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Created wetlands and dams

Created wetlands come in many different varieties, but can be roughly divided into wetlands intended to imitate at least some aspects of natural waters and ecosystems, and dams which are primarily a way of storing water but can also be modified or improved to provide some habitat functions as well. For all of the good intentions underlying created wetlands, very few have a clearly defined plan or include any provision for monitoring the achievements (or failures) of those who design them. By contrast, the humble farm dam can only be improved regardless of its original limitations as habitat.

Created wetlands

Very few created (also called constructed) wetlands have much value as habitat for anything but the most common and adaptable animals, mainly because they are designed and planted by people who have little or no background in aquatic biology, and lack any clear or defined goals beyond water treatment and a pleasing appearance. Habitat is always accorded a token importance on the plans, but without any indication of just what it might be for, or any recommendation as to assessing what its value.

This is the outcome of a curious phenomenon – the coordinators laying out the grand plan for nearly all created wetlands are mostly landscape architects. I have yet to hear of any Government authority employing a landscape architect to rehabilitate or recreate a terrestrial ecology, yet they continue to be asked to design wetlands as ecosystems, and in some cases win awards for their work because those who judge