

# LONDON, ESSEX & HERTFORDSHIRE AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE TRUST

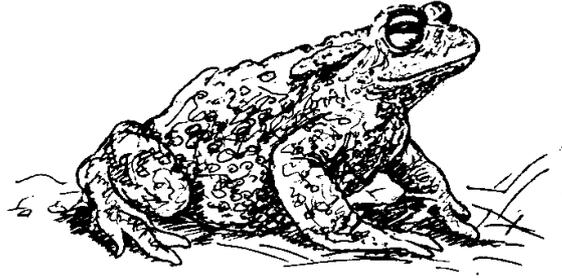
Registered Charity No. 1089466

## Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*)

## FACT SHEET No. 5

### Recognition

Adults: 6 - 10 cm. The males are smaller than the females. The body is rounder and more warty than the common frog. They have a semi-circular head shape, viewed from above, in contrast to the pointed snout of the frog. The colour is very variable but often khaki, brown or grey, with darker spots. The iris is orange or red in colour.



They walk or use small hops but do not leap like frogs. Spawn is laid in "ropes", consisting of a double row of eggs. Several thousand eggs may be laid. Tadpoles grow to 25 mm and are a uniform black colour. Often the tadpoles shoal in large ponds, as they are toxic and do not need to hide in weed from predators.

### Status & Distribution

They are widespread throughout Britain, except in Ireland and some of the offshore islands. They can be found from coastal to upland areas, wherever there is water for breeding and vegetation to provide food and cover. They are rarer in highly intensive agricultural areas and in the centre of cities.

### General Ecology

Like all British amphibians, the adults spend most of the year on land, where they forage at night for a wide range of invertebrate prey, particularly worms, slugs and beetles. Adults often use the same daytime refuge throughout the year, leaving it to hibernate deep in the earth under tree roots, rocks and log piles.

They are common in rural and suburban gardens and provide a valuable pest control service. In the spring, often a couple of weeks after the common frogs in an area, they emerge from hibernation and migrate to their breeding sites. These water bodies are typically larger than common frog ponds, with large lakes and ponds favoured. In many areas this involves a considerable migration from their over-wintering site and mass mortality may occur when the adults cross roads.

Males croak with a high-pitched call to advertise their presence and size to females and compete with other males for access to mates. The sex ratio is male-biased, often 4 : 1, so competition is intense. Several males may grasp a female in the mating position, called amplexus, resulting in her drowning. The spawn strings are wound around water plants as the pair swim about.

The adults spend the rest of the year on land, with females often in the water for only one night a year! The tadpoles are protected from fish predation by their distasteful skin, a feature that lasts through life, and metamorphose after about twelve weeks. The young 'toadlets' are vulnerable to predation, despite their poisonous skin, and only a fraction will survive to adulthood that is reached in two years for most males and three years for females.

### **Conservation**

The Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) only protects the common toad from collection at certain times of the year from its breeding ponds for sale. It is considered to be sufficiently abundant not to warrant extra protection but in some areas it may be locally uncommon and opportunities for conservation exist.

Where roads cross the paths of migrating toads, officially organised "toad patrols" may operate in the breeding season to reduce the annual estimated total of 50 tonnes of toads run over in Britain. Surveys have shown that up to 40% of adults can be killed on roads, making these "patrols" particularly worthwhile.

### **Frequent Questions**

*Have we got toads in our garden or are they frogs?*

If the animals appear only briefly in the pond, are warty, lack a pointed snout and show a difference in size between the sexes, they are toads. If they have a pointed snout and leap rather than walk, they are frogs.

*How can I help local toads?*

Make a large pond in your garden! Support your nearest "toad patrol" and send records of all your amphibian sightings to the local county Amphibian & Reptile Group (contacts available from the address below).

### **Further Information**

The common toad	F. Slater	Shire Publications
Frogs and toads	T. Beebee	Whittet Books
Reptiles and amphibians in Britain	D. Frazer	Collins New Naturalist