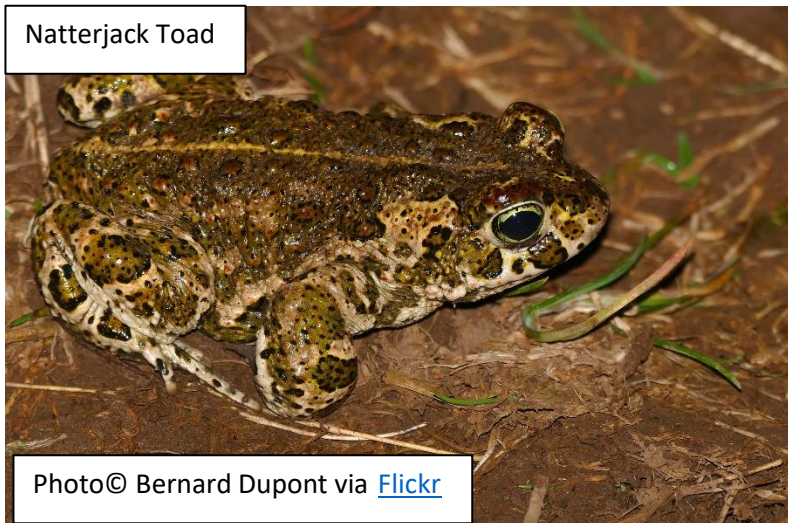


February – Frogspawn and Amphibians

Amphibians are cold blooded animals which spend part of their lives in water and part of their lives on land. They are the most endangered group of animals in the world with many, many species around the globe at risk of extinction. In Ireland we have three different types; these are the common frog, smooth newt and natterjack toad. The common frog and smooth newt are found throughout the country but the natterjack toad is mostly found only in Kerry.

These three are among the very few animals which hibernate in Ireland. We can often get mixed up and think that animals like squirrels and badgers hibernate but they actually stay awake and active during the winter months. We are lucky in Ireland because the weather does not get too cold so most animals do not need to hibernate. Amphibians, however are cold blooded which means they rely on the outside environment to keep themselves warm. If it is cold out they cannot stay warm. Insects are a big part of amphibian's diets so they would also struggle to find food during winter. This leads them to spend winter hibernating. They generally bury themselves under mud or log piles and only emerge in early spring. They obviously cannot rely on a calendar to know when spring has arrived so their bodies gradually wake up when the temperatures start to increase. February is a good time to look out for amphibians, particularly to see frogs and frog spawn although if there is a mild January many amphibians will be active then as well.

Natterjack Toad



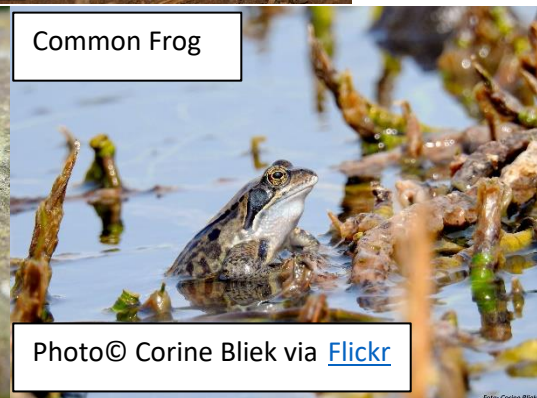
Photo© Bernard Dupont via [Flickr](#)

Smooth Newt



Photo© Gail Hampshire via [Flickr](#)

Common Frog



Photo© Corine Bliet via [Flickr](#)

Foto: Corine Bliet

Activity 1: Learn more

Research the life cycles of [frogs](#), [newts](#) or [toads](#). Learn what kinds of predators they have, what they eat and the habitats they need to survive. What challenges and threats do they face in Ireland?

- Watch common frogs awake from hibernation and produce frog spawn in this [video](#).
- Learn more about Smooth Newts in this short [video](#)
- Watch this [video](#) to hear the amazing sounds of the natterjack toad. It focuses on their breeding process or watch this short clip to get a look at the adult natterjack toad [here](#).
- Try our origami frog craft. Follow along with GS officer Alison in this [video](#). All you need is a square piece of paper (any colour).

Activity 2: Notice Nature

Spend some time outside this month and keep your eyes peeled for frogspawn or even newt eggs. Frogspawn can be found in all kinds of freshwater from puddles and ditches to larger ponds and lakes. Frogs lay their eggs in large batches of several thousand but many of these will be under the surface of the water. Sometimes it appears as though there are bubbles floating on top of the water, as you get closer you will see that they are more like jelly with a black dot in the middle. Newts lay individual eggs usually on grass or other plants beside water. These may be found all around the country but are very difficult to spot! Toads lay their eggs in lines called Toad Strings. These would also be found in freshwater but probably only in Kerry and not until much later in Spring.



Frog Spawn



©Natural England via [Flickr](#)



©Gilles San Martin via [Flickr](#)

Toad Strings- Notice they are in lines.

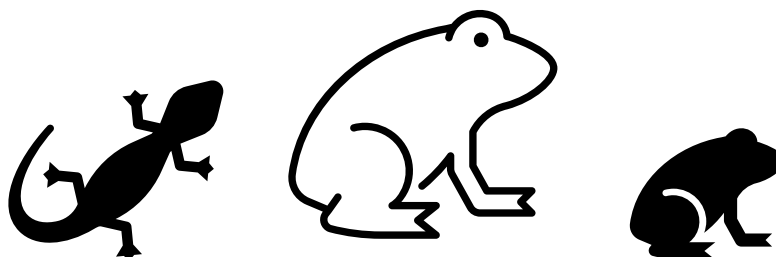
Newt Egg. They are often “hidden” by a plant.

Activity 3- Take Action

There are many different things you could do in your school or at home to help amphibians in Ireland. Since these animals use different habitats at different times of the year and throughout their lives there are lots of opportunities to make an impact! Why not try one or more of the following:

- Make a home for amphibians to spend the winter in with this [RSPB guide](#)
- Creating a small pond can be of huge benefit. Ireland has lost a big percentage of its wetlands in recent years so providing this habitat can really help.
 - You could either make a simple [container pond](#)
 - Or for a bigger project you could create a [larger garden pond](#).

If you do spot any frogspawn or take part in an activity related to amphibians, we would love to hear all about it. You'll find us here: @greenschoolsire on Twitter or Instagram, use #greenschoolsbiod



Best of luck this month!