

NATTERJACK TOAD *Bufo calamita*

1. CURRENT STATUS

1.1 International/National

1.1.1 The Natterjack Toad is a western European species. Outside of its stronghold in Spain and Portugal, where it remains widespread and common, its status is regarded as unfavourable due to large population declines.

1.1.2 Its distribution and abundance declined markedly in the UK during the 20th century due to loss of habitat (heathland, sand dune and upper saltmarsh). Natterjacks are now restricted to four natural sites in Scotland and 35 in England plus 13 sites to which it has been reintroduced.

1.2 Local

1.2.1 In North Merseyside the Natterjack Toad occurs on the Sefton Coast in seaward dunes between Southport and Hightown. In 2000 it was present on 13 sites (three of which are reintroductions). The breeding population is estimated just over 1000 females.

1.2.2 The largest populations are on Ainsdale Sand Dunes NNR and Ainsdale and Birkdale Sandhills LNR. Natterjacks are absent from much of the dune coast and some breeding sites are relatively isolated.

1.2.3 Natterjacks require a mosaic of habitats in fairly close proximity: wet slacks and pools of varying depths some of which hold water until mid- to late summer for breeding; short grassland and bare sand for feeding; and open sand ridges for burrows.

1.3 Legal

1.3.1 The species is listed on Appendix II of the Bern Convention and Annex IVa of the Habitats Directive. It is protected under Schedule 2 of the Habitat Regulations and Schedule 5 of the WCA.

2. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

2.1. National

2.1.1 Loss of habitat due to housing and industrial development, agriculture and reduced grazing on heathlands.

2.1.2 Fixation of dune systems and prevention of tidal inundation through the creation of sea defences.

2.1.3 Habitat fragmentation, leading to genetic isolation of populations.

2.1.4 Loss of breeding pools and competition with Common Toads.

2.2 Local

2.2.1 Interruption of dune accretion processes leading to over-stabilisation of dunes.

2.2.2 The spread of rank grasses and scrub, partly caused by a decline in rabbit-grazing, further reducing suitable habitat.

2.2.3 Losses to development, forestry and recreational uses have reduced the area of available habitat. Fragmentation of habitat has led to isolation of populations.

2.2.4 Creation of permanent water bodies in the dunes has encouraged populations of invertebrates which prey on Natterjack tadpoles and, most seriously, of Common Toads which both predate and suppress the development of Natterjack tadpoles.

2.2.5 Gassing of rabbits, especially on golf courses, can kill Natterjacks using burrows and removes a valuable grazing animal.

2.2.6 Collecting and disturbance of spawn and tadpoles can reduce metamorphic success.

2.2.7 Inappropriate management can cause the loss of low vegetation structure and open ground used by natterjacks for foraging.

2.2.8 Water abstraction, conifers and scrub lower the water table locally and reduces the number of pools in which natterjack tadpoles can develop to maturity.

3. CURRENT ACTION

3.1 National

3.1.1 English Nature's Species Recovery Programme has had Natterjack Toad as one of its priorities.

3.1.2 A Natterjack Toad Handbook has been published.

3.2 Local

3.2.1 An annual monitoring scheme was established in the 1980s, co-ordinated by Sefton Council.

3.2.2 Major habitat restoration and creation works have been carried out by Sefton Council and EN partly as a result of the Species Recovery Programme (1993-95) and the Sefton Coast Life Project (1996-99). These have included scrape/pond creation and reprofiling, grazing and mowing, scrub clearance and beach management.

3.2.3 EN has begun the phased removal of frontal woodlands at Ainsdale to restore large areas of open dune habitats. This work is subject to review in 2000.

3.2.4 HCT is producing an updated Conservation Strategy for Natterjacks on the Sefton Coast.

3.2.5 Common Toads and their spawn are being removed from key Natterjack breeding pools.

3.2.6 Natterjack spawn has been translocated to re-establish populations.

4. KEY HABITATS

* Sand dunes

* Saltmarsh

5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

5.1 Maintain current population and distribution ensuring favourable condition.

5.2 Restore Natterjacks to their recent historical range by 2010.

5.3 Create linkages between populations.

6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

6.1 Site safeguard

6.1.1 Review SSSI coverage of Natterjack sites and ensure all significant populations are designated by 2001. (Action: EN) (Priority: Medium)

6.1.2 Designate all sites with Natterjack populations as SLBIs by 2000. Viable sites should have breeding pools and suitable habitat for foraging. (Action: EAS; LA) (Priority: Medium)

6.2 Policy

6.2.1 Ensure completion of conservation strategy. (Action: HCT; EN; SCP) (Priority: High)

6.2.2 Ensure Natterjack requirements are taken into account in all plans and strategies affecting Sefton Coast, including coastal defence and beach management. (Action: DEFRA; EN; SCP; EA) (Priority: Medium)

6.3 Land management

6.3.1 Ensure Natterjack presence and requirements are recognised in all site management plans and that all sites have management plans. (Action: EN; land managers; HCT) (Priority: High)

6.3.2 Ensure appropriate management of Natterjack sites. Measures include maintenance of 'key pools' and a range of other shallow seasonal pools, scrub removal and mowing and grazing. (Action: EN; HCT; land managers) (Priority: High)

6.3.3 Remove limited areas of woodland and scrub on dunes to allow linkages and to expand populations. (Action: land managers; HCT; EN; FC) (Priority: High)

6.3.4 Re-create habitat on degraded dunes and other appropriate areas to consolidate and expand current range. (Action: EN; land managers; HCT) (Priority: High)

6.3.5 Minimise effects on the water table of golfing management and sewerage/drainage from roads and buildings. (Action: LEA; NWW; golf courses; LA; EN) (Priority: Medium)

6.3.6 Minimise effects of beach cleansing and roads and clearance and seek procedures to improve habitats. (Action: LA) (Priority: Medium)

6.3.7 Retain vehicle-free areas of beaches and uni-posting to encourage dynamic dune processes. (Action: LA) (Priority: Medium)

6.4 Species management and protection

6.4.1 Ensure presence of Natterjacks is taken into account wherever any works which may affect them are carried out. (Action: EN; LA; LEA; landowners) (Priority: Medium)

6.4.2 Identify suitable sites for re-introduction and initiate re-introduction at eight sites in Sefton by 2005 in accordance with local strategy. (Action: EN; HCT; landowners) (Priority: High)

6.4.3 Consider usefulness and practicality of continuing or extending removal of Common Toads from Natterjack pools. (Action: HCT,EN; landowners) (Priority: Medium)

6.4.4 Continue and consider extending programme of fencing, signing and wardening of pools. (Action: HCT; EN; landowners) (Priority: Medium)

6.4.5 Raise awareness of species' protected status in local police force and local authority. (Action: EN; SCP; Merseyside Police) (Priority: Low)

6.5 Advice

6.5.1 Ensure landowners and managers of sites containing natterjacks are aware of the species' needs, legal status and the importance of conserving the species and that advice on its management is available. (Action: HCT; EN; SCP) (Priority: High)

6.6 Research and monitoring

6.6.1 Monitor all colonies annually using established methodology. (Action: land managers; SCP; EN; HCT) (Priority: High)

6.6.2 Produce and distribute annual reports on breeding success to relevant bodies. (Action: EN; SCP; HCT) (Priority: High)

6.6.3 Continue annual spring recorders/managers meeting (Action: SCP) (Priority: High)

6.6.4 Consider establishment of a body to monitor implementation of this plan. (Action: MBG) (priority: High)

6.6.5 Encourage relevant research via Sefton Coast Research Forum. (Action: SCP; HCT; universities) (Priority: Low)

6.7 Communications and publicity

6.7.1 Further promote and circulate the published Natterjack handbook (Beebee and Denton 1996) and HCT Natterjack conservation leaflet to land managers. (Action: EN; SCP; HCT/WWF) (Priority: Medium)

6.7.2 Produce and distribute a simple leaflet identifying conservation needs and aims of this plan for general circulation. (Action: HCT; EN; SCP) (Priority: Medium)

6.7.3 Continue system of Natterjack interpretation signs at appropriate locations. Design new sign (Action: EN; land managers; HCT) (Priority: Medium)

7. LINKS TO OTHER PLANS

7.1 UK BAP - sand dunes HAP, saltmarsh HAP,
Natterjack Toad SAP, Sand Lizard SAP, Petalwort SAP

7.2 North Merseyside BAP - sand dunes HAP, saltmarsh
HAP, Sand Lizard SAP, Skylark SAP

8. CONFLICTS WITH OTHER PLANS

North Merseyside BAP – Woodland HAPs, Red Squirrel
SAP, Petalwort SAP

9. CONTACTS

Sefton Coast and Countryside Service

Sefton Coastal Strategy Officer

English Nature, Pier House, Wallgate, Wigan WN3 4AL

Herpetological Conservation Trust, 655a Christchurch
Rd, Boscombe, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 4AP