



# Foxglove Covert's Flagship Ponds

**Foxglove Covert** was awarded Flagship Pond status in 2014, because it is one of the very best sites in the UK for freshwater biodiversity. Here you can find a cluster of wildlife rich ponds with exceptional wetland plant communities, an increasingly rare sight in the UK. This fantastic site also supports several of Britain's most endangered freshwater plants and animals, including Great Crested Newts and Water Voles, delicate rare plants like Pillwort and Marsh Stitchwort, and a small unassuming snail - the Pond Mud Snail, which is a specialist of high quality ponds and an indicator of ancient wetland habitats.

Looking out from this hide you can see the Flagship Ponds at Foxglove Covert which include a complex of newer ponds constructed in 2008: these are fed by water abstracted from a spring, which circulates through the ponds via a system of pipes and bunds. There are also a number of pre-existing, much older but very high quality, shallow pools, some of which dry out naturally every year.



**POND MUD SNAIL** are distinctively elongate pond snails, closely associated with old ponds in unimproved habitats like heaths and commons. Sadly the UK population has declined by up to 50% in the last 30 years, though good populations still exist in a few locations, including locally in lower Swaledale. Pond Mud Snails prefer ponds that dry out in summer, and which are naturally low in nutrients. These sites can be overlooked and are easily damaged, either by draining them or turning them into permanent ponds. Pond Mud Snail has been found in 10 of the 21 ponds surveyed at Foxglove Covert, mostly within the 'old pools'.



Pillwort

**PILLWORT** is a delicate aquatic fern confined to places where low nutrients, fluctuating water levels and grazing livestock limit competition from larger plants. It has declined both in Britain and the rest of Western Europe due to the decline of traditional pastoral landscapes, agricultural intensification, and pollution. Pillwort has been lost from nearly half its known sites in the UK, although there are several recent Yorkshire localities. At the moment Pillwort has been recorded in 2 of the ponds on the reserve.



**MARSH STITCHWORT** is a plant of fen and water margin habitats. In the UK it has declined by more than 30% during the late 20th century, and Foxglove Covert is one of the few remaining populations in Yorkshire. Six plants have been identified on the site, all in a small area of one of the 'old pools'. Here it was associated with dense vegetation including Pointed Spear-moss, Bottle Sedge, and Bog Pondweed.

Marsh Stitchwort



**Freshwater Habitats Trust and the Foxglove Covert Volunteers have worked together to survey the ponds, looking for Pillwort, Pond Mud Snail, Marsh Stitchwort, and assessing pond diversity and water quality.**

## Protecting the ponds at Foxglove Covert:

Retention of the old, pre-existing pools is critically important for the rarest plants and animals at Foxglove Covert. The ponds will be left undisturbed apart from maintaining light grazing to avoid an increase in scrub cover. They will also be left to dry out annually, as this is an essential part of the life cycle of the animals that live here.

Occasional, small-scale management of some of the new ponds may be necessary to maintain a range of pond types but it will be important to allow others to develop into richly-vegetated fen habitat.

Steps will be taken to prevent colonisation of the wetlands by the invasive non-native plants like New Zealand Pigmyweed. Since this species is already established in several ponds on Catterick Ranges, special care should be taken when moving machinery, tools and animals (including dogs) between sites as this highly invasive plant can spread from very small fragments.



**Foxglove Covert** is a Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance. The overall management of the site is the responsibility of the Management Group which is made up of representatives from Catterick Garrison, Richmondshire District Council, Natural England, and a number of volunteers who have an interest in making the reserve a success

A dedicated group of volunteers help maintain Foxglove Covert, carrying out practical tasks on the reserve, including monitoring of the ponds and the special species they support. This work is largely funded by voluntary donations and could not continue without the generous contributions of its supporters.

**Freshwater Habitats Trust** is one of the UK's principle research and conservation charities for the protection and recovery of our most endangered freshwater habitats and species. We work in partnership to develop and deliver practical advice to help people manage and create new clean water habitats for wildlife.

**Flagship Ponds** is one of three projects within Freshwater Habitats Trust's People, Ponds and Water Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



PICTURE CREDITS: Mud Snail © Ian Hughes; Marsh Stitchwort © Richard Lansdown; Pillwort © Freshwater Habitats Trust / Naomi Ewald