

Information Sheet 4

Restoring a Pond



Ponds in Peterborough have originated for a variety of reasons. Most of them are manmade for example farm usage, village ponds, ornamental ponds, fish stores and more recently garden ponds. Every pond is individual and will need to be managed as such or much of their wealth of wildlife may be lost or the best may not be gained from efforts to maintain it.

General Points

There are a few general points to bear in mind about ponds:

- Unmanaged ponds will naturally undergo succession i.e. the gradual build up of silt resulting in the edge plants growing into the middle, eventually leading to infill and wet woodland.
- All stages that a pond will go through will support wildlife. It is easy to over manage a pond and what is best for amenity (for example lots of open water with attractive marginal vegetation) may not be the best for wildlife. Seek advice using the contacts given below if you are unsure.
- Where you have more than one pond it can be a good idea to manage them in turn so that they are each at a different stage of succession.
- The area between the highest water levels and the lowest, in an average year, is called the drawdown zone, this is one of the most important areas as it contains many different species of wildlife. Half a metre distance in water level during the year is normal and essential.
- If a pond dries out in one year (but not every year), particularly in very late summer or early autumn, this is not necessarily a disaster. For example this will ensure that no fish are in the pond, which will help frogs toads and newts to have a particularly successful year the next year.
- Many species are adapted to periods of total drying out; some of these will actually thrive in the less competitive environment when the pond fills up again.
- Ponds are not isolated from their surroundings; their inhabitants interact with habitats in their immediate vicinity. For this reason a properly managed “buffer zone”, an uncultivated/unmanaged area around the pond, is very important. This is also a habitat in its own right.
- An algal bloom is common soon after disturbance such as dredging. This is due to some of the nutrients that have been locked up in sediments being released all at once.
- The source of water supply is important; run-off from fields and roads may bring pollution or extra nutrients into the pond.
- Rather than digging out an existing pond it may be best to extend it or even dig a new one.

Restoring Neglected Ponds

The best time of year to restore a pond is between November to January to minimise disturbance to wildlife. Avoid clearing vegetation and de-silting in harsh weather, to minimise exposure of disturbed fauna. It is best not to re-stock a pond with plants but to allow it to re-colonise naturally. You must dispose of spoil from your pond responsibly. If in doubt please contact us to discuss further.

- Never clear the whole pond of one species of plant, or stand of mixed vegetation.
- Deal with only one half or less of the pond at any one time, unless there are compelling reasons to do more. The half that is untouched will then seed in to the cleared half and help it to naturally regenerate.
- Do not add fish for amenities sake, they eat the eggs and young of amphibians and other pond dwellers.
- Do not move amphibians into an unpopulated pond, there may be conditions which make it unsuitable, and if they are already there it may introduce disease. A good pond will attract amphibians of its own accord.
- If the pond needs more light, clear or pollard trees or shrubs on the south side. Take out young or diseased trees/shrubs rather than healthy older trees.

- It is not essential to remove fallen branches from the water as they can create a valuable habitat. However beware that this does not encourage more branches to be thrown in.
- Construction of woodpiles from felled material can be good for wildlife. However be mindful of human interference that could rule this out. What is intended as a wildlife habitat could be turned into a bonfire or used to play “who can make the biggest splash”.
- If possible leave vegetation that is removed from the pond beside the water for a few days to allow creatures to return to the water. It will, of course, need removing after a few days or else the nutrients in it will end up back in the pond. Also beware of well meaning passers by who may be tempted to put the vegetation back in.
- Keep a buffer zone around the pond – the bigger the better.
- The least damaging way to remove silt is by hand, but for larger ponds it is easier to use machinery such as a 360-degree excavator or JCB with experienced labour or contractor. If machinery is used try to work from just one area to minimise damage to surrounding vegetation.
- Do not dump spoil around trees in damp hollows, or in other areas of wildlife interest. It could for example be spread over farmland.
- Do not dispose of spoil or vegetation into another water body or watercourse. It will invariably not be good for it.
- Be careful not to damage the pond lining when excavating. Puddled clay may be red/brown, yellow/white or pale grey and will be hard to shovel. A layer of gravel, paving slabs or bricks may protect it and will indicate when you have removed all the silt.
- Too much vegetation is better than too little – few species rely on open water.
- Underwater rubble piles with lots of gaps are good wildlife habitat.
- The drawdown zone at the water edge requires little management.

Where can I go for further advice?

The Natural & Historic Environment Team at Peterborough City Council are happy to provide more specific help on pond restoration. The City Council also services a growing network of voluntary Pond and Tree Wardens who might also help with your ideas. The local Wildlife Trust (01733 294543) may also be willing to offer some assistance.

<p>Natural & Historic Environment Team Stuart House East Wing St Johns Street Peterborough PE1 5DD</p>	<p><u>Contact:</u> James Fisher Wildlife Officer</p> <p>Telephone: (01733) 453543 E-mail: wildlife@peterborough.gov.uk</p>
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