

# People, Ponds and Water



## EVALUATION & LEGACY REPORT 2015 - 2018

*Inspiring people to connect with Britain's freshwater heritage*



# Acknowledgements

We have been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and support of the hundreds of volunteers who have given their time to support the People, Ponds and Water project - early morning site visits, midnight surveys, scaling mountains and venturing into dense scrub; there has been no end to the lengths they have been willing to go to, to discover and protect the species and places they love.

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FHT

@PondRiverStream

All that's left is to say a great big  
THANK YOU to everyone who has  
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# 1. Our vision for People, Ponds and Water

**The People, Ponds and Water project was the beginning of a national partnership project working with volunteers across England and Wales to monitor, manage and protect freshwater wildlife.**

Freshwaters and the species they support are amongst the most threatened habitats in our modern world. Clean unpolluted water is scarce across most of England and Wales and extinction rates for freshwater biodiversity are significantly higher than for terrestrial and marine habitats.

In spite of this, formal monitoring of freshwaters covers less than 1% of the habitat resource, and mostly focusses on the main rivers and larger lakes. We know very little about the condition and status of our ponds, headwater streams, ditches and smaller lakes.

**Clean Water for Wildlife:** A citizen science survey to raise awareness of the true extent of nutrient pollution, and identify clean water habitats in England and Wales, with the ultimate aim of helping to protect biodiversity. Nutrient pollution is invisible so often doesn't seem 'real' to people. Using quick kits makes it possible for people to easily 'see' pollution for the first time.

Monitoring of freshwater species is also extremely patchy. Historically, efforts have concentrated on just a few charismatic species or has relied on ad-hoc recording which makes it hard to undertake robust analysis to identify change and the reasons for change.

Knowledge gaps such as these create critical barriers to habitat and species protection. As part of People, Ponds and Water we aimed to bring together an army of trained freshwater champions who would help provide the evidence.

**PondNet:** A volunteer survey network to collect statistically robust data to identify trends in pond quality and pond species, including uncommon plants and animals. Survey methodologies are standardised and include environmental metrics; giving information that will help to explain the reasons for changes in biological quality, and ultimately help to guide the direction of freshwater policy.

We know that more than 90% of lowland waterbodies are degraded but the top 10% of ponds support around 70% of all freshwater species, including more rare and protected species than rivers, lakes or ditches. So it is vitally important that we protect our best freshwater habitats and species to ensure they stay in good condition.

The best-of-the-best ponds form part of a network of the highest quality pond sites. Supporting land managers and local communities can play a vital role; helping to raise awareness of the importance of these sites and implement practical management solutions based on best practice so that the species they support can thrive.

**Flagship Ponds:** A network of some of the most important pond sites in England and Wales, known to support populations of species under threat. Local communities develop sustainable plans for these sites. Schools and local groups work on citizen science projects, bespoke to each site. New funding is provided to undertake monitoring, management, pond creation and help species recovery.



## 2. Evaluation strategy and legacy planning

People, Ponds and Water has been a pivotal project; we've developed new ways of working, we've uncovered critical new information on the status of species and habitats, and we've delivered a sustainable legacy for freshwater biodiversity, for our volunteers and for our project staff.

Along the way we've also learned some valuable lessons for Freshwater Habitats Trust, and for other organisations hoping to run similar projects in the future.

In the People, Ponds and Water project we wanted to inspire people to connect with, understand and participate in the protection of their freshwater environment. Volunteers would become directly involved in actions that would make a nationally significant difference to the long-term protection of freshwater heritage.

Freshwater Habitats Trust developed an evaluation strategy and legacy plan for People, Ponds and Water during the development phase of the project with support from an independent evaluator "Heritage Insider".

The aim of our evaluation was two-fold: it ensured we achieved our project objectives and targets, and it helped us improve the project outcomes for people, the freshwater environment and our organisation as the project progressed.

We wanted to address **three key questions**:

- Evaluation of the benefits to heritage was assessed for each of the project elements.
- The benefits of People, Ponds and Water to people and communities.
- The outcomes for our organisation and the project legacy for wildlife, for our partners and for volunteers.

**Evaluation of the benefits to heritage was assessed for each of the project elements.**

We compared each of the project elements against quantitative and qualitative targets, e.g. number of people engaged, number of sites surveyed, completion of resources, and volunteer satisfaction.

### PondNet

- The *extent to which the network provided sufficient data* to validly assess and explain change in its key species, habitats and environmental measures - assessed through analysis of the data entered in the PondNet database,
- The *quality of the data* collected, by comparison with professional quality assurance data collected by re-surveying at least 5% of sites previously surveyed by volunteers,
- The *quality of project resources* including support materials and IT infrastructure, assessed through volunteer and other user feedback,
- The *extent to which the data were used by others*, undertaken as a qualitative assessment.

### Clean Water for Wildlife

- The *number of survey results* returned,
- The *use made of the kits and data*, assessed qualitatively and through partner questionnaires,
- The *extent of volunteer transitioning to other activities*: assessed through on-line survey polls of participants.

### Flagship Ponds

- The *delivery of SMART targets* on each Flagship Pond site as delivered within the lifetime of the project,
- The *extent to which national objectives had been addressed* for Priority Species,
- The *extent to which project results had been disseminated* at both local and national levels.



## Evaluation of the benefits to people and communities.

Evaluation of the benefits to people was evaluated through questionnaires and interviews with project volunteers and other participants; including before- and after-surveys for longer-term volunteers, as well as immediate feedback forms for short term events such as training courses.

- The *number of people who participated* in each element of the project compared to targets,
- The level to which *people gained benefits from the project*, framed in terms of generic learning outcomes:
  - Knowledge and understanding,
  - Skills,
  - Attitudes and values,
  - Enjoyment, inspiration, creativity,
  - Activity, behaviour, progression.
- The projects reach, i.e. the geographical extent of the People, Ponds and Water project,
- The breadth of our socio-economic engagement. Assessed through anonymous surveys of project volunteers and interviews with representatives of harder to reach groups.

## Evaluation of the project outcomes for our organisation and the project legacy.

We needed to ensure that our own organisational structures were working well, and evaluated this in three ways:

- Internally *through staff reviews* providing targets for staff achievement and development, as well as providing feedback from staff on the adequacy of organisational management and staffing,
- Through *external review by the project* evaluator, the advisory board, and through questionnaire evaluations from volunteers and partners,
- Assessing our ability to achieve project legacy and benefits, for people and for our organisation.







## 3. Evaluation methodologies

**People, Ponds and Water was a complex project with three strong overlapping elements. Add to that, concepts that were new approaches to citizen science; and ways of working that were new to us as an organisation. Evaluation at all stages of the project has been an important process in our learning.**

Freshwater Habitats Trust were keen to undertake the project evaluation ourselves so that we could be directly involved in seeing feedback and developing the project as we went along.

To ensure that we assessed each of the three key questions without bias, we used a combination of techniques and sought responses from different project audiences, bringing these together to get a consensus of opinions.

We also asked for Heritage Insider our external evaluator to undertake evaluation to answer specific questions, where we felt an independent approach was needed. We then bought the results together to provide a comprehensive review of the results.



### Evaluation during the development phase of People, Ponds and Water

Consultation interviews with 10 potential project audiences and a workshop with 26 project partners to assess our approach to structured surveillance (PondNet) to identify challenges and opportunities.

Power analysis of data to design the PondNet network to ensure that we could produce statistically reliable results.

Evaluation of the PondNet trials in Hampshire, Cheshire, Yorkshire and Sussex to develop the project structure and understand the support requirements of volunteers.

### Evaluation at the end of Year 1 of the People, Ponds and Water project

In year 1, we trialled Clean Water for Wildlife with 5 neighbourhood survey groups, to inform roll-out for 2016 and 2017.

Review of PondNet training through questionnaires handed out at the end of sessions with c. 117 individuals.

Quarterly reports as required by Heritage Lottery Fund (including quarterly officer updates).

Annual report and review meeting with PPW advisory group, and with Heritage Lottery Fund and our HLF mentor.

SWOT analysis by the 4 regional project officers and project administrator at 1<sup>st</sup> year team review meeting.

### Evaluation at the end of Year 2 of the People, Ponds and Water project

On-going project reports and review meetings with PPW advisory group, Heritage Lottery Fund and HLF mentor.

Survey Monkey feedback questionnaires for each project element:

- PondNet (103 respondents)
- Clean Water for Wildlife (127 respondents)
- Flagship Ponds (49 respondents)

Interim evaluation report to Heritage Lottery Fund, HLF mentor and Heritage Insider.



### Evaluation at the end of Year 3 of the People, Ponds and Water project

On-going project reports and review meetings with PPW advisory group, Heritage Lottery Fund and HLF mentor.

Survey Monkey feedback questionnaires for the project as a whole (369 respondents).

Pre and post survey questionnaires to harder to reach Clean Water for Wildlife groups (59 respondents).

Telephone interviews with 3 representatives for the harder to reach Clean Water for Wildlife groups.

Analysis of web and social media.

Legacy planning with the PPW project team and wider Freshwater Habitats Trust staff.

### Independent evaluation by Heritage Insider

Critical friend support and training for PPW project team (2014 - 2018).

Interviews with 5 teachers to assess engagement by schools as a potential audience for Clean Water for Wildlife - April 2014.

Interim and end of year 1 and year 2 review meetings for PPW project team.

A focus group in August 2017, with 7 members of the PPW project team.

Telephone interviews to understand key issues with audiences from:

- 5 representatives from the Flagship Pond groups.
- 14 volunteers from the PondNet project.
- 3 representatives from the Network of Local Environmental Record Centres.







## 4. Overview of the outcomes from the project

### What we achieved . . .

Freshwater environments are experiencing extinction rates 5 times higher than their terrestrial counterparts<sup>1</sup>, and in lowland landscapes the majority of freshwater habitats are polluted<sup>2</sup>.

As an organisation, Freshwater Habitats Trust and a small number of partner organisations have been championing the value of freshwater habitats. But the amount we could achieve in isolation was limited.

The People, Ponds and Water ethos is that the best way to protect freshwater habitats is to increase people's enjoyment, knowledge and experience of them.

All communities have access to freshwater habitats. If we wanted to make a difference to the general understanding of the importance of freshwater biodiversity, increase knowledge about the pressures and threats facing freshwater habitats, and the need to conserve the very best remaining habitats we needed to reach out to a wider audience.

The People, Ponds and Water **volunteers have made a real and significant difference to freshwater heritage** through the national surveys and Flagship ponds projects.

- The first ever national survey for Great Crested Newts, the results of which have been reported to the European Commission.
- Data from PondNet and Clean Water for Wildlife have been adopted as a priority habitat layer by the national statutory agencies.
- Discovery of previously unknown declines in pond habitats and protected species even within protected areas, which will be addressed through national reviews with site management.

- Recovery of species to sites from which they'd been lost, and creation of new high quality habitats within the lifetime of the project.

The People, Ponds and Water project has **exceeded our expectations reaching out to a wide range of people and communities**.

- The number of people engaged in each element of the project was well above our expected targets. We aimed to engage 15,000 volunteers and surveyors, and in total engaged more than 18,000.
- Two-thirds of participants said that they had never taken part in a freshwater survey before.
- More than 90% of participants said they had learnt something new about freshwater biodiversity from being involved in the project.

People, Ponds and Water has **allowed our organisation to grow and created a stable platform** for ongoing work with partners and volunteers.

- The power of new technologies to engage volunteers has been demonstrated through the use of clean water test kits and eDNA kits to survey Great Crested Newts. This has opened our eyes to future opportunities.
- We've secured funding to offer 4 of the project staff full time employment and the remaining two part time work whilst we develop other bids.
- Other projects and organisations are adopting the techniques and survey resources that we've created during the People, Ponds and Water project – e.g. the Thame Catchment Partnership, National Trust, Our Past: Our Future HLF funded landscape partnership project in the New Forest.

<sup>1</sup> Vaughn CC (2010) Biodiversity Losses and Ecosystem Function in Freshwaters: Emerging Conclusions and Research Directions. *BioScience*, 60 (1) 25-35.

<sup>2</sup> Williams P, Biggs J, Crowe A, Murphy J, Nicolet P, Weatherby A, Dunbar M (2010) Countryside Survey Technical Ponds Report from 2007. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.



## What could we have done better . . . ?

People, Ponds and Water was an ambitious project, challenging for any organisation to deliver, but with additional challenges for Freshwater Habitats Trust as we effectively doubled our number of staff and built a new volunteer network to undertake delivery.

Whilst the project as a whole was a success, evaluation highlighted several elements which we could have done better.

### WaterNet

During the development phase we identified that an important part of the project and the project legacy would be to have a central on-line database, where people could submit records, download results and see their results in context, with some interpretation of what the results meant.

We planned to create a bespoke database within the first six months of the project. Elements of the database were completed and made available to a restricted number of users, but it took the full project to produce what we had originally outlined in the project brief.

Underestimating the design complexity and the need to confirm elements of the design as the project developed led to the considerable delays.

The frustration this caused was reflected in feedback by volunteers who were looking forward to having this two-way access to their own and other people's data. We minimised the impacts, by working more closely with volunteers to collect their data, but this caused extra work for the project team.

In hindsight we should have had the database in place before the project began, and/or sought more 'like for like' quotes in order to judge the likelihood that the work could be completed on time and on budget.

The good news is that there is now a database in place for future project delivery and it will be possible for volunteers to use this tool post project, which will form a significant part of the legacy for PondNet and Clean Water for Wildlife volunteers.

### Project scale

The scale and ambition of the People, Ponds and Water project led to some difficult challenges. The project team were spread thinly both geographically and between the three project elements. They felt that each project element on its own would have been a full time job.

However, they also felt that it was a fully cohesive project and although we discussed it we were all unwilling to scale back on any of the project elements.

A central volunteer coordinator as part of the project team who could have supported the project officers as and when needed would have significantly helped to spread the workload.

### Legacy for the volunteers

We found that the greatest project successes were where volunteers had very close one-to-one support from the project officers. This applied to both PondNet and Flagship Pond sites. Clean Water for Wildlife surveyors were more independent but still required a lot of handholding because this was such a new technique.

Volunteer feedback indicated that time spent with experts was one of the elements that they enjoyed most, and others wished that there could have been more time available to spend undertaking joint surveys, joint site visits, with the project officers.

We have concerns that without a continued local coordinator role we will lose volunteers who are not highly self-motivated. This was exacerbated because of the changed agreement between Natural England and Local Environmental Record Centres which had formed a part of our legacy plans for the project.

To minimise this risk we have given volunteers the opportunity to transition to new projects that we've been developing with project partners, and where possible linked them into existing volunteer networks locally to keep them engaged.



## 5. PondNet

**PondNet is the first national volunteer survey network for pond habitats and uncommon pond plants and animals in England and Wales.**

Over the last three years we've built a monitoring network of randomly selected sites, securing landowner permissions and recruiting and training volunteers.

At a national level, we worked with species groups and experts to produce statistically robust and repeatable survey techniques.

At a local level, support from Environmental Record Centres, a network of highly skilled local experts and the limitless enthusiasm of our volunteers has made the survey a success.

The quantity and quality of data collected by volunteers has allowed us to identify and explain change in its key species, pond habitats and environmental measures.

- Volunteers have submitted **8,500 individual records** from over **3,300 ponds**
- PondNet has collected statistically significant data on **15 priority pond species**
- We've held over **190 training events** for more than **1,600 volunteers**
- Our survey packs and 'How to videos' are available online, including over **30 species ID and survey sheets**
- New data has enabled us to **report on the status of pond habitats** in protected sites and in the wider countryside



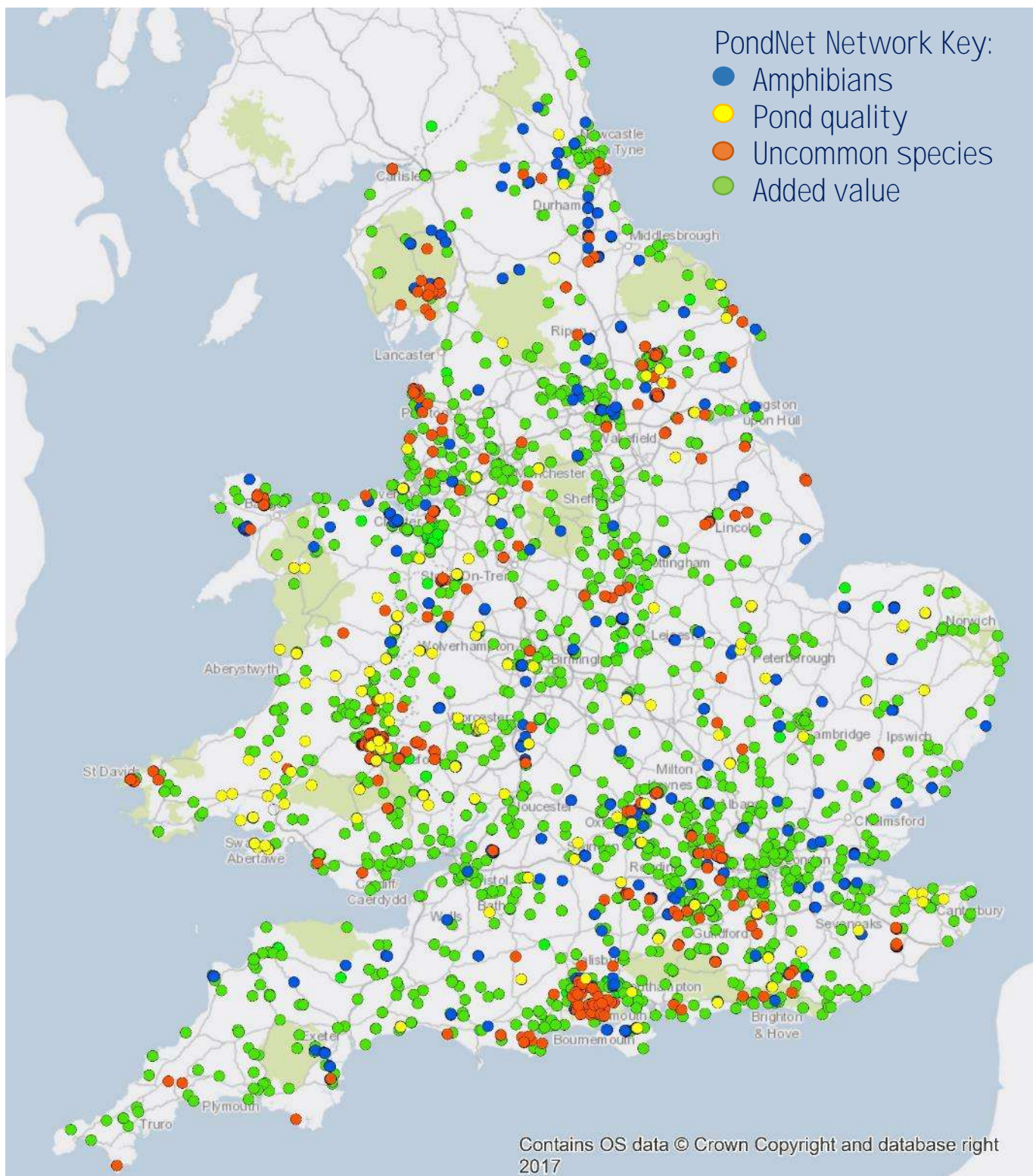
***What did the volunteers think?***

*I wanted to say thank you so much for everything I've gained and learned from my volunteering.*

*Water & nature can be an endless and daily source of fascination.*

*FHT has advanced [my enjoyment] in so many ways that are now a part of my everyday life - even leeches (medicinal of course) now are amazing!*





## PondNet is comprised of several overlapping sub-networks:

**Amphibian network:** recording the number of occupied ponds per randomly selected 1 km grid squares (incl. eDNA Great Crested Newt surveys).

**Pond quality network:** plant and invertebrate surveys of randomly selected ponds.

**Uncommon species:** monitoring populations of uncommon plant and invertebrate species at specific known ponds using a standardised methodology.

**Added value sites:** volunteer selected sites including PondNet spawn surveys (Common Frog and Toad) and community surveys for dragonflies.



## 5.1 PondNet – Achievements against targets

		Target	Achieved	Proportion of target achieved (%)		
				50	100	Target exceeded
Support materials	Volunteer survey packs					
	Volunteer H&S					
	Survey methods	32	37			116%
	Species ID sheets	32	32			
	Training videos	5	8			160%
	Guide to aquatic plant ID					
Survey sites	Identify survey locations	900	3380			+300%
	Records entered	1050	7607			+700%
	Historic data entered	650	958			147%
Training	Basic level events	180	185			
	Expert level events	12	12			
	<b>Total training events</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>197</b>			
People	Basic level volunteers trained	1500	1503			
	Expert level volunteers trained	60	122			+200%
	Mentors and trainers trained	40	48			120%
	Volunteers submit records	1050	2399			+200%
Partners	Agree roll-out steps with partners					
	National/local media	5	29			+500%
	Agree equipment hubs					
	Agree species licencing					

**PondNet targets were achieved or exceeded.** The number of people signing up to take part in PondNet was double the number we anticipated. This was hugely positive, as we were able to gather the right **quantity** of data to undertake statistically robust analysis of the results.

It also presented two challenges – managing such a large volunteer network to ensure that individual **volunteers felt sufficiently supported** and making sure that we maintained the **quality of data being collected**.



## 5.2 Evaluation of PondNet data quantity and quality

PondNet was designed to collect statistically robust data, which requires standardised methodologies and a randomly stratified sample of sites. From the beginning we were clear that we were not collecting data for the sake of it, but that any data collected should be part of the monitoring network.

We were also aware that different surveys would suit the skill set of different volunteers.

PondNet amphibian surveys are an entry level activity for volunteers with little or no training required. In the design of PondNet we envisaged a network of 200 1 km grid squares across England and Wales surveyed using traditional amphibian survey techniques i.e. 4 visits between dusk and midnight using a torch to search for breeding adults, egg searches and pond netting techniques.

Thanks to funding from Natural England, Defra and others we were able to supplement the national survey with eDNA (environmental DNA) kits for Great Crested Newts. These replace the need for repeat night time visits because they are based on one water sample collected at any time during the breeding season. This is the first ever national survey to use eDNA to monitor amphibian populations.

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**eDNA has revolutionised the possibilities for collecting credible data on the distribution of Great Crested Newts.**

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In a trial project of the eDNA kits, we had found them to be highly effective at detecting Great Crested Newts when they were present (99% effective), versus traditional torch surveys (75%). However, there is a cost consideration as a single use eDNA kit cost c. £100, whilst a standard robust torch of sufficient power to survey newts costs c. £15. Until now, QA of the eDNA kits, versus traditional methods, for volunteers taking part in a national survey had not been assessed.



Analysis of the PondNet results showed that all surveys completed in full (2015-2017) were completed using eDNA (380 ponds, 131 1 km grid squares). In the remaining 69 squares of the 200 1 km network, a combination of eDNA and traditional surveys were used, but where traditional techniques the surveys were only partially completed. The eDNA approach worked significantly better for volunteers.

At the other end of the spectrum we also undertook QA of survey results which required high levels of skill.

Plant species richness is an important survey metric in PondNet because it strongly correlates with pond quality. It is also used to assess priority pond status in PSYM. During 2016 we surveyed five ponds at random across England and Wales and compared volunteer results with those of Penny Williams, Freshwater Habitats Trust's technical director.

Analysis of plant survey data shows that plants were rather poorly assessed by volunteers. Only two of the ponds had richness totals that were within 75% of the total obtained by the QA surveyor (80% and 92% similarity). At two ponds, the volunteer results for species richness were less than 20% of the QA surveyor total (14% and 19% similarity). The remaining pond was just half (58%) of the QA result.





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**There is still a big gap in the accuracy of complex surveys, between experienced and inexperienced volunteers.**

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As we had seen in the PondNet trials, there was a clear disparity between inexperienced volunteers and volunteers who also happened to be professional freshwater ecologists in their day jobs, and whose results were usually closely comparable with the QA survey.

Inexperienced volunteers were prone to some misidentifications, but the biggest discrepancy was apparently due to inadequate searching, missing species. This discrepancy increased as pond richness increased; a combination of factors including, (i) species rich ponds may include a greater number of harder to identify species, and (ii) species rich ponds have smaller individual species abundance, increasing the risk of missing species during searches by inexperienced volunteers.

We were able to plug gaps in the core skilled PSYM network using a smaller team of highly skilled volunteers and a wider group of volunteers supported by the PPW regional project officers.

At the start of 2017 the PondNet network was fulfilled, but we wanted to be able to offer volunteers other survey options that would not compromise the quality of the data. We launched the PondNet spawn survey to engage volunteers in recording breeding amphibians (frog and toad spawn). This is important data for us, but also a great transition activity for new recorders and those who had previously undertaken clean water surveys.

This activity went incredibly well and we received more than 1,380 records from England, Wales (and Scotland!), from 1,085 1 km grid squares.

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**Volunteers need a range of surveys to suit their skills; rather than trying to upskill volunteers in a short space of time, to meet the needs of the survey.**

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## 5.3 Feedback from volunteers on PondNet

PondNet relies on volunteer input to collect enough data to provide credible results, and to provide accurate and statistically reliable results. We were asking a lot from volunteers, in terms of their time commitment and skill set. It was therefore a high priority for us, that volunteers enjoyed their experience and felt fully supported.

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**98% of volunteers said that they had enjoyed or really enjoyed taking part in PondNet.**

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Feedback from volunteers suggested that they were happy with the project resources:

- 96% rated the website resources as good or excellent,
- 97% rated the project videos as good or excellent,
- 98% said they had all the information they needed to undertake the surveys,
- 94% said they had all the equipment they needed to undertake the survey,
- 100% of volunteers were satisfied with all elements of the PondNet training sessions.

### Volunteer feedback

We asked one of our core volunteers, who has been with us for the whole of the PondNet project, for detailed feedback on his impression of PondNet and how it was working. The feedback was largely positive but he raised an important issue which we have heard on the grapevine from others. The question was, "Have you felt well supported throughout your time volunteering?"

Answer: Yes, but felt that PondNet was not as prepared as it could be for the 'volunteer army' who had signed up. Time to fully support all of these volunteers may not be available because of the geographical area covered by the regional officers and how busy they were with the multiple elements of the People, Ponds and Water project.



He commented that, volunteers need to be nurtured, encouraged and kept on board, without this some volunteers might leave to join other projects. He thought that the training was great but afterwards there were long gaps and lack of contact. He also commented that volunteers like himself took part in surveys like this in part for the social side and the possibility of linking people together. This was achieved at the PondNet training sessions but afterwards without a central hub and a regular programme of meetings these volunteers lost contact. This was especially true for volunteers who did not use social media.

PondNet was designed to have a fairly independent volunteer network, connected via social media, and we recognise that this approach does not suit everybody. One of the reasons for this decision was because we wanted the network to continue to function after HLF funding for the People, Ponds and Water project ceased, as we are likely to have a smaller team coordinating the project at a national level. However, we are keen to understand what we could have done differently and to talk to volunteers who have left the project to determine why. We asked Heritage Insider to undertake some independent evaluation for us to understand these issues (see below).



Telephone interviews were conducted with 14 PondNet volunteers by Heritage Insider, external evaluators of the PPW project (Appendix 1). The purpose of the interview was to find out how well the volunteers felt PondNet had worked, what challenges they had faced, and any improvements to future projects they would like to see.

The experience of the PondNet volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive. It is evident that the majority of volunteers' expectations had been met or exceeded, with 98% selecting 'four' or 'five', on a five point scale.

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**91% of volunteers felt they had learned something new about the value of ponds for freshwater wildlife since becoming a PondNet volunteer.**

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Positive factors discussed included:

- The high levels of training and instruction provided to the volunteers,
- Volunteers were provided with a strong grounding to the work by being shown exactly what they were doing at the start of the surveying,
- Opportunities to develop new skills and develop a catalogue of new knowledge.

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**"I've really enjoyed it, the people on the project were great, Naomi and Francesca were super and very supportive. They were never judgemental and that was lovely."**

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**- PondNet volunteer**

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The majority of volunteers felt that they have gained something from the experience as well as being able to give back.

But there are always better ways of working and there were some things which we could change for future projects:

- The problems with regard to the data portal (see Section 4) were raised as a significant snagging point for the volunteers once they were ready to enter their results,
- Some volunteers would have liked more interaction with the project team or other volunteers, working with at least one other person seemed to work best for volunteers,
- Certainty and more information about how volunteers could continue to engage after the project ended would have been welcomed earlier on in the project.

## ***PondNet volunteer*** **Kirsty Staunton**

I have always found ponds and streams interesting. I taught Biology for over 20 years and one of my favourite parts of the syllabus was freshwater ecology and our annual field trips to local forest streams. Volunteering with Freshwater Habitat Trust has given me the opportunity to develop this interest while gathering important information about the biodiversity of ponds.

What I particularly enjoy about volunteering for FHT is the scope to learn. With the help and guidance of FHT staff I have completed habitat surveys of several New Forest ponds for rare plant and invertebrate species for the PondNet project. My knowledge of aquatic plants is increasing and I have been introduced to the amazing fairy shrimp and fascinating mud snail. I thoroughly enjoy my voluntary work with FHT. I find it relaxing and rewarding and would recommend it to anyone with an interest in the aquatic environment."







## 5.4 PondNet outcomes for stakeholders

At a national level we worked with 14 species groups and national experts to agree standardised methodologies for the PondNet species to make our surveys compatible with existing or previous work, including Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK, Aquatic Coleopterists Conservation Trust, Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, British Pteridological Society, BugLife, Conchological Society, Dragonfly Society, FrogLife, Ian Hughes, Martin Hammond, Richard Lansdown, and the Species Recovery Trust.

As a result we have been able to feed into national datasets for Article 17 reporting on implementation of the Habitats Directive. The main focus of the directive is on maintaining and restoring a favourable conservation status for habitat types and species of community interest. Monitoring and reporting under the directive is a legal requirement.

PondNet volunteers have made it possible to report on the national status of Great Crested Newts for the first time thanks to eDNA; we've reported on the status of Medicinal Leech for the first time in 20 years; and have collaborated with the plant groups to undertake the most extensive surveys for Pillwort, Marsh Clubmoss and Tubular Water-dropwort.

We've also been able to report on change in the condition of priority pond habitats for the first time. These ponds, mostly within nature reserves, should be maintained at the highest standard. Unfortunately we have been able to show that declines are occurring even within protected sites, due to factors such as increasing secondary scrub on sites which lack conservation grazing and the shadow of an extinction debt occurring as we lose species across whole landscapes. Our work will now form a priority pond layer flagging up issues within the database of the statutory agencies.

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**"Bringing in more volunteers has been useful, the promotion around the project enabled us to reach volunteers we hadn't reached before."**

**- LERC representative.**

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At a local level, the project has benefitted from the support of Local Environmental Record Centres. These hubs are a useful connection between a national project and local delivery, and a model we outlined as a sensible way for the People, Ponds and Water project to become sustainable post 2018.

In England, LERC support was encouraged with extra funding from Natural England direct to LERCs through their MoAs in 2015/16, in the second year of the project the relationship between Natural England and these LERCs changed and the MoAs were cancelled. However, Natural England's support for the project continued in the form of a grant allowing Freshwater Habitats Trust to agree MoAs direct with each of the LERCs.

Thirty seven LERCs in England agreed to this way of working. Two LERCs declined as they did not have staff time available to help with the project. In Wales, there was no financial support for LERCs and we approached them separately to agree an effective way of working.

Our experience of this way of working, a national project administered at a local level, has been very positive, and we wanted to understand the benefits of this approach for the national organisations and LERCs. Telephone interviews were conducted with three LERC representatives by Heritage Insider, external evaluators of the PPW project (Appendix 2).

The LERCs said that the project had been useful because it had:

- Built capacity for the LERC and for existing projects within the LERC,
- Led to coordination of a greater number of volunteer efforts,
- Helped the LERC reach new volunteers.

What could we have done differently?

- Better transfer of data back to participating LERCs during the project,
- Inclusion of LERCs in the project development phase,
- Being more aware of the individual LERCs agendas to help fulfil their objectives as well as the objectives of the project.



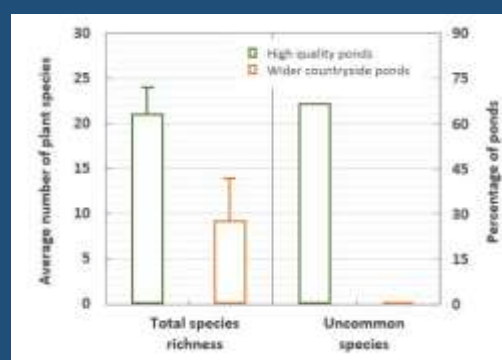
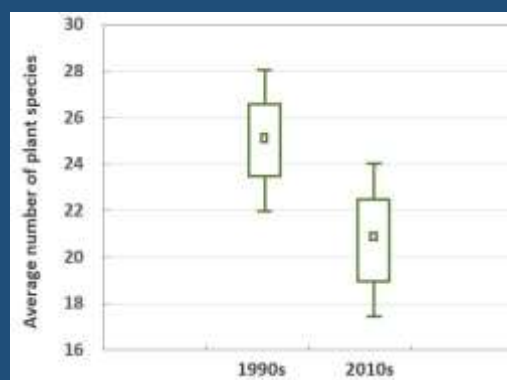
## PondNet reveals new information about the quality of our best ponds



In the early 1990s Freshwater Habitats Trust undertook the first survey of high quality ponds in the UK. The results revealed that ponds were exceptionally rich and important habitats, supporting more species, and more rare species than our best rivers. In 2015-16 the People, Ponds and Water project provided an opportunity to re-visit some of these amazing ponds and see how they had changed.

Disappointingly two-thirds of the high quality ponds in England had lost a significant number of plant species and a disproportionate number of uncommon species over the c. 25 years between surveys. High quality ponds in Wales retained more of their species but similar losses were recorded in the number of uncommon plants.

PondNet surveys of wider countryside ponds, outside of nature reserves, also revealed a worrying picture. The average total number of wetland plants recorded per pond was less than half of the total from high quality pond sites. In the survey, less than 1% of wider countryside ponds were found to support an uncommon plant species compared to 78% of high quality pond sites.



Declines in species richness (top). The poor condition of wider countryside ponds compared with high quality sites (bottom).



## 6. Clean Water for Wildlife

**Clean Water for Wildlife** is a nationwide project to raise awareness of the critical importance of clean unpolluted water for freshwater wildlife.

In the first national survey of its kind, we recruited citizen scientists to gather data about nutrient pollution from all kinds of freshwaters including ponds, lakes, rivers, streams and ditches, all of which are important for freshwater wildlife.

Over 31,000 water quality kits were distributed across England and Wales through the Clean Water for Wildlife survey.

We continue to receive more results on a daily basis through the WaterNet on-line data portal, but so far just under 10,000 records have been submitted from around 7,000 freshwater habitats, including ponds, lakes, rivers, streams and ditches.

People have started to actively use Clean Water for Wildlife data to raise the profile of the importance of clean water at local and national levels.

**The bad news is** the extent of nutrient pollution. We found high levels of nitrates and phosphates amongst all freshwater habitat types.

**The good news** is that people found clean unpolluted water in all the landscapes they tested, and some landscapes were almost completely free from nutrient pollution.

**And more good news** is that the results reveal for the first time the national importance of small waterbodies in the clean water network.

The majority of the clean water was concentrated in ponds - 66% of the ponds tested had clean water; whilst few running waters were free from nutrient pollution - only 27% of rivers and streams tested had clean water.



***What did the volunteers think?***

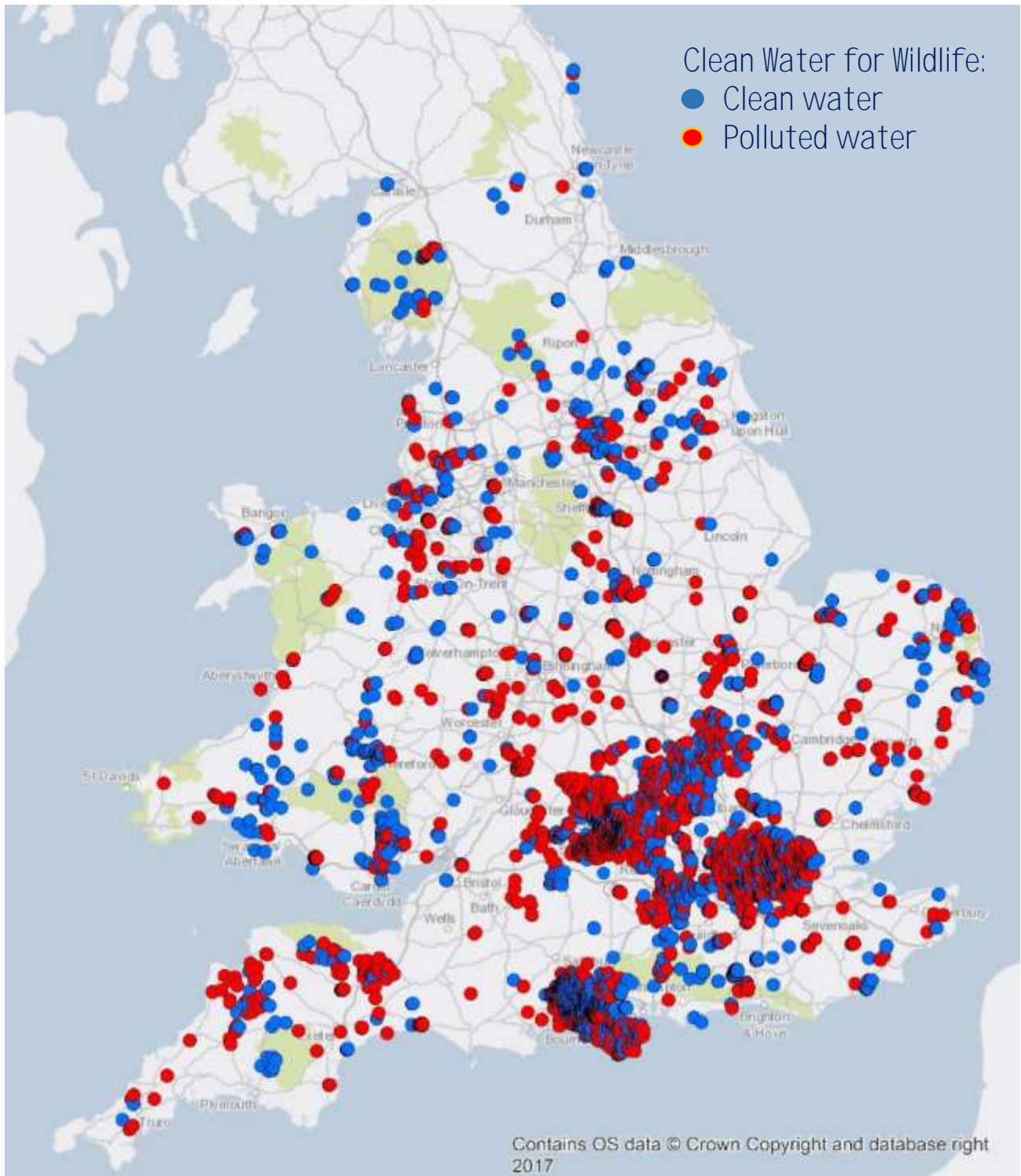
*Learning more about some of my local places, especially when I've wondered about their habitat quality in the past.*

*I enjoyed the walks to get to the places and to have the added purpose.*

*My daughter is home schooled so it was a great learning opportunity for her.*

*A worthwhile project making good use of lottery funds.*

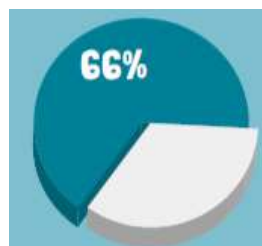




## Proportion of ponds, rivers and streams with clean water in England and Wales

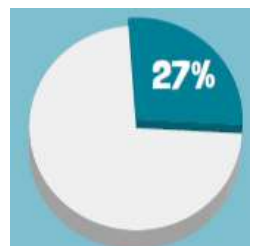
### Ponds:

66% of ponds surveyed were Clean Water habitats



### Rivers and streams:

Only 27% of rivers and streams surveyed were Clean Water habitats





## 6.1 Clean Water for Wildlife – Achievements against targets

		Target	Achieved	Proportion of target achieved (%)		
				50	100	Target exceeded
Support materials	Technical report					
	Volunteer H&S					
	Training presentation					
	Training video					
	Survey leaflet					
	Follow-on activity packs					
Publicity	End of year reports	3	7			+200%
	Dissemination events/talks	3	11			+300%
	National/local media	5	22			+400%
	Stakeholder meetings	10	14			140%
Groups	Yr 1 Neighbourhood groups	4	5			125%
	Yr 2 Volunteer and partner groups	320	583			182%
	Yr 3 School groups	30	62			+200%
	<b>Total groups</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>650</b>			<b>184%</b>
People	Yr 1 Neighbourhood volunteers	40	41			
	Yr 2 Survey and partner volunteers	5400	8271			153%
	Yr 3 School volunteers (children)	1000	1538			154%
	Yr 3 Independent volunteers	7000	4966			
	<b>Total volunteers</b>	<b>13440</b>	<b>14816</b>			<b>110%</b>
Kits	Yr 1 Neighbourhood group kits	240	275			115%
	Yr 2 Volunteer survey group kits	11400	15501			136%
	Yr 3 School kits	665	1032			155%
	Yr 3 Independent volunteer kits	14000	14937			
	<b>Total kits</b>	<b>26305</b>	<b>31745</b>			<b>121%</b>
Training	Yr 1 Training neighbourhood groups	4	4			
	Yr 2 Training volunteer groups	8	14			175%
	<b>Total training sessions</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>			<b>150%</b>



## 6.2 Evaluation of Clean Water for Wildlife

The lessons learned from evaluation during Year 1 and Year 2 of the project allowed us to deliver an exciting third year of Clean Water for Wildlife. We exceeded the project's targets in terms of the number of kits delivered and the number of groups, schools and communities we've engaged.

- We've distributed over 31,000 (nitrate and phosphate) kits
- Engaged an estimated 14,500 individuals and over 650 groups
- Held 14 stakeholder meetings with key statutory and non-statutory organisations to promote Clean Water for Wildlife, and secured match funding from Thames Water to extend the Clean Water for Wildlife survey in the Thames Region
- Promoted Clean Water for Wildlife at 11 public engagement events
- Delivered 18 Clean Water for Wildlife Training Events to schools and local groups
- Designed bespoke 'CWW Schools Packs', 'CWW Activity Boxes' and 'Follow-on activity packs'
- Linked with more than 62 school groups from 30 schools across England and Wales, including more than 1,500 students aged 7-14
- Collaborated with the HLF funded 'Our Past, Our Future' project, who were then able to recruit an additional 30 school groups from 15 schools, and distributed 450 kits to engage a further 750 students
- One of our schools was the first school in Wales to achieve the Primary Science Quality Mark GOLD award – they made a video using our CWW kits: <https://twitter.com/CaerphillyCBC/status/887698912001359872>



Students using clean water quick kits



Check it out! Our 1st Schools Pack on its way to a school! Find out about our [#ThamesWaterforWildlife](#) activity here [bit.ly/2eXToyJ](http://bit.ly/2eXToyJ)



Congratulations to [@fcwpa](#) – First school in Wales to achieve the Primary Science Quality Mark GOLD Award!



*"I liked how [the follow-on pack] raised the profile of ponds and ditches and their importance for wildlife. It also included a 'what's next' section which is very useful and will hopefully encourage people to get involved in their local community and take pride in their surroundings."*

*In 2017 we launched Clean Water for Wildlife for schools*





## *Social Media push to get more records from the Clean Water for Wildlife survey*

To date, we have received just under 10,000 results from the 31,000 kits distributed. Many of these kits were distributed during the last six months of the project, and we expect to get many more results during the next year (2018).

We did expect to have some kit losses, as participants have told us that they like to use a couple of kits to get a feel for the survey before going out to do their sites.

Our aim will be to get c. 15,000 results, roughly 50% return on the kits we have distributed. In order to improve our chances of getting more results in, we have been running a series of social media posts to point out gaps on the map.

We continue to get daily requests for kits and it seems that the project is continuing to gain momentum even though we are currently at the end of our kit supply. We have made details of the kits suppliers available on Freshwater Habitats Trust's website and are working collaboratively with new partners to purchase kits at a reduced cost for future projects.



## **Clean Water for Wildlife feedback**

Clean Water for Wildlife was designed to be a standalone survey which would require minimal support from the PPW project team, because the resources would make it possible for participants to learn how to use the kits and interpret the results on their own.

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**94% of participants said that they had enjoyed or really enjoyed taking part in Clean Water for Wildlife.**

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Feedback from participants suggested that they were happy with the project resources:

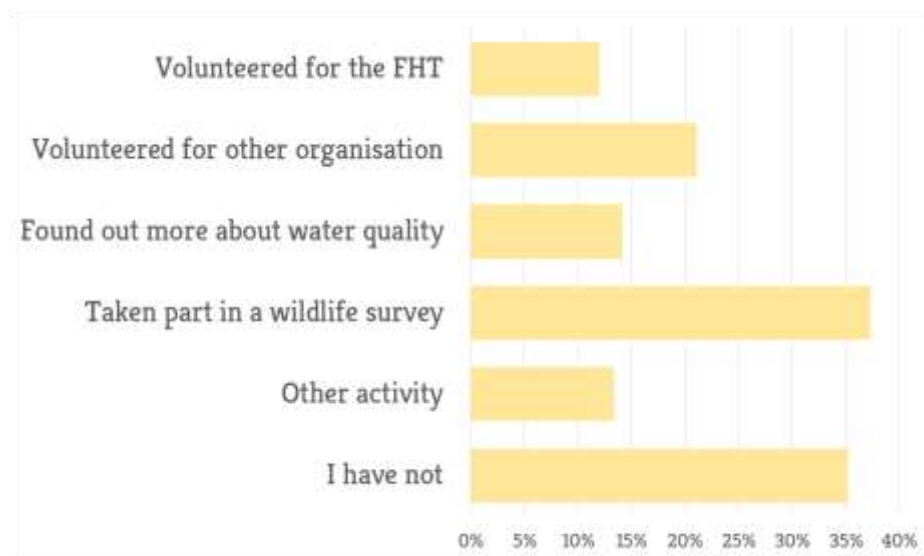
- 94% rated the Clean Water for Wildlife leaflet as good or excellent,
- 100% rated the Clean Water for Wildlife videos as good or excellent,
- 82% of participants found the quick kits easy to use,
- 97% of participants said they would take part in Clean Water for Wildlife again.





## 6.4 Clean Water for Wildlife outcomes for individuals

An important outcome of the Clean Water Wildlife survey was the stepping stone it would provide for people to get into recording both freshwater habitats and wildlife recording in general; and its ability to raise awareness of the impact of nutrient pollution on freshwater wildlife.



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65% of participants went on to take part in other nature based activities.

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*Volunteer activity after taking part in Clean Water for Wildlife demonstrating that it can provide a stepping stone into conservation work*

Clean Water for Wildlife has proven itself to be a hugely popular entry level survey. With 68% of volunteers having never taken part in a survey before.

After taking part in Clean Water for Wildlife, 65% of participants went on to take part in another nature based activity. This included surveys for Freshwater Habitats Trust, but also for other organisations which they had learned about through taking part in the project. Only a third of the volunteers stopped at this activity alone.

A second aim of the survey was to help raise awareness of the impact of nutrient pollution on freshwater habitats. 85% of respondents said they had learnt something new or surprising about their local freshwater environment and the wildlife found there.

A third had learnt about the value of pond habitats for providing clean water habitats in an otherwise polluted landscape.

Another 20% of the respondents were saddened to learn about the widespread impact of nutrient pollution on freshwater habitats in their neighbourhood but felt empowered that they understood why these changes had occurred, and that creating new clean water habitats could really make a difference to the restoration of freshwater biodiversity at a landscape scale.

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**"I learnt about the low quality of the water near to where I work, which was great to pass on to local people to try and improve the water's quality".**

*Anonymous quote from CWW volunteer*

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## 6.5 Clean Water for Wildlife outcomes for stakeholders

The Clean Water for Wildlife survey structure allowed a wide range of audience groups to take part and make use of the project data.

**Neighbourhood groups:** Community volunteers who could make regular nutrient measurements at their local water bodies, with the key aim of using these findings to influence local decision making through: Neighbourhood Plans, Parish Biodiversity Action Plans and Community Wildlife Plans.



*The Blackwater Valley Group volunteers have been undertaking regular water quality sampling using the quick kits since the start of 2015. The results have shown that their river has higher water quality than is usual for lowland England. They are using the data to prepare their own catchment management plan to raise the profile of the importance of their river.*

**Active conservation groups:** Groups whose members had a broadly environmental interest in rural and urban areas including: The Conservation Volunteers, Rivers Trusts, and British Trust for Ornithology.

*Volunteers from the Ock Catchment Partnership used data collected during a "Water Blitz" event to identify clean water areas and create a landscape map of water quality*



### Working with existing projects and organisations:

Environmental groups and their members, such as the Wildlife Trusts and National Park Authorities, who run surveys that already engage people in collecting data.



*On and around the Flagship sites volunteers have collected clean water data which directly influences the management of the sites. At Castor Hanglands, Cambridgeshire, National Trust volunteers and members of the local community collected clean water data to highlight the value of the nature reserve and to highlight the potential for impacts from proposed new developments.*

### National Agencies and policy makers e.g. Defra, Environment Agency, and Natural England:

These are agencies that can use the data to make a difference by, for example: (i) protecting individual sites or (ii) using trend data for better decision making.

*Clean Water for Wildlife has collected the first national dataset on water quality in pond habitats. Natural England are now adding these data to the national Priority Pond map as a proxy to identify important pond sites. These data will be available to all the statutory agencies.*





**Other uses we hadn't anticipated:** Clean Water for Wildlife has been a hugely popular element of the People, Ponds and Water project. Water quality test kits have been sent out far and wide, to volunteers of all ages and interests. We've used them on PondNet and Flagship Pond sites, with community wildlife groups, reserve managers, schools and colleges, professionals in industry, and local individuals who've taken their dogs with them to test the freshwater habitats in their own neighbourhood.



*Coxlease School in Hampshire provides education, care, therapy, welfare and support for boys and girls aged 5 to 19 years old who have severe difficulties regulating their emotional, social and mental health needs. A small group of 5 boys having achieved weekly behaviour targets were given the opportunity to use clean water kits as part of their after school club.*



*Clean water data collected by volunteers has contributed to a brand new way of managing Cothill Fen in Oxfordshire. Prior to the survey, water quality was not known to be an issue. The water testing has shown that it is in fact the primary threat to the reserve. Testing has also pinpointed where the pollution is draining from, leading to positive work with the adjacent landowner and installation of measures to divert polluted water away from the site and channel clean water onto the fen.*



*Restored mineral sites are known to have potential as clean water sites for new pond creation. Collecting clean water data has helped to zone a restored site at Panshanger Park to balance activity on the site between informal recreation and wildlife. Keeping the highest quality sites for wildlife and opening up less vulnerable ponds for dog walkers and duck feeding.*



*Clean Water for Wildlife teamed up with the British Dragonfly Society to survey for clean water habitats - Variable Damselfly are in decline but the reasons why are poorly understood. Poor water quality may be a key cause.*

*Homeschoolers heard about the kits through a shared online forum. A huge success, the kits went out to dozens of individual educators.*





## 6.6 Clean Water for Wildlife reaching new audiences

**Clean Water for Wildlife surveys would lead to the engagement of significantly more people in biodiversity issues, increasing awareness of the value of biodiversity and increasing the number of people taking positive action.**

Wider engagement through Clean Water for Wildlife would enable us to reach a broader range of targeted audiences including: families and children, people of retirement age, minority groups from varied ethnic communities, groups from inner city communities, and groups who can experience barriers which stop them from engaging in wildlife recording communities – for example individuals with physical or learning disabilities.

In the third year of Clean Water for Wildlife we ran a large publicity campaign through our own and partner organisations, websites and social media, ran articles in the wildlife press, and appeared on local radio shows.

We had some notable successes:

- 50% of Clean Water for Wildlife participants were retired (whereas only 18% of the UK population is retired).
- 20% of samples were collected in urban areas (whilst the proportion of land area classified as urban is only 6%).

However, the demographic of participants in Clean Water for Wildlife was a rather traditional sector of the wildlife recording community.

- Outside of our schools programme, only 6% of participants were from local adolescent or young adult social groups.
- Only 10% of working age participants were unemployed (the proportion of people aged 16-64 who were out of work was 15% in 2016).
- 99% of Clean Water for Wildlife participants identified as White British (the UK is obviously much more diverse, 20% of the population are not part of the White British category).

- Only 7% of participants classified as having a physical or mental disability (the UK estimate for disability is 18%).

Given the ease with which these kits could be used, there should have been no barriers to wider audience engagement. We agreed with HLF that we would use contingency to try to directly engage with these harder to reach groups, and evaluate why they had not been able to access the resource before.

We contacted 74 organisations covering the following groups:

- Physical disability charities and groups.
- Group supporting individuals with developmental or learning difficulties.
- Local community groups with a focus on support for different ethnic minorities.
- Local community groups with a focus on support for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Feedback from the surveys showed that once we'd engaged people in Clean Water for Wildlife they loved it.

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**93% of participants said that they enjoyed or really enjoyed taking part in Clean Water for Wildlife.**

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**The barrier to taking part was hearing about the project in the first place.**

- 36% of participants found out about Clean Water for Wildlife following direct contact from our project officer.
  - 20% of participants signed up to take part after reading the web pages specifically targeted to hard to reach groups on the Clean Water for Wildlife web pages.
  - 86% of participants had not heard about Clean Water for Wildlife before the targeted approach. Our passive approach to making contact in the wider survey had not been effective at reaching these groups.
-





## A direct approach is required if we want to improve the audience reach and inclusivity in future surveys.

- Direct engagement increased the number of adolescent and young adult participants from just 7% to 24% of participants.
- Using this approach, 42% of the targeted harder to reach group participants identified as not White British, compared to the 1% engaged when we took the passive approach.
- At the end of 2016 only 7% of participants categorised themselves as having a disability; after the direct approach to these groups we increased the number of disabled participants to 44%.

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Engaging harder to reach groups requires a specific project officer, whose job is to make contact, explain the project/survey principles and organise access permission on behalf of the groups where needed.

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## What resources would have helped harder to reach groups to take part?

We interviewed 3 group leaders who worked with children and adults with learning difficulties to discover whether the general resources we provided for the Clean Water for Wildlife project were suitable for their group members.

- All participants enjoyed how simple and easy to use the kits were and said that they were happy with the resources provided.
- We could have improved the resources by providing a simplified version which left out some of the 'higher' science, as this was too advanced for the age group they were interacting with.
- One group would have liked a list of places where they could visit, with all safety checks and landowner contacts sorted in advance for them.
- Wanting to know more about their waterbody was a natural progression for these groups, as it had been with our wider Clean Water for Wildlife participants. There is a real appetite for other technologies which could help non-technical scientists to participate in gathering credible information about the environment.







## 7. Flagship Ponds

Flagship Ponds are the very best pond sites in England and Wales; identified because they support populations of the some of the UKs rarest species and because they represent some of the least impacted most diverse pond habitats remaining in the country.

PondNet and Clean Water for Wildlife have provided important information on the current status of freshwaters in England and Wales; and it's clear that many habitats and species are increasingly in trouble.

In spite of these challenges we estimate that around 20% of the 400,000 or so ponds in the UK, still achieve Priority Pond status – high quality un-degraded ponds. Flagship Ponds are a sub-set of the very best Priority Ponds. They support one or more of the very rarest pond plant and animal species, a very rich assemblage of species, or internationally important pond types.

An important reason for giving a pond Flagship status is to create a focus for protection and monitoring, and to help raise awareness of a site's importance at a local and regional level.

### Every Flagship Pond site should:

- Be monitored appropriately.
- Have a management plan in place which relates specifically to the ponds and the species they support.
- Funding in place to support management or pond creation.
- Appoint a local “guardian” who will: carry out high-level monitoring and where appropriate liaise with the landowner and provide a link with specialist advisers.

The Flagship Ponds project identified 70 Flagship Pond sites in need of immediate support, about half of all the Flagships which have been identified in England and Wales.



### *What did the Flagship Group members say?*

*This [Flagship training] has completely changed the way I think about what makes a good wildlife pond.*

*Technical support of this nature from experts is invaluable to site managers as much as promoting community interest.*

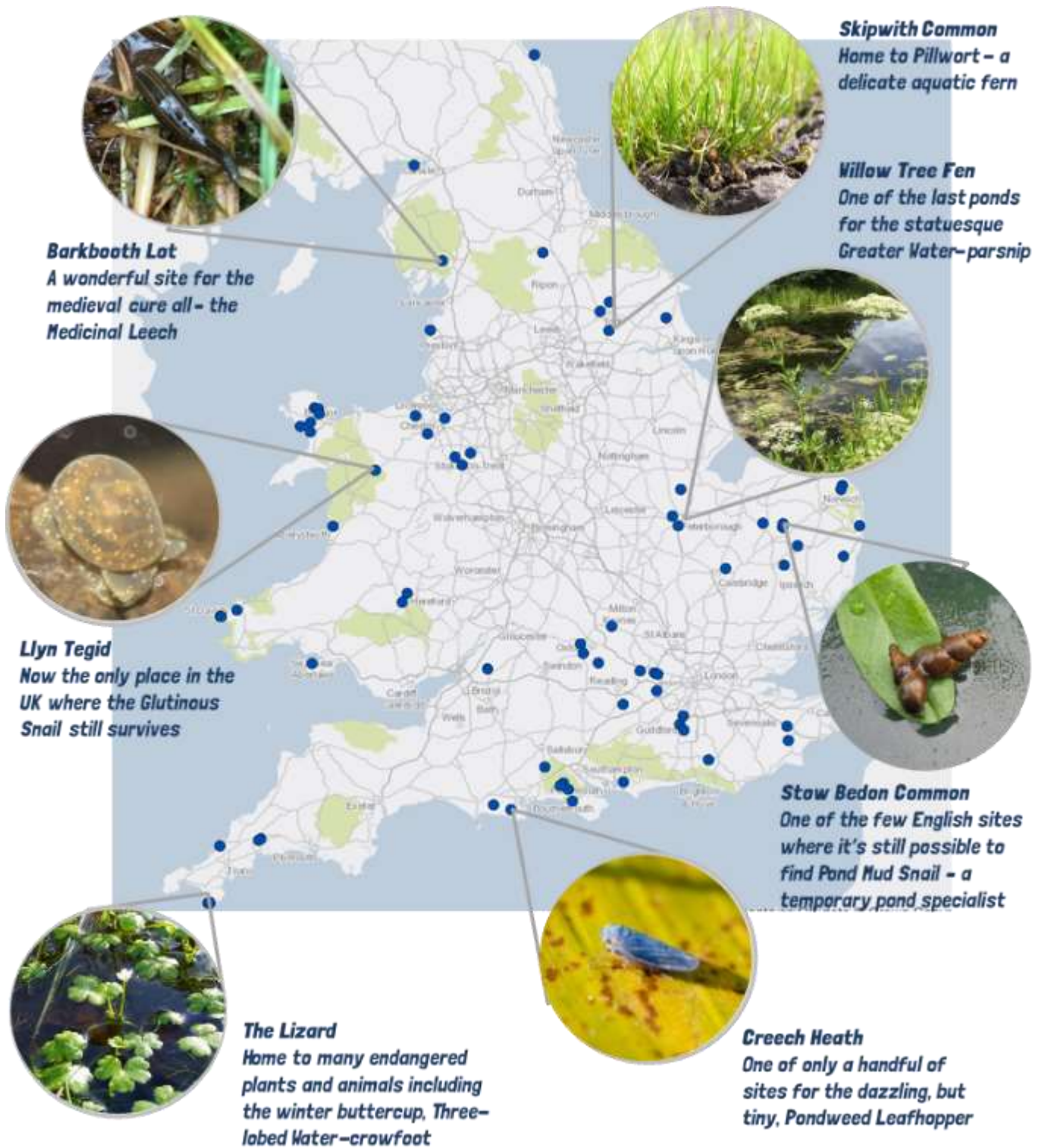


## 7.1 Flagship Ponds – Achievements against targets

		Target	Achieved	Proportion of target achieved (%)		
				50	100	Target exceeded
Support materials	Pond management principles					
	Pond management template					
	Priority species management plans	20	21			
Flagship sites	Flagship agreements signed	70	70			
	Management plans	70	72			
	Community events	42	44			
	Citizen science projects	42	45			
	Survey and management work	70	67			
	Management by volunteers	7	11			157%
Flagship communities	Active flagship group volunteers	420	522			124%
	Species ID and survey events	70	93			133%
	Number of volunteers trained	400	673			168%
	Volunteer survey results submitted	210	942			+400%
Publicity	Press articles	20	20			
	Case studies	20	20			

Over the last 3 years of the People, Ponds and Water project we've:

- Worked with over 500 active volunteers on Flagship Pond sites.
- Run more than 90 training sessions with species experts to upskill over 650 Flagship Group volunteers.
- Held 40+ pond events; from water quality testing, to evening talks and daytime walks – reaching a further 1,300 people in the wider community around the Flagship Pond sites.
- Undertaken practical management, including pond survey, pond creation and species recovery work on all of our Flagship Pond sites.
- Added two new pond sites to the Flagship Pond network.



The Flagship Pond network: 72 of the most important pond sites in England and Wales





## 7.2 Saving sites – Sound Common

**One of the biggest successes of the Flagship Ponds project has been to bring together communities to help protect sites and species.**

Sound Common is one of the last remaining locations for Water Violet and Pond Mud Snail in Cheshire. Prior to the Flagship Ponds project, activity on the ponds on Sound Common was minimal, and there were concerns that the species may be declining.

The whole site is currently being restored to heathland and there was a focus on raising awareness with the local community about the need for tree management work on the heathland, a point of contention on many sites, so the ponds were put on a back burner.

Thanks to the Flagship Pond project, we were able to run a series of training days on Pond Mud Snail, community events including a dragonfly walk and talk, and practical management days to help restore the ponds. We've even created new ponds on the site and provided advice on management which will help to reduce diffuse pollution from impacting the Water Violet Pond.

The most exciting outcome has been the turnaround in engagement with the local community. The ponds have helped to pull the people into the site and given them an insight into the value of the wildlife on their doorstep. This has not only benefited the conservation of the ponds, but has also acted as a gateway to understanding the need for wider management of the site.



*Sound Common Flagship Ponds - saved by the support of the local community*



## 7.3 Saving species – Glutinous Snail

**The Flagship Ponds project has led to the protection and conservation of 69 priority pond species. This has been achieved through the hard work and dedication of some remarkable volunteers.**

Llyn Tegid is the only site remaining in the UK for the Glutinous Snail. This incredibly rare freshwater mollusc has very specific habitat requirements – if it finds itself out of the water for longer than a few minutes it will die; if it finds itself driven into deeper water because of dropping water levels its food supply (green algae) disappears and it starves!

Ian Hughes, and his family, have been trying to save Glutinous Snail on the lake. With funding from Flagship Ponds, Ian has designed and created a snail refuge to try to provide some hope for the future of this remarkable creature.

These snail houses create a safe place where the snails can live and breed just below the lake surface, and when the water levels drop the refugia provide a damp hollow in which the snails can shelter until the water returns.

Ian also made it his mission to spread the word on the Glutinous Snail. He has worked with the local landowners and staff at the National Park Authority to raise awareness of the threats to Glutinous Snail and the management required to save them.

He's given local talks, organised walks with local groups, communities and schools; and even created some larger than life models to give these miniature animals a personality that's hard to overlook.

It is with the continuous help of local landowners and Ian's enthusiasm to strengthen and encourage the interest of local communities in the freshwater wonders at Llyn Tegid and the rare Glutinous Snail, that this work and public engagement has been made possible.



*Llyn Tegid Flagship Pond – a rare creature given a voice by the efforts of one man and his family*





## 7.4 Improving Flagship Ponds

The Flagship Ponds project achieved the most gains for wildlife and communities where the project officers built strong relationships with the groups. This interaction was limited by the time available per officer per site, and the high turnover of staff at some sites.

Questionnaires at the end of 2016 showed that more than two-thirds of our Flagship volunteers and stakeholders did not know about the value of their ponds for freshwater wildlife before the project began. The value of the project was highlighted by the 92% of stakeholders who reported that they gained new information from the project officers following training and events.

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60% of Flagship volunteers didn't know about the value of their site to freshwater wildlife before the project began.

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The Flagship Ponds project was one half of the overall PPW project for the project officers. On average, each officer was allocated 3 weeks per site over three years, to organise training, arrange surveys, and advise on practical management. Project officer feedback expressed that they wanted to have more time to spend with their groups, but this had to be balanced against the project timetable for PondNet.

Heritage Insider conducted telephone interviews with five representatives from the projects Flagship Pond groups regarding their involvement with the People, Ponds and Water project (Appendix 3). The purpose of the interviews was to find out how useful the project had been to the Flagship Pond groups, what had been achieved through working with the project, and what could be improved with future projects.

Half of the participants in this independent evaluation talked about the knowledge they had gained and 80% felt that they had been well supported. The value of the PPW project officers was also highly praised.

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92% of stakeholders gained knowledge from contact with the project officers – at training or engagement events.

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One of the group leaders interviewed was disappointed by the level of contact they had had and did not know what had been achieved. On further investigation, we discovered that the person interviewed had not been involved in the project at the beginning and had missed the period of contact and project set-up with the project officer. We have now rectified this at the site and have gone through the survey reports and longer term management plans for the site with them.

This pattern was repeated at 10% of the Flagship Pond sites. Turnover in site staff over the three years of the project required the project officers to re-engage and upskill new staff. At one site, a new site manager was appointed every year!

Flagship project officers reported that the level of engagement was dependent on the interests of the new members. For example, if they were primarily interested in birds it required more work to raise their awareness of the value of freshwater wildlife. So although support materials were available for each of the Flagship sites, it often required one-to-one support to fully engage groups.

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*“Technical support of this nature from experts is invaluable to site managers as much as promoting community interest”.*

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The level of knowledge of the importance of freshwater habitats and species is low, even amongst conservation professionals. Support from experts to advise and provide the knowledge is rated very highly; but without continued support and with turnover in volunteers and site managers it is hard to maintain new knowledge within organisations and groups.

Larger groups and those which existed before the project began, are likely to be able to disseminate knowledge to new group members to overcome turnover. New groups or those with a smaller size will rely on the Flagship Pond support materials and management plans to guide them. However, they may struggle without the one-to-one support.



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*"Anne Heathcote is a credit to you and is the reason I have scored this question so highly".*

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More time



More resources



More staff



Improve  
communication

*Infographic adapted from Heritage Insider showing improvements we would like to see in the Flagship Ponds project*

In future projects developed around the Flagship Pond sites we would:

- Allocate more time to the advisory element of the project – at least three weeks per project officer, per site, per year.
- Devote more resources to be able to engage national and local experts – professional ecologists can only volunteer some of their time in support of a project such as this.
- Increase the number of project officers – sites within one hour drive of the project officers benefitted from the proximity of their advisor. They held more events and undertook more practical management activities than sites further afield.
- Facilitate communication between the lead organisations, the volunteers, and Freshwater Habitats Trust – as part of legacy planning we have agreed ways of maintaining contact with each of the Flagship Pond groups.



## 8. Web Interface

WaterNet is a single integrated database: a data entry hub and data download portal. The database was developed to bring together the three elements of the People, Ponds and Water project: PondNet, Clean Water for Wildlife, and Flagship Ponds.

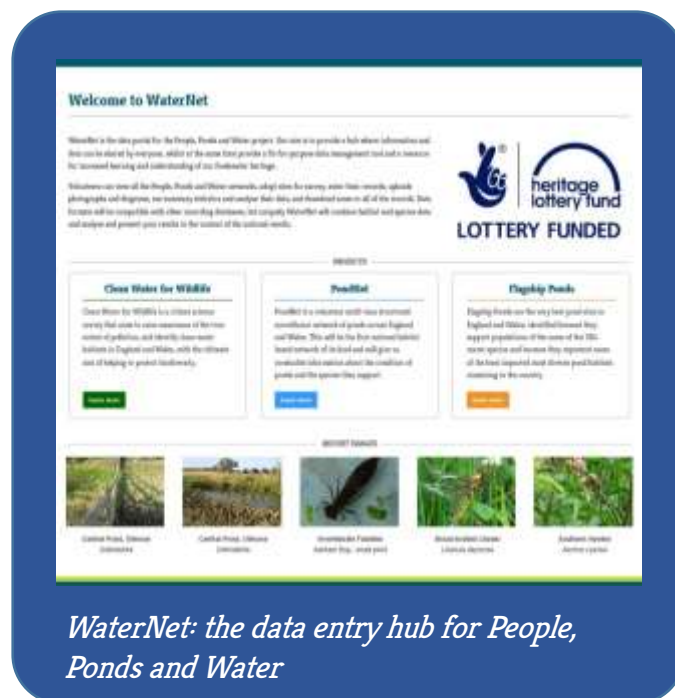
Volunteers would be able to enter their records, review their own and others results, and get feedback to help interpret their findings. Outside organisations would be able to access and download records and environmental data to feed into local and national plans.

The detailed specification for WaterNet was more complex and time-consuming to prepare and implement than originally anticipated.

In the development phase of People, Ponds and Water we used an Indicia based database, the template used by the Biological Record Centre for species recording. We could see that this database would allow volunteers to enter species records, but it could not accommodate large amounts of environmental data, data on nutrient pollution, or site based recording of individual pond habitats which we needed for Flagship Ponds. This existing database was also unable to interpret the results for volunteers.

We completed a new database specification and tender process by month 3 of the project, it then took a further 6 months to create the database framework. The length of time required to create the database reflects the bespoke nature of the design, the difficulty in combining both environmental and species data, and the need for automated analysis of data. It may explain why there was no off-the-shelf product available!

During 2015, PondNet and Flagship volunteers were able to use the interactive site map (available through the Freshwater Habitats Trust web pages) to select sites for survey and could submit records to their regional project officer via email or post.



*WaterNet: the data entry hub for People, Ponds and Water*

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**In hindsight, the database should have been designed and completed in advance of the start of the project.**

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In the 2016 survey season, we were able to provide a log-in for registered volunteers, to enter their records onto the demo version of WaterNet. This gave volunteers an opportunity to test the site and for us to make improvements to the online recording forms. But, the demo version still had limited functionality in terms of retrieving and analysing data. The necessity to log-in to the demo version also created a barrier to volunteers, especially for the Clean Water for Wildlife volunteers, who had less interaction with the project officers.

Our aim for 2017, was to migrate the demo version of WaterNet to the live version of the site. In addition, we provided a simple online form, for clean water data and amphibian data, to prevent any further delays, for the volunteers who would like to enter their records on-line.

In reality, it took the three years of People, Ponds and Water to complete the WaterNet database. In hindsight, the database should have been designed and completed in advance of the start of the project, so that volunteers could begin entering data from day one.



## 9. The benefits of PPW to people and communities

**Feedback from our volunteers was overwhelmingly positive. The People, Ponds and Water project engaged a wide audience, and people feel that they have really contributed to the conservation of freshwater biodiversity, as well as gaining positive benefits themselves from taking part.**

At the end of the People, Ponds and Water (PPW) project, in January 2018, Freshwater Habitats Trust sent out a Survey Monkey questionnaire to all the participants we had been in contact with throughout the last three years of the project. We wanted to know that the project had achieved its main aim for peoples and communities.

Namely that people had gained knowledge and understanding from taking part in PPW, and that people and communities had gained personal benefit in terms of new skills, enjoyment and inspiration from taking part.

We also wanted to know whether volunteers would work with us again on future projects, and what we could have done differently.

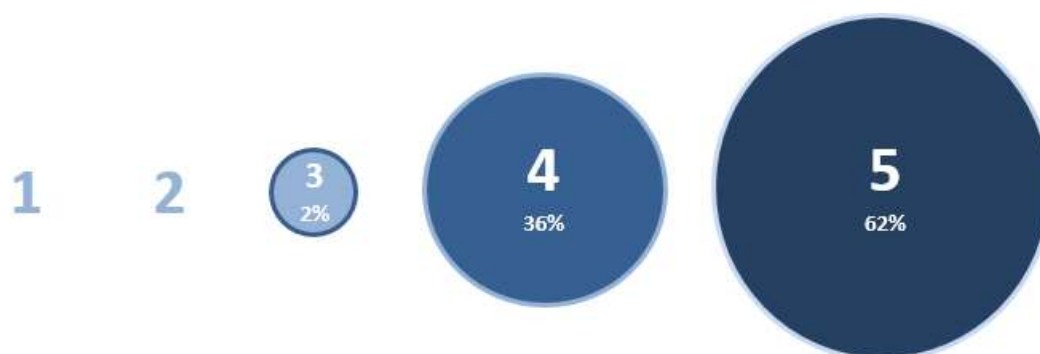
A total of 441 volunteers responded to the questionnaire, representing all three elements of the project.

- 38% PondNet (139 people)
- 21% Flagship Ponds (78 people)
- 61 % Clean Water for Wildlife (224 people)

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### We asked volunteers, “Did you enjoy taking part in People, Ponds and Water?”

98% of volunteers said that they enjoyed or really enjoyed taking part, none of the respondents said that they disliked taking part in the project.



### We asked volunteers, “Do you feel you have developed personally by taking part in PPW?”

More than half of the volunteers felt they had developed as a result of taking part in PPW. In the comments section most volunteers (76%) revealed that this was from gaining new skills or increased knowledge.

20% of the volunteers felt they had gained confidence from meeting new ‘like-minded’ people and had become more connected with their local community.

3% of our volunteers had said that the project had reawakened something for them; including connecting back with nature, increasing bonds within their family, and using the experience to get them “back out there” following a change in lifestyle and personal tragedy.

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**56% felt they had developed personally from taking part in PPW.**

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## We asked volunteers, "If we were to run the People, Ponds & Water project again, what could we do differently to improve your experience?"

We were delighted to discover that we had got the project right for most of our volunteers. 369 respondents answered this question, and of these, 64% did not want us to change anything about the project. We classified the remaining comments to understand what we could do differently in the future.

### 64% of the respondents did not want us to change anything about PPW.

- 14% of participants wanted us to communicate the results of the project better and use the results for lobbying.

We hope that the State of Pond Nature report and the project summary report has gone some way to addressing this. We will continue to disseminate outcomes from the project over the next year and beyond.

- 8% of volunteers wanted more time with the project officers and more opportunities to spend time with 'like-minded' people.

This has been a theme throughout the project. Volunteers enjoy spending time in organised events, and the greater opportunities for networking and learning that this provides.

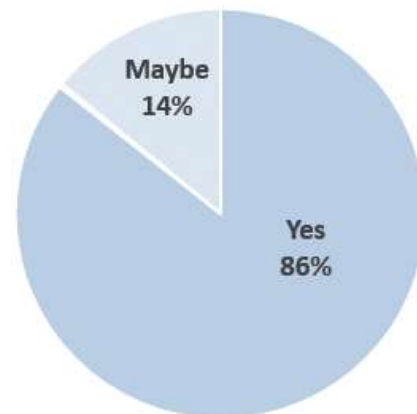
- 7% of participants referred to WaterNet and the delays in the development of the database.

We are aware of the issues with WaterNet and were surprised that this was not raised as more of an issue. We hope this is because the measures we put in place to mitigate the problems were satisfactory.

- 6% of volunteers simply wanted more of the project: more areas, more taxa, more techniques, and more years to engage.

Our legacy planning will allow many of the PPW volunteers to continue working with us.

86% of the respondents said that they would take part in an FHT project in the future.



## We asked volunteers, "Would you be interested in taking part in future projects with Freshwater Habitats Trust?"

99% of volunteers said they would maybe or definitely take part in a future project organised by Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT). Volunteers said maybe rather than definitely because they said they would if they were available.

Only one volunteer said that they would not take part again, but did not give a reason why.

### What the volunteers said:

*"Very well executed project and I hope that this leads on to further work for the future."*

*"Great way to raise the profile of an underrated habitat."*

*"All three projects have been great and have had positive conservation outcomes for ponds and freshwater in Sussex, with really good people engagement and upskilling of local volunteers."*

*"Great initiative. Hopefully it can be repeated in say 3 years' time so results can be compared with last time."*

*"Great people and great organisation."*

*"A worthwhile project making good use of lottery funds."*



## 10. PPW and Freshwater Habitats Trust

**We needed a strong team, with a lot of experience to deliver this ambitious project.**

The project's full time staff included the National Coordinator, Project Administrator and four Regional Project Officers. Naomi, the National Coordinator had worked with Freshwater Habitats Trust for five years prior to this role and was a member of the Trust's senior management team.

Knowledge of freshwater habitats and experience in the development and trial of structured habitat surveillance using volunteers (later PondNet) would prove vital for successful project delivery.

All of the project officer had experience of working with volunteers and some experience of working with freshwater habitats; Francesca had also worked with Freshwater Habitats Trust during the PondNet trials and Anne Heathcote had been one of our PondNet trial volunteers.

### People Ponds and Water Project Team

**Dr Naomi Ewald,  
National Coordinator**

**Date appointed:** 19/01/2015

**Start date:** 01/02/2015

**Email:** [newald@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk](mailto:newald@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)



**Laura Quinlan,  
Project Administrator**

**Date appointed:** 18/01/2016

**Start date:** 09/02/2016

**Email:** [quinlan@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk](mailto:quinlan@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)



**Anne Heathcote,  
Northern England  
Regional Officer**

**Date appointed:** 12/02/2015

**Start date:** 16/03/2015



**Hannah Shaw,  
Wales Regional Officer**

**Date appointed:** 30/03/2015

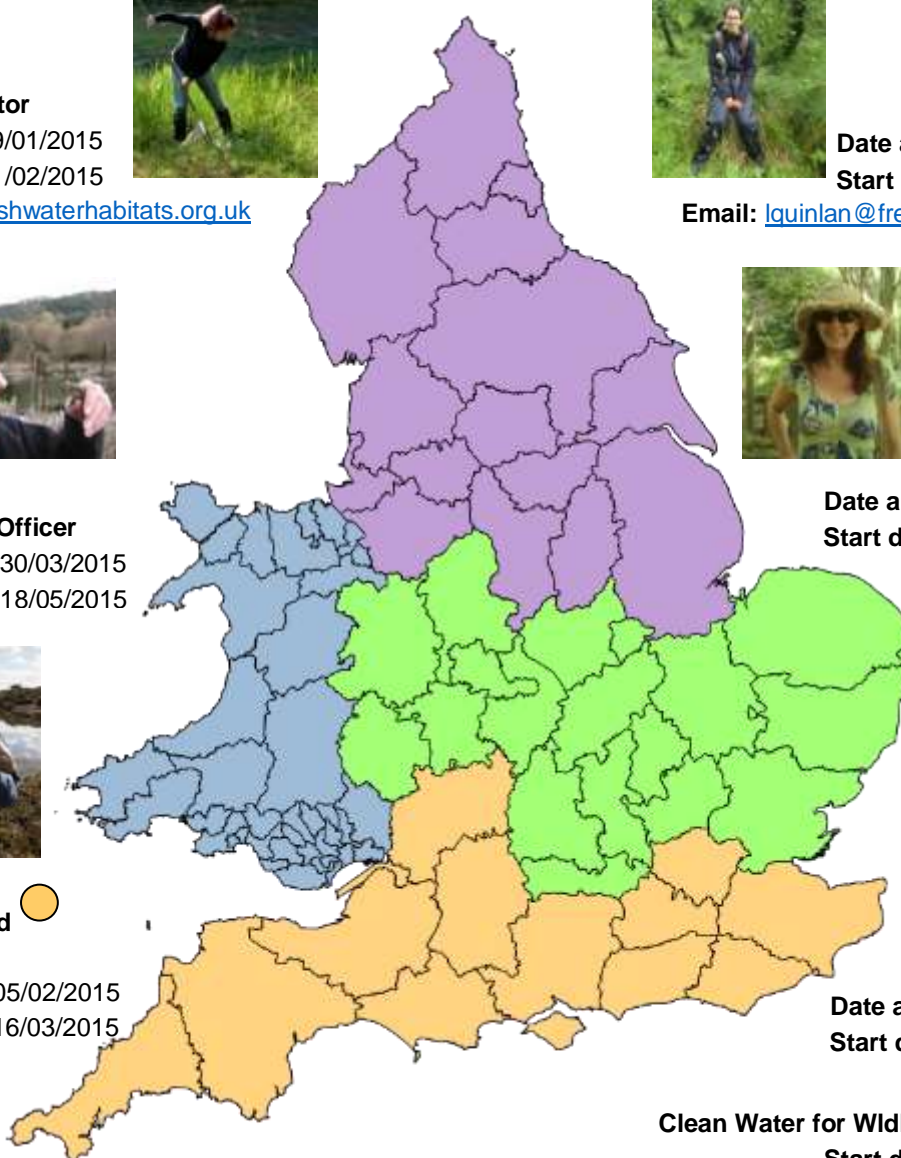
**Start date:** 18/05/2015



**Francesca Dunn,  
Southern England  
Regional Officer**

**Date appointed:** 05/02/2015

**Start date:** 16/03/2015



**Pete Case,  
Central England  
Regional Officer**

**Date appointed:** 05/02/2015

**Start date:** 16/03/2015



**Hannah Worker  
Clean Water for Wildlife Project Assistant**

**Start date:** 01/10/2017

**End date:** 30/03/2018



## 10.1 Project organisation

### Project recruitment

All staff members were in post by mid-March except the Welsh Regional Project Officer who did not begin work until mid-May due to previous contract commitments.

We recruited a second Project Administrator in January 2016 after a mutual decision was made to let the previous administrator go after her 6 month review.

The new administrator Laura has proved to be an exceptional addition to the team which enabled the project to run smoothly in spite of the added administrative burdens from the eDNA kits (which were not part of the original bid) and data handling requirements which were more than anticipated without a fully functional WaterNet.

Laura was also a linchpin in facilitating communication between the project team, Freshwater Habitats Trust comms team, and other FHT staff.

### Revisions to staffing

Francesca made the decision to leave the project at the end of September 2017 for personal reasons, to go travelling. With less than 3 months to go on her contract, we decided that rather than recruit someone on a short term contract; Pete (Central Officer) and Naomi (National Coordinator) would cover the remaining activities on the Southern Officer's region between them.

With the various delays in start dates we were left with some underspend in the staff budget. The project officers were due to end their contract in December 2017, but we agreed to extend their contracts to the end of March 2018 to achieve the following aims:

- Dissemination of project outcomes at regional and national levels;
- Completion of flagship pond practical tasks;
- Organisation and delivery of the end of project events.

We used the remaining staff underspend to employ a project assistant to facilitate an extension to the Clean Water for Wildlife survey (see Section 6.6).

### Summary of officer feedback

Heritage Insider were asked to conduct interviews with our four regional project officers (Appendix 4). The purpose of the interview was to find out how well the officers felt each area of the project had worked, what challenges they had faced, and any improvements to future projects that they would like to see made.

Telephone interviews were conducted in January 2018. The Project Officers were pleasantly surprised with how well the project had gone. They felt that the biggest impacts had been:

- The number of people engaged through PondNet, Clean Water for Wildlife, and Flagship Ponds.
- The level of awareness that the project had raised about the value of freshwater biodiversity and the current impacts facing freshwater species and habitats.
- The value of the new technologies – eDNA and Clean Water kits to help volunteers engage.

When asked what they would change in the future the main issues were:

- The size of each of the regions that the project officers had to deal with.
- Making the data portal available at the beginning of the project.

At the time of the interviews, there was some discussion around concerns that there wasn't an immediate future project for those who have volunteered or been otherwise involved in the project, and uncertainty over their on future with FHT.

- All of the project officers have now been offered some form of continuation with FHT.
- All of the project volunteers have now been given options for continued engagement through PondNet or the Flagship Pond sites.

Our lesson from this has been to disseminate legacy plans with project volunteers at an earlier stage of the project. However, these plans are largely dependent on the availability of funding which could not be confirmed until the end of the financial year.





## 10.2 Project communication and dissemination

### Project comms (internal)

The National Coordinator (Naomi Ewald) and Administrator (Laura Quinlan) were both based at Freshwater Habitats Trust's Oxford Office. The Project Officers are based within their region. Managing a project of this size and maintaining contact with the regional officers was a priority. We achieved this through:

- Scheduled weekly one-to-one phone meetings between the National Coordinator/Project Administrator and each regional officer.
- Bi-monthly face-to-face team meetings as a project group in Oxford.
- Bi-monthly face-to-face meetings with wider FHT staff and technical director.
- Two visits per region per year by the National Coordinator to undertake site based queries and upskilling for project staff.
- Quarterly updates from the regional officers which we turned into a quarterly project news (an internal document for HLF and FHT).

### Project comms (external)

Freshwater Habitats Trust disseminated information about the project through a project newsletter, through our own website, and through social media.

The People, Ponds and Water newsletter has a distribution list of c. 1,700 people and organisations, our Twitter feed had 8,423 followers, and the Facebook People, Ponds and Water page [www.facebook.com/PeoplePondsWater](https://www.facebook.com/PeoplePondsWater) 906 followers.

Our social media reach went through the roof on our PPW Facebook page when one of our Spawn Survey posts was shared by BBC Springwatch! We reached a total of 88,328 people and the post had 879 reactions, comments and shares. Our most popular Facebook post was about the discovery of Medicinal Leech at one of our Welsh Flagship Pond sites; it reached over 1,650 people.

We also prepared over 70 articles for local and national media during the lifetime of the project.

### Project partnerships comms

We successfully set up an Advisory Group at the start of the project to build project links with a small number of key stakeholders to maximise mutual organisational benefits.

The group consisted of 11 members from a range of statutory organisations, recording groups, land managers, and two volunteers from PondNet and Clean Water for Wildlife. The main aims of the group were to:

- Ensure that information was exchanged between the groups.
- Increase the project's effectiveness for all stakeholders, by identifying the opportunities and possible collaborations.
- Ensure the volunteer community (who underpinned the project) were sufficiently supported and engaged.
- Discuss data handling and how to disseminate the data to all partners and stakeholders.

Through the wider project we have now worked with over 600 organisations and groups.

### End of project dissemination

The PPW team decided to hold several regional events as well as an all-encompassing national event, to celebrate the contribution of the partners and volunteers to the People, Ponds and Water project.

In the Southern Region we held a freshwater forum in the New Forest which was attended by over 90 volunteers and partners.

In the Central Region we held a joint event with the River Thame Catchment Partnership to over 20 volunteers and partners.

In the Northern Region over 40 participants joined us for a celebratory event and a walk around one of our most popular Flagship Pond sites.

The end of project event at Chester Zoo attracted over 50 volunteers and partners in spite of the snow. People travelled from across Wales and as far afield as Norfolk to show their support.



# 11. People, Ponds and Water project legacy

The project has created a major legacy for Freshwater Habitats Trust, for people and communities, and for freshwater heritage.

## We've increased the number of skilled staff within Freshwater Habitats Trust

It has been possible to offer all members of the People, Ponds and Water team contracts to continue their employment at Freshwater Habitats Trust. The People Ponds and Water project has delivered one of our main organisational aims towards a regional organisation structure.

- The Northern Project officer will become National Coordinator for PondNet surveys 2018.
- Our Central Project Officer will continue to implement work on Flagship Pond sites as part of landscape scale project development.
- Our Southern Officer, who left the project to travel for a year, will join us again in 2018 to deliver a new public engagement project in Oxfordshire.
- Our Welsh officer is currently developing a project to save one of the rarest freshwater species in Wales, the Freshwater Pearl Mussel, using the citizen science model.
- The project administrator and National Coordinator will become part of the core FHT team.

## People, Ponds and Water has increased our engagement with key audiences

We asked volunteers (369 individuals) whether they knew of Freshwater Habitats Trust before signing up for the project. 58% of volunteers questioned were new to our organisation. People, Ponds and Water has increased our public profile and broadened our professional reputation.

- People, Ponds and Water has harnessed the power of more than 15,000 volunteers to gather data on the health of freshwater habitats in England and Wales
- The People, Ponds and Water team have collected over 16,200 records from more than 10,000 sites
- The project has worked with more than 600 statutory and non-statutory organisations and community groups, and undertaken practical management on 72 of the best pond sites in the UK

## We've increased the ability of volunteers to deliver conservation gains

### Flagship Ponds

70 of the most important freshwater sites in England and Wales are better managed and protected as a result of People, Ponds and Water. We've already added two new sites to the network and are building towards a national network of Important Freshwater Areas.

69 priority species have benefitted through local action and engagement on Flagship Pond sites. We've delivered more than 40 actions identified by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales for protected species. For example, dune slack management for bryophyte species in Cornwall and Anglesey to achieve favourable conservation status for the SSSI.

We will continue to work with the c. 500 volunteers on Flagship Pond sites to deliver their management plans. These have identified tasks for each site for the next 5 years.

Monitoring of Flagship sites will be undertaken by Flagship Groups. However, as a back-up, the sites will also form part of the PondNet network, and it will be the responsibility of PondNet to ensure that, if community monitoring breaks down, it can continue through other PondNet volunteers.

Events and activities have already been planned by all of the Flagship Groups for 2018, including joint events between groups who share similar species. Headley Heath Flagship Pond site will host a new national workshop on Starfruit conservation in autumn 2018.

Some of the sites will benefit from additional support from FHT in 2018, as they have been incorporated into wider landscape projects where we are working. For example, Stow Bedon Common in Norfolk which has been awarded additional funding from Biffaward.

We will continue with comms on the Flagship Pond project by showcasing one site every month on social media and on our website.

Two years after the end of the HLF-funded project, when the benefits at the majority of Flagship sites will be able to be assessed, Freshwater Habitats Trust will host a workshop/conference for Flagship Groups, statutory bodies and NGOs to demonstrate the value, learn from inevitable failures, and celebrate the success.



## PondNet

More than 3,300 ponds form part of the PondNet network, monitoring over 30 Priority Pond species. These data have been shared with national recording schemes, and local environmental record centres.

We will continue to support the PondNet volunteer network in the long-term as a key, strategic, organisational activity. We have already secured funding from Natural England to support coordination of Great Crested Newt eDNA volunteers in 2018.

At least 200 PondNet volunteers have already signed up to continue PondNet surveys – specifically for Great Crested Newts eDNA surveys and the PondNet Spawn Count.

We will continue to promote surveys throughout the year as part of a PondNet calendar, to remind existing volunteers when it's time to go out and survey.

In the longer term we plan to extend the monitoring network to other small freshwaters such as ditch networks, headwaters and small lakes, so that PondNet is supported within a broader framework.

These longer term plans include further development of new technologies which have proved so important in the delivery of this national volunteer monitoring network.

WaterNet, the database for People, Ponds and Water is now available for volunteers to use along with the project resources which are accessible via our own and through partner organisations.

## Clean Water for Wildlife

Clean Water for Wildlife was a standalone survey to raise awareness of nutrient pollution and help local communities identify clean water habitats.

We've made the survey resources available online and provided example case studies to demonstrate how communities, local groups, and organisations could use the results.

The value of the results from Clean Water for Wildlife have been acknowledged at a national level by Natural England and will form part of the supplementary methodology used to identify Priority Pond habitats where no biological data exists.

Several project partners have already incorporated the project principles into new projects they are developing. For example the use of Clean Water kits and Freshwater Habitats Trust resource in Catchment Partnership projects.

## People, Ponds and Water has given us new information on the status of species and habitats

Data collected through the project has created a strong evidence base which we, and others, can use to set the agenda for freshwaters, make better arguments for resources, and focus attention on critical biodiversity issues.

In the last three months of the project we've been busy writing up reports, sharing results with our volunteers and generally shouting about the achievements of the project, including production of the People, Ponds and Water summary report:

<https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/people-ponds-water>.

But, we really wanted to produce a document which would have a lasting legacy. That is why we decided that we would produce the 'State of Pond Nature' report – a document which will include the details behind the species trends highlighted in the PPW summary report.

This report will show our volunteers, stakeholders and other NGOs and Government organisations what we really see happening to our freshwater wildlife – and how important clean water and ponds are in the freshwater landscape. We will finish writing this report in the next month or so and we will be releasing the 'State of Pond Nature' report in June 2018.







Freshwater Habitats Trust's aim is to protect freshwater life for everyone to enjoy. Our vision is that all threatened freshwater plants and animals have recovered and developed sustainable populations, the UK has a functioning network of freshwater habitats: The Freshwater Network, and people value freshwater habitats and their wildlife. We deliver our conservation aims through our expert staff and our conservation, community, research and policy work.

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