

## IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE POND TODAY ...

The weather continues to break records with one of the mildest Novembers ever, preceded by one of the coldest Octobers, wettest Junes and a very warm March. What has yet to change, despite the occasional wet month, is the long dry spell now spanning several years. According to one report we need heavy rain from now until May just to get back to normal levels. As well as our obvious need of water, many other creatures need it too - as only a glance at a drop of pond water through a microscope readily reveals.

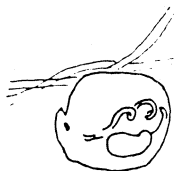
Like those denizens of the night - the moths - this was yet another whole new world for me discovered since coming to Turvey. And what an exciting world it is, with no two drops of water, let alone ponds and rivers, being alike.

The very first sample provided numerous, as yet nameless, creepy-crawlies of all shapes and sizes and modes of locomotion: the monastic equivalent of Darwin's first experience of a South American rain forest! This sample included a tiny brown capsule attached to the side of the pond which two weeks later produced a minute and pristine water-boatman - my first aquatic baby!

This was followed by a succession of startling vignettes: the sudden lurching past of a dragonfly nymph in all its horrible glory, modified somewhat by the carpet of algae on its back and the presence of grazing protozoa which were, in their turn, being snapped up by a variety of rotifers also hitching a ride on the nymph's back. (They say if we look at ourselves closely it's much the same - I'd rather not).

Other samples produced green translucent wormlike creatures making forays from their places of concealment in the algae - there are moray eels in Turvey if you dare to look! A close examination of two newt larvae revealed blood cells (?) pumping through their gills and feet, but another look revealed spider-like mites searching for a share of the same life substance. There is no stasis here, no quarter given, everything is either nibbling or being nibbled by something else. I waited in vain, however, to see a hydra making a catch with its beguiling but deadly limbs, so this is one schoolboy ambition which remains unfulfilled. But I did see rotifers with twin-heads like Ronson razors, and others armoured with all sorts of plates and projections - enough to make a rhino quail, or at least show signs of envy. And there were water-fleas and mayfly nymphs, quick-silver diving beetles and caddis fly houses, nematode worms thrashing all over the place and snails ponderously cleaning up everyone else's mess only to make more of their own.

So there's life out there every bit as exciting as a TV safari - and death too within inches of one's nose. I still can't get over seeing a tissue like piece of protozoa simply dissolving into tiny grains of something which was no longer itself but immediately snatched at by a passing neighbour. A word of warning: If you want to sleep soundly at night, leave the microscope under lock and key, and the swarming paramecia well alone.



Feeding thro  
opening on green  
algae



?volucella  
also with  
algae attached