

The common toad (*Bufo bufo*)

Characteristics

Common toads are dark to reddish brown and have a lumpy appearance. They possess a pair of well-developed ear glands and have a warty skin. Their reddish-golden eyes are quite striking. The males are about one third smaller than the females, which can grow up to 15cm long.

Distribution and habitat

The adaptable common toad is the most widespread amphibian in many areas of Europe. In Austria, it can be found in places up to 2000 meters above sea level.

The summer habitat of the common toad is the forest. Spawning waters are usually permanent, where cohabitation with fishes is frequent. Also, there are known populations in wild water meadows which use those temporary pioneer waters as spawning ground.

In the National Park Thayatal, common toads spawned in seven of the 24 studied still waters. The two very populated sites in the Wolfsteich (more than 2000 individuals) and Sagteich ponds (more than 400 individuals) are particularly valuable, as well as the medium population in Fugnitzsee, area as a north-west meta population centre.

Life patterns

Common toads are active very early in the year. When the weather is humid and temperatures rise above 4°C, they leave their place of hibernation and can travel up to 2,200 meters to reach their spawning waters, even crossing wild rivers. For many years, they keep going back to their spawning grounds. For the common toads of the National Park, the Kaja brook valley is an important migration corridor. The males come out of hibernation earlier. They clutch the females with their muscular arms, but often also other males or amphibians, fishes etc. For this, they possess patches of hardened skin on their three middle fingers, called nuptial pads. With the help of these pads, the male toad holds onto the female's shoulders and lets her carry him on her back to the spawning waters. Since females do not visit the spawning waters every year, there are always more males than females. Thus in the males' scramble over them, females are clutched by several males and often die in the process. When they are captured, males utter a squeaky cry for release. The eggs are delivered in long gelatinous double strings that are 2 to 5 meters long and spread out between reed stalks, deadwood or grass. A female lays between 2000 and 6000 black eggs. After one or two weeks, tadpoles hatch from the eggs, building swarms of thousands of individuals. After two to three months, they turn into small toads and usually move to solid ground between early June and mid-July. On paths close to rivers, this can turn into a very noticeable mass migration, commonly called "frog rain". It is only after two or three years that they return to their birth waters as adult and sexually mature toads.

Special features

The common toad was elected amphibian of the year 2012. As such, it serves as the icon for the protection of amphibians on roads. During their spawning migration in the spring, toads are often victims of traffic. In many places, their journey is secured by the installation of seasonal protective fences or – unfortunately, only in a few locations so far – by permanent protection systems for amphibians with passageways under the roads.

Threat and status of protection

The common toad is included in the Austrian Red List under the category NT (almost endangered species), but is considered as endangered in Lower Austria.