

LONDON, ESSEX & HERTFORDSHIRE AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE TRUST

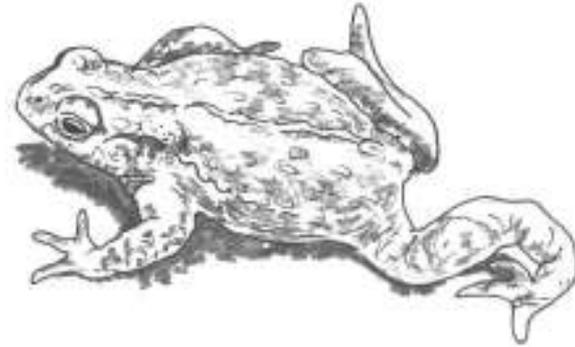
Registered Charity No. 1089466

Natterjack Toad (*Bufo calamita*)

FACT SHEET No. 6

Recognition

Adults: 5 - 7 cm. This is our smallest toad, with proportionately shorter hind legs than the common toad. They have a yellow or cream vertebral stripe running the length of the back. The iris is an emerald green instead of the orange/red colour of the common toad. Unlike the common toad, natterjacks run rather than crawl.



In the spring, males call loudly using a large vocal sac under the throat. They are our only native amphibian with a loud call. The spawn is laid in shallow, unshaded water and the eggs are arranged in a single row. Full-grown tadpoles are black, with a whitish "chin spot" below the mouth.

Status & Distribution

The natterjack toad is Britain's rarest amphibian and is restricted mainly to coastal dunes in Lancashire, Cumbria, SW Scotland and Norfolk. They also occur inland on a few heaths in southern England and East Anglia, which are mostly the result of re-introductions. They are found on the Kerry coast of west Eire.

General Ecology

The ecology of the natterjack toad is specialised and very different from the common toad. Their preference for warm, sandy soils is connected with their choice of breeding sites. These are warm, shallow, unshaded pools or "slacks", where the tadpoles can develop rapidly and be relatively free from predators or other competing amphibian tadpoles.

The adults are active nocturnal predators and require open habitats to capture insects and spiders, often by giving chase. In more scrubby areas, common toads may have a competitive edge over natterjacks by both hunting more efficiently and breeding earlier.

In late spring, males assemble at the ephemeral pools and call loudly at night to attract females. Colonies of thousands can be heard up to a mile away in favoured areas. Females lay their spawn in the shallows immediately when

grasped by a male. The tadpoles have a very fast development and may metamorphose eight weeks after spawning. However, the slacks often dry up before metamorphosis and kill all the year's tadpoles.

The adults are fairly secretive by day, often concealed under debris, or living in burrows in the sand that they excavate themselves. They also hibernate in the same burrows, typically from October to April.

Conservation

The natterjack toad has been protected from killing and injuring since 1975 and was later given full protection by the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981). This also prohibits handling and disturbance of the animals and also protects their breeding sites. Despite this protection, however, heathland populations of the natterjack in particular have continued to suffer declines due to habitat fragmentation and pond acidification.

In the 1990s, re-introductions have been carried out under English Nature's Species Recovery Programme to heathland sites and coastal areas of North Wales, Devon and Cornwall. Deepening of the breeding slacks has not been very successful as predators and competing frog and common toad tadpoles can become established.

The most successful management techniques involve the protection of large areas of habitat containing many different slacks and maintaining the open nature of the terrestrial habitat by removing scrub and encroaching woodland. The total adult population numbers no more than several tens of thousands, compared with several million for the more widespread and adaptable common toad.

Frequent Questions

We have toads in the garden - are they natterjacks?

No! Look closely and you will see that your toads lack a yellow stripe.

How can I help the natterjack?

This is very difficult as they will not survive in gardens and it is illegal to handle or disturb them. If you live close to a colony, you can join a practical management task (contacts available from the address below).

Further Information

The natterjack toad	T. Beebee	Oxford University Press
Frogs and toads	T. Beebee	Whittet Books
Reptiles and amphibians in Britain	D. Frazer	Collins New Naturalist