

Toad task force

6 April 2011

An army of volunteers will be wading into ponds across the UK this spring to map the spread of a killer amphibian fungus.

Scientists from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) are working with 400 volunteers recruited by [Amphibian](#) and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG-UK) to swab more than 6,000 amphibians for the presence of [chytrid fungus](#) (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*).

Teams of volunteers will be heading out after dark between April and June to swab amphibians in more than 200 ponds across the UK. The Defra-funded survey will include 100 more sites than the last chytrid survey in 2008, with volunteers in action in Northern Ireland for the first time.

In addition to sampling common [toads](#), natterjack toads and the UK's three species of native newt, volunteers will also be swabbing non-native species such as the alpine newt and marsh frog. ZSL scientists are targeting new species and covering more locations in a bid to create a more complete picture of the UK's chytrid infection.

Chytrid [fungus](#) causes the disease chytridiomycosis, which results in the thickening of amphibian skin and prevents the transfer of vital salts across it. Scientists are now racing against time to understand how the deadly disease is spread and which species are most at risk.

"Chytrid has had devastating effects on [amphibian populations](#) across the globe, even causing some [species](#) to become extinct. It is essential that we understand where the fungus occurs in the UK so that we can identify the toads and newts that are under threat from succumbing to the disease," said Freya Smith, scientific coordinator of the survey at ZSL.

Jonathan Cranfield, vice-chair of ARG-UK said:
"The volunteers play a critical role in helping us to understand what is happening in our ponds.
Ensuring the future of our best-loved amphibians

would not be possible without the dedication and enthusiasm of the volunteer network."

The volunteers will collect samples of DNA from 30 amphibians at each site by swabbing the surface of their skin. The samples will then be analysed in laboratories at ZSL to check for the presence of chytrid fungus.

Provided by Zoological Society of London

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