



Herefordshire
Amphibian and
Reptile
Team

Ponds and Newts Heritage Network Project Newsletter no 3 July 2013



The Spring and early summer has seen the project focus on surveying ponds in the

project area, with training in March, and the newly trained volunteers and more skilled people getting out surveying; on WildPlay events, Celebration Days and issuing the School teachers' Education Pack.

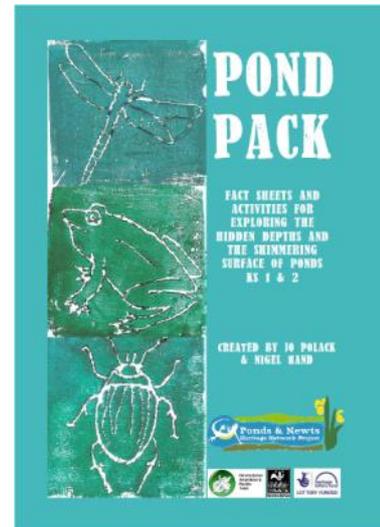
Training Events and Pond Surveying

5 training sessions were run in March, including one for the Wildplay officers, and 48 people attended the courses. Many have now been out surveying ponds, and Nigel has assisted them where required. Over 30 ponds have been surveyed so far but we hope to survey a lot more than that this summer, so please contact Nigel if you want to survey more ponds.

Ponds have varied from big farmland ones to medium sized garden ponds, and the quality has ranged widely also. A lot were in poor condition, but others were very good with a wide range of species. A rough estimate of species so far found: Great crested newt (European Protected Species) presence in at least 7 of the 30 ponds, palmate newt in 9, common toad in 3, stickleback in 1. An adult female grass snake was seen swimming during a survey. Invasive non-native pond plants have been found in 4 ponds, including crassula and azolla. Invertebrates included pond olives and damselfly nymphs in high numbers in Ashperton. Ashperton seems to be particularly good for developing a good network of invertebrate and newt ponds. Bromyard Downs is good for breeding palmate newts. This highlights the importance of the project promoting pond management and restoration, and pond creation (several of the best ponds were also fairly new).

Schools and Information Materials

The school teacher education pack (similar to the What's that Snake? Project one) has been issued to all primary schools in Herefordshire. Jo Polack has done a tremendous job on this. Talk to Nigel to see a copy of this excellent pack. Two WildPlay events were held in May:



The school Pond Pack

at Brockhampton Primary and Ashperton Primary, together with a Wildplay officers' pond training session (10 attendees). They went very well with 110 pupils, parents, teachers and assistants - the response was positive and teachers found it extremely helpful as their knowledge on pond ecology was generally poor. Many children indicated it was 'the best day at school' they had ever had!!

Two schools have so far received visits for pond dipping and pond wildlife education. Visits to a further 6 to 12 are planned for the autumn term. Ledbury Primary is looking to put a pond in the present school eco area.

Fourteen schools attended the Eco-schools day on June 5th when the project was presented to over 130 primary and secondary children. The day was held at St Mary's Lugwardine with a stand showcasing pond life. Comments from teachers, assistants and pupils were extremely favourable. The Herefordshire eco-schools coordinator Jane Denny is collating feedback from all the schools.

Pond Celebration Events

We have held two Pond Celebration Events so far. One was at Woodside Lodges near Ledbury where a series of lovely ponds is laid out. Over 40 people including lots of children came to try their hand at pond dipping and see what pond life there was.

The Nature Trust Wildplay team was also present and gave the children games and activities with a pond theme. The whole afternoon seemed to be much enjoyed by everyone. This same formula was repeated the following week at Bringsty Common, but this time under gathering heavy skies. We hope to hold another one in late August in the Ashperton or Ledbury area. Watch the website for details.

Mapping Historic ponds in the Project Area

The mapping of existing and historic ponds based



Pond dipping in one of the ponds at the Woodside Lodges Pond Afternoon

Below: The Wildplay gazebo proved very popular



on the ordnance surveys of today and 1892 has been done by the Herefordshire Archaeological Department and the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre and the archaeological and wildlife report on them is to be produced October 2013.

Publicity

The exhibition (display boards and leaflets) have been of great value at the various community events and talks. Nigel has also undertaken regular pond site interviews for BBC Hereford and Worcester radio over the course of the spring and summer. Progress and comment about the ponds are regularly posted on the project Facebook page.

Future Wildlife Pond Corridors

Possible areas identified so far for improving the pond networks (wildlife corridors) are from Ashperton to Yarkhill and Stretton Grandison, from Bosbury to Mathon, from Bromyard to Bringsty and the area along Falcon Lane near Ledbury.



A Water Scorpion caught in one of the ponds, and a Broad-bodied Chaser at Bringsty Common

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