

If You Go Down to the Woods Tonight – Out of Season Toad Surveying

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I am sure most of you are familiar with toad survey techniques, whether it is counting strings of spawn, adult numbers in a pond or, the most effective, using drift fencing and pitfall buckets to count numbers arriving to breed. Even toad crossing data can be used. Whatever the method employed the emphasis as with other amphibians is nearly always on breeding ponds in the spring and early summer and with good reason. But what of the terrestrial habitats where toads spend most of their lives?



In their terrestrial phase Common toads are quite cryptic and difficult to observe.

In early August we were doing the inaugural glow worm survey on my regular reptile site when we found something unexpected. The site has two relatively open areas, good for reptiles and the odd glow worm, divided by a band of high canopy mature woodland. Walking through this woodland little rustling noises could be discerned, which on investigation proved to be toads, presumably hunting in the leaf litter. Previously we had seen a few toads over the years on site but that night we saw 10 and heard more. Given the ease with which we found them I presumed that this must be a recognised survey technique for the species. In fact, nearly all amphibian survey effort as mentioned is targeted at their breeding sites. On



those rare occasions when pitfall trapping is used to survey for amphibians, the trapping effort is still concentrated around the perimeter of the breeding pond(s).



In mid August I repeated the walk through the woodland. It was a bit colder with a breeze but in 45 minutes I found 9 toads ranging in size from 3 to 8cm. It would appear that there is a previously unrecorded toad population using the site as a terrestrial habitat.

There is no toad breeding on site indeed toads are not, I think, mentioned specifically in the existing management plan simply because they are so very rarely seen. A possible breeding pond does exist 200 metres beyond the site boundary and up to 300m from the woodland in question.



Toad in the hole

I am sure some of you reading this who perhaps survey for bats/moths/glow worms or stag beetles must have found toads in woodlands at night. Please let SxSARG know your experiences. While ponds will remain the focus of recording efforts for this species, in woodland sites without breeding ponds where toads may have been overlooked, this might be a viable technique to at least detect presence. If it turns out that there is no recognised technique for woodland toad surveying then perhaps it would make a good research project. Please contact: SxARG.