

In defence of the poor frog and toad

Due to climate change, our winters are getting warmer, and certainly this winter started off very mild. So much so that our humble frog decided to begin spawning in January, far too early really, as they would not normally begin until late February to early March. As normal, I found big clumps of spawn in puddles down the lane in a field, and so rescued it every morning for a week, and put it into my pond at home. I only have a small pond, but frogs, toads and newts all come and lay their eggs in it each year, and very pleased to see them I am to. Of course, it was too early, and a lot of it didn't survive the hard frosts we had at the beginning of March, but enough did that were lower down in the water. You can imagine my horror when talking to other people in and out of the village who have ponds of their own, to hear that they can't abide so much frogs and toads spawn in their ponds, and so take it out and throw it in the fields or flush it down the loo. Why? Frogs and toads have to fight for every little space to reproduce due to all their natural habitats being filled in or dug up over the years, to make way for bigger fields and so bigger yields. Talking to some of these people who throw away our precious future frogs and toads, they seem to think that they use streams to spawn in, but they don't, they like still water such as ponds, water in ditches, and now, because of the shortage of ponds, large puddles, that will of course dry up before the tadpoles are mature enough to hop away, but they don't know that! Nice garden ponds seem to them to be the answer, but obviously, some pond owners have other ideas. Most of the tadpoles will not reach maturity anyway due to predation from birds and other creepy-crawlies who live at the bottom of their precious ponds. I have watched as a blackbird has eaten a great deal of mine until I had to put some netting over to stop it. Beautiful dragonflies who fly about our gardens during the summer and get admired by everyone, they lay their eggs in our ponds, and then the larva, who take about two years to mature into adults, eat their way through countless tadpoles, fish and anything else that they can get their jaws on to, it's nature's way, and why frogs and toads lay so many eggs to provide food for others. Water boatman, water spiders pond skaters, you name it, they are all waiting there to pounce, and so why oh why are there people out there fishing spawn out of their ponds and dumping it? In some parts of the country frogs and toads are a rarity, and so why not think how lucky and privileged we are here in Puddington to have these little creatures willing to spawn in our ponds. Don't dump them, help them, after all, we see enough of them squashed along the roads after a night of rain.

I was out walking a few weeks ago on a warm sunny afternoon, and as I got closer to a pond along the edge of a field that *has* been left undisturbed and natural so far, I could hear what sounded like geese. When I got to the pond and looked in, I could see that what it really was a mass of toads spawning, and they were so busy at their task, that they took no notice of me or my dogs. In all my years watching wildlife, I have never come across so many toads at one time, it was amazing, and the noise they made really did sound like geese, it was so loud. They don't croak as frogs do, it is quite a different noise altogether. They also spawn later on in the spring once it's warmed up more. I think that frogs start while it is still so cold because any snakes that would eat them are still in hibernation, but toads don't have to worry because of the bad taste their skins give out, and so snakes leave them alone. I managed to let our local wildlife photographer know in time for him to get down there and take some pictures, because it would only be this one day of the year that they would be there. I look forward to seeing the result.