

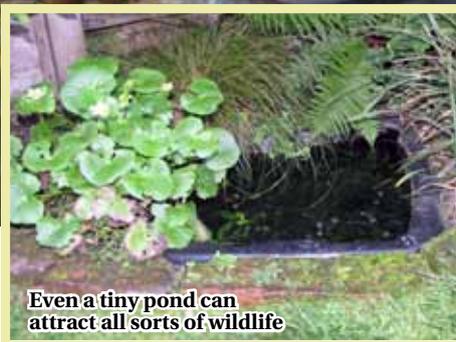
# Put in a POND

**Ponds have been disappearing fast, but creating one is one of the best things you can do for wildlife on your smallholding. Penny Bunting reports**

**Putting in native plants will oxygenate the water**



**The iridescent dragonfly**



**Even a tiny pond can attract all sorts of wildlife**



**Frogs rely on garden ponds for survival**

**O**ften considered slimy or warty, and featuring unfavourably in many fairy tales, frogs and toads are probably not most people's favourite animals.

But I love frogs and toads, and am happy to share my garden with them. They are fascinating to study and – best of all – one of their favourite foods is the gardener's worst enemy: slugs!

Frogs return to the same pond each year to begin breeding. We've seen as many as 20 frogs in our medium-sized pond at a time, which makes me wonder where they all used to go before it was built.

The sad fact is that frogs and other pond-dwellers don't have a great deal of choice when it comes to choosing a home. The number of countryside ponds is falling, and pollution affects many that are left.

According to Pond Conservation ([www.pondconservation.org.uk](http://www.pondconservation.org.uk)), freshwater and wetland habitats such as ponds, rivers and streams support about 10 per cent of the UK's wildlife, but cover only three per cent of the country's land surface. On farms alone, 227,000 ponds were lost between 1945 and 1998.

Many wetland species have shown decline over the past 50 years, and some are threatened with global extinction.

This means that frogs, toads and newts – along with numerous invertebrates such as mayflies and water beetles – are increasingly relying on garden ponds for their survival.

Building a pond in your garden is one of the

best things you can do to help – and attract – wildlife. Water is essential for frogs and toads – they wouldn't be able to breed without it. But a garden pond will attract a myriad of other creatures too.

Peer into any pond and you will soon see what I mean. Pond skaters skim the surface and water boatmen use their long, oar-like legs to propel themselves along. The larvae of damselflies and dragonflies can be seen darting around – and in summer the adult insects, with their beautiful iridescent colours of red, blue and green, hover near the water.

Ponds attract many airborne insects – which in turn will attract bats, swifts and swallows. Other animals rely on ponds too – mammals such as hedgehogs and foxes will stop by for a drink, and birds will bathe in the water.

You don't need a lot of space to put in a

pond. Preformed ponds are available in sizes as small as a metre wide, and are quick and easy to install.

Of course if you do have space to spare, the bigger the pond, the more wildlife will be attracted – and a large wildlife pond could provide a stunning feature on the smallholding.

With the construction of any wildlife pond, there are a few important points to be aware of. Firstly, it's essential to have areas of shallow water at the edges of the pond. If the pond's sides are too steep, visiting wildlife will struggle to get out – hedgehogs and other small mammals may even drown.

Putting in some native plants, such as starwort or water crowfoot, will oxygenate the water, keeping it naturally clear and clean. Some non-native plant species are highly invasive, so these should be avoided.

And ponds are very attractive to young children, especially when the water is teeming with fascinating creatures. Pond dipping is a fun and educational activity, but children should always be carefully supervised near water, even if the pond is shallow.

All new ponds, big or small, will begin attracting wildlife almost immediately. And after just a few months, you could have your own little army of slug-munching frogs and toads helping out on your plot.

*Penny Bunting is a smallholder and writer living in the Peak District. She also runs award-winning environmental project Little Green Space ([www.littlegreenspace.org.uk](http://www.littlegreenspace.org.uk))*



**Frogs return to the same pond each year**