

African Clawed Toad

Species Description

Scientific name: *Xenopus laevis*
AKA: Platanna, African clawed frog, Llyffant crafangog Affrica (Welsh)
Native to: Africa south of Sahara
Habitat: Lowland ponds

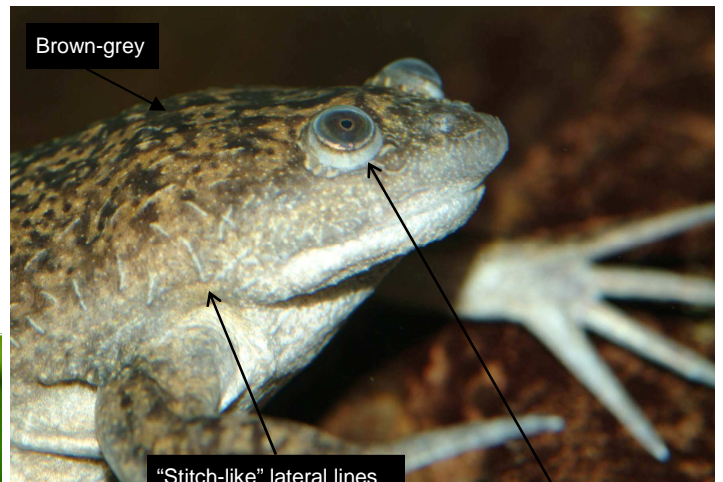
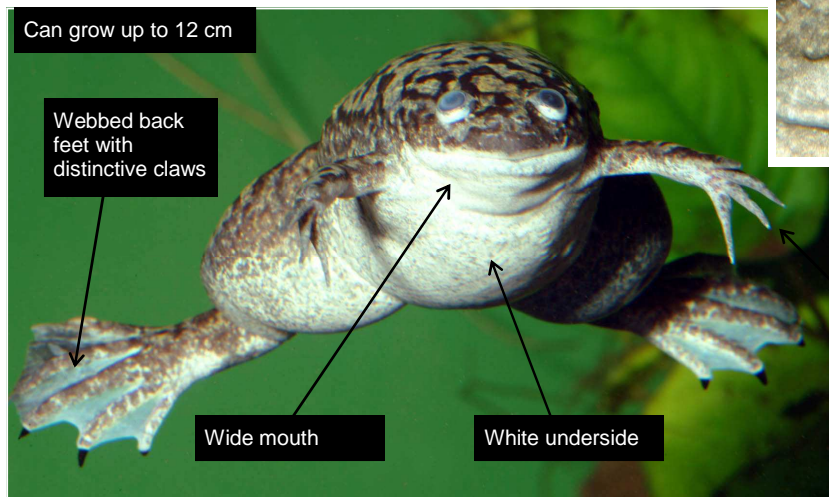
Relatively easy to distinguish from native frogs and toads by the flattened body and head with small eyes positioned on top. They have brown-grey blotched bodies with white undersides, powerful hind legs with webbed clawed feet, small front legs with splayed long fingers and lateral line organs along the sides of the body which resemble stitches. African clawed toads are predominantly aquatic although they will move across land to colonise other ponds. They feed on small aquatic crustaceans such as water-fleas and terrestrial invertebrates.

They were first introduced to Kent in 1955 but this population subsequently died out. Further populations were discovered in Isle of Wight and South Wales in 1962 and 1979 respectively. Individuals have been known to live for at least 14 years in the wild. Populations may have been introduced as pets released into the wild or escaped from laboratories. They are known to be vectors of chytridiomycosis which may be a threat to some native amphibians.

African Clawed toad is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such, it is an offence to release or allow the escape of this species into the wild. For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



Key ID Features

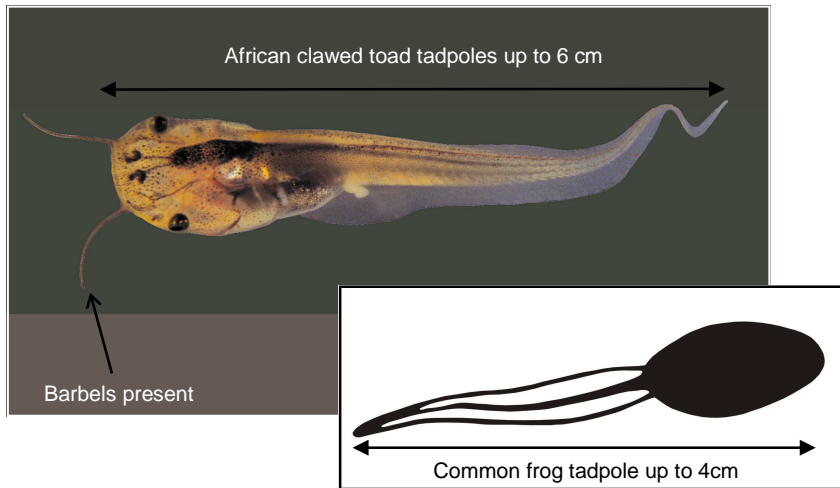


Splayed long fingers on front

Small eyes positioned on top of flattened head

Identification throughout the year

The mating season in UK populations is currently unknown. Females can produce several thousand eggs in a season. Tadpoles have long "fish-like" bodies with wedge shaped heads and long feelers or barbells. Tadpoles shoal like fish, filtering algae, and develop into adults when they have reached 5-6 cm, usually after several months.



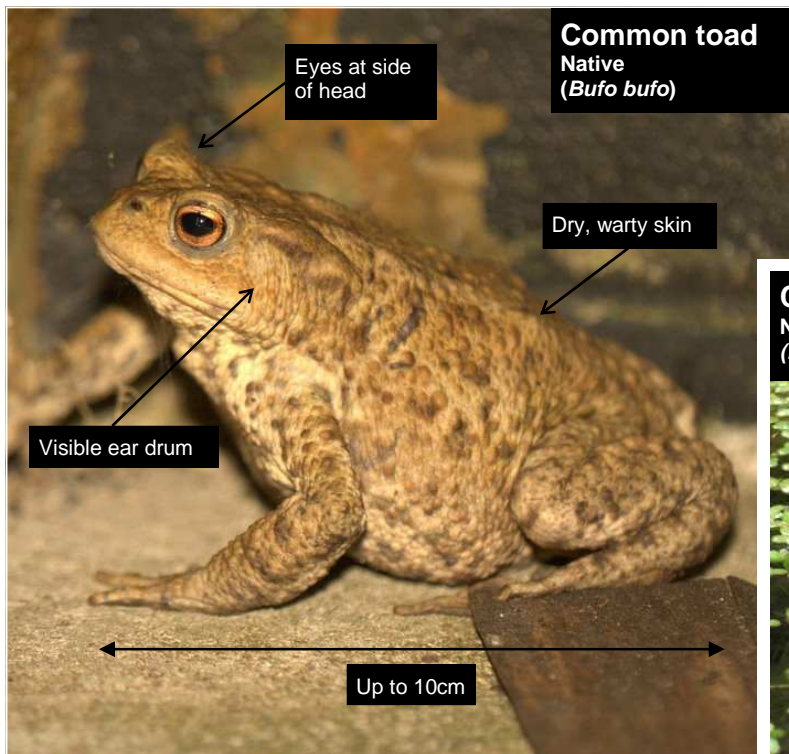
Distribution

Restricted range with known breeding populations in South Wales and the Isle of Wight.



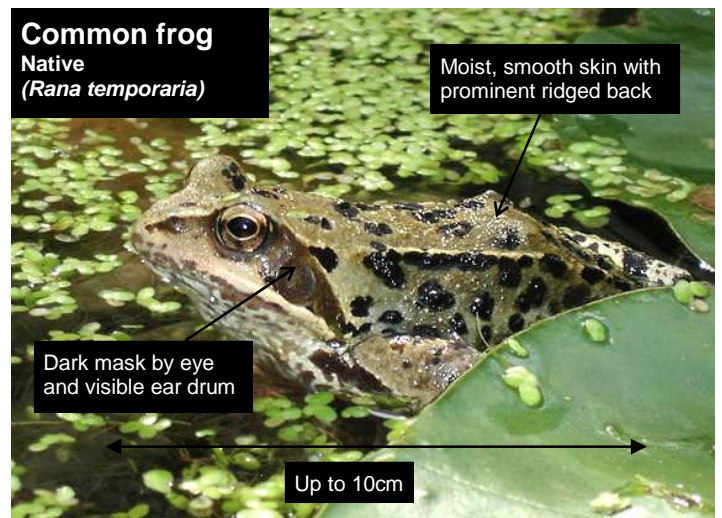
Source: Various

Similar Species



Common toads and common frogs have:

- eyes that are positioned at the side of the head rather than directly on top like the African clawed toad;
- a visible tympanum (ear drum) at the side of the head; and
- the claws and webbed feet of the African clawed frog are very distinctive; common toad has much less distinctive claws and no webbed feet, the common frog has no claws at all



Chytrid fungus

African clawed toads are known carriers of the chytrid fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*. This can cause the disease chytridiomycosis which seriously affects some amphibian species. Cases of chytrid infection have been discovered in some native amphibians in some parts of the UK. The fungus affects amphibians by attacking their skeleton and skin.

Chytrid fungus is water-borne and so can be accidentally spread between water bodies. When looking for species in and around a water body, disinfect all footwear and equipment before moving to other water bodies to avoid spreading the disease.

References and further reading:

Beebee, T and Griffiths, R (2000) "*Amphibians and reptiles: a natural history of the British Herpetofauna*". HarperCollins

Lever, C (1979) "The naturalised animals of the British Isles". Paladin

www.alienencounters.org.uk