

annualreview



Herts and
Middlesex

2019-2020



GRASSHOPPER WARBLER © AMY LEWIS

Wildlife faces more challenges than ever before and our aim is to help it thrive by managing nature reserves, advising others on how to manage their land and standing up for wildlife.

We're also here to connect people with wildlife; to inspire and enable them to take action so that we can all enjoy a wilder future. With over 23,000 members, the Trust has a powerful local voice and our 600 volunteers make all the difference to what we can achieve.

The Trust aims to lead wildlife conservation across our area and the **2020 Hertfordshire State of Nature** report puts us in a great place to do this. Prepared by the Trust and the Herts Environmental Records Centre, the report underlines the need to act now to address the ecological and climate emergency, the loss in amount and quality of habitats and the severe decline of species. While we only had access to data from Hertfordshire, the similarities with Middlesex mean that many learnings from the report can apply to the whole of the Trust's area. Special thanks go to all the volunteer recorders who have recorded wildlife over the years and shared their data and to the Christopher Laing Foundation and the Spear Charitable

Trust who provided funding for the project. The report will help shape future conservation and provides a framework for the Trust to work with partners, from farmers and local authorities to businesses and local communities. All can play their part in creating a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Sadly the year finished with the COVID-19 outbreak, which is having a severe impact on our income with membership recruitment, fundraising, events and volunteering being put on hold. But amidst the turmoil and trauma, we saw a growth in interest in wildlife that people can see close to home underlining that instinctive connection we as humans have with the natural world around us.

Our ongoing work to address and raise awareness of the ecological and climate crisis becomes more pressing every year. We must secure a stable future for the Trust. There's much to do and we need to act urgently, but together with our supporters, we can make sure that Hertfordshire and Middlesex have a Wilder Future.

Mike Master
Chairman

Lesley Davies
Chief Executive



Nature Reserves

Thanks to the generosity of our members, grant funders and volunteers, our nature reserves continue to thrive.

Woodland management to open up glades, increase woodland diversity and encourage native species' regeneration took place at Old Park Wood, Purwell Ninesprings, Gobions Wood and Balls Wood. This benefits woodland flora like moschatel, wood sorrel and wood anemone. Opening up areas of woodland also helps plants like bramble and honeysuckle which are fantastic for pollinators, like the white admiral butterfly, and provide nesting places for warblers.

Our precious **grassland and heathland reserves** support a wide variety of specialised plants like orchids. Grazing and scrub clearance is essential to maintain good ecological condition and improvement projects were carried out at Long Deans, Aldbury Nowers, Amwell, Frogmore Meadows and Waterford Heath. At Hertford Heath heavy machinery was brought in to scrape the top soil off to remove nutrients from the soils. As a result, delicate heathland plants have become re-established with bird's-foot trefoil appearing, the first record for the heath since 1983, and bristle club-rush, a new species for the site.

Enhancement of **ponds, wetlands and reedbeds** took place at Tewin Orchard, Fir and Pond Woods, Cassiobury Park, Thorley Wash, Lemsford Springs, Stanborough Reedmarsh, Tring Reservoirs and Purwell Ninesprings. At Rye Meads, large areas of rush were cut to improve the habitat and a few days later lapwings were seen displaying. At Patmore Heath, bramble and birch saplings were removed from the wetland part of the reserve to benefit sphagnum moss. The work also resulted in the discovery of star sedge on the reserve, a first record for this site.



Encouraging visitors to our nature reserves remains as important as ever. New signage was installed at Tewin Orchard and Frogmore Meadow, and new fencing projects have been designed to allow access and protect the most sensitive areas.

Developing our **knowledge and understanding** of our nature reserves is vital. Our programme of surveys of fauna and flora help build up a picture and ensure a dynamic approach to site management.

Water voles

Surveys at Amwell, Rye Meads, Thorley Wash and Panshanger Park underlined the vital role volunteers play in saving this endangered species. Panshanger Park and Tewinbury, both on the Mimram, had more signs than ever before. For the first time in years, records of populations were also discovered at Broadwater Lake and Stocker's Lake in the Colne Valley.

Conservation In The Wider Landscape

Chalk river conservation

The Living Rivers Project remains a priority for the Trust due to the international importance of chalk rivers and the very special wildlife that they support. In this busy year working with farmers, fisheries and local authorities, plans have been drawn up for the River Ash at Easneye, the River Rib at the Abbey Cross Fishery, the Upper Lea at the Meads in Wheathampstead, and the Stort at Buntingford.

Landscape on the Edge

Through a new project in the Colne Valley, we are providing habitats for water voles and are working with angling clubs, developing conservation management plans for fisheries and delivering wetland ecology training.

Nathusius' Bats

Working with the Regional Park, Maple Lodge Nature Reserve, Three Rivers District Council and Hillingdon Natural History Society, we are carrying out research into the populations of this rare species in the Colne Valley. Ponds, glade and wetlands were created and reedbeds restored at Maple Lodge and Maple Lodge Marsh.

Local authorities

There is huge potential for local authorities to make a real difference for wildlife and the Trust is delighted with the number who are now working in partnership with us.

With Stevenage Borough Council and Dacorum District Council, we installed swift nesting boxes as part of their renovation of social housing. At Stevenage, we wrote plans for the Borough's ponds and ancient hedgerows and advised on grassland management, tree planting and the creation of a new community orchard, all part of our helping the Council to deliver its commitment to addressing the climate emergency. With Watford Borough Council, we undertook botanical, water vole, otter and bat surveys along the River Colne, and we worked with Welwyn Hatfield District Council to trial varying the mowing regime of road verges to leave areas uncut to benefit wildflowers and invertebrates.

As part of our project with Harpenden Town Council, a change was made from the traditional management of the Common to trial improvements for overwintering invertebrates and late flowers by leaving 15% of the grass uncut. Initial surveys found that the uncut strips contained large numbers of harebells as well as providing habitat for many bees and grasshoppers. A questionnaire of common visitors showed how positively this change was received.

We partnered with Youth Connections, part of Hertfordshire, to deliver the first phase of Go Wild at Hudnall Park, a National Lottery Heritage Funded project. We prepared a management plan to improve and conserve the habitats in the Park and supported the delivery of nature focused wellbeing learning for young people.

Farmland conservation

Working with farmers remains hugely important with much potential to create valuable habitats. Thanks to our volunteer team of expert surveyors, the Local Wildlife Sites Project continues to play a crucial role in increasing the knowledge and understanding of important sites, encouraging landowners to continue positive conservation management of these precious sites. Plans were drawn up for farmers in the Jordans Farm Partnership focussing on key species and habitats relevant to the farms' local landscape. Bat surveys on one farm revealed the second largest recorded maternity population of Barbastelle Bats in mainland Britain.

Standing up for wildlife

The Trust has an important role in commenting on planning and infrastructure proposals, including local plans, minerals plans and neighbourhood plans. We made comments on 9 local plans and scrutinised over 1,200 planning applications where wildlife could be impacted. We continue to make the case for the full and proper consideration of the ecological impact of High Speed Two, which will pass over our Broadwater Lake Nature Reserve, liaising with the HS2 main contractors and Natural England.

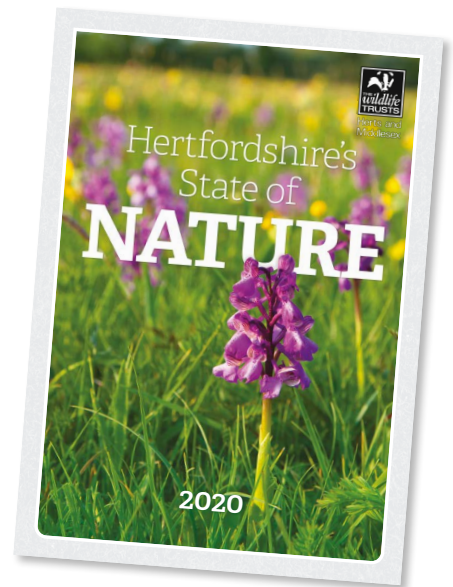
Herts Environmental Records Centre

HERC is hosted by the Trust and now holds over 2.8 million records, an increase of 400,000 records over the year. HERC played a key role in the production of the Hertfordshire State of Nature and is supporting the Herts Natural History Society to digitise the Society's historic journals going back nearly 150 years. HERC helped with management plans for Hertford Heath, Patmore Heath and Tewinbury nature reserves. It provided training on GIS for the Natural History Society county recorders, database training for the Boxmoor Trust and Maple Lodge Nature Reserve, and grasshopper and cricket identification for volunteers in Stevenage to monitor the population of the great green bush-crickets at Shacklewell Grassland.



Hertfordshire's State of Nature Report

In March 2020, the Trust published an ambitious report looking at the last 50 years of nature conservation in Hertfordshire.



Hertfordshire's State of Nature report assesses over 7,500 different species and how their numbers have changed between 1970 and 2020. The results are based on over 2.8 million species records held by the Herts Environmental Records Centre. Taking inspiration from the national State of Nature report, this report is the first of its kind to focus in such detail at Hertfordshire's wildlife and wild places.

Of 10,863 species recorded in Hertfordshire in the last 50 years, 7,696 species (over 70%) were able to have their conservation status assessed. Of those, 1,524 species (20% of those assessed) were identified as being Hertfordshire Species of Conservation Concern - extinct or threatened in a Hertfordshire context. The report also found that over 70 species have gone extinct from the county since 1970.

While this report makes for unhappy reading in most parts, it is important to remember that we can make more space for wildlife in our day-to-day lives and, if we work in partnership, we can reverse the fortunes of wildlife in the county.

A huge thank you goes to everyone who has contributed to this milestone report, in particular the many volunteer recorders who have spent hours over many years surveying wildlife and who helped analyse the data. Without the support of our partners, members and volunteers, the Trust simply could not continue our work. This report is just the beginning. The future undoubtedly holds many challenges and we are looking forward to facing these alongside you and others who believe in a wilder future for Hertfordshire.

Read the full report at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/stateofnature



Black-necked grebe – of National Importance

The only place in the South of England where this rare water bird breeds is Hilfield Park Reservoir. Between five and ten pairs breed here regularly – the national population of black-necked grebes is estimated at 32-55 pairs – making this bird and the site extremely relevant in a national context.

Marsh tit - Declined

Despite its name, it is primarily a woodland bird. It has undergone a marked decline recently, probably mainly related to changes in woodland structure, similarly to most of Hertfordshire's other declining woodland species.



Burnt orchid – Extinct

This rare and distinctive wildflower can only be found in chalk grassland. Its last known location was a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Connecting people with wildlife

Affinity Water Biodiversity Project

Based at Stocker's Lake, Springwell Reedbed and Hilfield Park Reservoir, our activities continued to be very popular with events such as family practical days, seasonal bird watching and school visits, attracting over 1,300 people. Supported by Affinity Water's employee volunteering programme, the grasslands and islands of Stocker's Lake have been enhanced. Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Friends of Stocker's Lake, Dexter cattle are now grazing the meadows. At Hilfield Park Reservoir, black-necked grebes bred, with five young from three broods, the first successful breeding for three years. Nathusius' pipistrelles have been recorded in high densities at both Stocker's Lake and Hilfield Park Reservoir.

Conservation and the community

The variety and growth of support from our local community has been very encouraging, including fundraising events by the Harpenden 1st Brownies, St Mary's School in Ware, St Hilda's School in Harpenden and Hornbeam Wood Hedgehog Sanctuary. We introduced charity challenges including the Chess Valley Challenge, kindly sponsored by Affinity Water, in which 50 people took part and raised over £3,000.

We were very pleased to be accepted onto the Herts Community Foundation's Building Effectiveness Programme. This year-long programme identified new communities and groups for the Trust to reach, piloting events with Carers in Herts in partnership with Harpenden Town Council.

Engaging children and young people

Our partnerships with Stevenage Borough Council, Harpenden Town Council, Affinity Water and Tarmac are tremendous ways of encouraging children to learn about wildlife, and in Tring, the Wild Trax project proved popular with the 11-17 age group. Many of our events are designed to attract families. Across the Festival of Wildlife, Apple Day and the wide variety of guided walks, we saw over 1,600 children taking part.

Thanks to Welwyn Garden City John Lewis and their Golden Jubilee Trust programme, one of their partners, Karl Toombs, joined the Trust on a six-month placement. Karl ran a new school engagement and fundraising programme through which he visited 13 primary schools and inspired over 2,100 children. At Harpenden, we delivered an accredited training course for Duke of Edinburgh students from St George's School, giving skills in woodland management and wildlife surveying.

Events

Over the year, we ran over 200 public engagement events which were enjoyed by more than 6,500 people. A highlight was Professor Dave Goulson's talk on the 'Garden Jungle' in September as part of our work to heighten awareness of the value of gardens to wildlife and the plight of pollinators, and raised over £1,000 for the Trust.



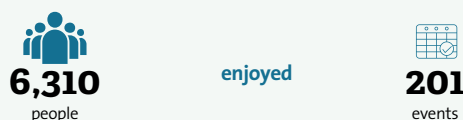
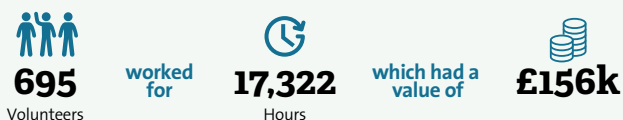
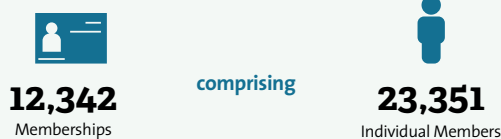
Wildlife Highlights

- New colony of water voles discovered at Stocker's Lake and signs found on the River Beane for the first time in many years.
- Bittern seen at Amwell, Rye Meads and Marsworth Reservoir.
- 11 green sandpipers at Lemsford Springs in October.
- Male spoonbill in breeding plumage, nest-building and roosting at Amwell.
- Grasshopper warblers breeding at Rye Meads and Thorley Wash.
- Reed and Cetti's warbler in high numbers at Marsworth Reservoir and sedge and reed warbler doing well at Springwell Reedbed.
- Scarce emerald damselflies bred at Hertford Heath and Norfolk hawkler suspected to be breeding at Amwell, Rye Meads and at King's Meads.



- Several poplar leaf-rolling weevil were found at Balls Wood.
- Devil's bit scabious had a good year at Danemead after new fencing prevented the late flowers being grazed by cattle.
- Norfolk Bladder Moss rediscovered at Wilstone Reservoir, one of only five sites in the whole of Britain and the only site outside of West Norfolk. The last record from Tring Reservoirs was 1969.
- White helleborine found at Aldbury Nowers, it was also a good year for small blue, holly blue and orange tip butterflies.

The Year In Numbers



Funding our work

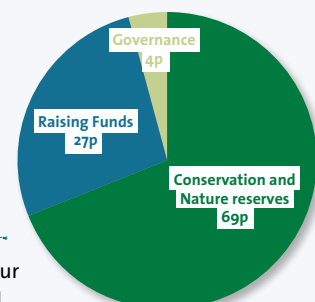
Income

Membership subscriptions:	£1,064k
Grants (restricted):	£531k
Fees and contracts:	£293k
Donations, gifts and grants (unrestricted):	£109k
Legacies:	£133k
Fundraising activities:	£232k
Investment and other income:	£49k

Total: £2,411k

Expenditure

For every £1 the Trust spends...



We are very grateful to all our funders and supporters. Full Accounts are available on our website - hertswildlife.org.uk/publications.