

Natural Community - Pond



A pond is a depression in the ground where water collects. It might be as small as a puddle where frogs spawn in the spring; it might be half a mile across. Most of the ponds in Missouri are man-made - formed when water is deliberately trapped by dams. The water in ponds is standing, not flowing; it's shallow enough that sunshine can reach the

bottom and rooted plants can grow completely across the pond. There are no waves, the water temperature is fairly even and the bottom is generally covered with mud. The amount of dissolved oxygen may vary throughout the day.

Ponds are always evolving. Sunlight supports the growth of rooted plants and algae. Some pond plants grow entirely underwater; some, like water lilies, have flowers and leaves that float on the surface. As time passes, the plants die and sink to the bottom. Soil from the banks and the dam erode into the pond. If left alone, the pond will eventually fill in with dirt and debris until it becomes solid land. It may take hundreds of years for this transformation from clear water to soil to occur.

Ponds support a huge variety of life ranging from microscopic plants and animals to large mammals. Muskrat and beaver build their homes in the middle of the pond. (In fact, the beaver may have constructed the dam that created the pond.) Raccoons and mink hunt along the shore. Mallards nest along the shore and feed in the shallows. Water turtles spend their time

hunting and basking in the water, venturing on land only to find mates and lay their eggs.

Spring at the pond is a season of birth. Turtles and frogs emerge from the shallow bottom where they hibernated all winter. Insect larvae are so plentiful that the water ripples as they chase each other. Blackbirds and other birds arrive to stake their claims to territory.



By the middle of summer, salamanders and frogs have completed metamorphosis, losing their gills and becoming air-breathers. The ducklings have hatched and are learning to swim. The dragonfly larvae started life as fierce underwater predators; now they hunt on the wing. Turtles climb on each other to find the sunniest place on floating logs.

In fall, the summer songbirds are replaced by migrating geese and ducks. The full-time residents eat greedily to store reserves for the cold season ahead. The animals who do not hibernate (like the muskrat) store food in their burrows and lodges.



Gradually, the weather gets colder and the pond freezes. The turtles have dug themselves deep into the mud. Beaver and muskrats spend the nastiest days sheltered cozily in their lodges. Fish, who are cold-blooded, aren't bothered by winter; they just move more slowly, waiting for spring.