

Practical Task Afternoon 16 April 2009: Mill Pond at top of Markeaton St, West End, Derby

The lowering sky couldn't get much lower and our spirits were as damp and low as this very low very grey Thursday April sky. April can be good at yellow but on this day it seemed like it was only doing shades of grey. It wasn't until Lynne, our roadie-for-the-day had driven off that it dawned on Ken and Judith that the gazebo, our shelter for the long, wet afternoon, had one very serious defect. It was spacious alright with a fine frame, click-fit joints and even sock weights to hold it down. But whichever way you looked at it you could not help but notice that it had errmm well - no skin.

The drizzle upped the tempo and the trees drip drip dripped. around the silent and deserted Mill Pond "Fancy a brew?" says J. "Go on then" says K, feeling a little inadequate. What would Ray Mears do here he muses. J lights the gas burner under the table and little kettle starts to stir.

"Hello" calls an unreasonably cheerful voice rising like birdsong from between the trees. "Is this the pond dipping then?" J & K exchange glances. Is this for real? Lu and Hollie look real enough. And bright and expectant. And positive and energetic. "We're here for the pond dip!" "So are we" says a young lad from the path behind us. He's doing a project for school explains his mum.. Then Tracey arrives with her girls. Game on!

Right then, let's do it. Out comes the kit, loaned to us by BTCV. We do the safety briefing and head for the water's edge. Half fill the trays with pond water and place them away from the dipping point. Demonstrate use of the net. Then pass the nets around. Tentative then vigorous swishing as the kids get the hang of it. As the nets are carefully inverted over the trays several pairs of eyes gradually sharpen their focus. There's nothing there ...yes there is what's that??? And bang on cue through the clearing come Derek and Maggie to the rescue, the Derby City Pond Warden Association movers and shakers. Identification keys consulted hardly a creature escapes without at least a family name from the four youngsters and Mitchell's species list starts to expand.

Survey List compiled by Mitchell Roe aged 8

1. Damselfly Nymph	8. Mayfly Nymph
2. Fly larvae, various	9. Pond Snail
3. Freshwater Hoglouse	10. Ramshorn Snail
4. Freshwater Shrimp	11. Smooth Newt
5. Greater Water Boatman	12. Water fleas/mites, various
6. Leech	13. Whirligig Beetle
7. Lesser Water Boatman	

Later we turn to the land and directed by Judith and Tracey, fresh from a course at Nottingham, we dig for worms.. We learned to distinguish some species and tell their age and sex (not telling – come along yourself next time) and were so absorbed that we almost missed Hannah Brackenbury, roaving photographer from the Derby Evening Telegraph. She took some great shots on a day when the rest of us left the cameras inside. We've got the rights to the group photo..

While the pond dipping continued our older members did a very thorough litter pick round the pond before we returned all the living specimens safely to the water. In spite of the weather the kids (and some of the adults) took some persuading to pack up and it was past four o'clock before we were done. A bit damp on the outside maybe but bright eyed and warmed through by the satisfaction of a great afternoon.

Attendance:

Andrew Bennett and his dogs, Brenda Hitchcox, Cynthia Sims, Derek Golson, Edie Stuart, Hannah Smith, Hollie Henriques, Judith Overton, Ken Clarke, Kerry Ann Roe, Lucinda Schirle, Lynne Wood, Maggie Cooper, Mary Cucinski & Charlie the springer, Mitchell Roe, Rob Elliott, Ron & his grandson, Sophie Smith and Tracey Smith.

We acknowledge the help received from BTCV Stephen Wright, Derby City Pond Warden Association Derek Golson & Maggie Cooper, DET Hannah Brackenbury, Parks Superintendent Ranger Allan Martin, WildDerby Beverley Rhodes & Graham Toone