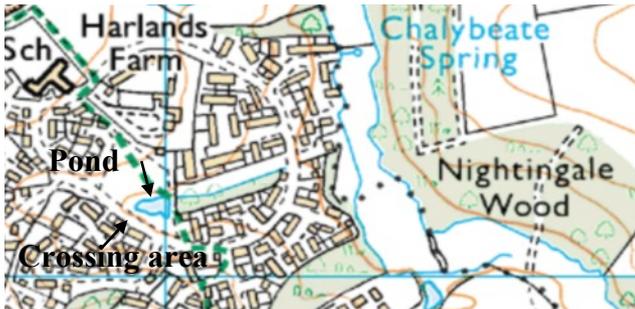


Harlands Farm Pond – Mallard Drive Uckfield

My 22 year Tale of the Toads at Mallard Drive by Jenny Bacon

When I moved to Mallard Drive in June 1994 the Harland's estate was in the early stages of being developed by several different house builders. By the following spring we as a family were involved in the annual Toad Migration.



Harlands Farm Pond

Despite all the earth movement that took place over the years and the ever changing landscape the toads still migrated to the old farm pond each



Common Toad

spring when the conditions were right. The migration could last well over a month depending on the night time temperatures. One of the main

problems the toads faced was unless there was a driveway nearby the toads were unable to climb up the kerb stones to cross to the pond and therefore they were trapped on the road and vulnerable to being squashed by passing cars. Uckfield Town Council were persuaded to lower 8 or 9 of the kerbstones adjacent to the pond, which helped.

Another hazard were the surface water drains which the toads could fall down and if not rescued would ultimately drown.

In the early days the number of toads we helped across the roads each year were between 150 and



Toad March

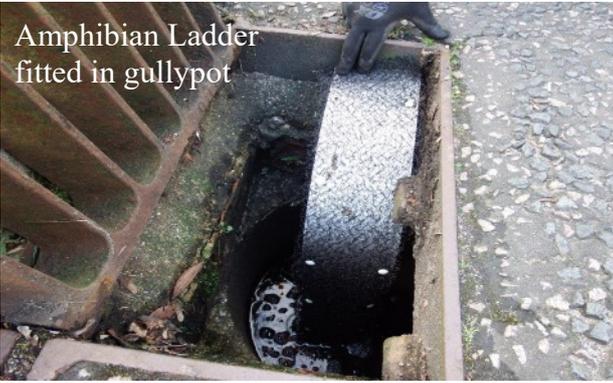
300, with numbers staying at this level for several years. However during a hot summer in 1997 the water levels in the pond became dangerously low, with high levels of silt in the pond so the National Rivers Authority (as they were then known) came out and removed all the fish. From recollection I think they were Rudd.

With the fish removed, after a few years the pond's diversity changed and became dominated by frogs. We also found common newts and palmate newts crossing the roads. In 2003/4 we helped over 1000 frogs to the pond whilst the toad numbers were just about holding their own. However in my opinion this was due to the fact that the fish had been removed some years earlier, so the frog tadpoles no longer were predated by fish.

Over the following years more houses were built and soon goldfish had been introduced to the pond. This was another turning point in that we found the frog population starting to decrease with the toad population increasing. We also found fewer newts crossing the road in the spring.

Since 2012/13 the toad numbers have gone from strength to strength. The numbers of toads that we helped across the road and those found at the pond

Amphibian Ladder fitted in gullypot



reached over 1000, with the frog numbers having dropped to the low hundreds.

This seems to have been the turning point in favour of the toads, further development had stopped and the toad numbers increased steadily each year. The numbers of toads crossing the roads now appears to have levelled off at just over 1000.

As well as crossing the roads the toads also travel along the wooded stream which takes the overflow water from the pond that runs through the middle of the estate. We have tried to record the number of toads travelling to and from the pond via the stream and would estimate well over 1000 each year. It was imperative that this stretch of woodland be protected and left undisturbed as we believe many toads use the woodland during their terrestrial phases and also use it as a corridor into the open country side heading out towards Bird in Eye.

In 2016 East Sussex County Council agreed that Sussex Amphibian & Reptile Group could trial the use of special amphibian escape ladders by installing them into 20 of road drains (gully pots) on the site.

The ladders consist of a nylon mesh (Enkamat) fixed onto a flexible strip of metal which is temporarily fitted into the gully pot during the migration period. This enables toads and newts to climb out of the drains on their own. The trial proved to be a success and meant that volunteers no longer had to struggle lifting heavy drain covers at night and fishing out toads from what can be very unpleasant water.

Without the dedication of the few people that helped the toads over the years we would not have the numbers now seen in the pond – In particular I would like to mention Rita who lived by the pond and Caroline Dobbins who lives opposite.

Update :

In July 2016 Wealden District Council designated the Harlands Farm toad site as a Local Wildlife Site. Local Wildlife Sites (formerly known as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - SNCI's) are identified and selected by Local Authorities as areas which are locally important for the conservation of wildlife. Their selection takes into account the most important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats within the county. As a result, these special sites have a huge part to play in the natural green fabric of our towns and countryside. They make up a web of stepping stones and corridors for wildlife.

Common toads are suffering devastating declines across the UK and the Harlands Farm site is one of the most important sites in Sussex where toads are in danger of being killed by traffic. The LWS designation, covers the Harlands Farm pond, the wooded stream and the surrounding grassland.

