



“Our guide to a walk round Biddenham Village Pond”

The start

Walking down the public footpath between 3 and 5 Gold Lane, directed by the brown signposts and our own painted sign in the form of a fish with a kingfisher perched on top, you will come first to the triangle of land leading towards the pond.

The triangle

We manage the triangle in a “natural” way to encourage the wildlife, plants and flowers that live and grow here. Comfrey grows in profusion, easily recognised in the summer by its pink and blue flowers on the same flower head. It is a widespread herb and an old country remedy for broken bones. The peeled stems can be eaten in salads and taste like cucumber.

Stinging nettles are food for caterpillars of the red admiral and tortoiseshell butterflies in June. Amongst the trees are alder, ash, elder and wild cherry. Thistles provide seeds for the birds to eat. Work continues to create an environment which encourages other species, producing the appearance of a small woodland glade.

The old stone wall

As you approach the pond you will come to the old stone wall forming the eastern boundary of the pond. This originally extended across the northern side of the pond too but was knocked down so cattle in the field to the north could get to water. Midwife toads live in holes in this wall and others nearby. Accidentally introduced to Bedfordshire in the early 20th century these toads have become naturalised here and at several other sites. They are the smallest toads found in Britain, measuring 3.5 cm long. They make a bell-like sound, which is best heard around the pond in the early evening and gives rise to their other name ‘bell toads’.

The pond

Going through the gate in the stone wall, the jetty by the wall was built in 1989. You might see caddis larvae, water boatmen and water scorpions here. The jetty opposite was built some ten years later as a fishing platform when there were fish in the pond. It was decided not to restock the pond after it dried out completely in 2011 as part of our transition to managing it as a “natural pond”.

In summer, damselflies and dragonflies can be seen hovering over the pond and house martins and swallows skim over the water catching insects. In early evening, pipistrelle bats may swoop down near you.

The pond was initially stocked with yellow water lilies, also known as ‘brandy bottles’, water crowfoot, broad leaved pond weed and water milfoil to encourage shade and keep the water supplied with oxygen. You may see a heron or if you are really lucky, a kingfisher. Moorhens and mallard are regular visitors and sometimes nest and raise their broods here. The pond supports both common species of newt. The most spectacular is the great crested newt, a protected species.

There are benches on which you can sit to relax and enjoy this pleasant and peaceful place. Spare a few minutes to look at the information board which illustrates some of the features described here and some of the plants and wildlife you may see by the pond.

Reedmace (commonly known as bulrushes) grow prolifically in the south west corner of the pond, and you can see their brown spikes in the summer. Their growth has to be restricted periodically or they would eventually cover the whole pond. Azolla has become a periodic nuisance in recent years and if unrestricted, can cover the pond like a pink carpet. Yellow irises bloom here in the spring and you may find water forget-me-not, delicious smelling purple-flowered water mint and the appropriately named celery-leaved buttercup. This area is a refuge for hunting spiders and pond skaters. Precipitation is the main source of water for the pond but there is also run-off from the neighbouring fields which can have an impact on water quality.

The hedge on the western boundary of the pond was planted in 1986 to give shelter from the west wind. In spring, you may see frog and toad spawn in the water nearby. You may find bog bean and king cup, and fungi flourish on tree stumps and elsewhere. Look across the adjoining field, in which a substantial dovecote (also illustrated on the information board)

once stood, and you will see the village church of St James. Walking down the path between the hedge and the field fence, you may find bluebells and wild ransomes, wood garlic and celandines. Trees and the hedge provide nesting sites for birds.

The triangle from a different angle

Turning back and retracing your steps through the gate in the old stone wall into the triangle, a striking feature is the tall horse chestnut trees. There is a tawny owl box in one of them. There is also a bat box in a nearby pear tree. Ground cover is left rough for woodmice and common pigmy shrews. Bracket fungi abound on old wood. There are bullace trees near the pond hut.

Walking down the path from the hut alongside the shrubbery you will eventually rejoin the public footpath to Gold Lane. Shrubs planted here provide shelter and food for the birds in the autumn. There is dogwood, hazel, spindle, wayfaring tree and guilder rose. The last two have red berries but the wayfaring tree has hairy leaves whilst those of the guilder rose are shiny. The spindle has bright pink and orange seed pods. The buddleia with its long purple spikes of sweetly scented flowers attracts butterflies in summer. The hazel is coppiced on a periodic rotation.

The history

The village pond was created in 1700 by the Boteler family as a carp pond to supply fish to Biddenham Manor. Meat and eggs for the Manor were provided by the dovecote built in 1706 in a field next to the pond but demolished in 1966. The pond lies on the ancient causeway leading from the village green to the church.

We do not know when the pond ceased to serve its initial purpose of supplying fish to the Manor. But eventually it fell into disuse and became overgrown until in 1986 a group of Biddenham residents began a project to restore the pond and to maintain it as a conservation area and village amenity.

The Friends of the Biddenham Village Pond was established as successor to the project group to manage the pond site and its continuing conservation and to raise the funds necessary to support that work. The Friends encourages villagers and visitors to the pond to become members and to help financially through their membership subscriptions and practically with its regular conservation and maintenance activities at the pond.

The end or is it?

The Friends of the Biddenham Village Pond hopes you will enjoy your visit to this special place, our village pond. Please come again, and why not become a Friend? You will be most welcome. You will find a membership application form on our website (www.biddenhamvillagepond.wordpress.com). For a small annual subscription you will receive two newsletters each year with information about the pond, events and activities, and you will be helping fund the work to conserve and maintain the pond for the present and future generations.

Whether you become a Friend or not you will be very welcome to help with practical conservation and maintenance at our work mornings during the year, and there are other ways to help too. There is more information on the website about the pond, the dovecote, and how you can help; and you can also contact us via the website (or through our secretary, Jenny Kimber, tel: 01234 266921). You can receive automatic updates about the pond, events and activities if you 'Follow' our website or 'Like' our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/biddenhamvillagepond).

The thanks

The pond is here today for everyone to enjoy. It is a local resource available to school and youth groups for environmental studies and wildlife projects. Public access to the whole site has been kindly granted by the two landowners.

Thanks are also especially due to the former Bedfordshire County Council, Bedford Borough Council, Biddenham Parish Council, Biddenham Show Committee, the First Friday Lunch Club, BTCV, EB Bedfordshire Limited, Rural Action, Shell UK Limited, the local Fire and Rescue Service, and the residents of Biddenham for help with advice, finance, and conservation and maintenance work on site.

The country code

Please remember the country code and help take care of our countryside:

- keep to the rights of way
- don't leave litter (there are bins at the pond, or take it home with you)
- close gates behind you
- don't damage crops
- don't pick the wild flowers
- always keep dogs under control (please pick up after them and use the containers provided: there is a dog litter bin on the path in the triangle)

Thank you very much.

One of the few remaining village ponds in Bedfordshire