

Information on Dudley's other Nature Reserves is available from  
**Culture & Community Services**  
 Claughton House, Blowers Green Road, Dudley DY2 8UZ  
 Tel: (01384) 814189

**Saltwells Local Nature Reserve**  
 Tel: (01384) 812795

**Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve**  
 Tel: (01384) 812785

Published by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Designed by Graphics Studio  
 Directorate of the Urban Environment  
 telephone 01384 815515/5530/5541  
 Maps based upon the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of  
 the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright  
 Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead  
 to prosecution or civil proceedings  
 Dudley MBC. 100019566 4th February 2005



# THE WILDLIFE OF BUCKPOOL & FENS POOL NATURE RESERVE

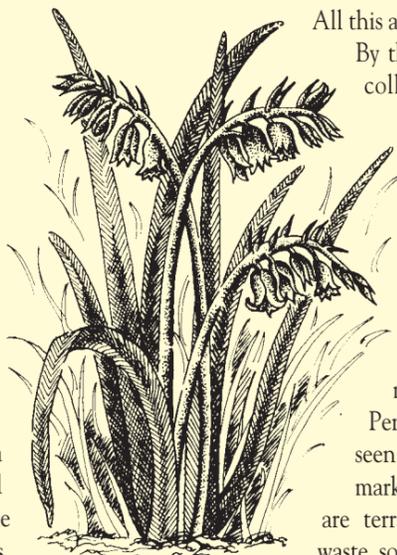


# THE WILDLIFE OF THE BUCKPOOL & FENS POOLS NATURE RESERVE

The *Buckpool and Fens Pools Nature Reserve* is a wildlife haven flourishing in the very heart of the industrial Black Country. Canals, pools, ponds, streams, grassland and scrub combine to make this area unique in Dudley.

If you could be taken back 100 years, it would be a very different picture. At that time there were still working collieries at the Dell, on the Leys and the Wallows and around Grove and Middle Pools. There were claypits where Middle Pool and the Farmers Pond are today, and a huge brickworks on The Leys. The Pensnett Railway ran between Middle and Fens Pools, bringing coal from the Earl of Dudley's Baggeridge pits to the Round Oak Iron and Steel Works, whose blast furnaces lit up the night sky for miles around.

Railway sidings ran all over the site and went down to wharves along "Wide Waters", where goods were loaded onto canal barges for transport along the Stourbridge and Dudley canal system. The air was full of smoke and noise and there can hardly have been room for a blade of grass amongst the slagtips, colliery waste and railway sidings that covered the site.

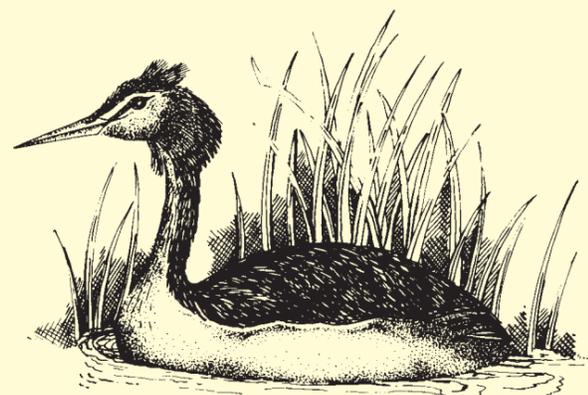


Bluebell

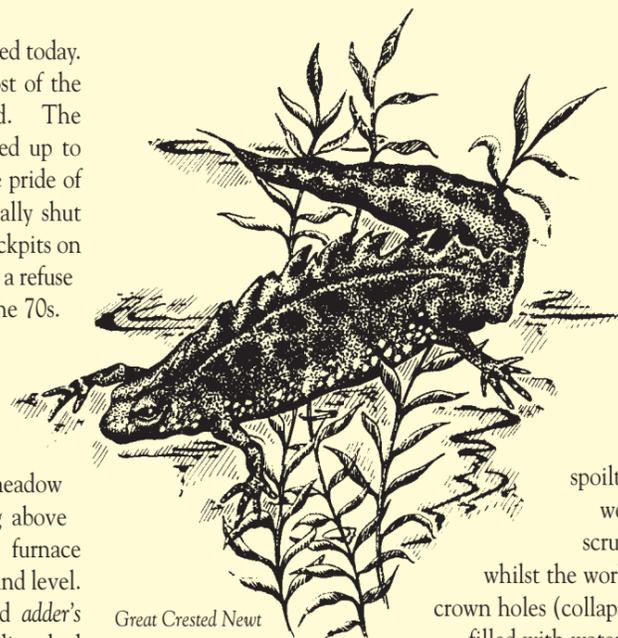
All this activity and industry has disappeared today. By the early years of this century most of the collieries and claypits had closed. The brickworks and railways survived up to the 1960s, and Round Oak, the pride of the Earl's industrial empire, finally shut down in the 1980s. The old brickpits on the Leys were used for a while as a refuse tip, but were finally capped in the 70s.

Only two areas of the Reserve have been relatively free of man's activities. Evidence of Pensnett's pre-industrial past can be seen near Fens Pool in a small meadow marked by "ridge and furrow", rising above are terraces of colliery, clay and blast furnace waste, some 100 feet above the natural ground level. On this meadow are found *hay rattle* and *adder's tongue fern*, both characteristic plants of old, undisturbed pasture.

*Buckpool Dingle* still has the appearance of a natural wooded valley, despite the nearby colliery mounds. A few relics of the ancient *oak and hazel woodland* that must once have covered this area still survive along the valley sides. *Bluebells*, *wood anemones* and *wild garlic* can be found and woodland birds like *great spotted woodpecker*, *treecreeper* and *jay* are present.



Great Crested Grebe

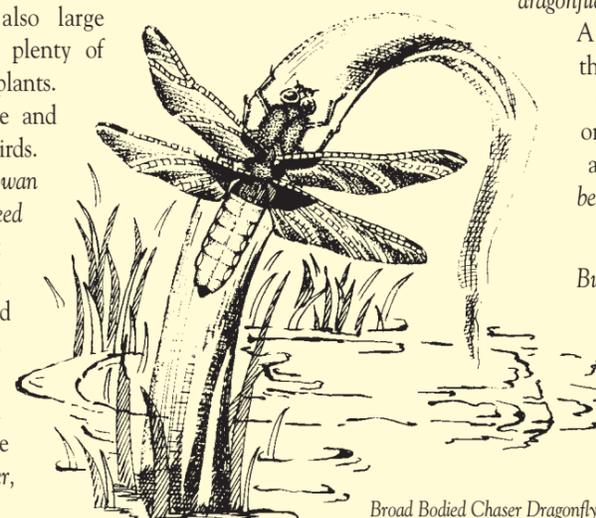


Great Crested Newt

Over the rest of the site the scars of past industrial activity are still visible.

Once the industry had gone, the land was left to nature. Slowly the abandoned spoiltips and railways were clothed with scrub and grassland, whilst the worked out pits and crown holes (collapsed mine shafts) filled with water. Gradually the wilderness of wetlands, grasslands and scrub that you see today emerged.

*Grove, Middle and Fens Pools* are still used by British Waterways to top up the canal system. They also have an excellent fish stock, including some enormous *pike* and *carp*! There are also large populations of *frogs* and *toads*, plenty of invertebrates and some unusual plants. The wealth of fish, invertebrate and plant life attracts many water birds. Resident species include *mute swan* and *great crested grebe*, whilst *reed* and *sedge warblers* are frequent summer visitors. The Pools attract many over-wintering and migrant waterfowl, such as *shoveler*, *wigeon* and *gadwall*. Some more unusual species can also turn up, and in the past the Pools have seen *great northern diver*, *red necked grebe* and *bittern*.



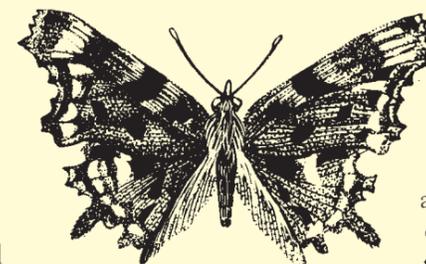
Broad Bodied Chaser Dragonfly

Much of the *Stourbridge Canal* is unused, allowing wildlife to flourish undisturbed by boat traffic. *Coot* and *moorhen* nest in reedbeds and the beautiful *arrowhead* and *flowering rush* are common.

The many *small ponds* north of Fens Pool provide a habitat for the *great crested newts*. Once common in the British countryside, numbers have dwindled due to development, loss of farm ponds and agrochemical pollution. Now urban wetlands like the Fens house most of the nation's population of this creature. In addition there are huge numbers of breeding *frogs*, *toads* and *smooth newts*, making this one of the best amphibian sites in the country. Because amphibians spend most their life outside the breeding season on dry land, the banks of furnace waste and lumps of clinker lying near the ponds are an important feature. Amphibians use these to hide under during the heat of the day and to hibernate in winter.

On summer days around the small ponds you will see *dragonflies* and *damsel flies* hawking for insects. A careful look at reed stems will reveal the empty larval cases left behind after the adults have emerged. Swimming on the pond surface are *water boatmen*, and you may see the fierce *great diving beetle*, which is not averse to tackling a stickleback or tadpole!

*Buckpool stream* is surprisingly clean for such a built up area - clean enough for *freshwater shrimps* to thrive and provide food for small fishes. In several places it opens out into marshland, a habitat for frogs and home to the scarce *wood clubmoss*.



Comma Butterfly

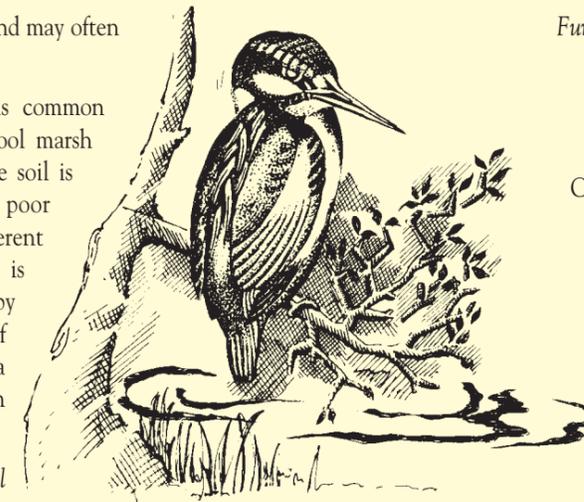
A pair of *kingfisher* nest in the Dingle and may often be seen fishing.

Marshland of many different types is common throughout the Reserve. The Buckpool marsh vegetation is tall and lush because the soil is rich in plant nutrients. On the poor industrial soils on the Fens a very different kind of marsh with *sedges* and *rushes* is found, and on a marsh by Middle Pool is a large colony of *southern marsh orchids*, a spectacular sight when in flower in June.

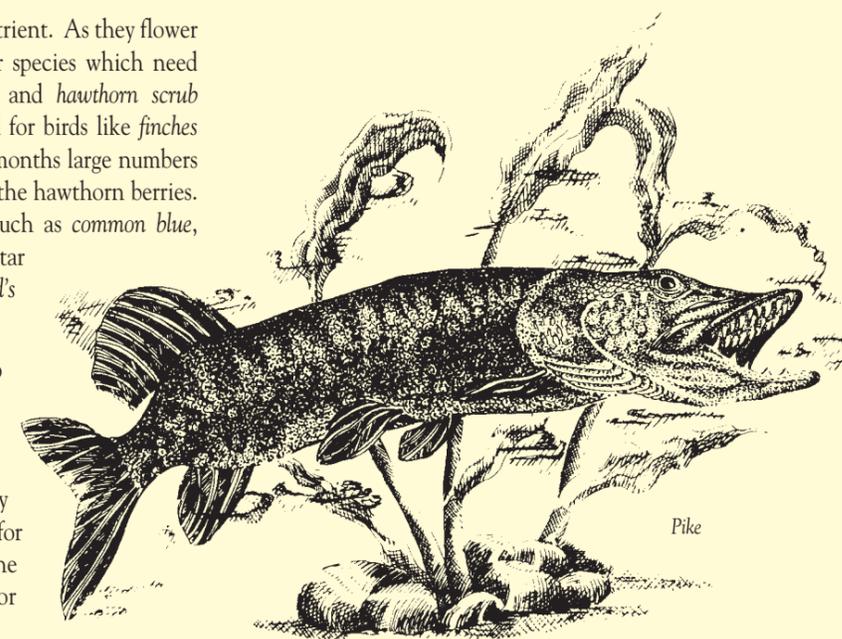
On the slopes above *Middle Pool* and north of *Fens Pool*, *pioneer vegetation* is dominant. Because the furnace slag and railway ballast is alkaline, many of these plants are usually found on limestone grassland and are locally rare, such as *blue fleabane*, *ploughman's spikenard* and *fairy fax*.

Pioneer species survive on very little nutrient. As they flower and die the soil is enriched and other species which need more nutrient can colonise. *Sallow* and *hawthorn scrub* develops, providing nest sites and food for birds like *finches* and *warblers*, whilst during the winter months large numbers of *fieldfare* and *redwing* are attracted by the hawthorn berries. Sheltered in sunny glades, *butterflies* such as *common blue*, *comma* and *small skipper* feed on nectar from wildflowers like *knapsweed* and *bird's foot trefoil*.

*Buckpool* and *Fens Pools* have wardens to look after its wildlife. They will be happy to provide information to visitors and to arrange guided walks and illustrated talks about the Reserve. They also implement the Management Plan for the site, which aims to improve the reserve not only for wildlife but for visitors too.



Kingfisher



Pike

Further information is available from:  
The Senior Warden  
Buckpool & Fens Pools Nature Reserve  
Tel: 01384 812780 or  
Culture and Community Services  
Cloughton House  
Blowers Green Road  
Dudley DY2 8UZ  
Tel: 01384 814189

Illustrations by  
Melanie Heywood