

## OVER HALF OF EUROPE'S AMPHIBIANS FACE EXTINCTION BY 2050

More than half of all frogs and toads living in Europe could be driven to extinction within 40 years as climate change, diseases and habitat destruction show their effects, scientists have warned. The majority of the most threatened species live in Mediterranean regions, which are expected to become warmer and drier. Island species are especially at risk because they are unable to move to cooler climates. In Britain, where viruses are already wiping out many hundreds of amphibians a year, conservationists fear for the future of the common toad.

Researchers described the **bleak** outlook for Europe's amphibians at a meeting of the Zoological Society of London last night. Sir David Attenborough, who was due to attend the symposium, said: "Amphibians are the **lifeblood** of many environments, playing key roles in the function of ecosystems, and it is both extraordinary and terrifying that in just a few decades the world could lose half of all these species". One in three of the world's amphibians are already on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's red list of endangered species, with some estimates suggesting 150 species have already become extinct since the 1980s. The expansion of towns and cities into natural habitats is chiefly responsible for the amphibians' precarious future, to which many scientists believe climate change and diseases are actively contributing. Snakes, fish and birds that feed on the amphibians are already showing some signs of decline as the main ingredient of their diet dies out. The disappearance of some amphibians is also expected to lead to a rise in insects and other creatures that amphibians feed on. "Given that many of the things that amphibians eat are the things that destroy our crops or bite us and suck our blood, we might be feeling some of the effects a bit more directly than we've expected," said Garner.

Ten years ago, scientists raised the alarm after finding vast numbers of amphibians were being **wiped out** by a species of fungus which infects the skin through which many of the animals drink and breathe. One alarming case has been seen in the Peñalara National Park near Madrid, where the climate has become more humid and the fungus has caused mass mortality among amphibians. Garner and his colleagues based their assessment on published research into the effects of climate change on amphibian habitats, and believe more than 40 species could be extinct by 2050. One study showed that as global warming alters the climate in Europe, almost every amphibian habitat would be affected. In Britain, infections caused by a family of **pathogens** called ranaviruses, which emerged in the 1980s, are causing widespread deaths among some of the most common amphibians. Scientists at the meeting will emphasize the need to reduce the effects of climate change by slowing down greenhouse gas emissions, but for many species that will come too late. In the short term, conservationists are urging zoos to set up captive **breeding** programmes for the most threatened amphibians.

*The Guardian* on line. Adapted

**bleak:** desolador

**lifeblood:** element vital / elemento vital

**toad:** gripau / sapo

**crop:** collita / cosecha

**wiped out:** exterminats / exterminados

**pathogens:** agent patogen / agente patógeno

**breeding:** reproducció / reproducción

