



Welcome to first edition of *Tadpole Times*. Over the last year, Nottinghamshire Amphibian and Reptile Group (NARG) has been working hard to be more active in the field and recruit new members with an interest in herpetofauna. If you're unable to get out into the field to help out with surveying, scrub clearance or even improving a pond, don't worry – all are welcome! We're working to improve our communication with members and non-members, and this newsletter will complement our social media updates, which I'm sure some of you are already following.

From The Chair

2023 and early 2024 has been a transition period for NARG.

Although the group reformed in 2019, it didn't quite manage to find its footing at that time. Many members were busy with their day jobs, and then COVID got in the way!

Still, we managed to strike up partnerships with some landowners/managers and survey sites, and a few active members conducted surveys and kept records, which kept the group going. Some members also did habitat work at survey sites.

In 2023 the group became more organised, and set up a formal committee. We held an AGM and took volunteers out to learn how to conduct surveys.

In 2023, slow worm surveys were our top reptile priority. This involved using survey sites to determine the presence or absence of slow worms – and if they were present, to estimate their range and population (while still searching for other herpetofauna). We managed to record slow worms at two new sites in five new transects. In fact, we managed 138 reptile survey transects.

We also conducted amphibian surveys at local sites, and constantly added new sites.

In 2023, our volunteers recorded all of the Nottinghamshire herpetofauna species, and it looks like 2024 will be even busier.

Our committee and volunteers have set up some amazing toad patrol groups, which have saved hundreds of common toads, as well as native newts and common frogs. This work is currently in full swing, with volunteers springing into action all across the county. A big shout-out must be given to Maiya Evans for organising these patrols.

We now need more people who are enthusiastic about reptiles and amphibians to drive the group forward.

Please get in touch and help ensure a bright future for the reptiles and amphibians of Nottinghamshire.

Email: nottsarg@hotmail.com

Kevin Clarke



SURVEYS

We have plenty of surveys lined up this year, and we're inviting more members to come along and learn how to conduct surveys for NARG. You do not need any prior knowledge or experience, as you'll pick it up as you walk around with us. And once you've gained some knowledge and experience, you can pass it on to others. We're adding new sites all the time, so any help is greatly appreciated. Come along to meet like-minded people and maybe see some animals you haven't seen before!

Children are more than welcome to help.

All survey dates will be posted on social media (see elsewhere for links) and in newsletters if they're out in time. Remember, some dates might be cancelled at the last minute, depending on the weather. If you're interested, get in touch at: nottsarg@hotmail.com

COMMON TOAD

The UK has two species of toad – the Common toad (*Bufo bufo*) and the Natterjack (*Epidaleia calamita*), which is our rarest toad, only found at a few coastal sites. The only other toad in the British Isles is the spiny toad (*Bufo spinosus*), which is exclusive to Jersey. Common toads are far more widespread, often found in allotments, gardens, woodlands and grasslands across the country.



Maiya Evans

The Common toad is protected by law – it's illegal to sell or trade adults, juveniles, tadpoles and spawn.

Around February or March, toads start to wake up and head to the grasslands and woodlands to forage in preparation for the main event of the year – mating season.

While the Common frog (*Rana temporaria*) has smooth skin, black patches behind their eyes and long back legs used for leaping, common toads are identified by their rough, warty skin, amber eyes and scrawny back legs used for crawling. These toads spend most of their life on land foraging for food, and return to ponds to breed when the weather becomes warmer. Males can be identified by their black nuptial pads, located on their feet, which are used to grip to the females during mating.

During breeding, they lay spawn in strings rather than clumps. Soon, the jet-black tadpoles hatch. The name 'tadpole' is believed to have originated from the Anglo-Saxon era, with 'tadige' and 'tadde' meaning toad, and 'polle' meaning head – so 'tadpole' literally means 'head of toad'! At around 10 weeks, the tadpoles develop into toadlets. They crawl out of the water and spend the next 2–3 years on land before returning to the water to breed. If you have been lucky enough to see a toadlet, you'll know just how cute they are!

Once breeding season is over and the spawn have been laid, the toads focus their energy on feeding themselves up to prepare for winter. Breeding is exhausting work, especially for females, so it's essential to build up energy stores in order to survive the colder months. Once the temperatures start to fall, the toads hole up in a warm log pile or burrow for the winter.

Despite the common myth that toads give you warts, toads are in fact extremely beneficial to our ecosystems. In fact, they provide natural pest control services by eating slugs, worms and insects!

Folklore

Toads are often associated with witchcraft. It was once believed that inside their head was a magical stone, known as a toadstone or bufonite, which was thought to be an antidote to poison. In fact, toadstones are the fossilised teeth of *Lepidotes* – an extinct ray-finned fish.

If you stumble across what you believe is a common toad – or any amphibian and reptile, for that matter – please log it on Record Pool, which gives us valuable data on the distribution of these amazing species.

Although their numbers have declined rapidly in recent years, there are many ways to help your local toads – you can build ponds or log piles, avoid using slug killer, or join us on our toad patrols!



Francesca Shaw

TOAD PATROLS

As you are probably aware, February–March is when amphibians travel from their hibernation area to their ponds to breed. Unfortunately, this often means they have to cross busy roads, leading to mass casualties. It is estimated that 20 tonnes of toads are killed on the roads each year, and amphibian populations have declined by 60% over the last 30 years.

What can you do?

NARG now has a group of dedicated volunteers who dedicate their spare time to rescuing our warty friends. Our volunteers lead toad patrols during the evening in Feb-March. Some run for around 30 minutes, while others last for hours on end. When it comes to rescuing amphibians, every second counts – so if you have a few minutes to spare in the evenings, please get in touch through our email: nottsargtoadpatrols@hotmail.com. One of our patrol coordinators, Maiya or Kay, will be in touch as soon as possible to set you up with a local patrol.

First, you'll need to sign our risk assessment and declaration form so you are covered by our insurance. Then all you need is a bucket, torches and hi-vis, and you're all set!

We are now in a position to help existing toad patrols, too. So if you run one, or know someone who does, contact us and we'll be happy to support you. Or if you know of an area that needs a patrol, get in touch!

Because of the warmer weather in February this year, our patrols have already been rescuing amphibians for a couple of weeks now, and have saved many vulnerable individuals – more than 400 toads in total. We will update you in the next edition.

Maiya Evans



WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

When it comes to finding amphibians and reptiles, your back garden is just as important as the countryside. Even if you live in the city, be sure to keep your eyes peeled. You never know what you might find. We've seen badgers in Nottingham!

If you have a pond in your garden go out at night and look for amphibians, take a note of their numbers and what they're doing, e.g. breeding, resting, feeding, etc. Send your results to nottsarg@hotmail.com, and include details of the pond's location and the date you saw them. We can then enter your results on a map, which helps plot the species' distribution. Any photos are helpful, especially if you are not sure what you're looking at! Check your garden during the day, too. You might find slow worms, grass snakes and common lizards basking in the sunshine, or hiding under rocks, wood, etc. Again, take a photo if possible and send us the details.

If you're out for a walk, watch the edge of the woods, especially near bramble, for grass snakes. Lizards are very often found on fallen logs soaking up the sun's rays. All sightings are important for mapping the distribution of our herpetofauna. Log anything you see at www.recordpool.org.uk. It would be appreciated if you send us the details, too – be sure to include the date, the species, the grid ref or pin drop on Google Maps, and a photo if possible. We can verify what you've seen if you're not sure. Email the details to nottsarg@hotmail.com

On 23rd February, the Friends of Newstead and Annesley Country Park (FNACP) Group welcomed members of Brackenhurst University Conservation Society and the NACP Amphibian & Reptile Group, who visited the park for training in how to survey and ID amphibians. We also discussed biosecurity, which is a crucial consideration when conducting surveys. Despite the temperature being lower than recommended for surveys, it was quite a successful night! Although the survey only covered a small area, we recorded the following species:

- 32 male toads
- 2 dead male toads
- 12 male smooth newts
- 5 female smooth newts
- 2 unknown smooth newts (too quick to identify!)
- 1 female toad
- 1 male GCN*

* Two of the surveyors present had a great crested newt licence.



How can you help?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SURVEY?

Amphibians and reptiles are under-recorded in Nottinghamshire. We want to change this, but we need your help. As noted in our Chair's report, we already have lots of survey sites, and their number is growing. That means we need more volunteer surveyors. You don't have to go out every week, just when you have spare time.

REPTILES

Reptile surveys usually take place in the morning, but sometimes as late as midday, depending on the weather. You are more than welcome to come along and see what they involve. There's some walking and chatting, but most importantly, it's about checking the refuges and searching for reptiles. We'll help you identify what you find and where to look for different species. You're most likely to see slow worms and common lizards, and perhaps an occasional grass snake.

At the moment, we conduct most of our surveys in the Sherwood Forest area, as various landowners have given us permission.

AMPHIBIANS

Unlike the reptiles, amphibian surveys are conducted at night, and can be done while it's raining. The starting times vary depending on what species you're looking for, and may finish in the small hours of the morning. Surveys usually happen at the weekends, because finishing at 2am isn't ideal when you have to get up for work! On these excursions, frogs, toads, common newts and great crested newts are on the radar. A special licence is needed to survey great crested newts, so if they're likely to be found then someone who has one will be present. In any case, we'll be there to show you how to find and ID species.

Survey dates will be advertised on social media, and hopefully by e-mail.

Bits 'n' Bobs

Record Pool is a national database that anyone can use to record any wildlife they see. Access it via the QR code below or the link to the bottom right.

Send us your pictures! We want to see any amphibians or reptiles you've encountered – just tell us where and when you saw them.

What would you like to see in the newsletter? Let us know.

Are you a member? It only costs £5.00 to join. Follow the QR code below or the link to the bottom right. These will take you to our webpage. Click on **join/donate** in the menu bar.

We hope you enjoyed this first edition of *Tadpole Times*. See you soon!



The One Voice for Animals UK auction launches on 3rd March and runs until 7pm on 7th March. Lot 79, the book *A Curious Newt called Twistig*, is the **dedicated lot for NARG** (and has been specially signed for us by the author, Thomas Waddington). There are at least 75 other lots where the winner can choose to donate their winning bid to us.

To bid, join the auction group at: facebook.com/groups/onevoiceauction



To bid join the auction Facebook group on facebook.com/groups/onevoiceauction

SOCIAL MEDIA AND LINKS

The link below will send you to

<https://linktr.ee/nottsarg>