

FROGLIFE PRESS RELEASE

Goodbye Mr Toad? Scientists chart a worrying drop in numbers of our most lovable amphibian.

A new study led by Froglife, the UK's foremost amphibian and reptile conservation charity, together with experts from Switzerland has shown how the efforts of ordinary members of the public are identifying big declines in our native amphibians.

Every year thousands of volunteers in the UK, working as part of Froglife's 'Toads on Roads' patrols, help save amphibians as they migrate to their breeding ponds across busy roads. Toads are particularly vulnerable and over 800,000 are carried to safety by volunteers each year in the UK and Switzerland. Froglife's conservation scientists teamed up with Swiss counterparts to analyse millions of records of common toads (scientific name *Bufo bufo*) collected by these patrols over more than three decades from the two countries. Unfortunately, despite the effort of the volunteers, the researchers show that our toads have undergone huge declines.

The team's results, published in the open-access journal PLOS ONE (<http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0161943>), show that toads have declined rapidly and continuously since the 1980s in both countries. It is likely that hundreds of thousands of toads have disappeared from the countryside in the past 30 years. In the UK, south east England suffered the worst declines while in the west (including Wales, south west and west England) populations also declined but have remained stable for the past decade. The North, including northern counties and Scotland, has also seen significant toad declines in the past 20 years. It is not clear what has caused numbers of toads to drop so dramatically but likely causes are a combination of changes to farming practices, loss of ponds, an increase in urbanisation and more deaths on roads as traffic values have increased. Climate change could also be a factor as research has shown that milder winters are detrimental for hibernating toads.

Dr. Silviu Petrovan, Conservation Coordinator at Froglife and one of the authors of the study said: *"Toad declines at this scale over such large areas are really worrying. Toads are extremely adaptable and can live in many places ranging from farmland and woodland to suburban gardens. They are also important pest controllers eating slugs, snails and insects and are food themselves for many of our most likeable mammals such as otters and polecats. Without the efforts of the thousands of volunteers that go out and move amphibians across busy roads we would have no idea that these declines had occurred and the situation could be much worse. One thing that is clear is that we need to do more to look after our environment in order to protect the species that depend on it."*

Paul Edgar, The Senior Amphibian and Reptile Specialist from Natural England, the government's adviser for the natural environment in England and who have funded Froglife on road mitigation research, said: *"This paper highlights a number of important issues for our native amphibians and conservation more generally in the UK. The common toad is sadly on a downward trend. This is partly because of habitat fragmentation, and so understanding and mitigating the impacts of this issue is vital. We need to continue to build good quality habitat links across the wider landscape if we are to offer opportunities for this species to recover. We're working hard to do this through measures such as Countryside Stewardship in the rural setting, and ensuring good quality Green Infrastructure is included in new developments. This paper reinforces the vital positive role that the public play in both protecting and recording data about our wildlife. We need to build on this engagement to further help us collaboratively reverse these declines as a matter of urgency."*

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NOTES:

1. Bullet points on Froglife

Froglife is a UK wildlife charity committed to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles - working with people, enhancing lives together for a healthier planet.

In 2015/16 Froglife:

- restored 193 habitats and created 43 across England and Scotland
- were supported by 1,891 volunteers
- delivered 1,015 educational talks, training, sessions & events
- answered 7,086 enquiries on social media, email and phone
- benefited 12,543 people

In Spring 2015 a total of 86,060 toads and 8,470 other amphibians were rescued by 139 toad patrols in the UK.

2. Bullet points about toads

- Common toads (*Bufo bufo*) have a wide distribution in Europe and in the UK
- Toads occupy a variety of habitats, from woodland to wetlands, farmland and even urbanised areas
- Toads breed in large ponds or lakes and can travel extensive distances between their terrestrial and aquatic habitats
- Spring migrations of toads make it them vulnerable to road mortality and toads are typically the most common vertebrate species killed on roads in Europe
- Volunteers have been working on helping toads for decades and millions of amphibians have been moved across roads
- Toads are predated by a variety of species including grass snakes, otters and polecats