Thompson Common is managed by Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the site contains woodland, meadows and over 200 ponds, including pingos, a rare type of natural pond. These habitats will support the pool frogs alongside a wide range of other species. For more information, please visit www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk or call 01603 625540.

This project is part of the Breaking New Ground Landscape Partnership Scheme for the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks. The scheme is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and a wide range of partners.

For more information visit www.breakingnewground.org.uk

The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) Trust is the UK’s leading charity dedicated to conserving amphibians and reptiles. Our vision sees amphibians and reptiles thriving in their natural habitats, and a society inspired and committed to their conservation. ARC manages nature reserves, runs monitoring, research and species recovery projects, campaigns for policy changes, raises awareness and acts as a focus for interested people. For more information please visit www.arc-trust.org or call 01202 391319.

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Re-introducing the northern pool frog to NWT Thompson Common, Norfolk

Front cover image: female pool frog.
Leaflet text & design: Yvette Martin. Photos © Jim Foster/ARC.
Species history: Not until the mid 1990s was the pool frog considered native to England. The matter was unclear because foreign frogs had been released here. Yet detailed research uncovered pool frog bones from mid-Saxon times, and records documenting the pool frog’s presence in England prior to any known frog introductions. Studies on genetics and mating calls reinforced the native status of pool frogs.

An unfortunate case: Pool frog numbers dropped dramatically in the 19th and 20th centuries, thanks to loss and damage to their Fenland and Breckland habitats. By the mid 1990s it was too late and the last native population of pool frogs, at Thompson Common in Norfolk, was lost.

A happier ending: A reintroduction project was devised by Natural England and ARC to bring these beautiful frogs back to their last known home county. Genetics revealed that English pool frogs were closely related to Scandinavian frogs (hence the name, northern pool frog). From 2005 to 2008, pool frogs were imported from Sweden and carefully released at an undisclosed location in Norfolk, where habitat had been specially enhanced. This population has now established and gradually expanded.

Identification: Northern pool frogs are predominantly brown in colour with darker blotches, and a light yellow or green stripe along the back. They are a similar size to common frogs, and males are slightly smaller than females. Male northern pool frogs have a loud mating call generated by a pair of white inflatable pouches (vocal sacs) each side of the head; common frogs lack this feature.

Life cycle: Pool frogs breed later in the year than common frogs, coinciding with warm weather in May and June. The spawn clumps are small, and eggs are brown above and pale below. The eggs hatch within five days and the tadpoles grow rapidly. They emerge from ponds as froglets from late July to September. Pool frogs hibernate from October to April. Adults mainly eat flying insects, and their predators include grass snakes and otters. Once adult, pool frogs typically live from 3 to 6 years.

Pool frogs at Thompson Common: Being the last known location before they went extinct in England, we’re delighted to bring the pool frog back to Thompson Common in 2015. This reserve has ideal habitat: clusters of large, sunny ponds set in open woodland. Frogs are being transferred from the first Norfolk site, which was established using Swedish pool frogs. This is part of a plan to ensure English pool frogs are secure in the long term. ARC is working on this with a range of landowners and conservation organisations, including Natural England.

Spotting pool frogs: We’re releasing pool frogs in a part of Thompson Common that is closed to public access, so you are unlikely to see them for now. This is mainly because the frogs need to be undisturbed while they settle in. However, the frogs will spread to public areas in future. To learn more about pool frogs, please visit the ARC or Norfolk Wildlife Trust websites. We’re also working on plans to display frogs in captivity, so anyone can see them up close.