

Community Pond Warden Scheme for Lancashire (UK)

A pilot project empowering local people to conserve ponds



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What is the Community Pond Warden Scheme?

The Community Pond Warden Scheme for Lancashire, in the north west of England, is a two year pilot project that empowers local people, communities and organisations to conserve Lancashire's important pond landscape. The scheme is run by the UK charity Pond Conservation with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Natural England, Environment Agency, the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust and the Martin Wills Wildlife Maintenance Trust.

Why has the scheme been run?

Over the last 160 years, the number of ponds in Lancashire has dropped by an estimated 60%. Many of the remaining ponds are degraded and there is a worrying trend towards larger, deeper and densely shaded/vegetated ponds, suggesting a loss of pond diversity. There is also a lack of data on ponds, preventing strategic protection and management of the pond resource.



This pond in a housing estate is affected by *Crassula helmsii* and has lost many native plants from the shallow margins. Other ponds on site have parrot's feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) and have been stocked with fish. With help from the Pond Warden Scheme, local people now value these ponds and have begun to tackle these issues.

The Pond Warden Scheme helped a community group design, fund and create a large pond complex, write a management plan, and get training to monitor the site in the future. With this success under their belt, the group has gone on to plan an ambitious new project to protect 2km² of pond-rich urban greenspace and the nationally important species it supports.



How is the scheme run?

The scheme aims to tackle the issues of inadequate data, lack of awareness, pond loss and degradation, and a misunderstanding of ponds, by:

- Publicising ponds
- Running pond surveys
- Helping people fund and carry out pond creation and management projects
- Providing training, advice and information

A project officer runs a helpline, arranges training events and publicity, provides advice on ponds, and produces a newsletter and web pages.

There is great enthusiasm for ponds amongst the general public, and volunteers and community groups are a vital means of solving many local pond problems.

Like many ponds in Lancashire, this pond was once surrounded by fields and hedgerows but is now in a housing estate and suffers from many negative influences associated with people, including excessive duck-feeding, pollution, artificial bank structures, neglect, vandalism and abuse of wild animals.



The proximity of this pond to people increases the likelihood of inappropriate releases of fish or plants, harming the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) population, but it also means problems are identified and addressed quickly. A local resident has become a Pond Warden. He keeps an eye on the pond, and raises awareness to deter more illegal goldfish dumping.

What has the scheme achieved?

- People are enthusiastic to get involved, and the scheme has been instrumental in instigating many new pond creation and management projects. As the pilot scheme draws to a close, it leaves a legacy of increased awareness and real on-the-ground improvements of Lancashire's pond landscape, and the lessons learnt from this work are important.
- In the two years the project has run, over 750 enquiries have been received requesting advice on pond issues.
- The project officer has provided detailed advice and support on over 50 pond projects, and produced guidance to help many more.
- Over 60 people have become Community Pond Wardens, carrying out surveys, creating and looking after local ponds.
- Over 500 days, worth over £40,000, have been spent on activities that help to conserve ponds in Lancashire. This is an underestimate of the time spent by people directly involved in the Community Pond Warden Scheme.
- Nearly all the pond issues people have asked for help with involve urban sites. People care deeply about their local patch but seem to be less interested in distant sites or abstract issues that are not directly relevant to their local ponds.
- It is hard to get the public to take part in pond surveys or to create ponds; most people are interested in the fate of existing ponds that they value for a variety of reasons.

A community group got advice through the Pond Warden Scheme to sensitively and successfully restore a lost pond in a historic woodland site so that local children could enjoy the frogs and frogspawn just like the older generation used to.



For more information visit www.pondconservation.org.uk