

# Pond Restoration and Celebration Project Mar-Dec 2007

## Project Report

**Darylle Hardy: project officer**

### Project aims and objectives

This project was inspired by the voluntary group Herefordshire Amphibian and Reptile Team (HART). Having surveyed nearly 300 ponds in the county during their Ponds and Newts Project, they found that nearly 50% supported great crested newts but also that there was a lot of habitat neglect. In response HART was keen to raise the profile of ponds and to restore some with the help of local communities.

The aim of the project was therefore to return more ponds into good conservation management. The objectives were:

- To restore 5 identified ponds that were accessible to the public with the help of local people
- To set up community-based pond groups for each pond and provide training and support so that they could manage the pond beyond the life of the project
- To run 5 awareness-raising pond celebration events at inspirational wildlife ponds

HART was granted funding from Herefordshire Rivers LEADER+ Programme (£31,655), SITA Trust (£21,666) and The Wye Valley AONB (£2287). The LEADER+ funding also included £6580 in volunteer time match funding.

### Project operation

The project was conceived to be of 9 months duration, running from March – Nov 2007 with a full time project officer. HART arranged a management agreement with Herefordshire Nature Trust for a fee, to host and co-manage the project. This included office accommodation and line management of the project officer, and bank rolling of the project. This latter was essential as the predicted cash flow, with funding paid well in arrears, was beyond the financial capabilities of HART as a voluntary group. HART retained a strong role in project's management and on the steering group.

- The role of the project officer (Darylle Hardy) was to co-ordinate the project, engage local communities, organise events, write risk assessments, facilitate pond restoration work, manage the budget, make funding claims and fulfil funding-body requirements.
- A project consultant (Will Watson) was contracted to survey ponds, write management plans, provide volunteer training and expert guidance.
- Specialist contractors were employed to undertake the major restoration work and volunteers were sought to provide follow-up work.
- The pond celebration events were co-ordinated by the project officer but HART volunteers played a central part in running the events.
- A steering group consisting of Richard King (HART), Margaret Wrenn (HART), Francesca Griffith (HNT), Nicky Davies (BAP Partnership), Dorothy Wright (Herpetological Conservation Trust) and Darylle Hardy (project co-ordinator) met 4 times during the project to provide guidance.

The five ponds were selected for the project prior to its start and had the support of landowners and members of the local community. All had permissive access or public rights of way nearby and were visited by local people. The ponds at Ross on Wye and Holme Lacy fell into the Wye Valley AONB area, and ponds at Madley, Honeymoon Common and Staunton-on-Wye fell into the Herefordshire Rivers LEADER+ area, thus permitting the funding of the project.

The ponds were at:

- **Madley Moat:** on farmland owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, situated near the recreation area and a public right of way, and is used as a dog walking area.

- **Honeymoon Common:** common land near Eaton Bishop owned by the Church Commission and managed by Eaton Bishop parish council.
- **Welsh Water pond near Alton Court,** Ross on Wye, situated next to the Town and Country Trail.
- **Holme Lacy college:** in old parkland on the farm with permissive access and nearby footpaths.
- **Bulmers wildlife area** near Staunton-on-Wye: permissive access from a footpath and a regular haunt for local people

The training courses for volunteers were held at different times over the summer and autumn at the ponds being restored. They were aimed at volunteers in the pond groups to give sustainability to the pond restoration work.

Sites for the pond celebration events were established once the project was underway. The format consisted of knowledgeable volunteers from HART being stationed around a pond enthusing and demonstrating an aspect of pond life or management to the visitors. This was followed by tea in a local village hall or similar venue.

The project was extended by 1 month to the end of December because funds were still available and the restoration programme had slipped because of difficulties caused by the unseasonal weather.

### **Pond Restoration**

The outline plan for the restoration work was as follows:

March:

- project officer employed

April/May:

- consultation with stakeholders and local communities
- engage volunteers

May/June:

- survey of ponds and management plans written
- pond groups established
- permissions gained for work on habitat of great crested newts

June/July:

- management plans approved by landowners/communities
- bat surveys where required

July/Aug:

- training for pond groups
- contractor quotes obtained

Aug/Sept/Oct

- contractors engaged
- pond restoration work by contractors
- follow-up work by volunteers

This provided a useful plan to follow with such a tight project timescale. Timing of restoration work was defined by great crested newt metamorphs having left ponds before any digging took place, and nesting having finished before tree work was undertaken.

Unfortunately the weather in 2007 followed an unusual pattern with very dry weather in April/May and very wet weather in July/August. By September the ponds were fuller than they had been all year and

newts of varying ages were still in the water. Conversely, by November, the ponds were drier than they had been all year, which certainly worked in favour of later pond restoration work.

### **Madley Moat**

This was almost completely shrouded by a canopy of trees to the extent that viewed from the distance the public did not always realise there was a moat there. The water was dark and murky and fly tipping had taken place previously. Willows were growing in the water and there was plenty of dead wood but despite this, the survey found great crested newt eggs.

The site is a listed ancient monument (thought not scheduled) though the county archaeologist felt unsure about its history because of the small size of the island. However erring on the side of caution, this did mean there were restrictions in what management work could take place:

- No digging/de-silting because of disruption of silt layers in which historical information could be held
- Protection of the banks from erosion during work
- No pulling out of established willow by the roots because of disruption of silt layers.

Public consultation took the form of a 'visit-the-pond' open morning and previous and subsequent articles in the parish magazine and posters in the shop. Attendance was not great, but later on I discovered: that people didn't know it was there, assumed it was at the environmental centre nearby, or knew it by a local name rather than what was on the map. The feeling of those locals who did attend was that some of the big crack willows should stay, and that the rubbish should be cleared out. A consultation meeting was also held with stakeholders including the tenant farmer and a county archaeologist.

The management plan aimed to create open water to encourage more vegetation and invertebrate diversity. It consisted of clearing the fringe of willows from the southern (sunny) side to open it up, cutting down and treating willows growing in the water with herbicide, and thinning the big crack willow. A felling license was obtained as the quantity of wood was close to falling into these restrictions if it was taken off-site. A bat survey was also undertaken and although no evidence was found, trees were marked for retention that might provide bat roost habitat.

Quotes for the required work started at double the budget of £2000. However compromise was reached, with supplementary funding from the landowner (Duchy of Cornwall) and National Grid (pipeline) and the willingness of a contractor to work alongside volunteers, with several work parties overseen by the Nature Trust. The Duchy also agreed to take the larger trunks off-site, and the farm manager provided a trailer to remove some of the chippings off-site. Without all this support, only half the work could have been undertaken.

Work took place in late August and September with dramatic effect. The contractor felled and chipped wood. Volunteers raked dead wood from the water and banks, coppiced smaller stands and manned a fire, built habitat piles and planted up the bare banks to speed up the re-vegetation process.

At a later stage, a herbicide license was obtained and a contractor bought in to re-cut and treat stumps of willow in an attempt to prevent re-growth, particularly those growing in the water.

A very small patch of bulrush (*Typha*) existed in the pond, which the project was keen to remove because of the high likelihood of its rapid colonisation following removal of the trees. However the local volunteers were adamant that they wanted to keep them and would manage them. In the interest of local decision-making and empowerment, we discussed a 'limit of acceptable change' with some fixed-point photography to ensure that boundaries were established for its expansion.

### **Ross on Wye**

This old reservoir pond has clear water and fluctuating water levels, with a broad succession of marginal vegetation, including lots of water mint. However, willow saplings were encroaching on the marsh and

pollarded willows on the periphery had grown back. Management work here attempted to reduce the impact of the willows.

Planning for the restoration work was initially hampered by the turnover of contact staff at Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) because of retirement and maternity leave. Also there were a number of different departments to be dealt with because the site was actually under the operation of United Utilities. Another consideration was that the pond was situated in a paddock let to a grazier, though he was particularly accommodating. However, once contact had been made with key people in the organisations, permission for the restoration work ran smoothly.

Public consultation included a display in the local Heritage Centre for a week with the project officer in attendance on two occasions, and an awareness-raising bat walk. There was an article in a local newspaper, and the project officer took the opportunity when visiting the site to chat with people on the Town and Country Trail. This latter approach was welcomed and effective and indicated that people had heard something about the restoration plans. However, residents from nearby were worried about increased vandalism and parking in the area. Making sure that site visitors parked in an acceptable place alleviated parking worries.

Treework was undertaken by the contractor in November, followed by a morning with volunteers picking up willow twigs to stop them growing in. Positive comments were received from dog walkers passing by who had watched the on-going work.

Further work post-project is planned with a partnership between Herefordshire Nature Trust and Welsh Water, to put in a viewing area by the pond.

### **Staunton-on-Wye**

The Bulmers wildlife area lies at the bottom of Lower House Orchards on the edge of what is known as the Letton Lakes area, a flood plain of the river Wye. About 27 years ago a network of ponds and new woodlands were established with some subsequent management. Previous surveys had found medicinal leech as well as great crested newts, and the 2007 survey also identified a rare mud snail and water beetle.

Pond 7 was chosen to restore because it was a potentially good great crested newt pond but was completely choked with bulrush (*Typha*) and surrounded by trees with very little in the way of egg-laying plants. Public consultation took the form of an open afternoon by the pond, and an educational visit from the village school to raise awareness of the work through letters going out to parents.

The management plan sought to de-silt the pond completely taking out all the bulrushes (*Typha*), and to clear trees and create a shallow margin on the south-eastern side to increase the draw-down zone. An application assessing the need for planning permission was made to the council but found not to be needed. Because the pond was one of a close network, it was felt that pond biodiversity would naturally re-stock quite quickly, therefore the impact of complete clearance would be lessened.

In the management plan, the silt was to be spread on a field on the landholding that was to be put into new orchard trees in the following winter. The reasoning behind this was:

- That the grassland in the wildlife area was tussocky, lightly managed by occasional mowing and not improved for 20 years, therefore good habitat for GCNs
- That the area flooded most years and silt would be washed back into the ponds
- That the silt would be of benefit to the nutrient status of the soil before it was planted.

In view of this, in the EA Waste Disposal Regulations box 7a was ticked by the Bulmers manager, in hope that the silt could be incorporated on the field. However a soil analysis of the pond silt by Bulmers showed little nutrient benefit, and once the digging started it was also clear that the bulrush (*Typha*) was down to the clay level and that any diggings would be of little value. A decision was made by the

project consultant and the orchard manager that the silt would be piled into a heap near the pond but on a floristically poor area of grass, and would over time become good newt refugia.

Timing of the work was restricted to September by the apple harvest because of the planned need to take the silt through the orchards up to the field for spreading. It was important that headlands were not churned up before harvest and that the work did not clash with harvesting.

Unfortunately, because of the unseasonal summer, the pond was still full of water when work was due to begin, and the contractor had to hire a pump which increased the costs. Trees were cleared along one side, the pond was scraped of bulrush and earth dug away to make a shallow edge. At a later date, volunteers transplanted plants like forget-me-not, flag iris, water plantain and water mint from other ponds on the site to speed up vegetation of marginal plants on the bare banks.

### **Holme Lacy**

This pond is within old parkland on the college farm and is thought to have historically been a deer-watering pond. At some stage it appears to have been partially filled in, as the pond only exists in half of its banked margin. It has continued to be an unfenced cattle-drinking pond though it tends to become almost dry in summer months. In the Parkland Restoration Plan, the pond was identified as needing restoration work with no further guidance or restrictions given. College students also use the pond for environmental training purposes.

In a previous survey GCNs were recorded but there were none found in the 2007 survey. The management plan aimed in the long term to return the pond to its original size within the banks. It was considered that the first step should be to dig the extension while leaving a bund with the existing pond. This would allow the new pond to be colonised and ensure that it held water; then in a couple of years the bund could be removed to create one stretch of water. The ponds would be fenced temporarily to allow marginal and bank vegetation to be planted and established to provide further cover for newts and other wildlife.

The work took place in early September with the soil being spread in a dip in the neighbouring arable field. The profile was saucer-shaped to increase the draw-down zone and make it safe for cattle to drink from and student access. Students erected a temporary fence, and the college will continue to use and maintain the pond into the future.

### **Honeymoon Common**

The Common is currently largely abandoned agriculturally because of the problems of stock getting on the roads, and is crossed by ditches put in for drainage purposes and to keep travellers at bay. It is owned by the Church Commission and leased to the parish council, and there are 12 homesteads with commoner's rights. A few people use it to walk their dogs and several locals have expressed interest in seeing it managed better. Although it would benefit greatly from grazing, it is a wonderful scrub and wet grassland wildlife habitat.

The Common has several ponds dotted about, mostly overgrown, but there are two bigger ponds. The project wanted to deal with one close to the road, which when surveyed in 2005 had a record of the very invasive non-native species *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand pigmy weed or Australian swamp stonecrop). When re-surveyed in 2007 the *Crassula* had spread across the pond and was forming a dense mat under the bulrush (*Typha*) and other rushes and sedges. A very small number of GCN tadpoles were found though many more smooth newts.

Consultation took place in Eaton Bishop village hall with the project co-ordinator visiting a parish meeting briefly and a specific meeting at a later date with the project consultant, co-ordinator and Francesca Griffith (who has good understanding of Commons legislation) present. A number of people attended including some Commoners, and people expressed a desire that the project should restore the back pond, which had been de-silted 15-20 years ago but was now choked with bulrush (*Typha*). We explained that we wanted to try and deal with the *Crassula* problem in the roadside pond and this was

accepted. The Commoners were kept fully informed of the progress of the pond restoration by letter and several of them volunteered to help with the work.

The management plan aimed to deal with the *Crassula* by digging out the pond completely, disposing of the waste offsite and spraying any re-growth of the *Crassula*. This is a formula that the project consultant had used relatively successfully on a previous pond. EA waste disposal regulations expect pond dredgings to be spread round the banks, but this would not have been appropriate in this situation because of the high risk of re-infestation of the *Crassula* in the pond, or further infestation to other water-bodies on the common. The diggings would need to be disposed off-site.

Unfortunately, disposal of the diggings off-site had inherent problems, largely financial. Because of decomposition gasses produced by rotting vegetation, EA decreed that the diggings would either have to go into landfill (nearest site is Pershore, 30 miles away; tipping cost of £15/t) or composted (nearest site interested in taking it is Abergavenny, 17 miles away; tipping cost of £25/t). Contractors quoting on the job had difficulty estimating how much weight or volume the diggings would be, and therefore were suggesting that for both options, transport would be in the region of £20,000, and thus prohibitively expensive. They also wanted the diggings to be placed in a heap on site, preferably for a few weeks, so that the vegetation would dry out and the lorries could be filled rather than the contents slopping round.

Other options were suggested and investigated.

- Ploughing the diggings into a dry field that would be subsequently sprayed with the crop: this is not permitted by EA waste disposal regulations as it is disposing of a waste product, not enhancing the agricultural value.
- Spraying the pond to get rid of the *Crassula*: in several people's experience, it takes regular re-sprays to control the weed let alone kill it. Who would pay for a licensed operator to do this?  
Also to get good spray coverage of the *Crassula*, plants like bulrush (*Typha*) that are growing through would need to be cut and removed – with the risk of spreading fragments of *Crassula* out of the pond  
There is a risk that spraying the pond would kill off other species and pond life, and that the *Crassula* would come back without any other competition.
- Putting the diggings into a hole and burying it: this is not permitted by EA waste disposal regulations and also would release decomposition gasses
- Mulching the pond or pond diggings with black plastic: this could be effective but is difficult to control over a long period on common land.
- Digging a new pond on the common and filling in the old one: Commons legislation is very strong and actions like this would need time-consuming permission from the Secretary of State as well as the Commoners and other stakeholders.
- Allowing the pond to dry out and become willow carr with the hope that the *Crassula* would die back with increased shading: there is still the risk of it spreading to other water-bodies on the common.

Eventually, the steering group decided that dealing with this particular pond with its *Crassula* infestation was beyond the scope of the project, and it was decided instead to do some work on the back pond, as originally wished by the Commoners.

The new survey revealed GCN and also a rare (Red Data Book) beetle and this informed the new management plan. It was decided that some shallow scrapes would be dug in the marshy area next to the pond for the benefit of invertebrates, some areas of bulrush (*Typha*) dug out of the big pond to create open water while leaving some of the habitat to re-colonise other areas. Clumps of trees surrounding the pond would be cut down and made into habitat piles while leaving boundary trees standing.

Work took place in November, with one contractor doing the tree work and another doing the digging, initially of the 3 scrapes, and then when it was clear that the project had money to spare, areas of the big pond. Two volunteer mornings were spent building the habitat piles with logs and brash, and clearing paths round the pond.

### **Pond Groups**

To add sustainability to the work undertaken on the ponds, the concept of developing 'pond groups' for each one was proposed. These groups would continue managing the pond beyond the life of the project. This has proved difficult for a number of reasons.

In the funding application it was suggested that the groups were quite formal with evidence of their existence being minutes or similar documents. In reality, it proved difficult firstly to get people to come to consultation events in order to build a group; and secondly to keep building and maintaining interest over the summer when very little was happening. Once work was underway and volunteers were needed for physical work, people became more involved and were happy to be contacted for future work.

Another issue in volunteer work beyond the project is that of risk assessment and public/personal insurance cover. This is particularly pertinent for the Welsh Water site in Ross. Any access, let alone work on the site would only be permitted if these were in place, plus WW would need to be informed when and who was on site. Bulmers also require H&S paperwork. Any further management work would perhaps need to be undertaken by HART who have volunteer insurance and could arrange these formalities.

A further issue is the maintenance of ponds that have populations of the protected great crested newt. The project consultant Will Watson obtained a license to disturb their habitat and enable work to be undertaken for the duration of the project. The question is to what extent volunteers would be permitted to do any sort of maintenance work on the habitat of GCNs without a license. This has yet to be clarified by the Herpetological Conservation Trust.

'Friends of' groups have been developed at Madley, Honeymoon and Staunton-on-Wye. A key person has a list of people who have shown interest or helped out with the pond restoration and are happy to be contacted in the future. Each group has a HART person attached to them to give support by helping with any questions that arise and knowing who to contact. The groups will be able to borrow equipment from HART, and if a HART volunteer wished to lead the work party, the group would benefit from HART insurance too. The groups are advised to speak to their HART contact before any work is undertaken to ensure that they would be permitted to do the work.

At Ross, HNT will initially work with DCWW on creating a viewing area and a discussion is underway about corporate volunteers from DCWW working there. A HART contact has been allocated and may be able to raise HART volunteers for ongoing management work. At Staunton-on-Wye, the Bulmers orchard manager already undertakes work in the wildlife area every winter. He has received guidance from the project consultant in how to manage the ponds for great crested newts. At Holme Lacy, the college will take over the maintenance and also already have a working relationship with the project consultant established.

### **Training**

Training days for the pond volunteers was part of the project with the idea that it would help volunteers manage the ponds beyond the project. In practice, it took various formats depending on the situation and was open to anybody that was interested in ponds, whether part of the project or not. Pond training days were led by the project consultant and involved a half day of slides and discussion about the theory and practice of pond restoration, and a half day dipping and/or discussing management of ponds on site. The majority took place during the summer.

Daytime training was held at Ross (mid-week) and Holme Lacy (Saturday), and an afternoon/evening arrangement at Staunton-on-Wye (mid-week during school holidays). At Eaton Bishop the classroom part was held one evening aimed at both Madley and Honeymoor people, and then while restoration work parties with volunteers were taking place, the project consultant discussed further management work with them.

The training events were not particularly well attended, though appreciated by those that did. This may have been because they were in the summer: people not wanting to be inside or busy with other things. Also because no pond restoration work had been undertaken at that stage, people were less engaged. It may also have been that the advertising was not reaching people. Information about training events was sent directly to pond volunteers, was available at events and at the Nature Trust, and was mentioned in parish magazines.

Venue	Training event	Number of people
Eaton Bishop/Madley 12/7/07	Slide show evening	6
Ross on Wye	Training day	5
Staunton-on-Wye 7/8/07	Practical afternoon Slide show evening	17 adults, 12 children 5
Holme Lacy 11/8/07	Training day	5
Madley Moat 15/9/07	Restoration work and training	6
Honeymoor Common 1/12/07	Restoration work and training	5

### Pond Celebration Days

The pond celebration events were conceived as awareness-raising opportunities to inspire, educate and encourage the public to create, manage and enjoy ponds. They were to be held at beautiful ponds rather than the ones the project was restoring.

The broad format was having knowledgeable HART volunteers stationed around the pond talking about one aspect of pond wildlife like dragonflies, newts or pond invertebrates, while the public moved round each volunteer in small groups. The pond owner was also part of the tour, talking about the pond's management. Tea and cakes in the local village hall followed, with display boards about the project and leaflets available about pondlife and pond management.

Five pond celebration events were held between June and mid August. The venues were suggested to, or chosen by the project with the intention to reach different target communities, hence a variety of venues were chosen.

- Ashperton, 6/6/07: a farm walk organised by and in partnership with FWAG to inspire the farming community, with HART volunteers dipping the ponds.
- Breinton Manor, 30/6/07: a farm pond created 12 years ago for wildlife and a water source for fire emergencies; HART volunteers were stationed around the pond.
- Westonbury Mill Water Gardens, 17/7/07: free entry was arranged for this small attraction but it was specifically chosen as a suitable venue for people in the west of the county.

- Little Dewchurch, 28/7/07: a rich smallholding pond created 12 years ago for wildlife, situated in the south of the county. HART volunteers were stationed around the pond.
- Kenchester Water Garden and aquatic centre, 12/8/07: this was aimed at people with garden ponds who would be visiting the garden centre. HART volunteers were stationed around the ponds as before. There were also volunteers manning a children’s craft tent doing pond-related activities. The site owner talked about building garden ponds.

The Kenchester event also helped develop a working relationship with the owner of the biggest pond garden centre in the area, where issues like invasive pond species were discussed.

Support from a team of HART volunteers was essential for these events and made them thoroughly enjoyable for all concerned. Apart from demonstrating the wildlife, volunteers were also involved in signing people in and producing teas in the village halls.

A budget was not allocated for these events in the final funding application, so costs had to be kept to a minimum. A good quantity of volunteer time in match funding was achieved through these events, as volunteer experts rated highly on the scale of match-payment.

Venue	No of visitors	No of volunteers
Ashperton/FWAG	25 + late comers	4
Breinton Manor	29	8
Westonbury Mill	10	9
Little Dewchurch	37	11
Kenchester	16 at talk, more passers-by	9

The pond celebration events were an enjoyable form of education and awareness raising. The HART volunteers have suggested that similar events could be repeated next year, perhaps at one of the restored ponds.

**Marden village pond**

By October it was clear that the project was under-budget and money was available, so there was discussion at the steering group meeting about how to spend it. The parish clerk of Marden had contacted the project officer in August asking for management advice for their ‘village’ pond, the restoration of which came up on the parish agenda on an annual basis. Having received agreement from LEADER+ conditional on the pond having public access, and agreement from the landowner, the project consultant was asked to survey the pond and suggest restoration alternatives. The village could then take this forward.

The management plans were presented at the parish meeting and the pond was taken on as a project by one of the councillors. The pond was found to have a very steep profile and deep holes so it was suggested that public access to the site was very carefully controlled, though its situation next to the road and close to the village school made it a scenic feature of the village. An approach by a member of the village to the council’s funding support team suggested that restoration of the pond by the community would fit the criteria of the West Midlands Breathing Spaces lottery fund.

**Publicity**

Articles describing aspects of the project were written for parish magazines, the Nature Trust magazine, HART newsletters, BAP magazine, and the Growers magazine (for Bulmers). Brief reports appeared in the Hereford Times and Ross Journal.

A leaflet was put together with the objective of inspiring people to restore ponds and will be sent out with the Herefordshire Nature Trust magazine and other targeted publications, as well as being distributed locally.

Simple display board interpretation was designed for Madley moat, Bulmers and Ross on Wye ponds. Descriptions and pictures of each pond were made into downloadable leaflets for the HART and HNT websites, and also distributed in paper form locally.

## **Finance**

Having secured funding from Herefordshire Rivers LEADER+ and the SITA Trust, the project struggled to get a third party to provide £2287 (approx 10% of grant) to release the SITA funds and allow the project to begin. Funders were reluctant to provide money to pay another funder. Madley parish council put forward £50 and the Duchy of Cornwall was prepared to put forward a small amount, but this did not equate to enough. Eventually this money was drawn down from Wye Valley AONB with the proviso that two of the ponds were in the AONB. This meant dropping one pond and taking on the Ross Welsh Water pond which had previously been identified by HNT for a potential project.

Herefordshire Rivers LEADER+ paid for 52.6688% of all expenses, including volunteer in-kind hours. There was a sliding scale for valuing volunteer time depending on the job being done: £13.85 for management/consultant level, £10.85 for skilled, £7.75 for administration work, £5.05 for manual/unskilled labour. In the early application, it was anticipated that the project would be co-ordinated by volunteers and this would build considerable value. However, with a salaried project co-ordinator in place, it was not clear whether the volunteer match funding would reach its target. Much of the volunteer work was unskilled and therefore valued at £5.05 and did not add up very quickly. Luckily the HART project manager Richard King put in many hours and this built up the quota.

SITA Trust paid the whole cost of contractor work, surveys and management plans, training and a proportion of the project co-ordinator's salary when they were on site. Their salary contribution did not cover administration time organising the pond restoration, an aspect that was not understood at time of application. This caused a problem in the budget because the project co-ordinator was not on-site enough, but was resolved when SITA allowed a re-allocation of the budget putting more money into pond contractor work.

HNT invoiced HART on a monthly basis for expenses, and HART claimed from the funders. Claims for funds were made on a monthly basis from LEADER+ and with special arrangement, on a 1 or 2 month basis from SITA when the big contractor bills had been paid. HART was significantly behind paying the invoices until the later stages of the project (often owing HNT in the region of £10,000). The cash flow was poor because of the delay-factor in claims being paid, and because SITA were mainly paying for site work, the majority of which took place in the autumn.

## **Herefordshire Biodiversity Action Plans targets**

The project feeds into BAP targets for GCN species action plan (2000 plan) and pond habitat action plan in the current BAP review.

### **BAP 2000: species action plan for Great Crested Newts.**

Target: to restore existing GCN sites and create new sites through appropriate management.

- The project has restored 5 sites where GCN were present in the 2007 survey (Honeymoon Common, Madley and Staunton on Wye), present in an earlier survey (Holme Lacy) or found in habitat piles on the bank (Ross).

Action 5.3.1: enable the natural expansion of the species in target areas, encourage and facilitate habitat management by restoring old ponds, creating new pond clusters and habitat corridors.

- The project has restored old ponds.

## **Current BAP review: Eutrophic water habitat**

Action to restore 10 sites by 2010:

- The project has achieved 50% of this target through restoration of the 5 ponds.

Action to undertake hydrological and biodiversity surveys:

- The project has undertaken biodiversity surveys at 6 sites.

Action to produce advice, set up demonstration events and workshops with relevant land managers:

- The project has held events (5 training and 5 pond celebration days) with demonstrations and advice about pondlife and pond management to which the public were invited. One event was aimed specifically at farmers.

## **Conclusions**

The project has successfully achieved clear outcomes in the restoration of 5 ponds in the county. These are unlikely to have been restored without the funding. The participation of volunteers was valuable as a means of engaging local people, though not essential in all cases because of the scale of work done by contractors. However at Madley Moat, the amount of work undertaken would have been significantly less without them.

The pond celebration events were a useful and enjoyable awareness-raising concept, particularly with the team of volunteer supporters. This is something that HART can repeat in other years and will continue to raise awareness of ponds. It may have been better to have had only 3 events or to spread them (as was originally planned) over 2 summers, and have a budget to pay for expenses, village halls and teas.

The project co-ordinator has been fully occupied during the time period though a 1-year contract would have been better, and the partnership between HNT and HART has worked well. The bankrolling by HNT has been essential to the financial capabilities and production of the project by HART.

The project format with its clear and achievable outcomes would be worth repeating in other areas.

15<sup>th</sup> February 2008