

Italian tadpole rescue mission under way

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A complex emergency rescue mission reportedly is under way near Milan, Italy, to save the lives of hundreds of rare tadpoles discovered at a building site.

Scientists say the tadpoles will become green toads -- a rare species of amphibian whose numbers are declining across Europe, the Italian news agency ANSA reported Thursday.

Green toads are protected by strict European Union directives.

The tadpoles found in Assago, near Milan, are in trouble partly because the puddles in which they live are disappearing and because of heavy construction vehicles that could squash them.

Officials issued a temporary stop-work order at the construction site after the tadpoles' presence was discovered, ANSA said. That's allowing animal activists to remove the tadpoles so they can be taken to nearby pools and waterways.

Daniele Colombo, a World Wildlife Fund volunteer who has been organizing the rescue mission, says the eventual problem will be where to put the thousand or so baby toads once they have completed the next critical phase of their development.

"The ideal solution would be to create a special reserve for them," said Colombo.

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