

PST29 - Restoring farmland ponds: Lessons from the Norfolk Ponds Project, UK

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The agricultural landscapes of east and north-west England, UK are dotted with ponds at a density >10 ponds/km². Many of these ponds were produced as a consequence of marl extraction in or before the 17th and 18th centuries and due to their age and a recent lack of management, they are now threatened by terrestrialisation. Despite agri-environment schemes encouraging pond management through tree and sediment removal, UK farmland is currently dominated by overgrown ponds resulting in low landscape-scale species diversity. Following recent research demonstrating an increase in biodiversity across multiple taxa after pond restoration in Norfolk (eastern England), the Norfolk Ponds Project (NPP) was established in 2014 to encourage farmers, conservationists and local communities to actively restore, conserve and re-connect with farmland ponds. The NPP is a partnership between the Pond Restoration Research Group at University College London (UCL) and several conservation organisations, among others, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Norfolk Rivers Trust, Natural England and the National Trust.

This presentation will provide an overview of the NPP's key activities and achievements over the last 3 years. These include:

- Before-after monitoring of agricultural pond restorations
- The provision of advice to landowners on how best to restore and manage ponds in farmland through site visits and the production of a best-practice pond restoration leaflet
- Establishment of a questionnaire to gain knowledge of public and landowner perceptions of farmland ponds and awareness raising through an online conversation on pond restoration via social media
- Promotion of key pond species, such as great crested newt, crucian carp, and key plants such as stoneworts
- Educating the public and farmers on the value of ponds in farmland through site visits and open days
- The establishment of community pond restoration projects that re-connect landowners and people with farmland ponds

The NPP's work suggests that, with initial inspiration, support and advice, farmers and local people can play a huge role in a 'bottom-up' pond conservation initiative aiming to reverse the ecological decline of farmland ponds.