

Common Toad

(*Bufo bufo*)



STATUS & ECOLOGY

The common toad is the most common UK amphibian, being found in a variety of habitats, including woodland, grassland and mature gardens. The species is generally distinguished from frogs by its brown wartish skin, and the ability to produce a range of bufotoxins when attacked. Like their amphibian relatives, toads depend entirely on the availability of a clean fresh water source in which to breed and so are valuable environmental indicators.

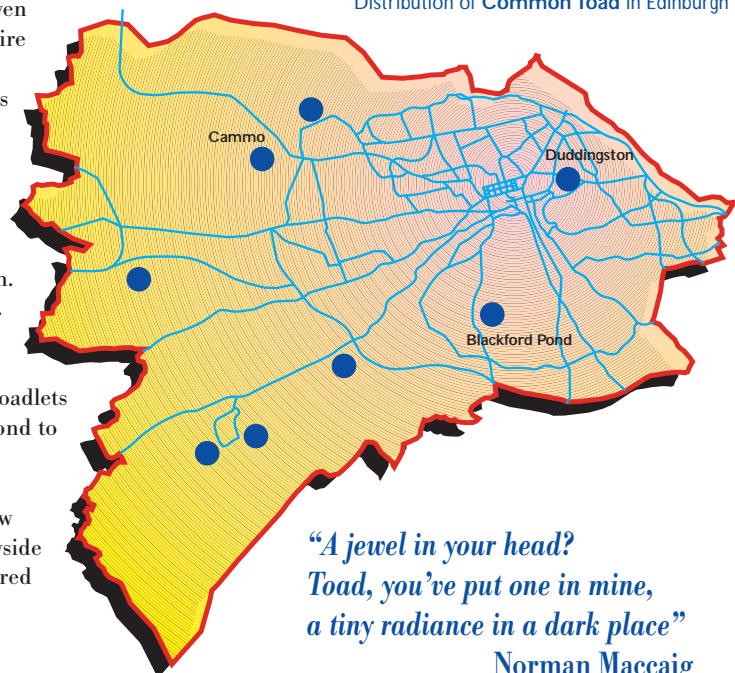


Common toads predominantly feed on invertebrates such as ants, woodlice, beetles and worms. They themselves are preyed by a range of animals including pike, heron, gulls, crows, weasel, rat, hedgehog and fox. Although largely non-territorial, toads seem to have a preference for a given hunting location and exhibit a strong migratory desire to return to their birth pond to breed. It is this allegiance and preference for a specific pond that has inhibited their use of garden ponds.

In Edinburgh, migration commences from mid/late March as toads make the hazardous journey to mate and spawn. Toad spawn is laid in strings, up to a metre long and wrapped amongst pond edge vegetation. Ponds of about 20-30cms depth are therefore required. Toad tadpoles are omnivorous, but mainly feed on plant and algal material. The metamorphosis from egg to toadlet takes 12 weeks after which time the toadlets make the equally hazardous return trip from the pond to locate a suitable hunting habitat.

The common toad is not specifically protected in law other than by the all inclusive Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. However, under this Act a license is required to sell any amphibian.

Distribution of Common Toad in Edinburgh



*"A jewel in your head?
Toad, you've put one in mine,
a tiny radiance in a dark place"*

Norman Maccaig

FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

Given that the life-cycle of the common toad is intrinsically linked to fresh water sources and mature vegetation, any factor which impacts on these will adversely affect toad populations. The loss of ponds, wetland and other water features across the city and within the surrounding countryside has been extensive and toad populations have likely declined in response. Leachate pollutants from agricultural and industrial sources, which reduce water quality, and vegetation losses have further minimised breeding success. Pond edge erosion through the loss of emergent vegetation may also be a contributing factor.

Threats

Habitat loss remains the greatest threat to Edinburgh's common toad population, although the rate of loss of fresh water and wetland habitats has declined in recent years. Continued road development and increasing road traffic also threaten local populations, especially at times of migration.



CURRENT ACTION

Common toad numbers are regularly monitored by the City of Edinburgh Ranger Service at Blackford Pond and Cammo Pond. Work is underway to improve pond edge vegetation at both sites, including the continued management of the invasive *Azolla sp* on Cammo Pond.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objective

To stabilise and sustain Edinburgh's current common toad population.

Targets

To identify, conserve and improve common toad breeding ponds in Edinburgh.

Actions

Monitor all accessible ponds in Edinburgh during the March toad migration during Spring 2000 and Spring 2001 to ascertain current common toad usage.

(Actioned by : City of Edinburgh Council Recreation Department, Scottish Wildlife Trust & East of Scotland Water)

Undertake a public survey over Spring 2001 to establish the usage of privately managed ponds, including garden ponds, by common toad.

(Actioned by : City of Edinburgh Council Recreation Department, City of Edinburgh Education Department, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Lothian Wildlife Information Centre)

Draw up action plans for key common toad breeding ponds by Winter 2001 to ensure or improve toad access (e.g. 'weep' holes in walls, public signage, pond edge vegetation planting, mowing regimes)

(Actioned by : City of Edinburgh Council Recreation Department, East of Scotland Water, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Scottish Wildlife Trust)

Protect known common toad breeding sites on public land by identification in relevant local plans from Summer 2001.

(Actioned by : City of Edinburgh Council City Development Department)

Key Contacts

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CHAMPIONS

