one's house and garden is a bigger problem than the losses on the roads - derelict barns that once provided toads with a winter home have been replaced with smart barn conversions and 'desert' lawns. So having got people out on patrol we try to use them to persuade their neighbours to provide the toads they rescue with a hibernaculum. Newts seem better able to exploit the built environment and are often found deep under paving slabs.

We also encourage patrollers to talk to everyone they meet about toad patrolling and in Norfolk this has definitely changed public attitudes towards toads. Most people have a very poor understanding about amphibian life cycles and are amazed when you tell them that the toad they just ran over could have been 20 years old. Ten years ago toad patrollers were regarded as eccentrics and were shy about admitting to their nocturnal wanderings - now the toad patrol is part of the social calendar in many villages, especially where the patrol meets at the village pub!

With good publicity in parish magazines and local papers it is relatively easy to get people to help with toad patrol; most patrols in Norfolk have a public meeting in a pub before the migration.

However, it is much harder to find people to manage a patrol. The effort of making sure that people are out on patrol on the nights when the toads are moving, as well as the unpredictable spring weather, places a heavy burden on the patrol manager and Toadwatch recognises that they need support - there are details of a forum at toadwatch.org where all patrol managers are welcome to discuss issues with other managers.

It is noticeable that in Norfolk the majority of patrollers and nearly all the patrol managers are female, many of the men who patrol have been brought along by their wives! Maybe this is because toad patrollers are predominantly motivated by compassion rather than taking part in a 'technical' conservation exercise. By working on our publicity and by getting patrollers to educate their friends we hope to show that patrolling and habitat conservation are both essential for the survival of our toads.



Photo: Cheryl Frost

To find your nearest toad patrol, please visit:

14 www.froglife.org/what-we-do/toads-on-roads/tormap

Toads in the Woods

by Alexia Fish
London Dragon Finder
Ecologist



In South West London, nestled between the River Thames and Richmond Park, is a quiet area of green space known as Ham Common. This stretch of land was given to the local

community by King Charles I in 1635, in exchange for the 483 acres he took and designated as deer hunting grounds in the area that is now known as Richmond Park.

Adjacent to Ham Common is Ham Common Woods, a rich 30 acre woodland that was historically used for gravel quarrying and is now mostly used for recreational purposes by a variety of different community groups, in particular educational groups like forest schools.

There is a population of common toads on site at Ham Common Woods that appear to be suffering high mortality when they are crossing Church Road, a road adjacent to the woodland, to get through a private garden, where beyond that there is presumably a breeding pond close by. This breeding pond



has not been found yet, however, and no spawning toads have been found either, so it is thought that they are dispersing into Richmond Park.

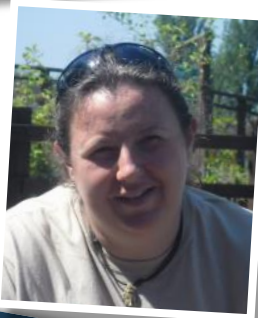
After a local resident reported the high road mortalities of the toads in 2010, a toad patrol was set up by the community and began running by 2011. The patrol consists of setting up toad fences during peak times of year when toads are found to be migrating, finding the animals along the fences and helping them across the road. During 2011, 408 toads were counted crossing the road (including 25 dead ones). Since then, numbers have dwindled to approximately 50. In order to help conserve and expand the toad population at Ham Common Woods, Froglife are hoping to create a pond on site in the winter of 2016. The pond will be built close to the centre of the woodland in an area of disused gravel pits, where these hollows can be deepened and lined to create 2 small ponds with a channel linking them. The creation of this pond will hopefully provide a suitable breeding area for common toads on site and dissuade them from crossing the road, thus reducing mortality rates. These ponds will also have benefits for other wildlife on site, such as common frogs, smooth newts and invertebrates such as dragonflies and water beetles.



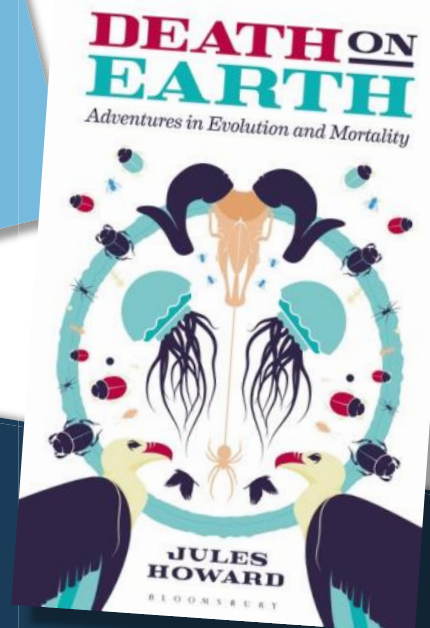
Photo: Jon Fray

Rebecca Neal, Froglife's Conservation Youth Worker,
reviews Jules Howard's

"Death on Earth"



Title: Death on Earth:
Adventures in Evolution and Mortality
Published by: Bloomsbury
Illustrated by Samantha Goodlet
ISBN: 978-1-4729-1507-8



Here is another random and interesting book from Froglife's recently crowned patron. Instead of sex this time, (see his previous book "Sex on Earth") we have death as the fringe wildlife topic.

This book explores the science of death, and in it Jules meets with professionals studying and working in a wide range of industries. Jules uses his beautifully-crafted writing skills to bring out the passion that the people he meets have for their chosen field. There are sections on aging, parasites, donkey mourning, extinction, decomposition, salmon sex (he just can't leave it alone!) and scavengers. I kept finding words last heard during my degree years such as free radicals, telomers and apoptosis, and finding I almost remembered what they meant!

I was particularly affected by the chapters on toads on roads, and bird-cherry ermines, neither of which ended well for the animals concerned. I hope his words inspire more people to care about the less cute animals that share our planet.

I enjoyed this book and found the author to be honest, self-deprecating, and extremely funny. The personal accounts in this book add to the story and made you feel part of his journey. My only criticism is about the structure; I am someone who likes to see exactly how things have been put together and I found it a bit difficult to identify the organisation in this book.

If for no other reason, buy this book to find out more about Ming the clam. Fascinating stuff!

The first time I saw a toad

by Ashlea Jarvis Conservation Youth Worker Trainee



To some readers, this might seem like a novelty but I felt the need to share this wildlife memory with you. It is always something that has stuck with me since early childhood.

I was, what I consider, lucky as a child. I lived in a relatively small town with access to nature in abundance. There were green spaces and nature reserves everywhere, and when you're out with your friends riding bikes on a weekend after a long week at school, you seem to be drawn to these seemingly isolated havens of dusty tracks, wide open farmer's fields and trees ripe for the climbing.

These areas were never short of water since the Fens was (and still is) prone to flooding. I remember being fascinated by water. It didn't

matter what stretch of water that might be, whether it be the sea, a river, a stream or a small pond. Just the way it looked or moved was interesting to me when I was very small and the passion seemed to grow as I got older.

When I learned what could be living in and around these waters I was all the more eager to seek them out. I would constantly turn over rocks to see what might be hiding underneath. I would stand near the water's edge to see if I could see any movement. I would literally explore for hours and luckily, my friends were as passionate about my exploits as I was, otherwise I don't think they would have put up with my adventures for long.

On this particular day, I remember going out with my friends on our bikes as usual. The day was hot and sticky and I remember my clothes sticking to my back as I rode along. Midges were everywhere and they loved the fact I was wearing a yellow t-shirt!

The local brick pits were our destination and as we arrived I immediately saw a small pond which I ran over to and

did my usual routine of turning over rocks on the edge. I saw movement. Could it be a frog? I scooped it up in my hands, it felt lumpy and bumpy and strangely dry. It had the most dazzling eyes I had ever seen! They glittered like gold. This thing didn't hop it just crawled across my palm, so calmly.

My friends came over to take a look at what I was staring at in my hands. We all had a go at handling it and taking a closer look. We had various arguments amongst ourselves about whether it was a frog or a toad but in the end I think we all agreed that it was a toad. We placed it back near the edge of the pond and watched it crawl away at its own pace, thankfully no worse for wear after the manhandling it had just received from 5 or 6 young people.

I think experiences such as these shaped the future for me and fed my passion for wildlife so much that it influenced what I ended up doing with my life. Nature is a gift that should be experienced by everyone and now I have a daughter I hope to pass on this passion to her.



Photo: Victoria Larcombe



Frogs in my pond

a diary by Jean Hicks Friend of Froglife



It all started on Sunday 21st February...

Saturday 20th February was fence erecting day, when a strong and very able young fellow came round to put up my new 6ft fence. Not a frog in sight. We looked in the pond to see if there was any activity – not a thing. No movement whatsoever. All very, very still and quiet.

However, Sunday morning, 21st February was a completely different story. They had all moved in overnight, like stealthy invaders, whilst the rest of the world was sleeping. We counted four lots of two, practicing for the piggy-back race, and one spare frog, waiting for his turn to join in the fun.

That night came a noisy frog chorus – and the night following – music to my ears!

Checking each morning, the increase in frogspawn was phenomenal. Every day more and more appeared, in the centre of the pond, round the edges, behind rocks and in watery plant pots. This production line continued for about a week, then all went quiet again, leaving the frogspawn clusters to float in their designated positions. The slow process of development progressed through the cold and wet days into spring, then came the exciting day when the tadpoles began to hatch. Not all at once, but over a period of a couple of weeks, so that as time has gone by, they have all been at different stages of development. Some, even in late May, do not appear to have made any progress of development at all, whilst others have changed shape and their little back legs have begun to develop. The final transition from tadpole to frog is very quick and only takes a few days, so to see this taking place, regular checks and much pond watching follows.



Once all the jelly sacks had disappeared, I fed the “tads” with flaky fish food, crumbled into fine dust-like particles, which they loved. Watching the sudden flurry of these little creatures chasing the particles across the top of the water was great fun and the cause of much smiling.

Photo: Jean Hicks

Sunday 5th June – Wow – more excitement. A quick check in the morning to see how the pond life was progressing and moving of a couple of small stones perched on the top of a pond rock revealed the most amazing sight. About half a dozen (6 in metric terms) tiny, tiny, almost transparent frogs were hiding. They scurried back into the pond at my nosey disturbance on their hiding place. They were so tiny that at least 3 of them would have fitted onto my small finger nail. In the evening another inspection revealed one of these amazing creatures clinging to the side of a pond rock with its tiny head just poking through the surface of the water to breathe.

Photo: Jean Hicks



Tuesday 14th June. All has gone quiet with just a few “tads” left. If they have all turned into these tiny, tiny frogs, they are probably leaping in and out of the water on a nightly exploration, dicing with death through the grass and plants of the garden and seeking out hiding places.

Another challenge – should I create another pond in order to house the anticipated influx of frog life which is likely to appear in 2017, or wait to see how many do survive. Will I be able to tell? Endless anticipation!

Since the 14th June, I have encountered these tiny creatures in various parts of the garden, usually tucked in damp areas and in long grass or under piles of cut grass which still has some moisture. They are now gaining the colour of brown/green, but it is absolutely fascinating to see these frogs as they make their way around the garden. Fortunately there are a lot of gaps under the fencing where they will, probably one day soon, venture out of this haven and into the wider world. The big question now is, do I cut the grass?

Photo: Sue North



Spreading Our Wings

FRIENDS OF BOARDWALKS NATURE RESERVE

by Liz Morrison Conservation Officer



Froglife works to improve habitats for amphibians, reptiles and a whole host of other wildlife. Active involvement in nature conservation is known to improve the wellbeing of volunteers, and on the Boardwalks Nature Reserve, volunteers, from all walks of life, come together to conserve wildlife. By helping local communities to get involved with the care of the nature reserve on their doorstep, we hope to safeguard wildlife in perpetuity.

This season

We have monitored amphibians, reptiles and a range of invertebrates with the help of our local volunteers. Our volunteer

dragonfly recorder, Patricia Thompson has been helping us to record the dragonflies and damselflies on both Boardwalks and Hampton Nature Reserve. Thanks to Trish we have learnt a great deal about the different species and their habitat requirements. The start of the Odonata recording season was heralded for us with the Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula* making an appearance in April and species such as the inquisitive Southern Hawker dragonfly *Aeshna cyanea* carrying on as late as October, even into a mild November in some areas.

Timing it Right

A hot sunny day is best for finding active dragonflies and

damselflies, much like our reptile friends. Bright sun and low wind is ideal but the hotter both reptiles and Odonata get, the faster they are. Our regular volunteers are all too familiar with how elusive fast moving lizards and grass snakes can be once warmed up! If like us, you are new to recording it helps to really get up close to identify your new finds or get a photo, the trick is to catch a sunny morning when things are just starting to warm up but aren't quite up to full speed, many dragonflies and damselflies will be perched on vegetation catching the sun after a cool period. Don't be put off if things cloud over though there are other ways to detect dragonflies...

An emerging teneral Common Darter on marginal vegetation hardening off its newly expanded wings



Trish with vice county recorder Mark Tyrell watching the male Willow Emerald.





A stunning male Willow Emerald damselfly



Photo: Roger & Sarah Orbell

Trish created a wonderful display of exuviae from our sites - a great way to see Odonata species up close

What to look out for

Children can be taught to quickly separate dragonflies and damselflies by looking at whether the wings at rest are held out to the side of the body or folded back. We've also learnt to spot the colours and markings of the eyes, thorax, abdomen, wings and on the ten abdominal segments and appendages. There are lots of great resources for helping you to identify your findings and we've found working together with enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers to be a brilliant way to get started. The British Dragonfly Society holds details of local groups. Lone recorders can submit records via an app much like our free Dragon Finder app, available online.

The lifecycles of dragonflies are tied to water, much like amphibians. Eggs are laid in

or near water, tadpole-like larvae hatch and live in the water and feed, undergoing a n i n c o m p l e t e metamorphosis over a period of months or years. Nymphs emerge from the water leaving behind exuvia (discarded moulted skin) which provide evidence that a species has successfully bred. If the weather has turned chilly and there isn't much about, provided it hasn't rained very recently, you can still search for exuvia between April-September, in warm years, the window of opportunity for exuvia hunting is even longer provided there are a few mild days between rainy spells. Adults often emerge in synchrony to maximise the chances of short lived adults finding a mate.

Collecting exuvia is a fun way to record dragonfly breeding

and assess pond quality. No animal is harmed as they are simply moulted skins so exuvia collections provide an easy, non-invasive way to study and identify different species without harming individuals.

This season we have recorded eleven dragonfly species and nine damselfly species on Boardwalks including a species new to Peterborough, the Willow Emerald damselfly *Chalcolestes viridis*, Trish found the first recorded male on Boardwalks in August. The species has resided in the south east but this year has expanded its range significantly.

The Willow Emerald damselfly is so called because it lays its eggs into willow branches overhanging standing water and so requires a particular set of conditions in order to breed. Whilst we remove trees casting shade across ponds, we ensure some ponds retain some overhanging trees for a range of different invertebrates.

This spring and summer has seen volunteers from near and far come together to share their enthusiasm for studying wildlife. Our weekly butterfly transect walks became butterfly, dragonfly and damselfly walks and allowed us to monitor the development of ponds through those seasons in conjunction with the wider terrestrial habitats.

The exciting new find attracted even more visitors from the surrounding area with recorders from the Huntingdonshire Flora and Fauna Society coming to the reserve regularly to help spot the Willow Emerald damselfly. Young people have helped us to record all manner of invertebrate species through the Green Pathways and FACT projects and we welcome young volunteers and interns on work experience that provide invaluable levels of support finding, identifying and logging species sighted.

We welcome everyone to get involved in helping us, the friends of Boardwalks Nature Reserve, to learn more about the sites in our care. So over to you... what will you find?

Some of our fantastic volunteers!



About Boardwalks

The Boardwalks Nature Reserve is situated on the edge of the city of Peterborough. Froglife have been working in partnership with the Peterborough City Council since 2015 to restore, improve and maintain a range of habitats for wildlife. In March 2015 a series of overgrown ponds were improved by de-silting with an excavator and trees were cut back to let in more light. A series of small unlined ponds were excavated along the floodplain and three lined ponds were created within meadows outside of the flood zone. The meadow ponds were created primarily as amphibian breeding ponds free of fish, though the ponds and terrestrial habitats are teeming with a variety of wildlife. More information can be found here:

www.froglife.org/what-we-do/froglife-reserves/boardwalks

Froglife would like to thank the Dulverton Trust for funding a warden to work with volunteers monitoring wildlife and improving habitats. If you want to join our friendly volunteer teams please visit our events page for upcoming sessions:

www.froglife.org/what-we-do/events

Male Banded Demoiselle



Damselfly and dragonfly species recorded on Boardwalks nature reserve:

DAMSELFLIES

LARGE RED DAMSELFLY

BLUE-TAILED DAMSELFLY

BANDED DEMOISELLE

COMMON BLUE DAMSELFLY

AZURE BLUE DAMSELFLY

SMALL RED EYED DAMSELFLY

LARGE RED EYED DAMSELFLY

EMERALD DAMSELFLY

WILLOW EMERALD DAMSELFLY

DRAGONFLIES

COMMON DARTER

RUDDY DARTER

SCARCE CHASER

4 SPOTTED CHASER

BROAD BODIED CHASER

BLACK TAILED SKIMMER

EMPEROR DRAGONFLY

MIGRANT HAWKER

BROWN HAWKER

SOUTHERN HAWKER

HAIRY DRAGONFLY



Male Southern Hawker dragonfly

Froglife Ltd. update

Stepping stone grass
snake installed at
HMP Peterborough

Froglife Ltd. has been very busy over the past few months, particularly with our training courses and Leapfrog Schools projects. This year we have provided training on amphibian identification, great crested newt surveying (and working towards your licence) and reptile ecology and surveying. Our courses have now finished for 2016, but we will be offering our extensive training programme again in 2017, keep an eye on our website for updates.

www.froglifeltltd.co.uk

Recently Froglife Ltd. took on a project to create a more wildlife-friendly garden for the Mother and Baby Unit at HMP Peterborough. The somewhat bare space has now been transformed with colourful planting, chalkboard animals and bug hotels. The area includes a sensory garden and bog garden which will not only be great for the children but will also attract a variety of insect life – grasshoppers and butterflies have already been spotted!



Thorpe Meadows memorial pond

Earlier in the year we received a lovely request: someone contacted us to ask if they could make a donation for us to build a pond in memory of their mother. Of course we were delighted to do this, it is such a lovely way to remember someone close.

We agreed a beautiful location in Thorpe Meadows, Peterborough and the team got to work. Within a couple of weeks a good sized pond had been dug and a beautifully carved bench has been installed, a plaque will be added shortly.

In the spring, once the water level has increased, we will do some planting of native plants to further enhance the area. This will provide a great setting for local residents to be able to sit alongside a pond, watch the wildlife and reflect.

Thank you so much to this very generous family, it is certainly a fitting way to remember someone who loved wildlife.



We have a range of cards, books and gifts for all occasions in the online Froglife shop at www.froglife.org/shop. All profits raised support our conservation and education work.

Not sure what to buy someone?

Why not give a Froglife Friendship as a gift! Your friend will receive a pack of goodies, and biannual copies of our Natterchat magazine, for just £18.00 per year.

Family friendship as a gift is also available - see shop for more details.



When you purchase a Dora Designs Lionel, Prince the Toad or Posh Prince Toad through November & December 2016 use promotion code natchat2016 and receive a FREE Prince Toad Junior paperweight.

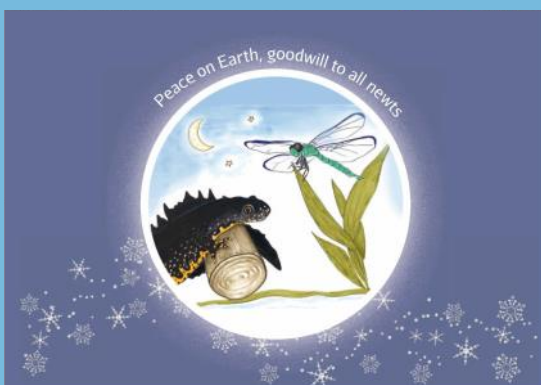


Lionel Armstrong
Frog doorstop

Prince the Toad
doorstop

dora
DESIGNS
Posh Prince Toad
doorstop

Prince Toad Junior
paperweight



Get a head start on Christmas and take a look at our selection of Christmas cards. Single design and mixed multi-packs are available.

Help promote Froglife by displaying and demonstrating your love for amphibians and reptiles with this new and exclusive Froglife window sticker for only £1.00.



Angus Environmental Trust ~ BBC Children in Need ~ Better Together Volunteers ~ Biffa Awards ~ The Bromley Trust ~ CALA Homes ~ Cambridgeshire Community Foundation ~ Central Scotland Forest Trust ~ City Bridge Trust ~ CJ Wildlife ~ Clark Bradbury Charitable Trust ~ Cory Environmental Trust ~ CSS Copiers ~ The Ernest Cook Trust ~ The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation ~ The Gannochy Trust ~ Garfield Weston Foundation ~ Glasgow Natural History Society ~ GrantScape ~ The Heritage Lottery Fund ~ Kirklees City Council ~ Lee Valley Regional Park Authority ~ London Boroughs ~ Mackintosh Foundation ~ The MacRobert Trust ~ Mears Ltd ~ Natural England ~ O&H Hampton ~ Patagonia ~ Peterborough City Council ~ Peterborough Youth Offending Services ~ The Robertson Trust ~ Scottish Natural Heritage ~ SITA Trust ~ SSE ~ Sheffield City Council ~ Staffordshire County Council ~ Tesco Bags of Help ~ Turcan Connell ~ University of Glasgow ~ Waitrose ~ William Dean Trust ~ Young Start

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Lin Wenlock (Chair), Rodger Downie (Vice Chair), Frank Clark, Philip Wheeler, Gordon MacLellan, Richard Donoyou and Inez Smith.

VOLUNTEERS

A big thank you again to all of our volunteers, especially all those toad patrollers who make such an important contribution year after year!