



BEESTON WILDLIFE GROUP

Frogs and Toads

In a previous article, we speculated why Herons nested so early, Sean Browne has the reason – due to the super-abundance of frogs and toads when their young are hatching. It's now mid-March, we'll be seeing ponds or any fresh water with clumps of Frogspawn. Here are some facts about Britain's commonest amphibians.

Frog or Toad?

Frogs have smooth wet-looking skin: Toads have dry looking warty skin

Frogs have long limbs and hop: Toads have smaller limbs and walk

Frogs have a pointed nose: Toads have a blunt nose

Frogs have round pupils: Toads have a horizontal slit-like pupil

Frogs have a dark area behind the eye: Toads lack a dark area behind the eye

Frogs hibernate under water or mud: Toads hibernate under logs, stones, hedges, leaves etc.

Frogs can live anywhere but usually close to water: Toads are terrestrial and only come to water to breed

Frog tadpoles are grey/brown with gold speckles when mature: Toad tadpoles are jet-black

Both species take three years to reach maturity and can live for 10 years.

Frogs, hibernate from mid October. Underwater they absorb Oxygen through their skin. They awake in February and head for the nearest water to seek out females. Males croak to attract females. There is no courtship, males will wrestle with other males to get on the back of a female, they 'hug' (called Amplexus – Latin embrace) the female and hang on by digging in swollen pads that have developed on their thumbs. In the water, the female lays 3000 eggs, the male fertilising them as they emerge. The small black eggs sink to the bottom and later swell with contact with water making them float freely - this is the familiar frogspawn. When the female has finished laying, she will depart the pond and the males seek other females. Males are so determined to mate; they will even grab fish and hang on - often suffocating them. Tadpoles usually turn to frogs after about 15 weeks, but occasionally they remain as tadpoles over winter and develop into frogs the following year. This is known as suspended metamorphosis and is possibly due to lack of food for the tadpoles.

Toads, hibernate in October and wake up later than frogs in March. They head for their own birth pond (known as philopatry), walking past suitable breeding ponds. The journey can take 10 days depending on distance, involving walking over roads where many are killed. Some people set up toad crossing projects and carry them over the roads during this time of migration. The amplexus is not so violent as in frogs. Amazingly, Toads do not mate their own kin; they are able to detect family members by their calls. The female lays 7-10 feet of double stranded 'jelly' containing the eggs. The strands are woven round plants as the mating pairs move around the pond vegetation.

Toads have a distasteful secretion on their skin, Herons, Crows and Foxes disembowel Toads leaving the skin behind. Toads try to protect themselves by inflating their lungs which enlarges their body to more than double its normal volume and rise on all four legs making them a formidable looking beast. When danger has past they deflate themselves.

Other species

There are other introduced species of Frog that are mainly found in Kent. The smaller and rarer Natterjack Toad has a thin yellow line running down the centre of its back. They live in sandy and heath land areas usually near the coast - there are none in Ireland!

Frogspawn

It is not recommended that you move frogspawn to other ponds; this is to reduce the spread of disease. If you bring home frogspawn to educate children or yourself - return the froglets or toadlets to the pond they came from.

One of life's simple pleasures is watching tadpoles develop - treat yourself this spring and get a jar and become a child again. It will bring you closer to nature and put a smile on your face!



Frog



Frogspawn



Frog Tadpoles



Common Toad



Toadspawn



Toad Tadpoles

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