

QUESTION CORNER

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Until now, common toads were thought to be terrestrial. The highest toad in this study was found three metres up a tree — and scientists say there is a chance the toads might be venturing even higher.

This is the first time that the tree climbing potential of amphibians has been investigated at a national scale (*PLOS ONE*).

The research was led by the University of Cambridge and Froglife, and supported by wildlife charity People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES).

Common toads are regarded as typical terrestrial amphibians, which spend their time both on land and in water during breeding. To date there have only been a handful of documented sightings of common toads in trees in the U.K.

Consequently, common toads and U.K. amphibians in general have never been surveyed for in trees. Over 50 common toads were found during surveys of hazel dormouse nest boxes (located 1.5m above ground) and tree cavities usually used by bats, says press release.

Many of the cavities were small or not visible from the ground, so it is unclear how toads are finding them and how difficult it is for toads to climb particular trees.

Toads were not found in boxes or tree holes with other species, however they were found using old nests made by dormice and even birds.

While 50 records is not a huge number, it suggests that toads spend more time in trees than was previously thought. The discovery suggests that tree cavities might represent an even more important ecological feature than conservationists previously thought. It highlights the importance of protecting our remaining natural woodland habitats, especially ancient trees with veteran features (such as hollows, cracks and other natural cavities) for all wildlife.

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