



Knowle Park Nature Notes: February

The first signs of spring can often be seen although it is still several weeks away. Frogs start to emerge from their winter hiding places and head towards their breeding ponds.

When Frogs mate eggs are laid in clumps and toads lay eggs in long chains. It takes 6-21 days for the egg to hatch into a tadpole. The warmth of the water and the food supply then determines the speed of the tadpole's development. A week later they can swim and feed on algae. At about 6 to 9 weeks legs start to sprout, the head becomes more distinct and the body elongates and their diet is dead insects and plants. At 9 weeks they look more like a tiny frog with a really long tail. By 12 weeks, the tadpole has only a small stubby tail and looks like a miniature frog and at roughly 4 months the frog has completed the full growth cycle. In April the adults and young frogs will leave the pond and for the rest of the year these animals are very unobtrusive and difficult to find, only to return again next year to lay more eggs and start the process all over again.

Just above the pond you will see hedge that we laid several years ago. Laying a hedge looks easy, but in practice it requires skill and experience. The aim is to reduce the thickness of the hedgerow and each stem is then laid down. A section of bark and sapwood must connect it to its roots in order to keep it alive. Upright stakes are then placed along the line of the hedge and a hazel binding is woven around the tops of the stakes to hold the stakes and tops down securely. This is great for wildlife as it thickens the hedgerow providing increased cover for insects and wildlife in general.

Other things to look out for:

- Hazel catkins have started to expand into golden tassels in order to release their pollen to the wind.

