

Getting to know amphibians ...frogs, toads and newts

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POND
CARE

There are six species of amphibian that are commonly known to be native pond inhabitants, these being; The Common Frog, Common and Natterjack Toads and Palmate, Smooth and Great Crested Newts. Being amphibians they all rely on ponds for breeding and also during early stages of their tadpole life, but as adults, they spend much of their time on land.

The word amphibian describes this life style: *amphi bios* meaning double life.

Due to natural habitat loss and pollution, garden ponds now seen to be a vital habitat for most of our amphibian species. Building even just a small wildlife pond in your garden will not only recreate lost habitat for amphibians and other wildlife, but it can also become a link between isolated populations. If you have a pond or considering building one, it is also important to think about the terrestrial environment. Make sure there is plenty of ground cover and sheltered areas, like a log pile, for the adults to live in. Amphibians feed on slugs, insects and other invertebrates so it is also important to avoid using pesticides.



Our first report of frog spawn this year from a customer was mid-February

Newts

Palmate newts are the smallest newt species in this country at only 100mm in length. They are dull in colour and males can be distinguished as they have a black filament at the end of their tail. Smooth newts are slightly larger at about 110mm in length. The males develop a bright orange stripe down their belly. Great Crested Newt much larger at 170mm and have dark warty skin like a toad. Males have a distinctive crest running along their back. It is important to note that they are an endangered species and are protected.

Toads

Common Toads are the largest species of amphibian native to the UK. They can live up to 40 years in captivity but the average is between 6 and 7 years. They breed later in the year than common frogs and can be identified by their warty skin and shorter, stocky hind limbs. Natterjack toads are found in sandy heathland habitats so are rarely seen in garden ponds. These are also a protected species.

Common Frogs

These are the first amphibians to emerge from hibernation. Our first report of frog spawn this year from a customer was mid-February. Frogs prefer to lay their eggs in shallow water or on top of floating rafts of oxygenating weed. Once hatched; it can take up to 12 weeks for tadpoles to complete metamorphosis, before turning into miniature frogs. Tadpoles are predated on by fish and insect larva like dragonfly nymphs and are an important early source of food. Frogs lay masses of eggs to ensure some get through to adulthood. Once fully developed into frogs, they remain in damp environments and will return to the pond to rehydrate. It takes between 2 and 4 years for them to become sexually mature and most don't live beyond 5 years.

Ranavirus

Ranavirus is a non-native virus first discovered in the UK in 1995. It infects all amphibians but is more often seen in common frogs. The virus causes internal bleeding and ulcerations on the skin. Animals affected by the virus appear drowsy and very thin. The virus spreads via contact with other infected animals and contaminated water. Where there are outbreaks there is often mass death throughout the population, affecting all ages. Some individuals will catch the virus but do not suffer any symptoms, but they can carry the virus to new populations. It is thought that the virus could be to blame for an 80% drop in the UK common frog population since its discovery. The Ranavirus often gets blamed for large numbers of frogs that are found dead in early spring but the virus is only active during the warm, humid days of the summer months. If you find dead frogs that you suspect may be the victim of the Ranavirus then report it to Froglife via their website www.froglife.org or collect a form from our aquatic shop.



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