

Toad Patrol FAQ's

Before I Patrol

What equipment do I need to safely patrol?

You will need a decent torch, a bucket that has not been used for household chemicals and a high-viz jacket. You will need to wear warm and waterproof clothing too. You should also carry a mobile phone in case of emergencies.

When will the migration start & end each year?

This depends on the weather and varies from year to year. Typically, the patrols run from February until the end of March. There will be some nights within this period where we do not patrol as the weather will not always be suitable for amphibian movement.

What time does the nightly patrol start?

This also depends on the date and the weather. Patrols start as soon as it gets dark and this is earlier in February than it is in late March. We tend to give some guidance on this in our update emails once the patrols have started for the year. When the clocks spring forward at the end of March then patrols won't start until after 19:30, but in late January or early Feb they could start before 18:00. The weather also influences this as amphibians will start to move earlier if it's raining. Again, we will give guidance on this in our updates.

How long does the patrol last each night?

It all depends on the weather. Generally, patrols run for 1 to 1 & ½ hours, from as soon as it gets dark, as this covers the peak movement and also often coincides with rush hour.

As mentioned above, on wet nights toads will start moving a little earlier (at sunset for example - maybe 15-20 mins earlier than on dry nights). In normal conditions toad movement tends to slow or stop after an hour or so as most will move as soon as it is dark. If it has been dry for a while and conditions are suddenly good (for example, a downpour at 2am) then this may encourage toads to move then, but thankfully traffic volumes should be negligible at that time.

We also get nights when conditions are right on the cusp and the odd toad could move at any time throughout the night. We can't do too much about those nights as we can't have people out all night on the off chance of saving a few toads. It's a balancing act and we try to get good numbers of volunteers out on the nights when we expect decent toad movement at peak times. We have to guard against volunteers burning out and also have to ensure that volunteers are not on their own on site.

Is it too cold/warm/windy/dry tonight for amphibian activity?

Toads prefer air temperatures above 6 degrees; they don't like very strong winds and are more likely to move during rainfall, if there is a wet road surface or in humid & cloudy conditions. We often use the 'Real Feel' guide on many forecasts which tells you how cold it will feel rather than the actual baseline temperature.

We tend to give some guidance on this in our update emails once the patrols have started for the year. If we are sure that conditions are going to be too cold then we won't have anybody out on those nights. If it is likely to be a little on the cold side then we may just

have a couple of people out to quickly check the site. In early-mid Spring in the UK it is unlikely to ever be too warm for toads to be moving.

Can I wear gloves?

Most volunteers just use their hands rather than wearing gloves but you are fine to wear fabric gloves if you prefer not to touch the toads. This can make picking up smaller toads and newts a bit more tricky and if you wash the gloves this must just be done using hot water and no chemicals. If you wear disposable gloves these should be either vinyl or failing that Nitrile gloves and not latex. If using bare hands then please ensure that your hands are chemical-free (no soap, no hand sanitiser or hand cream for example).

Is touching a toad/frog/newt with a bare hand safe?

Yes, it is perfectly safe for you but can be harmful to the amphibians if you have any salt or chemicals on your hands. You cannot get warts or catch any disease from handling toads or other amphibians. You should wash your hands well after patrolling though. Many patrols now suggest that volunteers wear vinyl or Nitrile gloves (whether disposable or longer lasting options). Our preference would be longer-lasting non-disposable gloves due to their reduced negative environmental impact. If re-using any gloves these should only be used at 1 patrol site and not for any other purpose or at any other location containing amphibians (native or non-native) such as your garden pond, other patrol sites or for captive reptiles and amphibian collections.

What sort of torch should I use?

This is up to the individual patroller. If you plan to be involved a fair bit then a rechargeable torch is good idea. There are some excellent premium options out there but also many of the cheaper torches available on Amazon or Ebay are powerful and rechargeable. The build quality may not be the best but in many cases can be surprisingly good. The torch needs to be bright enough so unless it is an emergency or your main torch has died then we suggest that volunteers don't use torches built into their mobile phones. This will drain the battery quickly and also could make you a target for thieves. Carrying a spare torch or spare batteries is advisable too.

What should I do if I need to cancel a proposed shift?

Please give us as much notice as possible. If you feel ill then please let us know in the morning. If it's a last-minute change of plans then please let the patrol leader know. Please also post to the Facebook group if you are part of it and/or to any relevant WhatsApp groups. Please also contact any other volunteers that you may be in contact with who are also due to patrol. Last minute emergencies happen of course, but we just want to make sure that other volunteers are not alone at the site and want to avoid suddenly being low on volunteers at short notice.

How old do you have to be to patrol?

This depends on the patrol in question but also on the child and their parents. Some sites are more suitable for children than others. All attendance by minors needs to be approved by the Patrol Leader at the site. All decisions on this are always at the Patrol Leader's discretion and must be approved first with appropriate insurance forms signed to avoid invalidating our insurance.

How old do you have to be to patrol without a parent or other adult?

18 - we have to abide by the guidance set out in our risk assessment for each site in order to satisfy our insurance requirements. We also work with Avon & Somerset Police and have to be able to justify our activities if questioned.

Is the patrol suitable for people with disabilities?

This depends on the nature of the disability and the level of support that the individual may need to have in place. The location of the patrol will also play a part in any decision made as patrolling at some sites may be more dangerous than at others. Certain nights may also be more suitable when traffic volumes may be lower, or if we have plenty of volunteers on a given night then this can be easier for the Patrol Leader to accommodate.

We do try to help with all such requests where possible but the safety of the volunteers and the public is the primary concern. Our site-specific risk assessment would need to be amended by the Support Worker and any attendance needs approved by the Patrol Leader at the site. Our Patrol Leaders are all very busy at this time of year so please bear with us and understand that not all requests can be accommodated.

Media enquiries

Any media requests must be referred to the Patrol Leader. We get lots of requests each year and whilst these can be a useful tool for attracting new volunteers and raising awareness, they often repeat previous content and can be very time-consuming to support. Our Patrol Leaders are all very busy at this time of year, so please bear with us and understand that not all requests can be accommodated.

If you are approached by someone from a media outlet either while on patrol or at another time, please refer them directly to the Patrol Leader in order that any queries/quotes/comments are screened/verified before publication.

I am a student. Can I volunteer for Toad Patrol to fulfil my volunteer hours requirements for my course?

Yes, you can as long as you read the risk assessment and send us a completed insurance form. You must wear high-viz clothing whilst patrolling and if you want to bring other volunteers with you, they must also complete the insurance form to ensure they are covered.

We get a lot of requests from students each year at certain patrol sites. We will always try to accommodate these requests but individual volunteers will need to organise & complete their own timesheets. We will then cross check these against our records and provide one signature at the end of the patrol season.

Our Patrol Leaders are all very busy at this time of year so please bear with us and understand that not all requests can be accommodated. We do not have scope to fill out individual evaluations on volunteers; if this is needed it must be flagged to the Patrol Leader before you first volunteer.

How far along the road do I need to go?

The best bet is to speak to the other volunteers on site. They will be able to give you guidance when you first patrol. Some people will check different areas to others based on their past experiences and/or a willingness to check on the quieter/more remote stretches. Volunteers should only do what they are comfortable with and should keep talking to other volunteers to make sure that all areas are covered.

Can I bring my friend?

Yes of course. We are always happy to have additional volunteers. They will need to read the risk assessment and complete an insurance form prior to patrolling. We cannot accommodate any additional volunteers without these. They must also wear high-viz clothing.

Can I bring my dog?

This depends on the patrol in question and is always at the Patrol Leaders discretion.

Whilst Out on Patrol

What should I do if it's quiet and cold?

If it's cold and quiet when you patrol and there are no signs of amphibian movement then please check in with the other volunteers and then head home. It is really important that you speak to other volunteers so that nobody is left alone on site not knowing that others have left. If you can't find the other volunteers then please let the Patrol Leader know.

What do I do with the toad when I have picked it up?

Please place it carefully in a bucket. Please don't overfill buckets and place small newts in a separate container. Ideally, we don't keep toads in the buckets for too long. Depending on the patrol site you may release toads each time that you pass the release point if it's part of a circuit or if you are volunteering at a site when only certain people have permission to access the lake area (Fishponds for example) then you will need to let those people know that you have toads to release. Other volunteers will explain all of this to you when you first patrol.

Why are volunteers asked to record the numbers of dead amphibians on the road?

We record these figures and submit them to our national charity partners and scientific organisations. Recording the numbers of dead toads encountered allows us to compare numbers year on year and can help inform local & national planning & conservation measures.

Why is it important that I remove dead amphibians from the road?

Not all volunteers will be comfortable picking up dead amphibians from the road. If you are not comfortable with this then please point the dead amphibian out to other volunteers. This is important as it prevents multiple volunteers counting the same dead toad numerous times. Aside from over-counting the same dead toad, the other main benefit of moving corpses is to avoid other volunteers from trying to save a toad that is already dead. Dead amphibians can be placed under undergrowth nearby so that other volunteers don't see them and so that nature can take its course in terms of other animals feeding.

Can I put male and female toads in the same bucket/container?

Yes, this is fine as long as the bucket is not overcrowded. If you are with another volunteer and they have a bucket too then it can be best to keep the females separate from the eager males. This can help avoid tiring them out too much before they reach the lake as multiple males will try to climb on to the back of a female.

How do I tell the sexes apart?

Our parent charity ARG UK have produced a useful guide for identifying native amphibians and telling the sexes apart. The guide can be downloaded by visiting the link below, <https://www.arguk.org/info-advice/id-guides/441-amphibian-id-guide-revised-2019-pdf>

Can I put frogs, toads and newts in the same bucket?

Most of our patrols have relatively lower numbers of newts and frogs and the reasons for this are covered further down the FAQs. Newts should ideally be put in separate containers as they tend to be very small and delicate and can easily be crushed by larger toads which may be clambering all over each other. Frogs can leap out of buckets without a lid so a lid is useful at some of our patrol sites (see further FAQ below on how to recognise whether you have a frog or a toad in your hands!).

I've found an injured amphibian (bleeding etc) - what should I do?

Please speak to other volunteers in the first instance. Amphibians with minor injuries may well recover so should be put to one side away from the road on the lake side of the road if migrating to the lake. Please place them under some cover. They should not be put into buckets with other toads if possible and should be released away from other toads too to avoid males clambering on them.

Please don't put obviously injured toads into the water or near to the water as they may not be able to swim. More seriously injured amphibians that don't look likely to survive can also be placed to one side under cover.

At times it will be difficult to determine if an injured amphibian is likely to survive or not. In the past, some volunteers have taken an injured amphibian to a local vet who may be sympathetic to injured wildlife. This isn't expected of you and be careful if taking injured animals to a vet that you don't know as you could end up with a bill.

Some experienced volunteers may take injured amphibians in for a few nights to see if they survive before releasing them. There are knowledgeable ARAG group members and experienced volunteers at each patrol site and it's worth speaking to them or the Patrol Leader for advice. Injured amphibians should be kept away from central heating, from chemicals and from any amphibian populations in the volunteer's garden as they may be carrying an infection.

I have found a toad that looks sick rather than injured. Are there amphibian diseases to be aware of?

There are various amphibian diseases found in the UK and elsewhere at present and separate equipment should be used if patrolling at different toad patrol sites unless those sites are within 500m of each other. If you find a toad that looks sick rather than injured then please don't put it into a bucket with other toads.

Amphibian & Reptile Conservation have a section on their website that outlines the most common diseases affecting amphibians <https://www.arc-trust.org/pages/category/disease>

The Garden Wildlife Health initiative allows volunteers to report sick or dead amphibians online. Photo of sick amphibians or even samples of or from dead amphibian can sometimes be sent off for analysis. To report please visit the following link and register what you have seen. The team will then advise if they want samples and how this can be done - <https://www.gardenwildlifehealth.org/gwh-database/>

Our parent charity ARG UK have produced a useful guide on amphibian disease precautions. This is aimed at stopping the spread rather than what to do with sick amphibians. <https://www.arguk.org/info-advice/advice-notes/324-advice-note-4-amphibian-disease-precautions-a-guide-for-uk-fieldworkers-pdf-2/file>

Can I stop traffic to pick up a toad?

In short, no. We do not have any authority to stop traffic and this could risk injury to the volunteer and to the driver. Unfortunately, some toads will be run over and you should never risk your safety to save a toad. Anyone taking such risks will be asked not to attend in future.

One thing you can do is shine a torch fixed with a narrow beam onto the toad and point (from the safety of the pavement). You must be careful not to shine the torch at the motorist as this could cause an accident and will almost certainly lead to complaints which may put the future of the patrol at risk. Most motorists will see the beam of light on the toad and will slow down or drive around the toad if safe to do so.

What should I do if confronted by a member of the public?

Please calmly explain what you are doing and pass on the Patrol Leaders details should they want them or refer them to the Facebook page. If you feel threatened at all then please walk towards another volunteer for support and call the police if appropriate and/or Andy. There is a police reference for each patrol when can be given to the police should you have to call them.

General Patrol Queries - Why the toads migrate, species ID etc

Do we help toads when they leave the lake?

If we see toads clearly moving away from the lake during the patrol activity then we will help them in the direction that they are travelling in. We don't organise a patrol later in the spring/summer to help all toads returning from the lake because once they have spawned, they are again much more careful about their safety. They will only tend to move when safe to do so, they won't move en masse and usually wait until darkness, which by then is well past rush hour.

Where are the toads coming from?

Toads can travel more than a kilometre to reach their favoured breeding site. Toads don't associate with water outside of the breeding season so can be found in much drier habitats and can come from anywhere where they have sufficient cover and food. Toads are decreasing nationally due to a loss of suitable habitat and the fact that they often have to cross busy roads to reach their breeding lakes. This is why your help is so important.

Why do toads sit in the middle of the road?

Male & female toads will both cross the road to get to their breeding lakes. Males will often sit in the road as this is generally the flattest surface from which to look out for arriving females.

Do frogs and toads migrate at the same time?

Frogs will start moving to water earlier in the year and in colder temperatures than toads. The patrols are called Toad Patrols as the main focus at each site is helping the toads get to the larger ponds and lakes that they use to breed.

Frogs are much less common at most of our patrols as they do not need large ponds and lakes in which to breed. Frog breeding activity is often reported from the South of England as early as Christmas whereas Toads don't tend to start migrating until February. Toads often travel far further to these larger water bodies, while frogs often don't need to due to a relative abundance of smaller garden ponds.

Why are the lakes more suitable for Toads than Frogs?

Frogs and newts can breed in almost any small waterbody. In a normal garden pond toads may be found for the first few years but are soon outcompeted by frogs unless there are fish in the pond. Ultimately newts will outcompete even the frogs in most garden ponds and toads will often disappear altogether from these ponds. Fish will eat all life stages of frog (spawn, tadpole, froglet, frog) and will also eat newts too. Toads, their spawn and their tadpoles are all distasteful to fish due to toxins in their skin meaning that they can breed in fishing lakes where frogs and newts will be predated.

I patrol at different sites; can I use the same equipment across different sites? If not, why not?

No. There are various amphibian diseases (not harmful to humans) found in the UK and elsewhere at present and separate equipment should be used if patrolling at different toad patrols sites unless those sites are within 500m of each other.

This includes buckets, footwear, gloves and nets (if used). There is guidance available on how to sterilise equipment via the link below. A 40 degree machine washing cycle is sufficient for any clothes that may need sterilising but please read the instructions on the garment carefully as some waterproofing can be damaged at 40 degrees.

<https://www.arguk.org/info-advice/advice-notes/324-advice-note-4-amphibian-disease-precautions-a-guide-for-uk-fieldworkers-pdf-2/file>

What is the difference between a frog and a toad?

Technically toads are just one specific family of frog species. All toads are frogs (or anurans) but not all frogs are toads. Toads all over the world tend to prefer drier habitats than most frog species. They tend to walk or run rather than hopping or leaping. They have drier, often 'warty' skin and generally only associate with water when they are reproducing (although some toad and frog species in the tropics for example may sit beside water to hunt insects or animals including other frogs in some cases).

There is a link below that you can visit to get more information on the differences between frogs and toads in the UK. You can always ask other volunteers if unsure. Please don't be embarrassed, it is the best way to learn. After a very short time you won't have any trouble distinguishing between our native frogs and toads but the newts may be another matter!

<https://www.arguk.org/info-advice/id-guides/441-amphibian-id-guide-revised-2019-pdf>

I know someone who wants to get involved in the patrol - what do they need to do?

It really helps our busy Patrol Leaders if you can direct them to the risk assessment and insurance form for the site in question and field any questions that they may have. Once

they have sent us the completed Insurance Form then we can add them to our email list and they will get all updates going forward. If you can also buddy up with them when they first patrol then this will also save our Patrol Leaders quite a bit of time too.

Why is it important I report my toad/frog/newt numbers to ARAG? What happens to this information?

The data tells us how many amphibians we are able to save each year but we also need this information to help monitor and to protect our important toad populations against a national backdrop of significant declines in toad numbers. Keeping a tally of the species composition can also help us understand how the populations in some ponds may be changing over time.

We share the data with our national charity partners (Froglife, ARG-UK & ARC) and the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) which is really important in ensuring that the amphibian populations, their breeding ponds and migratory routes are protected when developments are considered.

What are 'mating balls'?

Mating balls are formed when multiple males attempt to clamber on to the back of a female in the hope of successfully spawning. The male in amplexus (mating position) will have multiple other males trying to dislodge him and he will likely be kicking out at the other males to maintain his position. You will often see this happen on a smaller scale on land during the migration but it occurs on a much larger scale in the water with more than 10 males reported in some instances. Unfortunately, female toads caught in these mating balls do sometimes sadly drown.

What is amplexus?

Amplexus is a type of mating behaviour exhibited by some amphibian species including common toads. The male grasps a female with his front legs as part of the mating process, and at the same time or with some time delay, he fertilises the eggs (externally), as they are released from the female's body.

How do I join Avon Reptile & Amphibian Group (ARAG)?

You don't have to be a member of ARAG to help with toad patrols. However if you would also like to join ARAG you just need to complete the Joining Slip that can be found on our mini website <http://groups.arguk.org/arag/> or via the Files section of the Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AvonRAG/>

The completed form should be emailed to Info@arag.org.uk

What should I do if I still have questions?

Please ask other volunteers whilst patrolling or post to the Facebook Group for your Toad Patrol. Other experienced volunteers will often be able to answer your query and if not, the Patrol Leader probably can. Asking the question via Facebook means we get to share the response which could benefit others & cut down on admin.

Aside from patrolling, what else can I do to help?

- Sharing patrol packs with potential new joiners is really helpful and saves the Patrol Leaders a lot of time.
- Talking to other volunteers (whilst walking) is really important too. This helps to answer queries that volunteers may have and also to flag up any issues that may need attention from the Patrol Leader. Many of our volunteers have made good

friendships whilst on toad patrol and look forward to catching up with other volunteers each spring too.

- Please also answer questions from interested passers-by. This helps raise awareness of the plight of the amphibians and the important work of the volunteers. It can also lead to new volunteers joining up and local road users being more considerate to the animals and the volunteers.
- If you have free time and feel that you can take on more responsibility then please contact the Patrol Leader to ask if they need any assistance. This could be anything from being responsible for locking the toad signs open during the patrol and closed for the rest of the year to adding in historic records to our website or contacting local stakeholders for assistance (funding, new signs, road issues etc).