

Celtic Rewilding Statement on the Britain's Lost Frogs Project

Thank you for the opportunity to address concerns regarding Celtic Rewilding's Lost Frogs Project. We welcome this dialogue with the herpetological community and hope to provide clarity on our current work. We are looking forward to contribute to the upcoming Herp Workers Meeting at the end of this month (January).

We sincerely apologise for any confusion, concern, or inconvenience caused by recent media coverage and the way this project has been presented publicly. We recognise that the herpetological community has legitimate concerns about biosecurity, legal compliance, and the protection of native species, and we take full responsibility for not communicating our approach more clearly from the outset.

Project Status and Governance

First and foremost, we want to emphasise that **no releases have occurred, nor are any planned in the near future.** Celtic Rewilding is conducting feasibility research, and we are working through the proper regulatory channels:

- We have maintained ongoing engagement with **Natural England** throughout this process
- We have kept **Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC)** informed from the project's inception
- We are involved with the **Conservation Evidence Organisation** and have attended their conference to ensure our approach aligns with evidence-based conservation best practices
- Any future reintroduction would only proceed with appropriate **Section 14 licensing** under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- We are committed to following **IUCN reintroduction guidelines, English Code for Translocations** and UK biosecurity best practices
- A working group will be put together in due course to enable this project to adhere to relevant guidance and legislation

Funded Work for 2026

Rewilding Britain has funded our work throughout 2026, which is **strictly limited to research and assessment.** This funding covers:

- Surveys of potential release locations
- Production of an in-depth feasibility study building on the Churchill Fellowship thesis
- **SedaDNA analysis of peat cores** to establish historical species presence
- **Disease Risk Analysis**
- Licensing discussions with relevant government bodies

Importantly, this grant does not cover the acquisition or breeding of any animals for release. We are firmly in the evidence-gathering phase.

Project Update: Refined Focus

Based on the evidence compiled in Harvey Tweats' 145-page Churchill Fellowship thesis, we are now **prioritizing the agile frog (*Rana dalmatina*) and moor frog (*R. arvalis*)** for our feasibility research. The historical and paleontological evidence for these species' native status in Britain is considerably stronger than for the European tree frog.

The European tree frog (*Hyla arborea*) is now a lower priority for our work. While it remains a species of interest, we acknowledge that the physical evidence for its past UK presence is less robust. Our SedaDNA work may provide further clarity on this, but our immediate focus is on the species where native status is better supported by existing evidence.

Biosecurity and Disease Risk

We fully recognize that biosecurity is the paramount concern for any translocation work. This is why disease risk analysis is a core component of our 2026 research work. We are working with specialist expertise to ensure that:

- Comprehensive disease screening protocols are developed
- Risks to existing native amphibian populations are thoroughly assessed
- International best practices in amphibian biosecurity are followed
- Any future work would only proceed if disease risks can be adequately mitigated

Media Coverage

We acknowledge that recent BBC coverage misrepresented the timeline and nature of this work, creating the impression that releases were imminent or straightforward. This was not our intention, and we take responsibility for how our participation may have contributed to this misunderstanding. We did not endorse the original BBC article and have since worked with them on a revised version.

The gap between careful scientific communication and media presentation is a challenge we continue to navigate, and we recognise we should have been more proactive in ensuring accurate public communication from the start.

Evidence-Based Approach

We believe that decisions about whether these species could or should be reintroduced must be based on robust evidence, not assumptions. This is precisely why we are conducting this feasibility work, to gather that evidence and make it available for scientific and regulatory scrutiny. Our involvement with the Conservation Evidence Organisation further reinforces our commitment to ensuring all decisions are grounded in the best available evidence.

If, after comprehensive assessment, reintroduction is deemed infeasible due to disease risk, lack of suitable habitat, legal barriers, or any other reason, we will accept that conclusion. Our commitment is to the evidence, not to a predetermined outcome.

Engagement with the Herpetological Community

We value the expertise within organizations like BHS, ARG UK, ARC, and the wider herpetological community. We are committed to transparency and would welcome ongoing dialogue as this research progresses. If there are specific concerns about our methodology or approach, we encourage direct engagement with us.

Concerns About Institutional Bias and Unregulated Activity

We want to address a broader concern: excessive institutional resistance to legitimate reintroduction research could inadvertently encourage less regulated, "maverick" efforts by inadequately equipped individuals or groups.

Our concern is this: if transparent, evidence-based research conducted through proper regulatory channels is met with blanket opposition rather than constructive engagement, it may not prevent reintroduction attempts: it may simply drive such efforts underground or into the hands of those less qualified, less transparent, and less concerned with biosecurity.

This is why we have chosen to work **openly and through official channels**

Regulated, evidence-based research with full biosecurity protocols is far preferable to unauthorised releases by individuals lacking expertise, resources, or accountability. By conducting this work transparently with regulatory oversight and community engagement, we hope to demonstrate that legitimate questions about Britain's herpetological history can be investigated responsibly.

We welcome the herpetological community's scrutiny and are committed to working within established frameworks. If our research concludes that reintroduction is not feasible or advisable, we will accept that conclusion.

Moving Forward

We are committed to improving our communication with the herpetological community and ensuring that our work is conducted with full transparency. We apologise again for the concern this has caused and hope to rebuild trust through our ongoing commitment to proper process, evidence-based decision-making, and open dialogue.

That is why we are looking forward to engagement with everyone at HWM2026.

Summary

- No releases are occurring or planned in the immediate future
- We are working through proper regulatory channels (Natural England, licensing framework)

- We are engaged with Conservation Evidence Organisation to ensure evidence-based practice
- Current work is research-focused: feasibility study, disease risk analysis, SedaDNA analysis
- **We are now prioritizing agile frog and moor frog; tree frog is lower priority**
- We are committed to IUCN guidelines and robust biosecurity protocols
- We welcome constructive engagement with the herpetological community

Our question to the community: how can we all work together to ensure that this project discourages maverick efforts while still quenching the demand for a wilder, vibrant Britain?

We hope this clarifies Celtic Rewilding's position and current work. We're happy to answer any questions.

Celtic Rewilding Team

22/01/2026

ENDS
