

Back from the Brink – Species summary

Natterjack Toad

BftB project: IP05 Gems in the Dunes

Project lead organisation: Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust

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Species name – common & scientific	Natterjack Toad – <i>Epidalea calamita</i>
Photograph	 <p>© Alex Hyde / Back from the Brink</p>
Taxon group	Amphibian
Conservation status	Protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. Listed as a European Protected Species under Annex IV of the European Habitats Directive.
UK distribution	Coastal sand dunes and saltmarsh in Scotland, Cumbria, Merseyside, North Wales and East Anglia. Sandy heaths across Hampshire and Surrey.
Habitat associations	Sand dune, salt marsh, sandy heath
BftB work carried out:	
Survey & Monitoring	All 90+ breeding pools deemed “suitable” were regularly monitored by volunteers and land managers each year between March and August, counting spawn strings (indicator of adult population size), tadpoles and toadlets (indicator of breeding success). This methodology fits in with long-term Natterjack Monitoring Programme.

Sites habitat management works	Existing breeding pools which had seen declining numbers over recent years due to poor habitat quality were rejuvenated on a number of sites, often in tandem with scrub removal and bare-ground creation close-by to improve both terrestrial and aquatic habitat quality. Some new pools were created by excavating down to the water table, allowing pools to flood annually and dry-up by the end of summer (removing predators/competitors). Some new pools were lined with a pond-liner to retain rain water where water table was too low – these were created to better connect populations. Some pools were fenced to reduce disturbance from humans and dogs.
Conservation 'interventions' incl. reintroductions & translocations	No large scale conservation interventions. Occasional moving of spawn strings from pools that were rapidly drying to deeper areas to ensure survival.
Technical advice provision	Species information guide, species survey guide and habitat management guides for slack creation/rejuvenation, scrub control, and bare earth creation, were created.
Links made with other taxa / conservation work?	Pool creation and rejuvenation was linked to improving habitat for <i>Bryum warneum</i> , <i>B. calophyllum</i> and <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i> . Removal of scrub and bare ground creation may benefit <i>Lacerta agilis</i> and <i>Cicindela hybrida</i>
Wider engagement & advocacy activities?	Numerous public events, specifically guided evening walks, with the purpose of raising awareness of the natterjack toad and conservation issues. Creative arts activities engaged with new audiences and natterjack toads were a species of focus.
BftB results obtained:	
Recorded Distribution (in BftB focal areas)	54/87 breeding pools with positive records (peak count from 2018)
Recorded Abundance of species populations	2700-6100 breeding adults (5 year average of sex ratios of 1:1 and 1:3.5)
Recommendations for future work:-	Create new pools (shallow and flat) more frequently in frontal sections of sand dunes as terrestrial habitat is most suitable here and would maintain a healthy population size (if not encourage growth). Increase livestock grazing intensity and extend grazing areas on Ainsdale and Birkdale LNR to manage scrub and maintain a short sward. Use heavy machinery to remove scrub from flat areas and create slacks in its place.