

# All creatures great and small



*“All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small...”*

The words of the much-loved Victorian hymn have continued to inspire down the generations for its depiction of the natural world. The words capture the awe and wonder of God’s creation from *‘the purple headed mountain’* to *‘the tall trees in the green wood’*, from *‘each little bird that sings’* to *‘the ripe fruits in the garden’*. I’m very much hoping that having experienced a chilly April and May, June will see the advent of *‘the pleasant summer sun’*

Growing up for most of my childhood and youth in Africa I learnt very quickly of the dangers that taking your dog for a walk across the South African veld could bring. In fact, walking with a dog was a good way of protecting yourself. Dogs make a noise, and their constant toing-and-froing helps to warn off poisonous snakes and aggressive baboons. Always carry a stout stick. And never forget that where there are baboons, there are often leopards. Big game was something I took for granted, smaller creatures only ever entered my consciousness if their sting or bite could prove to be lethal. Never reach up with your hands without being able to see what is there – scorpions, black widow spiders etc.

This past Lent I took on the challenge of restoring a much-neglected pond in The Rectory garden. I've never had a pond before but was encouraged by our good neighbours Mags and Terry to bring back to life an overgrown derelict site that I soon realised was leaking! It has taken a good many hours to complete, including the need to reline but I was assured that the fruits of my labour would be more than amply rewarded. How true that has proved to be. I had not appreciated before the importance of ponds as a natural habitat. Frogs and toads I knew about however ponds as an important breeding habitat for newts has been a revelation.

I now know that the area in which we live is a favoured habitat of one of Europe's endangered species, the Great Crested Newt. The population of Great Crested Newts has declined significantly in recent decades due to the deterioration in pond provision. Newts need ponds in which to breed; without them, we are at risk of losing an important part of our biodiversity. At The Rectory we are still in the early days of fostering pond life, but we do now have a corner of our garden that has become a haven for a myriad of insects, a toad has been spotted. And recently, two Great Crested female newts appeared as if from nowhere...

I'm learning to appreciate some of God's smaller creatures. A trip to the pond never fails to excite. Creepy crawlies and slimy amphibians are finding a new home and I'm glad to be able to help. If you've ever been tempted to have a pond in your garden but never quite got around to it. Take the plunge. Lots of little creatures will be grateful. The *'bright and beautiful'* are waiting to be discovered right on your doorstep.

God Bless

*Revd Mark Bailey*