

The Journal

Nature Notes

Spring is the time when our garden ponds start to fill with life. Usually the amphibians are the most



noticeable inhabitants of our ponds at this time of year, with Frogs and Toads returning to lay their eggs. Although perhaps seen less often, Smooth Newts (as shown here) always look splendid in their breeding colours when the yellow or orange underside is speckled with dark spots of various sizes. The male also develops a wavy crest that runs from the back of the head to the tip of the tail, as well as fringes on the edges of the hind toes. Females lay 200 to 300 eggs, which they attach to pond vegetation, and these take around 10 weeks to metamorphose into air-breathing juveniles. At the end of the summer most newts leave the pond to hibernate in moist, sheltered parts of the garden before emerging from hibernation in March or April and returning to the pond. Newts are carnivorous at all stages of their life, starting with plankton, then insect larvae and

molluscs, and finally slugs and worms when they leave the pond.

Amongst the more spectacular inhabitants of the garden pond are dragonflies and damselflies that, although they begin their lives as rather dingy grubs crawling in the pond, emerge as some of the most colourful garden wildlife. The male Banded Demoiselle seen here is one of the most elegant with its subtle shades of dark blue. Females lay eggs onto the leaves and stems of aquatic plants; the eggs take around two weeks to hatch after which the larvae live underwater amongst the aquatic vegetation for two years. They crawl out of the water and the adults emerge from the larval cases, allowing their wings to expand and dry before flying away.



Snails are found in almost all garden ponds whether or not they were deliberately put in. They



usually cause no problems and may help to keep the pond clean as they feed predominantly on soft algae scraped from the walls of the pond. One of the most attractive is the Great Ramshorn Snail, which grows to over 2 cm in diameter and often has a bright red colour. This colour is due to haemoglobin in the blood, in contrast to most other freshwater snails, which have greenish blood. Where the snail lacks a dark skin pigment, the red colour is most noticeable.

The Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Horticultural Society have a project entitled Wild About Gardens, which has been set up to encourage people to use their gardens to help support nature. As adding a pond is one of the best things you can do for wildlife in your garden, they have produced a free booklet (Big or small, ponds for all) that can be downloaded from their website (<http://www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk>). This explains why a pond is so useful to your wildlife, how to plant up your pond and look after it. Size doesn't matter, even a washing-up bowl or an old sink can provide a home for a wealth of wildlife. However, it is always best to avoid fish in your wildlife pond as they tend to eat everything else over time.