

natterchat

Froglife's newsletter - amphibians, reptiles & nature news
Issue 27: Autumn/Winter 2023

People edition



TRANSFORMING LANDSCAPES

TRANSFORMING LIVES

TRANSFORMING RESEARCH

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Garden Wildlife Health (GWH) is a collaborative project between the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Froglife and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), which aims to identify disease and monitor the health of British wildlife.

Visit: www.gardenwildlifehealth.org to find out more.



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Help us to find dragons!

Help us to understand how climate change is affecting our species by recording your sightings of amphibians and reptiles over the autumn and winter.

Our free **Dragon Finder smartphone app** will help you to identify all the different amphibians and reptiles you might spot in the UK. You can also use it to record your sightings, adding to our Living Atlas of where the animals can be found.





Dear readers,

Welcome to our Autumn/Winter 2023 Natterchat.

In this edition we are showcasing the people who have

been inspired by nature through engaging with Froglife in a variety of ways, and those who have gone the extra mile to help conserve our native reptile and amphibian species. Froglife couldn't do what we do without the community that make our work possible, from staff, through to volunteers, toad patrollers, interns, trainees, trustees, patrons, and our supporters. The stories that are told throughout this edition have inspired me and provide hope for the future of our species.

Throughout this edition, you will be given ideas on how to get involved in our work and how to contribute to the habitats that surround you. There are great tips for everyone, ranging from what you can do if you can do if you only have a small amount of time, to those of us who are fortunate enough to have more time.

Those in our community will share with you their journeys into wildlife

conservation, showing that there isn't one size that fits all and that there are ways to get involved, no matter your skillset or background. I have known all our trustees for quite some time now, however, each one of their articles have given me a new insight into their backgrounds and interests. As for our staff, James McAdie, FES Operations Manager, writes about his extraordinary journey from military service to working for a nature conservation organisation. Then there's Ash Mawby, Froglife's Communications Officer, who progressed through our Wildlife Ambassadors Programme into various roles with us through a journey that has taken twelve years and hopefully will continue into the foreseeable future.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we all depend on nature - something that we have known for a long time now. Kelvin, our London Blue Chain Project Development Manager very aptly quotes E.O. Wilson when explaining the importance of involving people in nature conservation: "Humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species." A recurring theme that seems to appear in this edition is that of mental health - namely that involvement

in conservation work and being outdoors has had a positive impact on wellbeing. Zak, our Somerset Green Pathways Project Officer, delves into the biophilia concept and the theory that our bodies remember our deeper ties to the wild.

We are delighted that several external people have contributed to this edition. Nida Al-Fulajj, Conservation Research Manager at People's Trust for Endangered Species, writes on the success of partnership working. We are certainly better together than as individual organisations. To conclude, I must reiterate that the work we do would not be possible without the support of our friends, donors, volunteers, staff, and trustees, for without you, we would not have been able to achieve all that we have. It is with you that we face the challenges to our habitats, ecosystems, and species, and it is with you that we celebrate our successes. It is our privilege to be able to share these stories with you and we hope that in turn, they inspire you.

Kathy Wormald

CEO of Froglife

The Lower Derwent Valley, managed by Natural England, is a species rich natural floodplain, high in floral diversity. These ancient meadows are partly managed by local farmers taking a hay crop once a year in July. To allow this to happen many hours are spent in June removing the Ragwort by hand as it is potentially harmful to the farm animals eating the hay. Staff and Trustees from Froglife volunteered for a day and helped remove over 30 black bags of Ragwort.



Nature connectedness

The benefits and importance of connecting with the natural world

With the ever-increasing discussion about the climate and biodiversity crises, it is only natural that we are asking questions about how we as people are connected to nature. Indeed, we are part of the natural world, are we not?

“Humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species.” - E. O. Wilson

It seems that this sense of connectedness to nature is something that we all feel in different ways as we go about our daily lives. Some of us live in rural areas where it may be simpler to create connections with the natural world. Whilst others, like me, live in urban areas where we perhaps lack the same opportunities for contact with nature. Though, there has been an increasing focus pushed on the benefits of connecting with our natural surroundings.

It is not all that long ago when we were forced to live a hyperlocal life thanks to the pandemic, during which many people explored their local greenspaces in a new way, creating a heightened awareness of just how important and valuable such places are. Many people, myself included, became more acutely aware of the direct benefits of being in nature to their mental health. In

an urban context this is particularly relevant as people living in cities are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems. In her book ‘The Nature Fix’, Florence Williams explores the research demonstrating that just having nearby trees, water and greenspace to see, benefits us cognitively, psychologically and, more specifically, can increase our creativity and civic mindedness. Of course, the mental health benefits are only part of the wellbeing impact of nature connectedness. Many people will also gain physical health benefits in their active lives outdoors, from running in the park and community gardening, to food growing on allotments and conservation volunteering.

An example of conservation volunteering that will be familiar to many readers is pond dipping and surveying, as part of citizen science projects to understand the health of our freshwater habitats. This type of activity, so commonly done with children, can be a fundamental moment in the lives of young people - one of their first encounters with the life cycles of wild species, and often so close to home. It has the potential to be a formative experience in which an appreciation and love for nature is born, resulting in, as is the case for most conservationists, a lifelong respect for the natural world.

It’s this latter point which is equally important in the discussion regarding the benefits of connectedness to nature; namely that benefits are often reciprocal, to us as humans and to other species and their habitats.

In returning to the ‘people’ part of this equation and as our regular supporters will know, one of our three Froglife targets is Transforming Lives. This captures our ambition to engage people from all backgrounds with the work we do for our species and their habitats. This is a crucial part of our work, and it is at the forefront of my mind as I develop the London Blue Chain project. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, our project is focused along the Green Chain walking routes in Southeast London, and we are working to collaborate with communities and individuals from walks of life that haven’t traditionally been part of nature conservation. Specifically, we know that people



Here are some ideas to get you started!

- Conservation volunteering (check out Froglife opportunities, of course).
- Food growing at home, an allotment or community garden.
- Get creative - draw, paint, make, record or even just ‘be’ in nature.
- Take a mindful walk through your local park and soak up what’s around you, using as many senses as you can.

from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented in the conservation sector. To help focus our efforts, we've been using recent census data and mapping to reach out to our intended audiences through existing groups and networks, such as in community centres, faith groups and cultural events. I look forward to updating readers again as the project progresses!

Following on from matters of inclusivity and greenspaces, there are also important steps being taken towards improving equality of access to nature. In many urban settings, there are often areas where residents don't have local greenspaces within easy reach of their home and thus have less opportunity to experience the benefits of spending time in nature. Policy makers (including the Greater London Authority) are using spatial data to create maps which highlight such areas so that targeted

action can be taken to improve the green infrastructure locally. Practically speaking, as it can be complex to create new parks in cities, this may result in local authorities making small interventions; like pocket parks or green corridors, such as the 'Bee Roads' project in Lambeth, which is engaging community groups and volunteers to support nature with biodiversity improvements on greenspaces alongside roadsides.

The importance of participation of communities in conservation and green (and blue) spaces is not to be underestimated. In the first instance, in London it's clear that community contribution is increasingly needed as local authority resources for parks and nature are insufficient to sustain our National Park City. Anyone who has litter-picked a park or pond will know the sense of achievement and empowerment that comes with it. And this is the encouraging point,

communities acting together can harness a power to make change that others can't! Just recently in South London, in the London Blue Chain area, a community of conservation-minded people raised over £100,000 to support the purchase of the closest ancient woodland to the City of London, reclaiming it from the developer with the aim of restoring it for nature. This wouldn't have been possible without community support, and it could be said that it demonstrates a current, wider desire for better access to nature, as can also be seen in the growing Right to Roam campaign in England.

Knowing then that we are part of nature, and that fostering connectedness to the natural world benefits all of us, what will you be doing next?

By Kelvin Shewry. *Kelvin is the Project Manager developing Froglife's London Blue Chain project.*



From reptile conservation, to digging up dinosaurs



As far back as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the natural world and especially reptiles. My family moved to Sarawak when I

was 9-months old and, thanks to all the geckos, one of my first words was "lizard". Then we moved back to Scotland and the only reptiles I saw were the slow worms in our compost heap and dinosaur skeletons in the museum. Today, I work for the University of Reading and while my research covers the three Fs (flora, fauna, and fungi), I mainly teach courses on reptiles and palaeoecology.

My career has mainly come about by making friends with like-minded people and making or taking opportunities. When I was 17, I decided the Royal Air Force wasn't for me, so I fundraised a few thousand pounds to volunteer on a conservation project in Sumatra. I was the first person in my family to get a degree and studied Ecological Science with Wildlife Management at the University of Edinburgh. During this time, my friends and I organised an expedition to Mauritius to study invasive plant species with the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation. We ended up going back after graduating.

So aged 22, I had an honours degree and lots of experience, but the only work I could get was doing data entry for a housing company. As you can imagine, this gave me lots of motivation to do something else. Then out of the blue I got a phone call from a friend asking if I wanted to be her research assistant in Trinidad. So, I quit the job, applied to some M.Sc. programmes and went to the Caribbean to work on temperature-dependent sex determination in leatherback turtles.

Working with leatherbacks was incredible and while in Trinidad I was accepted onto an M.Sc. in Ecology at the University of Aberdeen where I became interested in spatial ecology. This led me to take a Ph.D. in Plant Science studying spatial patterns in belowground symbioses (mycorrhizal fungi), then a postdoc in Canada, and my research interest in reptiles took a back seat until I joined the University of Reading as a Lecturer in 2015. One day the subject of reptiles came up over coffee with a colleague and I have been teaching a popular module called "Reptiles and Dinosaurs" ever since.

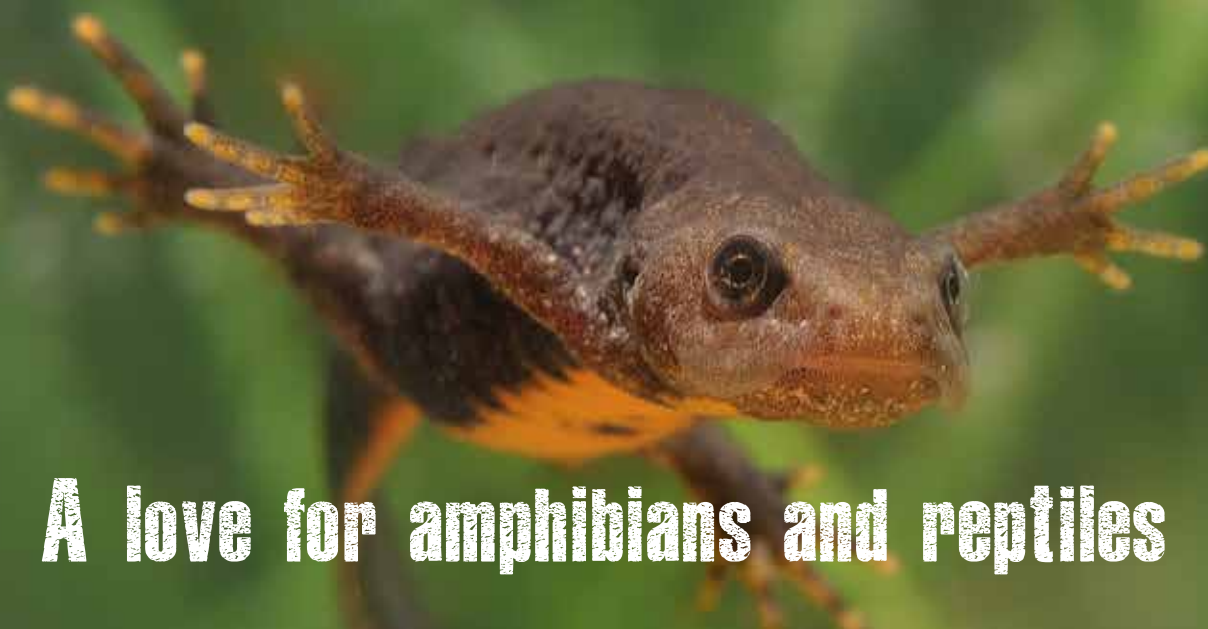
In Reading, I am setting up new herp monitoring sites and restoring old ones. These will inform local conservation efforts and give our undergrad students valuable

experience. Overseas, I study lichens as indicators of fossil bones and work with Canadian and Australian palaeontologists on dinosaur "mummies". I have a Ph.D. student studying reptile palaeoecology and several undergrads doing herpetology projects. My advice for anyone wanting to work in herpetology is to find other people who like herps, make friends, be open to opportunities, and have conversations about the things that interest you. You never know where your love for reptiles and conservation might take you.

If you want to get actively involved in herp conservation, one of the most valuable things you can do is offer your time and enthusiasm. Monitoring work is vital and usually relies on volunteers. Contact your local council or the Amphibian and Reptile Group (ARG) about conservation monitoring going on around you. You might be able to join an existing project, or even get something set up.

By Dr Brian Pickles. *Brian is an Associate Professor of Ecology at the University of Reading. He divides his research time between plant-fungal symbioses, reptile conservation, and palaeoecology. When he isn't stumbling upon dinosaur mummies, he is looking for reptiles and finding old herp monitoring networks.*





A love for amphibians and reptiles

Before I started volunteering for Froglife, I volunteered for various other organisations such as Nottinghamshire Amphibian and Reptile Group (NARG), Derbyshire Amphibian and Reptile Group (DARG) and the Friends of Newstead and Annesley Country Park Group (FNACP).

I first started doing surveys on Newstead & Annesley Country Park in 2019, initially just going out of interest to see what amphibians and reptiles were around for the Friends of group. This site has a population of grass snakes, common lizards, common frogs and toads, smooth newts, and also the exquisite great crested newt. Undertaking these surveys developed my love for UK herps and allowed me to really dive deep into my passion. Although I also love reptiles, amphibians are my main passion and have been since 2018 (age 15) when I saw my first great crested newt. Almost every spare moment since has been taken up reading about and surveying amphibians! The surveys I carried out with Chris Monk, Secretary of Derbyshire ARG, increased my knowledge no end and after three survey seasons of many late nights and early morning with this group I was over the moon to gain my GCN licence. Kevin Clarke, chair of Notts ARG has also been a great help in developing my knowledge on reptiles, with surveys elsewhere in the country, mostly surveying adders and palmate newts.

I also undertake local toad patrols with my mum every year, helping

toads cross busy roads to get to their breeding ponds. It is extremely rewarding to help not only toads and frogs but, often, newts too. It can very upsetting to see the, sometimes, mass casualties but I believe we help many more than we can't and that makes it so worthwhile.

I started studying Wildlife Conservation at Nottingham Trent University in September 2022 and, around this time, also started volunteering with Froglife as part of a small team verifying records sent in by members of the public on the Dragon Finder app and I truly believe this is one of the best opportunities I could have had - not only did this open up the opportunity to take on further voluntary work, it has helped me build on my knowledge, bettering my identification skills for the UK's amphibians and reptiles.

My favourite part of this is that we get records sent in of all species, native and non-native, from every part of the UK. I have identified species such as wall lizards and alpine newts (although these are both non-native species), species that I would not see in my local area. The location that some of these species are found in helps me learn more about their distribution and this is one element of the work I find extremely interesting. We have also had records sent in of toads in trees and I just love it when these kinds of photos are sent in.

I enjoy the opportunity to work with others who are as passionate as me about herpetofauna and we work well

sharing interesting finds and helping each other with difficult ID.

The knowledge I have gained from my volunteering both before and after joining Froglife has helped me become the Amphibian and Reptile Officer for the FNACP Group. I now train like-minded volunteers and plan events that benefit herps on site and regularly still undertake and organise surveys for official records and statistics. I now co-ordinate toad patrols around parts of Nottinghamshire and am also the Toad Patrol Co-ordinator and Officer for NARG - these are all roles I have taken on since becoming a volunteer for Froglife. Volunteering for Froglife has helped build up my confidence in identifying species (sometimes from the worst photograph possible) and has opened other opportunities for me such as the Toad Patrol Officer.

I have not made a definite decision yet about my future after university, but I do know it will involve herpetology and conservation, which has been my passion for many years.

By Maiya Evans.

Maiya verifies sightings on the Dragon Finder app and is also an Officer for Nottinghamshire Amphibian and Reptile Group.





Toad patrols helped my anxiety

I have always experienced anxiety, but as for many of us, my anxiety levels shot through the roof during the pandemic. I think twenty-four-hour access to the news along with all the conspiracy theories is definitely not right for our brains. In my experience, our modern anxieties are ones that are more ongoing (chronic) rather than explosive (acute). I may worry about something that never happens, but because it doesn't happen, the worry never ends.

We're not built for extended periods of anxiety and yet many of us live with it daily. Waiting to get, but hoping not to get, coronavirus was one of the scariest things for me in a long time. I read so much on the news about the dangers and had done so much to protect myself and my extremely vulnerable mother, yet I still felt like it was round each corner. However, I never caught it - meaning that I was just living in a continuous state of heightened anxiety.

In 2022, during my PGCE year, my mum told me about the issue facing Colleen and her band of Toad Patrollers on Stone Street in Sevenoaks, Kent. At the time I was planning lessons for my placement, writing an essay which would make up 50% of my grade and planning my wedding for June 2022. My anxiety was at its peak, but I have always loved frogs and toads, so despite the time pressures I was under, I decided to go with my mum for one of the nights.



On the night in question, the rain was pouring. I collected my mum and we drove over to Stone Street, so excited to see and save as many toads as possible. Before we even arrived, we had to stop for a toad in front of our car! We arrived to find Colleen (the patrol leader) trying to scoop up toads in a pond net because she hadn't quite plucked up the courage to actually touch one yet. I'm not squeamish, so I got in there straight away! I grabbed toads and frogs to put into a bucket for their safety, all while feeding back the numbers to Colleen who was taking the tally and taking buckets full of squawking amphibians to safety by the pond across the road. The aim was to save as many toads, frogs, and newts as possible from being run over by the steady flow of traffic running down the country road. It's usually quite a quiet road, but a diversion was forcing more cars than usual onto the road and the warm and wet weather had drawn the toads out of their winter hiding spots and towards the pond to breed.

There was lots of adrenaline involved, but by the time we had called it a night and gone home, the danger had passed. We'd saved as many toads as we could and there was no lasting threat. We knew that they wouldn't be back out again until the next evening, where we would be ready and waiting. I realised that it had been a long time since I felt stressed about a situation that was actually unfolding in the moment, which was then resolved. Once the toads were saved, I found that I could relax. And not just about the toads, but about everything! I was working, toad patrolling, relaxing and then sleeping. In fact, I was sleeping better than I had in years. When the season came to an end, I knew I would really miss it, but I was already left looking forward to the 2023 toad migration.

Now when I have an anxiety which is quite large, perhaps about losing my job and my life changing beyond recognition, I can remember that whatever happens to me, those

toads will be waiting for me again in February, helpless but not scared. And sometimes if I feel like I'm missing something, I think of how those toads are brave in their stupidity, and I realise that I could be a bit more like them. A year later, I am happily married, a qualified teacher, have my first toad tattoo and 25 lovely new friends. This year's toad season wasn't as fulfilling for me because about two weeks in (after I had only attended two busy nights) I managed to break my foot in an unrelated accident. This meant that I couldn't get as involved as I was last year, but hearing everyone's news and getting a bit involved on some of the quieter nights was nothing to sniff at. Toad Patrol 2024 will be everything that this year should have been!

By Jessie Bartholomew-Smythe.
Jessie is an active toad patroller. For the rest of the year, she is a KS2 teacher and plays for Ide Hill FC's women's team.

Work on your ID skills!



My journey at Froglife

As I sit here pondering how to start this article, it makes me think “where do I even begin?” when it comes to telling the story of my time with Froglife right from a project participant, to where I am now. It almost seems like a lifetime ago since I was a (relatively) young woman, out of work, quite depressed and just wanting to find a job so badly that I was sending out at least 50 CVs per week and receiving no response.

My job searching was how I (completely accidentally) came across Froglife as an organisation in the first place. It was 2011 and I had been out of work for almost a year. I had just been to the job centre to sign on and do my usual job searching. I was heading back to the bus station for my journey home when I came across a rather interesting-looking stall... it was engaging enough for me that I felt the need to walk over and investigate. “Froglife?” I thought, “never heard of it.” But, still intrigued, I had a chat with the lady running the stall and it just so happened that they were looking for people like me to take part in their new project ‘Wildlife Ambassadors (WA)’- a six-week project whereby people who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) took part in practical conservation. Needless to say, I signed up straight away. It was fate.

During my six weeks on the WA project, I had gained so much knowledge on not just reptiles and amphibians, but a whole host of other wildlife thanks to the knowledgeable and supportive staff at Froglife. I did lots of creative stuff too including clay modelling and

even some sewing to make a giant teepee for a festival taking place that summer. After my six weeks were over, I just didn’t want to leave, so that was it. Froglife was stuck with me for the foreseeable. I joined as a volunteer on the WA projects that followed and volunteered on a reminiscence project alongside this, which brought young people and older people (usually in care homes) together to share their wildlife memories.

I lost count of how many hours I volunteered because it just didn’t seem like work. It really was just so enjoyable being outside and being with like-minded people. Improving the lives of locals was also a big boost for me. You could just see people’s passions come out when they had spent some time with us and felt more confident. That’s what it’s all about. I was lucky and was nominated for various volunteering awards (winning a fair few) and was also offered training which contributed to my volunteer work via Froglife. Weirdly enough, I have also met a few celebs including Charlie Dimmock, Mike Dilger and John Craven volunteering for the charity. That’s not something that everyone can brag about!

Fortunately, I managed to find work at a local garden centre, and continued to volunteer for Froglife until I couldn’t anymore. That’s right, I was ballooning to the size of a giant space hopper because I was pregnant with my daughter, so volunteering was limited for someone who had the structure of a Weeble. Froglife was never far from my mind, even during my maternity leave where dirty



nappies and sterilising bottles was the norm. After my daughter turned two, I felt the urge to get out there again and start helping out. Thankfully, a new Froglife project had started at a school that was nearby, so for a couple of hours a week I went along, painted fences, planted flowers and created bug hotels for an outdoor classroom. It was thrilling and I felt that I had regained a little bit of myself after being 'mummy' for so long. You tend to unintentionally lose a bit of your identity when you are committed to raising a small one!

Not long after starting volunteering again, a traineeship on the Green Pathways Project became available. I couldn't really say no! I applied, interviewed relatively well (after forgetting how to speak at one point) and I was given the job the same day.

I'm not embarrassed to say that I was so happy to a point where I became rather tearful! Throughout the traineeship I worked with so many young people and schools across Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire and it was such a thrill to see their confidence grow from week to week and see their amazing progress.

Two things that stuck out for me during the traineeship were successfully applying for grant funding for two new ponds and helping to create these and being filmed for Gardeners World (which was absolutely terrifying if I'm honest). Towards the end of the traineeship, I was reluctantly looking for other work in the sector as I didn't really want to be out of work again. Thankfully though, Froglife hadn't had their fill of me just yet, so they offered me a job as Communications Officer

and Toads on Roads Coordinator.

In total, I have been with Froglife (in one capacity or another) for twelve years, which just goes to show what an amazing place it is to work. The jobs are varied and there is always something new happening every day. The people I work with are hardworking, intelligent, kind, and hilarious people and it doesn't really matter that they sometimes raid my treat drawer in my desk!

Froglife will still have to put up with me for a long time yet, as I have no intention of moving on. I am that crazy lady that stays in one job for decades!

By Ashlea Mawby. *Ash is Froglife's Communications Officer / Toads on Roads Coordinator.*

Case study

Sheila Gundry, Froglife Operations Manager, had a free weekend and dug a pond



There are very few natural ponds in my village, so I decided to create a community pond at our village allotments. The allotments are some of the oldest in the country, created originally for the poor of the parish. They provide excellent territory for a wide range of amphibians and reptiles, with plots at varying levels of cultivation / non-cultivation and surrounded by wildlife-friendly hedges and old walls. There are plenty of newts already, which try to survive in the water butts, and there is talk of frogs too.

I discussed with other plot holders and got agreement for the pond from the Allotment Wardens and the site owners (Parish Council). It fitted in very well with their plans for a communal area in the centre of the allotments. I promoted the pond dig day through the allotment newsletter, word of mouth and with signs on each of the gates. Over 25 people turned up for

the pond dig day and the diggers ranged from age 3 to over 80. I discovered that, not surprisingly, allotment holders are very good at digging! We then lined it with a flexible EDPM liner and left it to fill up with rainwater, which it did very rapidly.

Talking with other plot holders, I found there was concern about safety. To accommodate this, we designed it carefully to make sure that there was a very gentle slope for people (or wildlife) to get out if they fell in and put a strong fence around it (with room underneath for amphibians and reptiles to access it). We have added oxygenating plants and marginal plants and are looking forward to it getting fully established and welcoming new life as time goes on!



Introducing our trustees...

Prof. Roger Downie



I studied zoology at the University of Glasgow in the sixties, specialising in animal development, and went on to a PhD at University College London. Returning to Glasgow, I was part of a group teaching a new degree course in animal development, including reproduction, and got interested in the reproductive strategies of the 'lower' vertebrates. Through an ex-student, I was fortunate to spend several months with my family in Trinidad, getting to know the reproductive adaptations of the 30+ frog species there, and encountering nesting leatherback turtles. This began a forty-year engagement with Trinidad and Tobago, usually in the company of teams of students there to learn about tropical biodiversity. Later, I got involved in some research on UK herp species, so, when Froglife began a project in Scotland, Kathy Wormald asked me to talk at the launch meeting in Edinburgh. I must have done something right, because she then persuaded me to join the board as a trustee, and I've not managed to escape since!

A feature that attracts me to Froglife is its emphasis on the benefits to people of interactions with nature. This fits well with another organisation I've long been involved with, Friends of the Earth, which campaigns on the many ways we have damaged the environment, and the harmful effects of this damage on people and wildlife. Improving how we live in the environment requires concerned groups to work together, and that is why I'm happy that Froglife is an active member of Scottish Environment Link, allowing our small charity to contribute to a louder voice for change.

I grew up in a city in SW Romania, close to the border with Serbia and Hungary, in a warm sub-Mediterranean region with lots of nature. In my childhood things were quite tough as the late eighties in communist Romania were a time of fear and scarcity and I spent several mornings helping my parents queue for milk at 6:30am and people would sometimes queue for five or more hours to buy meat. TV consisted of a single channel with evening-only transmissions, most of it unwatchable propaganda. Saturday was a school day but we did get to spend a lot of time in nature on Sundays and during school holidays, and I was immediately drawn to wildlife. I watched and caught countless common, wall, sand and even green lizards as well as the odd snake and kept captive wall lizards and even a rescued pet grass snake, much to the despair of my parents.

At university I studied Veterinary Medicine, and I worked in parallel with numerous projects including volunteering with the vets in zoos and also a lot of ecological research projects at the University of Bucharest. I graduated in 2003 and went back to study for a Masters in 2005 at the Faculty of Biology because by then I figured out that while working as a vet was very interesting, I did not want a career looking after cats and dogs in the city. In 2006, I went to work as a volunteer field scientist in Honduras and met a big group of mostly British and American academics and I greatly enjoyed working with them, especially as the working style with students was much more open and relaxed compared to what I had experienced. I got a scholarship to do a PhD in Animal Ecology at the University of Hull, which I completed in 2011 and later that year I got the job as Conservation Coordinator at Froglife where I worked for five years and greatly enjoyed my time there. Since 2016, I have been a Senior Researcher at the University of Cambridge, mainly on how to use evidence to improve conservation decisions and solutions, often with examples from road ecology, where I have published many studies. I became a Froglife trustee in early 2017 and I try to assist the organisation in developing more research and better showcasing their great habitat and species conservation work.

Dr. Silviu Petrovan



I completed a work experience placement with Froglife in 2019 on the London Tails of Amphibian Discovery (T.O.A.D) project focused on improving amphibian habitat and educating the public in the capital. I had a fantastic time engaging with people to spread the marvellous pond gospel as well as netting newts and photographing frogs. I frequently returned as a volunteer for other events, presentations and habitat surveying throughout summer 2021. Following this, I then joined the Froglife board as a trustee and have had a great time engaging with the organisation ever since. The practical and optimistic conservation objectives of Froglife resonate with me and inspire me greatly. I am very interested in ecology and evolution and am completing my undergraduate studies in Biology at Imperial College London and I am also a visiting student in the Garner Group at the ZSL Institute of Zoology. You will often find me loitering around London's parks looking for hoppy and slinky fellows.

Xavier Mahele



Inez Smith



I used to be staff at Froglife up until 2007, though it wasn't long before I returned as a trustee in 2010 - where I've been ever since! While I was staff at Froglife, I set up the FACT project (which was previously known as The Peterborough Environment Enrichment Project).

For me, an amphibian and reptile fascination started with the sheer excitement of tadpoles as a three-year-old. I haven't really put down that jam-jar of wriggling wonders since. I studied Zoology at Glasgow University. I taught in Malawi (dwarf toads, the songs of a swamp full of reed frogs, puffadders on woodland paths, bristling blue-headed agamid lizards... occasional crocodiles). I worked as a countryside ranger in Manchester. And for the last thirty years, I've been self-employed as a storyteller and artist, using creativity to encourage people to explore their relationships with the world around them. Through all of this, that particular amphibian thread has stayed strong. While I love reptiles, it's amphibians that captivate me - so much so that my company is called Creeping Toad and my house is open to captive amphibians in need of refuge. My connection to Froglife started when Kathy (our CEO) asked Roger Downie (our vice-chair) if he could suggest anyone else as a possible Trustee. Roger and I have known each other from my undergraduate days back in Glasgow. I hopped at the chance and have been involved ever since. For me, my scientific background informs the creative work I do, and the heart of it all is imagination, enthusiasm and passion: encouraging people to renew their sense of wonder in the world around them. If that work has a particular emphasis on ponds and freshwater, hoorah!

Gordon MacLellan



Find out more at www.creepingtoad.com

Frank Clark



I left school at fifteen and joined the RAF as an apprentice engine fitter and at the grand old age of 18 and a half, I found myself part of an eight-man crew flying V.I.P.s around the Far East and occasionally back to the UK. After all this excitement and no interest in nature – well not the animal kind - and ten years of service, I joined the world of industry and spent a lifetime in engineering of various sorts, mainly in sales. Interesting and varied but still no great interest in wildlife even when walking my dogs. Then on retirement things began to change. My wife and I moved to Sauze d'Oulx in Italy. A ski resort well known to British skiers for good skiing but, twenty years ago, known for its nightlife. It has since matured and now most winter visitors seem to be early to bed, up early for breakfast and out for a day's skiing. For all this, it was a lovely place to live and for spring, summer and autumn, we could walk in the mountains and enjoy the fresh air, the wildlife and flowers. This is where things began to change. Slowly and almost unnoticed, I was becoming really interested in the natural world.

Things began to really change in 2016 when we moved to Peterborough and met Daniel Pic, who was working for Froglife and responsible for Hampton Nature Reserve at the time. My fate was settled. From walking through high mountain meadows and forests it immediately changed to mud, ponds and newts. Out of this growing interest and to help in any way I could, I volunteered and was accepted as a Froglife Trustee. This is something I still enjoy. From this simple start I have become deeply involved in recording the weather on the reserve and I run a fleet of trail cameras around Hampton Nature Reserve recording a lot of the bird and animal life on the reserve. A big problem is finding camera locations in places used by the animal wildlife but not too obvious to the human wildlife. The latter can't resist removing cameras if they find them!

I grew up in the suburbs of south Manchester with not a lot of wildlife around me and a family generally unsure what to do with my interest in nature. I could see the distant hills of the Peak District from my bedroom window and eventually, after a Biology degree in Oxford, ended up studying landscape-scale ecology of mammals in those hills for a PhD at the University of Manchester. Following that, I took up a lectureship at the University of Hull, based in Scarborough where I worked for more than a decade teaching ecology, conservation and environmental science and developing research on a variety of vertebrates in the UK and elsewhere (mostly Indonesia). In that time, I had a number of excellent research students, one of whom, Silviu, ended up as the conservation lead for Froglife. After working together, he suggested I put myself forward for a position as a Trustee, which I did and was pleased to be accepted. Around the same time, I moved to the Open University, based in Milton Keynes, and because late nights chasing hares through fields, or months spent in a hammock in the forests of Indonesia were not very compatible with having a young family, I shifted focus somewhat to research on urban trees and nature in urban environments more generally. Through this, I am increasingly working with people alongside nature, including as citizen scientists. I see enormous value to both nature and people in the work that Froglife does and the way that work is done: delivering real change 'on the ground' without great fanfare and with a can-do attitude. It's a privilege to be able to support that in a small way as a trustee.

Dr. Phil Wheeler



The Dewpond at Castle Hill by Moonlight



I am standing beside a dewpond as darkness descends. From the black scrub, a blackbird pink pinks and song thrushes duet with each other. The day is sinking and the moon, waxing gibbous, rises out of the darkening and contemplates its reflection in the water below. It is two nights from the full Pink Moon. The evening speaks of blues – cobalt, indigo, ultramarine. I cast my gaze around and notice a star or planet becoming visible in the western sky above a fringe of silhouetted hawthorns on the brow of the surrounding hills. It's Venus. To the south, Sirius shines, the brightest star in the Night sky. It is quiet, still and cool. The smell of damp earth reminds me of cold nights camping.

I have been sitting beside and sketching dewponds for the Dewpond Project by day and wanted to experience one in

a different way. As well as noting wildlife, I am here to soak up the mysteries of the place, to feel how our ancestors must have felt when they gazed at the moon. This dewpond has been here for over 200 years, possibly much, much longer, a watering hole for livestock in these otherwise dry, chalk hills.

The shadows creep inwards, shrouding me. I watch and listen. An owl hoots far away down the valley. Then the silence is broken as a solitary duck drops down to the water causing the moon to ripple. The duck gently quacks to herself before taking off into the darkness, spooked, no doubt, by the rustle of my jacket or her detection of an alien presence at her twilight haunt.

The deepest blue of Night has come and it's time to leave. On the way back up the hill, moonlight picks out the white gleaming teeth of the chalk path. I walk with a moon shadow, past a hillside of gorse flowers, pinpricks of fallen stars. At the top of the hill, I am back to civilisation, the streetlights of Woodingdean spread before me. Out at sea the red lights of the Rampion wind farm flash off and on, off and on. It has been an evening I won't forget.

By Alexi Francis. Alexi produced a series of illustrations for Froglife's *Discovering Dewpond's* reminiscence project, including those pictured on this page. You can see more of her art on her website: <https://www.alexifrancoillustrations.co.uk>.



Transforming lives



Meet Chantel Carr, who was our Reserve Warden and Trainer dedicated to improving the lives of others through the power of nature. She also ran the Transforming Lives project, though has since moved on to new pastures. This project seeks to break down barriers that prevent people from working and volunteering outdoors, especially those who are usually under-represented. Chantel's work became even more critical since the pandemic, as more young

people have been struggling with their mental health and confidence. Through her project and work on the nature reserves, Chantel saw first-hand how volunteering outdoors can significantly improve individuals' self-esteem and sense of belonging. It was a source of great pride for her to see some of the volunteers she trained become Trainee Reserve Wardens themselves. The next two stories are those told by volunteers that have worked alongside her.

Recovery and healing

As someone who was born and raised in London, spending time in nature was not something that I was able to do often. Concrete and tall buildings were my playgrounds, and I rarely had the opportunity to explore greenspaces. However, my mother, Margaret Carr, always spoke about her childhood in India, where she was surrounded by incredible wildlife, from tigers and monkeys to snakes and wild boar. She would tell us stories and teach us about the importance of preserving our environment, always

with Sir David Attenborough playing in the background.

As I grew older and life got busier, I didn't always make time for nature. But in 2021, I had a bad accident at work, which resulted in the amputation of one of my fingers. The recovery was painful and left me traumatised, with bad nightmares, loneliness, and depression. It was then that my daughter suggested I volunteer with Froglife, and it turned out to be one of the best decisions I've ever made.

On my first day, we went to Hampton Nature Reserve to complete a reptile survey, and I fell in love with it instantly. I helped cut back the scrub and learned so much about the local wildlife, including wildflowers, butterflies, adders, newts, and also their habitats. But what I appreciated most were the people I met. They were kind, wonderful to work with, and just a great bunch of people. We did a lot of different activities, from evening bat walks to building fires and cooking food, and I loved every minute of it.

Volunteering with Froglife has helped me immensely with my depression and PTSD. Being outdoors, surrounded by nature and good company, has been a healing experience. Now that I'm back at work, I miss the sessions, but I will always cherish the memories and the positive impact it had on my mental health. I'm grateful to Froglife for creating such a fantastic opportunity and to my daughter for encouraging me to take part in it.

By Robert Carr. *Robert volunteered on Hampton Nature Reserve and is also Chantel's dad!*



Embarking on a conservation journey

A year ago, a friend introduced me to a wildlife charity called Froglife. I had been suffering from depression and anxiety at the time and was hopeful that volunteering with Froglife would help put me on the path of battling it.

My journey first began on a sunny Thursday morning at Hampton Nature Reserve. I was terribly shy and beyond nervous about meeting the team. Little did I know that this group of incredibly passionate and creative people would change my life for the better! Two long-standing volunteers took me on a reptile survey where I saw my very first great crested newt. Over the next few weeks, I also saw my first slow worm, roe deer and adder! My confidence began to grow as I felt myself starting to enjoy being outdoors again and interacting with people. As the months went by, I began to really connect with the trainee reserve wardens and the other volunteers, they were all so accepting and made every volunteering day fun. They helped increase my knowledge of the reptiles, butterflies and mammals living on the reserve.

Having learnt the reptile transects and the routes around the reserve, I was soon able to lead others on surveys. With this newfound confidence, I decided to help at one of the community days that Froglife runs at Eye Nature Reserve by running a bake sale. I felt like this was my opportunity to push myself to become independent and learn how to use my initiative as my anxiety had once held me back on this. Going into winter,

the reptile surveys stopped and the habitat management began. Through the cold, rain and snow, we tackled scrub clearance and chopped copious amounts of willow and hawthorn, whilst trying not to prick ourselves full of holes. Pond management was most definitely my favourite job as it involved getting in the pond with waders, although raking the reeds was rather back breaking! Baking potatoes on the bonfire was a real treat and extremely rewarding after a hard day's work.

Throughout all of this, the reserve warden Chantel, supported me and taught me so much. I felt a great sense of achievement knowing that I've come so far personally and professionally throughout my journey in conservation. I didn't know in which direction I wanted to go in life, and Froglife has given me the ambition and motivation to begin a career in conservation. The opportunity for this year's traineeship at Froglife came up and I was encouraged to apply for it, and I'm so proud to say I got it!

I am so lucky to have joined the group when I did, they have changed my life in more ways than I could've imagined. So here's my thanks to Ethan for introducing me to Froglife, Sarah and Roger for showing me my first reptile survey, Judith for her wealth



of knowledge, Elizabeth for knowing how to make people smile, Patricia for inspiring me to just give it a go, Skye my gremlin buddy, Vaughan for teaching me to look up in the sky more and your endless ramble about birds, Tony for your nonstop support of my passions and interests and going the extra mile for me. And finally, Chantel for being an extraordinary mentor and showing me what I'm capable of achieving.

By Kaitlin Oliver. *Kaitlin was a volunteer for Froglife's Transforming Lives project in Peterborough. She has since joined the project in a larger capacity as a trainee - congratulations Kaitlin!*





Working together towards one goal

The collaboration between Froglife and People's Trust for Endangered Species

Our wildlife, both globally and here in the UK, is under threat. The general public and our politicians have a much greater awareness and understanding of the biodiversity crisis now than in previous decades. But the scale of the crisis is vast and the efforts needed to make a change are equally huge. Those of us working in the conservation sector are adept at making limited resources go further, mobilising teams of volunteers and being flexible in order to find effective solutions. One way we can be more impactful is working in partnership with others facing the same challenges.

Charities are often seen as competitive, bidding against each other for limited funds and the public's attention. But we're also really good at collaborating, which is important in ensuring that our collective work has the greatest impact and makes the most of our resources. Recently, People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and Froglife have been collaborating, with great success. My role at PTES is Conservation Research Manager but, like in many small organisations, my role extends to areas outside my normal remit. At PTES, we have limited scope for policy work and rely heavily on our membership of Wildlife and Countryside Link. But significant events, such as Brexit and new targets set under the international Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), means that UK legislation

is rapidly being updated, against a backdrop of our government's desire to show global leadership in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises.

Froglife's Jenny Tse-Leon (who is Froglife's Conservation, Evaluation and Research Manager) and I met through an innovative online coffee-and-chat initiative during Covid. A partnership and friendship quickly developed when Jenny approached me the week following our meeting, concerned about threats to species protected under one of our key pieces of wildlife legislation: the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Though neither of us had policy expertise, we quickly mobilised over 40 environmental NGOs to push back against proposals to remove protection for some of our key species: common frogs, toads and water voles. We even met with the Welsh environment minister, sharing our concerns, and listening to hers - forging a useful alliance.

Our collaboration gave me confidence to work in an area that I wasn't familiar with; it was great to have someone in the same situation with whom to share thoughts and ideas. We also had greater reach, combining our connections, and I think working in partnership made it easier to engage others and convince them to join our efforts. Our organisations focus on very different species (ours on mammals and invertebrates), so

our partnership had more strength in terms of showing others the potential scale of the impact of removing protection for a broad range of species, regardless of taxa. We don't know the outcome of our efforts yet, but we are ready to continue fighting against reducing protection for our wildlife.

Despite PTES focus on mammals, we realised we had other areas of interest in common when I mentioned to Jenny that our volunteers sometimes find toads in the wooden nest boxes they put out to monitor hazel dormice. Turns out, Silviu Petrovan, a Trustee at Froglife, was already researching this, and so we pooled our records together along with data from our colleagues at the Bat Conservation Trust. This was then written up and published in a fantastic article. It highlighted not only how often toads are found in trees (!) but also how important collaboration is - particularly in wildlife conservation. Unexpected finds and difficult challenges are part of our daily work. Sharing those finds and tackling those challenges are better and easier to do in collaboration with others working in the sector.

By Nida Al-Fulaij. *Nida is the Conservation Research Manager at People's Trust for Endangered Species.*

We are all animals

Helping nature to help ourselves

At our Somerset Green Pathways for Life project, we've had a busy year so far. A new hedgerow sprouted into life, forming a corridor of cover for wildlife navigating a busy town pathway. Habitat piles await reptiles, amphibians and other creatures looking for a warm damp hideaway. Bird boxes were hammered into place, ready for residents. Our native woodland wildflower patch got denser and greener by the day, and literally thousands of tadpoles wriggled free of their wobbly cocoons to explore the new pond we dug last autumn.

All this work was created by people living with dementia and their carers, in activity sessions designed to benefit the mental and physical health of our participants, and to improve local greenspaces for people and wildlife.

Biophilia is a term coined by psychologists and biologists to describe the innate human-nature connections resulting from our long evolutionary history entwined

within the natural world. Modernity's separation of human societies from 'nature' as something outside our homes, towns and ourselves is comparatively recent, and according to the biophilia concept our bodies remember these deeper ties to the wild. Perhaps this explains why time spent amongst nature feels so good?

One strand of this story relates to people living with dementia. There is ever growing scientific confirmation of nature's wellbeing potential for all of us, and an emerging body of research is pointing to specific benefits that getting outside into greenspaces has upon many of the negative symptoms which can be associated with dementia.

After running groups on our Somerset project for a few years now, I am noticing the way nature holds and mirrors diversity back to us - by which I mean nature is infinitely diverse in all kinds of ways, from its uncountable multisensory offerings to intricate

weavings of scale from the minute to the enormous. We ourselves are diverse beings with needs and emotions that change across a day, with changing seasons and cycles, and across our lives. I feel this ties in closely with the biophilia concept. Our bodies and minds are wired to connect easily with nature whether we are conscious of this or not, and I'm coming to my own conclusions about the relevance this has for dementia.

Dementia is an umbrella term covering hundreds of different conditions affecting the brain, all resulting in the loss of brain cells over time. Alzheimer's disease is by far the most common type. Each person living with dementia has a unique experience with the condition, due to complex interactions between a highly variable disease, and the individual's background, lifestyle and all the things that make up the slippery concept of the self.

Continue overleaf



This makes nature's infinite diversity hugely helpful for people living with dementia - whatever we enter a greenspace carrying or dealing with, the conditions can be found for healing work to occur. This could look like reminiscing about long-loved gardening and a sparking of knowledge and skills. It might be a cold wind stirring up some deep grief to be shared and aired with others. It might be the relaxing joy of being held in the sun's warmth. Or the self-validation of building a bird table together and watching the first feathered visitors arrive.

To make space for this diversity - our sessions are deliberately varied, a real mixture of activities from hands-on habitat creation, gentler seasonal arts and crafts, nature walks and mindfulness. It's a real balancing act accounting for the varying needs and abilities of participants - our number one aim is always that people leave a session with positive emotional outcomes. Even spending time 'passively' in greenspaces does the trick, though getting tangible things done, especially if they are helpful for wildlife species, gives a powerful wellbeing boost.

The benefits can also be unexpected. Thelma has been attending our sessions since July 2022. She moved to the area relatively recently and is increasingly unable to access social activities due to her mobility declining,

and no longer being able to drive. She has always loved to go outdoors and is now facing several barriers to doing so. The primary reason she chose to attend was an opportunity to socialise, and in the words of her daughter Anne: "To be in the fresh air, being with other people. Doing some kind of physical activity, feeling something purposeful... Otherwise, she doesn't go out a great deal."

Attending the sessions has had a positive impact on Thelma's emotional and social wellbeing. Her daughter explains that after the sessions, her mood is "always better, no matter how she was beforehand. She is brighter and more 'with it', more chatty and bright, it does make a clear difference." "She started to go outside into the garden again - rather than before when she was saying 'oh what a shame it's such a mess'. Now she is actually trying to get out there and do things. Noticing and remembering what flowers should be coming up at what times."

From simply looking for fresh air and socialising, we find additional unexpected benefits on an individual level for Thelma. The group benefits from her sense of humour and the fun she brings to sessions. Wildlife species benefit from the habitat creation and nature friendly gardening we get up to. Again, nature's infinite qualities come to mind. We are all animals - a part of nature too, although it's



sometimes easily forgotten. How we interact with other plants and animals is our choice - but it seems unequivocal that working together to benefit one another has the biggest wellbeing impact of all.

By Zak Mather-Gratton. *Zak is the Project Officer on Froglife's Somerset Green Pathways for Life project.*

The difference between a frog and a toad

When asked to write an article for the latest Natterchat, it was suggested that I call it a "Decade working for Froglife". I did consider this title for some time but ultimately decided against it as I felt as if I was writing my own obituary and it was a painful reminder of father time catching me up. I have surpassed the decade marker now and I believe must be into about my thirteenth year, and my transformation from smooth newt to grumpy toad can be seen through the

numerous staff photos that have been taken over the years.

The most frequently asked question that I have to answer apart from the difference between a frog and a toad is how I got into this line of work. It is a question asked not only by keen ecologists on one of the training courses I deliver, but also by people I meet in everyday life who seem fascinated by what I do and the animals I work with (amphibians and

reptiles, not the office staff). I would guess from conversations that I have had, that my route into conservation is quite unusual and probably very different to the majority.

Upon completion of my school education, I attended college where I took my A levels along with additional GCSEs in subjects that interested me that weren't available at school. I had not planned a route or career path for myself and like most lads of that age

was happy to be living life studying, socialising, and taking part in football and basketball for the college. It was my intention to move from college to university, but an unexpected bereavement in the family resulted in me moving to London and reassessing my future. My family had a strong affiliation with the Armed Forces with my Grandad Don having landed on Juno beach, my Grandad Archie part of the Naval Fleet and my brother Stuart a serving member of the Army in the Royal Artillery. I decided to join the Royal Air Force and after enlisting, moved onto RAF Halton for my recruit and trade training. Despite being made to sprint up and down hills by the Regiment drill instructors often until individuals were physically sick, there was an affinity amongst the recruits with the woods and the wildlife we would often see amongst them.

During my RAF career, I was fortunate enough to move around and had tours of Arizona, Turkey, the Falkland Islands, Canada, as well as postings to Oxfordshire and Norfolk. During these longer tours I filled my out of work time with voluntary work mostly with young people and sport such as football and boxing coaching. This voluntary work followed me throughout my forces career and into my new career when I left the RAF after ten years and moved into Private Service. It was during one of my jobs here that I started to take more of an interest in land management as one of the homes I was working in had an estates team and the property had a lake and river running through it and lots of ornamental ponds that the head gardener loved talking to me about, as I had mentioned we always had ponds in the garden growing up. I was still volunteering with young people in my spare time and was part of a team mentoring young offenders which

was both challenging and rewarding. It was during a conversation with the volunteer coordinator that Froglife came up and she enthused about the conservation work they were doing with young offenders as part of their reparation. She encouraged me to apply for a vacancy that they had and although I had experience of working with young offenders, I felt my conservation experience was purely a love of the outdoors and was unsure if that would cut it.

As it turned out, my lack of conservation knowledge wasn't a massive barrier, and I was reassured that there were enough knowledgeable staff at Froglife to ensure that I would soon be able to confidently tell a frog from a toad. I began working for Froglife managing the young offenders and soaking up as much information as I could from my colleagues. As a project, we progressed from simplistic bird box and wooden toad home creations to creating wildlife ponds in schools with dipping platforms and even a fancy ornate bridge over one!

The small wildlife ponds became large excavator dug ones, with the responsibility given to me by my boss of managing a large-scale pond creation project. After reading numerous pond books and racking up hours watching YouTube videos, I set about creating three ponds in a pocket park that were soon inhabited by smooth newts and common frogs, which was all of the feedback I needed!

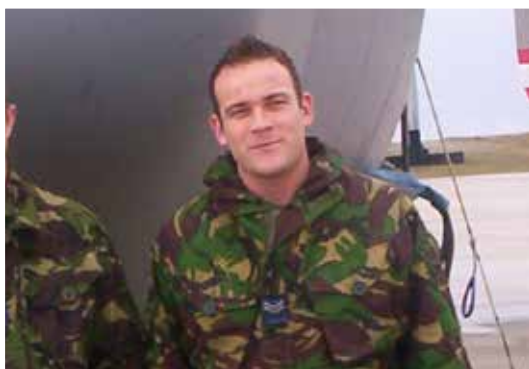
I moved from the young offender project over to managing a project that delivered habitat works and public engagement works, which was another opportunity for me to learn more species-specific information and also about large scale pond creation and restoration. I learnt

from colleagues, from contractors and most importantly experience of what worked well and what didn't. As part of the project, we exceeded our public engagement targets and nearly doubled our habitat creation targets as I learnt smarter ways of working whilst establishing and building relationships with landowners.

The relationships forged resulted in additional works being asked of Froglife and so I progress into my current role which is Operations Manager for Froglife Ecological Services. Any paid for services are delivered via FES with all profits being donated back to the charitable Trust so this includes pond creations, pond restorations, terrestrial habitat works, training, survey work, report writing etc. This has resulted in me having to learn even more but has resulted in a really enjoyable and varied workload. I can be creating ponds on the south coast one day and the very next delivering great crested newt training to enthusiastic students from Cambridge University.

My decade plus with Froglife has been filled with work that I can look back on with pride. I have created and restored ponds the length of the country and taught individuals that will hopefully go on to make a real difference in the conservation world. I still get as excited now about seeing wildlife in its natural environment as I did when I was a young lad of six and our headteacher Mr Brown used to take all the children off of the school field to see the froglets emerge from the pond at the bottom of the lane. I can also now tell the difference between a frog and a toad!

By James McAdie. *James is the Operations Manager of Froglife Ecological Services (FES).*



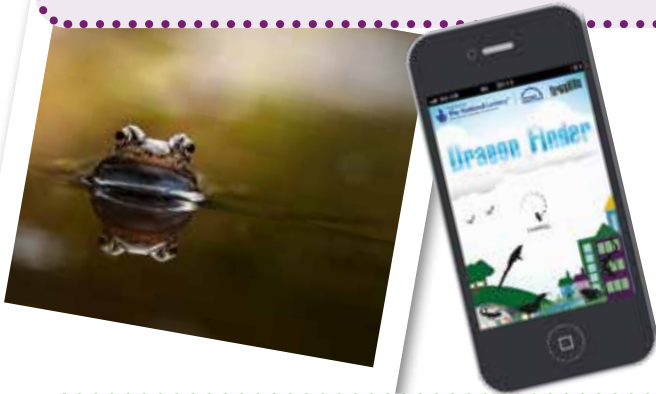
Scan the QR codes to be directed to the Idea Zone pages on our website.

Get involved



Autumn is when our amphibians and reptiles will be preparing for brumation in the winter, so you may see them nearby a pond, under some logs or in a compost heap. When you see one, upload it on the Dragon Finder app - it can be done in a couple of minutes and just needs a photo and some basic information. There's plenty of help to identify the species too, and a lovely feature where you can listen to the sounds they make.

I only have 5 minutes to spare!



I have another 5 minutes!

Make a donation to Froglife



Amphibians need ponds to breed in, but the rest of the year they are out and about in gardens and woodlands, so if you don't have room for a pond, create an area where amphibians that breed in nearby ponds can spend the rest of the year. If you do have a pond, check that there is plenty of long grass, piles of logs or stones nearby.

Make some homes for wildlife in a damp corner of the garden or a nearby green space, allotments, community garden or school grounds. Simply pile up some logs or branches to create over-wintering homes for amphibians and reptiles. Digging a shallow hole and filling with logs and branches works well too. These are called hibernacula.



I have an hour free!

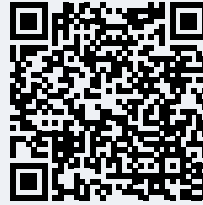


Top tip!

Is your pond prone to freezing over in the winter? Float a tennis ball on the surface so that a small pocket remains unfrozen for any overwintering tadpoles. Never smash ice on a frozen pond surface! If you want to melt the ice, your best bet is to boil a saucepan of water and place it on the surface and allow it to melt gently.

Make a mini-pond

Adding a source of water to your garden or a local green space is helpful for a wide range of wildlife. Ponds don't need to be large to attract wildlife - frogs and newts may still lay eggs in small water bodies (1m wide or even less). A small container on a courtyard garden or terrace works well for wildlife to drink and amphibians might pop in for a soak at night - they like to keep cool and moist in hotter weather. If you use a tub or recycled sink, avoid steep sides and make sure that there is easy access for wildlife to get in and out. Filling with rainwater is best and adding a few aquatic plants will provide food and shelter, plus colour for us all.



I have a couple of hours to spare!



I have half a day free!

Improve the compost heap in your garden or your local green space, allotments, community garden or school grounds. Plastic compost heaps are hard for amphibians and reptiles to access, so make one from old pallets or similar. The warmth of the compost is ideal for grass snakes to lay their eggs. They are great for slow worms too - the eggs hatch while they're still in the female's body and then she gives birth to the hatchlings, which are about 4cm long. A well-managed compost heap is perfect.



I have a day off but my garden is already wildlife friendly!

Chat to your neighbours. Do they need any help making their garden wildlife friendly? Could you make a gap under the fence so that toads, frogs and hedgehogs can travel between gardens?

I've got a free weekend!

Dig a pond in your local green space, allotments, community garden or school grounds. It doesn't need to be really deep - a lot of wildlife like the shallow areas. Frogs often spawn in shallow, warmer water and newts will fold over a stalk of grass or a leaf for their eggs, so a shallow pond with lots of aquatic or marshland plants is great for them. It's good to have some deeper water (70cm) too so that the whole pond is less likely to freeze in winter.

Use a flexible liner rather than a solid one and create a long, shallow slope so that wildlife can easily get in and out. Avoid water fountains and do not add fish to a wildlife pond because they will eat the invertebrates and their faeces will add too many nutrients to the water, which encourages algal blooms.



Don't mow all the lawn. Leave some areas of longer grass or leave most of the lawn long with a few mown pathways through it to reach other areas of the garden.

I'm really, really busy!



frogalogue

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Give **Froglife Friendship** as an extra special gift to someone you know who cares about frogs (and all amphibians and reptiles!). As well as knowing your contribution is going toward the conservation of the UK's amphibians and reptiles, your friend or family member will also receive a special pack. Friendships start from £18



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Inez Smith (Chair) ~ Roger Downie (Vice-Chair) ~ Frank Clark ~ Xavier Mahele ~ Gordon MacLellan ~ Silviu Petrovan ~ Philip Wheeler

PATRONS

Jules Howard ~ Kate Bradbury

VOLUNTEERS

And last, but certainly not least, a big thank you to all our volunteers. An especially big thank you to all those toad patrollers who did a fantastic job again this year. Your help is invaluable.

These prints are limited to 68 to represent % decline of common toad species in the UK over the past 30+ years. By purchasing one of these prints you will help Froglife continue to protect common toads and their habitats. Price £33.75

