

Why did the toad cross the road?



For a better reason than the chicken, that's for sure! Although we haven't had our coldest weather yet, spring will be upon us before we know it, and with it migration of the Common Toad. Every spring, usually beginning with the first damp mild weather from January onwards, Common Toads all over the country begin to make their way to their ancestral breeding grounds. Like many amphibians, the Common Toad spends the majority of its life on land, in damp dark places in woods and gardens. They can live up to 2km (or 1.3 miles) away from the breeding grounds where they were born. The journey back to their ponds often involves crossing roads which can be very hazardous. The Common Toad has declined over recent decades and one of the factors is the amount that are killed on the roads during their annual migration.

Toads move very slowly and cars move very fast – not a match made in heaven! So, to try to reduce the number of fatalities, the charity Froglife set up the 'Toads on Roads' project over twenty years ago. This project registers toad migratory crossings, putting up road signs to help warn traffic and co-ordinating local volunteers who patrol the sites. These intrepid volunteers – toad patrollers – are organised to try to snatch the toads from the jaws of death by manning known crossing places of which there is one in Plumpton Lane between The Old Mill House and south of Fairhaven. There are road signs here to warn drivers to be careful of toads crossing. These are activated when toads are expected so please look out for them and drive cautiously. If you see any toad activity – usually at dusk and shortly after - or any dead toads on the road please report to the Plumpton and East Chilton Wildlife Group via Facebook. There are other known local crossings that are much too dangerous to patrol. There are also crossings that we know about, but don't know whether the mortality there is significant. And there may be crossings that we don't know about. We would welcome details of any other such sightings so that we can monitor the sites.

In order to help reduce toad deaths we need a good number of local – very local – volunteers who can join our Whatsapp group and are able to respond quickly if we find toads are crossing. If you are adult (our crossing is too unsafe for children) and fancy giving a toad a helping hand this year please contact mariebullough46@googlemail.com. You will need a clean bucket, a pair of

clean gloves, a torch and a high visibility jacket if you have one – if not we will provide.

For further information have a look at <https://www.froglife.org/what-we-do/toads-on-roads/> which gives more information about Toads on Roads and lists the local registered crossings. See also the latest newsletter of the Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group (SxARG) under News at <http://www.sussexarg.org.uk/index.html>.

Even if you can't help out please watch out for warning signs and slow down for volunteers in the road!

Marie Bullough

Other activities: We are planning to hold a number of events again this year, including the Nightingale Walk and Newt Evenings. Numbers will be limited so look out for dates and register quickly to avoid disappointment.

At the time of writing there are still a few spaces available for the [30th Sussex Biological Recorders' Seminar](#), which will be held from 9.30 am on Saturday 16th February 2019 at Oathall Community College, Haywards Heath. This annual meeting is a great day of diverse talks, chat and exhibitions about wildlife studies in Sussex.