

THE MIDWIFE TOAD, *ALYTES OBSTETRICANS* IN BRITAIN

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The introduction of the Midwife Toad, *Alytes obstetricans*, into Britain has been discussed by a number of authors. Fitter, 1959. Frazer, 1964. Laver, 1977. Smith, 1949-50. Taylor, 1948, 1963.

The related history is, briefly, that the introduction took place in the late 1800's, the exact date being in some doubt. Their presence was first noted in 1903 in a nursery garden in Bedford, where they were probably originally accidentally introduced with aquatic vegetation.

In 1922 the nucleus of a second colony was introduced into a walled garden in Bedford by a Mr. Brocklehurst where they subsequently established themselves. In 1950 a third colony was discovered in yet another Bedford garden.

In 1947 Mr. Brocklehurst's son Robert transferred some adult animals and tadpoles to his own garden in Worksop, Nottinghamshire where a colony was established. In 1933 another colony was introduced near York, and in 1954 two egg carrying males to Totnes in Devon.

A further chapter in the history of *Alytes* in Britain has now emerged.

In 1985 the Northamptonshire Federation of Women's Institutes decided to complete a pond survey of the county. This in conjunction with the Northamptonshire Trust for Nature Conservation for which I am recorder of Reptiles and Amphibians. A standard form was devised with 'tick' squares to indicate the presence or absence of aquatic and associated animals and plants, with provision for further notes and sketches. One completed form had the word midwife inserted before toad in the 'tick' square, and since the form had been filled in some detail complete with sketch map it was decided worthy of investigation. A small village in the north east of the county is the location of the garden pond and within a few hundred yards a disused gravel pit complex has recently been converted to a leisure area. The owner of the property who completed the form informed me that the toads were established when she purchased the house some ten years earlier and had been introduced by the previous owner. The previous owner, who still lives locally, was contacted and I learned that the colony was established in 1965 by this lady, a Mrs. Brocklehurst, who moved to Northamptonshire from Worksop.

It was thought that the colony had died out in the severe winter of 1982 since no calling was heard the following spring. However, several animals have been heard during 1985 but the size of the colony has not been determined.

There is no evidence to suggest that the animals have established in the gravel pit area.

The garden has a large, well vegetated pool which is surrounded by a rockery and trees with gravel and slabbed pathways. Mrs. Brocklehurst states that the animals frequented a stone trough which is sunk to path level, when first introduced. The pool has ornamental fish.

At the request of the present owner the actual site is not named but has been communicated to the editor.

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