



Pond-dipping at Oakley Park

Reed Mace

This tall plant grows in shallow water and can reach 2 ½ meters in height. After flowering in summer, it develops brown, sausage-shaped seed heads which 'explode' in the spring spreading their seeds. In the past, these seeds were used for stuffing pillows and mattresses. The seed heads provide useful food for birds in winter and the stems are used by dragonfly and damselfly larvae to climb up, out of the water before turning into flying adults.



Frogbit

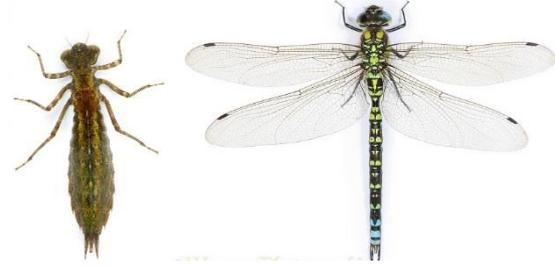
This small plant floats on the surface of ponds like tiny water lilies. It has a white flower with a yellow centre and the roots dangle in the water, not normally touching the bottom. In winter, they hibernate on the bottom of the pond and rise to the surface again in May. These plants are a good hiding place for small insects and provide a place for adult dragonflies and damselflies to land and bask.



Dragonflies and Damselflies

Both dragonflies and damselflies start life as a sticky egg before hatching into a nymph. The nymph will then spend a year or two in the pond growing bigger and eating worms, snails, tadpoles and even small fish! During its life in the pond, it will shed its skin up to 15 times as it gets bigger. When the weather warms up in spring, the nymph will climb a stalk and shed its skin for the last time and a flying adult emerges. During the summer, these adults can be seen flying above the pond catching smaller flying insects but will only live for a few weeks. In this time they must find a partner and lay eggs. You can often see them 'dipping their tails' on the water's surface as they lay their eggs.

Dragonfly



Nymph

Adult



Damselfly

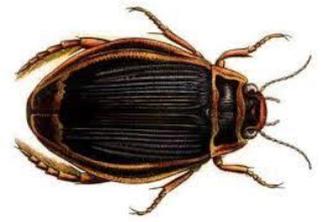
Pond Skater

These insects are between 1-2cm long and are often seen in large groups 'skating' around on the surface of the water on ponds, lakes, ditches and slow-flowing rivers. Pond Skaters have wings and are good fliers. In autumn they fly away from water to hibernate, until early spring. They feed on smaller insects which they stab with their sharp 'beaks'.



Great Diving Beetle

There are more than 350 species of water beetle in Britain and most ponds will have a good selection. The great diving beetle can be as large as 4cm long and is an excellent predator eating fish, tadpoles and other insects. It lays eggs in spring which hatch into larvae which look a little like dragonfly larvae. If they do not like the pond they are in or there is not enough food, they will fly at night to find a new home.



Common Frog

Frogs have smooth skin which is usually a mixture of greens and browns but can also contain yellow, pink, red, lime-green, cream or black. They can lighten or darken their skin to camouflage themselves. Female frogs lay eggs in ponds anytime from late winter and tadpoles will hatch 2-4 weeks later. During spring and summer the tadpoles grow legs and leave the water as tiny froglets. Frogs spend autumn eating insects, slugs and worms and spend the winter sheltering under rocks, in compost heaps or at the bottom of ponds. They can breathe through their skin as well as their lungs.



Newt

There are three types of newt in Britain; smooth, palmate and great crested. They lay individual eggs which are carefully wrapped in a leaf of pondweed by the female and, like frog spawn, the eggs become a tadpole. After laying eggs, in the summer months, newts come onto land and are often found in damp places underneath logs and debris. They then hibernate for the winter before returning to the water to lay eggs.



Snail

There are about 40 different kinds of water snail in Britain from the very tiny to the large Great Pond Snail. They can store an air bubble in their shells so they can breathe underwater. Two types that are found in our pond are the Ramshorn and the Great Pond Snail. Both are mainly plant eaters but will also eat dead animals.



Ramshorn

Great

Water Hoglouse

This crustacean is a close relative to the woodlice but spends all its life in water. It is not a very good swimmer though and will crawl around in the weeds and mud instead. They are often found in still or slow-moving water as they don't mind dirty water and like to eat rotten plants. Water louse carry their eggs and small young on their tummies.



Water Boatman

This brown bug lives in water and has long hairy back legs that it uses like paddles to swim. When they go to the top for air, they collect a bubble which they carry around with them under water to breathe. The lesser water boatman swims on its front and eats plants and algae but the greater water boatman swims on its back and will eat tadpoles, insects and small fish through a sharp tube that they stick into their prey before sucking out the juices like a straw.

