

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT #2

In our last posting of this series we looked at Council information relating to amphibians on the Sports Centre. Today, we will present evidence from actual recent surveys.

From 9th March to 31st May 2015, and initially in the interests of animal welfare, FoSSC undertook its own survey of amphibian populations in the vicinity of the (then recently drained) boating lake. Virtually every day over this period, early each morning, FoSSC visited the boating lake to record and rescue any amphibians which had arrived at the site overnight and got trapped in it -with sheer and high concrete walls, the boating lake was effectively operating as a giant pitfall trap for any amphibians approaching it from any direction over a wide area. Over this entire period (approx. 100 days) we recorded only:

- 3 juvenile frogs
- 8 toads (4 juvenile toads, 2 adult (probably both female) 1 clasped pair)
- In the region of 100 smooth newts

So how do these direct observations relate to national standards for categorising amphibian populations / breeding sites? Those standards are defined in the Scoring System for Amphibian Assemblages (NCC 1989/EN 2001) which ranks the importance of amphibian breeding sites according to the numbers of individuals found on a single survey visit during the breeding season when amphibians would be expected to be found. The national standard rating for common toad breeding sites is:

LOW/SMALL: <100 counted on a single visit

GOOD/MEDIUM: 100-1000 counted on a single visit

EXCEPTIONAL/LARGE: >1000 toads counted on a single visit

As you can see, the lowest / poorest category is assigned when less than 100 toads are counted on a single visit. For the Sports Centre, we recorded a total of less than 10 toads over the course of around 100 visits !!!!

FoSSC has been repeating this survey in 2016 and over the first 44 days of the survey has recorded:

- 0 frogs
- 7 toads (all considered juvenile)
- 57 smooth newts (variable age and size)

As a further observation, during 2016, there have been several large and persistent areas of standing water on the Sports Centre (behind the running track, at the back of the mini-soccer pitches, on the corner up to the golf course club house), but to date, and with very regular inspection, we have observed no frog spawn, what so ever, in any of these sites (matching our 2015 survey data – virtually no frogs) – In contrast, in the 30 x 40 ft garden of FoSSC's Chair, situated between

Winchester Road and Burgess Road, and with numerous small areas of standing water, at least 25 batches of frogspawn have been laid since Jan 2016!

We therefore conclude, based on actual evidence, as opposed to hearsay and wishful thinking that:

(1) the Sports Centre has very, very small, almost non-existent, resident amphibian populations (especially where toads and frogs are concerned)

(2) claims that, at the time of its drainage (2014-2015), the boating lake was a "*famous and very successful*" breeding site are totally without foundation and would seem to be being fabricated to suit a particular agenda.

Why the amphibian populations are so low is a separate question, but it doesn't alter the evidence. In our next posting we will look at possible reasons why this might be.