

# PONDS

**T**he Chiltern Hills were designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1965 in recognition that they are one of the finest landscapes in England and Wales. This leaflet, part of the Chilterns Landowners' Guide, is intended to provide you with some basic information to help you maintain and enhance the natural beauty of your local landscape.

## Why are ponds important?

Ponds have an important role to play in the landscape and cultural heritage of the Chilterns. They are a significant feature in terms of local distinctiveness and in many areas, form a parish or village focal point. They are also vitally important for wildlife - many rare and familiar plants and animals depend on them for at least part of their life cycle. They provide breeding areas for frogs and toads, shelter for water voles and otters and feeding areas for bats and birds. Some rare plants such as starfruit are only found in a few ponds in the UK. Recent research has shown that ponds in rural landscapes often have more freshwater wildlife than rivers, streams or ditches.

There is no standard type of pond that is best for wildlife but there are a few general things that can help make any pond a rich wildlife habitat.



## Management to benefit wildlife

- Surprisingly, ponds without much open water are often very valuable for wildlife. Resist the temptation to clear ponds with large areas of silt or which dry out for part of the year, as this can do more harm than good to both the wildlife and archaeology of ponds. Ponds at all stages of their development are valuable.
- Surrounding areas are very important - if possible allow damp areas to develop around your pond. This type of habitat is increasingly rare and can support many uncommon plants and animals. Areas of rough grass are also good for amphibians e.g. frogs, toads and newts.
- If you want a pond with permanent open water then consider making another one - never deepen or dig out existing wetlands or wet meadows to make a new pond.
- Generally, a mix of water depths and bank conditions e.g. shallow and steep edges will provide the best wildlife value.



*An example of pond which dries out seasonally but is a superb habitat for wildlife including newts, dragonflies and toads*

## Potential problems

- **Pollution** - the biggest threat to most ponds. Large numbers of fish and ducks cause problems by enriching the water, as do fertilisers, run off from muck heaps and outflows from septic tanks. These can cause extensive growths of duckweed and algae, choking the pond and starving it of oxygen which kills the inhabitants.
- **Problem plants** - non-native plants can blanket pond surfaces and bank-sides smothering native species that support other wildlife. Seek advice on the best way to control these if they appear in or near your pond.
- **Access by grazing animals** - limited grazing around parts of the pond margins and poaching of some edges is beneficial to wildlife, but can also cause problems by stirring up sediments and increasing the levels of nutrients in the pond. Part fencing may help but seek advice on what's best for your pond.



*Shaded ponds in woods can be particularly valuable for wildlife*

## Recommendations

- Don't deepen any temporary pond to make it permanent.
- Leave some trees around ponds, particularly on the north side. Partial shade is important for some rare plants and animals and may help to control some problem plants.
- Cleaning out a pond does just that - it cleans out the habitat and the wildlife. Remove a little at a time taking care to leave the spoil near the pond to allow wildlife to return to the water. If in doubt seek advice.
- Try to avoid managing the pond in winter months when hibernating frogs and newts could be disturbed and die through exposure to cold.
- Avoid adding plants to your pond; the best vegetation is that which occurs naturally. If you do want to add plants only use those that are native to Britain. In particular avoid the following:
  - New Zealand Swamp Stone-crop (*Crassula helmsii*) - sometimes called *Tillea recurva*
  - Parrot's-feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*)
  - Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*)
  - Curly Water-thyme (*Lagarosiphon major*).
- Avoid stocking a wildlife pond with fish and ducks as they pollute the still water and eat the other inhabitants (even if you feed them!).
- Take care when using any chemicals near ponds - follow the appropriate codes of good practice.
- Where possible, leave an area 2-5m around your pond to grow into rough grass and small shrubs to provide habitat for birds and amphibians and a physical barrier against disturbance and spray drift.
- Leaving piles of dead wood and large stones provides shelter and basking areas for insects and amphibians.

## Summary

Ponds are an integral part of the Chilterns. Many are important for cultural reasons and for wildlife. Management can do more harm than good so it is always best to take advice before starting any work.

*Photographs and text supplied by Chilterns Conservation Board.  
The Ponds Conservation Trust & Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.*

## Pond Plants

Some exotic pond plants bought from garden centres become very damaging pests in the countryside by spreading to other ponds. The problem seems to be particularly serious with submerged plants, (often called oxygenating plants). Choose native submerged species, DON'T move plants from garden ponds into wild ponds. Some exotic species are now a significant threat to some of our most beautiful wetlands and rarest plant species. Annually, thousands of pounds are spent trying to eradicate them.



## Relevant legislation

Any ponds that are a home to the Great Crested Newt, are in a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest or are a Scheduled Ancient Monument, will require permission (from the relevant body) to be granted before any work is carried out. If you are thinking of introducing fish to a pond - contact the Environment Agency [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) or telephone 08708 506506.

For free fact sheets on Good Wildlife Ponds, Planting Up Ponds and Problem Pond Plants or to order a copy of The Pond Book - contact The Ponds Conservation Trust [www.pondstrust.org.uk](http://www.pondstrust.org.uk)

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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,  
PLEASE CONTACT**