Wyre Forest Newt Survey - 2011

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Photos 1 and 2. The 'Dewsbury Box' Phil Rudlin

It may seem surprising but, for a variety of reasons, there are very few written records of wildlife within the ponds of Wyre. This is especially true of the newt populations and their distribution. (Wyre has all three species). Using historical and anecdotal accounts as a starting point, written records are being compiled for some ponds on Forestry Commission land based on survey reports using conventional methods. In 2011 Phil Rudlin (Forestry Commission Wildlife Ranger) was approached by David Dewsbury and his wife Sue with a view to surveying some sample ponds in the Wyre. David is the inventor of a new trapping device (the "Dewsbury Box" see photo 1) and was keen to extend his sampling area as a way of proving his new method to be more effective than conventional netting or bottle trapping. He has already deployed this method in several other areas to great effect.

The box is a simple design. Basically it is made from a sandwich box, a bin liner and pipe lagging! The box has a hole cut in the side and a plastic gauze funnel is created, (photo 2) allowing the newts to enter, but not escape. The bin liner is then attached to the box using strong elastic string and the pipe lagging is clipped onto the 'bottom' of the liner with a tube, acting as a breath hole. A small piece of lead is then glued to the bottom of the box to help it to sink and remain upright after being thrown in.

The box trap method is much less invasive than bottle traps as the box is cast into the pond, where it sinks to the bottom. (See photos 3 and 4) The surveyor does not have to wade into the pond and disturbance is minimal, both at setting and retrieving stages (see photos 4 and 5). Traps are put out one day and collected the next. The roomy box will accommodate many specimens without too much stress, whilst the simple float chamber ensures that, should the pond level rise, specimens will not drown. Due to the very warm, dry spring many ponds were much lower than desirable but, even so, the box was able to be deployed even in quite shallow water.

Twelve ponds were chosen (see map) on Forestry Commission and Natural England land. The boxes were deployed on the 3rd of May and retrieved on the 4th of May 2011. This method produced some interesting results.

In total 263 newts were caught across the survey area and it was no surprise that Palmate Newts were predominant with a total catch of 251. 7 Smooth Newts and 5 Great Crested Newts (GCN) were also found. This is a better result than netting alone would have achieved. The borehole had the best catch in a single trap with 56 Palmate Newts found (see photo 6).

Photos 3 and 4. David Dewsbury deploying the 'Dewsbury Box' Phil Rudlin

Photos 5 and 6. David and Val retrieving the 'Dewsbury Box' Phil Rudlin

Of the sites where GCNs were found their presence had been strongly suspected at the two Discovery Centre ponds and, indeed, two males were captured there. (A little later in the year efts were found, so females must have been present though none were captured.) Smooth Newts were also found in these ponds as well as Palmates. These ponds, along with St. Georges Pond (on NE land) were the only ones found to support all three newt species. At Longdon Hide Pool a single GCN and a single Smooth Newt were found and it was surprising that no Palmates were found. However, there have been no previous records of GCNs found there, so this was quite exciting. It was felt that, with a little 'tlc' this pond would support all three species in greater numbers. At St. Georges Pond the presence of GCNs was also previously unrecorded but here we caught two males.

The only ponds where no newts were caught in the survey area were Park Pool and the Uncllys Reservoir. Fish are to be found in both these ponds and it is known that GCNs in particular avoid ponds with fish present. (They can detect fish by a process known as 'deep sniffing'.) Another pond with a large fish population is Hitterhill Pool and here only a few Palmates were captured.

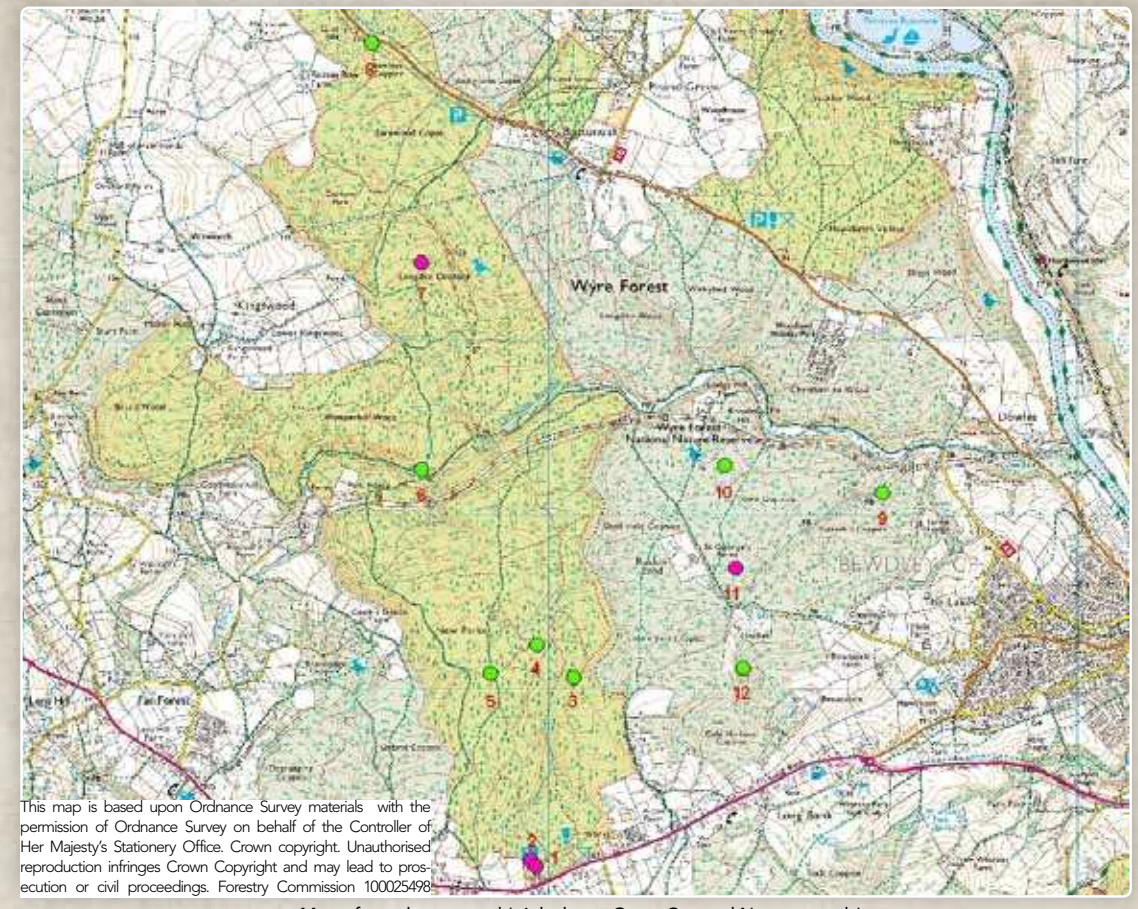
Alongside the data recorded, David and Sue have also supplied suggestions for the future management and development of the sites surveyed with a view to linking some of the more isolated ponds and improving habitat.

It is hoped to survey these ponds again and others using this method in 2012 to build up records and extend our knowledge.

NB. In July 2011 I deployed a Box trap in the garden pond at Uncllys Farm, where GCNs were suspected. An overnight thunderstorm raised the pond level dramatically, testing the float chamber to its limit. However, one female GCN was captured and released unharmed the following day. Had I used a conventional trap the subject would probably have died!

Photo 6. The catch from the Borehole! Phil Rudlin

Wyre Forest Study Group



Map of ponds surveyed (pink shows Great Crested Newt records)

Wyre Forest Newt Survey Data - 4th May, 2011

Pond	Pond No.	Trap No.	Total Newts	GCN Total	Smooth Total	Palmate Total	GCN Male	GCN Female	Smooth Male	Smooth Female	Palmate Male	Palmate Female
Forestry Commission Sites												
Discovery Centre Top pond	1	1	16	0	3	13	0	0	3	0	9	4
Discovery Centre Bottom pond	2	1	24	2	1	21	2		1		17	4
Park Pool	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hermitage Pond (Arboretum)	4	1	24	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	19	5
Borehole Pond	5	1	16	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	16	0
		2	56	0	0	56	0	0	0	0	43	13
Dowles Meadow pool	6	1	17	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	11	6
Longdon Hide pond	7	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
New Pool	8	1	6	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	4	2
		2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Natural England Sites												
Hitterhill Pool	9	1	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	1
		2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lodge Hill Pond	10	1	45	0	0	45	0	0	0	0	37	8
		2	31	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	24	7
St Georges Pond	11	1	9	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	5	4
		2	9	1	1	7	1	0	1	0	6	1
		3	4	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	2	0
Unclys Reservoir	12	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals			263	5	7	251	5	0	7	0	196	55