

Friends of the Meadows Pond Dipping Event 13 July 2014

Review by Pauline Macey

We would like to thank Friends of the Meadows for arranging the pond dipping expedition on the Meadows on Sunday 13 July 2014; it was a very enjoyable experience.

The unaccustomed spell of dry sunny weather for a few days prior to the event raised concerns as to whether the ponds and ditches might be dried out. However the gardeners' prayers were answered and substantial rain fell in the early hours of Sunday to replenish water butts, garden ponds and the ditches on the Meadows.



A dry, bright Sunday morning saw eighteen assorted individuals gathered at the Bottom's Lane gate to meet with the leader of the expedition, Julie Rose. Julie did the obligatory, daunting sounding, safety assessment and explained how the event would be run. Her own expertise was botany so she had invited along an invertebrates specialist Andy Harmer who was familiar with the Meadows and he was accompanied by his assistant for the day, Aquatic Ecologist Lidia Korba.

We were guided through the heavy vegetation and over the rough ground by Friends of the Meadows Recorder Andy Ingham who could evidently see a safe route to the ditches that was not evident to less experienced souls.

“Pond dipping” sounds a gentle activity but not the way the experts do it! Temporary habitat disturbance was effected by substantially framed fine gauge nets with sturdy long handles – the aim being to get specimens out of the ditch not the observer into the ditch. Several of the children proved to have an excellent technique and specimens quickly filled the various trays and jars for examination under magnifying lenses. As Andy Harmer described the habits and life cycles of some of the finds it soon became apparent that life down in the pond may be even more nasty, brutal and short than on the surface.



One particular mini-monster was the larva of the Great Diving Beetle which if ‘blown up’ could easily have starred in a Hammer horror film. By contrast the caddis fly larva was almost invisible inside a complicated construction of reed strands glued together by its cement like saliva which then provided a perfectly camouflaged mobile home.



Two finds were particularly exciting for Andy Harmer who had recently carried out a survey on the Meadows. One was a tiny newt - because newts had not been recorded on the Meadows recently and the other was an 'enigma'. This was identified as the diving beetle *Dytiscus circumcinctus* which is a very special find in Cheshire and a 'first' on the Meadows for Andy. It is about the size of a fifty-pence piece and is shown here on Andy's hand! This voracious, black, shiny mini-

beast can emerge from the water in the gloaming or twilight to dry out, vibrate and then fly away in search of another pond to terrorise, hopefully not yours!

The reference books were consulted and photographs taken of the finds and two hours passed very quickly in the enthusiastic knowledgeable company of Julie, Andy and Lidia. Fortunately we had our own Andy from Friends of the Meadows to lead us back across the Meadows to the safety of the main footpath at Bottom's Lane.

The details of the many individual finds will probably fade but the memories of a relaxed and enjoyable expedition which emphasised what a great resource the Meadows are will remain with us for a long time.

Pauline Macey