



Stewartfield Heritage Loch – case study of toadlet migration

Background

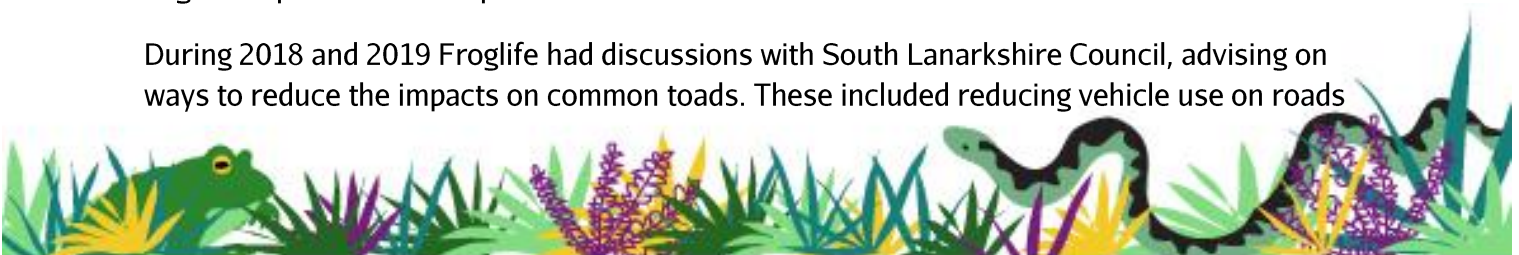
James Hamilton Heritage Park is a 32 acre park with accredited activity centre situated in East Kilbride, Scotland. The park features a 16 acre loch which provides rural surroundings for a range of water sports, from canoeing to windsurfing. The site is owned and managed by South Lanarkshire Council who undertake regular road/path sweeping and grass cutting throughout the spring and summer months to maintain the park. The park receives a regular number of visitors who use the footpaths for walking, cycling and jogging.

Stewartfield Heritage Loch supports a large population of common toads which migrate each spring from nearby terrestrial habitats. This migration route takes adults across surrounding access paths and roads. In 2017, Dr Kirsty Proctor discovered that toadlets were emerging from the lake in late June and early July and were being killed as they tried to cross the path around their breeding pond, by walkers, cyclists and joggers, as well as a road sweeper, lawnmowers and weed killer. Kirsty has since spoken to regular walkers who have related that in the past, there were many more toadlets crossing and that the path used to be 'black' with crushed toadlet carcasses.

Actions and outcomes

Kirsty initially reported this problem to South Lanarkshire Council in 2018 and requested that road sweeping be suspended during adult and juvenile toad migration periods. An agreement was reached whereby the council would initially suspend operation at the toad migration area until 23 July 2018, although this was extended further until Dr Proctor confirmed the migration period was complete.

During 2018 and 2019 Froglife had discussions with South Lanarkshire Council, advising on ways to reduce the impacts on common toads. These included reducing vehicle use on roads



where toads were known to migrate and avoiding grass cutting during the period when toadlets would be migrating.

During early 2019, Kirsty Proctor met with key staff at South Lanarkshire Council in the lead up to the migration and asked them to erect 'No Entry to Vehicles' signage to ensure no vehicles entered the suspended area, and also to paint around the areas of grass to be left uncut so no mistakes could be made. The council complied with this for a 2 month suspension period.

During toadlet dispersal in June, Kirsty carried out toad patrols 2 - 3 hours most days collecting juveniles from the surrounding paths. This also turned into an excellent opportunity for public engagement and awareness raising, as walkers, including children, would stop to ask about the toads. In addition, a community formed, with regular walkers learning about toads and informing Kirsty of the numbers of toads they had either seen or kindly moved off the path.

This year saw the collection of the largest number of toadlets recorded since Kirsty began three years ago. These measures therefore seem to be helping the toads and it is hoped that the toad population will recover in following years.

Figure 1. Number of juvenile common toads helped across paths at Stewartfield Heritage Loch in 2019.

