

HCCPS Newsletter February 2023



Ponds: In a separate article, reproduced with kind permission at the end of this letter, Dr Claudia Bernardini has written about an initiative to try to encourage local people to create ponds on their land. Claudia is the project officer of the [Newt Conservation Partnership](#) (NCP) and is monitoring existing ponds in Bucks and part of Oxfordshire and creating ponds and habitats particularly suited to Great Crested Newts. Where suitable sites can be established the creation of ponds will be fully funded. This area is particularly well suited for Great Crested Newts as they have been known to live here in the past and may well still be around. This scheme is an ideal opportunity for landowners who wish to take part since NCP not only covers 100% of all costs for pond creation/restoration and also for terrestrial habitats but there is also an annual payment to the landowner for each pond created and also a sum per hectare of terrestrial habitat created to help with the management and to compensate for the lost income.

Pallett's Pond: We were fortunate to have Claudia and her associates here to survey Pallett's Pond in April 2022 and although they found no evidence of this species, Claudia was fairly confident that, under better conditions, they would still be found here. Much of the vegetation in and around Pallett's Pond is perfect habitat for these newts and other amphibians. Claudia points out that suitable vegetation both in and around the ponds is significant since newts need a pond for breeding but they spend most of their adult life on dry land.

In 2003, when I edited the [Local Heritage Study Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons](#) (available on hawridgeandcholesburycommons.org) the Environmental Records Office had recordings of Great Crested Newts in Pallett's Pond but, as they were (and still are) heavily protected I was not allowed to mention them in the Study. Another local siting that I was told of but do not know further details was that, when work was undertaken at Chapel House, Buckland Common, a Great Crested Newt was found in the immersion pool which had been used for baptisms when it was a Baptist Chapel. We would be interested to hear more if anyone has further information.



Claudia (Right) with Charlie and Emma checking Pallett's Pond

The dewpond: This little pond to the east of the Cricket Pitch was clearly manmade but when it was created and for what purpose we haven't been able to establish. Barry Tompson who grew up in Cholesbury at the Old Manor House told me that James Pallett, who ran a carrier's business from The Bury, used to drive through the dewpond to wet the wooden wheels of his carts to expand them in their metal rims. Frank Brown who grew up at Baldwins at the top of Rays Hill, says that when he was young the pond was known as Elsebere or Elsemere Pond. According to Frank, 'it never held very much water but in winter this was just deep enough to slide on the ice with only the socks at risk of getting wet if you broke through. At that time the Common side of Rays hill was free of scrub. and made a perfect toboggan slope as it was steep and you could continue up the path on the other side to stop safely. Once Uncle George (Brown) stopped grazing his cows (in the mid 1960s) and myxomatosis killed off the rabbits, the Common side of Rays hill commenced growing brush and hawthorn and it was not long before sledging was impossible. I remember Pallett's Pond as we called it was much cleaner and clearer but we never ventured very far in as it was thought to go deep at the back. It was a good source of Sticklebacks many of which we caught using a worm on a bent pin suspended from 3 or 4 feet of cane or a straight twig'

About 25 years ago HCCPS tried to repair the base of the dewpond so that it would hold water all year long. However, this failed and to date it continues to dry out from time to time. Pond experts tell us that this periodic drying out can in fact be a good thing and that it is good to have different types of ponds which complement each other in an area. Such ponds as the dewpond can harbour unusual plants such as Water Purslane which grows prolifically here but is rare in Bucks.



David Dennis and DofE volunteer, Toby Grief-King clearing the dewpond

Garden Ponds: Though they might not qualify for a grant from the [Newt Conservation Partnership](#), creating even a small garden wildlife pond brings a lot of pleasure and it is astonishing how quickly they become home to small creatures – frogs, toads, newts, dragonflies, damsel flies water boatmen etc. Although I originally opted for a membrane base, after numerous repairs to holes made by visiting deer, ducks etc I replaced it with an uglier, though sturdier, preformed plastic base. This is now pretty much obscured by vegetation and remains undamaged several years later. Remember that amphibians need to be able to climb out of your pond so a pile of rocks by the edge makes this possible and Claudia advised me to put in Water Mint which she says newts particularly like.

Prehistory Day: In 2020, the [Chiltern Conservation Board](#) were planning to hold a Prehistory Day on our Commons. However, due to the pandemic, this had to be postponed. Plans are currently afoot to hold a similar event on Cholesbury Common on 18th March 2023. Further information about the event will be posted on New Grapevine when the plans are finalised but Dr Wendy Morrison, who is organising the event, hopes to have ‘exhibitors who will demonstrate various prehistoric crafts such as flint knapping, cordage-making from nettle fibres, cloth dyeing using native plants, prehistoric cookery, and prehistoric metal smelting. ‘We would also have displays offering more information about the project, heritage in the Chess Valley and in the wider Chilterns, and would run short guided walks around the hillfort.’ It sounds like a very interesting event.

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Financial Report: The Financial Report to the year end October 2022 is now available here on our [website](#) Our thanks to our treasurer Philip Prettejohn for preparing the report and to Mike Fletcher, our honorary Examiner for his careful scrutiny of the figures. Our thanks too to everyone who continues to keep the bank balance healthy by contributing in any way. See the financial report for further details.

At present, Philip is currently updating our membership records and we hope that you will not mind if you receive a reminder about subs if your membership has lapsed. It is very easy to do!! Philip points out that by completing a Standing Order form it means you won't have to remember to pay your subs each year and we won't have to pay anything as we do with PayPal who take a percentage for each transaction.

Subscriptions: If you do not pay your subscription by standing order or PayPal your annual subscriptions are due now. Family membership remains £20 and for an individual £10.

It is easy to make payments to HCCPS via our website (above) under HCCPS Membership. Here you can:-

- complete a **Standing Order** form
- use **PayPal** without signing up to PayPal.

Alternatively, you can make a **Bank Transfer** to:

Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons Preservation Society,

Account Number: 50458015, Sort Code: 20 - 02 – 06, Reference: Subs + your name

NB It would be helpful if you send a confirmatory email to treasurer.hccps@gmail.com.

Tree Felling: Most of the winter tree felling for Ash dieback for this year has now been done behind the Cycle Café and at Braziers End. In some cases, these areas have not yet been cleared since the ground is simply too wet. Christine has just inspected the trees on the Commons with John Morris to establish which trees will be dealt with next.

Times Nature Notes: Melissa Harrison wrote recently that balls of Mistletoe are becoming more common despite the decline in mistle thrushes which have traditionally spread mistletoe seeds. This is because blackcaps really love mistletoe berries. Blackcaps were once only summer visitors but now overwinter here because of our warmer winter weather. They peck the berries and then wipe their beaks on surrounding twigs ensuring germination of further mistletoe clumps. And did you know that the mainstay of badgers' diet is worms and that in frosty weather they can't forage for them? Although badgers can be far less active in winter and sleep more through harsh winter conditions they do still need to eat. Jonathan Tulloch reports of them foraging for acorns when worms are unavailable.

I am sure you are all looking forward to some drier weather but at least the ponds have been filling up nicely!

Lindsay Griffin

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FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LANDOWNERS TO CREATE AND RESTORE PONDS IN BUCKS

By Dr Claudia Bernardini, Project Officer, Newt Conservation Partnership

Cholesbury Parish, with its varied natural landscape, offers a good environment for amphibians to live and thrive. The mosaic of wooded and open spaces, heathland, ancient woodland, pasture, grassland and several ponds dotted around the parish, is fantastic habitat for newts.



(A Great Crested Newt – ©Freshwater Habitats Trust)

We are looking for landowners who might be interested in habitat creation or restoration for great crested newt. This could include the creation or restoration of ponds, woodland or meadows. Ideal locations include clay and wet soils and poor arable land. The presence of natural ponds in the parish confirms that the chalky nature of the area does not preclude the opportunity to create clean water ponds.



(Newgate Moor pond –©Freshwater Habitats Trust)

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Breeding ponds are necessary to maintain a healthy great crested newt population. However, adults spend most of their life on land so it is really important that a natural environment can provide forage, shelter, safe movement across the landscape and hibernation in the winter months. The scheme offers the opportunity to create and restore terrestrial habitat, including planting trees or hedges and the creation and restoration of grassland.

The Newt Conservation Partnership (NCP) is a community benefit society whose purpose is to create and manage high quality aquatic and terrestrial habitat for great crested newts.

We are the delivery partner for the NatureSpace great crested newt District Licencing Scheme, a new Government-approved approach to addressing the impact of developer on great crested newt to maximise conservation benefits. The scheme delivers habitat creation and restoration for great crested newt in many local authorities across the country, including Buckinghamshire.

NCP provides 100 percent funding for all costs of capital work and an annual payment to landowners that covers habitat management and compensates for any lost income (e.g. on agricultural land). The scheme has an extensive monitoring programme to ensure the habitat created or restored remains beneficial for newts and other wildlife. You can find out about our criteria on our landowner factsheet: <https://tinyurl.com/LandownerFactsheet>

If you know of suitable sites, or landowners who may be interested, please contact Claudia Bernardini at cbernardini@newtpartnership.org.uk or have a look at our website: www.newtpartnership.org.uk

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