# Natterjack toads breed in South Downs for first time in 50 years



The natterjack toad, celebrated as the UK’s loudest amphibian, is making a remarkable resurgence in the South Downs National Park. This resurgence follows a dedicated conservation initiative focused on revitalising habitats suitable for its survival. Recent reports indicate that a total of 28 toadlets have been counted at Blackmoor, Hampshire, marking the first recorded breeding of this unique species at the site in fifty years. The significance of this development cannot be understated, as prior to these efforts, the toads were limited to a solitary location within the national park, specifically Woolmer Forest, and had been considered locally extinct in neighbouring Sussex.

The successful conservation project, led by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC), involved meticulous planning and execution. Restoration efforts included the creation of shallow ponds and the reintroduction of grazing cattle to maintain the heathland ecosystem, which had suffered neglect since the 1970s. Jack Harper from ARC expressed enthusiasm about this achievement, stating that the hard work from various stakeholders is beginning to bear fruit, enhancing the prospects for this fascinating species in the region.

Olivia French, the heathlands project team leader for the South Downs National Park, echoed this sentiment, celebrating the progress as a testament to effective wildlife recovery strategies. She noted that with a breeding population now established at both Woolmer Forest and Blackmoor, the outlook for natterjack toads seems significantly brighter. French highlighted the alarming statistic that 75% of breeding sites for natterjack toads in Great Britain have vanished over the past century. These toads are now primarily confined to coastal regions in north-west England and the Solway Firth in Scotland, making the successful breeding at Blackmoor all the more vital.

As climate change further exacerbates challenges for the species—particularly due to rising sea levels—this resurgence in Hampshire is a beacon of hope. Notably, the authority's commitment to nature recovery has been bolstered by funding of nearly £40,000 allocated in December 2021 to support the reintroduction efforts in Blackmoor, part of the broader Heathlands Reunited conservation project.

The initiative also focuses on habitat restoration techniques such as bracken clearance and controlled grazing by Longhorn cattle, which promote a balanced ecosystem for the natterjack toads. These measures form part of a four-year plan initiated in 2022, aiming to translocate spawn and tadpoles from Woolmer Forest to Blackmoor, with an ultimate goal of establishing a self-sustaining population.

To safeguard this delicate resurgence, visitors to the Woolmer Forest area are kindly reminded to keep their dogs on leads throughout the breeding season from April to August, minimising disturbances to the newly created shallow ponds that serve as breeding sites.

The collaborative efforts of various conservation entities demonstrate a successful model for wildlife recovery in the UK, suggesting that with dedicated action, it is indeed possible to reverse the fortunes of endangered species, allowing them to flourish in their natural habitats once more. The story of the natterjack toad serves as an inspiring example of how targeted conservation initiatives can lead to significant ecological improvements, ensuring a brighter future for this rare amphibian.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/uks-noisiest-amphibians-making-remarkable-comeback-in-south-downs-COW4E36HVNJUTDYS63HFE2B444/)
* Paragraph 2: [[2]](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/natterjacks-return-planning-authority-supports-nature-recovery/), [[3]](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/the-top-10-biodiversity-success-stories-for-the-south-downs-national-park-and-looking-ahead-to-the-future/)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/uks-noisiest-amphibians-making-remarkable-comeback-in-south-downs-COW4E36HVNJUTDYS63HFE2B444/), [[6]](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/custodians/challenges-opportunities/)
* Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/natterjacks-return-planning-authority-supports-nature-recovery/), [[5]](https://www.arc-trust.org/news/returning-the-natterjack-toad-to-blackmoor)
* Paragraph 5: [[6]](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/custodians/challenges-opportunities/), [[5]](https://www.arc-trust.org/news/returning-the-natterjack-toad-to-blackmoor)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/uks-noisiest-amphibians-making-remarkable-comeback-in-south-downs-COW4E36HVNJUTDYS63HFE2B444/), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/uks-noisiest-amphibians-making-remarkable-comeback-in-south-downs-COW4E36HVNJUTDYS63HFE2B444/), [[3]](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/the-top-10-biodiversity-success-stories-for-the-south-downs-national-park-and-looking-ahead-to-the-future/)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/uks-noisiest-amphibians-making-remarkable-comeback-in-south-downs-COW4E36HVNJUTDYS63HFE2B444/), [[4]](https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/wildlife-explorer/amphibians/natterjack-toad)

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## Bibliography

* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/uks-noisiest-amphibians-making-remarkable-comeback-in-south-downs-COW4E36HVNJUTDYS63HFE2B444/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/natterjacks-return-planning-authority-supports-nature-recovery/> - In December 2021, the South Downs National Park Authority allocated nearly £40,000 to support the reintroduction of the natterjack toad at Blackmoor, Hampshire. This funding aimed to restore the heathland habitat, which had been neglected since the 1970s, by creating shallow ponds and introducing cattle grazing to improve conditions for the toads. The initiative is part of the Heathlands Reunited conservation project, which has been working to restore heathlands across the South Downs National Park.
* <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/the-top-10-biodiversity-success-stories-for-the-south-downs-national-park-and-looking-ahead-to-the-future/> - The South Downs National Park Authority highlights the successful conservation efforts for the natterjack toad, a rare amphibian found in the park. The Heathlands Reunited Project, led by the Authority and involving multiple partners, has been working to restore heathlands and ensure the survival of species like the natterjack toad. The project has funded bracken clearance and introduced Longhorn cattle grazing to improve the habitat at Woolmer Forest, leading to a significant increase in natterjack toad populations.
* <https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/wildlife-explorer/amphibians/natterjack-toad> - The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust provides information on the natterjack toad, a rare amphibian found in coastal locations, including the South Downs National Park. The trust describes the toad's distinctive yellow stripe and its preference for shallow pools on sand dunes, heaths, and marshes. It also notes the toad's loud, rasping call, which can be heard up to a mile away, and its nocturnal behavior during the breeding season.
* <https://www.arc-trust.org/news/returning-the-natterjack-toad-to-blackmoor> - The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC) discusses their efforts to reintroduce the natterjack toad to Blackmoor, Hampshire. After habitat restoration, including the creation of shallow ponds and the introduction of cattle grazing, ARC began a four-year program in 2022 to translocate spawn and tadpoles from Woolmer Forest to Blackmoor. The goal is to establish a self-sustaining population of natterjack toads at Blackmoor, with ongoing monitoring to assess the success of the reintroduction.
* <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/custodians/challenges-opportunities/> - The South Downs National Park Authority outlines the challenges and opportunities in conserving the park's biodiversity, including the natterjack toad. The Authority highlights the importance of habitat restoration, such as bracken clearance and the introduction of grazing, to support species like the natterjack toad. The Heathlands Reunited Project has been instrumental in these efforts, leading to significant improvements in the ecological condition of heathland habitats.
* <https://www.froglife.org/info-advice/amphibians-and-reptiles/natterjack-toad/> - Froglife provides detailed information on the natterjack toad, including its habitat preferences, breeding behavior, and conservation status. The toad is described as preferring shallow, warm ponds in sand dune slacks for breeding. Froglife also notes that the natterjack toad is legally protected in the UK, making it an offense to kill, injure, capture, disturb, or sell them, or to damage or destroy their habitats.