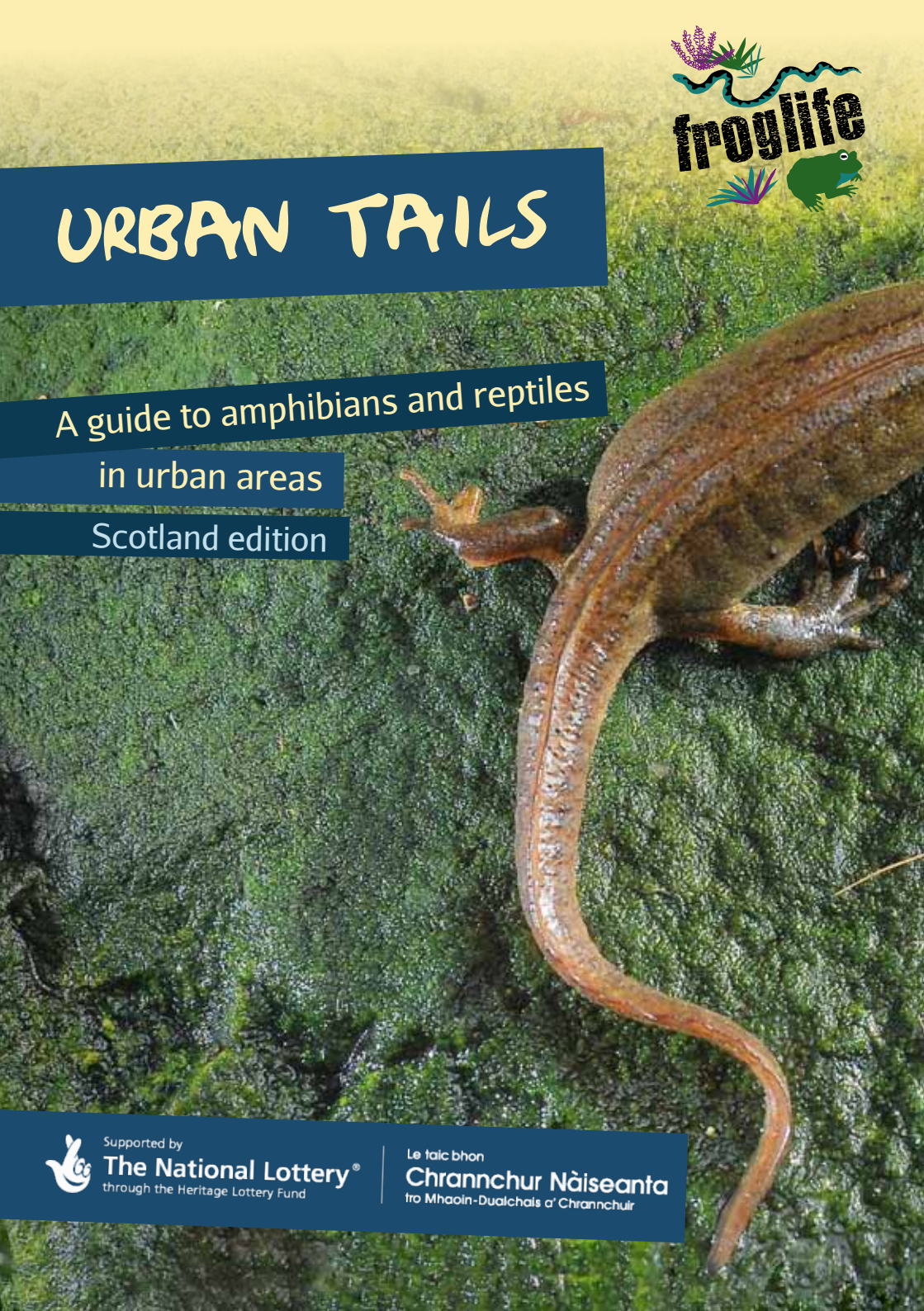
froglife

URBAN TAILS

A guide to amphibians and reptiles in urban areas

Scotland edition



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Le taic bhon
Chrannchur Nàiseanta
tro Mhaoin-Dualchais a' Chrannchuir

Urban Tails is a complete guide to amphibians and reptiles in urban areas - from how to identify them, to where you'll find them and how you can help.

Cover image: Sue North

Froglife is a registered charity: no. 1093372 (in England & Wales) and SC041854 (in Scotland).

Produced by Froglife:
Written by Jules Howard, Eilidh Spence and Samantha Taylor.
Edited and designed by Lucy Benyon.

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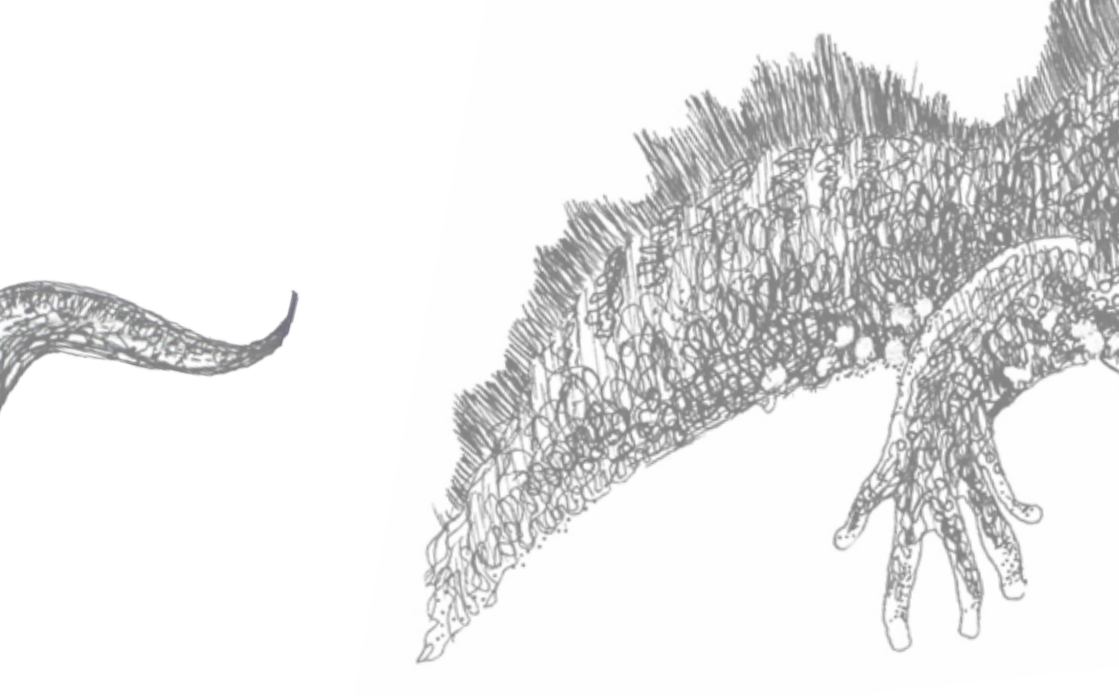


There are prehistoric creatures roaming around your local patch - creatures whose ancestors have walked, crawled and slithered since the age of the dinosaurs. They're called amphibians and reptiles: frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards...

These species are all around us, in fact many are probably within one hundred metres of where you are right at this moment.

This booklet provides information on how to get out there and discover more about amphibians and reptiles in the wild.

contents

1 id guide

Scotland is home to three of the UK's native reptiles and all but one of our native amphibians. This guide provides some simple tips on how to identify the most commonly encountered species.

COMMON LIZARD *Zootoca vivipara*

Dearc

Variable in colour, these lizards are extremely quick - often, all you might see is the long tail as it flees into the undergrowth! If possible look out for the pointed snout and the stripes that run along the flanks. Common lizards grow up to 15cm, nose to tail. Look for them on nature reserves and on some allotments.

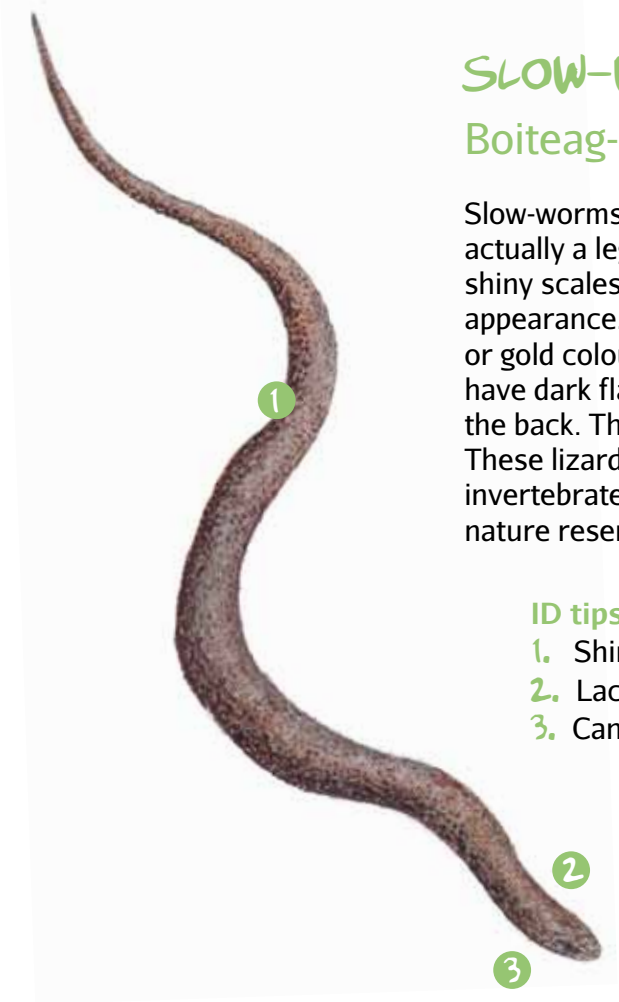
ID tips:

1. Long tail that can be dropped if attacked
2. Stripes along the back
3. Toes with claws
4. Pointed snout


Tracy Farrer


Jules Howard


Sivi Sivanesan/Froglife



SLOW-WORM *Anguis fragilis*

Boiteag-shlaodach

Slow-worms look a bit snake-like but are actually a legless lizard. They have really shiny scales that give them a smooth appearance. Slow-worms are usually bronze or gold coloured; females and juveniles have dark flanks and, often, a stripe down the back. They can grow up to 40cm. These lizards love compost heaps, where invertebrate prey thrives. Look for them on nature reserves, allotments and in gardens.

ID tips:

1. Shiny bronze or gold appearance
2. Lacks a distinct neck
3. Can blink (unlike snakes)


Paul Furnborough/Froglife

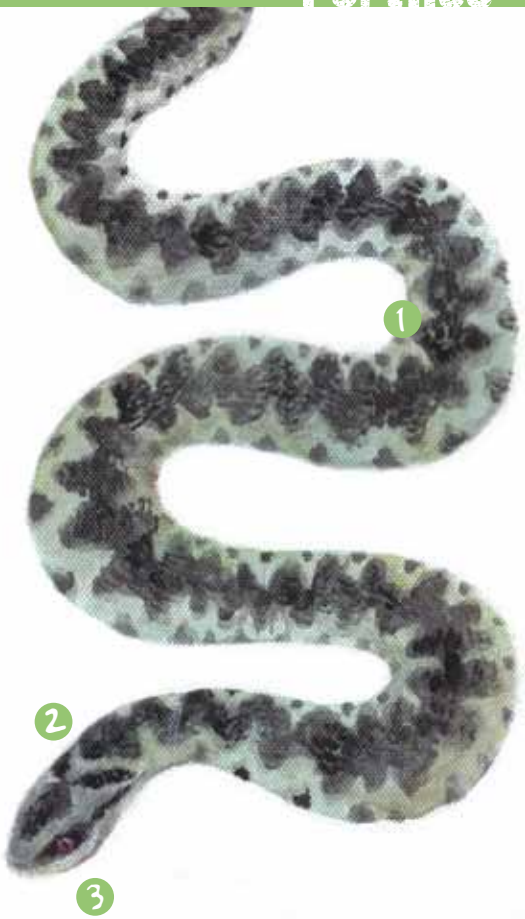

Jules Howard


Francesca Barker

ADDER *Vipera berus*

Nathair

This stocky little snake has a distinctive 'lightning bolt' down its back. They rarely exceed 60cm in length and can be found around patches of woodland and on heathland. Males are usually grey whereas females and juveniles are brown. Adders are our only venomous snake. Look for them on nature reserves (they're very unlikely to be found in gardens, especially in urban areas).



ID tips:

1. Dark zig-zag pattern
2. V or X on the head
3. Red eyes with vertical slit pupil


Tracy Farrer

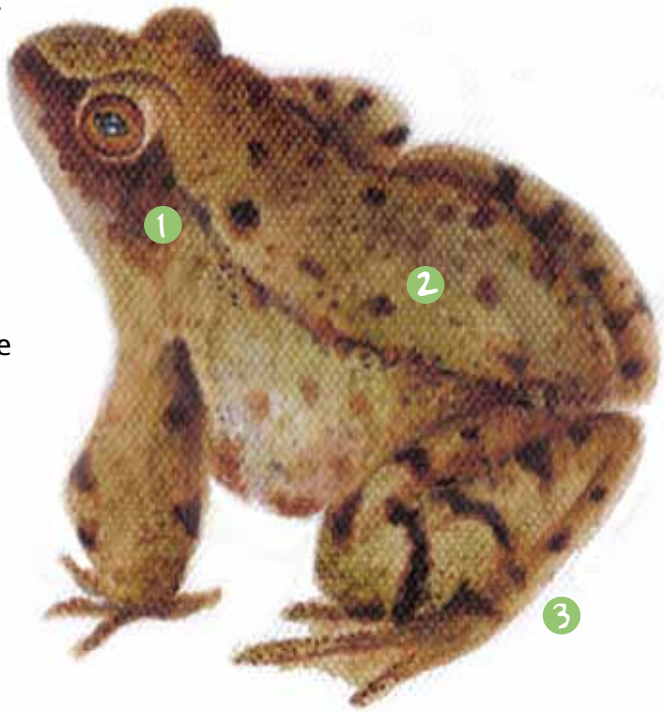

Nick Peers


Tracy Farrer

COMMON FROG *Rana temporaria*

Losgann

A firm favourite of garden ponds. Look out for stripy legs and a dark 'eye-patch'. Adults can grow to around 9cm (nose to tail) and are very variable in colour and markings. Frogs lay clumps of spawn in pond shallows. Character: slightly nervy, often leaping at any sign of danger. Likes nature reserves, allotments and gardens and has thrived in urban areas.



ID tips:

1. Dark patch behind eye
2. Smooth, moist skin
3. Long, stripy back legs


Sam Taylor/Froglife


Terry Brooker


Sue North


Sam Taylor/Froglife

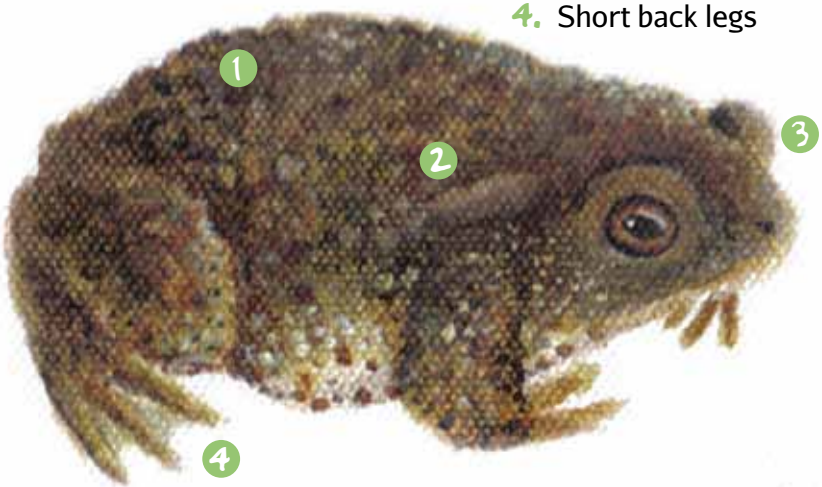
COMMON TOAD *Bufo bufo*

Mial-mhagach

Prefers crawling to jumping. Look for the dry, 'warty' skin and golden eyes. Adults are 5-11cm and usually a shade of brown or green with darker markings; variations do occur and juveniles can be very dark or brick red. Toads lay strings of spawn wrapped around pond plants slightly deeper in the water. Character: grumpy-looking! Look out for them in gardens, allotments and nature reserves.

ID tips:

1. 'Warty' skin
2. Pair of raised glands on shoulders
3. Golden eyes
4. Short back legs




John Heaser


Oliver Kratz


Sivi Sivanesan/Froglife


Sam Taylor/Froglife

SMOOTH NEWT

Lissotriton vulgaris

Dearc-luachrach

This small newt, rarely reaching more than 10cm, can sometimes be found in garden ponds and urban areas. Smooth newts have a slightly yellow/orange belly with black spots and males have a wavy crest during the spring. Females lay individual eggs which they wrap in plant leaves; newt 'tadpoles' have a frill of gills behind the head. Smooth newts are less common in Scotland than they are in the rest of the UK.

ID tips:

1. Brown/green smooth skin with stripes and/or spots
2. Line or wavy crest down the back
3. Yellow/orange belly with black spots


Francesca Barker


Chris Quy

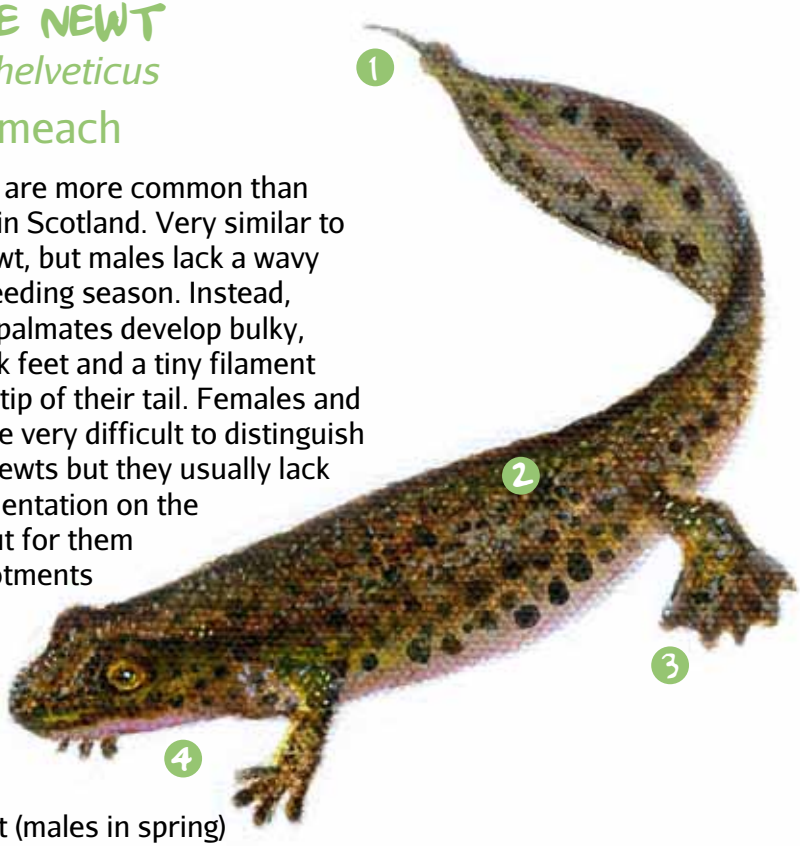

John Musto

PALMATE NEWT

Lissotriton helveticus

Dearc-pailmeach

Palmate newts are more common than smooth newts in Scotland. Very similar to the smooth newt, but males lack a wavy crest in the breeding season. Instead, in spring male palmates develop bulky, mitten-like back feet and a tiny filament appears at the tip of their tail. Females and juveniles can be very difficult to distinguish from smooth newts but they usually lack spots and pigmentation on the throat. Look out for them in gardens, allotments and nature reserves.



ID tips:

1. Tail filament (males in spring)
2. Brown/green smooth skin with stripes and/or spots
3. Webbed, bulky back feet (males in spring)
4. Throat unspotted


Mark Rowe


David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk


Jules Howard

GREAT CRESTED NEWT *Triturus cristatus*

Dearc-luachrach mòr

Our biggest newt. Look for the obvious warty skin (some 'warts' are white tipped) and the size is a giveaway (they grow up to 15cm and are quite stocky). Males have a white flash on the tail and a jagged crest that is much less pronounced outside of the breeding season. Females and juveniles lack this crest. Great crested newts have a bright orange belly with irregular black blotches on it. Eggs with a white centre are laid on plant leaves. Look out for them on some allotments and nature reserves; still considered quite rare (and protected) due to their patchy distribution across the UK.

ID tips:

1. Jagged crest (males in spring)
2. White-tipped warts
3. Orange belly with black blotches
4. Stripy toes


Sivi Sivanesan/Froglife


Jules Howard


Andy Mortimore

OTHER SPECIES

The following species are native to the UK but are so rare, especially in Scotland, that you are only likely to see them at select locations.

GRASS SNAKE *Natrix natrix*

Although common in the rest of the UK there are only reports of grass snakes in the Scottish borders, and these are few are far between. Easily recognisable by their yellow and black collar. Any sightings of grass snakes should be reported immediately!

NATTERJACK TOAD *Epidalea calamita*

Look for the distinctive yellow stripe down the back of the body. These noisy little toads like sand-dune ponds and are very rarely found elsewhere. They are only found at around 60 locations in the whole of the UK, including on the Scottish side of the Solway Firth.

SAND LIZARD *Lacerta agilis*

This lizard is native to the UK but is only found in Scotland as an introduced colony on Coll. Sand lizards live on sand dunes and heathland; males have a prominent green shimmer to their flanks during the spring breeding season. They're a relatively chunky lizard, reaching 20cm in length.

Smooth snakes *Coronella austriaca* and **pool frogs *Pelophylax lessonae*** are also native to the UK but are not found in Scotland.

2 discover

To see amphibians and reptiles you have to know what makes them tick. Here's a quick guide to some of the places you might see them...

★ **Where:** Compost heap

Why: Both compost bins and compost heaps are used by reptiles and amphibians as places to hide and places to forage. Many compost heaps are colonised by slow-worms, hiding out of sight, whilst taking advantage of the multitude of invertebrates (particularly slugs and woodlice). If you cover your compost heap with old carpet or tarpaulin try lifting this to get a closer look at the creatures inside.

When: Possible site for overwintering amphibians and reptiles. Slow-worms may be found all year.


Natalie Giles


Liz Evans-Jones


Natalie Giles

★ **Where:** Sheds and greenhouses

Why: Amphibians or reptiles may flee under a shed if disturbed so could be found lurking nearby. Frogs, in particular, are known to live comfortably in greenhouses where it stays damp and there are plenty of bugs and slugs to eat.

When: All year in and around sheds; primarily spring and autumn in greenhouses.


Lucy Benyon/Froglife


Lucy Benyon/Froglife


Sam Taylor/Froglife


Simon Parker


Lucy Benyon/Froglife

★ **Where:** Long grass, flowerbeds or vegetable patches

Why: All of our amphibians are predators and need to seek ample prey to survive. Invertebrates (particularly slugs and snails) make up the bulk of their diet. To look for amphibians and lizards it helps to think about where invertebrates gather.

When: Spring, summer and autumn.

★ **Where:** Sunbathing spots (open areas)

Why: Being cold-blooded, the activities of snakes and lizards are linked closely to the weather. If conditions are fairly cool (12-18°C), then they'll need to get their body heat up in order to hunt prey. To do this they bask in the sun (a good time to spot them). They like to do this nestled against something into which they can flee if disturbed (e.g. a dense bit of scrub or under a shed). For this reason you are unlikely to see snakes or lizards basking in the middle of a flower bed. Instead, look for the sunny edges of low-growing thick vegetation.

When: Spring and autumn. If it's too hot, then snakes and lizards will be fully charged by the sun and you're less likely to see them.

2 discover

★ **Where:** Ponds and water features

Why: Frogs, toads and newts all need to return to ponds to breed so this is a good place to start looking for them. A spot of pond-dipping can help you find out what amphibian larvae may be present in a pond. Night-time sessions with the torch can be equally valuable - particularly for seeing adult newts courting. Even the smallest water feature can become home to common species like frogs and newts.

When: Look for breeding amphibians on mild, damp spring nights by torchlight. In summer, 'metamorphs' (newly developed frogs, toads and newts) make their first miniature steps out of the pond as fully-formed adults - look for them in vegetation surrounding the pond but be careful not to step on them! Outside of the breeding season (May to October) you can expect to see amphibians up to one kilometre away from their breeding ponds (depending on the species). Adult newts may hang around longer at the pond in order to hunt for aquatic invertebrates and tadpoles.


Wendy Dowling


Lucy Benyon/Froglife


Lorraine Baker


Sam Taylor/Froglife

★ **Where:** Logs and log piles

Why: Amphibians may seek protection from predators or extreme weather by hiding underneath logs; toads can often be found buried down in soft mud. Decomposing wood is also a great place for amphibians and slow-worms to hunt for invertebrates.

When: All year.


Sivi Sivanesan/Froglife

★ **Where:** Hidey holes - such as in between plant pots or behind wheelie bins

Why: Seeking protection from predators. If you carefully look in or around these areas you might find amphibians or reptiles lurking!

When: Spring, summer and autumn. If there is enough protection from the elements amphibians may choose to overwinter here too.


Sam Taylor/Froglife

★ **Where:** Rockeries and paving slabs

Why: With their nooks and crannies, rockeries are great places for reptiles and amphibians. There are plenty of basking opportunities for common lizards, with easy escape routes if disturbed. Check under paving slabs for newts or toads hiding out.

When: All year.


Lucy Benyon/Froglife

2 discover

Now you know what you're looking for and where you'll find it, things should be simple right? Unfortunately not. All of our native species are facing some serious threats to their future and once common species are getting more and more scarce.

The top three threats facing the UK's amphibians and reptiles are...

DESTRUCTION OF THEIR HOMES

Habitat destruction is one of the biggest problems for all our wildlife. As human habitat has spread, animals have lost the woodland, ponds, meadows, heathland and other wild places they call home. Habitats have also been broken up by roads and development, so that where one large population lived before, there are now smaller fragmented groups. All of this makes it harder for animals to find places to live, breed and feed, making their lives more fragile.

ROADS

For amphibians, and common toads especially, roads can present a real challenge. As the roads break up habitats, they sometimes cut hibernation sites off from breeding ponds. When the toads wake up in spring and try to migrate back to the ponds to breed they have to cross these busy roads. It's estimated that 20 tonnes of toads are killed every year on roads - through being hit by cars or becoming trapped by kerbs or drains. Fortunately, some lucky toads have Toad Patrol volunteers to help. Every year, volunteers rescue anything from 35,000 to 70,000 toads!

AMPHIBIAN DISEASES

There are two diseases that are of concern to amphibians and we are working with the Zoological Society of London on research into managing them. **Ranavirus** makes frogs lethargic and very thin, and can lead to the sad sight of groups of dead frogs around a pond. These mass die-offs generally happen in hot summer months. **Chytridiomycosis** (or chytrid for short) is a fungus that grows on the skin and causes the animals to suffocate. Chytrid has wiped out populations of frogs and toads across the world. Although serious when it does occur, there have been very few cases in the UK so far. Please report any incidences of disease to Froglife.

Jules Howard

unsung heroes?

We love them, but we're aware that frogs, toads, newts, lizards and snakes are often forgotten about. Not only have we had a tendency to undervalue our wildlife in the UK, the creatures Froglife represents are sometimes misunderstood as nasty or dangerous. Sadly, this has lead to people deliberately killing amphibians and reptiles or removing them from their gardens.

3 leap forward

Want to get involved in helping amphibians and reptiles but not sure where to start? An 'urban tail' to inspire you...

Surrounded by a narrow strip of countryside, Carmunnock is the last village in Glasgow. Here, Windlaw Marsh and Pedmyre border the village and the City of Glasgow. Once used for grazing cattle and growing hay these areas are now being carefully managed as flourishing areas for wildlife.

After being farmed for many years, Windlaw and Pedmyre have been transformed for wildlife through Glasgow City Council's initiative to revitalise old areas of farmland for biodiversity. They're now designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

The sites contain a variety of habitats including some small ponds. In spring the main wetland area is alive with the chorus of common frogs, awakening from their winter slumber ready to breed.

In 2009 Froglife's Living Water project identified Windlaw and Pedmyre as areas where additional ponds would help benefit wildlife. It was hoped that by expanding the network of ponds new species would be encouraged into the area. They would also provide additional breeding ponds for the large population of frogs.

Eilidh Spence/Froglife

To create the new ponds, areas were carefully selected - they needed to be naturally wet so that there was a greater chance they'd hold water. The site was also checked to ensure no valuable areas for plants or wildlife would be disturbed by the pond work.

With the help of the BTCV, a group of enthusiastic volunteers and a digger the new ponds were created. Some at Pedmyre were planted up with native aquatic species to improve the area aesthetically for the local community.

Amazingly, only a month after creation frog spawn was found in three of the newly created ponds! On a sunny spring day, a shallow edge scrapped in one of the enhanced ponds can be found teaming with tadpoles basking in the shallows.

Volunteers will be encouraged to continue surveying these delightful ponds to monitor the success of the new habitats and to establish whether future work will be required on other ponds in the area. This wonderful site is not only a haven for frogs but also a variety of farmland birds and invertebrates and is a fantastic example of how an area can be adapted for wildlife.

3 leap forward

If you have an allotment here are some tips for making the area 'frog-friendly' and a 'reptile-refuge'. These tips can also be used in your garden or if you help out at a park or nature reserve.

Key: This habitat is used for:

1 Hiding 2 Hunting 3 Breeding

WHY ARE ALLOTMENTS SO GOOD FOR AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES?

Allotments are havens for amphibians and reptiles as they provide many of the features these creatures depend on, and all in one place. They provide places to sunbathe, find prey, hide and, in many cases, crucial places to breed (such as ponds and compost heaps).

Often, allotments have been around for years (sometimes a century or more), and this means that they have had more time to be colonised by amphibians and reptiles. Allotments have become a sort of 'historical safe-house' - a safe place for frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards to live, in a landscape that is changing all around them.

Allotments are particularly important places for reptiles, which have very specific requirements. Because reptiles need places to bask, thick vegetation in which to hide, and opportunities to find a range of prey, you're more likely to find reptiles on allotments than in gardens.

3 leap forward

The key to helping reptiles and amphibians, particularly in urban areas, is linking up habitats. Think about your allotment, garden or local green space... you can make it a wildlife haven but can the creatures get there or spread out?

What features surround the area? Amphibians and reptiles flourish when there's lots of different habitats that they like, all in one area. Basically you're more likely to see amphibians and reptiles in places that are surrounded by other 'frog-friendly' habitats.

For instance, if an **allotment** or garden is surrounded by other **gardens** (good foraging habitat for amphibians) and **woodland**, then expect to see more amphibians and reptiles here than on a site that's surrounded by roads, fences and concrete.

Generally speaking, as well as gardens, woodlands and allotments, amphibians and reptiles may be attracted to **heathland**, **hedgerows**, **cemeteries**,

parks and **general overgrown wasteland**. If your garden or allotment is surrounded by lots of these features, and they are well connected, then odds-on you'll have good populations of amphibians and reptiles.

South-facing slopes, such as **railway embankments** are a feature particularly associated with reptiles. Because these embankments are often at an incline this provides lots of opportunities for basking. Reptiles tend to use railway embankments as corridors between sites.

Railway embankments, like allotments, have often been present for more than a century meaning that reptile populations locally may have stayed relatively untouched as the countryside has changed around them.

If your allotment, garden or local nature reserve has a railway embankment nearby it might turn out to be a reptile hotspot.

4 one giant leap

Try some of these ideas if you want to get even closer to amphibians and reptiles...

FROGWATCH

Make sure you record your sightings of garden amphibians. Froglife's Frogwatch project is seeking information on garden populations of amphibians, to understand the importance of gardens and the impact that non-native diseases may be having on native species. Fill in the form at **www.froglife.org/frogwatch** (it only takes two minutes!).

LOOK OUT FOR REPTILES!

A countryside ranger or reserve warden can point out the reptile hot spots in your local area. Once you know where they are, take a notebook to jot down your sightings and draw pictures. Remember to note the time and date you spot them so you can tell your local Biological Record Centre about your sightings (find yours through the National Federation of Biological Recording: **www.nfbr.org.uk**). Don't forget to tell the nature reserve wardens as well!

DISCOVER MORE ABOUT POND LIFE

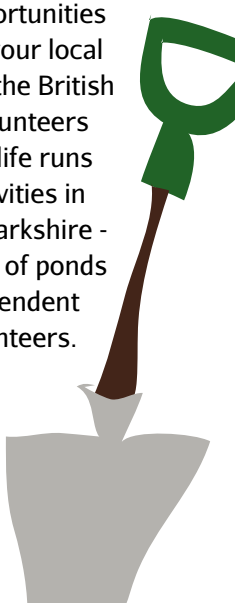
Pond dipping is a great way to introduce you to amphibians. Local nature reserves and organisations like the Scottish Wildlife Trust often run events.

FROGSPAWN: THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Visit a local pond in early spring and you could witness a frenzy of activity as frogs and toads get ready to lay their spawn. Keep visiting and you'll see the spawn appear and develop from eggs to tadpoles.

CLEAN A POND!

It's a messy job, but most ponds need a bit of cleaning out and the results are immensely satisfying. Opportunities exist all over the UK - ask your local nature reserve or contact the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) to get started. Froglife runs a number of volunteer activities in Glasgow and North Lanarkshire - we renovate hundreds of ponds each year and are dependent on teams of local volunteers.



about froglife

Froglife is a national wildlife charity, founded in 1989, committed to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles - frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards - and saving the habitats they depend on. We want all audiences to appreciate and learn more about amphibians and reptiles, and how to conserve them...

Froglife's work is made up of three main strands:

- **On the ground conservation:** this includes building ponds (particularly in urban areas), coordinating the national Toads on Roads project and managing a nature reserve that is home to Europe's largest colony of great crested newts!
- **Environmental education:** we specialise in working with socially excluded and hard to reach groups. This means that our education team works closely with a range of education providers, from the traditional (schools) to more non-traditional education providers, such as community groups, special schools and non-wildlife sector organisations like the YMCA.
- **Providing advice:** our Wildlife Information Service receives thousands of calls and emails every year regarding amphibians and reptiles in gardens and Froglife has become a central voice for public advice. We rely on donations from the public to help our important work continue.

Find out more at www.froglife.org

about funders

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund gives grants to sustain and transform our heritage. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions we invest in every part of our diverse heritage.

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Froglife is a UK wildlife charity committed to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles - working with people, enhancing lives together for a healthier planet.

www.froglife.org/urbantails

Froglife

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Join Froglife today and help us to save the UK's frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards, and their disappearing habitats.

For as little as £18 we give you regular newsletter updates, exclusive invites to Froglife events and special offers for Frogalogue merchandise.

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- **Online:** www.froglife.org/support
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- **By post:** add your details to the left, including your cheque or card details, detach and post it back to us.

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