

Guidelines to reduce injury and death of amphibians on roads

Toads in decline

The common toad, with its fiery golden eyes and warty skin, has long been associated with myth and legend. However, the toad also has an important part to play in Britain's natural history. As well as feeding on many of the pests that make homes in our gardens, these charismatic amphibians are also food for many of Britain's rarer wildlife like owls, otters and birds of prey. In recent years it has generally become accepted that the common toad is declining throughout the UK and the extensive development of our road networks is considered to be one of the causes of this decline.

Unlike frogs, toads are extremely picky about the locations in which they spawn. They prefer large, deep ponds and often return to the same ancestral ponds from which they emerged. An entire colony of toads will move to their breeding ponds over the course of a few days, sometimes to ponds up to a mile away from hibernation sites. Toads move on mild nights from February to April after prolonged bouts of rain. In some populations this can mean that upwards of one thousand toads migrate to a pond over a very short period of time. For many toads this journey will entail crossing roads. Unfortunately, toad migrations usually take place just after dusk which at this time of year coincides with the rush hour. Over a matter of years whole populations of toads can become severely affected by road mortality. When large numbers of toads are killed or injured on the road surface there are obvious welfare issues to consider but their corpses may also present a significant road hazard to drivers.

For a number of years Froglife has co-ordinated the 'Toads on Roads' scheme, a national campaign to register toad crossing sites throughout the UK. Registering toad crossings means that warning signs can be erected, alerting motorists to take extra care when driving so that fewer toads will be at risk from traffic-related deaths. Froglife has registered over 600 toad crossing sites across the UK but there are many more toad populations that may face dangers from the increasing traffic occupying our roads.

How can I help?

You can help by looking out for new toad crossings, by organising groups of volunteers to help in 'Toad Patrols' or by monitoring your local toad populations. This advice sheet provides information on where to look for toad crossings, how to get signs put up and where to find volunteers who can help. It also provides advice on the long-term management of sites so that toad crossings can be monitored yearly and their changes recorded.

Finding toad crossings

The easiest way to help the common toad is to look out for breeding ponds. Breeding ponds are typically larger than garden ponds, (over 4 metres wide), and will normally be a number of years old. Toad breeding ponds can often be quite covered or hidden and unlike frogs and newts, toad tadpoles can happily coexist with fish. If you find or know of a toad breeding site get in touch with your local amphibian and reptile recorder who will log the information – for details of your local recorder contact Froglife or visit www.froglife.org. Amphibian and reptile recorders play a crucial part in amphibian conservation as they monitor where amphibians occur and how local populations are faring. If a suspected breeding pond is next to a road it is worth monitoring this site during the breeding season to see the extent of toad mortality incurred due to traffic.



Photo: Nick Meade

If the number of toads crossing a site meet the criteria set for your county it can then be registered on behalf of the Department of Transport. Signs can then be put in place to lower the number of toads killed during migration. To register a toad crossing you will need to complete a 'Toads on Roads' registration form which can be obtained by contacting Froglife or by visiting www.froglife.org.

Once the site is registered 'Toad Crossing' signs can be erected on the road to slow traffic down and lower the number of toads killed during migration.

Signing toad crossings

For a site to be eligible for 'Toad Crossing' signs it must first be registered by Froglife on behalf of the Department of Transport.

Once we receive your registration form and providing the site meets the criteria set for your county, we will send you a letter confirming registration of the site which you should give to your local Highways Authority. In some counties they will then provide and erect the signs for the site. In other instances you may need to fundraise for the cost of the signs (the approved sign specification is number, WBM(R) 551.1). To determine a suitable location for the signs, it is best if a representative from the Highways Authority visits the site with the individual who registered the site, so that the areas where the toads cross can be pinpointed exactly and related to local traffic conditions.

Signs need to be erected at the start of the toad breeding season which in most of Britain is around the beginning of March. Migrations tend to occur earliest in the southwest with populations further north and east active a few weeks later. At the discretion of local Highways Authorities some sites in the southwest of England are signed in February. Signs should be taken down when the migration has ended or by April 30th at the latest. They tend to be targets for collectors and vandals so it is important to make the signs as secure as possible. The use of padlocks and anti-climb paint is recommended to prevent signs from being stolen. Tampering with road signs is a criminal offence and people have been fined for stealing toad signs.

If your site does not meet the criteria for the erection of toad crossing signs you should continue to monitor the site in following years to record any population changes.

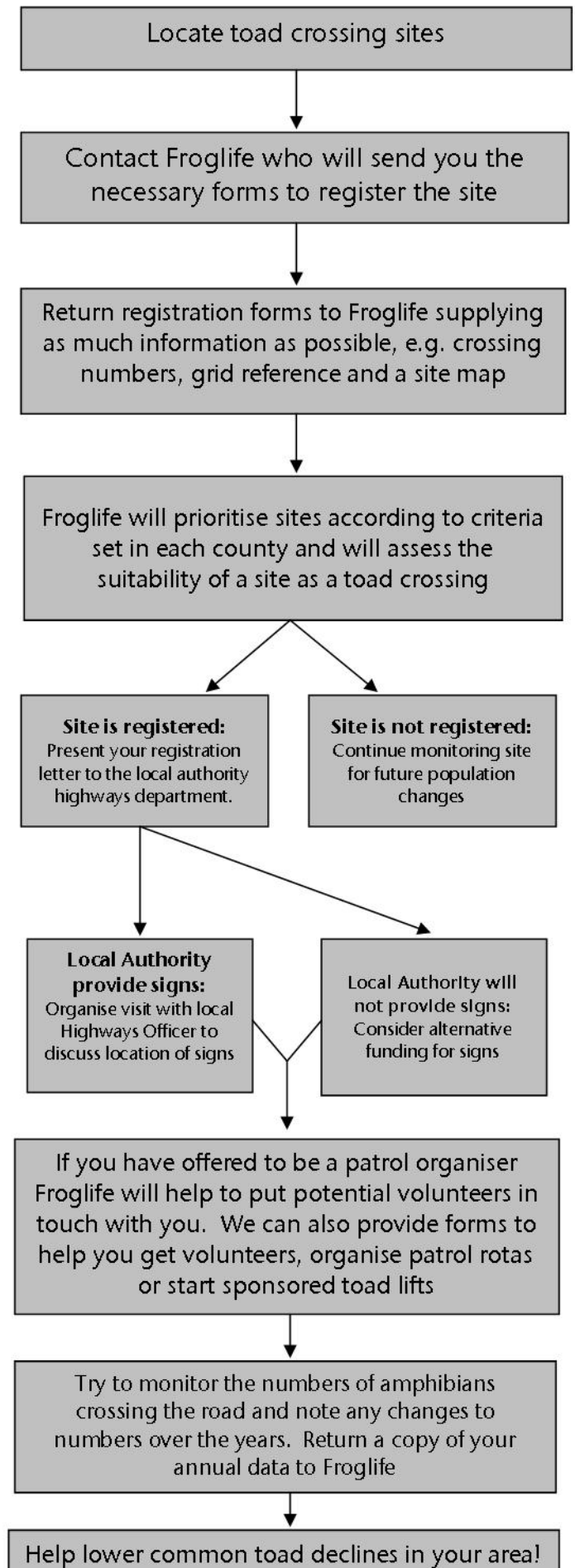
Organising a toad patrol

Once a site is registered and signs are erected you may wish to start a 'Toad Patrol'. These are active groups of volunteers committed to helping toads cross the roads and monitoring their numbers year on year. At some sites these toad patrols are the sole reason that large, viable populations of toads have remained locally for so many years. Volunteers move toads from one side of the road to the other by collecting toads as they approach the road and by moving them manually to the other side in the direction they were headed.

Volunteers will require some form of reflective clothing, a bucket and a torch.

Toad patrols require the commitment of a few people to find and organise volunteers, to monitor the site before migration begins and to make sure health and safety procedures are being correctly followed. Although this can be time-consuming, as a yearly effort it is a very rewarding pursuit both as a community exercise and as a task with obvious local conservation benefits.

How do I register a toad crossing site?



Finding volunteers

There are a number of places where you may find volunteers willing to help with toad crossings. Contact Froglife for details of your local Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs) or visit www.froglife.org. ARGs are groups of volunteers with an interest in amphibian and reptile conservation. They may be willing to help organise crossings or be useful in putting you in touch with local volunteers. Your local Wildlife Trust or Community Volunteer Service may also be able to help. Alternatively you could try posters or get in touch with your local press. Because of the charismatic public image of the common toad it can be relatively easy to generate publicity about toad crossings and patrols.

Funding

Sponsored toad lifts are sometimes organised to raise funds for equipment or travel expenses or they could be used for helping to fund local pond restoration projects that can benefit toads, frogs and newts. Funds might also be obtainable for this equipment from a number of sources such as the 'Community Champions Fund' (www.dfes.gov.uk/communitychampions), which is open to applicants from Wales, England, Scotland and N.Ireland. Alternatively you could try 'Volunteering England' (www.volunteering.org), which may be able to distribute small grants to those addressing the needs of their communities.

Health & safety

Safety must be a primary concern when organising a toad patrol since patrols will usually take place after dark, often on busy roads during rush hour. If you have concerns about any aspect of health and safety at a crossing site do not proceed without first taking steps to minimise the risk.

Never risk injury to pick up a toad

All patrollers should wear bright, reflective clothing and all children must be supervised by a parent or guardian at all times on a one child to one adult basis. Under no circumstances should you ever pick up a toad from the surface of the road - animals should only be intercepted on the verge. Toads sitting on the surface of the road pose a fatal risk to rescuers.

Toad patrols should never be carried out on blind bends, fast roads or accident blackspots

Sites with poor visibility and fast flowing traffic are especially dangerous and toad patrols should not be undertaken at these sites. Organisers should maintain a site risk assessment for each visit and ensure all participants in a patrol sign this before each visit - a general example of a risk assessment for a Toad patrol can be found at www.froglife.org.



Photo: Nick Meade

Toad tallying... Keeping track of the number of toads saved each year is a satisfying way of finding out how your local population of toads is faring.

Patrols should also consider insurance for covering injury to themselves and others – try the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) by visiting www.btcv.org

Always wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly after handling toads.

Records and monitoring

While road signs help in lowering the number of toad deaths in spring, the best and most satisfying way to keep a track of how a population is faring is to keep records of the numbers and species of amphibians rescued, the number killed and to generally monitor the condition of the breeding pond.

The more information you can provide the better as the data in the short term can be used to monitor declines, (or increases), year on year. In the longer term this can help us to understand better the possible implications of pollution and climate change on Britain's amphibians.

Froglife can provide you with suitable monitoring forms for recording many of these details.

Information should be sent to Froglife, your county organiser and your local amphibian and reptile recorder - contact details for these can be obtained from Froglife.

How else can Froglife help?

Apart from registering site crossings and acting as a central database for all of the sites across the UK, Froglife is also available to provide advice and information on the scheme. We can provide details of local amphibian and reptile groups (ARGs) and recorders, as well as county organisers (in some regions) who might be able to assist with recruitment and publicity.

Via the Froglife website we are also able to advertise and promote the work of groups and patrols. For more information visit www.froglife.org

Local networks

Toads on Roads patrollers can share amphibian conservation ideas with their local Amphibian and Reptile Groups. These groups act locally, surveying and protecting sites of particular interest to amphibians and reptiles. They may also be able to help with advice and publicity.

For more details of your local Amphibian and Reptile Group contact Froglife:

Froglife
White Lodge
London Road
Peterborough
PE7 0LG

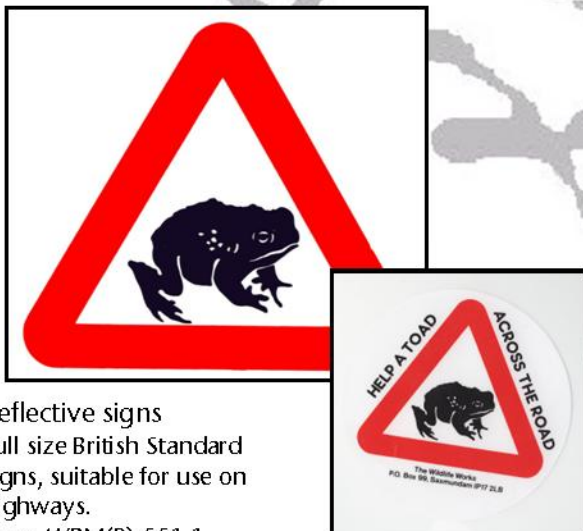
Phone: 01733 558844
Fax: 01733 558440

Email: info@froglife.org

Or visit:

www.froglife.org

Campaign materials



Reflective signs
Full size British Standard
signs, suitable for use on
highways.
Spec. WBM(R) 551.1

'Help a toad across the road'
Window sticker

Fluorescent Tabards
Be seen and get the 'Toads on Roads' message
across to motorists!

For prices or to order a copy of the
Froglogue contact Froglife on 01733 558844 or
visit www.froglife.org

Further reading

Frogs and Toads (1985) by Trevor Beebee.
Published by Whittet Books - ISBN 0 905483 38 3
Available from Froglife at £9.50 (inc. P&P)

The Common Toad (1992) by Fred Slater.
Published by Whittet Books - ISBN 0 7478 0161 4
Available from Froglife at £3.00 (inc. P&P)

Amphibians and Roads (1989) Edited by TES Langton
Proceedings of the Toad Tunnel Conference. Technical
reference to amphibian fences, tunnels and patrols in the
UK, Europe & USA.
Published by ACO Polymer Products - ISBN 0951 517201.
Available from Froglife at £15.00 (inc. P&P).

To order any of these publications please contact Froglife or
visit www.froglife.org and click on our 'Froglogue' for an
order form and for details of other resources available from
Froglife.

About Froglife

Froglife is a national wildlife charity concerned with the
protection of Britain's amphibians and reptiles, all of
which are increasingly under threat.

Froglife works to support and promote conservation by
providing information, education and training to a wide
range of people, from those working in the field to
people wanting to know more about the wildlife in their
outside spaces.

For information on Froglife's other projects or to become
a Froglife Friend contact:

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A Welsh language version of this advice sheet is also
available from Froglife.



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