

wildlifematters

Autumn 2018



Herts and
Middlesex

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PROTECTING **WILDLIFE** FOR THE FUTURE



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Autumn 2018

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© Denis Jackson



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From the Chief Executive

We are in a time of potential great change for wildlife legislation through which we have an opportunity to reverse the fortunes of our wildlife. But this is far from certain.



The Government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment sets out goals for the recovery of nature. Whilst welcome in principle, this must be underpinned by robust legislation. A new Agriculture Act and Environment Act are being considered by Parliament, both of which will be critical to the future of wildlife. They must have strong environmental principles and set out a commitment

to funding at a scale necessary to achieve nature's recovery. The Wildlife Trusts want to see legally binding targets across all public bodies, for instance in relation to the planning system which is particularly important in our part of the country with its high levels of proposed housing growth. Nationally, as part of Greener UK, the Wildlife Trusts are lobbying government to get these messages across. At the local level we have written to all our MPs to underline the need for new wildlife legislation to be robust. This is vital if we are to secure a future where both the

areas of natural habitat and species populations are on the rise. Now, more than ever, you can make a difference as a member of the Trust. I urge you to write to your MP and make your voice heard – the more people who let them know how much the future of our wildlife matters, the better.

Thank you for your continued support of the Trust and your help for local wildlife.

Lesley Davies 

Amwell Habitat Creation Project

The Trust has started a large-scale habitat creation project at Amwell Nature Reserve thanks to funding from the Environment Agency and Cadent. Amwell forms part of the Lea Valley Special Protection Area (SPA) and is internationally important on account of the wintering gadwall, shoveler and bittern.

The ambitious project will introduce new grazing and allow better control of water levels.

Excavators have been on site to re-profile areas around the main viewpoint and have created a new island that will offer more protection to vulnerable nesting birds. The ditch in front of the viewpoint scrape is now being grazed by pigs. As they root for food, they naturally disturb and turn over the ground, creating habitats suitable for wading birds to nest and feed in.

New fencing at Hollycross Lake and the Dragonfly Trail will enable us to start grazing with Old English goats, which are highly effective at controlling the woody vegetation and scrub in these areas.



Amwell

A new sluice in Great Hardmead Lake will allow us to more effectively control water levels, helping to ensure that we can provide perfect habitats for wintering ducks and breeding and migratory wading birds.

New spawning habitats for fish will also be created by felling trees into the lake. This, along with scrub removal, will create shorelines rich in vegetation for fish, insects, mammals and birds.



Hobbies chicks at Panshanger Park

Raptors at Panshanger

In August a pair of hobbies successfully bred at Panshanger Park.

The three chicks proved a hit with visitors who enjoyed hobby watching sessions with our People and Wildlife Officer, Murray. The busy hobby parents could be easily seen bringing food to the chicks in the weeks before they fledged.

In September an osprey returned to Panshanger Park to fish in the appropriately named Osprey Lake. Ospreys are regular visitors to the park as they make their way south to overwinter in Africa. This osprey was seen multiple times over a two-week period and visitors were treated to the sight of it hunting and catching fish. Turn to p23 to see a picture of the Panshanger osprey.

Celebrating Hertfordshire's Wildlife

In July over 1,200 people came together at Panshanger Park to celebrate the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex at the Trust's Festival of Wildlife.

This annual event is delivered in partnership with Tarmac and in association with the Hertfordshire Natural History Society. Visitors enjoyed guided walks and expert talks, birdwatching with Herts Bird Club, getting up close to the special wildlife of the beautiful River Mimram. Children were able to get out minibeast hunting and were further entertained with storytelling and wildlife craft activities. Usually a two day event, we sadly had to cancel the second day due to particularly bad weather. All those who missed out will hopefully be able to make up for it by coming along in summer 2019!

Our Tewin Orchard Apple Day event took place as usual in October with over 1000 people of all ages joining us for tours of the orchard and to stock up on our fruit, juice and preserves. Attendees were also treated to a tempting array of home-made cakes, a children's activities marquee and the chance to find out more about the Trust as well as other wildlife and local produce organisations. Our thanks go to Councillor Ken Crofton for once again supporting this popular annual event.

Colne Valley water voles get funding boost

As part of a partnership project in the Colne Valley, the Trust has secured funding to conserve the single water vole population in the area.

The 'Colne Valley – A Landscape On The Edge' partnership has secured £2.5m from Heritage Lottery Fund and brings together wildlife organisations, local authorities and water companies to deliver real benefit for built and natural heritage and practical engagement with local communities. Along with additional funding from the HS2 Additional Mitigation Plan, the Trust will now be able to employ a new Rivers & Wetlands Officer.

The Water Vole Project will deliver advice, leadership and training in water vole conservation, carry out surveys and research into local water vole populations, and also plan and deliver practical habitat improvement schemes. We hope that this work will be able to link up the remaining local population with another nearby in the Chess Valley.

Could you become a Trustee?

Could you use your expertise to help us to pursue our vision of a better future for wildlife and deliver the ambitions in our Strategic Plan?

We are looking for people with a passion for wildlife conservation as well as the ability to think strategically. Ideally, we're looking for experience in business and strategic development.

As a Trustee you would join the Trust's Council, which oversees our charity's governance. Your main contact would be with the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team. You will need to be able to attend quarterly Council meetings, the AGM, and Committee meetings, and will also have the opportunity to participate in site visits, meetings with partner organisations and workshops. Trustees can be appointed for up to three 3-year terms.

If you'd like to help make a difference for wildlife in Herts and Middlesex as one of our Trustees, please contact us at info@hmwt.org for an information pack.



22,000 support call to protect our sea life

Huge response to six-week public consultation on designating more Marine Conservation Zones.

Thank you. In the six weeks leading up to July 20th, 22,000 of you signed up to our Wave of Support campaign, urging Environment Secretary Michael Gove to designate 41 new Marine Conservation Zones in the seas around England. This is the latest triumph in a decades-long battle to secure better protection for the wildlife in our seas.

Until recently, we had no way of protecting nationally important marine sites in England and Wales, and only 0.001% of our seabed was protected. So we campaigned for the Marine and Coastal Access Act, which

passed in 2009 and paved the way for more protected sites in English seas. After two public consultations and campaigns by The Wildlife Trusts, Government has designated 50 new Zones in English waters. This is a great start, but we need a network of protected areas covering every kind of

“ We hope to hear the consultation outcome in early 2019 ”



How to draw a shark in the sand. Doing the entire UK is a bit harder

To raise awareness of the need for more MCZs, we drew the UK and its marine life on Filey Beach, North Yorkshire






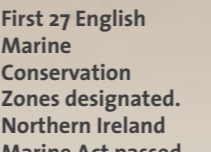
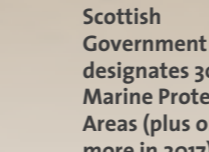


habitat and threatened species. This latest consultation could take us one step closer to a complete network. The Government has up to a year to decide which of the 41 proposed Marine

Conservation Zones they will formally designate. We hope to hear the outcome in early 2019.

Designating a Zone is just the beginning. We need to make sure these sites are managed well. This means restricting damaging activities, such as scallop dredging and bottom trawling, which threaten the wildlife that the site is designated to protect.

Restrictions are already in place for some of the first sites to be designated, such as The Manacles on the southern coast of Cornwall. With enough sites designated and proper management, our seas can thrive again.

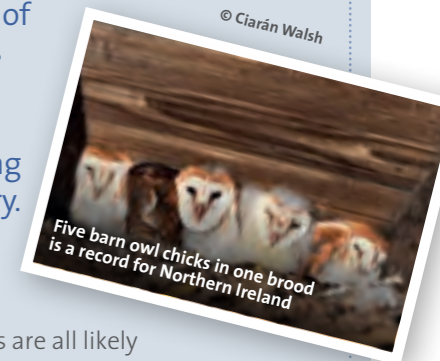
The 47-year fight for marine protection

1971	1990	1995	2002	2009	2013	2014	2016	2018
 Lundy, off Devon, becomes Britain's first Marine Protected Area	 Skomer in Wales is designated a Marine Nature Reserve	 Northern Ireland's Strangford Lough is designated a Marine Nature Reserve	 The Wildlife Trusts begin campaigning for a Marine Act	 Marine and Coastal Access Act passed in England. Scotland follows in 2010.	 First 27 English Marine Conservation Zones designated. Northern Ireland Marine Act passed.	 Scottish Government designates 30 Marine Protected Areas (plus one more in 2017).	 23 more English Zones designated. Four more in Northern Ireland.	 Consultation on third tranche of English Marine Conservation Zones.

Record brood of barn owls

Barn owls are one of Northern Ireland's most endangered birds, with only around 50 breeding pairs in the country.

Intensification of agriculture, use of rodenticides and an increase in major roads are all likely to have driven the population decline, but Ulster Wildlife are working to reverse their fortunes by advising landowners on how best to help barn owls. This summer, the tiny population was boosted by the discovery of five chicks in a single nest – the largest brood of barn owls ever recorded in Northern Ireland.



Five barn owl chicks in one brood is a record for Northern Ireland



A pine marten is a rare sighting in England

Pine martens back in Derbyshire?

Pine martens are cat-sized relatives of the otter and weasel, found in woodlands where they live in tree holes and old nests.

They were once common across the UK, but woodland clearance, the fur industry and persecution by gamekeepers has driven them close to extinction in England. Now this rare mammal is only recorded in a few English counties. Derbyshire was not one of them, until wildlife photographer Andy Parkinson noticed a dead male on a road between Belper and Ripley.

This is the first confirmed presence of the species in Derbyshire in 16 years.



The hidden world of moths

© Denis Jackson

Moths are all around us, but we generally have to accidentally disturb them to see them during the day. Unjustly, these mysterious, soft-winged creatures of the dark suffer from a somewhat bad reputation compared to their cousins, the butterflies. While there are 58 day-flying butterfly species in the UK, we have around 2,500 species of moths. Physiologically, there's very little difference between the two. However, they can be distinguished by their antennae – club-shaped in butterflies, more feathery in moths – and by their wings - butterflies usually fold their vertically up over their back while moths tend to hold them out in a tent-like fashion.

Moths are commonly divided into macro moths, the bigger species of which there are around 900, and micro moths which are smaller and generally harder to identify. Similar to the split between butterfly and moth within the order of Lepidoptera – meaning 'scaly-winged'

– the distinction between the two moths is also somewhat artificial: one of convenience rather than hard science.

Get to know your moths

Contrary to popular belief that they look simple and dull, moths are in no way less colourful and extravagant than butterflies. Among the 2,500 species of moths, you can find a great variety of splashes of coppery green, dusty brown and burnished bronze, vanilla-flecked creams and milky white, hairy chests and wings patterned with spots, stripes or jagged wood-shaving swirls.

However, their uniqueness is often only revealed at second glance and tends to have a vital purpose. The red underwing might look a bit drab at first sight helping them to stay undetected during the day, but as the name suggests their underwings have a really bright colour. Camouflage is also the buff tip's business with its fluffed-up face, easily mistaken for the uneven surface of snapped wood.

Other moths are more eye-catching, as they use other strategies to stay safe. The garden tiger moth has no need to hide as it uses its striking orange and blue colouring to warn predators that it is poisonous.

The hornet moth uses mimicry – the imitation of another animal or plant – to protect itself. It has bright-yellow and black stripes and clear wings, making it look like a hornet. The Chinese character, however, has a more interesting interpretation of this strategy: if you look like bird poo, no one will want to eat you.

As the name suggests, the drinker stands out with its behaviour. While the name comes from the caterpillar drinking dew from the grass stems it feeds on, as an adult it seems to fly as if under the influence.



What's in a name?

The names given to moths over time are intriguing. While some “do what it says on the tin” like the descriptive bright-line brown-eye, the yellow-tail or the brown-tail. Others are more creative, often reflecting the society of a former time - the appearance of the dingy footman was thought similar to 20th century servants. There is also the sooty black chimney sweeper, the rouge of the maiden's blush and the furry finery of the regal-looking white ermine moth.

Moths in trouble

Moth numbers are falling. According to Butterfly Conservation's most up-to-date report, The State of Britain's Larger Moths 2013, the total number of larger moths has declined by 28% in Britain from 1968 to 2007. The situation is worse in the south with a 40% decline in the same period, perhaps caused by species moving north in response to climate change. 62 moth species (macro and

micro) became extinct in Britain during the 20th century. Creatures that are both pollinators and prey, occupying a crucial place at the cornerstone of the wildlife food chain are falling victim to habitat destruction, pesticides and man-made climate change.

Help make moths a home

Moths can thrive in a variety of habitats with each species having adapted perfectly to their own, be it grasslands, wetlands or woodlands. Urban spaces such as gardens, parks, churchyards and road verges can provide important homes for moths. Make your garden moth-friendly by planting flowers that release their scent in the evening like tobacco plant, sweet rocket and night-scented stock. Excellent nectar sources that benefit day flying moths and butterflies include buddleia, honeysuckle and common jasmine, while native trees, shrubs and wildflowers will also provide food for caterpillars and are worth including in your garden.



Lesser broad

© Amy Lewis



My Wild Life

The Trust's very own Batman, Matt Dodds, talks about his work as Planning and Biodiversity Manager and his passion for nocturnal hunters.



© Freida Rummenhohl

Matt, tell us about your role at the Trust.

I am the Trust's Planning and Biodiversity Manager and I have worked at the Trust for four years. Previously, I worked as an Ecologist with Aylesbury Vale District Council where I founded the North Bucks Bat Group. Bats have always been a passion and it is great to be able to continue my work on bat conservation for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

What do you do day to day?

Monitoring and responding to planning applications and local plan consultations take up a lot of my time, and this is one of the main ways that the Trust stands up for wildlife.

I am also lucky enough to manage the Local Wildlife Sites project where volunteers help in our busy monitoring programme for these special places for wildlife. We are very fortunate to have a fantastic group of highly skilled volunteers who carry out surveys and provide advice for landowners.

I also conduct my own surveys and write reports for our wildlife consultancy which can be very varied and includes management of our Jordan's Farm Partnership commitment. This project enables us to provide direct advice to farmers who supply cereals to Jordan's with the aim to deliver real environmental benefits in the long term.



Bat surveying

© Freida Rummenhohl

Recently, I have been developing two exciting bat projects for the Trust which will help us to conserve two very rare bat species.

Tell us more about these bat projects.

The first is the Hertfordshire Barbastelle Project and is a joint project with Herts and Middlesex Bat Group, supported by the Environment Agency. We aim to improve our knowledge of the distribution of barbastelle bats in the county. The project is in its third year and is proving to be a great success. We have massively increased the number of acoustic records of barbastelle and this summer we were delighted to find a maternity colony in Ashridge – only the second one ever found in Hertfordshire!

The second is the Wetland Vision for Bats Project. Funded by HS2 additional mitigation fund, the project seeks to provide a monitoring framework through which we can increase our understanding of how Nathusius' pipistrelles use four of the lakeside nature reserves that we manage for Affinity Water in the Colne Valley. Together with funds set aside for practical habitat works, the project has enabled us to purchase specialist survey equipment which has hugely increased our capacity to find out more about bats for this project and will be vital for the future, too. We hope to be able to tag and radio track individual Nathusius' pipistrelles to see how they use this landscape, find where they roost

and attract them to new purpose-made roosting sites. We also aim to find and establish maternity colonies, only five of which have ever been found in the UK! These bats migrate hundreds of miles from Eastern Europe and this project will enable us to contribute our new understanding of when, where and why they do this as part of a pan-European study into these incredible mammals.

What can people do to support their local bats?

There are lots of things you can do to help bats in your area - dig a pond, don't use pesticides, plant food plants for moths and other night-flying insects, put up a bat box and join your local bat group, to name a few. I would particularly advise you to buy yourself a bat detector which will open a window into the wonderful world of bats and maybe spark a lifelong interest for yourself or your family. You can see detectors in action by joining one of the Trust's bat walks.

What's your personal wildlife highlight?

Now that is a very hard question, it is very difficult to pick one. In this country, snorkelling with seals in Northumberland takes some beating. Abroad, I would probably go for watching Lar Gibbons at dawn singing from the treetops in Thailand whilst I was 30m up in a rickety, wooden, termite-infested canopy hide. Terror and exhilaration in equal measure!



Checking bat boxes

© Freida Rummenhohl



Silent hunters

As dusk falls across the landscape, deadly hunters are taking to the skies, slipping from their roosts and wheeling silently above hedgerows and through woodland – the owls are on the wing. Frieda Rummenhohl meets the enigmatic owl – our ultimate night hunter.

Specialised hunters

Owls have adapted to become fearsome night time hunters. An owl's best weapon is its incredible hearing. Their flat faces and specialised feathers focus sound towards their asymmetrical ears, allowing them to accurately pinpoint their prey under leaves, plants and snow from even the slightest sound.

Owls are famously able to look 'backwards' by turning their head through 270 degrees. Although they have binocular vision their forward-facing eyes cannot move in their sockets, meaning they have to turn their heads instead. Contrary to popular belief, an owl's vision is only slightly better than ours and much of their 'night vision' is actually due to their excellent hearing.

Unlike most other birds, owls make virtually no noise when they fly. They have special feathers that break the

air flow over their wings to reduce the sound and their soft, velvety down further muffles any noise.

Folklore

Owls have long had their place in folklore but depending on where you're from you might have a very different opinion of them.

In the UK, owls – in particular the barn owl with its ghost-like appearance – had a sinister reputation for being a bird of darkness and darkness often meant death and misfortune. Poets such as William Wordsworth likened the owl to a "bird of doom" and people believed that the eerie screech of an owl meant imminent death or evil.

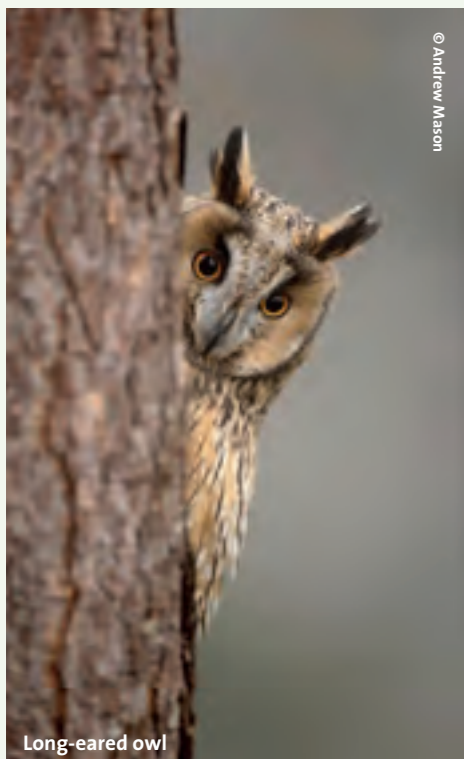
In contrast, if you lived in ancient Greece you would have worshipped owls instead of condemning them. In Greek mythology, the little owl was the goddess of wisdom Athena's favourite animal, inhabiting the Acropolis and protecting Greek armies in times

of war. It was believed that owls possessed an 'inner light' which gave them night vision.

Owls in Hertfordshire and Middlesex

The UK is home to six different types of owl, five of which can be found in our area where they inhabit farmland, woodlands, parks and grasslands. Most of our owls are nocturnal or crepuscular – active both at dawn and dusk – and usually shy away from human encounters making them hard to spot.

Autumn and winter are generally the best time of year to view, so now is a great time to go out and look for them - turn over the page to discover more about Hertfordshire's owls. The Herts Natural History Society's '*Birds of Hertfordshire*' helps tell us where to look for them and their conservation status.



© Andrew Mason

Long-eared owl

Long-eared owl *Asio otus*

An elusive inhabitant of coniferous woodland and undisturbed farmland, long-eared owls are smaller than a woodpigeon. They are mottled brown with big, orange-red eyes and long wings spanning up to one metre! Their "ears" are not actually ears but feathery tufts which are risen in alarm. Long-eared owls are incredibly secretive, their cry - a soft, elongated 'hooo' - being the only sign to give away their presence in a dark landscape. They hunt out their prey by sweeping clearings and fields in a zig-zag flying pattern.

Sadly, long-eared owls no longer breed in our area, but small numbers do occur in the winter months, usually roosting colonially in dense bushes.

Best place to see: Undisturbed farmland and woodland. Tring Reservoirs.



© Russell Savor

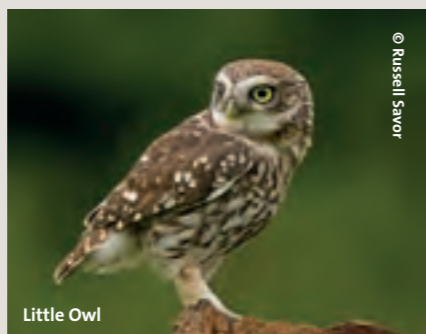
Barn Owl

Barn owl *Tyto alba*

Essentially snow-white but for subtly marked, buffy-brown upperparts, the barn owl is the ghost of the British countryside and has been over centuries, as its historical monikers like 'Ghost Owl' or 'Demon Owl' prove – not so surprising when you hear their piercing shrieks and hissing calls. With its distinctive

heart-shaped face, big black eyes, strikingly pale plumage and ghostly silent flight, barn owls are easy to identify and a treat to see. Look out for one flying low over fields and hedgerows at dawn and dusk, or near old buildings which they have made their nesting sites. When they have found the right partner barn owls mate for life, which is around four years.

Best place to see: Mixed farmland and rough grassland. Thorley Wash.



© Russell Savor

Little Owl

Little owl *Athene noctua*

With their characteristically stern expression and rather comical size – standing barely taller than a starling at under 25cm – the little owl may be our smallest member of the family. What they lack in stature is more

than compensated for in character. Introduced to the UK from mainland Europe in the 19th century, the little owl has made its home here without posing a conservation risk to ecosystems. Little owls can frequently be seen in daylight, perched on a fence post, hedgerow or rock, quietly scanning the ground for prey. When it spots a small mammal, reptiles or invertebrate, it swoops down and catches its unsuspecting victim with its claws or beak. Little owls are a bird of mixed farmland – roosting in cavities of farm buildings or in mature hedges.

Best place to see: Mixed farmland, especially with grazing animals and old hedgerows. Tring Reservoirs.



© Russell Savor

Short-eared owl

Short-eared owl *Asio flammeus*

Just like their long-eared cousins, short-eared owls are easier to find in autumn and winter when they arrive from Scandinavia, Russia or Iceland. With intricately mottled and streaked plumage, large eyes and broad wings, 'shorties' can often be seen during daylight hours, with marshes, unimproved grassland and mixed farmland their favourite haunts. They can be easily identified by their rather floppy flight, often likened to being 'bat-like', and hunt by sweeping a couple of feet above open fields and grasslands, swooping onto their prey, feet-first. They feed on small mammals and rodents such as voles, mice, shrews or moles, and occasionally small birds. Their 'ears' – feather tufts like those of long-eared owls – are often too short to be actually visible unless risen when the bird is alarmed.

Best place to see: Rough grassland and mixed farmland. Rye Meads.



© Margaret Holland

Tawny owl

Tawny owl *Strix aluco*

The tawny owl's intricate feather pattern – mottled reddish-brown with a paler underside – is the perfect camouflage in woodland. Thus, finding a tawny owl by day can be quite the task. Look out for the tell-tale behaviour of smaller birds – repeated alarm-calling and mobbing – which can give away an owl otherwise invisible in thick foliage near the trunk of a favoured tree. Their short wings show their perfect adaption to woodlands, giving them great manoeuvrability in tight spaces.

Tawnies feed on small mammals and rodents, small birds, frogs and fish as well as insects. Like the barn owl, once they've found a partner they stay together for life. Extremely territorial, they will fiercely defend their young forcing bird ringers to protect themselves with helmets and visors when ringing baby tawnies.

Best place to see: Woodlands and parks. Hobbyhorse Wood.

A big thank you

to our wonderful supporters!

Our wonderful supporters have been busy over the summer months raising funds for the Trust.

If you have a fundraising idea or would like suggestions on how you can help raise vital funds, please get in touch with Hannah at fundraising@hmwt.org.

Waitrose Community Matters

Thanks to St. Albans Waitrose for donating £258 to the Trust through their Community Matters scheme – and thanks to all Waitrose shoppers who voted for us! This kind donation will be used to help our beautiful wildlife garden in Verulamium Park continue to flourish.

Next time you pop into Waitrose or John Lewis please fill in a form to nominate the Trust for the Community Matters scheme and raise vital funds for our conservation work local to you.

Christmas is coming



The Trust is delighted to introduce our new, beautiful Christmas cards, with original artwork kindly donated by local wildlife artist Martin Gibbons.



Martin is inspired by the natural world and has a particular passion for painting and sketching birds in the field. To learn more about Martin and to see more of his work visit him at martingibbonsfieldartist.com.

Cards are £5 for a pack of 10 and can be purchased at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop

Church Coffee Morning

Kathleen Tuck, and her Church Eco Group in Hitchin raised £156 with their coffee morning at which they raffled a variety of donated prizes. Support from our members like this makes a real difference to the Trust. Thank you!

In Remembrance

Olive Sharman, Felicity May Westover and Elizabeth Mercer, have kindly left legacies to the Trust.

All long-standing members of the Trust, we are extremely grateful for their support over the years and for thoughtfully remembering the Trust in this special way. Their support has made, and will continue to make, a valuable contribution to our conservation work.

We would like to thank all the friends and family that donated to the Trust in memory of Jeff Barwick and long-standing members, James Savigear and Bill Hobman. Donations made in this special way ensure that our vital work can continue, protecting the local wildlife their loved ones cherished for future generations to enjoy. Our thanks and condolences go to all their friends and family.

Dragonfly Appeal Update

The Trust would like to thank everyone who generously donated to our dragonfly appeal. With your support we have been able to raise over £10,000 to improve and manage our wetland habitats. We didn't quite reach our target, reducing the amount of work we will be able to deliver this year, but our Reserves Team have already started getting busy.

Thanks to your support we have been able to start reed cutting at Amwell Nature Reserve. Reed cutting helps create variety within the reed bed to suit not just the wide variety of dragonflies found there but also birds, mammals and other wildlife that relies on these special habitats.

Keep an eye out over the coming months to see the team hard at work restoring our wetlands, all thanks to your support.



Broad bodied chaser © Tim Hill



Mace Group Volunteers

Working for Wildlife Days – Mace Foundation

Staff from Mace have been hard at work helping our Reserves Team at Balls Wood to remove overgrown scrub. Balls Wood is a large and mixed woodland boasting wide, sunny rides making it one of the best sites in the county to spot butterflies. Removing encroaching scrub from these open areas means wildflowers can thrive keeping the woodland diverse and full of wildlife as well as open and accessible for everyone to enjoy. We are grateful to the Mace team for their annual support!

Our Working for Wildlife Days are a fun and rewarding way to do your bit for local wildlife and to give back to the local community.

If you would like to organise a Working for Wildlife Day or to discuss your requirements contact us on 01727 858 901 or at fundraising@hmwt.org

Work place fundraisers – Network Homes

We are delighted that Network Homes in Hertford have chosen to support the Trust this year. The Hertford team came up with a number of excellent fundraising ideas from recycling schemes, and (much needed) coffee runs to a rounders match – all raising over £150. Fitting the fundraising into their busy work schedules, the Hertford team have done a fantastic job, thank you.



Cheque presentation

Puddingstone Distillery – Pink for a Purpose!

Thanks to our friends at Puddingstone Distillery for another sell-out year of our Himalayan balsam gin with £2 from every bottle sold going directly to the Trust. This year they have raised over £2,000 to support our local conservation work and we had great coverage on BBC's One Show. Cheers!



The Grove Business Breakfast

Working with businesses

Our work with local businesses was celebrated in the summer at our Business Breakfast. Special thanks to our hosts The Grove, lead sponsor Minerva and associate sponsor Affinity Water for showing their vital support for this new initiative. Our guests were able to hear directly from our business partners, learn more about the Trust's work and how they can support us, as well as having time to network with other local business leaders.

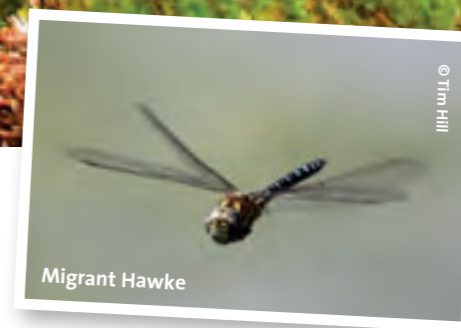


Old Park Wood



Nuthatch

© Tim Hill



Migrant Hawke

© Tim Hill

As autumn begins to give way to winter and the trees turn to golden brown, Frieda Rummenhohl, the Trust's Communications Officer, goes to explore Old Park Wood, a hidden gem, rich with wildlife but tucked away from sight.

It's all in the name: Old Park Wood is literally an old wood. We believe that this area has been continuously wooded since Saxon times representing a remnant of the extensive oak woods of northern Middlesex in former times. Being one of the most floristically rich ancient woods in Greater London, Old Park Wood has gained its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for good reason.

Over 19 acres you can find a high, ancient forest dominated by oak, with streams and wet hollows. I ramble along the circular walk and come across a small platform which provides me with a view into the thicket. The walk around Old Park Wood can be a little steep at times but a slope does make for better views. From the viewpoint, I spot chicken of the woods growing on an Oak tree, a sulphur-yellow bracket fungus announcing the beginning of fungi season.

At the bottom of the slope I come across the small pond that makes the reserve's centrepiece and supports a number of dragonfly species. A migrant hawkler darts past me and I can spot two brown hawkers a couple of metres away. At this time of year, there is no sign of the variety of colours that transforms the ground in spring with its spectacular blooms of bluebells, yellow archangel, lesser celandine, wood anemone and coralroot bittercress, the latter being a rarity in both



Chicken of the woods

© Charlotte Halsey

the UK and Hertfordshire. Old Park Wood offers a fantastic winter habitat for a locally important breeding birds including nuthatch and both the green and the great spotted woodpecker.

Senior Reserves Officer Josh Wells has told me all about the recent and future works in this reserve. The aim is to open up the pond a little more, both for wildlife and to improve views for visitors. Willow regrowth has already been cut back to allow more sunlight to reach the water.

We will also undertake some coppicing work benefitting the spectacular ground flora in spring.

I cross a bridge over a small stream which adds to the diversity of the site resulting in an incredibly high variety of plants and animals. It's difficult to imagine that, beyond the serenity of this wood, the

hustle and bustle of the big city is not far away. I can see why local residents and hospital visitors regularly use this reserve as an attractive retreat.

Visiting Old Park Wood

Old Park Wood is great to visit all year round. In the spring the wood is vibrant with wildflowers. Find out more and plan your visit online at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk.

Reserves Roundup

Thanks to the generosity of our members, vital grant funding and to our wonderful team of volunteers, it has been a busy summer in our reserves.

Our latest Living Lawnmowers are our new flock of herdwick sheep, which will help us introduce grazing to the new area of **Aldbury Nowers** for the first time this autumn. Sheep are the best way to improve the habitat structure of this rare chalk grassland.

Purwell Ninesprings once again saw a fantastic turnout of volunteers, including a group from North Herts College, for the annual cutting and raking of grassland as well as wildflower meadows.

Thanks to funding from the Affinity Water's Community Engagement Programme, willow spiling has been created to reinforce the river banks at **Lemsford Springs**. Spiling is a traditional practice of weaving willow between upright hazel poles to create a strong barrier structure; it will provide sustainable erosion control of the river bank.

Himalayan balsam was once again pulled preventing the spread of this invasive species and giving native wildlife the chance to regrow at **Rye Meads, Amwell, Waterford Heath and Tewinbury**.

Further wildlife highlights include southern marsh orchids at **Thorley Wash and Amwell**, spotted crane at **Wilstone Reservoirs**, southern migrant hawkler at **Rye Meads and King's Meads** and a white-letter hairstreak spotted again at **Aldbury Nowers**.



Coralroot Bittercress

© Peter Elton

Nature's Calendar

Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager, highlights some of his favourite seasonal wildlife and makes suggestions for things to look out for and do through the months ahead.

November Join the ivy league

On a recent guided walk that I was leading, we stopped to admire the flowers of ivy and the buzzing community of bees and hoverflies gorging themselves on the nectar.

A discussion followed where I was asked questions about whether ivy is a problem and whether it should be removed from buildings and host trees. My answer was a hearty and forthright "NO!" Ivy has huge benefits for our wildlife. After flowering, by November, the berries ripen and provide valuable food for song thrushes, mistle thrushes and blackbirds throughout the winter. The evergreen overcoat provides birds and bats with cosy roosting places, safe from predators – if you watch an ivy covered tree or building at dusk you're almost guaranteed to see birds disappearing into the foliage as darkness falls. A study by Oxford University also dispelled the view that ivy damages buildings. They found that ivy acted like a 13.5 tog duvet, warming up walls by an average of 15 per cent in winter and cooling the surface temperature of the wall in summer by an average of 36 per cent. Walls where ivy was growing were less prone to the damaging effects of freezing temperatures, temperature fluctuations, pollution and salts than exposed walls without ivy.



Ivy in flower

December Yew beauty

Last winter, the churchyards of our counties received a few more visitors than normal. Not all the visitors were heading for the church however - most of them were more interested in the fruit-laden yew trees within God's acre.

Unprecedented numbers of hawfinches arrived in Britain from mainland Europe, probably as a result of a lack of food in their usual wintering grounds. By December, it became clear that birds seemed to be favouring the fruits of yews and birds were being spotted in almost every churchyard, either feeding in the trees or on windfall fruits below. As the word spread, birdwatchers migrated from nature reserves too, in the hope of seeing what has become a rare bird in recent times. When I first moved to Hertfordshire in the mid-1980s, I remember watching hawfinches devouring cherries along the former railway line at Amwell Nature Reserve, their huge and powerful bills making light work of the stones, splitting them with a loud crack. I was told by a local that during the winter, the Amwell birds relied on a diet of waste peas from a processing plant in nearby Ware, but with its closure, the birds moved away. In recent times, the only reliable place to see hawfinches has been in and around the church in Bramfield, near Hertford, and this is probably still your best bet to see them this winter as it seems unlikely we will see a repeat of last year's finchvasion.

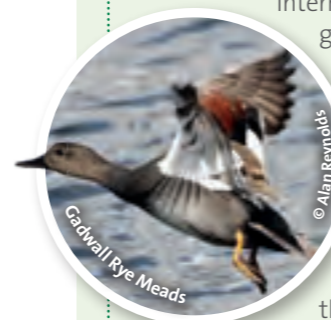


Hawfinch

January The Coot Mugger

The gadwall must be one of our most unappreciated birds. Not surprising really, as from a distance they do look rather dull – the males being all gloomy grey with a black bottom and the females boring brown.

However, get a close-up look and you will be rewarded with the most stunning and arguably stylish plumage of any duck – notwithstanding the striking black and white Gucci garb of the male smew. The gadwall is vermiculated – a mass of contrasting wavy grey and white lines – unparalleled in its gorgeousness. They may be gorgeous but they're also a kleptoparasite, hence their folk name of coot mugger. Gadwall habitually associate with coots – birds which dive below water to collect water weed, their main food. It's also the main food of gadwall, which lurk around casually, ready to steal weedy scraps from the coot. The best place to watch this kleptoparasitism taking place are the lakes in the Lea and Colne valleys where internationally significant numbers of gadwall gather every winter. The Lea Valley is designated as a Special Protection Area on account of the numbers of gadwall which gather there. If you would like to find out more about these kleptoparasites, we're running a wildfowl workshop at Stocker's Lake on 5th January, booking via the Trust's website.



Gadwall Rye Meads

© Alan Reynolds

February Mellow yellow

“ There is a Flower,
the Lesser Celandine,
That shrinks, like
many more, from cold and rain;
And, the first moment that
the sun may shine,
Bright as the sun
himself, 'tis out again! ”

William Wordsworth is perhaps best known for his poem exalting the golden daffodils as he wandered lonely through the Lake District but I prefer this, which describes the beauty and nature of one of our first flowers of the year. Its sunshine yellow flowers scattered across ditch sides and the floor of damp woodland, bring a moment of joy to the winter's end. Wordsworth observed the flower well as it has a habit of closing its flowers at the onset of rain and dull weather. When the sun comes out again, so will the flowers. The flowers provide a valuable nectar source for early-flying insects such as bumble bees which will buzz diligently from flower to flower when there is no alternative in the pre-spring landscape. In the past, lesser celandine was used as a cure for haemorrhoids. In the doctrine of signatures the seed heads were likened to piles and thus thought to be a cure for that particular ailment! One of its many folk names is the 'spring messenger' and that's my particular favourite – a reminder that longer days and warmer temperatures are just around the corner.



Lesser celandine

© Ross Hodgkott



The Nature of... A Churchyard

The screech of a barn owl, a bat flying from the church's belfry, overgrown graves gently illuminated by the moon; churchyards can seem eerie and deserted. At closer look, however, they are teeming with life, day and night.

Churchyards are important places for us humans, but they can be havens for wildlife too. As these habitats can remain largely undisturbed, numerous plants and animals have space to thrive. A place for contemplation and remembrance can become a valuable sanctuary for wildlife at the same time.

These sites may contain a variety of habitats: wildflower meadows, boundary hedges and shrubs, ancient trees, tombstones and stone walls or compost heaps. Thus, they support a diversity of different species from the smallest worm underground to a predatory owl making its nest in the church building.

During the day, you can spot butterflies swirling around the wildflowers and swifts spiralling in the sky, a robin perched on a gravestone chirping his song. Slow-growing lichens and moss colour the tombstones soft green and brown. At night, as some creatures head for shelter, others awaken. You might see frogs and toads hopping around gravestones, a hedgehog snuffling for grubs in deadwood. Bats are associated

with churchyards for a reason. They like to use church buildings as roosting sites and the surrounding area for hunting grounds, just like the barn owl.

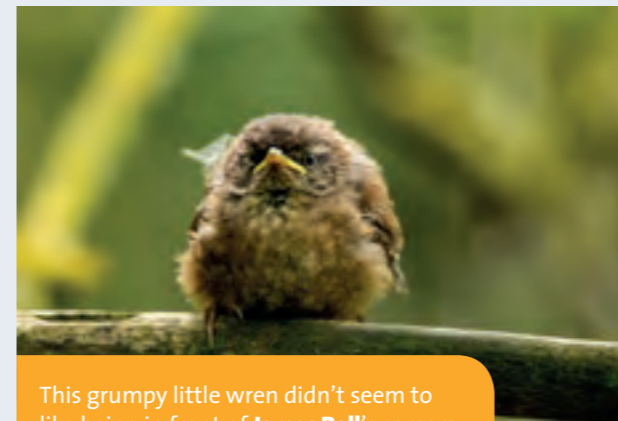
The national 'Caring for God's Acre' scheme aims to preserve and improve these habitats for the benefit of wildlife as well as the local congregation and visitors. Many churchyards across the country are already being managed in a wildlife-friendly way while providing room for the bereaved to remember their loved ones. A good example is Rectory Lane Cemetery in Berkhamsted where the Trust is taking part in a project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund - keep a look out for Trust activities at the Cemetery in our Go Wild listings online.

Your photos...

We love seeing your pictures from our reserves. Share your photos on Facebook, Twitter or e-mail them to info@hmwt.org



Simon Radcliffe captured this majestic osprey that visited Panshanger Park for a couple of weeks.
@Sir_Bluto



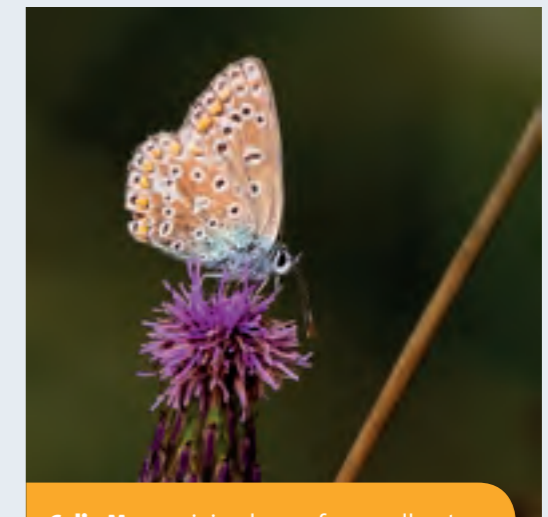
This grumpy little wren didn't seem to like being in front of **James Ball's** camera
@James.Wildlifeworld



Phill Luckhurst managed to shoot the scenic flight of a hobby at Wilstone Reservoir
@DistinctlyAver3



This migrant hawk was snapped at King's Meads by Trust supporter **Stuart Fox**
@StuartFox1



Colin Meager joined one of our walks at Hilfield Park Reservoir and caught this beautiful Common Blue
@cricket8572



Peter Elton sent us this incredibly detailed image of two ovipositing willow emerald damselflies from Hilfield Park Reservoir



Water Vole

Will you **help protect** Hertfordshire's last remaining fens?

We urgently need to raise **£22,000** to carry out essential maintenance and restoration of fens at four of our reserves.

Fens are a vital oasis for wildlife but **99%** of this habitat has been **lost in the UK**.

Water voles are on the **verge of extinction locally**. Our fens provide the food, shelter and a safe place to raise their young.

**You can donate online at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/fenappeal
Or call us on 01727 858 901 to donate over the phone**

