

natterchat

Froglife's newsletter - amphibians, reptiles & nature news
Issue 30: Spring/Summer 2025

The Warmer Months



TRANSFORMING LANDSCAPES

TRANSFORMING LIVES

TRANSFORMING RESEARCH

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Editor: Emily Robinson; Design by Victoria Larcombe

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!

Grab your phone, get your wellies, and go out dragon hunting this spring/summer to help us map amphibians and reptiles.

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 Supporters,

Welcome to the Warmer Months edition of Natterchat! While our last edition

highlighted the colder months, this issue is all about celebrating the vibrant spring and summer seasons. As the warmer weather returns, so do our incredible reptile and amphibian species, and we're excited to explore their activities during this time. Starting with breeding antics, spawning and the young developing into those beautiful animals that we so love and appreciate.

In this edition we have lots of interesting project updates, such as the fantastic Speaking Sculptures that were created as part of our Coalface to Wildspace Midlands project. I was honoured to be invited to Walsall Arboretum to judge the outstanding Lego pieces made by local communities, and an added delight was seeing one of our Speaking Sculptures standing proudly at the entrance to the visitor's centre. It was a delight to see the local community's

influence on these sculptures, benefiting both nature and people. A fantastic outcome!

You will see that London Blue Chain is off to a strong start, and the Project Manager's report highlights its success. Our trainees have also made excellent contributions to this edition.

In this edition, as always, we aim to inspire and encourage you—our amazing supporters—to continue helping wildlife in any way you can. We know many of you are already deeply committed, and your efforts make a huge difference.

This issue features a range of topics, starting with an introduction to reptile surveying, including a beginner's guide to help newcomers get started. As data is critical to our conservation work, we encourage you to share your findings with us.

We also delve into the effects of droughts on our species and provide tips for wildlife-friendly gardening to support local ecosystems. With the toad migration season upon us, we've included answers to Frequently Asked Questions to assist our

dedicated toad patrollers in their vital role of conserving toad populations.

Finally, as always, our wonderfully creative trustee, Gordon, wraps up this edition with another of his inspiring collections of poetry—a perfect way to end on a thoughtful and uplifting note.

We thank all our supporters, whether it be through grant funding, individual giving, corporate sponsorship, legacies, and volunteering, without your help we would not be able to achieve any of this. National Lottery Heritage Fund is one of our largest donors so a huge thank you to Lottery Players, you may not yet have won the big prize, but the biggest prize of all is the contribution that you make as players towards our conservation efforts.

Wishing you all the best for the warmer months and lots of reptile and amphibian joy.

All the best

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Wormald" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kathy Wormald, CEO





Coalface to Wildspace Midlands

Connecting to nature through community art



Coalface to Wildspace Midlands is our Walsall based community conservation project working to protect reptiles and amphibians, which has just entered its third and final year. A key aim of the project is to enhance the local area for both reptiles and amphibians, and people through the creation of 8 Neighbourhood Wildlife Corridors. So far, we have supported local people to make 9 new wildlife ponds and 121 small habitats, ranging from bird feeders to hibernacula.

Our other aim is to engage people from all walks of life and support them to build a connection to nature and learn more about our wonderful reptiles and amphibians. To achieve this, we have been running a range of creative activities and fun project elements, including Lego® Brick

Modelling, community art and wildlife gardening workshops.

Speaking Sculptures

The Speaking Sculptures are one of our most impactful community art project elements. We teamed up with artists, the Juneau Projects, to work with them via 32 community art workshops in Autumn 2023 and Spring 2024. An amazing 400+ people took part!

Each sculpture is made up of a unique signpost background thought up by our workshop participants and featured their wildlife designs. They crafted these designs using different artistic techniques, including collage, clay building and painting, to celebrate native species. Throughout the process they learnt more about local environments and the reptiles

and amphibians that call Walsall home.

To create the speaking element of the sculptures, community members recorded their nature memories and combined them with their favourite natural sounds to form a soundscape. Each sculpture has its own soundscape, which can be accessed through a QR code on the sculpture or via our website.

Rokshana Akter, Women's Wellbeing Support Officer at the A'aina Community Hub, shared that "Seeing their creations in the park made [participants] feel proud, and some also expressed how it gave them a deeper connection to the community by knowing their work contributed to enhancing the park."





To make sure that this fantastic community artwork supports local wildlife as well as inspiring people, each sculpture incorporates two habitats: a habitat pile and a bird box, crafted by the Caldmore Community Gardens Men's Shed group.

Estelle Fisher, Assistant Community Development Worker at Caldmore Community Garden, told us that "It's been a fantastic opportunity for our groups to work together on a nature related art project and to be able to bring families and friends to see the results. It's a creative and vibrant way to provide a habitat for insects, bugs and birds."

These unique Speaking Sculptures have found permanent homes on show in Walsall Arboretum, Caldmore Community Garden, Park Lime Pits, Palfrey Park, Pelsall North Common, Pleck Park, Reedswood Park, and Swannies Field. You can look up the exact location to visit the sculptures by scanning the QR code on this page.

Reedswood Park's Leaping Frog

We were fortunate to receive a grant from the Ironmongers Company in 2024, which allowed us to create a bonus statement sculpture within Reedswood Park, a large park in central Walsall. It celebrates the significant habitat improvements we made to the park's ponds in 2023, thanks to

funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The artwork was designed by the community, during fun consultation sessions with local schools and community groups. They voted for the freshwater species that they wanted the sculpture to portray and shared their creative ideas for the design. These ideas were then brought to life by the incredible sculptural artist Luke Perry.

The final sculpture is a spectacular steel leaping frog that carries the message "We Protect Nature". We hope this sculpture can inspire people to join us in our mission to make practical differences to improve amphibian and reptile habitats and be a beautiful public celebration of our amazing amphibians.

Richard McVittie from Walsall council shared that "The sculpture caps off a successful project that

changes the way that people see Reedswood park."

Louise Harrison, the deputy mayor of Walsall says that "The frog is beautiful. He's well-made and people are going to love him. People driving or walking past will definitely see and enjoy this".

By Elsbeth Leighton. *Elsbeth is Froglife's Coalface to Wildspace Project Assistant in the Midlands.*

Coalface to Wildspace, Midlands is made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage the local community with nature and enhance the local environment through Neighbourhood Wildlife Corridors.

Scan to see the Speaking Sculptures on the Froglife website



Art and creativity are wonderful and accessible ways to explore and connect with nature. The creativity of the Coalface to Wildspace Midlands project has enabled us to build a lasting impact within Walsall and work with local people to share in our vision of creating a world in which reptile and amphibian populations are flourishing as part of healthy ecosystems.

If you happen to be in Walsall, why not visit some of our spectacular community artworks?



Coalface to Wildspace

Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire & The Lothians



Towards the end of 2024, thanks to lottery players, the Froglife Trust was awarded a development grant from National Heritage Lottery Fund (NLHF) to develop our next project in Scotland. This project will achieve landscape scale habitat creation and restoration across three Scottish regions (Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, and The Lothians), primarily for the benefit of reptile and amphibian species, but it will also be beneficial for the wide range of other species that share the same freshwater and terrestrial habitats. Running alongside the habitat works we will be delivering an innovative programme of public engagement activities.

The development phase will be managed by our new Project Manager, Mark Chambers, who will be supported by our in-house Ecologist, Darren Starkey, and by a Consultation Consultant. We

will be working with a Fundraising Consultant to secure the co-funding. The development team will be focusing on the following:

Landscape scale habitat creation & restoration:

- Developing the Habitat Action Plans to create 54 new, and to restore 25, freshwater bodies. Accompanied by the enhancement of 24 terrestrial habitats to support the dispersal, foraging and over-wintering of wildlife.
- Developing the plans to work within nine neighbourhoods to enhance connectivity between the large scale aforementioned freshwater bodies. The Neighbourhood Wildlife Corridors (NWC) will be created by communities currently underserved by the heritage sector, who will, with the support of

Froglife staff and volunteers, manually create and restore 36 ponds. Connectivity will be further enhanced through the installation of 72 other nature friendly interventions, including wildlife homes, hibernacula, wildflower strips, basking banks, and bug hotels.

Public Engagement Programme:

Digital Outputs:

- Planning the creation of a 3D film featuring the geological changes of the regions over millennia and how these changes have informed the evolution of reptiles and amphibians.
- Formalising the Augmented Reality to accompany nature trails, delivering interactive activities to do around the trails.



- Setting up QR Codes for Speaking Sculptures that will inform users of the role the statues play for wildlife.

Public Engagement Activities:

- Developing natural creative art sessions/workshops to build and install nature focused elements at sites, Speaking Sculptures creation workshops and Mapestry workshops.
- Planning Wildlife Gardening Workshops using Lego to create mock wildlife gardens, to be followed by outdoor sessions to build and install Neighbourhood Wildlife Corridors.
- Liaising with schools and youth groups to deliver performance art with dance and sound sessions, creating dances around the movement, sound

and ecology of amphibian and reptile species.

- Setting up training courses to equip Coalface to Wildspace Guardian groups to manage large-scale habitat sites and Neighbourhood Wildlife Corridors.

Events:

- Identifying venues for the 3D film tour such as community halls and fringe theatres.
- Planning the Mapestry tour around built heritage venues.
- Planning celebration events at large-scale habitat sites.

This project will be training circa 550 volunteers and will engage directly with approximately 39,000 people.

The development team will certainly be kept busy for most of 2025 pulling all the elements together for the project delivery to start in 2026. As mentioned, we will be working with a Consultant Fundraiser to help us with securing the co-funding that will need to be in place to secure the NLHF delivery grant. If any readers have a few pennies lying around looking for a worthwhile investment, we would love to hear from you.





Reptiles at our Reserves

All reptiles are ectotherms, or cold-blooded animals. This means that they rely on external sources of heat to regulate their body temperature. Given the climate in the UK, all 6 native species of land-based reptiles are most active during the spring and summer months.

Froglife are very fortunate to manage some fabulous nature reserves in and around the East of England. Between them, these sites are home to four of our native reptile species; adders, grass snakes, slow worms and common or viviparous lizards. The name viviparous derives from the fact that, unusually for reptiles, they give birth to live young.

For us to protect and conserve reptiles and their habitats, it is vital that we have as much information as possible about their numbers, distribution and behaviour. The spring and summer seasons are

when we carry out all this critical survey work. Survey work begins in April and continues throughout the summer for as long as the reptiles are active. In the past this was usually in September but in recent years this has often continued into October. A very tangible reminder of the impact climate change is having on all our native wildlife.

Surveys are undertaken by our Reserve Warden, Trainees and our volunteers, many of whom have been volunteering their time for a decade or more. The surveys are organised into a series of 8 transects, which form a predetermined route across differing areas of the site. Spread throughout the transects are a series of monitoring stations. Each point consists of a carpet tile and a corrugated iron sheet, both 50cm squared, placed next to each other. The shelter and warmth provided by the survey tiles is the ideal habitat for a reptile. They are

often be found either basking on the tins to warm up or hiding in the shade of the carpet tile.

Surveyors carefully turn over the tiles and record any reptiles they see. Slow worms and adders are most frequently encountered underneath the tiles whilst the lizards are generally warming on their surface. Records are kept of species and, where possible, age and gender. The surveyors often encounter other species taking advantage of the warmth and shelter including dragonflies, and great crested and smooth newts.

The data we collect every year helps us to build up a picture of how our reptiles are faring on our sites but also feeds into national data sets to help inform the bigger picture of reptile conservation across the UK.

By Darren Starkey. *Darren is Froglife's Operations Manager.*

Reptile Surveys for Beginners

Carrying out reptile surveys may seem like a daunting task at first, but it is actually a very simple process. Anyone can survey without the need for prior experience, money or equipment. Plus, there are only four species to learn, so it won't take long before you are confidently identifying each one of them! We do have two additional native reptiles, the smooth snake and sand lizard, however, they are incredibly rare and a license is required to survey for them, so it is best to focus on the four widespread species. The four widespread species are grass snakes, adders, common lizards and slow worms.

The survey season usually runs from March to October, although it is dependent on weather conditions. Choose a dry, sunny day, ideally with little to no wind, and temperatures between 8-18°C. This is when reptiles are most likely to be out basking to

regulate their body temperature. Sunny weather immediately after cold or rainy conditions is perfect, as reptiles will be eager to get out and bask immediately.

The next step is to choose a suitable location to survey. Choose an area that is fairly open with varied vegetation structure; think a 'mosaic' of vegetation. Reptiles also love habitat edges and transitional zones between different habitat types (e.g. woodland and grassland), and even path edges bordered by vegetation can be great. Try to avoid monocultures and areas which are heavily disturbed by humans.

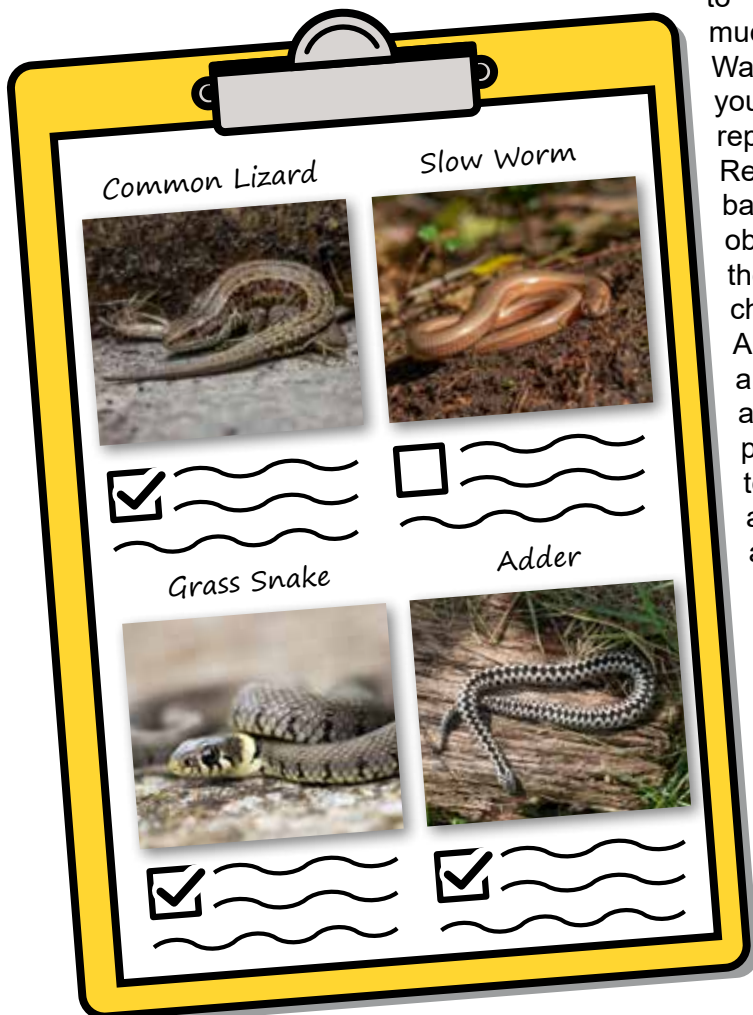
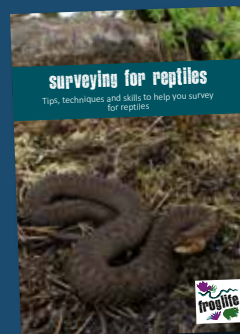
Now we are ready to survey! The easiest method to start with is the visual encounter method. Simply plan a walking route as long or short as you like, that will go through areas of suitable habitat, and remember to stick to habitat edges as much as possible. Walk slowly along your route looking for reptiles as you go. Reptiles will typically bask on or under objects that get hot in the sun, so be sure to check any of these. Abandoned tyres and metal sheeting are particularly popular. Remember to take your time, be as quiet as you can, and scan ahead. If you see or hear rustling, stop, take a step back, and wait 5-10 minutes. If reptiles are disturbed while basking, they usually return to the same spot soon after.

Now you know when and how to survey, it's time to get started! We are setting you a challenge for this upcoming survey season: go out and conduct 2-4 daytime surveys (although the more the merrier), and record any sightings on the Dragon Finder App (scan the QR code).



For more in-depth information and tips, techniques and skills to help you further develop your

reptile surveying skills, you can download our **Surveying for Reptiles** booklet. This will also help you learn more about each species that you find.



If you find a toad in a tree, which does happen (scan the QR code for information on this!), please report it directly to us and make sure you take a picture! We are calling on members of the public to record any sightings they have of amphibians in trees on our Dragon Finder App (including the details in the comments section of the report) or to contact us directly at: info@froglife.org



Gardening for Wildlife

Did you know there are an estimated 24 million gardens in the UK? Together, they cover a vast area larger than all our national parks combined. These green spaces can serve as havens for wildlife and provide a much-needed sanctuary for many species. Why not dedicate part of your garden to supporting wildlife? If you don't have a garden, a balcony, window ledge, or even an allotment can work perfectly — and you can involve your community too! Here are a few ideas to inspire you in the coming months.

By Paul Arestides. *Paul is one of Froglife's Transforming Lives trainees.*

Ponds

Ponds or water features are always a fantastic starting point for any wildlife-friendly garden. They often become the heart of the space, especially when designed with wildlife in mind. The excitement of seeing a frog, toad, or newt is always a spectacle at any age and gives a huge sense of achievement and satisfaction. Ponds also play a crucial role in supporting birds, mammals, and insects, creating a rich and diverse habitat.

If you can't dig a pond you can use anything from an old washing-up bowl to a disused tin bath or sink to create a pond, just make sure you add a ramp (this could be a pile of bricks) to allow wildlife to enter and exit safely. Planning and building a new pond is both fun and rewarding, offering a peaceful spot to sit and enjoy the wildlife you've attracted throughout the summer months. For guidance on how to create a pond, our Froglife website is packed with helpful information to get you started.

Log piles

Create a log pile in a quiet part of the garden - it is simple and fun to do. Not only will it attract reptiles and amphibians but can also be a haven for insects and will attract feeding birds and hedgehogs.



Rockeries

Rockeries are a wonderful way to create a space filled with beautiful flowering plants, rocks, and stones, making them ideal for reptiles and amphibians while also attracting pollinators. These spaces provide reptiles with sunny spots to bask, as well as areas to rest and feed. Building a rockery is a great follow-up task after digging a pond, as the soil from the excavation can be used for this purpose. To enhance the habitat, consider adding old logs, branches, and bricks as you build the rockery, creating additional areas for reptiles and amphibians to burrow into.

Compost

Compost is essential for a thriving garden, and it can be easily created by building a small open structure with two bays or simply by piling it in a corner. Be sure to add plenty of small broken twigs, cardboard, and dry matter alongside food peelings and grass cuttings to help balance the decomposition process. Compost heaps provide an ideal environment for various insects, and the warmth generated by the rotting material often attracts grass snakes. If you're lucky, you might even have the pleasure of these beautiful reptiles laying their eggs in your compost!

Grass

With 97% of flower-rich meadows lost since the 1930s and this having a detrimental impact on pollinators, why not leave an area of grass to grow and flourish? This patch of lawn can become part of your garden display, encouraging insects, butterflies and bees whilst also being a great area for amphibians, reptiles, and birds. You will be amazed at what will return year after year.

If you want to make this area a thriving meadow, you can remove the turf and some topsoil and seed it with a native wildflower mix. This will help prevent the grass from outcompeting the wildflowers and will reduce the nutrients in the soil, which benefits these species.





The Effects of Drought on Amphibians and Reptiles

Sitting writing this article watching the sleet pouring down outside on a cold January day, it's hard to think that droughts are having a damaging effect on our reptiles and amphibians. However, UK weather is being impacted by climate change, and we are more regularly experiencing extremes of temperature and rainfall.

This winter the Environment

Agency has carried out a public consultation on "Drought: how it is managed in England", which is the updated version of the 'National Drought Response Framework' released in 2017. The report describes droughts as:

"Natural events which we cannot prevent. They reduce available water supplies and can have negative impacts on people,

wildlife and the environment. Drought is featured as a risk facing England on the National Risk Register, and we will likely experience more frequent and severe droughts in the future due to our changing climate."

While some reptiles have developed adaptations to cope with water scarcity, all UK amphibians require moist habitats and open water for breeding. As a result, amphibians are expected to suffer more than reptiles which are better adapted to drier environments.

As water levels decrease:

- breeding ponds can reduce in size or dry out completely, limiting or completely stopping amphibian reproduction. Common frogs can speed up their development in response to their breeding ponds drying up, however, this can lead to them metamorphosing at smaller body sizes which can reduce their life chances. Common toads are unable to change their development rate, hence favouring larger more stable water bodies.



- feeding opportunities for grass snakes are impacted, as they often hunt in open water.
- the concentration of any pollutants in freshwater bodies increases, increasing the damaging effects on species that encounter them.
- vegetation and the land itself can dry out reducing the availability of moist/humid environments for amphibians to shelter. In worse case scenarios this can lead to death.
- habitats can become fragmented, reducing available space for amphibians and

reptiles to disperse, making populations more susceptible to climate change effects.

The impacts of droughts are exacerbated by the reduction in the number of freshwater bodies in the environment, caused by humans. Froglife receives regular reports of water bodies being lost due to poor management, concerns over health and safety and building developments.

Advocating for nature

Froglife is a member of Wildlife and Countryside Link: the largest environment and wildlife coalition in England, bringing together 86

organisations to use their strong joint voice for the protection of nature. We joined forces to submit a response to the Environment Agency consultation calling for a more proactive, holistic approach to managing drought in England than that which is set out within the document. Drought management in practice remains largely comprised of reactive measures and focused overwhelmingly on public water supply whilst neglecting environmental and agricultural impacts.

By Jenny Tse-Leon. *Jenny is Froglife's Head of Conservation and Impact.*

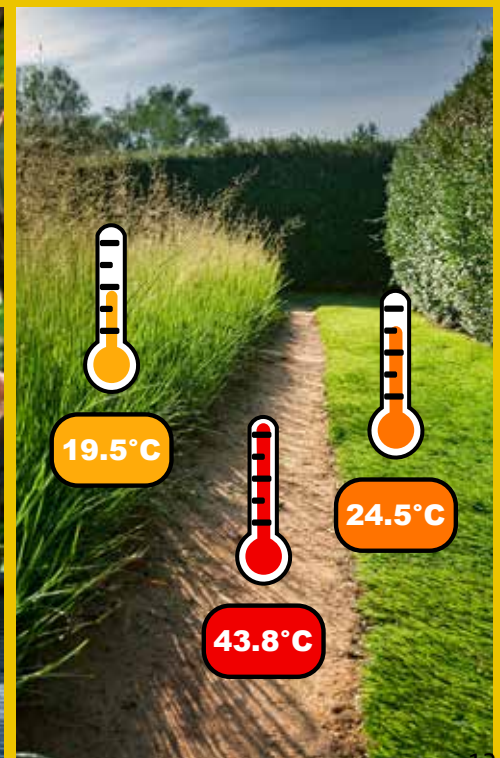
How you can help

We are very grateful to all our supporters whose donations help us to carry out this core advocacy work. In addition to supporting Froglife (by becoming a Froglife Friend, leaving a legacy, fundraising for us), here are a few ideas of what you can do at home to help mitigate against the impacts of drought:

Create ponds and/or bog gardens in your garden / allotment.

Campaign for ponds to be created or volunteer to help manage ponds in your local open spaces including schools, nursing home grounds, etc.

Leave grass to grow long – adding structural diversity to your lawn helps maintain humid environments and keeps the surface temperature cooler.





London Blue Chain

Habitat works across London



A London Blue Chain pond within the Rouel Community Orchard in Southwark

Being someone who works outside a lot, one of the pleasures of the job is to experience the changing of the seasons first-hand. As part of the project, we did not let the shorter days and cooler temperatures of winter affect our enthusiasm, and managed to complete a wide range of habitat work during the season – under some crisp and bright blue skies too!

We use the November-January 'maintenance window' to do work on existing ponds which needed restoration, because the number of animals using ponds is at its lowest, thus minimising damage and disturbance. We also take advantage of the increased rainfall during the winter months to fill up newly created ponds ready for the spring breeding season.

Our biggest restoration was of Nunhead Cemetery's 30-year-old

unlined pond. We cleared out dense mats of yellow flag iris rhizome and dug through a thick layer of silt and organic matter to reveal the original high-quality London clay on which the pond was first built. We also pruned back some overhanging branches from around the pond area to prevent leaf fall, and used the spoil removed from the pond to form the start of what will eventually become an outdoor education area adjacent to the pond. The team also completed habitat management and restoration work at Agnes Riley Gardens in Lambeth. Here, we removed some invasive parrot's feather from within the pond and created some hibernacula across the wider park area.

Our Froglife Ecological Services (FES) team completed major restoration work at multiple large sites over the winter period, too.

At Lewisham's Sydenham Wells Park, a drainage channel leading into the pond was de-silted, along with the pond itself. The London Wildlife Trust's Birdbrook Nature Reserve – a Site of Metropolitan Importance – benefitted from having its multiple ponds de-silted, deepened and re-profiled. This site is already a hotspot for amphibians and reptiles, and we hope that this work will further strengthen its resilience and boost breeding productivity in the spring.

We are now looking forward to the warmer Spring and Summer months when we will be enjoying exploring local green spaces with local communities, watching the excitement of the breeding season and listening out for the telltale rustle of a reptile basking in the early morning sun.

As always with London Blue Chain, our overarching mission is to complete landscape-scale habitat interventions for reptiles and amphibians in south London, but also to always involve individuals and communities from the local area in these works. We'll be at Lambeth's ever-popular Brockwell Park, creating a natural, clay-lined pond which will become one of the project's five 'medium'-sized sites.

Elsewhere in Lambeth we are aiming to complete a small pond in collaboration with The Garden Museum, in Waterloo. This pond will be a fantastic asset both to the local community and to the museum itself. We will be



Volunteers support with the restoration of Nunhead Cemetery's pond, in Southwark

making the most of the warm weather as much as possible, too, by continuing outdoor training sessions for community groups and volunteers across the summer. Engagement with young people at locations such as The Somerville in New Cross, Brixton's BIGKID Foundation and Deptford's The Albany will also continue. Here, we'll running creative sessions and getting stuck into some of the ponds in the local area, to see what creatures we can find!

The London Blue Chain Guardians element of the project will also be continuing across the warmer months. Our focus here is to engage community groups in a training programme which will ultimately instil confidence, expertise and know-how into these groups so that beyond the lifespan of the project they can take ownership of and maintain and monitor many of the London Blue Chain's new blue habitats. We'll take groups to their ponds to plant them up and assess areas for improvement before finally co-producing a maintenance plan for each pond. During the spring, we will undertake surveys of these habitats, to assess the improvements that have hopefully been made to the populations of our species.

We will also be getting creative this summer – running outdoor sessions with south London-based freelancers who will be working with local groups to produce posters, create stories and even re-enact the ecosystems found within our wildlife ponds. The beautiful growing space at The Albany, the South London Botanical Institute and Palace Road Nature Garden will all play host to this special summer programming, so keep your eyes peeled!

From the start, this project has been about people and wildlife, jointly, and founded upon the idea that for conservation projects to

be sustainable overall, they must have local people embedded at their heart. As such, you can expect us to continue our work creating new small ponds across the six boroughs we're working in – at locations such as Horne Park in Greenwich, within St. Martin's estate in Lambeth and at the well-loved Brockwell Park, also in Lambeth.

If you'd like to find out more about the project, please email the team on londonbluechain@froglife.org. You can also enquire to get registered for our newsletter here, which goes out monthly and contains full details of all recent activity and forthcoming events to get involved with!

By Harry Forshaw. *Harry is Froglife's London Blue Chain Project Manager.*

This project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. A big thank you to players of the National Lottery.



Members of the local community work to create a new pond at Upper Norwood Recreation Ground

Encounters in the Warmer Months



As a child, you might have heard enchanting tales of mythical creatures—a warty dragon with a rippling crest, a fiery orange belly, and a dazzling tail gliding through a pond, or a golden-striped reptile hidden in a distant cave. While these legends may have sparked your imagination, the thrill of discovering real-life wonders like a male great crested newt in a freshwater pond or a juvenile slow worm in a sunlit meadow can be just as magical. Observing these fascinating species in their natural habitats is a joy to share with family and friends, especially young children who are eager to explore nature's secrets. If you're lucky enough to spot these incredible creatures, be sure to snap some photos and share your sightings with us on our Dragon Finder app.

What are our reptiles and amphibians doing in the warmer months?

During the spring months, amphibians and reptiles emerge from their brumation and begin their breeding season. You may come across spawn and tadpoles in a freshwater environment. As tempting as it may be to move spawn from one freshwater habitat to another, it is best not to handle or disturb species during their breeding period. The collection and transfer of spawn between different habitats poses a significant threat to our species. This can lead to the transmission of diseases and viruses, which can have devastating effects on populations.

By the summer, many species will be in their metamorphosis

stage, such as froglets, toadlets, and efts. You may feel compelled to protect young species from the heat and transfer them to a damp, cool space, thinking they are vulnerable. Amphibians have a chemosensory system that allows them to sense water from long distances. If a species is found in an exposed area, they are likely foraging or migrating to a freshwater habitat.

What to do when handling an amphibian or reptile:

- The most important thing to know is that you need a license to handle certain herpetofauna species. You must not disturb or alter their habitats, as this risks contributing to the decline of their population. This applies to species such as the great crested newt, smooth snake, sand lizard, and natterjack toad.
- As amphibians and reptiles are cold-blooded vertebrates, they thermoregulate externally. When discovered, they may be migrating to a space to regulate their temperature. It is important not to handle them with your hands, as you may overheat them.
- Lizards may become stressed and drop their tails as a defence mechanism, as the act of handling them could lead them to think of you as a predator. So, it's best just to leave them be!
- If handling them for educational or conservation purposes, you must wear gloves to prevent the species from absorbing chemicals from your hands

through their skin.

Help prevent the spread of diseases and viruses

There are diseases and viruses that can spread among amphibians and reptiles, such as Ranavirus and Chytridiomycosis. These two diseases have significantly contributed to the decline of amphibian and reptile populations. There is no cure for these diseases yet, but their spread can be limited by:

- Not transferring spawn or eggs between different habitats, as the spread of Ranavirus can occur through water as well as direct contact. The transmission of Ranavirus can cause significant declines in both aquatic and terrestrial communities.
- Not handling amphibians or reptiles unless for surveying or educational purposes. If you must handle them, remember to wear gloves and keep the species in trays or bottle traps. All equipment, clothing, and footwear must be cleaned and dried before handling species in a new habitat to prevent the spread of pathogens.
- If handled, always release the amphibian or reptile in the same habitat where you found it.
- If you identify a species with a disease or virus, report it to the Garden Wildlife Health website.

By Mariam Turay. *Mariam is one of Froglife's London Blue Chain trainees.*

Transforming Lives

This amazing project was generously funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund to provide a comprehensive nature conservation training programme for up to over 3 years ending in April 2025. The 2 main differences the project has endeavoured to make were to diversify the conservation sector and improve habitats on the three Froglife managed Nature Reserves.

The project attracted a lot of applicants as this is a rare opportunity to get into conservation without a relevant degree or years of volunteering experience which can act as a barrier to some especially those from lower income backgrounds. Our current cohort of 4 trainees are working towards the end of their traineeship in April which will complete the project. Out of the 10 trainees in the previous 2 years, so far, 6 have successfully secured positions in the conservation sector. Fingers crossed for this year's trainees!

The nature conservation sector is the least diverse sector out of all the charitable sectors, and the UK cannot save nature unless we have the buy-in of all communities living here. The diversity of our trainees varies through age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, socio-economic background and physical and learning disabilities. This diversity gives new perspectives to the world of conservation and exposes more communities to the beauty and wonder of nature to enthuse them to want to protect it.

The trainees have been an integral part of maintaining the reserves we manage over the last 3 years, for the benefit of reptiles and amphibians. Most of the trainees' learning happened on these reserves, from shadowing our Reserve Warden carrying out a range of activities from habitat management to reptile surveys.

They also work with volunteers regularly, giving them invaluable experience learning how to manage them safely and ensure they are getting the most from their experiences. We also reached out to other projects within Froglife to get experience of how they work and to see how the areas they work in differ from the reserve management. External shadowing was also arranged with Nene Park Trust and Butterfly Conservation showing how other organisations work and how they manage their reserves for varying purposes.

Crucially, the traineeships were successful because the trainees were passionate about wildlife and conservation. They got stuck in and worked hard because they love working outdoors. As the traineeship was a full year, they got to see how the work they did on the reserves benefited the wildlife that lived there. Working across a year really shows how seasonal the job is and how planning is essential to ensure everything gets done on time.

It's been a privilege watching people blossom over the traineeship from people that struggled to hold eye contact when talking to become enthusiastic and competent trainee reserve wardens that wax lyrical about conservation and welcome people on to the reserve like old pros. Spending time to recognise the strengths of people and build their confidence through person-centred learning has been the key to success for most trainees. This enabled them to focus on the branch of conservation they wanted to work in and how to get there.

By Clare Middleton. *Clare is Froglife's Reserve Warden and Trainer.*





District-Level Licensing for Great Crested Newt Conservation

The great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) is one of the UK's most iconic amphibians, known for its striking appearance (which still gets a wow from me after all this time) and ecological significance. However, like many species, it faces significant threats from

habitat loss, fragmentation, and infrastructure developments by humans.

Conservationists and developers have long wrestled with the challenges of finding a solution to balancing ecological preservation

with the need for economic growth through development. Enter district-level licensing, a pioneering approach designed to streamline the often-lengthy processes while enhancing the species' protection.

HOW?

The DLL process begins with an ecological assessment of a district, identifying areas of high conservation value and potential for habitat creation. Developers contribute a fee based on the scale of their projects and the anticipated impact on newts. These funds are then used to establish and maintain habitats in designated areas which is where Froglife Ecological Services as a HBD comes in creating and restoring ponds and enhancing terrestrial habitats.

WHY?

Traditionally, protecting great crested newts involved a site-by-site licensing process, which could be time-consuming, costly, and often ineffective. Developers were required to identify the presence of newts on their sites and mitigate any impact by relocating populations or enhancing local habitats. While well-intentioned, this approach was often subject to criticism for its fragmented nature, limited ecological benefits, and delays in project timelines. Often the lack of long-term habitat planning resulted in a failure to deliver successful conservation outcomes.

WHAT?

District-level licensing is a strategic, landscape-scale approach introduced by Natural England. Instead of focusing on individual development sites, it assesses impacts on newts across entire districts. Developers pay into a central fund, which is used to create and manage high-quality habitats for newts in optimal locations through local Habitat Delivery Bodies (HDBs) of which Froglife Ecological Services has been appointed. This proactive strategy ensures that conservation efforts are more effective, coordinated, and sustainable.

Natural England oversees the program, ensuring that habitat creation meets strict ecological standards and fulfils agreed criteria. This ensures newts benefit from habitats designed specifically to meet their needs.

To date Froglife Ecological services has created and restored fast approaching 100 ponds through the scheme in the counties of Essex and Leicester. This year is set to be more of the same with more works planned and monitoring of previous ponds scheduled.



Looking ahead

The success of district-level licensing for great crested newts has the potential to serve as a model for other species and conservation challenges. But effective monitoring of the scheme will be required to understand the overall impact on great crested newts at a national scale. By integrating ecological science, policy, and development needs, this approach demonstrates how innovative solutions can integrate conservation and development.

District-level licensing offers great crested newts a chance to thrive in a landscape increasingly shaped by human activity. For developers it provides clarity and efficiency, speeding up often lengthy processes. Most importantly it demonstrates that with creativity and collaboration we can find solutions that work for both people and nature.

By James McAdie. *James is Head of Operations at FrogLife Ecological Services.*



If you are a landowner interested in pond creation or restoration for Great Crested Newts and have suitable land in the Essex or Leicester area please get in touch with our FES Operations Manager via james.mcadie@froglife.org

Toads on Roads FAQs



How do I know when to start patrolling?

Toad migrations

typically begin between late January (in southwest England) and late March (in northeast England and eastern Scotland). Start patrolling on consistently mild nights ($>5^{\circ}\text{C}$) with wet weather. Monitor the local weather forecast (e.g., Met Office or BBC Weather) and check night-time conditions for the best guidance.

To know when toads are moving in your area:

- Have someone nearby regularly check the road for activity.
- Follow Froglife's social media for updates on toad movements.

Toads tend to start migrating earlier in the South-West and later across the rest of the UK, but this varies depending on local weather conditions. Be prepared and ensure all patrollers are ready once the migration begins.

How do I handle the toads?

When handling

toads, follow these guidelines to ensure their safety and comply with animal welfare standards:

- Minimise handling: Handle toads only when necessary and keep the time they are retained in containers as short as possible.
- Use proper gloves: Preferably use powder-free vinyl gloves over latex or nitrile. Use a single set of gloves per patrol site and dispose of them safely afterward. For reptile translocations, use a new pair of gloves for each species and site.
- For unplanned rescues: If gloves aren't available, handle amphibians with bare hands that have been wetted with unchlorinated water. If prolonged holding is needed, place the animal in an appropriate container until it can be released safely.

How can I help amphibians trapped in drains?

To help animals

trapped in road drains, it's important to gain permission from your local Highways Department before attempting to lift drains, as they can be very heavy and cause injury. Instead, you can use a long net to safely rescue trapped animals. Additionally, consider writing to your local council to encourage the installation of Wildlife Gully Ladders. These ladders, made from mesh, help amphibians, reptiles, and other small creatures escape from drainage gullies, especially during migration periods when they may fall in. Installing these ladders is a low-cost solution for wildlife conservation. Always contact your local council first to discuss the possibility of installation.

What do I do if I suspect an amphibian has a disease?

If you suspect any amphibian disease in your toad population, it's important to either take a photo or send a specimen to the Garden Wildlife Health project (www.gardenwildlifehealth.org) for identification. To prevent the spread of disease, always clean your gloves, footwear, and equipment with sodium hypochlorite, following the guidance on the container, and dispose of it safely after each patrol. Be sure to emphasise the importance of this hygiene practice to fellow patrollers to protect local wildlife.

How do I record and report data for Toad Patrols?

Once you've collected your records, submit the data to the Toads on Roads Portal. The portal provides guidance on how to record and submit your data effectively.

Accurate data submission helps track toad migration and conservation efforts, so ensure all records are complete and submitted promptly.

Which way do I move the toads?

Toads typically move from terrestrial habitats to breeding ponds during migration. Use Google Maps to identify potential breeding ponds and overwintering grounds (often woodlands) to help determine their direction. If habitats exist on both sides of the road and it's unclear which way the toads are heading, make a judgment call, prioritising their immediate safety by removing them from the road.

Towards the end of the season, toads may be traveling in either direction. If you're unsure, move them to the side of the breeding pond for the best chance of safety.

Should species/sexes be separated into different buckets?

Yes, it is best to use two buckets—one for female toads or those in amplexus (mating position) and another for male toads and other species. This prevents the formation of a "mating ball," where multiple males cling to a single female, which can harm the animals.

If your bucket contains a "layer" of toads, record the details and release them safely on the other side of the road. Share these records with the patrol leader to ensure accurate totals. Avoid stacking toads on top of each other because the welfare of the toads during release is just as important as their rescue.

Scan the QR code to be taken to the Toads on Roads Portal:



Summer Words and Stories

Frog Tadpoles

In thousands, we waited, dreaming slowly in jelly,
Gathering in wriggling hundreds,
Jaws clashed, beaks stabbed, we
Dwindle and
A last
Hope
Hides.



Metamorphosis

Midsummer dew
Invites adventures,
Tempting questers out of familiar shallows,
Over sand, over gravel,
Into tangles of grass
And footpath deserts,
Clambering, scrambling,
A froglet's first hop.



Toadpoles

One,
And
Then three,
And now five,
And more and still more,
Wriggling, swarming, swirling, pouring,
A seething tide patrolling the pond's perimeters.

Questioning

What will you do
If the lizards come running,
In a sand-dry skitter,
Into your heart?

What will you do
If the newts flick their tails,
And glide through
The walls of your detachment?

What will you do
If a snake in its beauty,
Enchants you and
Dissolves the barriers of your disgust?

What will you do
When mud unfolds legs,
And a toad's eye opens and
Draws you into golden wonder and amphibian delight?

Sun-Warmed Bank

Soaked in sunlight
Until the warmth wakes and
New life is born
Within log
And leaf litter and
Rockpile and stone.
Marvels here
Explore on slender toes or, scrabbling,
Dig sandy
Burrows
And
New lives are
Kindled again.



Spindleshanks

Twig-legs and determination,
Drives them up and out,
An adolescent graduation.
Leaving home,
Setting out into the perils of wood, field and
flowerbed,
Leaving pond and cool water behind.
Ahead is drying heat,
And a path's expanse,
And hungry mouths,
And stamping feet.
Leaving pool and depth and secrecy
But this is the young hero's quest
To thrive and grow,
With the relentless optimism
Of new froglets.

Jewels

Among water lilies in deep mud,
Black pearls on a silver string
A necklace stranded in the weeds,
Holds the hidden treasures of spring
Summer warms the world to richness,
Wakes the pearls to wriggling wonders
Dries the pond to star-cracked mud,
And sends toadlets into great green yonders.

Waiting

Where does my joy lie?
With a coiled snake on a sun-warmed stone?
With quicksilver, slow-worms flowing over fallen leaves?
With a lizard on the log-pile, basking and watchful?
Where does my joy wait?
With lingering frogs in summer pools?
With newts, poised,
Suspended dragons on the sunlit, spotlit stage of a pond's depth?
Where does my delight wake?
With a late hatch of flying ants
Rousing the toads to excitement.

A Frog

A frog
Blinks, gulps, measures
The distance between hope
Hunger and safety, calculates,
And leaps.

But toads
Will watch and wait
Gauging those lengths and leaps
Discarding all in favour of
A strike.

Amphibian Magics

Too many young wizards,
With over-eager wands,
Give us too many frogs
In summer ponds.

But,
Sneaking out of their lessons,
Enthusiastic junior witches,
Have filled field edge and hedgerow
With mobs of toads in ditches.



These are the writings
educator, artist,
zoologist and Froglife
trustee, Gordon
MacLellan. Gordon
combines scientific and
expressive fields to
offer challenging and
exciting workshops
which you can learn
more about on his
website:
www.creepingtoad.com

frogalogue

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Jules Howard ~ Kate Bradbury

VOLUNTEERS

And last, but certainly not least, a big thank you to all of our volunteers especially all those toad patrollers who are doing such a terrific job again this year.

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



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 £29.95

