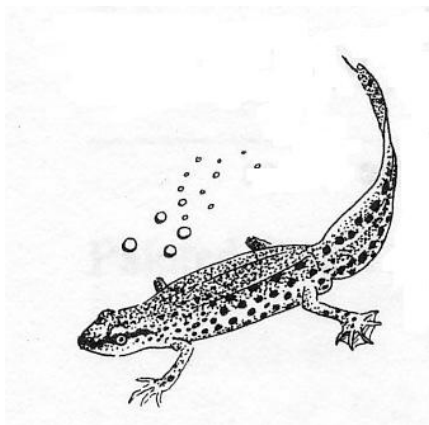


Newts

Our lovely inviting pond is always disappointingly free of frog and toad spawn – frogs seem very scarce here and although there are plenty of toads they have not yet deigned to spawn in our pond. So I decided that there really should be some newts. The reason being that newts just love ponds without any frogs because they lay their eggs later in the season than frogs, and both their eggs and tiny tadpoles are the favourite snack of hungry and by this stage, carnivorous, frog tadpoles.

So to prove it I set out with a torch one fine night in April, having read that this was the best way of finding them. And lo! there were newts. Six of them, lying around in the weed near the surface. But what sort?? Well, they were small – no longer than about 8 cms, maybe 3 inches at the most – from nose tip to tail tip. Also slender, and rather dull khaki coloured. After much peering with the binoculars I could just make out one individual which was more clearly and brightly marked. I watched this one, which I thought was a male, and eventually as he swam I could see his webbed rear feet – the source of his name Palmate Newt.



Now I shall have to wait and see if we get any newt tadpoles (newt-poles?). You cannot easily see the eggs – they do not lay a big mass of spawn like frogs or long strings like toads but lay each egg carefully on vegetation and wrap a leaf over it. A very different survival strategy - laying fewer eggs and better protecting them, compared with the profligate exposed spawn blobs of the frogs!

Rosemary Royle

PS. Another Hoopoe was sighted at St Brides on 9th May by the restaurant staff as they were clearing Sunday lunch! So near and yet so far