

LONDON, ESSEX & HERTFORDSHIRE AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE TRUST

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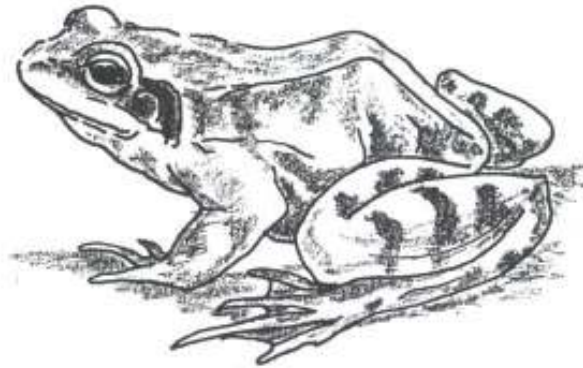
Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)

FACT SHEET No. 4

Recognition

Adults: 8 - 10 cm. They are a brown or grayish colour, with dark markings, although colour can be highly variable.

In the breeding season, males develop 'nuptial pads' on the thumbs to help them hold on to the female. The hind limbs are longer than those of the common toad and the skin is not as warty. The tadpoles are a speckled bronze colour, unlike the black larvae of common toads.



Status & Distribution

The common frog is the most widespread and numerous amphibian, which is found throughout mainland Britain and Ireland. It has been introduced to some islands.

General Ecology

Like all British amphibians, the adults spend most of the year on land, living in shady, moist habitats, such as hedgerows, damp grassland, scrub and woodland. The common frog is a regular breeder in garden ponds, feeding at night on slow-moving invertebrate prey, such as worms, slugs and insect larvae. Males may hibernate in the mud at the bottom of ponds but most females spend the winter on land.

In the spring, between January and March, depending on weather conditions and location, adults return to their ponds to breed. The common frog is generally the first amphibian to migrate to its breeding pond and males usually arrive first to await the females. The males will croak to attract a female. A wide variety of still water bodies are chosen, with small farm and garden ponds being particularly favoured.

The males will mount females in a position known as amplexus. This allows them to externally fertilise the eggs when she spawns. The spawn is usually laid at night in shallow water, which is the warmest part of the pond, and can

easily be seen in large clumps. Once the female has spawned, she departs leaving the males behind in the pond.

The eggs take up to three weeks to hatch into the familiar tiny tadpoles. These feed on algae at first but become carnivorous prior to metamorphosis. Their hind legs begin to develop first and the tail is gradually absorbed.

Tadpoles are eaten by many predators and only a small number will survive to become adults. On leaving the pond, the tiny 'froglet' will not return to breed until the second spring.

Conservation

The Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) only protects the common frog from collection at its breeding ponds for sale. It is considered to be sufficiently common not to warrant specific conservation measures against killing and injuring or habitat protection, although declines in some areas have been noted.

They survive well in garden ponds and the increase in this habitat has given frogs a wider distribution in some urban and suburban areas. In part, this has compensated for the substantial losses of rural ponds.

Frequent Questions

How do frogs know where to find ponds?

A chemical, called glycolic acid, is produced by algae in the water when the temperature begins to rise in spring. Frogs can smell this, even when highly diluted, from some distance away. If you have a new pond in your garden, and there are frogs in the area, they should colonise naturally.

I have too much spawn in my pond, what should I do?

Nothing! You do not have too much! It is quite natural for frogs to produce far more spawn than can ever survive. Do not move spawn to other ponds, as it can spread disease or non-native plants to the detriment of wild populations. If the pond you were thinking of taking it to is suitable for frogs, then it will already have its own maximum population - adding more will not produce higher frog numbers!

Further Information

Frogs and toads	T. Beebee	Whittet Books
Reptiles and amphibians in Britain	D. Frazer	Collins New Naturalist