

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>	<b>Item no.</b>
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee		
<b>Subject:</b> Amphibians on the Heath	<b>Public</b>	
<b>Report of:</b> Simon Lee	<b>For Information</b>	
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p> <p>This report reviews the status of amphibians on Hampstead Heath and recommends practical habitat management which would be beneficial to their conservation. Some of the recommended actions are already being implemented or are planned as part of the Heath's current annual work programme.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>That the Committee note the contents of this report.</p>		

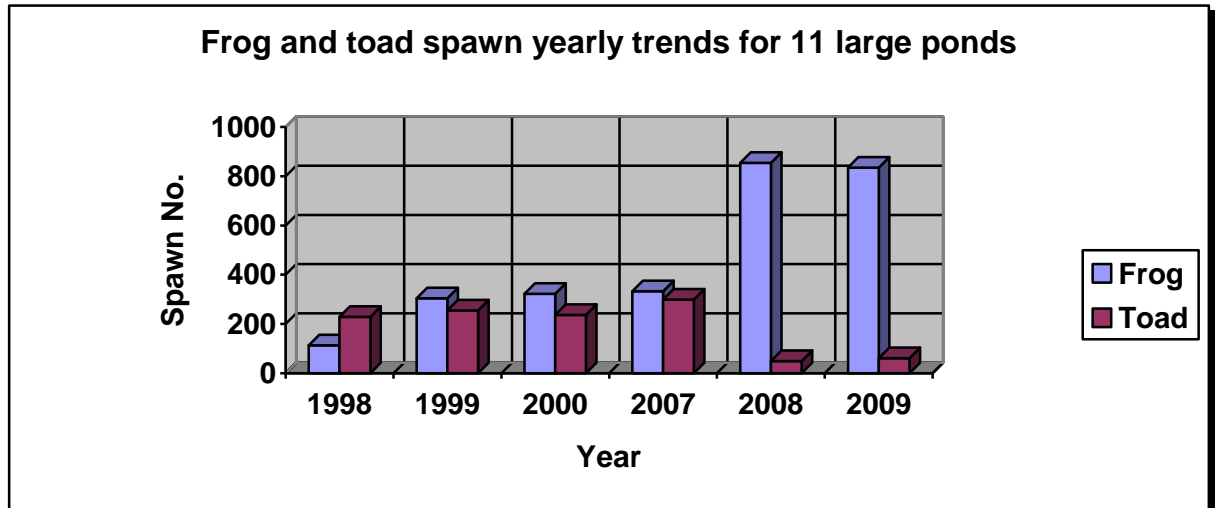
## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. An Essential Action in Hampstead Heath's Management Plan Part I is to 'Monitor changes in the Heaths ecology' (NL12). Amphibian recording is one such form of basic monitoring and gives an indication of not only the species' well being, but also of the pond habitat as a whole.
2. Annual counts of frog and toad spawn had been made on the Heath from 1997 to 2000. The survey was reinstated in 2007 using the same methodology, so we are now in a position to assess trends in the Heath's amphibian populations which span a decade. As systematic monitoring of newts began only in 2008, there are insufficient data to analyse trends.

### **Current Position**

- All 11 large ponds in the Hampstead and Highgate Valleys were surveyed in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2007, 2008 and 2009. The aggregated figures for these ponds reveal a gradual increase in frogspawn and a decrease in toad spawn between 1998 and 2009 (see bar chart below). Frogs are also more widely distributed on the Heath than toads; there are several large ponds from which toads appear completely absent.



- So far, newts have been recorded in several of the small, shallow ponds on the Heath and also in the Bird Sanctuary and Hampstead No.1 Pond. This indicates that they may also be detected in the other large ponds if survey methodology is improved.
- In the larger ponds it is thought to be a combination of a lack of emergent and aquatic vegetation, shade from trees and fish predation which will restrict amphibian numbers. However the decline in frogspawn records for the Extension ponds indicate that ponds can also become too vegetated for amphibians to breed successfully. Frog spawn found in the first year after construction (2007) of the ponds in Cohen's Field show the relative ease with which frogs will colonise suitable habitat.
- It is thought improvement in management has contributed to the increase on certain ponds and a subsequent lack of management has caused declines on others.
- Marsh frogs were illegally introduced relatively recently to the Extension ponds, but the impact of this non-native species on common frog populations is not yet known.
- A fuller report is provided in Appendix 1.

## Recommendations

9. The following general practices should be followed to encourage amphibian populations:

- Increasing the amount of light to the edges of ponds, e.g. by coppicing and lifting bank side trees. The Men's Pond has suffered the most serious decline in amphibian numbers and should be considered a priority for lifting of bank side vegetation
- Planting emergent and floating vegetation.
- Continuing to creating new small ponds or pools. It is likely that they will need to be fenced to prevent disturbance by dogs.
- Continuing to monitor the marsh frog population on the Extension ponds.
- Considering regrading sections of some ponds to allow planting of emergent vegetation.
- Partial dredging and removing some vegetation from the Extension ponds to maintain some open water and prevent succession. Particular ponds of concern are Extension ponds 2 and 3.
- Leaving any ivy stems growing into the water. In the absence of emergent or aquatic vegetation ivy appears to be the choice of plant for toads to lay spawn on and around.

10. Recommendations for specific ponds are given in Appendix 1.

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

11. Any dredging will require equipment to be brought in and a location for the disposal of dredgings to be agreed. This will be addressed in a future Committee report on management of the Extension ponds and will not be undertaken before this time. All other amphibian monitoring and management work will be undertaken using the Heath local risk budgets.

### **Legal Implications**

12. The City has a legal duty under the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 to maintain the natural aspect of the Heath.

### **Property Implications**

13. Property implications of dredging any of the Extension ponds will be addressed in a future report.

### **HR Implications**

14. There are no HR implications of this report.

### **Strategic Implications**

15. The proposals link to the theme in the Community Strategy to protect, promote and enhance our environment.
16. They also link to the Open Spaces Department Plan through the Strategic Aim to ‘adopt sustainable working practices, promote the variety of life (biodiversity) and protect the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations’, and the Improvement Objective to ‘ensure that measures to promote sustainability and biodiversity are embedded in the Department’s work’.
17. These works also help fulfil an Essential Actions in the Part 1 Management Plan, namely:

*To manage the Heath’s ponds to enhance their nature conservation value*

### **Conclusion**

18. The Heath’s ponds support the native amphibians common frog, common toad and smooth newt. These populations will continue to be monitored. A number of management practices are proposed which will enhance the habitat for these species and so help to conserve and increase their populations

### **Appendices**

**Appendix 1:** *Amphibians on Hampstead Heath and their conservation.*

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