



## GROUPS

Examples from left to right top to bottom: Common frog (*Rana temporaria*) Norman Crowson, Frogspawn – lillitve, Great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) WitR, Palmate newt (*Triturus helveticus*) MikeLane45

# Amphibians

Information: Mary Cummins

### All about amphibians

- A class of vertebrates that evolved lungs and colonised land but still returns to water to breed.
- There are 7 native amphibian species in Britain: natterjack toad, common toad, common frog, pool frog, great crested newt, smooth newt and palmate newt. They are of two orders: tailless – frogs and toads, and tailed – newts.
- Several species are widespread but none is common; all receive some level of legal protection.
- Common frogs and common toads are “explosive” breeders, congregating in ponds, sometimes in large numbers. Females release all their eggs at once. Breeding is usually 14–21 days. Combative breeding behaviour and arduous migrations weaken the animals; many will breed only once. Thousands of eggs are produced in jelly-like spawn; free-swimming tadpoles graze on algae and detritus.
- The rare natterjack toad breeds later in the year than the common frog and common toad; its breeding habitats of dune slacks (water-filled depressions between coastal sand dunes) and sandy heaths, are scarce and declining in the UK.
- The newt breeding season is more prolonged, lasting up to four months. Mating is less combative: during a courtship “dance”, a sperm package is passed from male to female and eggs are laid individually on submerged plant leaves. Larval newts (efts) are active predators feeding on aquatic invertebrates. All tadpoles and eft are food for predatory invertebrates, fish and terrestrial animals.
- For successful breeding amphibians require unpolluted, well-vegetated, still water, retained for long enough each year for tadpoles and eft to complete development.
- To survive on land, adults and juveniles need undisturbed, semi-natural, habitat, providing an abundant invertebrate food supply and shelter from frost, high temperatures, drought and predation.

## Why do amphibians need our help?

Breeding ponds have been lost due to deliberate destruction, development of brownfield sites (e.g. quarries), neglect, pollution and drought. Terrestrial habitat has been destroyed, fragmented and degraded by development and agricultural intensification.

Climate change: drought causes ponds to dry up prematurely and creates uninhabitable arid terrain; high rainfall and resultant flooding spreads pollution, displaces tadpoles and spawn and can cause colonisation of ponds by predatory fish; erratic weather can disrupt breeding activity.

**DID YOU KNOW? The rarest UK amphibian is the pool frog. Thought to have gone extinct in the 1990s, it has since been reintroduced in Norfolk. Research has shown that pool frogs have local dialects; it is possible to tell an English pool frog from one found in Norway by the sound of its call.**

## How can we help?

- Create your own wildlife sanctuary: Dig out a pond and plant it up with native species, provide shallows so that animals can climb out. Please do not introduce fish. Create a terrestrial sanctuary by maintaining patches of overgrown vegetation and damp areas, along with log piles or gappy rockeries. Grow/encourage insect-friendly plants and leave heaps of dead vegetation as additional winter refuge.
- Avoid using insecticides, slug pellets, weed-killers, fertilisers and strimmers.
- Don't get a cat and reduce cat damage by making sure there are plenty of hidey holes on land which give easy access to the safety of the pond.

## Learn more

- Amphibian & Reptile Conservation (ARC) [arc-trust.org/](http://arc-trust.org/)
- Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG UK) [arguk.org/](http://arguk.org/)
- British Herpetological Society (BHS) [thebhs.org/information-advice/native-reptiles-and-amphibians](http://thebhs.org/information-advice/native-reptiles-and-amphibians)
- Froglife [froglife.org/](http://froglife.org/)
- Rewilding Britain [rewildingbritain.org.uk](http://rewildingbritain.org.uk)
- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds [rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/other-garden-wildlife/amphibians-and-reptiles/](http://rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/other-garden-wildlife/amphibians-and-reptiles/)
- The Wildlife Trusts [wildlifetrusts.org/](http://wildlifetrusts.org/)
- Information on legal protection Natural England [gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england](http://gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england)
- Contact an A Rocha UK naturalist at [naturalist@arocha.org](mailto:naturalist@arocha.org)