

Newts & Shoots Wetland Improvements

The Newts & Shoots programme of habitat improvements has seen the creation of a new pond in Elmdon Nature Park and pond improvements at Palmers Rough Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Shirley, Bridge Meadow Drive, Knowle; and Jobs Close LNR, Knowle. In December 2021, work got underway on the pond at Palmers Rough, followed by the other sites in January to February 2022 and native wetland species will be planted in the spring.

Prior to the improvement works the three ponds at Palmers Rough LNR, Bridge Meadow Drive and Jobs Close LNR were in poor ecological condition supporting few aquatic insects and plant species. All of these ponds suffered from various degrees of canopy shading and were heavily silted with corresponding negative impacts on water quality, wildlife and the recreation and amenity value of the pond. Many years of inappropriate duck feeding compounded the accumulation of silt through an increase in bird excreta and the introduction of excessive bird food, especially bread.

Elmdon Nature Park is adjacent to the Jaguar Landover Logistics Operation Centre development. A condition of the development was to create additional great crested new habitat, specifically a pond and associated hibernacula and bank within the site. This scheme has been delivered in an area of species poor grassland on the eastern edge of Elmdon Nature Park. You can read more about this exciting project [here](#).

The focus of the three pond enhancement projects was to deliver improved water quality which will enhance their wildlife potential. Following input from council's ecologists, tree officers, drainage officers and parks department a restoration design was chosen with consideration for the environmental benefit, capital cost, constructability and future maintenance. The final design included the following elements:

- De-silting of the ponds to add depth, create more open water habitat, improve water quality and conditions for emergent and submerged pond plants;

- Necessary coppicing of trees and pruning overhanging branches to increase light to the pond and reduce organic inputs (also slowing future accumulation of sediment);
- Marginal planting areas around the perimeter of the ponds to provide new and more varied aquatic habitat, to improve oxygenation and water filtration, enhancing biodiversity; and
- Pond dipping platform (Palmers Rough LNR) and associated interpretation panels to educate members of the public about how to maintain good pond health / highlight biodiversity enhancements.

The restoration of the ponds is aimed at creating more accessible and enjoyable local spaces for residents and visitors alike – whilst providing conditions to attract wildlife and improve water quality.

The project has been led by the council ecology team who are aware of the sensitivities of the environment and the balance between impacting on existing wildlife and enhancing habitats for the future. From their studies ecological indicators suggest that the ponds are a poor aquatic habitat with interest limited to just a few stands of emergent pond plants and limited pond life. No evidence of great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) were recorded in any of the ponds and invertebrate surveys suggested a poor-quality habitat.

Reasonable precautions have been taken regarding the timing and location of the works to avoid impacts to wildlife (e.g. amphibians, bats and breeding birds) and for pond enhancement. Prior to the management works being carried out a European Protected Species (EPS) assessment was carried out to ensure no negative impacts on protected species and thus to inform appropriate mitigation. An initial walkover survey was carried out by council ecologists to check for signs of EPS, especially bats and great crested newts, where management work (waterbody desilting, bankside tree and other vegetation management) was taking place.

Works have been overseen by council ecologists, landscape architects and carried out by a wetland specialist contractor. Council ecologists will use standardised methodologies to monitor the ecological improvements that result from the project

work using the Freshwater Habitats Trust National Pond Survey methodology along with a great crested newt survey. This will be compared to baseline surveys carried out pre-works to assess the ecological condition of the ponds.

The 'Newts & Shoots' group of works is part of the Wildlife Ways Small Habitats Grants Programme – European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This programme supports a wide range of habitat and nature improvements across the borough and beyond. Solihull Newts & Shoots project will ensure better conservation for over 3.8 hectares of woodland, grassland and wetland habitat – an area equivalent to six football pitches.
