

Newt Surveys at Knoll – 2021 to 2023

Each spring our charity undertakes a 'newt watch', surveying the gardens four main ponds during April and May when the newts are most likely to be present. The team consists of Mitch Perkins (Volunteer Survey Co-Ordinator), Ro Jecock (Charity Chair), Rob Bascombe (Volunteer Amphibian and Reptile Surveyor) and Neil Lucas (Charity Trustee). Our thanks to Mitch Perkins for preparing the report and supplying some of the images.

It looks like the newts are doing well at Knoll! These shy amphibians spend most of the year in cool damp parts of the garden, but in spring they head to the ponds to find a mate and breed. Most of 'the action' occurs between dusk and dawn, so surveys are undertaken as the sun goes down.



Using torches Neil, Rob, Ro and Mitch searched the Falls, Dragon & Mill ponds for breeding newts over 4 nights between April and May. On average 38 newts were recorded which was over 5 times higher than previous years!



An encouraging number of newts, both palmate and common, were recorded during this year's survey.



The Dragon sculpture lit up to great effect by the torches of team newt.



Getting close to the action! The DWT team and charity chair Ro setting traps in the top pond.

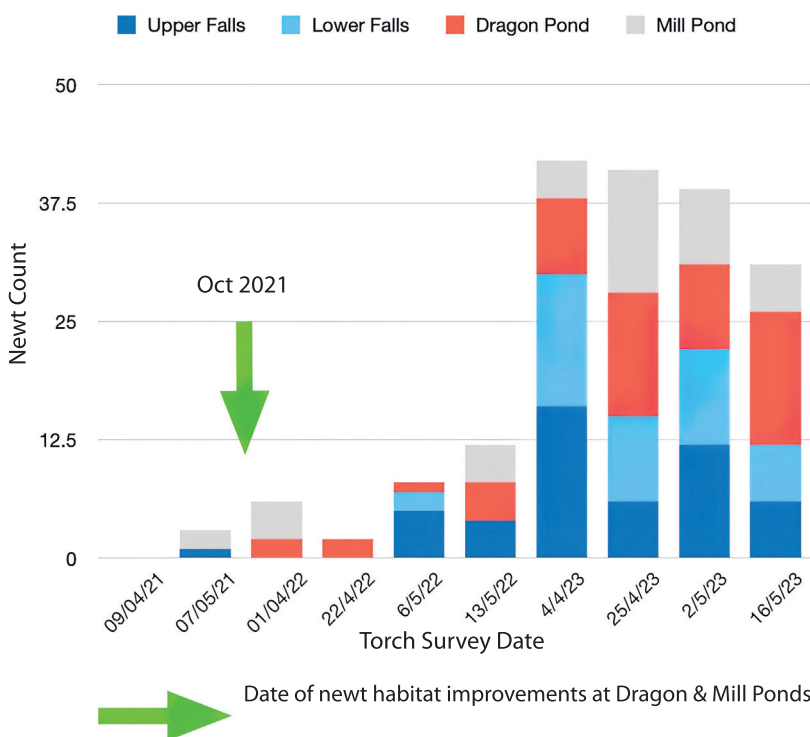


Newt with midge larvae

In October 2021 volunteers and experts from Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust helped us create a ramp to enable newts to access Dragon pond. This 'rockery' also provides a safe place to shelter and hibernate.

Prior to this work we hadn't seen any newts in Dragon pond. Two years later we spotted 14 newts on one evening and we suspect there were probably more hidden by the water plants. At Mill pond, the habitat was improved by removing an area of Iris to create an open area for breeding newts to meet. Again, two years later, numbers appear to have increased.

Graph showing newt torch survey results 2021 to 2023



Most of the newts recorded were palmates; the males have groovy back feet, which make them appear to be wearing oven-gloves! One possible pair of common newts were recorded in Dragon pond. There may have been more but the females of both species look very similar.

A newt trap survey led by licence newt surveyors Ben Arkless and Mariko Whyte from Dorset Wildlife Trust, meant we could deploy traps overnight. The traps need to be fixed by canes into the ponds and, due to the solid base of Dragon pond, they could only be deployed in the soft bottoms of Falls and Mill ponds. The newts were clearly smarter than us and were only found in 3 of the 19 traps, but this confirmed that palmates were present.



Great diving beetle; fascinating to see, this large, fast moving beetle is seen in all our ponds.



Backswimmer; seen on all the ponds these voracious predators hang upside down just below the waters surface.

Being in the garden at dusk meant we were treated to other wildlife as well as newts. Hooting tawny owls, foraging bats and elusive great diving beetle!

One of the biggest highlights was witnessing the emergence of emperor dragonfly larvae queuing up to emerge overnight into adults. What a privilege!

Water measurers; easily overlooked these amazing creatures slowly make their way across the waters surface.



As a nymph, Dragonfly larvae spend their time in the ponds and look very unlike their adult form. They are well armed and have a big appetite!



Quite apart from the newts, an impressive number of Dragonfly larvae chose the last evening to emerge during this year's survey. It was a wonderful privilege to see the process in action.



Courtesy of Mitch Perkins