

The Birth of a Pool

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It was summer 2021. Ever since excavating two pools 17 years earlier, I had gazed down upon them and admired their visitors - White Storks and Great White Egrets plodding the margins to hunt frogs and small fry, Goldeneyes pretty regularly, a Kingfisher on a couple of occasions, Green Sandpipers and Snipe now and then. But always I had had that niggling thought 'how I would like the pools to be bigger'. In reality, measuring in at about 25 metres long and 15 metres long, I couldn't really say they were that small, but finally I had reached the conclusion that it was time to act - a floodpool a few hundred metres away had attracted a pair of Little Grebes to breed. And that was a dangerous place to breed, they had attempted there one time before and failed when it dried up prematurely. In summer 2021, they fledged the young with a whisker of time to go before it dried, but still the seed was now firmly planted ...I wanted a pool large enough to potentially attract them to breed.

So, here it is, October 2021, as autumn kicked in and most species that would be disturbed had long departed, the plan came to fruition: Step One. Big pool excavation needs big tools, the arrival of the mean machine: Step Two. The basic idea of the project was to excavate an adjacent pool next to the big one, as below, then dig out the connecting area and, like magic, one new mega pool should materialise. Excavator man was quite enthusiastic - it looked like we were heading for Australia! Step Three. Unfortunately I was not there at the moment of break through. Apologies to all the frogs who were peacefully swimming around when suddenly their calm abode turned into a rushing torrent - must have been Lithuania's biggest waterfall for a few brief moments!

The pictures below shows the morning after, all the area to the rear is the new part. The water level is still quite low at this point - most of the water flooded into the excavated hole! Step Four. Excavator man thought he had nearly finished at this stage, so did I. However, I then decided it needed to be bigger - so when he went home for the day, I marked out an area at the rear to further expand both in length and width. That is what he is about to start in the above photographs. To the wildlife around, disturbance overall was very minor - waterbirds and those likely to use the pool had largely already migrated out and the feeding station at the opposite end of the adjacent pool was still full of birds, even the moderately shy Grey-headed Woodpecker still visiting despite the iron monster cranking its arm and dumping yet more mountains of soil. One more bird treat at around this time - to the one side, clanks of the excavator and splashes of water being displaced, to the other the oh so evocative calls of a Pygmy Owl. First species actually attracted by the spoils of the newly created pool was a pretty impressive one - a Camberwell Beauty sunning itself on displaced piles of soil. Not only the first species on my pool, but also my latest ever record of this species in Lithuania (8th October). Step Five. Excavator man again did a good job lengthening and broadening the far end, so when he popped off home for the evening I decided he could do the same at the near end - I marked out a new area for him to work on next day. And so, on a rather frosty morning, he added one more extension to the pool ...with this bit, the total length of the new pool became about 75 metres. Step Six. With the first pool completed, it seemed a waste to send the excavator away without doing a little management on its baby sister pool. With its border of reeds and shrubs attracting Marsh Warblers and the lily pads serving as favoured haul out pads for frogs and resting spots for damselflies, I had some doubts about doing this pool - not only were the considerable costs escalating, but I also had to destroy some nice habitat. Excavator man wanted to get rid of "all that old reed mess" on all sides of the pool, but instead I merely deepened and extended the near end by a metre or so. I am comforted by the knowledge that it will return better, but it was still a sorry sight to see nice vegetation grubbed up. Result. Well, the pools were finished and nicely filling with water ...tracks of a Moose revealed an inquisitive animal, perhaps taking a drink from the water. Roe Deer and Red Fox tracks also in the abundance of levelled soil around. And that was that, me slightly bankrupt, the project was finished, it was now just a final wait for the pools to fill to the top and then, come the spring, for vegetation to reestablish and the life of the pools to return. Not on this pool, but treat of the autumn was a fantastic family of Otters in my adjacent flood forest ...I was atop my observation tower and there was a splash in the water just beyond - I presumed it was a Beaver, but instead a splendid Otter was swimming past. And not just one, but for the next 40 minutes, an adult and two well-grown youngsters swimming around, playing and clambering up on the Beaver lodge. They eventually vanished inside the Beaver lodge. These would be most welcome on my new pool.