

The Croydon Ponds Project 2018-2020

The History, Ecology and Legacy of Croydon's Ponds



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With sincere thanks to all the volunteers, partners, funders and everyone else who has been involved in the Croydon Ponds Project.

Graphic design by Rob Bowker

Cover photo: Ditches Lane Pond, see page 14

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Introduction

There are over forty ponds in public places in the London Borough of Croydon.

Many are well known landmarks that feature daily in the lives of local people, others are hidden away in our green spaces quietly providing valuable habitat for wildlife. Little was generally known of the history of these places, their importance to Croydon’s heritage or the ecological value they hold.

From January 2018 to March 2020, with generous funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) Croydon Ponds Project has been working with volunteers, community groups, ecologists and historians to reinvigorate the public profile of our ponds.

This book aims to give you a better view of our ponds – recording their stories, their historical uses and the wildlife they support.

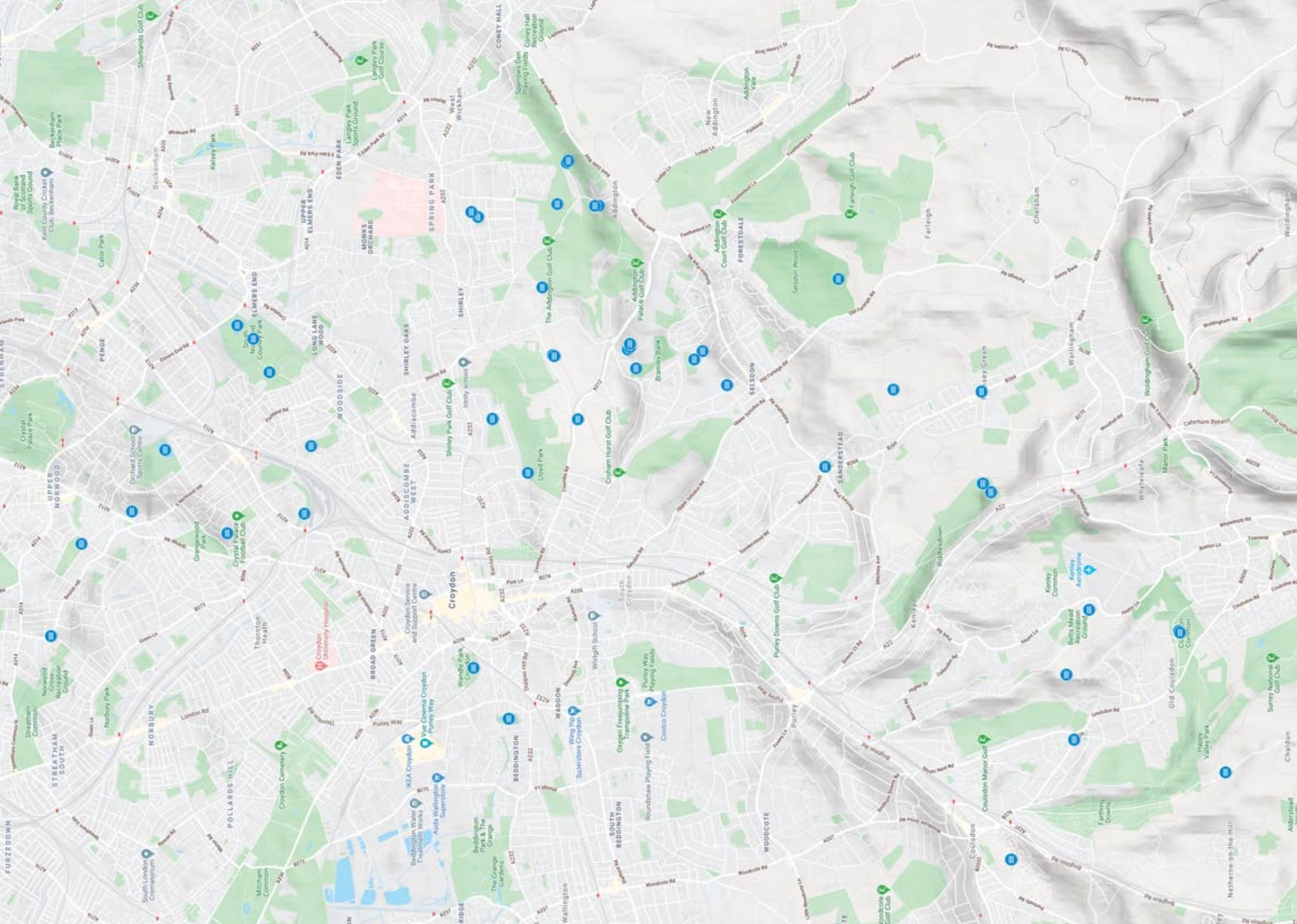
Adam Asquith
Croydon Ponds Project Officer

Ponds in Croydon

This map shows the general spread of ponds in Croydon – the full map can be seen at bit.ly/CroydonPondsMap

A full list of ponds covered by the Croydon Ponds Project is also provided at the end of this book.

A digital version of this booklet, along with the findings from our ecological surveys will be available at tcv.org.uk/London/Croydon



The role of ponds in the community

Ponds often provide an attractive focal point in the community. A calm village duck pond on a Sunday afternoon, a boating lake filled with sails or a mirror like pool in a serene woodland are all very emotive, nostalgic scenes – and with good reason.

Living close to water, or ‘blue space’ can have a positive impact on our mental health, much in the same way that access to ‘green space’ can. By encouraging outdoor exercise, fresh air and interaction with nature, the presence of ponds can boost mental and physical wellbeing among local communities.

People who help to manage a local pond can make a positive contribution to a valued green space within their community, as well as learning new outdoor skills and connecting with local people.



Weed clearance at Ditches Lane pond

The role of ponds for wildlife

Ponds provide a home for a huge number of species: plants and fungi, fish, birds, invertebrates, amphibians and even mammals.

Naturally occurring ponds have been part of our landscape for millions of years, and man made ponds for millennia. Much of our native wildlife has come to depend on them for a source of fresh water. With increases in intensive agriculture and urbanisation, there has been a marked decrease in our number of ponds across

the UK over the last few centuries, making it more important now than ever to protect these havens for wildlife.

Many of our ponds, new and ancient alike, are now managed for wildlife by groups like The Conservation Volunteers and local 'friends of' groups.

Sometimes this can mean dredging silt from a pond, or extending its margins, but managing

ponds for wildlife is not always about actively working in and around the pond.

Surveying the wildlife and carefully selecting ways to help encourage it is often more beneficial than any major disruption to the pond itself. This can take the form of removing invasive species, planting some beneficial plant species, or building a 'hibernaculum' nearby – a pile of stones, wood and mud – which can be used by amphibians visiting the pond



WILDLIFE POND HABITATS

All kinds of lakes, ponds, puddles and pools can be useful for wildlife and looks can often be deceiving. There is no such thing as an 'ideal' pond – they are all important! Even a small puddle in a roadside rut, or a water-filled hole in an old tree stump can be a haven for water-loving plants and animals!

In general, larger, deeper ponds are a better habitat for fish and birds, however smaller ponds often have more amphibians and invertebrates.

Different plants and animals will have different preferences of course, but the most varied pondlife can normally be found in the margins of the pond as the shallows are protected from deep water predators such as fish. Shallow margins are also important as they allow animals to enter and exit the water easily. A steep sided pond may prove very hard for a frog to get out of once it has got in!

Water levels can fluctuate over time, giving each pond a 'draw down zone' with varying levels of wetness. Around a partially dried pond you may have some other small pools, areas of bare, wet mud and drier, higher banks.

'HELP! THE POND HAS DRIED UP!'

A pond drying up seems worrying, but this may be a natural process if it dries during hot weather.

'Ephemeral' or temporary ponds are ponds which appear during particularly wet weather and dry up in the summer.

Some may stay wet for most of the year, others will last just a few weeks. Despite this, these ponds and pools provide valuable habitat and connectivity between more permanent ponds. These ponds can be particularly useful for amphibian and invertebrate species that are at risk of predation by fish in larger ponds.

Some of our rarest species make use of ephemeral ponds across the UK.

In Croydon we have a small ephemeral pond at Addington Hills where we have Sphagnum moss growing, which is only found at three sites in Croydon.



Addington Hills pond often dries up, but is still a valuable resource for wildlife

What to look for – pond plants



Marsh marigold



Purple loosestrife



Water plantain



Water mint



Yellow flag iris



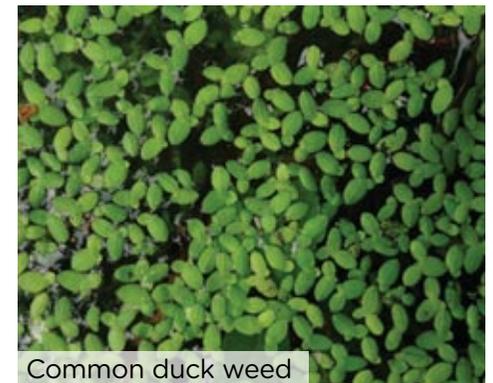
Reedmace



Gipsywort



Broad-leaved pond weed



Common duck weed

What to look for – pond animals



Common frog



Common toad



Smooth newt



Smooth newt nymph (left)



Water boatman



Southern hawker dragonfly



Smooth newt



Water flea



Freshwater anelid leech



Water louse



Common pond skater

Ecological surveys – what we found!

Keeping an eye on the species of plant and animal we have living in our green spaces is an important way to inform how we manage these sites.

A borough wide survey of Croydon's Ponds was last conducted in 1994, so our knowledge badly needed updating.

During the summers of 2018 and 2019 TCV volunteers surveyed 42 public ponds across Croydon. Surveys were undertaken over 5 Days in 2018, and 6 Days in 2019. These surveys were undertaken by the Project Officer and two volunteers who are established local ecologists that had previously surveyed Croydon's Ponds in the 1990's. Other volunteers joined in to lend a hand and they learned new identification skills and how to survey.

Plants were recorded both in the ponds and around the water's edge, and animals living in the water were found by 'pond dipping' – sweeping a net through the water and tipping the contents into a tray. We found an array of animals such as insect larvae, snails, tadpoles, newts, worms and leeches!

It appears from comparing the 1994 and 2019/20 surveys that the ponds that have received management work from TCV and other community groups have improved their species

counts. Good to know we're doing something right!

Some ponds seem to have declined – the reasons for this are less clear. Some seem to have become silty and shaded after a lack of management, and others have been adversely affected by invasive species outcompeting our native species. Hopefully through the habitat management work TCV have done throughout the Croydon Ponds Project and continued improvement work in the future, these ponds can also see an improvement over time.

The full survey results and write-up can be found at tcv.org.uk/London/Croydon



Species recording



Survey sampling

Invasive species

Some plants can help turn ponds into havens for wildlife – providing food, shelter and nesting sites for animals that use them. However, some of the non-native plants brought to the UK in the last few centuries can outcompete our native pond life.

Often, these plants can take over wild ponds if left unchecked and some are notoriously hard to remove. Pond owners, gardeners and anglers can unwittingly assist in their spread by carrying tiny fragments of the plants on their equipment, shoes or clothing, or by emptying fish tanks or plant holders into wild ponds.

After our surveys and the work TCV have done in ponds, care is taken to make sure our tools and equipment are clean, to avoid spreading any of these invasive plants.

The best advice is to Check, Clean and Dry equipment before using it in another pond.

- ✓ Check your equipment and clothing for living organisms
- ✓ Clean and wash all equipment, footwear and clothing
- ✓ Dry all equipment and clothing – some species can live for many days in moist conditions.

Invasive species – The big three in Croydon

New Zealand Pigmyweed

Crassula helmsii

Forms dense mats which reduce light levels and can displace native plants. It can regenerate from tiny fragments and easily spreads to new areas, making it very hard to get rid of.

Floating Pennywort

Hydrocotyle ranunculoides

Grows incredibly quickly forming a floating raft on the surface of the water. This shades out other species and prevents oxygen reaching the water. It can also make a pond look remarkably like dry land – more than a few people have walked straight into ponds hidden by floating pennywort!

Parrot's Feather

Myriophyllum aquaticum

Much like floating pennywort, Parrot's Feather grows in thick rafts and stops light and oxygen getting to water. This can have a devastating effect and entirely fill a pond if left unmanaged.



New Zealand Pigmyweed



Floating Pennywort on Ditches Lane pond



Parrots Feather

Ponds and their historical uses

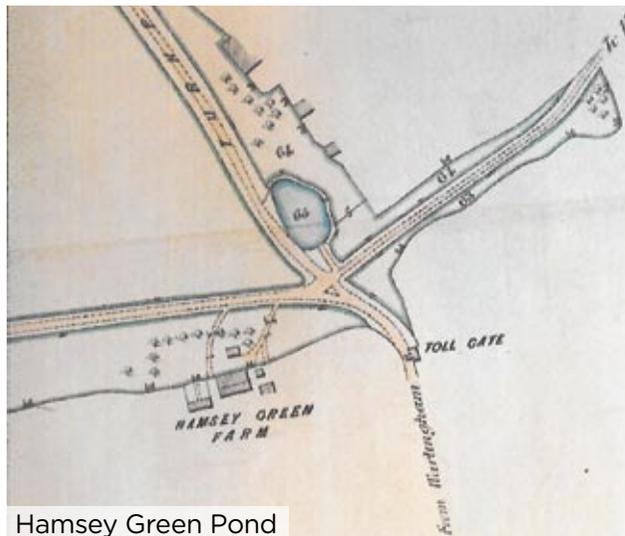
Ponds have been used as a source of fresh water by people for millennia – TCV’s volunteers have plumbed the depths of the Museum of Croydon archives to find out about the histories of our ponds, when they came to be, and any interesting information found along the way!

DROVERS PONDS

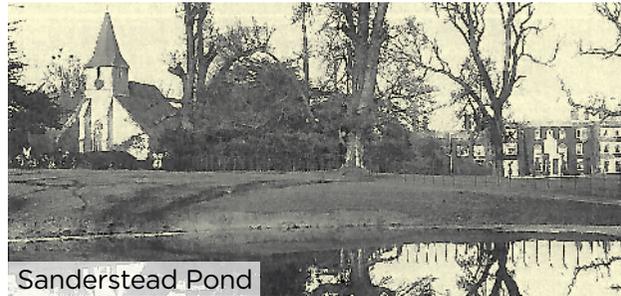
Drovers ponds are found at the side of ancient roads and pathways.

These ponds were used to water cattle and sheep being herded to market.

In Croydon, these roads were mainly from London to the surrounding countryside.



Hamsey Green Pond



Sanderstead Pond

Droving continued until the mid 19th century, when it was largely replaced by railways and later automobiles, but the ponds can still be found along main roads in towns and villages.

Good examples of drovers ponds in Croydon are the Sanderstead and Hamsey Green ponds along the ancient Limpsfield road.

HORSE PONDS

Similar to droving ponds, horse ponds would be found along travel routes and used to water and cool down horses.

These ponds would often have an entrance and exit so a cart could travel through the pond. The water would soak and swell the wood of cartwheels to help keep the iron tyres on.

MILL PONDS

Mill ponds ensured an ongoing supply of water to power a mill. A channel of water would turn

a large waterwheel to turn grinding stones or other machinery. In Croydon we have a remaining mill pond at Waddon Ponds, where a mill was mentioned in the Domesday book, and milling took place until the early 20th Century.

ORNAMENTAL PONDS

Ornamental ponds include fish ponds and duck ponds, that are intended to be picturesque, and often provide a nice setting for a picnic. Enjoyed by communities and wildlife alike these ponds are very much a valued part of Croydon life.

The pond at Coombe Wood Gardens is surrounded by Pulhamite, a rare ‘fake rock’ made in the 1800s by James Pulham and Son. Only a handful of these rockeries remain in their original form, this one contains a fish pond and stream and is frequented by ducks and herons.



Coombe Wood Gardens

South Norwood Country Park

Historically, South Norwood Country Park was mainly farmland, but was eventually acquired to be used as a sewage farm. It was used as such from about 1865 until its closure in 1967. Parts of the land were used for farming hay and other crops. It was closed mainly due to inefficiency, supposedly due to poor drainage due to the clay subsoil. This wasn't great for irrigation, but the wet nature of the area affords the wetlands we see in the park today.

After the sewage farm, the site was left unused and so regenerated into grassland and wetland. There was a lot of argument over what the park would become, and given the boundary with Bromley, there was even something of a contest for its ownership.

Fortunately, pressure from residents prevailed and all commercial plans were scrapped, and regeneration was undertaken until its opening as a country park in 1989. The park is now designated Metropolitan Open Space and a Local Nature Reserve.

In the park there are three ponds and a large wetland area, with historical and ecological importance.



Lamoates Pond

LAMOATES POND

The name 'lamoates' appears on old maps to denote an historic moated house on this site. The original house dates back to the 13th Century. A deed from 1467 mentions a moated garden but no house here, suggesting it was abandoned at the time. This was probably due to flooding caused by the damp nature of the site which continues to this day, making it a haven for wading birds and waterfowl.

In the late 19th Century the area was converted to a sewerage farm and the moats were covered up. Today a vague square shape in the field can be seen from aerial photography, and a



The Lake

small pond remains at the approximate site of the house, offering valuable habitat for aquatic insects like water fleas and damselfly larvae.

In 1972 the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society (CNHSS) held an archaeological dig at the site and found remnants of a wooden bridge across the moat. However, due to flooding and vandalism the dig had to be abandoned.

THE LAKE

The Lake is one of the largest bodies of open water in Croydon and as such is a magnet for wild birds, both those native to Britain and

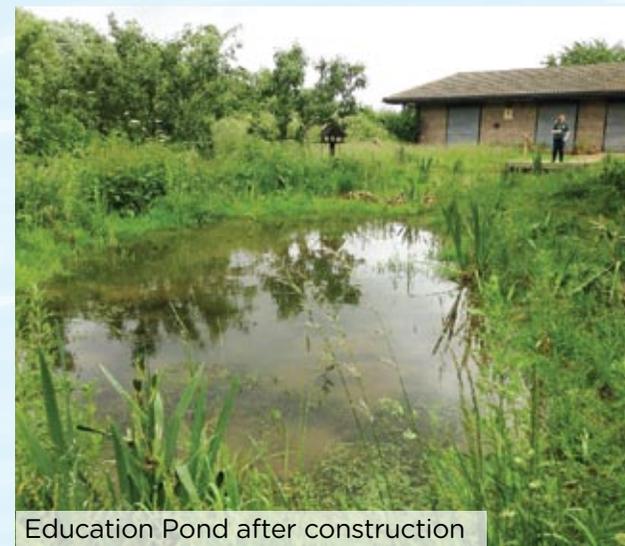


visitors from further afield. This lake was dug prior to the opening of the country park in 1989.

Crack Willows (*Salix fragilis*) surround the lake which TCV regularly coppice – the practice of cutting trees down to ground level to encourage fresh growth, which can be beneficial for wildlife. Around the edge of the pond, for instance, there are areas of shoreline that can be used by ground nesting birds to rear their young. Opening a different area of shoreline each year ensures that there is a range of ages of willow growth, offering a variety of habitats for wildlife. The cut willow is then woven into a hedge to help protect these areas for birds and animals to use them.



Education Pond during construction



Education Pond after construction

VISITOR CENTRE: EDUCATION POND

This is a man-made pond, dug in 2013 by Froglife, which has been planted and colonised by reedmace, water plantain and water mint. The pond is now used as an education resource, with the wardens running pond dipping events for local school groups.

The pond supports dragonfly larvae which live in the water over the winter, before coming out of the pond in summer to spend their adult lives hunting and mating. In the spring and summer it is home to common newts and their young, called 'efts', and also supports common frogs, and their frogspawn and tadpoles.

Happy Valley - Ditches Lane Pond

This pond is a good example of a woodland pond, supporting a wide network of life. Providing water for the birds and animals of the surrounding woodland, and valuable habitat for water loving species of plants, amphibians and insects that live in it. Ponds like this one are integral to the biodiversity of an area.

The Croydon Ponds Project identified the Ditches Lane pond be one of the most species rich pond in the borough, containing over thirty species of plant and animal.

This is the only pond where Green Hydra was recorded. Hydra are tiny, bizarre looking animals that attach to underwater vegetation and feed on small invertebrates like water fleas by ensnaring them in its tentacles.

Ditches lane pond also contains Common Newts to Water Snails, Freshwater Pea Mussels, Leeches, Dragonfly and Damselfly larvae. In the summer months, keep an eye out for Dragonflies hunting and mating over the water here, and laying their eggs in the pond's margins.

The plant covering most of the water surface is an invasive, non-native plant called Floating Pennywort, which can grow aggressively, forming thick rafts. This can stop light and oxygen from reaching the water, which is damaging to other water life. TCV carefully



removed the weed by hand every autumn to maintain an open water body. The aim is to

reduce and eventually eradicate the weed to ensure the pond can flourish.

Heathfield ponds

Heathfield Ecology Centre on Gravel Hill is the site of an old farm that appeared on Roqcue's 'Survey of Surrey' map from 1762. It is likely that there was a pond at the farm for watering cattle, however the first time one is shown on a map was the 1837 Tithe Map of the area.

In 1927 Raymond Riesco, a well-known solicitor and collector of oriental ceramics, bought the estate and turned the farm into a mansion and gardens. During these works he enhanced the gardens around the house with a pond and pools which were fed by springs, causing

waterfalls to tumble down the surrounding rockery. Even in dry weather, the springs can still be seen seeping in. The trees and gardens reflected by the calm waters of the basin are a serene sight, much enjoyed by visitors to the gardens.

Surveys of the pond in the 1980s concluded that the water was somewhat stagnant, however in the mid 1990s a further survey suggested improvement. The surveys undertaken during the Croydon Ponds Project in 2018 and 2019 showed an array of plants and animals using the ponds, including dragonfly and damselfly larvae, newts, pond snails and much more! The pond is currently cared for by the Heathfield Nature Conservation Volunteers.

There are two other ponds on the site. There is a large round concrete pool in front of the house that has a pretty wetland grass called Orange Foxtail growing in it. Orange Foxtail is not rare nationally but was only found at this site in Croydon.

There is also a small rectangular pond surrounded by a patio, which has a mixture of submerged, marginal and floating vegetation. This mixture of plant life provides valuable habitat for invertebrates, and dragonflies can be seen darting between the ponds during the summer.



The Rectangular Pond at Heathfield Ecology Centre

Sanderstead Pond



Sanderstead Pond lies at the top of Sanderstead Hill by its junction with Addington Road. Close by is the ancient church of All Saints built in the 13th Century with its familiar spire visible across the pond. The squire's house at Sanderstead Court could also have been seen before it was demolished (by 1958) following bomb damage in World War II.

Here, in the centre of village life, the pond was a watering stop for travellers with horses and carts, and for herds of cattle and sheep being driven north to market. To ensure it would hold

water, the large basin had been lined with an impervious clay. The shallow water and sloping edges allowed carts to be driven right in so that any loose wooden parts in wheel would swell and fit more tightly within the iron rim.

Sanderstead Preservation Society was founded in 1961. Minutes of their meetings record their attempts to keep the pond area in the County of Surrey and out of London "it being the heart of the village and still of great natural beauty". Nevertheless, in 1964, the area became part of London, with Croydon Council taking on

responsibility for the pond's maintenance. The Society members were worried about the fluctuating water level, and several surveys had tried without success to find a spring which might be feeding the pond. It was concluded that rainfall and dew fed the pond together with the minimal amount running off surrounding land. To ensure a more constant level, a piped connection was made to the mains in 1967. Croydon's proposed enlarged roundabout caused great concern to the Society, and the work did in fact result in some loss of land bringing the road closer to the pond edge. Thankfully the proposed car park at the pond site never materialised.

An unusual entry in the Preservation Society minutes was a member's statement that 'double T-shaped girders were placed across the pond during World War II'. Such tactics had been designed to prevent enemy tanks skirting round any road blocks, and were just some of the many methods used in the rings of defences around London in the early 1940s.

Today, Croydon Council and volunteers maintain this well-known landmark with its pleasant pond and surrounding green space, by removing vigorous water vegetation, cutting grass, and caring for trees and shrubs. Check the colourful information board for the names of some of the wildlife which you may see here.

Hamsey Green Pond

Archaeologists have found evidence of Neolithic and Iron Age settlements near the pond.

The first written record was as “Wychemere” in Sanderstead Manor Court Rolls in the reign of Elizabeth the first. Two centuries or so later, the large pond was marked on the 1840s Tithe Map alongside the Turnpike Road leading from Warlingham towards Croydon. This route-way would have been busy with all kinds of travellers with pack mules and with animals ‘on the hoof’ being driven north to market. All the animals would have welcomed a drink here. As the pond was shallow and the sides sloped gently, carts and wagons could be driven right into the water. Because the wooden parts of wheels, the spokes and felloes, tended to become loose within their iron rim, wheels were soaked in water to make them swell and fit tightly again.

After Hamsey Green Farm was sold off for housing in the 1920s, the pond became disused and began to silt up. Forty years later Tandridge Council restored the pond. After boundary changes in the 1990s meant the pond was then within Croydon, the Council began regular work to maintain it, clearing out some of the fast-growing vegetation and the invasive Parrot Feather. In recent years TCV have been removing this weed on a yearly basis. Wildlife value is increasing and you may see Mallard Ducks, and Smooth Newts, and Azure



Damselflies flying above Common Reed Mace and Yellow Flag Iris.

The scene of a large party of bathers enjoying a

splash in 1904 was captured on a postcard. This activity is not recommended today! The pond is fenced around but you may walk in through the gate to sit and enjoy this pleasant spot.

King's Wood Pond

Hidden deep in 150 acres of ancient managed woodland, King's Wood Pond is neither a village pond nor a farm pond. As it lay slightly aside from the ancient track-way which is now the Limpsfield Road, it is not thought to have been used to water herds of cattle being driven to market. In any case, woodland was valuable and the Lord of the Manor would not have allowed such intrusion and trampling.

After becoming little more than a damp hollow where frogs were still lay frogspawn which could never develop, the pond was re-instated in winter 2002. Vegetation and earth infill were skimmed out of the hollow to reveal a smooth layer of impervious clay. This layer has proved to be intact despite fears of damage from tree roots, and water has always been present though the level varies.

Growing on the rim of the pond were two oak trees believed to be over 150 years old, so the pond must be older than that. Removal of the two trees reduced the burden of autumn leaves falling in and clogging up the water, and opened the pond to more sunlight.

What was the pond's used for? The corner of a wood-bank curving round the pond may have marked the edge of a field where animals could be grazed and they would have needed

water. The clay lining was obviously man-made, but it is not known how long ago. The metal detectorist present when the pond was cleared found a variety of metal objects including a spent shotgun cartridge and a musket ball, but nothing which would give a date when the pond was made. Also present was an archaeologist who found no dateable object, but pointed out a line of knapped flints set along the pond edge possibly marking the original boundary.

Wildlife was immediately attracted to the new habitat – footprints in the mud showed that deer and duck had visited. Toad spawn has been seen. Frog spawn is seen in most years, and in 2020 mounds of spawn were laid in mid February. Take a quiet walk along the path off one of the main rides to watch what wildlife may appear.

The Croydon Ponds Project survey in 2018/2019 listed – Common Water-starwort, Lesser Pond-sedge, Pendulous Sedge, Toad Rush, Soft Rush, Annual Meadow-grass, Broad-leaved Dock and Blanket Weed.

There used to be a second pond until it was partially filled in by the Council in the 1970s. In wet weather, rainwater gathered in the muddy floor provides a seasonal damp habitat.



Kings Wood Pond in 2004



Kings Wood Pond in 2009



...and full of frog spawn in 2019

Heaver's Meadow

Heaver's Meadow is a flood plain, allowing the Norbury Brook to overflow at times of high rainfall to protect the railway and surrounding residential areas from flooding. Over the years the meadow has developed into a valuable wetland area for local wildlife, supporting plants and animals that rely on water to survive.

Most of the site is 'willow carr', meaning a wet wooded area where willow grows. Willow trees love damp areas and can cope well with the fluctuating water levels of a flood plain.

A number of the willows trees are coppiced every year by TCV. Coppicing is the practice of cutting a tree down to ground level to stimulate new growth, which is beneficial for wildlife as it creates a mosaic of light and shade across the site. Young trees also need more water to grow than older ones.

The meadow is now home to pond snails and dragonflies, amphibians like common frogs and mammals such as voles.

During the Croydon Ponds Project, TCV have hand-pulled the invasive weed Parrot's Feather from the site to suppress its growth and allow other plants to re-establish. By revisiting and pulling the weed again when necessary, this site should benefit long term from more open water and a wider variety of plant species.



Lloyd Park

The pond at Lloyd Park is a haven for wildlife, often overlooked by visitors to the park. Tucked away in its quiet corner this small, spring fed pond supports a wide range of plant and animal life including newts, dragonflies, damselflies, aquatic snails and even the occasional duck!

TCV, look after this pond every year, removing vegetation to keep the pond open. The main bulk of vegetation in the water is Watercress, a great plant in its own right - however, it can grow very quickly and overcrowd a pond this small, stopping other plants from growing. By removing a small section at regular intervals, the pond retains some open water for light and oxygen to reach the water, and encouraging submerged oxygenators like Rigid Hornwort and Water Starwort to grow.

Common newts breed here between March and June. The open water allows them to act out their mating ritual. The males, which have a fiery orange underbelly during the breeding season will 'dance', showing off their markings and wafting pheromones towards the more drab looking females.



South Norwood Lake



The South Norwood Lake was built as a reservoir for supplying water to the Croydon Canal in 1809. The canal was built to join the Grand Surrey Canal in New Cross, and rail links from Croydon. South Norwood Lake was one of two reservoirs, the other located in Sydenham.

The Lake is a rare reminder of the canal, most of which was filled in after its closure in 1836

after a mere 27 years, proving an unsuccessful venture. The canal was sold off to the London and Croydon Railway company for £40,250, and much of the line from West Croydon to London Bridge follows the route of the canal. South Norwood Lake is by far the largest 'open water' remnant of the canal, with two small sections now used as wildlife ponds in Bett's Park in Anerley and Dacres Wood in Forest Hill.

After the closure of the canal, the lake was unused for a number of years. The lake and surrounding land was finally sold to Norwood Sports Club in 1881 and was used for swimming, boating and skating in the winter. The lake and some of the surrounding area was bought by the Croydon Corporation in 1931.

The lake is now used for pleasure - it is the home of the Croydon Sailing Club and is also used for fishing.

In recent years, there has been a problem with algal blooms in the summer. Algae naturally occurs in freshwater ponds and lakes, and is normally a valuable part of these ecosystems. However, a combination of hot weather and high-nutrient water can cause 'blooms' - large clouds of single celled algae. These blooms can block oxygen and sunlight from dispersing through the water, and some kinds of algae can even release toxins into the water.

To combat this, as part of the Croydon Ponds Project, TCV worked with Croydon Council to install some floating vegetation islands on the lake in early 2019. These islands were designed to have plants growing on them that take some of the nutrients out of the water, reducing the likelihood of algal blooms. They seem to have been a success, as in 2019 there was no major bloom at the lake!

Willy Pit Pond, Warlingham

This pond actually lies just outside of Croydon, in Warlingham, so was not officially recognised by the Croydon Ponds Project for surveying and habitat management work.

Various theories surround the origin of the name. The pond had once been much deeper,

possibly originating in a pit dug for clay – hence the word PIT in the name. In 1883 a seven year old boy had sadly drowned, falling through the ice “on the pond adjoining the common” but a local school’s log book named him as Frank, not as Willy. So who was Willy/William? He may perhaps have been a local village character

associated with the pond in some way.

The pond was not marked on the 1844 Tithe Map. It lies slightly west of the modern main road, and at the edge of the village’s common land. When this land was enclosed and largely built on with housing, the pond became disused and silted up. The local council infilled it, laying drainage pipes. In the 1980s a big hole was dug in the centre so that water would drain away and the water habitat ceased.

Plans were drawn up by the Downlands Countryside Management Project in 1996 to recreate the pond as wildlife habitat. Excavations showed the pond’s shape had changed over time, and was originally larger extending to the line of the present pavement. Archaeologists found that the clay liner shelved gently down away from the road which would have allowed carts to be driven in to soak the wooden wheels. Metal detectorists from the West Kent Detector Club found assorted items but nothing which might reveal a date for the pond’s origin.

The photograph taken in February 2020 shows that without sufficient maintenance recently, the pond has been engulfed with vegetation with little open water remaining. Clearance of vigorous vegetation would quickly increase the wildlife value here.



Beulah Hill Pond

Beulah Hill pond was known in the nineteenth century as the Crown Pond. It has also been commonly referred to as the Conquering Hero Pond due to its proximity to the Conquering Hero public house.

The date the pond was created is obscure. The earliest evidence of its existence was at the time of the Croydon Inclosure Award of 1800. The pond and its surroundings was one of numerous plots of land totalling 237 acres in various parts of Croydon and Norwood which the Inclosure Commissioners allocated to “the Inhabitants of Croydon”. These lands became known as the “Croydon Waste Lands”. The description of this plot is “One piece of Waste Land (No. 1086) on Norwood Common, at Biggin Hill, comprising a large pond or gravel pit, containing one acre three rods and thirty four perches.”

A further Act of Parliament in 1806 authorised the Croydon Waste Lands to be sold and the proceeds used to build a Town Hall, a buttermarket, and provide a burial ground. By 1869 the Crown Pond was the only part of the 237 acres that had not been sold off.

The pond was believed to have originally been spring-fed but the spring had failed some time before 1872. After this, the pond was fed mainly by rainwater draining off the road. This meant that mud and animal dung from the road



would get washed into the pond and it would periodically need cleaning out. Between 1850 and 1900 this frequently led to conflict between local residents, who valued having a pond on their doorstep, and some members of Croydon

council and its predecessor the Croydon Local Board of Health, who were concerned about the cost of maintenance and would have preferred to see the pond filled up and either sold off or kept as a public open space.

Beulah Hill Pond (continued)

The Conquering Hero public house was built next to the pond in 1864. By 1868, local residents complained of bad smells from the pond. At this time there was no mains drainage in that part of Norwood. A cesspit in the basement of the Conquering Hero was liable to overflow into the pond, polluting it. In 1868 the Board of Health, at a cost of £45, drained the pond, cleaned it out, and refilled it. They also extended a main sewer into the district and required Mr. Hunt, the landlord of the pub, to connect his premises to it. When the pond was drained, it was reported that, despite the foul matter at the bottom, “half a bushel of carp, roach, and other fish, were found in the upper waters.”

Only two years later, the pond needed cleaning out again and the Board of Health resolved to fill it in at a cost of £130 and sell off the land for building. This plan was dropped when it with opposition from local residents who pointed out that some years earlier, the pond had been repaired using £120 raised by public subscription. The pond was again threatened in 1872 but it was saved when a group of local residents proposed that they could help raise funds, and upon agreement of a lease the residents would “keep the land as a pond in repair, or as an open planted space during the same period.” As this would relieve the Board of the expense of maintaining the pond for a period, they agreed to the proposal.

However, the Board were apparently still responsible for repairs to the pond as in 1882 they repaired the camp sheeting around the pond and also installed a railing across the wash-way to stop horses going into the deep part of the pond.

By 1893, the lease had run out. Croydon Borough Council drained the pond and about a third of it was filled in before work stopped due to running out of materials. The Upper Norwood Ratepayers Association reacted furiously to the imminent loss of their pond. A petition signed by a large number of local residents and ratepayers was ignored. At a public meeting held on 20th April 1894 at the by now dry pond, it was resolved to send a delegation to the next Council meeting. As a result, the council relented and decided instead of filling up the pond, to obtain estimates for various options for restoring it. Proposals to concrete the bottom of the pond, as had already been done for Thornton Heath pond, and with fencing all around to keep animals out, were rejected as too expensive, and instead the cheapest option, of restoring it to its former condition, was adopted. This proved to be a false economy, as annual cleaning out was still found necessary. In 1896 a petition by local residents addressed to the Town Clerk of the Corporation of Croydon referred to “the unsanitary, filthy, and disgraceful state of the ‘Conquering Hero’ Pond”.

Eventually, in 1912, major alterations were done at the pond, to “Improve banks, plant trees, shrubs. etc., and erect short length of wall”. Railings were installed around the pond to prevent access by animals. To compensate, a water fountain and a water trough for animals were installed. It was probably during these works that the artificial rocks (probably Pulhamite, as used at the Coombe Wood pond) were installed around the pond. An elderly man was employed as keeper of the pond.

Beulah Hill pond hit the local headlines in 1953 when a man was charged with killing a swan, the property of Croydon Corporation, with intent to steal it. He told the court that the landlady of the Conquering Hero had asked him to shoot the swan because it was believed to have been eating ducklings on the pond. He was fined £5. Two years later, Croydon Corporation provided the pond with two swans which had been bred at Waddon pond the previous year.

In 1962, six-foot high wrought iron railings were installed to stop children gaining access, and the frontage was re-formed to make a paved area with public seating. The intention was to improve the sight-line for drivers an acute bend in the road. The seats were installed facing away from the pond until the council were persuaded to turn them around in the 1990s – and it remains a pretty spot to stop and sit today.

Littleheath Woods

Littleheath Woods has three ponds: The Keyhole, Green and Cattle ponds. They help support the wider woodland by providing water for the plants and animals of the surrounding area, and also provide valuable habitat for water-loving species of plants, amphibians and insects.

KEYHOLE POND

Keyhole Pond got its name from its shape. Woodland ponds like this suffer from leaves falling from trees every autumn which cause the ponds to silt up and dry out. To help keep the Keyhole Pond open as a haven for wildlife, TCV and the Friends of Littleheath Woods 'desilted' the pond, allowing it to hold more water for longer, aiding our native amphibian species. Keep an eye out for clumps of frogspawn here in the spring, soon to be followed by tadpoles!

CATTLE POND

Cattle Pond is a rain fed pond that used to be at the edge of Fallen Oak Field, providing drinking water for livestock when the area was used for agriculture. Since then the woods have extended towards the field, making it a shaded woodland pond. It is home to a range of invertebrate life including dragonfly nymphs. These spend most of their lives underwater, leaving the pond in summer to become flying adults. On bright summer's days you are likely to see dragonflies and damselflies skimming over the water and in the surrounding area hunting and mating.

GREEN POND

Green Pond (or 'Old Pond') was filled in with 'clinker', an industrial waste product, after WWII. The Friends of Littleheath Woods have opened it up again and it is now re-established as a pond. The water level does fluctuate. It can dry up in summer months and in particularly wet weather the Green Pond can fill up quickly, and excess water is taken via a pipe to run into a 'wet woodland' area that the Friends of Littleheath Woods have planted with damp-loving woodland plants.



Cattle Pond

Index of ponds

Pond Name	Grid Reference
Addington Hills E (small pond)	TQ3532564686
Addington Hills W (large pond)	TQ3530764688
Beulah Heights Wood	TQ3332269690
Beulah Hill	TQ3178770634
Bradmore Green	TQ3088358304
Bramley Bank	TQ3517063707
Brickfields Meadow	TQ3416667541
Cane Hill	TQ2918458778
Coombe Wood	TQ3452764384
Coulsdon Common new (south)	TQ3225757049
Coulsdon Common original (north)	TQ3225757049
Dollypers Hill	TQ3169358652
Hamsey Green	TQ3500859548
Happy Valley (Ditches Lane)	TQ3053456490
Heathfield Rectangular	TQ3546563819
Heathfield Rockery	TQ3551263840
Heathfield Round	TQ3539,63791
Heavers Meadow	TQ3333767635
King's Wood	TQ3522560431
Littleheath Woods Cattle	TQ3534063046
Littleheath Woods Green	TQ3510562735

Pond Name	Grid Reference
Littleheath Woods Keyhole	TQ3508462626
Lloyd Park	TQ3388764963
Millers Pond	TQ3695965643
Pinewood Lake	TQ3610064900
Riddlesdown Chalk Pit	TQ3381859341
Sanderstead	TQ3407461406
Sanderstead to Whyteleafe	TQ3419659548
Shirley Heath	TQ3716364824
SNCP Lake	TQ3552568486
SNCP Lamoate	TQ3543968344
SNCP Visitor Centre	TQ3501968107
South Norwood Lake	TQ3397969214
Spout Hill Pond	TQ3709464226
Spout Hill Spring	TQ3709564290
Threehalfpenny Wood Mud Pond	TQ3776764676
Threehalfpenny Wood The Heart	TQ3760064593
Upper Norwood Rec Ground	TQ2962730381
Waddon Ponds	TQ3094065233
Wandle Park	TQ3154865568
Wattendon Pond	TQ3252358241
Whitehorse Meadow	TQ3306868564
Whitgift Pond	TQ3451865437

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PAGE 7	Smooth Newt (<i>Lissotriton vulgaris</i>) Gail Hampshire/Wikimedia
Marsh Marigold (<i>Caltha palustris</i>) Akabashi/Wikimedia	Newt eft Charles Sharp/Wikimedia
Purple Loosestrife (<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>) Hornbeam Arts/Flickr	Water flea (<i>Daphnia</i> sp.) Hajime Watanabe/Flickr
Water Plantain (<i>Alisma plantago-aquatica</i>) Peter O'Connor/Flickr	Great Pond Snail (<i>Limnaea stagnalis</i>) AfroBrazilian/Wikimedia
Water Mint (<i>Mentha aquatica</i>) Linda De Volder/Flickr	Water Boatman (<i>Corixa punctata</i>) Anemone Projectors/Wikimedia
Yellow Flag Iris (<i>Iris pseudocorus</i>) Jörg Hempel/Wikimedia	Leech (<i>Annelid</i> sp.) Peter O'connor/Flickr.tif
Great Reedmace (<i>Typha latifolia</i>) Ronail/Needpix	Southern Hawker Dragonfly (<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>) Charles Sharp/Wikimedia
Gipsywort (<i>Lycopus europaeus</i>) Krzysztof Ziarnik/Wikimedia	Hog louse (<i>Asellus aquaticus</i>) Charles Sharp/Wikimedia
Broad leafed pond weed (<i>Potamogeton natans</i>) Aimaina Hikari/Wikimedia	Pond skater (<i>Gerridae</i> sp.) Gail Hampshire/Wikimedia
Common Duckweed (<i>Lemna minor</i>) Mokkie/Wikimedia	PAGE 11 Coombe Wood Gardens Abrizio Malisan
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Common Frog (<i>Rana temporaria</i>) Bernie/Wikimedia	
Toad (<i>Bufo bufo</i>) Armin Kübelbeck/Wikimedia	



The Conservation Volunteers organise regular task days every Wednesday and Thursday in different parks and woodlands in and around Croydon.

Our varied task programme runs year-round and includes far more than just pond work. Tasks include: coppicing in woodland, charcoal making, wildflower meadow maintenance, construction projects and more. If this interests you, please get in touch.

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Croydon Ponds Project - The History, Ecology and Legacy of Croydon's Ponds

Croydon has over forty publicly accessible ponds that are essential to wildlife, important for communities and integral to local history. The Conservation Volunteers' Croydon Ponds Project, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and supported by Croydon Council, has worked with volunteers and community groups to research their local ponds and manage them for wildlife long into the future.



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