

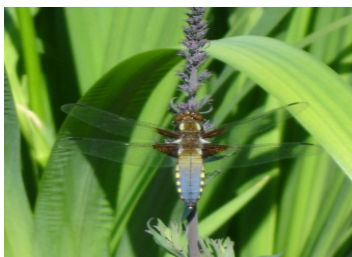
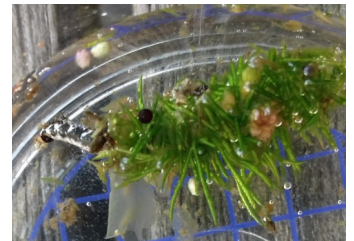
Pond Life



There is always a moment in the spring when frogs appear in my pond and hopefully soon after we here the croaking at night as they mate and then the spawn appears. The picture shows a frog hiding very successfully in the weed. I did not see him until I blew up the photo! We used to get lots of frogs and spawn but in recent years the number have decreased dramatically. I

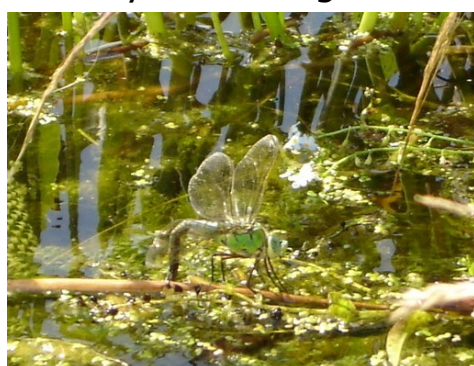
thought this was due to the pond not being as healthy as it should be or to the disease called red leg which has affected frogs badly or even to someone nearby using pesticides. I eventually found the answer from a speaker from the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group who explained that frogs can detect if there are newts in the pond which will eat the eggs and tadpoles and the frogs go elsewhere. It is impossible to do anything about it. There is some good news however as toad eggs and tadpoles are poisonous to newts so they will survive.

Fortunately a healthy pond will have many other creatures. The photo opposite shows an aquatic caterpillar, a rather unusual pond animal. The Brown China Mark Moth lays its eggs in the water and the caterpillars stay there. They build a case of bits of weed to protect themselves, rather like Caddis Fly larvae.



My favourite pond animals are Dragonflies and Damselflies. There are 3 types of Dragonfly-Chasers, Darters and Hawkers which vary in size, shape and behaviour. The photo opposite shows a Broad Bodied Chaser. Damselflies are much smaller and slimmer. They are all excellent hunters as they have very effective mouthparts and can hunt on the wing.

The life cycle of all these creatures is fascinating. The photo on the right shows damselflies mating. The adults live for a short time, just enough to mate and lay eggs. The adults often fly around together for some time after mating. The



female lays eggs in the pond as the photo opposite shows. The eggs hatch into nymphs which can live in the pond for years, gradually getting bigger so they shed the outer casing at intervals. The nymphs are voracious hunters in the pond. When the adults are ready to emerge they climb up reeds, shown

opposite, and emerge from the exoskeleton, leaving it behind on the reeds. The wings gradually expand so the adult can fly away and the life cycle continues. Even a small pond can have lots of wildlife and be fascinating. For details of how to build a pond look at the web site for The Wildlife Trusts.

