



CONSERVATION ADVISOR SITE VISIT REPORT

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Date of visit: 24 June 2021

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Location: TM054753

Total site area: 0.366ha

Approximate pond area: 220 m²

Soil: Slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage (Source: Soilscales)

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Enquiry

Botesdale Parish Council owns a piece of land bordered by farmland and a public footpath which might be suitable for pond restoration. Historically, there were marl pits on the site and those have now filled to become ponds. The site as a whole forms a lovely corridor through the farmland.

We are currently looking to improve the site in some way but would benefit from some advice.

Summary of the site

The site is accessed along a footpath from Bridewell Lane to the south of The Street in the village of Botesdale. The footpath network is an important local amenity for quiet recreation, access to the marl pit land is at present not clear to footpath users.

The pond, described as a marl pit, is marked on the Tithe map provided by Botesdale Council also on the OS 6" map 1842-1952. The marl pits are located in a narrow strip of land and now populated with mixed deciduous trees.

The woodland habitat is linked through hedgerows to Priority Deciduous woodland at Botesdale Common. Beyond, to the east of the Marl Pits land lies arable fields.

There is an old hedgerow which runs along the opposite side of the track but does not form part of this parcel of land.

There are approximately 11 ponds within a 1km distance from the marl pit.



National Library of Scotland OS 6" map 1842-1954



Pond restoration

Little invertebrate life nor aquatic plant life is visible, the pond at the time of the visit. The pond holding a low level of water and shaded by trees on all sides.

In its current condition there is a poor chance of Great Crested Newt, although it cannot be ruled out.

Restoring the pond to a healthy state would allow natural recolonisation by aquatic invertebrates, increasing biodiversity and maintain a historical landscape feature.

Due to the narrow land holding and adjacent arable field, the risk of agricultural runoff could compromise water quality and jeopardise success of pond restoration. However, some coppicing of trees to the south and east could improve structural diversity within the wood and permit dappled light onto the pond to give bring about some degree of pond restoration. It is likely that the pond will resemble a semi-shaded woodland pond with fluctuating water levels, but this is still freshwater habitat with wildlife value.



Commented [SH1]: Worth outlining why restoration is a good option in this situation, also are there any site considerations that might make it difficult?



Trees adjacent to ponds influence water quality by the combined effects of shade, lowering the water table and leaf deposition. To restore the pond, some trees which are shading the pond to the south and east would need to be coppiced.

1. The initial phase of restoration work would be to coppice (cut to the ground) or thin less mature trees which are casting shade on the water to the east and south of the pond. Winter is the best time to for this work (avoid the bird breeding season March-August).

If mature trees are to be felled or reduced then the tree surgeon should be made aware of the Bat Conservation guidance for bats in trees, see below. There is a possibility of hedgehogs utilising the tall vegetation so care should be taken when undertaking clearance work, use hand tools or ideally clear in autumn (after their breeding but before hibernation).

2. Remedial work to the pond itself may then be required. This involves the removal of accumulated debris to take the pond back to its original profile.

Any restoration should be done with caution as there is a possibility of archaeological finds.

To minimise the impact on pond life (with particular reference to great crested newts) the best timing for de-silting would be the 1st November-31st January, however this window is for guidance only and the potential impact of machinery on wet winter soils has to be balanced against the risk for great crested newts.



If the pond dries out in the summer, this would be the best time to do remove debris whilst the surrounding ground is dry, and it is easier to get machinery on site.

If the pond retains water, then as a precaution, the presence or absence of Great Crested Newts should be established through an eDNA test. The cost of an eDNA test is £145 +VAT for the kit if doing yourselves, for Suffolk Wildlife Trust ecological services to carry out the work, the cost is £550+VAT

3. To desilt the pond, use a digger bucket with teeth on. This will create a more varied topography to the benefit of pond invertebrates. Check that any machinery which has been used elsewhere for pond restoration has been cleaned down well to avoid introducing non-native invasive weeds such as New Zealand pigmy weed. Remove the majority of silt and debris back to the historic pond profile. Pond debris could be offered to a neighbouring farmer to spread on their field.
4. Leave a buffer between the arable field and the pond edge to limit run off. |
5. | Create some dead wood or brash piles nearby for amphibians and invertebrate communities. Many pond species only use water for a part of their lifecycle and are dependent upon surrounding habitat for the terrestrial, adult stages of their life cycle. Surrounding grasses, tall herbs, shrubs and log piles can all support these species.

Commented [SH2]: Unless they have specifically asked, I wouldn't mention this – best not to plant ideas that may not occur otherwise!

Woodland management

The narrow woodland comprises mixed deciduous tree native species.

Priority Deciduous Woodland Habitat is indicated on Defra maps as approximately 190m to the east and aerial maps indicate near connectivity by the hedgerow network. In addition to birds of the wider countryside, some farmland birds benefit from the shelter, feeding and nesting opportunities provided.

Within the woodland are some significant trees worthy landmarks and candidates for ancient tree status. A community survey could record these on the Ancient Tree Forum website or via their app. see wildlife recording.

The woodland seems to have a balance of mature trees, some scrub and saplings and does not currently require intervention. Reinvigorating the scrub layer can be accomplished by some selective coppicing as part of the pond restoration project.

It would be worthwhile encouraging local naturalists to record the ground flora during the spring when woodland flora is usually more evident.

An annual tree safety check along the track is something to consider. Although when not causing a safety issue, standing deadwood should be retained as an important wildlife resource.



Public engagement

- Information about Marl pits could be provided in the village newsletter, website, phone-based download or interpretation board.
- A viewpoint near the Marl Pit could be created, perhaps with a glimpse of the surrounding countryside beyond rather than relying on the pondlife to provide all the interest.
- When choosing the best location for log seat consider the impacts on pond and bird life versus benefits of public access eg dogs can enjoy a swim but disturb pondlife and churn up sediments. The seat may be best placed along the track edge or just into the woodland further along from the pond to avoid such issues arising.

Wildlife Recording

- There are many forms it could take but can be more widely beneficial if lodged with Suffolk Biological Records either directly or through i-Record. The i-record platform allows for groups to set up their own space for collective records and has a process for verification. [Suffolk Biological Recording Online](#) | [Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service \(suffolkbis.org.uk\)](#)
[iRecord](#) | [Manage and share your wildlife records \(brc.ac.uk\)](#)
This is a useful video: [Setting up an iRecord activities for local groups - YouTube](#)
- iNaturalist is an app based Identification platform.
- Ancient Tree Inventory, as described under 'trees' for surveying and recording significant trees.
- The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species have launched a hedgerow survey which is based on the DEFRA guidelines. Their website includes some sound guidance on assessing and managing hedges. [Hedgerows - People's Trust for Endangered Species \(ptes.org\)](#)

I haven't assessed the small ancient orchard, this area could be given more attention at a later date. Should you wish to learn more about traditional orchards and their management, The Peoples' Trust for Endangered Species offers a breadth of information as does Suffolk Traditional Orchards Group.

Screaming parties of swifts were also observed along The Street, I believe that Suffolk swift group are already aware but there may be an opportunity to promote swift conservation further through Parish initiatives and communication channels, do get in touch with SOS swifts for further information.

It was a pleasure to meet you and discuss the opportunities for habitat restoration. We would love to hear how you get on, do share any results of your project.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Smith
Community Wildlife Advisor



Important considerations

1. Some of the more mature hedge trees may be providing bat roosts. Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (amended) and Conservation of species regulations 2017 (amended). The protection makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat or group of bats in their roost or to damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or resting (roosts) (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time). Any tree surgery carried out to the mature trees should follow the guidelines from the Bat Conservation Trust.
2. Great crested newt, *Triurus cristatus* are protected by law, it is an offence to: kill, injure, capture or disturb them; damage or destroy their habitat; and to possess, sell or trade. This law refers to all great crested newt life stages, including eggs.

Resources

The value of ponds for heritage

[1. UNDERSTANDING PONDS \(freshwaterhabitats.org.uk\)](https://www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)

[Microsoft Word - Ponds of Historical Interest -complete new design.doc \(freshwaterhabitats.org.uk\)](https://www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)

SWT webinar on pond

restoration: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox_CVtwcX_4&feature=youtu.be

Designing ponds with public access

[1 \(freshwaterhabitats.org.uk\)](https://www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)

Suffolk Traditional Orchards Group have produced some useful advice specific to Suffolk Orchards:

[STOG Advice Notes | Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service \(suffolkbis.org.uk\)](https://www.suffolkbis.org.uk)

The Peoples' Trust for Endangered Species have a breadth of information about traditional orchards

[Orchard practical guides - People's Trust for Endangered Species \(ptes.org\)](https://www.ptes.org)

Swift conservation

[Swifts | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Contact email swifts@suffolkbirdgroup.org

Accompanying factsheets:

Pond restoration and management, Woodland management, Community grants, Ponds with fluctuating water levels.