Flaxton Amphibian Pond Survey 2026

Introduction and Methods

In 1994 a survey of ponds in Flaxton and neighbouring area was carried out by John Spray (Gray & Spray 1994). This survey particularly concentrated on great crested newts, but also recorded other amphibians where present. At the suggestion of John Spray, another survey of ponds in Flaxton was carried out on 18 April 2026, with the aim of repeating the 1994 survey and looking at additional ponds where available, by licensed members of the York Amphibian and Reptile Group (YARG), accompanied by volunteers. This followed a limited survey of four ponds in 2024 (report available on the Flaxton Environment Group page of the Parish Council website).

Of the 12 ponds in the original 1994 survey, nine were re-surveyed. Seven of these were in gardens, two were in crofts (small fields) behind gardens on the far side of the footpath know as Back Lane, and one was the pond on the Common at the southern end of the village. The location of one was uncertain and permission to survey was refused for two others. Permission to survey seven further ponds was kindly provided by their owners, of which five were in gardens, one was in a croft and one in a small field.

The ponds were surveyed by torchlight after dark. Where adult amphibians were found these were counted. The presence of eggs and tadpoles was noted but no attempt to count these was made.

Results

The results are summarised in Table 1. Of the nine ponds originally surveyed in 1994 that were resurveyed in 2026, evidence of great crested newts were found in seven, though in one case only eggs were found. Of the two in which none were found, one (pond no. 6) was a small garden pond covered in duckweed and the other (no. 9), located in a croft, had cloudy water, so that visibility was poor in both cases. Great crested newt eggs were also found in a garden pond not surveyed in 1994 (no. 2).

Evidence of smooth newts was also found in seven ponds, including some in which they were not found in 1994. One pond (no. 5) contained a palmate newt, a less common species with a preference for ponds with acidic water.

Frog tadpoles were found in two ponds, one in a croft (no. 9) and the other the pond at the corner with York road (no. 17). Adult toads and tadpoles were found in pond 13, and toadspawn was seen in pond 16, both of which were ornamental garden ponds.

Four of the ponds contained fish. In two of these, each of which had many fish in, no newts were found though a third (no. 16) contained a large ‘neotenous’ great crested newt. This term is applied to newts which don’t fully complete their life cycle, and retain juvenile characteristics including external gills. Two (13 and 16) contained toads as adults, tadpoles

or eggs, as noted above. The fourth pond with fish in (no. 12) contained large numbers of both great crested and smooth newts, but in this case only a few fish were present.

The results indicate that newts are still widely distributed in Flaxton ponds, including the rapidly declining great crested newt, which is becoming rare in much of the UK. In many ponds only small numbers were found and in two only eggs were seen, though these appeared plentiful. The survey was carried out in what would normally be considered the middle of the breeding season, but the spring had been a warm one and is it possible that in some cases the adult newts had moved back to terrestrial habitat which is where they spend the majority of the year, outside the breeding season.

Ponds where no great crested newts were seen either had numerous fish (see above), or were difficult to survey because of poor visibility due to cloudy water or plants covering the surface (see Appendix 1). One may have been two small. Fish are known to eat newt eggs and small larvae, and newts may struggle to survive in ponds where fish are present unless the pond is large and has plenty of suitable vegetation to hide in. It is better therefore not to introduce fish into ponds where there is a desire to encourage newts.

Newts are also predatory, and will in their turn eat frog spawn and small tadpoles. Great crested newts will also eat toad spawn and tadpoles. It is not surprising therefore that newts were generally not found in 2026 in ponds with frogs and toads present, though in 1994 some ponds contained frogs or toads and newts. These species can coexist in large ponds, but are less likely to in smaller ponds.

For those interested in encouraging amphibians, advice is readily available and a selection of sources are provided at the end of this report. Briefly, some of the most useful things you can do are as follows:

- Create a pond with gently sloping sides (or at the very least, have a ramp to allow amphibians to get in and out)
- Allow vegetation cover to develop around the pond's edges
- Make sure that any plants that are introduced are native and form a reputable source. Introduction of invasive non-native plants is a big problem and once present they can be difficult or impossible to eradicate.
- Do not stock ponds with fish
- Provide some long grass for the amphibians to forage in outside the breeding season.
- Provide piles of logs or stones for the amphibians to hide under when not active, and hibernate under during winter. Compost heaps are also useful as shelters and sources of prey.

Table 1. Summary of results (numbers refer to adults; eggs and tadpoles not counted. P = adults present but not counted)

2026						1994				
Pond number	**Great Crested Newt**	**Smooth Newt**	**Palmate Newt**	**Frog**	**Toad**	***Pond number***	**Great Crested Newt**	**Smooth Newt**	**Frog**	**Toad**
1	12 + eggs	12				***63***	17	18	6 + tadpoles	
2	eggs	2								
3										
4	eggs					***37***	1			
5	5	9	1							
6		4				***40***	2	10		
7	1	10				***41***	1	3	P + spawn	
8	7					***38***	39			
9		egg		tadpoles		***43***	19	1		
10										
11	1					***64***	5		20	
12	21	11				***44***	2	P	P	P + tadpoles
13					2 + tadpoles					
14		1								
15	4					***27c***	8			
16	*				eggs					
17				tadpoles						

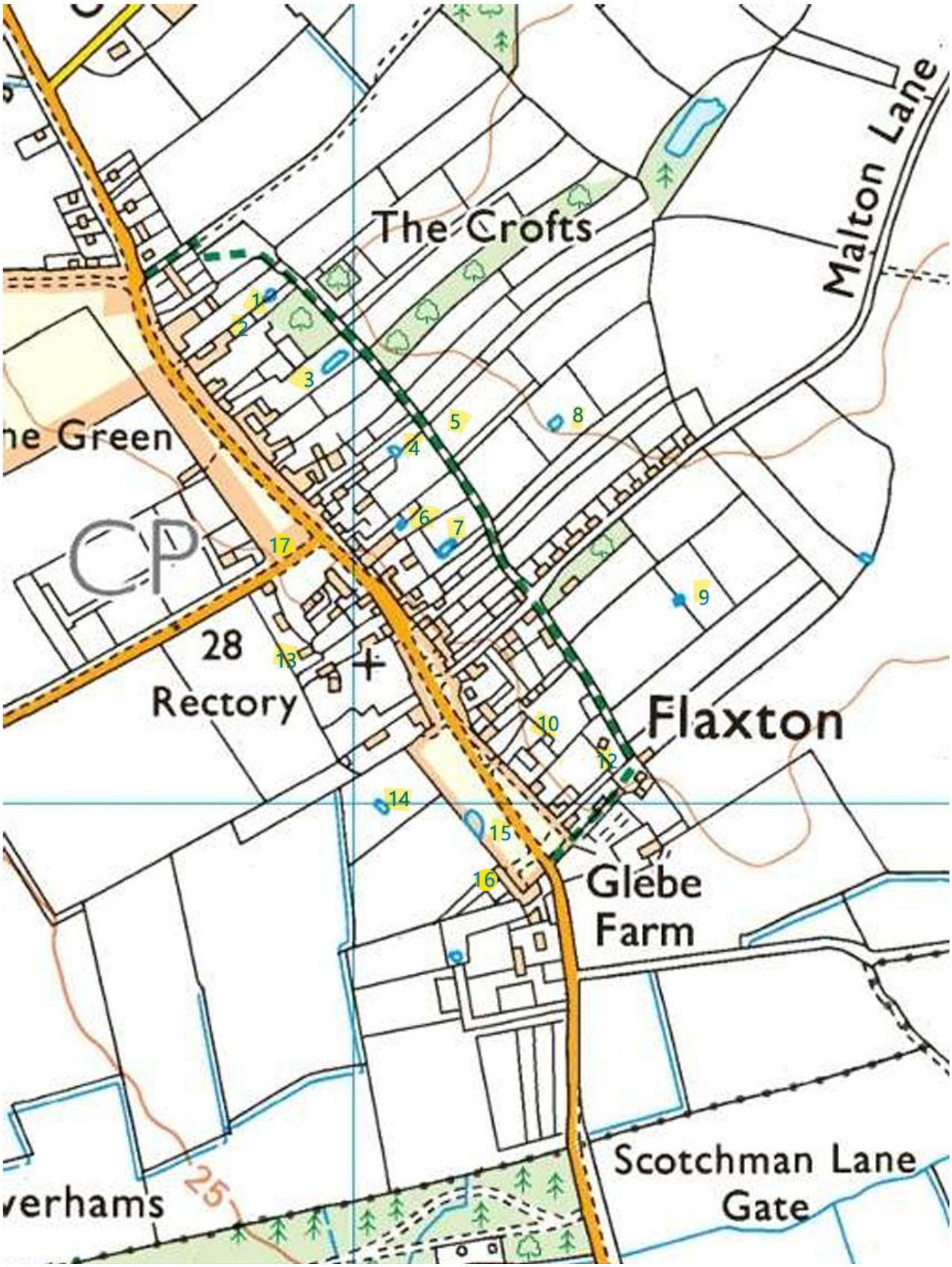

Figure 1. Map showing locations of ponds

Appendix 1. Locations of ponds and notes on ease of surveying

Pond number (2026)	Location	Ease of surveying
1	Flaxton House garden	Good
2	Fairview garden	Poor visibility
3	Village Farm	Poor visibility
4	Blacksmiths Arms / Prospect House garden	Good
5	Croft behind Prospect House	Good
6	Kelfield House garden	Heavy duckweed cover
7	Beechtree Farm garden	Surface vegetation obscured part of pond
8	Croft behind Kelfield House	Poor – visibility - algae
9	Croft south of Barney Lane	Poor visibility – cloudy with algae
10	The Lodge garden	Good
11	Location withheld at owner's request	Little water present
12	The Pines garden	Moderate – slightly cloudy
13	Sweetbriar Cottage garden	Good
14	Field near Draft Farm	Poor visibility and bankside vegetation
15	Village Green	Access limited by bankside vegetation. Visibility good
16	Willow Dene garden	Good
17	Flaxton Lane junction	Limited access due to trees etc

References

Gray, A & Spray, J. (1994). Estimated population and distribution of Great Crested Newts within the area of Anchor Plain / High Roans and the parishes of Lillings Ambo and Flaxton. Report to Ryedale Council.

Sources of advice on creating and managing ponds and other habitats for amphibians

A number of organisations provide advice on how to encourage amphibians and other garden wildlife. Links to a selection of these are given below.

- ARG UK - Wildlife Gardening /Dragons in your garden leaflets here Wildlife Gardening - Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK
- ARC Trust Gardens & ponds | Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Froglife: Info & advice and Wildlife at Home