Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

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 going on 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. Males often start to move first and will wait around the pond for females to arrive and then climb on their backs. When they are returning to ponds many are killed on roads. Toadspawn is laid in long ribbons wound around the underwater stems of pond plants so toad ponds will have submerged and/or emergent plants. Vegetation around pond margins is also very important, providing toadlets leaving the pond protection from drying out and from predators such as birds. Native plants in and around ponds are always better than non-native as they are used as food by the invertebrates which are then eaten by toad poles and toads. The ideal toad pond is deeper than that required by frogs and has a depth in some areas of 90cms.Toadlets leave ponds in large numbers over a few days in summer. Toads spend most of their lives on land, living in scrub, woodland, beneath hedgerows or in coarse grassland feeding at night on insects, worms, slugs and other invertebrates.
According to Froglife, toad populations in south-east England have fallen by more than 68% since 1986.

Bromley Biodiversity Partnership received 96 records of toads within the London Borough of Bromley between 2017 and 2020 (inclusive), of which 27 were ponds where breeding toads have been recorded. 8 known breeding ponds are within Local Nature Reserves or Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), 18 are in private gardens and 1 is within open space in a recently built small estate. These are shown in the maps accompanying this document. Within the borough there are few records from rural areas where there tend to be less ponds and less people to submit records, but there is a also a lack of records in some more urban areas e.g. Beckenham, Langley Park, Eden Park, Elmers End, Penge, St. Paul's Cray, St. Mary Cray, parts of Orpington and Biggin Hill. There is a need to better publicise the ongoing survey and encourage more people to submit records.
All records have been sent to the local records centre, Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) and Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG).

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 (where COVID permits)
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, so biodiversity in general.

1) Please continue to send records to bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com Any evidence of breeding very welcome.

   How to Look for Breeding Toads

   Results from 2017-2020 have revealed some ponds where toads breed, but more records are needed, particularly evidence of breeding. The easiest and safest way to do this is to have a look, in daylight, for male and female toads in amplexus (a male on top of and holding onto the larger female) in or very near to a pond in March/April according to weather conditions. Help with this would be very much appreciated but it is very important that great care is taken near ponds, the banks of which may be very slippery at this time of year. Using binoculars to look from a short distance away should be ok but we urge that no-one takes any risks in looking out for toads. If anyone is interested in having a look for toads in amplexus, please contact bromleybiodiversity@gmail.com so that information received regarding when

amplexus is first noted in the borough can be sent to interested parties so they know when to start checking nearby ponds.

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) In areas where toads are often found as roadkill, put up temporary notices in spring warning that toads may be crossing. For advice regarding helping toads cross roads see www.froglife.org/what-we-do/toads-on-roads
4) 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 will 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.
5) Improve vegetation in existing ponds where toads are known to breed so eggs can be wrapped around pond plants.
6) Scrub, hedgerows and rough grassland provide toads with protection and the habitat required for prey items (beetles, worms etc.). Improve vegetation around ponds accordingly by maintaining some scrub around them and/or leaving areas of adjacent grass uncut during the summer.
7) In gardens, planting more native species will help to increase prey items available for toads because many of the invertebrates they eat are adapted to live on native species rather than exotic plants.
8) Toadlets often emerge from ponds at about the same time (in summer). They are very vulnerable to predation by birds and to cutting or strimming of grass around ponds, so even if you do not have long grass around your pond leave grass uncut in this area for a week or so until they have dispersed.
9) 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, contain pond plants which toadspawn could be wrapped around and include some marginal vegetation in which they can hide and feed on emergence. See https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk for further advice.
10) 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.
11) Decrease pesticide and herbicide use and encourage others to do the same.
12) Have a wild area in your garden or local park with some scrub, a log pile and a pond.

Bromley Biodiversity Partnership Species & Habitats Subgroup
January 2021