

Toad Transport

Cutting grass is a task I detest undertaking particularly being a hay fever sufferer. Having a pet dog means grass cutting at home is a necessary evil. I need to keep the small patch of grassed lawn at the rear of the house relatively short to allow the successful removal of the regular deposits associated with dog ownership.

August 9th 2020 and the dreaded mower is again brought out of the shed. I always first check the grass for any doggy deposits before starting any cut. Suddenly I see movement in the long grass and to my delight I spot a tiny toad crawling around trying to flee from me as best he can. I then see more movement further on and realise there are several of them. I hadn't noticed any young toads during previous cuts earlier in the summer. Off I go to collect a dog water bowl and amphibian rescue begins in earnest.

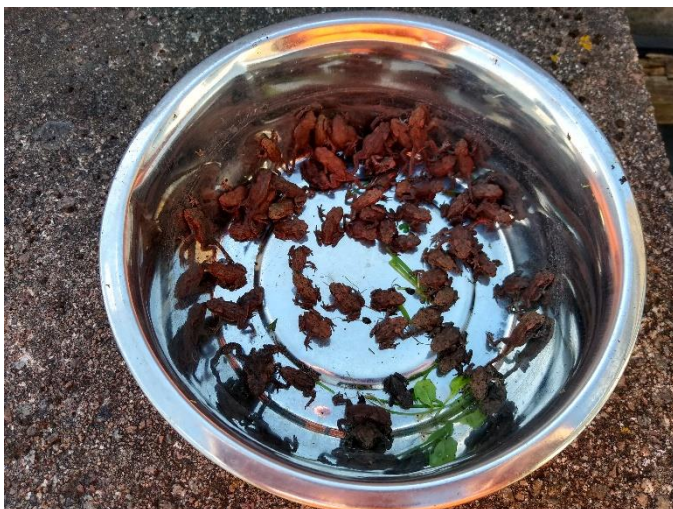
There was no way I could mow the grass knowing these little fellas were sheltering in there. Ten minutes of thorough searching later and I have eleven young toads in the bowl.

I carefully released them well out of the way in the large, wild field adjacent to the lawn. Mowing then continued with a clear conscience and I kept a sharp eye on the ground and several more toads were saved. Over the next couple of weeks, I checked the lawn and realised it was now regularly crawling with young toads.

The tiny amphibians were obviously finding easier movement and presumably easier hunting amongst the shorter grass.

Jump forward a couple of weeks and unfortunately the next cut was required and so the dog bowl was once again used as an amphibian transport facility. By now the toadlet numbers had surged and a twenty-minute search revealed 107 toadlets. Just imagine the carnage if I hadn't bothered to look

before cutting the grass? It's no real hassle to allow enough time to first take a good look before cutting and I slept better in my bed knowing I had bothered.



I remember encountering this wildlife spectacle at the house before, probably 12 or more years ago. That time I had my two daughters walking in front of the mower collecting young toads as we went. The mild spring of 2020 must have once again created the same favourable conditions and there was an amphibian abundance. To see so many young, healthy toads was an absolute treat for



me. I remember being a lad back in Lancashire and seeing hordes of them ascending the hill by the fishing ponds heading towards the drystone walls at the top.

Toads are my personal favourite of our British amphibians. Slow, determined, quite ugly (to some people) and secretive. What's not to love? I particularly like their auburn coloured eyes which for some reason always remind me of conkers (which I also can't resist). If you get a chance carefully check out the eyes on a toad, they are beautiful.

Often on damp evenings we come across large toads crawling around by the back door of the house hunting for food and hopefully dispatching some of the slugs and snails which love our potted plants. With my kind efforts of saving so many tiny toadlets from the mower, hopefully we will be rewarded with many more years of free natural pest control by our good friend *Bufo bufo*.

Paul Castle North Sutherland and North Caithness Ranger

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Pics - Paul Castle