Wyre Forest Newts, 2016 update

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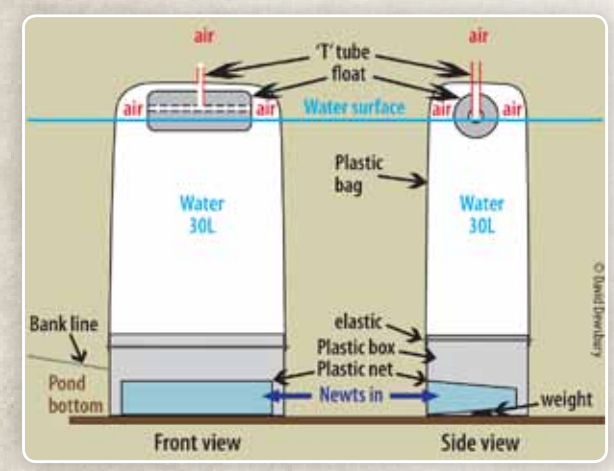
Surveys of newts in ponds in Wyre Forest began in 2012, using what was then a new method of trapping known as the 'Dewsbury Box' so named due its inventor David Dewsbury (see Vol. 21 of the Review for further details). The diagram below shows the design of the trap and photo 1 the catch from one of the ponds this year after 24hrs deployment. The survey has been undertaken to further our knowledge of newt distribution across the Forest and, whilst our sampling methods only really give a 'snapshot' of what is happening as we only trap once a year, it does give a clue to the general health of our ponds and newt populations in particular.



Plan of the Dewsbury Box

To this end we attempt to sample at approximately the same time of year from the start of May to early June to give continuity. We realise that we would gain much better data if we sampled more often, but this hasn't been practical so far. Sometimes, due to time constraints or poor weather conditions, the dates are slightly 'out' and this was the case in 2016. The spring began with very mild conditions, but things soon deteriorated with temperatures during April 5 degrees colder than at Christmas 2015! As a result our survey got off to a slow start as ponds appeared rather inactive and we had not sighted any newts. (With hindsight the newts had probably arrived at the ponds during the mild spell and then became torpid when it went cold again). Our survey began later in May as a result.

9 ponds have been surveyed annually for the last 5 years. Nil or poor results have been recorded in a further 4 ponds but these are no longer surveyed due to the presence of fish or, in one case, a historical diesel spill which still effects the quality of the water. All ponds surveyed are man-made, vary in surrounding habitat, size and depth. It is difficult, therefore to compare them directly but the survey will inform us of the quality of each pond and give us an indication of when work is needed. The table on page 45 shows the results so far but a few trends are starting to emerge. All 9 of the ponds have records of Palmate Newts, but only 5 have Smooth Newts and 7 have Great Crested Newts. The maximum 'catch' in a box so far is: 62 Palmates, 13 Smooths and 7 Great Crested Newts. The maximum 'catch' in one pond is: 96 Palmates, 26 Smooths and 7 Great Crested Newts. This shows that Palmate Newts are by far the most common newts to be found in Wyre Forest but all 3 species have been found in 5 ponds.

Since 2014 we have been photographing the bellies of any Great Crested Newts found during the surveys as they are known to be distinctive, like a fingerprint. (see photos 2-4). It occurred to us that building up a photo library, would not only add to our knowledge of individuals, but also lay down information for any future studies. Of course it is still early days and we only have a small sample, but we haven't had any recaptures so far. It is important to try and identify individuals as we suspect that there is very little movement of Great Crested Newts between ponds due to their widely scattered distribution across the forest. However, given wet weather conditions they may take the opportunity to 'pond hop' by travelling via ditches and flooded ruts to reach new territories and therefore we might find them quite some distance from the original pond they were found in.

As is common in such work it has thrown up several questions and few answers! For example:

1. Why do newts enter the box trap anyway? They are not baited and there seems little reason for them to go in, sometimes in very large numbers.

2. Why do we often find more males than females in the trap? Does this show a disparity of numbers between the sexes? There have been a few anomalies of course, but this has so far held true for all three species. Maybe females are more cautious or less inquisitive than males. Or, perhaps one female in the

Photos 2-4. Distinct belly patterns of 3 male Great Crested Newts Phil Rudlin

trap will attract lots of males due to pheromones? So far we simply don't know!

3. Another oddity thrown up by the survey has been 'hybrids' showing characteristics of both Smooth and Palmate Newts (see photos 5 & 6). We have been reliably informed that this can happen where the range of the two species coincide. In Wyre, the Palmate is predominant whilst the Smooth, or Common Newt is ironically anything but! We have found several of these 'hybrids' in the past but always defaulted them as Palmate. So far all of these have been males as far as we can recall. So another question occurs; are they capable of breeding or, like a Mule, are they sterile? More work is required on that one too!

Photo 5 Hybrid male with spotty chin Phil Rudlin

Photo 6. Hybrid male with threaded tail Phil Rudlin

In the hybrid in photos 5 and 6, note the threaded tail like a Palmate and the spotty chin like a Smooth. Also the Palmate usually has more pronounced webbing of the back feet, particularly during the breeding season. Could it possibly be a juvenile, not having fully formed feet?

The actual total number of newts from each pond was down a bit from 2015 but this was probably due to the newts using the ponds earlier than we expected and the survey starting a little late. We are learning all the time and are hopeful that 2017 will bring an upturn in numbers, and probably a few surprises and a lot more questions!

When first identifying newts folk wonder if they will be able to distinguish a Great Crested Newt. The two photos below show how different it really is compared to the smaller Palmate Newt. The Great Crested is unmistakeable - large and monster like!

Photo 7. Male Palmate Newt Phil Rudlin

Photo 8. Male Great Crested Newt Phil Rudlin

Wyre Forest Study Group

Pond No.	Number of traps	Trap No	Total Newts	GCN Total	Smooth Total	Palmate Total	GCN Male	GCN Female	Smooth Male	Smooth Female	Palmate Male	Palmate Female
1												
11th June 2013	1		3	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	1	0
1st May 2014	2	Trap 1	7	0	1	6	0	0	1	0	3	3
1st May 2014		Trap 2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
9th May 2015	2	Trap 1	7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	6	1
9th May 2015		Trap 2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
14th June 2016	2	Trap 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14th June 2016		Trap 2	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
2												
11th June 2013	2	Trap 1	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	3	2
11th June 2013		Trap 2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1st May 2014	2	Trap 1	8	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	7	1
1st May 2014		Trap 2	3	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
9th May 2015	3	Trap 1	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	2
9th May 2015		Trap 2	6	4	1	1	1	3	0	1	0	1
9th May 2015		Trap 3	5	1	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	4
14th June 2016	2	Trap 1	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	2
14th June 2016		Trap 2	3	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
3												
11th June 2013	2	Trap 1	14	0	3	11	0	0	3	0	9	2
11th June 2013		Trap 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1st May 2014	2	Trap 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1st May 2014		Trap 2	17	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	12	5
9th May 2015		Trap 1	9	0	2	7	0	0	3	1	4	1
9th May 2015		Trap 2	13	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	8	5
9th May 2015		Trap 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14th June 2016	2	Trap 1	4	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4	0
14th June 2016		Trap 2	23	0	2	21	0	0	1	1	18	3
4												
11th May 2012	1		21	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	17	4
23rd May 2013	1		2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
7th May 2014	1		25	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	16	9
29th May 2015	1		8	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	3	5
24th May 2016	1		7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	3	4
5												
11th May 2012	1		62	0	0	62	0	0	0	0	20	42
23rd May 2013	1		38	0	0	38	0	0	0	0	24	14
7th May 2014	2	Trap 1	50	1	0	49	1	0	0	0	37	12
7th May 2014		Trap 2	16	1	0	15	1	0	0	0	12	3
29th May 2015	2	Trap 1	52	0	0	52	0	0	0	0	47	5
29th May 2015		Trap 2	26	1	0	25	1	0	0	0	25	0
24th May 2016	2	Trap 1	37	0	0	37	0	0	0	0	30	7
24th May 2016		Trap 2	59	0	0	59	0	0	0	0	52	7
6												
11th May 2012	1		31	0	6	25	0	0	1	5	20	5
23rd May 2013	1		9	0	2	7	0	0	2	0	7	0
7th May 2014	1		43	0	2	41	0	0	2	0	29	12
29th May 2015	1		22	1	0	21	1	0	0	0	17	4
24th May 2016	1		27	1	2	24	1	0	2	0	21	3
7												
11th May 2012	2	Trap 1	47	6	13	28	2	4	2	11	11	17
11th May 2012		Trap 2	73	0	13	60	0	0	9	4	25	35
23rd May 2013	2	Trap 1	21	3	1	17	2	1	1	0	14	3
23rd May 2013		Trap 2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
7th May 2014	2	Trap 1	31	1	4	26	0	1	3	1	22	4
7th May 2014		Trap 2	51	5	2	44	5	0	2	0	42	2
29th May 2015	2	Trap 1	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
29th May 2015		Trap 2	29	7	1	21	4	3	1	0	16	5
24th May 2016	3	Trap 1	19	0	1	18	0	0	0	1	11	7
24th May 2016		Trap 2	24	0	4	20	0	0	3	1	20	0
24th May 2016		Trap 3	25	0	1	24	0	0	1	0	20	4
8												
11th May 2012	2	Trap 1	15	3	1	2	3	0	1	0	2	0
11th May 2012		Trap 2	9	0	2	16	0	0	1	1	12	4
30th May 2014	3	Trap 1	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0
30th May 2014		Trap 2	7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	3	4
30th May 2014		Trap 3	13	0	1	12	0	0	0	1	6	6
29th May 2015	2	Trap 1	26	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	19	7
29th May 2015		Trap 2	51	2	0	49	2	0	0	0	38	2
24th May 2016	2	Trap 1	23	0	0	23	0	0	0	0	19	4
24th May 2016		Trap 2	31	4	3	24	4	0	3	0	19	5
9												
11th May 2012	2	Trap 1	45	0	0	45	0	0	0	0	40	5
11th May 2012		Trap 2	31	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	25	6
30th May 2014	2	Trap 1	38	0	0	38	0	0	0	0	32	6
30th May 2014		Trap 2	30	5	0	25	4	1	0	0	18	7
29th May 2015	2	Trap 1	28	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	22	6
29th May 2015		Trap 2	53	2	0	51	2	0	0	0	43	8
24th May 2016	2	Trap 1	43	0	0	43	0	0	0	0	34	9
24th May 2016		Trap 2	20	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	15	5

Table showing results of newt surveys in Wyre Forest