# STIRRINGS IN THE POND by Dave and Gill Shearing

For those of us lucky enough to have a garden pond, March is the month when we see it starting to come to life after a dormant period over the Winter.

Although important, temperature is not the only factor that causes this awakening. Just as important is the day length, especially for the pond plants. Any pruning and tidying of marginal plants and deeper water plants such as water lilies should have been done during the Winter to minimize disturbance to Amphibians, Fish and invertebrates. Even if the plants were cut back severely in the Winter they will grow prolifically during the Spring.

Frogs mostly hibernate in the mud at the bottom of the pond and from about February onwards they can be seen in pairs on the surface spawning. Toads and Newts on the other hand will have spent the Winter in a shed, hole in a wall, mouse burrow or under piles of logs up to a mile from the pond and will have to travel overland back to the pond for spawning crossing busy roads in the process.

This happens mainly during the night and some village communities operate rescue schemes at this time of the year to assist them by carrying them across the dangerous roads. Toads will always return to the pond where they were born to spawn. Newts and Frogs are not so particular as long as the pond is suitable.

Many invertebrate species colonize a pond by flying in. These include many species of Beetle.

The largest is the scarce Great Silver Water Beetle, which can be up to two inches long. Unusual for a water Beetle, this one is a vegetarian.

More common is the Great Diving Beetle, which is up to 1.5 inches long. Both larva and adult are ferocious predators of small Fish, Tadpoles and invertebrates.

Another common species to arrive are the Water Boatmen, which are also predators. They can also give you an excruciatingly painful bite. You may see a swarm of small, black Beetles tearing around randomly on the surface. These are known as Whirlygig beetles.

Numerous species of Dragonfly and Damsel Fly may colonize the pond by the adults laying eggs, which hatch into fairly ugly, predatory larvae. These larvae may live and feed in the pond for up to three years before they crawl up a reed stem. Unlike most insects they do not have a pupal stage. The larva splits across the back and from it emerges the elegant adult Dragonfly or Damsel fly.

Many pond species such as Leeches and Snails cannot get to a pond overland or from the sky and so if we want them in our pond we have to put them there. A good tip when you are creating a pond is to obtain a bucket of mud from an established pond. Put this in your pond and you will 'seed' your pond with numerous invertebrate species.

Fish may be present in your pond. Although attractive to see they are not recommended if you want a balanced pond. They eat a tremendous amount of weed, eggs and invertebrates.

Lastly, I would urge you to wait until one hour after it gets dark and then go out to your pond with a powerful torch. You will be amazed at what you can see.

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo