

Creating and managing ponds for wildlife in the Tees Valley

Ponds come in all shapes and sizes. We have deep ponds, seasonal ponds, shaded ponds and open ponds, new ponds, ancient ponds. Some of our ponds have stretches of open water whilst others are full of vegetation and silt. This variety is the key to ensuring a diversity of pond wildlife in the Tees Valley and means that there is no one ideal management prescription suitable for all ponds.

Here are some general principles for managing and creating ponds, but remember that ponds will need different management depending on their location, water source, and the wildlife they already contain.


Consider ponds as part of the landscape. Tees Valley Pondscape is looking at ponds throughout the Tees Valley so that we can see how they fit into the landscape and connect with other ponds and wetland wildlife habitats. By managing and creating groups of ponds instead of individual ones, we can create better opportunities for wildlife.



Time any management operations for the winter months so that breeding amphibians are not disturbed.



Stocking a newly created pond is usually not needed. Ponds are usually quickly colonised by plants and animals. Transferring pond life can accidentally introduce invasive pest plants. If planting up is needed, for an urban pond in a prominent public place, select native plant of local provenance. Tees Valley Pondscape can help with this.




Temporary, shallow and seasonal ponds can support rare plants and animals that are adapted to fluctuating water levels. Damp grassland and marshy ground are also valuable wildlife habitats. Do not alter the water level of ponds without fully considering the effects on wildlife. The occasional drying out in drought years can benefit amphibians by eliminating fish that feed on their larvae.



Shaded ponds in woodland can be rich in wildlife. The waterlogged leaf litter and fallen branches can provide a habitat for some specialist aquatic invertebrates, whereas sunny unshaded ponds are favoured by great crested newt. Before removing trees or water logged branches, seek ecological advice. Tees Valley Pondscape can carry out specialist invertebrate sampling and amphibian surveys on your pond so that it can be ecologically evaluated before management work begins.




Creating new ponds is vital in order to replace those lost by natural succession. When selecting a location, ensure a high quality unpolluted water supply. Check that the pond is not being created on a site with existing high wildlife or archaeological interest. Siting new ponds near existing ones can link up an existing network of ponds and will increase the chances of colonisation and development of a rich wildlife habitat. Tees Valley Pondscape can advise you on all aspects of pond creation from site selection to detailed designs.



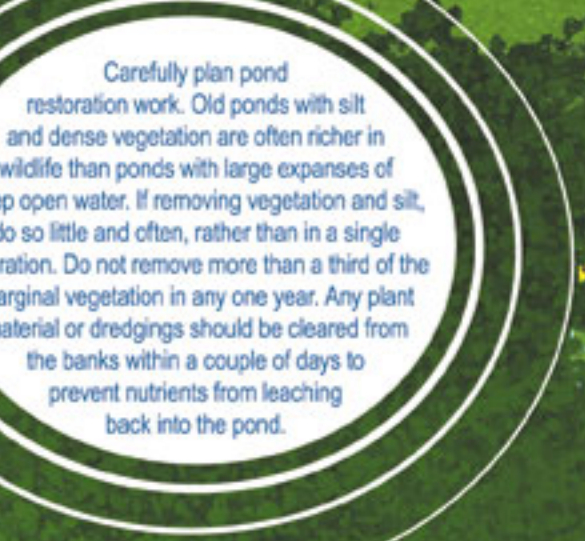
Fish and waterfowl can be detrimental to pond wildlife. Ponds provide valuable habitats for our native wildlife. However, artificially high numbers of ducks or geese can strip a pond of vegetation and their droppings can cause nutrient enrichment of the water. Discourage members of the public from feeding the ducks in village or park ponds with bread as this can encourage rats. Stocking a pond with fish is damaging to frogs, toads and newts, as fish eat the larvae of all amphibians. Introducing fish to a pond could wipe out a colony of great crested newt.




Consider the land surrounding ponds. Ponds are part of the landscape, not a separate feature. Many pond animals use this area during part of their lifecycle. Hoverflies feed on flowers, for example, adult dragonflies hunt for prey and amphibians hibernate under logs and stones. Rough grassland, marsh, heath and woodland all provide beneficial habitats. Their management and creation are a vital part of every pond management plan. Tees Valley Pondscape can work with you to prepare management plans for your ponds.



High water quality is critical, as unpolluted ponds have the richest wildlife. Pollution and nutrient enrichment will reduce the potential of ponds to support diverse wildlife. It is vital to find out where your pond water comes from, whether rainwater, surface runoff, groundwater or streams and ditches or a combination of sources. This enables the source of any pollution to be identified. Consider fitting a silt trap to stream-fed ponds. Urban ponds may need protecting from polluted runoff from roads and surface drains.



Carefully plan pond restoration work. Old ponds with silt and dense vegetation are often richer in wildlife than ponds with large expanses of deep open water. If removing vegetation and silt, do so little and often, rather than in a single operation. Do not remove more than a third of the marginal vegetation in any one year. Any plant material or dredgings should be cleared from the banks within a couple of days to prevent nutrients from leaching back into the pond.



Moderate trampling by livestock can be beneficial, as this creates many tiny temporary pools which are habitats to the larvae of bugs, beetles and caddis flies. High numbers of grazing animals can however prevent the growth of marginal vegetation. In these cases, fencing off part of the pond margin can increase the plant diversity of the pond margins.



Some species have special legal protection. It is vital to check before carrying out pond management if you have great crested newt or water vole. Tees Valley pondscape can carry out species survey and tailored management advice. This could enable you to receive practical assistance in creating and managing habitats for protected species.



Establishing a buffer zone of 10-20m around a pond will help protect it from agricultural fertilisers and pesticides. If managed as rough grassland it will also be a valuable wildlife habitat, especially for invertebrates and amphibians.



Some alien plant species such as water fern and Australian stonecrop can choke ponds and watercourses, damaging our native wildlife. Be careful not to inadvertently spread these garden escapees. For help identifying invasive pond plants and advice on their treatment, contact Tees Valley Pondscape.