

A history of the improvements that have occurred at the village pond with details of the work done by the Pond Volunteers.

The following pages are the Parish Pump Village Pond Updates plus one example detailed for the Parish Council

January 2020: Westham Village Pond: Volunteers work hard to restore pond wildlife habitats

The Pond Volunteers had worked through 2019 to remove densely overgrown bankside vegetation. The picture here shows the last day's working after several sessions completely clearing tall, dense brambles and self-sown trees that completely obscured the view of the pond. In the background overgrown brambles and trees have yet to be tackled. The water is still dirty brown and opaque showing the high level of pollution. You can also see clearly the almost complete absence of any water plants in this part of the pond. Nothing would grow in the heavily bacterial water.

By the summer of 2018 it was clear that Westham village pond had become unhealthy and lifeless and people could hardly see the pond for overgrown bank vegetation. A serious drought only made things worse. Westham Parish Council responded to local concerns and set up a Pond Working Group to design a management plan to bring back life and attractive views to the village pond. The working group draws upon sound ecological and landscaping expertise and has sought the best advice on pond management from bodies such as the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the national Freshwater Habitats Trust. The plan aims to restore and enhance the biodiversity of the pond and to create lovely views for people to enjoy.

A Pond Volunteer Group was also set up to help implement the plan alongside the contractors employed to do heavier tasks and regular mowing of the banks. Small groups of volunteers have worked steadily since last June to clear scrub, and plant native flowers and water plants around the banks. Even though the group has only been running for a few months it has already improved the appearance of the pond significantly. Work will continue through the winter. When spring comes the pond will be transformed by the leaves and flowers of the newly planted native plants and it is hoped that wildlife that used to live here will begin to return.

Toads, Frogs and Newts used to breed in the pond before it became too polluted. The volunteers are working to provide habitat for them and for water-birds such as Moorhens and Reed Buntings. Herons should be seen more often and even Kingfishers may visit. The cleaner water will be home to Dragonflies and Water Beetles again and it is hoped that flowers of the waterside plants will attract many more Bees and Butterflies.

There is no quick fix for restoring the biodiversity of the pond; it is a long term project that will take several years but it is rewarding one. The plan is to recreate a healthy beautiful pond that is an asset for local people and visitors alike.

The Pond Volunteer group is very friendly and undertakes simple gardening-type activities around the pond for an hour or so one day a week, alternating between weekday and weekend afternoons. Safe guidance is provided and the work is not over-taxing and implements the carefully designed management plan.

If you are interested in joining the Pond Volunteers to work to help wildlife return to a more beautiful Westham village pond you will be most welcome.

Contact the Clerk to The Council at: clerk@westhamparishcouncil.org.uk



Pond Volunteers at work



Native wetland flowers that the Pond Volunteers are restoring to the village pond

Left - Marsh Mallow



Right-Yellow Iris

May 2020: Life returns to Westham Village Horse Pond

After the Pond Volunteers had worked to create good habitat the amphibians returned to breed in the pond after many years absence. There were only a few patches of frogspawn, but it was an encouraging start.

For the first time in years Frogs bred successfully in habitat created by the Pond Volunteers over the winter. There was no sign of Toads, but maybe they will return next year.

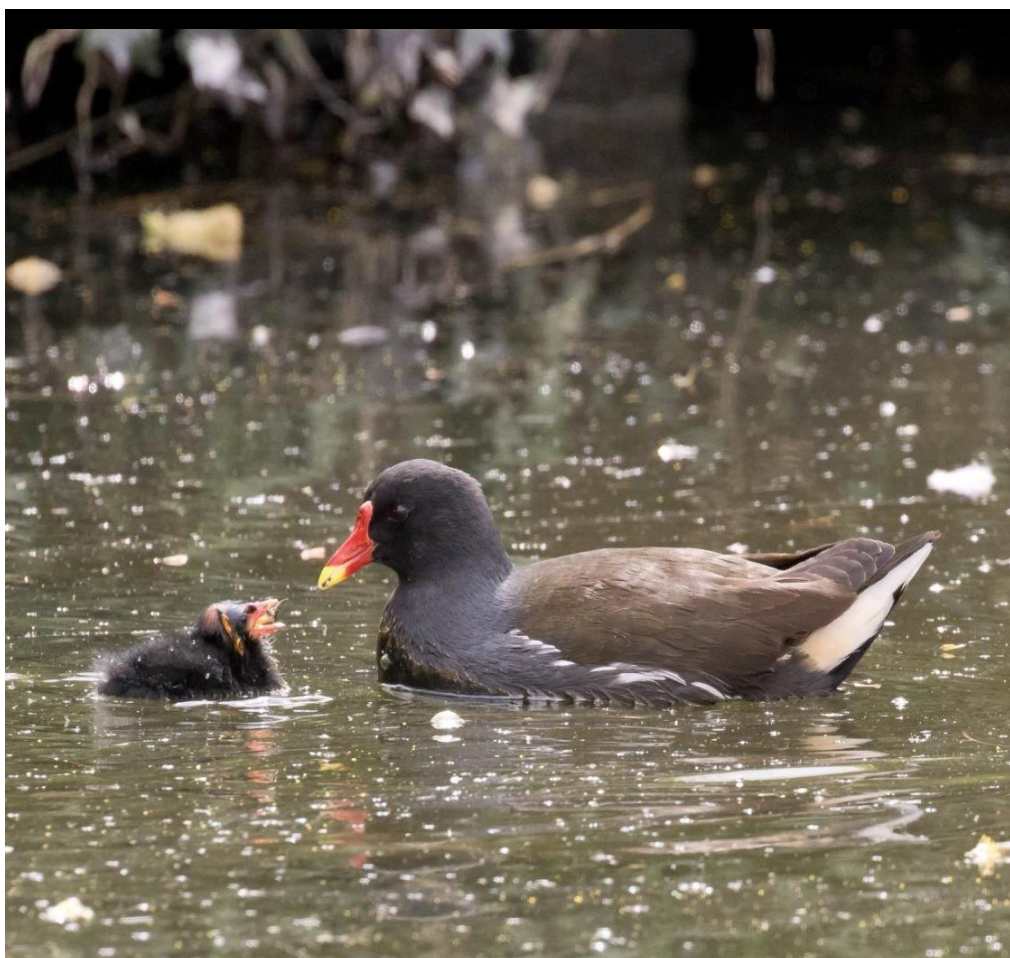
The Volunteers have reintroduced native plants over the winter. Marsh Marigolds flowered in April. Lots of Yellow Irises are now in flower. Plantings of native Water-Lilies are showing new leaves at the surface. Time will tell if they can survive. Removal of brambles by the Volunteers has opened views across the pond. Pondweeds have not yet returned. They are essential in any pond, providing food and oxygen and helping to remove pollutants. With clearer water dormant seeds may germinate. We need them back!

Moorhens had chicks early in the year. Canada Geese also have young. Geese like to graze short grass and they can be seen on verges and lawns a long way from the pond. Mallard also bred and their ducklings prefer to eat pond insects such as mayflies.

The baby birds have attracted a lot of interest. Happily many visitors just come to look and some only feed a little grain put on the banks. The single biggest threat to the health of the pond is too much food going into the system. The pond is quite small and it cannot cope with a burden of this extra food. Toxic algal blooms caused by too much food input have occurred frequently in the past. We hope that everyone will help to look after the water quality by feeding as little as possible. Clean, clear water is vital to all pond-life including the birds.

The pond is a very important feeding area for local Bats at twilight. Bumblebees are nesting in an old mouse burrow in a quiet corner. Hopefully Dragonflies will colonise the new pond habitat this year. Hopefully the wildlife will continue to return to this important natural haven.

Mum feeds a baby Moorhen a protein-rich mayfly



Frogs bred successfully in the pond in March



If you are interested in joining the Pond Volunteers please contact the Clerk to The Council at:
clerk@westhamparishcouncil.org.uk

September 2020: Pond Wildlife is Recovering with the Help of the Volunteers

A dry summer caused the pond to dry out but this is normal for our pond. Feeding was still a problem causing pollution and keeping many Rats around the pond

A Kingfisher was spotted for the first time for years and many more beautiful wildflowers have been planted. It seems that more wildlife is returning.

Another dry summer has exposed mud but this is not a disaster. Exposed silt is actually broken down to carbon dioxide by tiny worms and insects that feed on it! In turn these are food for Moorhens whose huge feet have evolved to allow them walk on soft mud. Wagtails, Swallows, House Martins and Bats also benefit. Special mud-adapted wildflowers, such as Celery-Leaved Buttercup, grow flower and set seed very quickly before disappearing when the pond fills with autumn rain.

A tonne of rubble, revealed by low water, was removed along with a bike, a laptop, bottles, and, unfortunately, many dog-poo bags.

Water quality is concerning. Oxygen levels are good but ammonia and phosphate are high due to excessive duck poo. The ducks' health also suffers as, packed together in polluted water, they acquire harmful parasites. One duck went to ESWR with a compacted crop due to overfeeding. This is potentially fatal - several ducks have died here this summer. Overfeeding also attracts rats. The biggest worry is an increased risk of a person catching Weil's Disease near the pond. With such a serious disease it is important to minimise the risk.

Although feeding seems kind it isn't. It causes real problems for the health of wildlife and people. There's plenty of natural food available to the ducks nearby. We ask everyone to help the pond recover by thoughtfully resisting the temptation to feed the ducks.

Work will continue to make the pond more beautiful and biodiverse over the winter! If you would like to volunteer contact the Clerk at clerk@westhamparishcouncil.org.uk



A rat next to a bench by the pond. Rats are attracted by feeding. They carry Weils Disease.

Pretty Celery-Leaved Buttercup is specially adapted to growing on bare mud in the summer.

The Pond Working Group has continued to work to respond intelligently to management challenges. The effective team has been able to provide a bespoke service to the Council backed by its combination of expertises in ecology administration and practical pond management options. One major advantage is its ability to respond extremely fast to problems as they occur. Very many hours have been spent in responding carefully and intelligently to the concerns raised about the pond. and providing practical solutions.

Removal of rubble: This summer was another with exceptionally low rainfall. The water level dropped to expose unwanted debris and this became a useful opportunity when the volunteers resumed activity. They took on a major task over the course of a weekend. This was the successful removal of over a tonne of rubble and items such as a bicycle frame, a car bumper, a motorcycle wheel, a laptop and many glass bottles. A lot of plastic waste was also removed including dozens of bread bags and much less welcome dog waste bags. A skip was hired and filled to the brim. The pond is now in a much better state. The wire protecting the bank was also tidied and pushed out of sight a little so that it is not a hazard but is an asset.

Naturally low water levels: In a rain/groundwater fed pond such as ours water level naturally falls in the summer. This season there has been a drought in Sussex and the problem is a common one in local ponds. Exposed organic mud is not in any way a disaster. In fact it is so normal that there is a community of plants and animals that have evolved to live on bare mud. The benefit of this is that the silt is actually broken down when it is exposed to the air. (It ends up as carbon dioxide breathed out by invertebrate decomposers such as tiny worms and insect larvae!) Specialised plants such as Celery-Leaved Buttercup grow quickly, flower and set seed on the mud before they become duck food and disappear when the pond fills in the autumn. Overall this sees the silt naturally reducing whilst providing a lot of natural insect and plant food for larger wildlife. The Moorhens especially like to feed on the mud. Their huge feet have evolved to allow them walk on it ease. Wagtails, Swallows and House Martins (as well as nocturnal bats) welcome the abundant insect life in this part of the pond.

Future desilting: A lot of mud has been exposed this year due to exceptionally dry weather. The drying out of part of the pond in summer is natural and inevitable in dry years and not in itself a good reason for desilting. As has been mentioned above some silt disappears naturally just as a result of being exposed to the air. We envisage a gradual removal of some silt each year. This should be done in a way to protect and enhance the wildlife habitat of the pond. Next August it may be appropriate to use machinery to deepen the wild end near the reed-bed by removing a substantial volume of mud. Here is very good advice from the leading UK pond advisory group the Freshwater Habitats Trust.
<https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Silted-up-ponds-and-dredging-1.pdf>

Marginal planting: To return the pond to a healthy state it would be good to have more plants growing in the pond at the edges. In the past plants could not survive the attentions of large fish or large numbers of ducks and geese and were completely eradicated. Marginal plants such as Irises and bulrushes remove pollutants from the water and help decomposition and reduction of silt. They also support a huge variety of bees, butterflies and moths and provide cover for nesting birds and habitat for frogs, toads and dragonflies. This year the volunteers have made a major effort to source a large number of attractive native marginal plants. Some were planted over the winter and made a good display of colour earlier this summer. Planting has continued in recent weeks and we hope that the pond will look even more beautiful next season.

Water quality: We have regularly tested water quality. The continued abundance of tiny Daphnia is reassuring as it indicates that oxygen levels are still OK. However the dissolved Ammonia levels are very high. This is serious pollution and almost certainly a result of the large number of ducks using the pond at the moment. Phosphate levels are likely to be high for the same reason as the Ammonia. Currently excessive algae colours the water greenish, along with dissolved duck poo that is brown. However there is a still high risk of an algal bloom of some kind due to this pollution. They have been regular occurrences here in the past and they not only kill most of the life in the water but also pose a toxicity risk to people and animals.

Health of Ducks: The high density of the visiting duck population also has implications for the health of the ducks themselves. Being attracted to our small pond by an easy meal and then packed together in very dirty water means that they acquire a high parasite burden (intestinal worms, flukes and feather parasites). This will increase their mortality and reduce breeding success in the future. One very poorly duck was taken in time to Sussex Wildlife Rescue and diagnosed with a grain compacted crop. It was treated successfully but this condition is potentially fatal. This indicates that the unfortunate spate of deaths of young ducks around the pond this year was most likely due to overfeeding. Unfortunately the feeding of ducks is not only seriously polluting the water and killing wildlife but is actually harming the ducks themselves. Ducks are adapted to feed mainly on water plants with ducklings requiring insect diet for healthy growth. A biodiverse, living pond can provide everything that they need provided that there are not too many of them. Ducks will always be at the pond but feeding them is not just completely unnecessary it is also very damaging indeed.

Rats: Excessive feeding has also generated a large population of rats. These otherwise charming animals can be a nuisance in surrounding properties when they damage plastic pipes and electrical wiring. However the main worry in having large numbers here is the increased risk of a person being infected with Weil's disease. This bacterial infection is carried in their urine. Rats urinate almost constantly and every surface that they move over becomes contaminated. The germ also survives well in water. Anyone touching surfaces or water around the pond is at risk. In our situation the pond volunteers but also small children visiting the pond are most vulnerable. With such a serious disease it is important to minimise the risk. The only way to do this is to reduce feeding at the pond as much as possible to avoid attracting rats.

Management in the immediate future: This autumn we plan to seed some of the grassy banks with native Wealden wildflower lawn and meadow plants. This should give a brighter show of colour in the spring and summer as well as providing nectar for pollinating bees and butterflies. Planting up the margins will continue with native plants that do not obscure views but give a display of flowers. Over the coming winter more tree work is envisaged. The overgrown willows on the island need coppicing. Willows and a cherry tree on the bank need reshaping to remove over-shading branches. The wilder end of the pond with its surviving reed-bed is the main area where wildlife has survived in recent years. The volunteers have reinstated additional tall fen plants and the reed-bed is now very healthy. Last Spring we dug a few small ponded areas protected by the reeds which were extremely successful in attracting breeding frogs and toads. During the winter we hope to dig out some

of the silt in this area to open up the reed-bed and enhance the wildlife here even more. It may be possible to begin introducing Water-Lilies again after the failure of our trial last year due to high duck numbers. We hope that frogs, newts, toads and other pond wildlife will also return in greater abundance.

Working with contractors: One of the greatest advantages of having had the experience of working around the pond this year is the acquisition of a better understanding that can inform planning for future work. In particular we will be able to refine the instructions to contractors to meet the needs of the Parish Council in maintaining the pond. It is hoped that with the pond in a better state, contract maintenance can be more straightforward and achieve more. This year we have established a good relationship with the current contractors sharing expertise to manage the pond and banks.

To sum up: We can say that this year we have substantially increased the biological capital held by the pond. In the future we hope that the established plants can grow and fend for themselves but also provide a habitat for all sorts of native pond wildlife. How else can we hope that our children can grow up seeing tadpoles and dragonflies, wildflowers and Kingfishers? Yes we had the first visit from a Kingfisher for many years early this summer as well as Yellow and Grey Wagtails and Herons! The village pond is again becoming a biodiversity hotspot!

Thanks especially to the Volunteers and the Parish Councillors who have worked so hard over the last year. It has also been heartening to have so many people offer their thanks and appreciation to the volunteers as they worked around the pond.



Pretty Celery-

Leaved Irises planted by the volunteers and and umbellifers flowering earlier in the year.

January 2021: Water Quality in the Village Pond is Improving!

Over the winter the trees on the island were pollarded or coppiced. This caused an outcry from a few necessitating further detailed explanation and reassurance from the Pond Working Group. Of course the trees have grown back very quickly. A very encouraging sign was the great improvement in water quality which was due to the drop in the amount of food being fed due to the signs devised by the PWG and put up by the Council.

The quality of the water in the pond is much improved. Clearer water is good evidence of that. Frogs and Toads should return to breed for the second time soon. Clean water is vital element in a healthy pond. Thanks to the many who have responded sympathetically to the Parish Council's request not to feed the ducks. Less food entering this small ecosystem has, so far this year, stopped algae and nasty bacteria from taking over again. Feeding ducks at the pond seems a good thing but sadly in the end it kills life in the water, leading to unhealthy conditions for both ducks and people. The birds have only to fly a short distance to find plenty of natural food on our local marshes. If we can continue to refrain from feeding we should see real change for the better as we head into spring. In 2020 officers from Wealden finally confirmed that the pond is only fed by rain and groundwater. So it is completely natural for the pond level to drop in dry weather. It is no bad thing. Native pond plants and animals cope with it very well. However it means that it is even more important to keep the water clean.

This year the volunteers will plant more native water plants and try to re-establish Water Lilies. Areas of the bank will be sown with Sussex wildflowers. Bird and bat boxes will be installed on bankside trees. It is heartening to see so many enjoying the quiet natural area. By working together to keep the water clean and clear, much more wildlife will be there for us and our children to enjoy safely in future. Thanks to the pond volunteers who have achieved so much in 2020! You are most welcome to volunteer! Please contact the Parish Clerk: e-mail clerk@westhamparishcouncil.org.uk



This is an interesting photo probably dating back to the 1960's or early 1970's. It shows the Common Reeds and Bulrushes that have always occurred at the pond. Given the right conditions both of these plants can spread quickly to form reedbeds. They are however fairly straightforward to control in a relatively small pond such as Westham's. They support a lot of wildlife and help clean the water and reduce silting. Here a pair of Swans is nesting in a typical reedbed setting.

May 2021: Westham Village Pond springs back to life.

The water was now quite clear and aquatic plants appeared for the first time for at least 30 years. The pond was springing back into life from being almost completely dead and toxic just 3 years before.

The pond is now much healthier. The water is clear, cleaner and well oxygenated. Some pondweeds are beginning to grow in the water for the first time in decades. They must have survived as seeds from over forty years ago! Since 2019, little by little, the volunteers have done a huge amount of work. Overgrown brambles and willows were cleared. Many Yellow Irises and other marginal plants have been planted. To see them flower this summer will be rewarding. The visiting Canada Geese bred successfully on the island. The coppiced willows there have already sprouted and will have tall leafy shoots by summer. It is lovely to see the geese feeding on their preferred short grass on the verges. Bird and bat boxes have been installed high in pond-side trees. Native meadow and hedgerow wildflowers are being restored, adding to the biodiversity. They will provide food and habitat for birds, bees, butterflies, moths and other insects. Again thanks to everyone who has refrained from feeding the ducks and geese. It has made such a difference both to the water quality and to the other wildlife. Frogs and Toads bred for the second time in many years again this spring. Some feeding still occurs. Sadly this adds to the excess nutrients in the pond risking the danger of a toxic algal bloom. In late April algal “blanket weed” looked to be taking over. Fortunately it died off suddenly, maybe ecological balance is returning as newly introduced water plants absorb excess nutrients. Swallows have returned and regularly swoop down to drink from the pond surface. It is good to know that the water is cleaner and healthier for them and all of the wildlife that depends on the special pond habitat.

Volunteers most welcome! (Contact: Parish Clerk: e-mail clerk@westhamparishcouncil.org.uk)



Plants are beginning to be able to grow again in the cleaner water. Notice the trees on the island have been recently coppiced and pollarded by contractors. Some major tree work was done. Several large self-seeded poplars were removed and the remaining large trees were trimmed.

January 2022: Much More Wildlife is Returning.

Since March 2019 volunteers have worked hard to restore wildlife to Westham Pond. Such things take time but already the pond is cleaner, healthier and more alive than it has been for many years. Plants are fundamental. They oxygenate water, break down pollutants, and trap silt. The volunteers have planted many species that had been lost. Some have beautiful flowers in the spring and summer. Waterlilies seem to be surviving. Pretty underwater pondweeds are now growing from seed dormant in the pond for over 30 years. The return of clear water allows light to reach the bottom to wake them up. Every plant supports different creatures so the more types of plant the greater the diversity of small animals.

Many species of dragonfly water-beetle, moth, butterfly, bee and other insects have now returned. Lots of tiny animals to eat and more plant shelter now provide good habitat for larger animals. Frogs, toads and newts have returned. Grass Snakes that eat them have also been seen again. 10- Spined Sticklebacks have increased and these little fish attracted birds that feed on them. Heron, Little Egret and even Cormorant have been seen. Kingfishers have started to visit regularly.

The Parish Council installed bird and bat boxes on bankside tree trunks are now occupied. The pond is an important area for bats and they can be seen flitting low over the water at twilight taking over from the Swallows and House Martins that zoom down in the daytime.

Thanks so much to everyone for taking notice of the request not to feed ducks at the pond. It is the biggest factor in restoring clean water which is essential in keeping all pond wildlife, including ducks, healthy.

Volunteers are very welcome. Please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council if you are interested.



Kingfishers regularly visit the pond now. Here is one hunting Sticklebacks on the south side

Westham Village Pond May 2022: Over 100 Frogs breeding with Toads and Newts

This Spring showed that the hard work done by the Pond Working Group and the Pond Volunteers over the previous three years had really made a major positive difference to the biodiversity of the pond.

The Yellow Irises planted by the Parish Council volunteers in recent years are flowering and looking lovely. Pondweeds have, for the first time, become established enough to oxygenate and clean the water to a significant degree.

There is really good evidence that the wildlife friendly policy implemented over the last 3 years is working. The bird and bat boxes put up last year were all fully occupied by Blue and Great Tits and Pipistrelle Bats.

This spring there were over 100 frogs breeding. There had been none before 2020 with only a few pairs in the last two years. Toads also breed but as yet only in small numbers. Major news is that Great Crested newts have arrived in the pond. They were probably here years ago and were lost when the pond became polluted but this is the first proper record of them.

The water in a pond like ours should be really clear but it is still not completely clean. Although the pond is now much healthier due to a thoughtful, kind response to the signs that politely ask everyone not to feed at all. If we all took this on-board our small pond it could be beautifully clean and clear. Every animal that lives at the pond has to drink the water and in many cases breathe it. They are no less susceptible to harm from dirty polluted water than we are. It may seem that giving food to the ducks is a nice thing to do but even a little feeding ends up polluting the water very badly and causes ecological damage.

The Pond Volunteer Group continues to work hard to restore wildlife to the pond and new members are most welcome. Please contact the Parish clerk for more information if you are interested.



Stunning Amphibian breeding success. From zero to over a hundred Frogs in three years.

September 2022: Westham Village Pond: Four Pictures of Cleaner Water



Yellow Loosestrife Bee: This rare bee appeared after we planted wild Yellow Loosestrife last year. It collects oils from the flowers to waterproof its nest. It is our only marshland bee to flood-proof its babies. Many insects were seen at the pond for the first time this year. Restoring wild plants has brought them back.

Reed Warbler amongst Lesser Bulrush: Newly restored reedbed has been found by Reed Warblers who have raised two families in nests attached to the reed stems. They are shy birds specially adapted to hunt insects amongst reeds. The reeds not only give them a home but also help purify the pond water. Only clean water can support enough insect food.



Emperor Dragonfly: Eight species of dragonfly now live in the pond. There were none three years ago. This is our largest species. The male is bright blue but this green female is laying her eggs amongst pondweeds. The nymphs will spend a year or two in the pond before hatching. Without the pondweeds there would be no pond animals to feed them. Pondweeds appeared for the first time this year. All they needed was light to grow. Sunlight can only penetrate clear, clean water.

Little Egret: These little herons now visit to catch Sticklebacks which feed on insects that in turn feed on pondweeds. The pondweeds grew for the first time this year because the water was clear, so it is just because of the cleaner water that these beautiful birds visit.

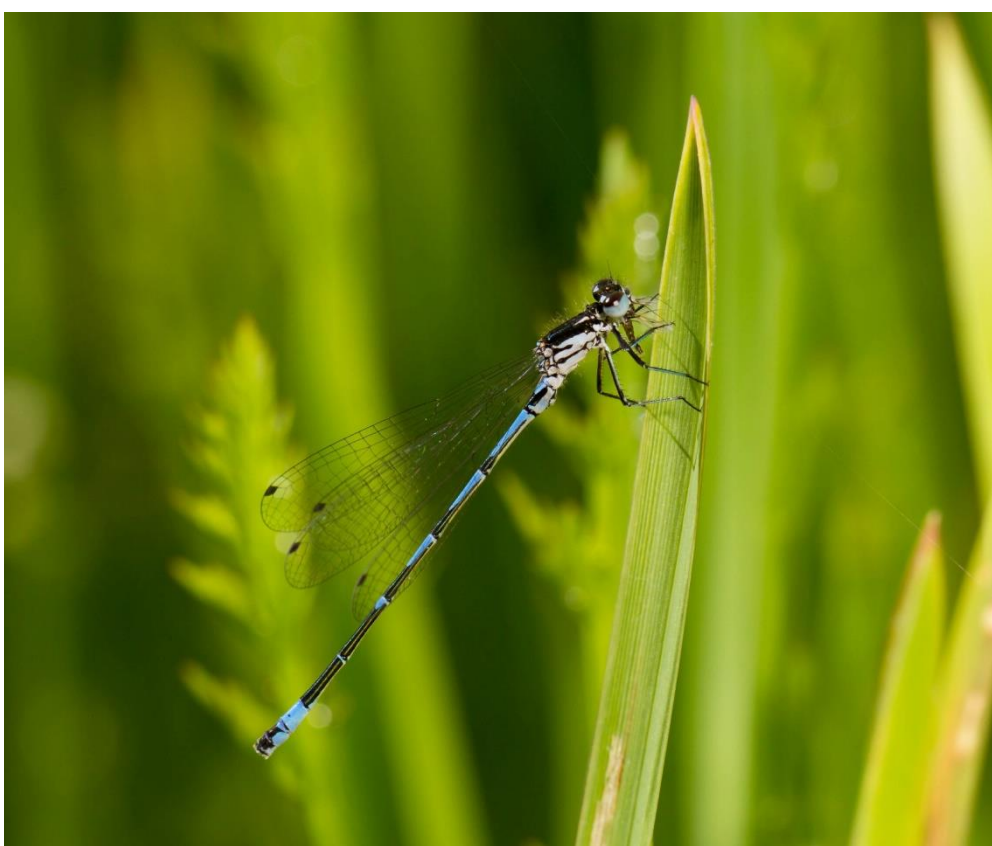
Thanks to everyone for observing the request not to feed anything to the water birds here. It is just that one simple thing has made the water cleaner and has allowed life to return to the pond.

January 2023: Westham Village Pond; More and more wildlife returns

Three years ago the pond was in a bad way. Since then the Parish Council and Pond volunteers have worked hard to restore biodiversity. We can now report really good results: □ Clearer water that is that is healthier for all wildlife including water-birds.

- Pondweeds that appeared from seeds dormant in the mud. The cleaner water lets light in causing them to germinate.
- Many attractive wild plants with beautiful flowers now form wildlife habitat around the pond.
- Return of Reedbed habitat with seven types of reed that cleans water and supports wildlife.
- Reed Warblers bred in this little Reedbed for the first time this year!
- Frogs have returned to breed. Three years ago there were none. A few arrived in the first two years but there were over a hundred last year!
- Toads have begun to breed again, but only a few so far.
- Smooth Newts and Palmate Newts have returned. Excitingly a Great Crested Newt was seen last year. We now have all three UK Newt species in the pond.
- Grass Snakes have been seen and Slow-worm lizards live on the banks in the longer grass.
- RSPB Nest Boxes placed around the pond have been used by Blue Tits and Great Tits
- RSPB Bat Boxes on bankside trees are used by Pipistrelle Bats and possibly other species.
- Bees, Butterflies, Moths and other insects have returned. Eight species of Dragonflies were counted.
- Moorhens, Mallards and Canada Geese bred.
- Kingfishers visited regularly as did Herons, Little Egrets and Cormorants
- Other birds including Blackbird, Chiff-chaff, Willow Warbler, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Starling, Blackcap, and Wren have nested.

Thanks to everyone reducing pollution by not feeding anything at the pond. Clean water is essential for all wildlife. If we work together we can save these wetland plants and animals for our children and grandchildren to enjoy.



One of the 8 types of Dragonfly seen at the pond.



A Reed Warblers's nest.

Westham Pond May 2023: Swans have arrived at the pond.

After three years of work there is now considerable biological capital at the pond. Reeds are spreading naturally and these will have to be cut back and pulled up to maintain a balance of habitats and to keep visual amenity.

As this note is being written in early May, Swans, Geese, Mallards and Moorhens are sitting on eggs around the pond. Reed Warblers have returned just this morning for the second year. It is heartening to know that the baby water birds will have clean water, reeds to hide amongst and lots of insects to eat.

The quality of the water and biodiversity was first assessed in 2019 using a reliable scientific technique, sampling the aquatic insects living in the water. Back then the pond was in serious trouble. The water was filthy, no aquatic plants could grow, and only a very few pollution-tolerant bugs were found. The score was a miserable 22 which indicated a very polluted and a damaged ecosystem. We repeated the test again this spring and the score had risen to 78. This puts the pond in good condition and although slightly polluted. The higher score shows that many tiny animals including species only found in cleaner water have returned. To see high biodiversity and a repaired ecosystem after just a few years is very cheering.

The major factor behind this change is the reduction in feeding at the pond. Just putting any food at all into this little system adds nutrients which eventually end up seriously polluting the water and harming wildlife. So it is not what is fed, it is simply feeding anything at all which eventually does the damage. It seems odd and hard to accept for some, but it is absolutely true. Without the help of everyone in our community who has taken this on board this extraordinarily positive change would not have happened. Harmful algae and bacteria have nearly disappeared now and the clearer pond water is not only full of wildlife but also much safer for everyone.



Swans hatching in the Reeds.



Red Campion Wildflowers planted by the Pond Volunteers two years ago.

September 2023: Reeds at the Village Pond

Westham Pond is old. It was once an inlet of the sea surrounding Pevensey Castle. There have always been reeds here. One kind, Sea Club-rush, has survived in the pond from 2000 years ago when it was saltmarsh. There were just one or two plants surviving in 2018 but it is now recovering.

The work done by the Parish Council has returned the pond to a healthier condition. It was important to allow reeds to re-establish. They remove pollution from the water and their roots put air into the organic silt, breaking it down. The black sludge in the bottom of the pond is now gradually disappearing as a result and the pond water is clearer.

Reeds are extremely important for wildlife. Each of the many types growing here supports different invertebrates. They include the Wainscot Moths feeding inside reed stems. These are essential food for the nesting Reed Warblers and the many Bats that fly over the pond.

Healthy ponds, eventually, grow over completely and so they have to be managed. As there is now lots of good wildlife habitat it is time to push back the reedbeds. As they use up nutrients, reeds naturally become smaller and some have to be pulled up or cut. This couldn't be done when birds were breeding. Removal has already started and lot more is planned. It is important to keep the views of the pond open and to maintain beds of shorter wildflowers around the banks. Over the winter the council will prepare the pond to be beautiful next spring, with even more wildflowers. Hopefully the newly returned Frogs, Toads and Newts will appear in even greater numbers.

If you would like to volunteer to help at the pond you will be very welcome. Please contact the Parish Clerk for details.

A Reed Warbler nesting at the pond.

An early 20th Century print showing Reed Warblers and their nest.

Sea Club-rush; a reed that has probably survived at the pond for over 2000 years.

A 19th Century print showing Wainscot Moths that live in the reeds at the pond. They are important food for birds, and bats.

