



# Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Ponds

October 2008

Pond in Cowslip Meadow, Houghton Conquest  
Photo by Ian Saunders





## Ponds

### National lead organisation(s):

Environment Agency  
Pond Conservation

### County lead organisation(s):

Environment Agency  
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

Ponds are defined as “a body of water, seasonal or permanent, between 0.0001 ha (1mx1m) and 2ha in area. Water is usually present for at least 4 months of the year during which time it may be of any depth” (Pond Conservation 2008).

### Scope

This action plan covers all ponds meeting the UK BAP definition above. Priority Ponds, however, are a focus of the plan. There are five criteria used to identify Priority Ponds; these are listed below. Not all are relevant to Bedfordshire ponds.

#### 1. Habitats of high conservation importance

Ponds that meet criteria under Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive

#### 2. Ponds with species of high conservation importance

These are Red Data Book species, BAP species, species fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act Schedule 5 and 8, Habitats Directive Annex II species, a Nationally Scarce wetland plant species, or three Nationally Scarce aquatic invertebrate species.

#### 3. Ponds with exceptional populations or numbers of key species

This is based on

(i) criteria specified in guidelines for the selection of biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (currently amphibians and dragonflies only)

(ii) exceptionally rich sites for plants or invertebrates (supporting 30 or more wetland plant species or 50 or more aquatic macroinvertebrate species)

#### 4. Ponds of high ecological quality

These are ponds classified in the top category for ecological quality as assessed by the standardised method for assessing the biological quality of still waters in England and Wales - the Predictive SYstem for Multimetrics (PSYM).

#### 5. Other important ponds

These are individual ponds or groups of ponds with a limited geographic distribution recognised as important because of their age, rarity of type or landscape context e.g., pingos, duneslack ponds, machair ponds.





## Current status

### National status

According to Pond Conservation the number of ponds has dropped enormously in the last 100 years and there are now almost a million fewer ponds in Britain than there were at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are thought to be in the region of 400,000 ponds remaining in Britain outside gardens; of these it is estimated that about 20% of ponds will be Priority Ponds giving a total of 80,000 ponds (Pond Conservation, 2008). Fairclough and Nicolet (2008) state that every year 1% of ponds are created or destroyed, but far more ponds than this are degraded or damaged but remain in place.

### Local status

A sample survey of ponds in 31 1km grid squares in Bedfordshire has been completed every 15 years or so since 1976 (Balmer et al 2007). This survey shows an overall loss of 4% of ponds in the sample area. It does not however provide detailed information regarding the turnover rate of ponds, and likely under-represents ephemeral ponds. In 2007 50% of ponds were found to be in the process of disappearing through succession and other factors. Several ponds were surveyed in detail; only one was found to be of high wildlife value (as defined by the Bedfordshire and Luton County Wildlife Site Criteria).

Extrapolating from the figures in Balmer et al (2007) would yield 2,865 ponds in Bedfordshire, with 860 lost and 630 created since 1976 along with 1,433 of which are under immediate threat of loss. A more detailed analysis (Balmer pers. com.) of the Landline GIS overlay has shown approximately 3,680 ponds mapped in the county.

Pond Conservation estimates that 20% of ponds nationally are likely to be of Priority Pond status; this would equate to 736 Priority Ponds in Bedfordshire and Luton. However if Balmer et al (2007) reflects the true picture, only 1% - between 287 and 368 - of ponds may be Priority Ponds. A more thorough investigation of the actual number of ponds and Priority Ponds in the county is required before firm targets can be set but the county appears to have approximately 1% of the national pond resource.

As of May 2008 only one pond in Bedfordshire – Maulden Meadow Pond – is listed on the National Ponds register.

## Current factors affecting Ponds

- Direct loss from neglect, infilling and drainage
- Ecological successional changes due to poor or absent pond management, eventually resulting in the loss of habitat for uncommon species of early and mid-succession ponds (e.g., great crested newt)
- Chemical pollution, nutrient enrichment and siltation with polluted sediments, which adversely affect the diversity of pond life
- Overstocking with fish and ducks
- The spread of exotic species (such as fish or terrapins and many invasive plant species)





- The spread of exotic disease, in particular Chytrid fungus which indiscriminately attacks amphibians
- Climate change, which may reduce the viability of shallow or ephemeral ponds (either by reducing, increasing or shifting the period of time over which they hold water)

## Current action

### Legal

PPS9 requires that local planning authorities take account of the potential impact of planning decisions on biodiversity. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) places a duty on all public bodies to conserve biodiversity. The duty is particularly relevant to national priority habitats and species. Ponds may be protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) by virtue of the species they support, such as white-clawed crayfish, great-crested newt and water vole. Ponds may also be protected by virtue of being within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

### National action

A draft national Habitat Action Plan exists for ponds, led by Pond Conservation and the Environment Agency. Pond Conservation is running a number of projects aimed at increasing both the health and number of ponds in Britain; these include the “Million Ponds Project” and a flagship pond guardian project currently under development.

### Local action

Individual ponds are lost and created every year as the result of development and other activities throughout Bedfordshire and Luton. The Greensand Trust, FWAG, BRCC and Wildlife Trust provide information and help to landowners and managers wishing to create, restore or manage ponds. These activities are not monitored and there is currently no single place where details of this activity are kept.

## Action plan objectives and targets

### Objective

Maintain and expand the number and geographical extent of high quality ponds in the Bedfordshire and Luton

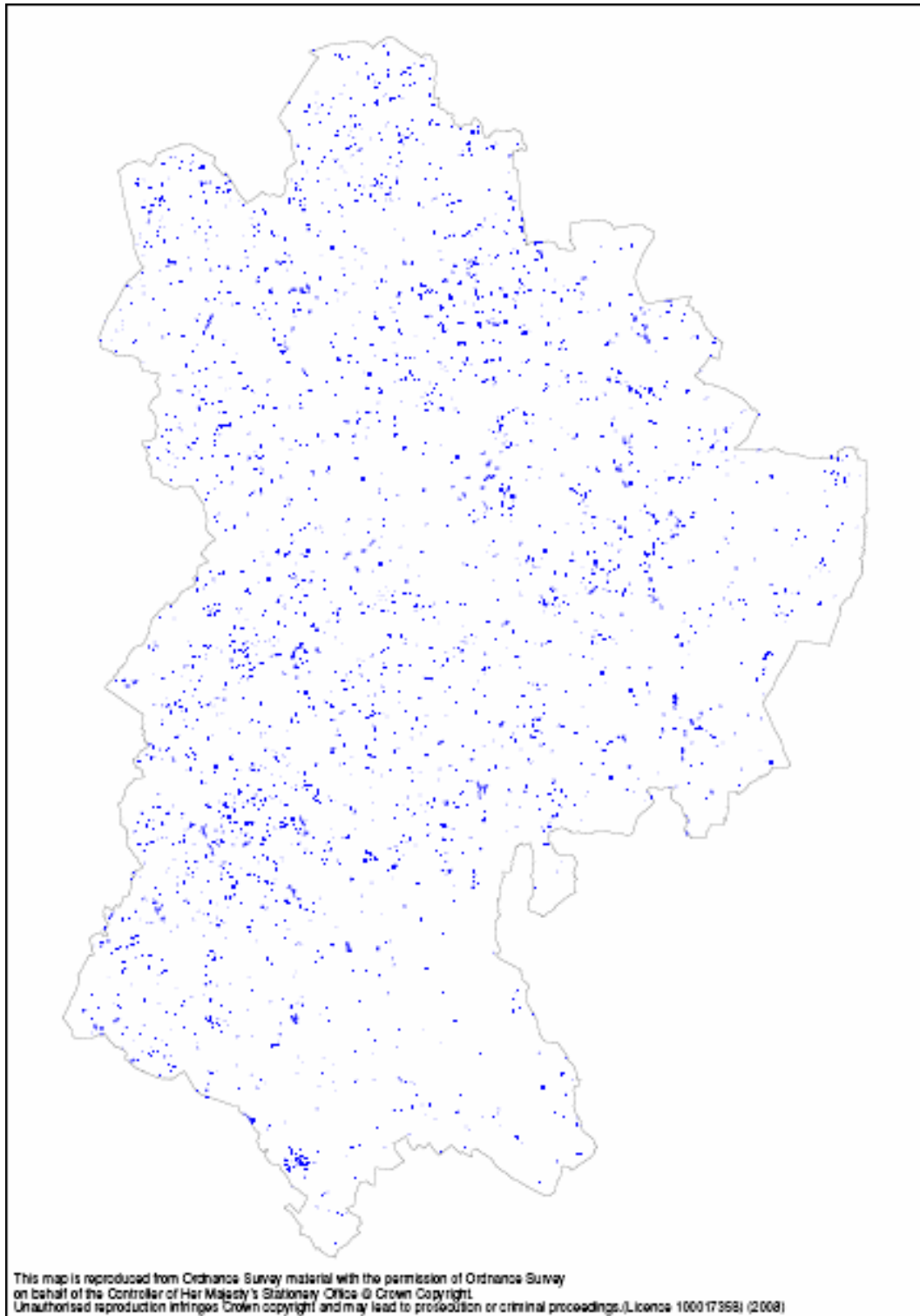
### Targets

- A. Maintain the number of Priority Pond sites as established by survey
- B. By 2022 restore 102 pond sites to high quality status to deliver Species Action Plan targets
- C. Create 80 new pond sites of high quality potential by 2015





**Figure 1** Still water sites in Bedfordshire and Luton



## Proposed action

### Abbreviations

BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	GST	Greensand Trust
BRMC	Biodiversity Recording & Monitoring Centre	LA	Local authorities
CWS	Bedfordshire & Luton County Wildlife Site Panel	RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
FMV	Forest of Marston Vale	WT	Wildlife Trust
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	WoT	Woodland Trust

Action	Implemented by
<b>Site safeguard and management</b>	
1. Identify by 2015 which Priority Ponds require management or restoration	BRMC
2. Ensure by 2020 positive management or restoration of all Priority Ponds requiring management or restoration	
3. All local authorities and NGOs to survey the ponds on their land and establish appropriate management regimes by 2015	LA, WT, RSPB, FMV, GST, WoT
4. Create 80 new ponds of high quality potential by 2015	FMV, LA
5. Ensure that the development control process protects all Priority Ponds and results in an annual net increase in the number of ponds in Bedfordshire and Luton	LA
<b>Advisory</b>	
6. By 2015 inform and provide information for all landowners with Priority Ponds on their land	FWAG, BRCC, GST
7. Ensure that pond owners and managers are kept informed of developments in pond conservation and know where and how to access resources	FWAG, BRCC, GST
8. Ensure all Priority Pond owners are aware of potential grants to help them protect or create new ponds	FWAG, BRCC, GST



### **Future research and monitoring**

9. Undertake surveys to identify Priority Ponds and produce a database of those ponds within Bedfordshire by 2010. Submit all results to the National Ponds Register	BRMC
10. Identify by 2010 areas where ponds of high quality potential can be created	
11. Identify by 2010 Important Areas for Ponds	
12. Update by 2010 the County Wildlife Site Selection Guidelines to reflect Priority Pond assessment methods	CWS

### **Communication and publicity**

13. Highlight the importance of ponds and their creation and protection to all pond (not just Priority Pond) owners and managers by 2010	
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### Monitoring the Action Plan

This action plan will be reviewed every five years as part of a wider BAP review.

### Complementary plans

A UK action plan exists for ponds.

Northamptonshire has written a habitat action plan for ponds; Buckinghamshire has written one for standing open waters.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton action plans, in particular those for great-crested newt, woodland and lowland meadow.

### Acknowledgements

This action plan has been written by Richard Lawrence (BRCC) on behalf of the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Forum with help from Keith Balmer (BRMC). Draft versions have been commented on by John Comont (BCC) and Helen Keeble (Pond Conservation).

### References

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