

Madley Moat

In 2007, pond survey and restoration work was undertaken on a pond at Madley Moat as part of the Pond Restoration and Celebration Project. This project was developed by Herefordshire Amphibian and Reptile Team (HART) and rolled out in partnership with Herefordshire Nature Trust. It was funded by Herefordshire Rivers LEADER+, SITA Trust and Wye Valley AONB.



Madley Moat after restoration D. Hardy

History

Madley Moat is listed as an Ancient Monument, having been identified as a moat by the Royal Commission in the 1950s though little further archaeological research has been undertaken. The moat's island is rather small for a homestead and is now well vegetated with trees, but the site is likely to be medieval. There are several other medieval sites nearby, including a motte at Castle Farm, deserted old settlements, defensive dykes and fishponds.

Lying on the edge of the village, locally the moat is also known as Pennylock pool. It used to be bigger, but in the 1960s a nearby orchard was felled and the debris pushed into the pond. The moat has been overgrown for at least the last 40 years and local people remember playing on the island, hidden away from adults! It also made a great ice skating rink in colder winters! One of the villagers has an old picture on their mantelpiece of the moat with a swan swimming proudly around.

Wildlife

In 2007 when the project began the restoration process the moat was a very poor pond habitat. Shrouded by a full canopy of trees except for a corner where the electricity board had cleared the wires, the water was dank and murky and it had been used for fly tipping with chairs, a bed and other rubbish emerging as it dried out. There was very little submerged vegetation though willow trees were growing profusely from fallen branches that had rooted in the mud. It was a good hideaway for a moorhen, but a poor resource for other wildlife.

Despite this, wildlife surveys in 2005 and 2007 found evidence of great crested newt eggs and a patch of frog spawn, and a number of invertebrates. In fact, while the restoration work was underway people frequently saw little frogs jumping out of the grass tussocks. Generally, however, there was little diversity in biological life to be found and it was graded by the ecologist as 'poor' for both plant species and invertebrates.

Great Crested Newts

The great crested (or 'warty') newts are our largest native newt and both they and their habitats are protected by British and European



Male great crested newt P. King

wildlife law. We are very lucky in Herefordshire that they are often found here. They tend to breed in well-vegetated, sunny ponds but the rest of the year they forage and over-winter in rough grassland and woodland or thick hedge habitats, so it is important that these habitats are available nearby.

Great crested newts lay eggs on plants like water mint, willowherb and flote grass growing in the water, the female carefully folding the leaf over the egg to protect it. Newt tadpoles will largely feed on pond invertebrates until August or September when they emerge from the water as juveniles. Although they may be found in the water in following breeding seasons, young great crested newts often don't breed until their third or fourth year.



Great crested newt eggs folded in leaves of flote grass P. King

Management

Restoration of the moat for wildlife had to take into account its historical significance. This prevented any digging-out so that any archaeological information held in the silt layers was preserved. Trees growing in the water couldn't be dragged out by the roots for the same reason, and therefore had to be cut and treated with herbicide to try and prevent them re-growing.



Madley Moat before restoration R. King

Restoration work took place over several weeks in September 2007. The aim of the management was to open up the tree canopy to let in more light and warmth so that a greater diversity of plants and pond invertebrates would be able to live there. These of course form the base of a food chain for many creatures.

For this purpose, the sunny southern bank was cleared of trees, and the willows growing in the water were cut down. We are also hoping that with fewer trees, the pond will retain more water over the summer and the newt tadpoles will survive to be able to metamorphose into adults.

Professional tree surgeons undertook much of the tree felling while volunteers cut smaller wood, cleared logs, burnt brash and planted the bare banks to speed up vegetation re-growth. Some of the big willows on the northern side were retained for cover while habitat piles were created from logs, chippings and brash as refuges for wildlife. The amount of work that we achieved wouldn't have been possible without all the support of volunteers!

Visit Madley Moat!

The village of Madley is on the B4352 Clehonger road west of Hereford. It is often remembered for the huge satellite dishes that are stationed nearby. The best way to visit the moat is to park at the recreation area - turn off between the church and the shop and look out for the tennis club sign on the right hand side towards the edge of the village. In the fence beyond the football field there is a gate to the right or a stile to the left, and it is possible to walk over to the moat. This is private land and there is only permissive access.

Acknowledgements

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