



Ponds

Perhaps the one positive I can take from this revolting weather is that the constant driving rain is keeping my little pond topped up to overflowing. But back 6 months to the long hot summer, I couldn't help nervously checking its dwindling levels, watching the pond skaters whizz around in ever-decreasing circles under the towering pond liner. And I know that soon the kingcups and yellow flag irises will be brightening up the margins and providing touchdown points for the dragonflies and damselflies. In fact, for much of the year the little pond provides much better entertainment than the telly (not hard!).

That's because under the water, at the surface, above and around, ponds can provide an incredibly rich habitat for wildlife. And although we have lost nearly 70% of them from the countryside over the last century, there are still getting on for half a million ponds in Britain. Now, of these, many will be polluted or function as ornamental fish ponds or for whatever reason lack much wildlife. However, British ponds still provide home to about two thirds of all our freshwater plants and animals, and their conservation value is at least as great as larger water bodies such as lakes and rivers: in fact, research has shown that they support more species of invertebrates and a greater number of rare animals. And the really special thing about them is that they are often just outside the backdoor, in the garden.

But what is a pond? The Pond Conservation Group definition is 'a man-made or natural waterbody between 1 sq. m and 2 ha in area that holds water for at least 4 months a year'. So the definition includes ponds that can dry up in the summer but can support 'both specialised and valuable communities'. This immediately brings to mind a pond dipping activity last summer with the Plumpton Cubs & Scouts in their pond, which I think they call 'The Swamp'. As well as 5 million man-eating mosquitos, what emerged from the pure mud was a small translucent crustacea, a fairy shrimp, which loves ponds that regularly dry out and, due to loss of habitat, is in the Red Data Book and fully protected in the UK. You never know what you're going to find when you start dipping in a pond.

More information on the local pond scene can be found in an article on our website at: <https://plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com/pond-survey.html>.

This describes a 2009 survey of ponds in Plumpton, the first of its kind to be undertaken in Sussex. The picture it paints is not too rosy. At that time at least, of the 93 ponds surveyed across the parish, only 4% were found to be species-rich. Part of the problem was that 55% of the ponds were connected to streams and ditches and therefore more liable to pollution from agricultural and road traffic run-off. Others had fish, which are not usually good bedfellows with other wildlife. For example, they surveyed the fishy pond next to the Village Hall, and found 9 species and 11 individual vertebrates after 3 minutes netting. In the fishless ditch overflow from the same pond however, they found 17 species and 83 individual invertebrates after just 30 seconds netting. I wonder what the same survey done today would reveal?

Whenever you hear the question, 'What's the single thing I can do to my garden to make it more wildlife friendly?' the answer is invariably 'Make a pond'. So why not make one in your garden in 2023? There is a mass of information out there about the dos and don'ts of pond creation, including of course, safety advice as far as young children are concerned. But once you've appropriately sited, dug, lined and filled with rainwater, the miracle of nature will do the rest. The invertebrates, the amphibians and at least some of the vegetation, will find their way to you. Happy viewing.

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