Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

According to Froglife, the number of common toads in the uk has declined by 68% in the last 30 years. Toads are a Bromley Species Action Plan Species. See https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/200023/conservation/1567/bromley_biodiversity_species_action_plan_toad .

Common toads spend the winter lying dormant in places such as compost heaps, beneath log piles or in crevices in walls, sometimes coming out to forage for invertebrates. They are generally nocturnal and emerge on damp, mild nights when the temperature is above 5 degrees Centigrade. In the Bromley area breeding typically occurs in March, sometimes continuing into April, but will vary from year to year and according to site. When toads are mature enough to breed (2-3 years old) they return to the pond where they were originally spawned, travelling up to 400 metres (occasionally as much as 2kms) but if suitable ponds are constructed en route to the original breeding pond these may be used. When they are returning to ponds many are killed on roads. Males often start to move first and will wait around the pond for the larger females to arrive. The male then climbs onto the female, clasping her from behind. They are then said to be 'in amplexus'. As they move about in the pond together the female deposits eggs in ribbons around pond plants and the male fertilises them with sperm.

The ideal toad pond is deeper than that required by frogs and has a depth in some areas of 90cms, but toads spend most of their lives on land, living in scrub, woodland, beneath hedgerows or in coarse grassland. Native plants in and around ponds are always better than non-natives as they are used as food by the invertebrates which are then eaten by toad poles, toadlets and toads. Toads feed at night on insects, worms, slugs and other invertebrates. Toadlets leave ponds in large numbers over a few days in summer and scrub, hedgerows or rough grassland around pond margins provide toadlets protection from drying out and from predators, such as birds, when they leave the pond.

Threats to Toads

- Loss of suitable ponds
- Loss of suitable terrestrial habitat (scrub, rough grassland, hedgerows, walls with crevices)
- Habitat fragmentation: death on roads
- A decline in invertebrate prey
- Pesticides (indirect effect: decline in invertebrate numbers, direct effect: build up of pesticide within toads from having eaten poisoned invertebrates).

Actions Needed

Listed below are a wide range of actions to suit a wide range of different people and organisations. Any help to better care for toads will also benefit many other species.

1) Please continue to send toad records to bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com Any evidence of breeding such as the presence of ribbons of toadspawn around pond plants or male and female toads in amplexus is very welcome. Check ponds in March/April according to weather conditions taking care as pond banks may be slippery. Using binoculars to look from a short distance away may be a good option.
2) Publicise the ongoing survey and encourage people to submit records, especially in under recorded areas e.g. Beckenham, Langley Park, Eden Park, Elmers End, Penge, St. Paul's Cray, St. Mary Cray, parts of Orpington and Biggin Hill.
3) Looking at the maps showing results to date, consider improving connectivity between nearby good terrestrial habitat (including gardens) and breeding ponds.
    - Improve connectivity between gardens where your neighbours are happy to do so. A 13 x 13cm hole at the base of garden fences, suitable for hedgehogs, is also great for toads. It may help keep some of them off the roads when they are travelling to breeding ponds and will increase access to possible foraging areas.
    - Encourage planners & developers to put in suitable ponds between terrestrial toad habitat and known breeding ponds, for example as part of Biodiversity Net Gain associated with larger building developments.
4) Improve vegetation in existing ponds where toads are known to breed so eggs can be wrapped around pond plants.
5) Plant vegetation in and around ponds using native species as much as possible because many of the invertebrates eaten by toad poles, toadlets and toads are adapted to live on native species rather than exotic plants.
6) Maintain some scrub around ponds and/or leave areas of adjacent grass uncut during the summer to give toadlets leaving the pond protection from drying out and from predators.
7) Toadlets often emerge from ponds at about the same time (in summer). When they start to emerge avoid cutting or strimming of grass around ponds for a week or so until they have dispersed.
8) If you are thinking of creating a pond which might be suitable for toads remember it needs to be about 90cms deep in some parts.
9) Encourage others including sports ground owners/managers and schools to provide terrestrial habitat for toads (and other wildlife) e.g. plant hedgerows of native species, maintain some scrub and leave areas of grass uncut during the summer.
10) Stop pesticide and herbicide use and encourage others to do the same.
11) Have a wild area in your garden or local park with some scrub, a log pile and a pond.

Useful websites:

The Freshwater Habitats Trust at https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk

Kent Reptile & Amphibian Group at https://kentarg.org/amphibians