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Never judge a book by its cover, or the value of a mosaic of wetland and aquatic habitats, however scruffy.

A survey of waterbodies, within an unremarkable area of arable farmland, yielded unexpected riches. Neglect and an uneven spread of poorly drained soil, within proximity to existing wet habitats, had passively created an interconnecting mosaic of wetland and aquatic habitats.



Un-managed undulating waterlogged areas provide species-rich wet habitats.

These habitats supported a notably species-rich assemblage of aquatic macroinvertebrates and numerous species of conservation interest, several with threatened or vulnerable status.

More than one surveyed waterbody achieved the criteria necessary for BAP Priority Pond status.

Whilst not hydrologically linked to, the area is undoubtedly benefiting from its proximity to, a neighbouring site of Regional value for invertebrates.

It is, however, the variety of wet habitats on a local scale

that support this faunal assemblage.

Whilst not pretty, an old farmland pond, with its seasonally diminishing water levels, supported an abundance of uncommon water beetles and soldierflies, beneath a dense covering of duckweed.

A deep turbid pond, with impenetrable willow scrub and mixed-species tall emergent vegetation fringing its margins, supported numerous aquatic bugs and dragonflies.



Deep permanent waterbody with willow scrub and herbaceous margins

Waterlogged soils amongst undulating terrain created ephemeral ponds and wetland areas; some deep, others shallow; some warm and open, others cool and shady; vegetation structure varied between the simple stems of rushes and sedges, to the complex tangle of brooklime and flooded marsh bedstraw. Each of these patches of habitat supported species both generalist and more

specialist.



Warm, shallow ephemeral wet habitat

An abundance of scrub and 'unruly' vegetation provided the habitat favoured by the terrestrial stage of many aquatic species life-cycles. The vegetation favoured for shelter or food depends on the species, its habits, its diet and mouthparts; tall umbelliferous species are favoured by several uncommon soldierflies recorded in the ponds, for example.

It is the interconnectedness of this mosaic of aquatic and wetland habitats that supported a biodiversity greater than would be by each waterbody, if in isolation.

Thus, a combination of proximity to neighbouring aquatic habitats, local hydrology and an absence of management, has, in this case, inadvertently led to an unusually diverse assemblage of aquatic macroinvertebrates, within a rather unassuming pocket of arable farmland.

