

Celebrating the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex

wildlifematters

Spring 2022



**Herts &
Middlesex**
Wildlife Trust

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Welcome



Our ambition is quite simple – the Trust wants to see a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

The good news is that we aren't the only people who want to create a wilder future. We know that our

members and supporters share this aim, as do the many conservation organisations in our area. Alongside them are farmers, local authorities, golf course managers, schools and businesses, many of whom are already working towards this shared ambition. There is real hope.

Our new Strategy 2030 sets out the key actions needed to achieve this aim, which you can read about on pages 8 to 12. It will also be the focus of our first Wilder Future conference in May 2022, where we will be laying down the challenge to local landowners, decision makers and community leaders to act together now. The Trust will continue to protect local wildlife through our work on nature reserves, advocacy and commenting on the planning process, alongside expanding our work to inspire and empower our communities to take action on their local patch. Collaboration will be vital and we are committed to sharing our expertise to help and guide others to do what they can for nature's recovery.

I've been reflecting on the feedback that we've had over the last couple of years and it's clear that now, more than ever, people are valuing the natural environment and the opportunity to see wildlife. But for each generation over the last century or so, their experience of wildlife has diminished and what feels good now is a shadow of what it once was; our Strategy 2030 aims to step up the pace of reversing these trends and to see wildlife flourishing once more – as it should.

It's certainly been a challenging couple of years and our members and volunteers have made such a difference to being able to keep working for nature's recovery. Thank you so much for your support.

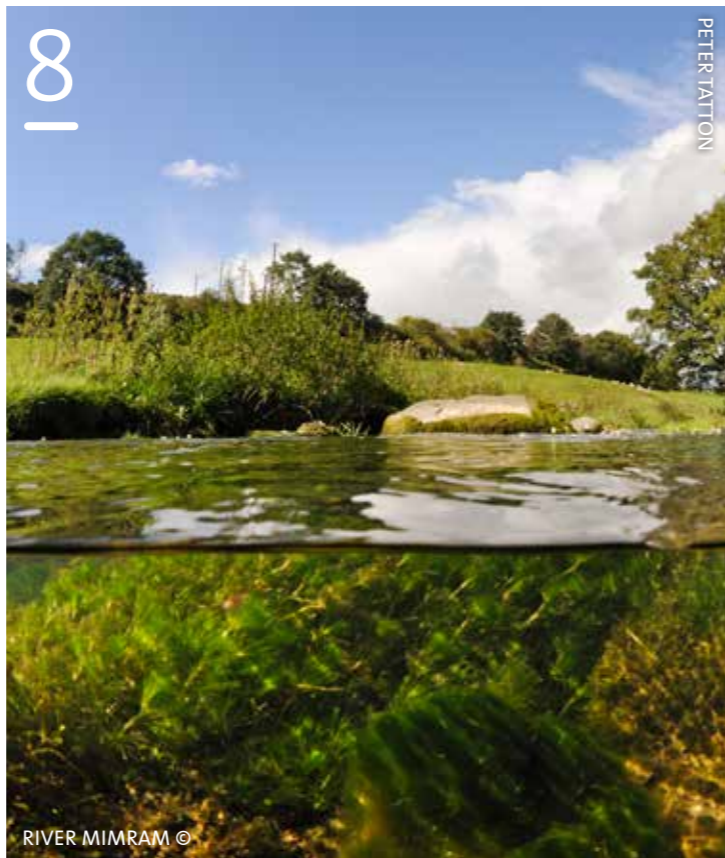
Lesley

Lesley Davies
Chief Executive

Cover: © Josh Kubale



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RIVER MIMRAM ©



PANSHANGER GREAT OAK ©

Get in touch

info@hmwt.org
01727 858901
hertswildlifetrust.org.uk
Grebe House,
St Michael's Street,
St Albans, Herts AL3 4SN

Registered Charity No: 239863

Membership
Lise Ashton
07919 575380
membership@hmwt.org

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Wild News

Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Woods

Watford Borough Council and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust have got together to work with the community to care for two important wild spaces in Watford.

The new three-year partnership will create a wilder future for Cassiobury Park Local Nature Reserve and Whippendell Woods through long-term management plans and community engagement. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust will run a new series of volunteering opportunities, giving the local community a chance to get hands-on with the wildlife on their doorstep.



RIVER GADE AT CASSIOBURY PARK



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Read about the noble chafer on The Wildlife Trusts website at bit.ly/noble-chafer

King's Meads viaduct

Eight wildlife murals have been painted at King's Meads Nature Reserve in Ware, to celebrate the wonderful wildlife living on the reserve.

King's Meads is an extensive nature reserve lying between Ware and Hertford, filled with wildlife and enjoyed by the local community. The wildlife murals have been created by artist Mark Tanti on the pillars of the Kingsmead Viaduct which carries the A10 over the nature reserve. Each mural displays one of the wild species which can be found at the reserve, including this beautiful kingfisher.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more and visit the reserve at www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/kings-meads



New year, new badger

Along with the rest of the Wildlife Trust movement, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust logo has been updated. With your support, we've been standing up for wildlife for over 100 years. Our logo might look a little different, but our work to protect and restore wildlife and wild places remains the same. Our new logo reflects our modern approach to spreading the message that wildlife needs a helping hand from all of us, and that together we can restore wild places.



Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Thanks for your support!

As a charity working for wildlife, we rely on the kind donations from our members and on grant funding to deliver positive change for the local environment.

Last year, we received £12,000 from Tarmac Limited through the Landfill Communities Fund which will enable us to deliver key habitat restoration work at Hertford Heath, one of the last remaining heathlands in the county. Thank you to Tarmac for this generous allocation to the Trust that will improve habitat for our wildlife at the reserve.

Thanks also to Graham and Henrietta Somervell's Wildlife Trust for funding two of our projects - a study of the dormice population in Balls Wood and the restoration of river banks at Lemsford Springs which will support species such as bank voles. Dormice are not currently recorded in Hertfordshire, but we hope this will change in the future as we learn more about the species and improve local habitat for their survival.

An exciting discovery on the River Mimram

A heptageniid, which is an invertebrate that spends most of its life in the river bed, has been found on the River Mimram in Panshanger Park.



Heptageniids have only been recorded at one other location in recent years, on the River Lea near Bayford in 2019. The invertebrate has been identified as a Yellow May Dun and was spotted in Panshanger Park by Robin Cole, a volunteer with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

Since the first Mimram discovery in November 2021, a second sighting was made in December 2021 by Simon Stebbings, about 200m upstream on the same section of the river. These two close sightings mean that the population is likely to be spreading across the river. This is a good sign for the quality of the water at this site as heptageniids are extremely sensitive to pollution and require excellent quality, fast-flowing water.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Read more about the story at www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/news

Could you become a Trustee?

We are looking for someone who has experience and knowledge in wildlife, ecology and nature conservation and who can be a strong advocate for nature's recovery. The Trustee will need to have a passion for the future of wildlife as well as the ability to think strategically.

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 would join our Nature Recovery

Committee. You will have the opportunity to participate in site visits, meet with partner organisations and other Wildlife Trusts. Trustees can be appointed for up to three consecutive three-year terms.

This is a voluntary role but all reasonable expenses properly incurred will be reimbursed.

If you'd like to help make a difference for wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex as one of our Trustees, please contact Becky Vernon-Clinch at becky.vernon-clinch@hmwt.org for an information pack.

The deadline for applications is 9am on Tuesday 19th April, and interviews will be held on Tuesday 26th April.

UK NEWS

The weird, wonderful & worrying

OUR 2021 MARINE REVIEW

Wally the Walrus made a surprise visit to our shores in 2021



Cetaceans take centre stage in our round-up of marine news from the last 12 months, with success stories, tragic tales, and strange sightings. There was hope for humpback whales, with strong numbers recorded around the southwest and further sightings in Scotland. One individual, named Pi, delighted whale watchers on the Isles of Scilly for over two months. The surge in sightings in recent years reflects populations recovering after bans on commercial whaling.

It wasn't all good news though, with large numbers of seals and cetaceans reported stranded across the UK, including a minke whale calf that tragically had to be put down after stranding in the Thames. In Cornwall alone, over 170 cetaceans and 247 seals were stranded, with a further 51 cetaceans recorded stranding in Devon. Many of these animals showed signs of injury from fishing gear or propellers, including a humpback whale off Looe Island that was caught in fishing lines. One of the stranded animals in Cornwall was a striped dolphin, which are common in the Mediterranean but seldom seen around the UK.

This wasn't the only surprising cetacean sighting in the south of the UK. Two orcas from the Hebrides made a scene-stealing appearance off the cliff-top Minnack Theatre in Cornwall — the most southerly sighting of members of this group of killer whales in over 50 years — and white-beaked dolphins, usually found in subarctic waters, were seen in Essex for the first time since 2000.

Whales and dolphins weren't alone in

popping up in unexpected places. 2021 saw two walrus recorded in the UK, with one, nicknamed Wally, spending weeks in south Wales and then the Isles of Scilly; and a second (known as Freya) briefly visiting Northumberland before being spotted in Shetland. There was also a pufferfish found washed up on a Cornish beach, which is an oceanic species that rarely comes this far north.

These unusual sightings provide further evidence of the impacts of climate change on our seas. Temperature changes can cause disruption to feeding habits and breeding cycles, driving animals to move out of their usual range. Some species are shifting their distribution completely. The ringneck blenny, a small fish normally found in the Eastern Atlantic or Mediterranean, has become common in Cornwall's Fal estuary, with further signs of breeding in the English Channel.

Our marine life faces many threats in addition to climate change, including disturbance from recreational activities. Cornwall Wildlife Trust reported that disturbances of marine wildlife have tripled since 2014, with an increase of jet skis and motorboats a major cause for concern. Elsewhere, The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales witnessed a seal pup being abandoned after people got too close to it. Surveys by Dorset Wildlife Trust recorded damage to the seabed caused by the anchors of large cruise ships, moored off the coast due to the pandemic.

But there was also plenty to celebrate last year, with good news for kelp

forests, seagrass meadows, oyster beds and many more habitats and species. In March, a new byelaw was passed to stop damaging fishing practices off the Sussex coast. To speed up the area's recovery, the Sussex Kelp Restoration Project will restore a vast 200km² of kelp forest, providing feeding and nursery grounds for molluscs, shrimp, and cuttlefish.

Seagrass habitats also got a much needed boost. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust transplanted seeds and plants to areas where seagrass has previously flourished, whereas Manx Wildlife Trust discovered a new seagrass meadow, Cornwall Wildlife Trust mapped seagrass regrowth in areas where moorings had been removed, and Cumbria Wildlife Trust carried out the first surveys of seagrass on mudflats off Walney Island for over 20 years.

There are even more sea success stories in our full round-up, which you can read at: wildlifetrusts.org/marine-review-21

Ocean oddities

- Adders took to the surf as snakes were seen paddling in the waves on Wembury Beach, Dorset and off the coast of Anglesey, North Wales.
- Devon Wildlife Trust reported a surge of compass jellyfish, believed to be caused by the July heatwave.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust rangers were wowed by a white puffin on Handa Island. The pale puffin lacks pigmentation in its feathers, due to a genetic condition called leucism.

UK UPDATE

Splatters matter

The latest results from the Bugs Matter Survey show that significantly fewer insects were recorded nationally in 2021 than 17 years ago. These results add to the growing evidence that insect populations are declining across the world, with potentially catastrophic consequences for wildlife, wild places, and people.

The Bugs Matter Survey, initially developed by the RSPB in 2004 is based on the 'windscreen phenomenon', originating from the observation that people find fewer insects squashed on the windscreens of their cars compared to several decades ago. The survey was revitalised and made more accessible in 2021, when Kent Wildlife Trust created the Bugs Matter App in partnership with Gwent, Somerset, and Essex Wildlife Trusts, and Buglife.



The app makes it easy for anyone with a smartphone or tablet to record the insects on their car, bringing meaningful citizen science to the pockets of thousands. Last year there were nearly 5,000 journeys logged, helping scientists monitor the alarming declines in our insects.

Find out more and get involved at kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/bugs-matter

Failing farmland wildlife

This January, the Government announced new schemes to reward farmers in England for supporting nature's recovery. Farmland accounts for a huge proportion of our land use, so it's imperative that we have policies that support farmers to help nature. The latest announcement includes a lot of the

right rhetoric, but still lacks any clear details or urgency. The published documents failed to provide details on eligibility, the determination of priorities, or how Government will ensure these schemes achieve target outcomes. Read more at wtru.st/farm-reform

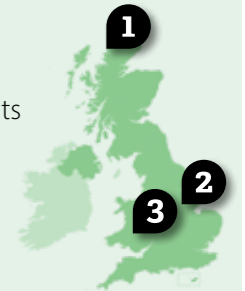
Welcome to the team!

The Wildlife Trusts are delighted to announce that GP and TV presenter Dr Amir Khan, and naturalist, TV presenter and author Iolo Williams, have become vice presidents of the charity. We also warmly welcome award-winning TV presenter Maddie Moate, and The Vamps' lead guitarist, James McVey (pictured), as wildlife ambassadors. The nature enthusiasts will use their voices, influence and audiences to help The Wildlife Trusts shine a spotlight on the urgent need for nature's recovery in the UK. Meet our new vice presidents and ambassadors at wtru.st/new-voices



UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Seabird power

The Scottish Wildlife Trust has joined forces with alternative rock band Sea Power to raise awareness of the urgent need to tackle the nature and climate crises. The Wildlife Trust worked with the band to create a new video for their classic track "The Great Skua," featuring footage of seabirds on Handa Island Wildlife Reserve. wtru.st/seapower



2 A city sanctuary

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust welcomed plans for a new 'Green Heart' in Nottingham city centre, after putting forward a bold ambition to transform a derelict former shopping centre into wildlife-rich greenspace. The vision is billed as a blueprint for sustainable city centres in a post-COVID world. wtru.st/green-heart

3 Wild in Wales

Radnorshire Wildlife Trust has purchased a 164-acre farm in mid-Wales, with plans to transform it into a haven for wildlife. Initial steps to bring nature back to the former livestock farm will include scrub development, to provide shelter for wildlife. The Wildlife Trust will work with neighbours, local farmers and landowners to create more space for nature in the region. wtru.st/mid-wales-farm



Living Rivers

Within Hertfordshire and Middlesex, over 600km of intertwining rivers, streams, brooks and canals flow across the landscape; connecting people, places and most importantly natural spaces for wildlife to thrive. This mosaic of freshwater habitats is the backbone of our Nature Recovery Network - without water, wildlife simply would not survive.

The jewel in the crown of Hertfordshire's freshwater network, is one of the rarest environments on the planet. Chalk rivers are a unique kind of river system that support some of our most iconic yet threatened wildlife, such as wild brown trout and water voles. There are less than 250 in the entire world and we are lucky

to find around 10% in Hertfordshire. Think of Kenneth Grahame's *Wind and the Willows* and your imagination will place you beside a beautiful chalk river on a summer's day. In good condition our chalk rivers can appear ethereal; with gentle banks sloping down to a verdant river edge, glass-clear water babbling over gravels as the river

travels along its meandering course, visited by the striking kingfisher, suspended mayfly and sail-finned grayling swaying in the currents.

Sadly, rivers and the wetlands they support are scarce and under threat. Combined, they cover a mere 1% of total county area - even less than

the national average of 3% - and they are far from being in good ecological condition. Over 55% of our rivers are classed as moderate condition and 45% are poor, meaning they have lower numbers and diversity of invertebrates, fish and plants than they ought to, as well as being affected by chemical pollution, physical modification and unnatural flow patterns.

A combination of land-use changes (including development and intensive farming), pollution, over-abstraction and historic industry such as milling, all linked to a growing population has clearly taken its toll on Hertfordshire's rivers. In short, we have a very limited supply of freshwater habitats left in Hertfordshire and Middlesex and what does exist is not in very good condition.

We need our rare and special chalk streams, navigable rivers, braided

brooks, pockets of fen, open water and wet woodland habitat to be brought back into tip-top condition. We need to expand these habitats to make them better connected, so that they are resilient in the face of climate change and can recover from environmental shock, as well as continuing to provide a safe-haven for wildlife migration into the future.

In 2012 the Living Rivers project was born to help reverse the fortunes of these environments. The Trust, in partnership with the Environment Agency, began to champion chalk rivers with the aim of raising awareness of their sensitive nature and supporting local action to restore them. Our Living Rivers project launched at the same time that a new, national approach to improving rivers was being rolled out by the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as an attempt to halt declines and meet targets in European law

known as the Water Framework Directive (2009). This new catchment-based approach offered support to local organisations in developing their own plans for improving rivers in their area and encourage partnership working for water across the country.



JON HAWKINS SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY



Since then, the Trust has been delivering the Living Rivers project and acting as host of the River Lea Catchment Partnership bringing together and supporting others to restore local rivers. A decade of the Living Rivers project has resulted many successes for rivers through our work across four themes:

A partnership approach

We bring together individuals, river groups, local authorities, businesses, landowners, NGOs and statutory organisations to explore ways of improving our river catchments. We have grown the River Lea Catchment Partnership from zero to 350+ contacts since we started hosting in 2012 and lead over 10 workshops a year to plan and push forward action for rivers, such as invasive species control, habitat creation projects or monitoring and surveying activities to keep an eye on the health of our rivers and flag issues to resolve together.

On the ground action

We deliver surveying, advice and restoration activities on private land in the countryside, towns and villages across Hertfordshire and Middlesex, as well as on our own Nature Reserves. We are working along 10 chalk rivers, delivering restoration projects to improve habitat condition for wildlife. Over 150km of river corridor and 200 hectares of wetland have benefitted from our advice or practical conservation assistance in the last decade and we have driven investment into freshwater projects upwards of £1.5m (including more to come this year!).

Working with the community

We raise awareness of chalk rivers, the threats they face and teach people how best to care for them. In 2012 chalk rivers were largely unheard of but voices across the conservation movement rallied together to raise their profile leading to more people taking action locally. We have taught over 500 pupils from 13 schools about chalk rivers and their wildlife, trained over 200 volunteers in river monitoring and restoration skills, and delivered river-engagement activities to around 5,000 people.

A wilder influence in Hertfordshire

We consult with water industry regulators, regional planning groups and local authorities to promote best practice freshwater habitat management and water resources planning for our area. The Wildlife Trust nationally are a key member of Blueprint for Water – a coalition of 24 organisations working to develop solutions to water issues facing England. At a local level, we sit on an advisory group developing a regional plan for water resilience led by Water Resource South East, as well as providing ecological input to Local Authority plans and projects related to water.

Looking ahead to the next decade of Living Rivers, expect to see some action on rivers near you! If you're out for a stroll on the River Rib, Ash, Lea or Stort this year, keep an eye out for "water spiders"; not the enigmatic raft-spiders that live in our fens, but the robotic kind which operate our river restoration projects. Between 2023-2025, we will be investing about £500,000 of grant funding into Hertfordshire' chalk rivers, working in partnership to: remove a weir that acts as a barrier to fish migration on the lower Rib; create a nature recovery network along 2km of the River Lea, enhancing and better connecting our two Nature Reserves at Lemsford Springs and Stanborough Reedmarsh; improving water vole and wild brown trout habitat on the

River Ash as part of a 7km river restoration project; working with natural river processes to protect a Local Wildlife Site on the River Stort; tackling invasive-non native plants along the River Stort; delivering an urban chalk river restoration scheme with Buntingford Town Council; supporting an angling club with delivering their river restoration plan; plus leading five community river restoration projects on the Rivers Quin, Mimram, Hiz, Beane and Birchanger Brook, to train local volunteers in practical river management.



Donate

Help support our vital work on rivers by donating through our webpage at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/donate

Get in touch

If you own a section of river or wetland habitat like a reedbed, lake or wet woodland and would like some advice contact our River Catchment Coordinator Sarah.Perry@hmwt.org

Volunteer

If you are a group or individual and would like to help with our surveying and improvement work please fill out an enquiry form online.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/livingrivers



Towards A Wilder 2030

This is a pivotal time and we must all take action for wildlife before it is too late. Based on the findings of the Trust's seminal report Hertfordshire's State of Nature, published in 2020, the Trust has written an ambitious new strategy to take us towards a wilder 2030.

Wildlife is in trouble. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and we have lost up to half our biodiversity in the last century. We are facing a nature and climate crisis and people are less connected with nature than ever before. We must act now to reverse the declines in wildlife and wild spaces and re-connect everybody with nature.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust believe wildlife should be able to thrive alongside our everyday lives and that everyone benefits from having access to nature. We believe that if we work together as a community, by 2030 wildlife will have space to thrive and our precious habitats and species populations will be recovering. People will feel more connected to wildlife and will be empowered to take action to give nature a positive future.

More land in Hertfordshire and Middlesex is managed and protected for nature

Locally, nearly 20% of our wildlife is threatened with extinction. Habitat loss and fragmentation of wild spaces have sent populations plummeting. To combat this dramatic decline and to allow nature to recover, we need to see at least 30% of the land in our area protected and managed sympathetically for wildlife.

The Trust already cares for 40 nature reserves covering nearly 2,000 acres. These are important wildlife havens, but they are not enough to stop such a drastic wildlife decline. Landowners and managers, local authorities and individuals can all help to reach our target of 30% – from farms to parks and grass verges to gardens, nature needs more space to thrive.

By 2030 we want to see:

- At least 30% of land connected and protected for nature's recovery.
- Wildlife habitats are the best they can be for nature and are resilient to the challenges of a changing climate.
- Wild places are better-protected in law.
- Species declines are reversed and their populations are recovering.
- Greater understanding of local wildlife and its ecology.

More people are standing up for wildlife and taking action for nature's recovery

We all have a part to play in building a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex. It is only by working together that we can create a vibrant and sustainable future where nature can thrive.

We need a people-powered movement for nature's recovery. The Trust wants to support communities to connect with nature and take practical action to create space for wildlife. If one in four people join us to champion wildlife, we can create a sustainable community movement for nature.

The Trust will act as a hub which connects individuals and organisations wanting to take action. Caring for wildlife needs to be inclusive and welcoming where everyone can make a difference.

By 2030 we want people to:

- Have greater knowledge, appreciation and involvement in nature.
- Be working with the Trust to develop and deliver their own local action for nature's recovery.
- Put nature's recovery at the heart of local decision making.
- See involvement with nature as welcoming and open to all.

Nature plays a central and valued role in helping to address climate issues and people's health and wellbeing

The nature and climate crises that we all face are inseparably linked. Climate change is driving nature's decline and the loss of wild spaces is leaving us ill-equipped to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to change.

Restoring nature can help soak up carbon emissions – there are natural solutions to climate change. When healthy, our natural habitats can also reduce the risk of flooding, improve people's health and wellbeing, as well as maintain healthy soils, clean water and the pollinators needed for our crops.

National research has underlined the important role that a healthy natural environment and access to nature is for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

By 2030 we want to see:

- Natural resources are properly valued for their ability to address climate change.
- Greater understanding of the impact of climate change on local habitats and species.
- Sustainable land management that restores biodiverse, natural processes.
- Greater understanding of the value of nature to health and wellbeing.

Our Vision For A Wilder Future

This is a crucial time to address the nature and climate crises and we must act now. Our strategy for a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex is ambitious and can only be achieved if we all work together. **Our future must be wilder.**

The challenges facing nature and the climate are vast and we must think big to see meaningful change. We are lucky to work alongside many individuals, organisations and communities who are already working hard to create space for wildlife. But we must do more and act quickly. **Everybody has a part to play in addressing the nature and climate crisis and by working together we can create a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex.**



hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/Wilder2030

"We have the choice of a better – and wilder – future. A future where wildlife thrives alongside people. A future where nature helps us in the fight against climate change."

Sir David Attenborough
President Emeritus,
The Wildlife Trusts



Days Out

NATURE RESERVES

1. Fir and Pond woods

Fir and Pond Woods is a beautiful reserve with varied habitat just to the east of Potters Bar.

The woods can be accessed from a small carpark or permissive paths from Potters Bar through the recently planted Potters Chase wood. The layout of the wood dates from the breakup of Enfield Chase in 1777 and some of the trees date from this time. The woods are mainly oak and hornbeam; in the spring, winter moth caterpillars are dangling from the trees on their silken threads, trying to avoid the tits, warblers and other birds looking to collect them to feed their young. Holly bushes and trees also abound including one of the biggest holly trees in Hertfordshire.

Towards the bottom of Pond Wood is an ancient acid grassland meadow, covered with anthills of the yellow meadow ant, which provide food for green woodpeckers - you can see the glistening ant remains in their white pool! The flora here includes wood sage, sheep's sorrel and mouse-ear hawkweed, in late summer Shetland sheep graze here, helping to maintain the meadow.

Along the banks of the Turkey Brook look for the bright yellow lesser celandine flowers. Ferns, mosses and liverworts flourish near the water and if you are very lucky you may spot a water shrew in the brook.

On the other side of the Turkey Brook is the "old pond" which dates from medieval times, and is now largely silted up. Spend time at the dragonfly viewing platform - 15 species of dragonflies and damselflies have been recorded on the reserve and in early spring the seeds of the reedmace blow around like snow settling on the water.

Upstream is the wet fen, a recently created habitat from a former cricket bat willow plantation. The bright blue (male) and yellow (female) broad-bodied chaser dragonflies love the newly created ponds by the path but be warned, you are likely to need wellingtons to walk here.

[words by John Rowley]



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/firandpondwoods

Why now?

Spring is a wonderful time to visit this woodland which is one of the best places to see dragonflies and damselflies in the county



Know before you go

COOPERS LANE ROAD, POTTERS BAR EN6 4DG

OPEN AT ALL TIMES
Park in the layby opposite Oshwal Centre.

Wildlife to spot

Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Chiffchaff.



2. Tewin Orchard & Hopkyns Wood

Tewin Orchard is one of the few remaining small village orchards with varied and often many local fruit varieties.

In the days of fruit markets in every parish, when produce wasn't shipped in from across the world, orchards were a common sight in villages across the country. In fact, Hertfordshire used to be famous for its abundance of apple and pear orchards and many British apple species originate from here. At Tewin Orchard, you can find old English apple and pear varieties which would otherwise have gone extinct.

The badger clan, for which Tewin Orchard has gained fame beyond county borders, is becoming more active, as the days are getting warmer. Badgers don't hibernate over winter but, just like us humans, they spend more time "indoors". The cubs, which have been born in the midst of winter, are now discovering the world beyond their sett - their underground burrow - for the first time whilst adults are out foraging.

Close your eyes and take in the poignant fragrance of wild garlic or the sweet scent of bluebells, covering the woodland floor in a purple carpet. Dead and decaying wood provide nest sites for birds and different bat species. Mosses, lichens and fungi - grow on the trees, playing a vital part in a healthy ecosystem by breaking down dead plant and animal matter.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/cassioburypark

Why now?

Visit this wildlife haven in a corner of Cassiobury Park, close to the bustling heart of Watford, in spring to embrace the wide range of bird species that visit this reserve.



Know before you go

WATFORD WD18 7LG

OPEN AT ALL TIMES
Park in the car park situated just inside the park gates at the end of Gade Avenue, free of charge for the first two hours with a ticket

Wildlife to spot

Bluebell, Dog's Mercury, Orange-tip butterfly.

3. Cassiobury Park

Tucked away on the western edge of Watford's Cassiobury Park lies Cassiobury Park Local Nature Reserve.

Cassiobury Park local nature reserve contains a wealth of habitats with the River Gade running through the site - one of Hertfordshire's precious chalk streams - and a number of ponds scattered around the area. Another interesting feature of the reserve are the old watercress beds, once used for commercial production of watercress, which are now valuable wetland habitats.

This diversity of habitats means that within a relatively small area there are a wide range of species to be found and it is a great place for bird watching. Song thrushes and bullfinches are found on the reserve and herons can often be seen hunting on the River Gade. One of the UK's most attractive

birds, the kingfisher, is regularly sighted - their presence often revealed by a flash of their iridescent blue plumage in the sunlight as they fly up and down the river. The lesser spotted woodpecker is a species you're more likely to hear than see, as it drums on a tree trunk - but you may also be lucky enough to get a glimpse of this striking bird with its black and white body and (in the case of the male) bright red crown.

The Trust has recently partnered with Watford Borough Council to improve the habitats at Cassiobury Park, read more about the project at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/news



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/tewinorchards

Why now?

Visit this tranquil orchard in spring and you're in for a sight. From April, white and light pink blossoms decorate the fruit trees, busy pollinators are hurrying from tree to tree and birdsong fills the air.



Know before you go

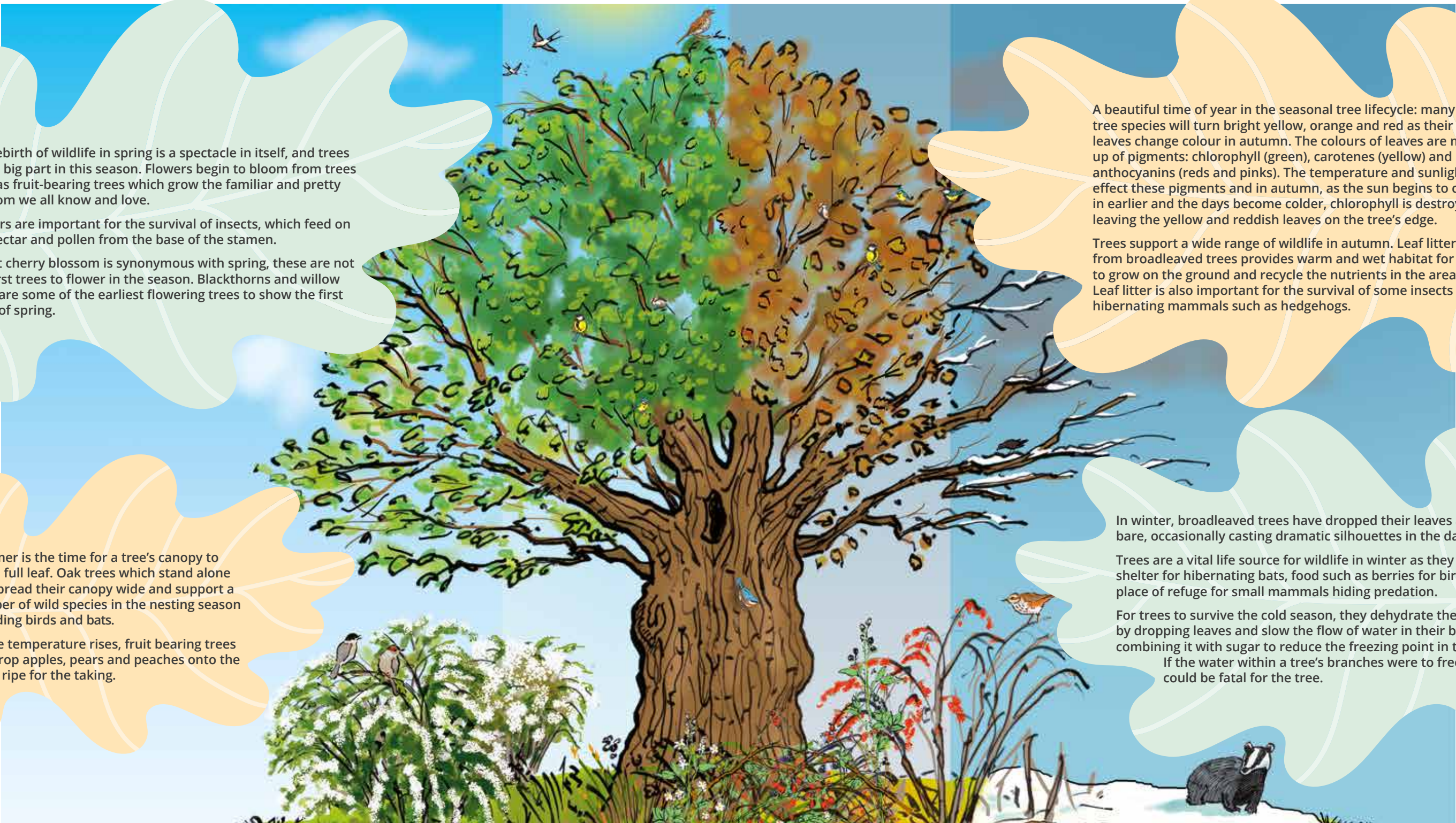
WELWYN GARDEN CITY, AL6 0LZ

OPEN AND FREE AT ALL TIMES

Wildlife to spot

Apple blossom.





The rebirth of wildlife in spring is a spectacle in itself, and trees play a big part in this season. Flowers begin to bloom from trees such as fruit-bearing trees which grow the familiar and pretty blossom we all know and love.

Flowers are important for the survival of insects, which feed on the nectar and pollen from the base of the stamen.

Whilst cherry blossom is synonymous with spring, these are not the first trees to flower in the season. Blackthorns and willow trees are some of the earliest flowering trees to show the first signs of spring.

Summer is the time for a tree's canopy to reach full leaf. Oak trees which stand alone will spread their canopy wide and support a number of wild species in the nesting season including birds and bats.

As the temperature rises, fruit bearing trees will drop apples, pears and peaches onto the floor, ripe for the taking.

A beautiful time of year in the seasonal tree lifecycle: many tree species will turn bright yellow, orange and red as their leaves change colour in autumn. The colours of leaves are made up of pigments: chlorophyll (green), carotenes (yellow) and anthocyanins (reds and pinks). The temperature and sunlight effect these pigments and in autumn, as the sun begins to creep in earlier and the days become colder, chlorophyll is destroyed leaving the yellow and reddish leaves on the tree's edge.

Trees support a wide range of wildlife in autumn. Leaf litter from broadleaved trees provides warm and wet habitat for fungi to grow on the ground and recycle the nutrients in the area. Leaf litter is also important for the survival of some insects and hibernating mammals such as hedgehogs.

In winter, broadleaved trees have dropped their leaves and look bare, occasionally casting dramatic silhouettes in the darkness.

Trees are a vital life source for wildlife in winter as they offer shelter for hibernating bats, food such as berries for birds and a place of refuge for small mammals hiding predation.

For trees to survive the cold season, they dehydrate their limbs by dropping leaves and slow the flow of water in their branches, combining it with sugar to reduce the freezing point in the water. If the water within a tree's branches were to freeze this could be fatal for the tree.

A tree through the seasons

A pinnacle of wildlife, trees stand high from the ground and offer shelter, food and opportunities for growth for so many wild species. Though many stand mighty tall, all trees sprout from a single seed. These small vessels of life contain everything they need to survive until the tree is ready to sprout.

Once a seed has sprouted and rooted into the earth,

it becomes a vulnerable seedling; it is at this stage of the tree's life cycle that it is most at risk from disease and grazing by rabbits and deer. If the tree survives this stage, it will grow to over three feet tall and become a sapling. Saplings are unable to bear fruit and have smooth and flexible trunks. The length of the sapling stage depends on the type of tree (for example, oaks remain saplings for much longer than cherries). Eventually, the tree will grow to

maturity. Trees reach this stage when they begin producing fruit and flowers; this is when trees are most useful to the wildlife around them.

In Hertfordshire, the most dominant trees are oak and hornbeam. Both trees live for a long time, with oak trees reaching ages of 1000 years old, being considered ancient at 400 years, and hornbeams living for up to 350 years.

There are two types of trees: coniferous and broadleaved. Most conifers are evergreen and retain their needles however some conifers are deciduous and will lose their

needles over winter. Broadleaves are mostly deciduous and drop their leaves but there are a few evergreen broadleaves, which retain their leaves over the winter period.



DID YOU KNOW?

The oldest living tree species in the UK is the yew tree, with the oldest living in a churchyard in Scotland and predicted to be between 2,000 and 3,000 years old!



TERRY WHITTAKER 2020 VISION

A Wheely Wild Challenge!

In Summer 2022 we are launching a new challenge to celebrate our amazing local wildlife and to raise funds for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. In June, the Ride Wild Challenge will set out to visit 30 wild places in Hertfordshire and Middlesex on a bicycle in just 30 hours!

The Ride Wild Challenge team will attempt to visit 30 wild places in 30 hours across two days, travelling by eBike. The challenge will demonstrate the breadth of incredible wild places we have in Hertfordshire and Middlesex and how these places can easily be accessed by sustainable transport. At each of the 30 wild places, our team will be stopping to meet with a local expert to find out how they are working with the Trust to benefit wildlife – from our

staff, to volunteers, local businesses, community groups and schools.

This challenge will take place during *30 Days Wild*, the national wildlife awareness campaign organised by The Wildlife Trusts which helps people connect with the natural world. During *30 Days Wild*, we invite you to do something wild every day in June.

Win your own electric bike!

Our friends at Estarli have kindly donated an e20 folding bike worth £1,255. To be in with a chance of winning, simply enter our raffle online at:

hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/RideWildChallenge



Full terms and conditions can be found at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/RideWildChallenge



Ride Wild Route

During the Ride Wild Challenge we will be shining a light on our amazing local wildlife, the threats it is currently facing and what we can do to protect it. The route will visit rare chalk streams, internationally-important wetlands, ancient woodlands, rare patches of heathland and stunning wildflower meadows. The challenge will highlight the fantastic places that are right on our doorsteps and easily accessible by sustainable transport. Ride Wild is all about celebrating local wildlife and the route has been designed to take in some of the best wild places in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. Our challenge will start at Stocker's Lake in the Colne Valley and finish at King's Meads in Ware.



Please note that the route and stopping points are subject to change if there are problems with access or suitability.

Show your support

As well as being a fantastic way to show off some of the best wild places that our area has to offer, we also want to raise important funds for the Trust. You can show your support by sponsoring the challenge here:



hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/RideWildChallenge

Our sponsors

We are grateful to our Ride Wild Challenge sponsors for making this ambitious and unique fundraising challenge possible. We continue to speak to potential business sponsors. If you would like to find out how you can support the challenge, please email fundraising@hmwt.org

Estarli

Hertfordshire-based electric bike manufacturer Estarli build eBikes that don't cost the earth. Their aim is to democratise the market with premium yet affordable eBikes that will help unearth a new generation of cyclists. Getting out and exploring one's local surroundings is why Estarli build bikes. estarli.co.uk



Puddingstone Distillery

Puddingstone Distillery, is a local gin distillery based in Tring and produces multi-award-winning Campfire Gin. Long-term supporters of the Trust and owners of the distillery, Ben and Kate, are true believers in connecting with the spirit of the outdoors and preserving wildlife in Hertfordshire. puddingstonedistillery.com



Wild Community

Find out how people have been champions for wildlife in Herts and Middlesex

★ From old to new

Sarratt Women's Institute are dedicated supporters of the Trust.

Over the last 10 years, their wonderful members have been turning unwanted and scrap material, like old curtains, into reusable shopping bags for the village community shop. The bags are offered for free to customers and they collect donations for the Trust – win win! Their skilful eco-initiative has raised £1,000 so far to help protect local wildlife. Thank you for all of your ongoing support – especially to the expert bag makers who have worked hard to turn something old into something new. Well done.



♥ Mid Herts Local Group - Thank you!

After more than a quarter of a century, the committee that runs our Mid-Herts Local Group has decided to close its doors.

Run entirely by volunteers, the group started up in 1994. Chairman, Dave Laming and many of the committee members have been there from the start. They have planned and delivered over 575 events for local wildlife supporters including guided walks, talks and trips to places of interest, all with the aim to celebrate and share their love of the natural world.

While the group has closed, many of the group's volunteers continue to support the Trust through their work on nature reserves and taking part in our events and engagement programmes.

On behalf of all those who have enjoyed the activities led by the group over the years, our staff and volunteers, we want to thank Dave, his committee and all those that have given their time, shared their enthusiasm and helped to raise vital funds for local wildlife over the last 27 years.

🚲 An epic Midsummer Challenge

Best of luck to Richard Witter who is cycling from Darlington to St Albans in June to fundraise for the Trust. Richard is aiming to complete the challenge in 17 hours on the longest day of the year, covering 260 miles. Richard said: "I've always been passionate about conservation, but as I've got older and had children I've realised more and more how much we take local green spaces for granted, and how important they are. There are so many amazing creatures under ever increasing pressure just on our doorstep, and sometimes this is forgotten when people think about conservation as a far away problem."

You can sponsor Richard here: [justgiving.com/fundraising/richard-witter1](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/richard-witter1)



♥ Give a Little Love

Thank you to the Harpenden, Rickmansworth and Welwyn Garden City branches of Waitrose for donating to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust through your 'Give a Little Love' scheme. The money you donated, over £1,300, will care for the wildlife and wild places in your local area.

🌸 In remembrance

We would like to thank June Crew who donated to Tewin Orchard in loving memory of her friend, and fellow naturalist, **Janine Tyler**. June describes Janine as "A gentle, loving stoic to the end, not only did she never complain of her pain as others would do, nor did she ever criticise or have a bad word to say about anyone. She was the most selfless person I have known and the best friend anyone could wish for." Our condolences go to June for the sad loss of her friend, and of course to all of Janine's friends and family. Thank you for supporting the Trust in Janine's memory.

We would also like to thank the family and friends of **Frances Ann Ronald** and **Dr Peter K Evans** for kindly donating to the Trust in their memory. These kind gifts will ensure that the wildlife that was so important to your loved ones will be protected for years to come.

Thanks also to the late **John Papachristou** who kindly left a gift to the Trust. He was a valued member of the Trust and it was incredibly kind of him to remember us in this special way.



🦋 The BFI National Archive Wildlife Garden

Kim and Angelo work at the British Film Institute's National Archive in Berkhamsted. They both took on the challenge of rewilding a previously unloved area of the site and transforming it into a haven for wildlife in 2018. Since the project started, the area has become a beautiful wildlife garden. Working diligently in tea and lunch breaks, Kim and Angelo began digging soil and removing nettles and bramble to clear room for a few beehives they had been given by a local beekeeper. The pair felt the space could do so much more for wildlife, and their BFI colleagues began contributing bulbs, bird baths and a bench so that everyone could enjoy sitting in the garden. As summer approached, butterflies started to arrive and bees were buzzing about the place. Kim and Angelo persevered in maintaining the garden throughout lockdown (socially distanced of course!) and in July 2020, they decided to install a pond at the garden. It took two attempts but the pond is now home to three frogs and is supporting the wildlife visiting the garden. You can see Kim's photographs from the garden below.

Kim said: "BFI donated some money from the Sustainability Budget to enable us to buy some plants, and this year, a wooden bench to go under the rose arch. It's now a lovely spot for anyone to sit and enjoy the quiet and bees and butterflies. It's become such a popular place that we need more benches. We had baby Blue Tits in the nesting box this year, a robin usually comes to visit when we're out there and a bank vole made an appearance a couple of weeks ago."

In addition to this, BFI is working with the Trust to investigate the potential for supporting wildlife across the National Archive site in Berkhamsted which is great news.

We were thrilled to hear about the wildlife garden in Berkhamsted, and we hope Kim and Angelo's story will inspire others to transform their local spaces for nature.

If you are looking for ways to make your space wilder, check out our wild actions page at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actions](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actions)



Woodland Wildflowers

Cast your eye down to the floors of woodlands in Hertfordshire this spring, and you will be met with a beautiful array of colours decorating the scene.

Bluebells, wood anemone, wild daffodils are the blues, yellows and orange bursts of life flowering from the undergrowth and turning their faces to the sun in the season of rebirth. Woodland wildflowers are one of the things that makes spring such a special time of year. We are lucky to have such a range of wildflowers in Hertfordshire, including the more commonly known flowers and a few rarities such as lords and ladies and special varieties of orchids.

Ancient woodlands

Some of the best places to see wildflowers are in ancient woodlands. These unique habitats make up only 2.5% of the landmass in the UK. In Hertfordshire, we have a few of these sites, namely the recently purchased Astonbury Wood, which the local community worked hard with the Trust to fundraise for and protect. What makes ancient woodlands so special is the centuries-old undisturbed soil and decaying wood which is wonderful habitat for invertebrates, fungi and wildflowers.

The complex biodiversity of these places makes them irreplaceable and this is why we must protect as many of them as we can. A number of wildflowers are indicators of ancient woodlands, meaning that if you spot a lot of these flowers, it is likely to mean the wood is ancient. Bluebells, wood anemone, primrose and wild garlic are all a part of the 'indicator species' for ancient woodlands.

On your adventures to woodlands this spring, take a look down to see if you can spot any of these woodland wildflowers.

Bluebells

For most of the year, bluebells are bulbs underground in ancient woodlands, emerging to flower from April onwards. From this time, millions of bulbs flourish, causing the blue carpets we so keenly associate with spring.

How to identify them: Look for blue nodding bell-shaped flowers sitting on top of long, narrow stems with drooping leaf fronds.

When to see them: April to May

Where to find them: Balls Wood, Longspring Wood, Old Park Wood, Stocking Springs Wood, Astonbury Wood.



JOSH KUBALE

Lords-and-ladies

This unusual looking flower is an early flowering plant. Lords-and-ladies love shady spots and grow in woodlands and hedgerows. This flower is poisonous so don't touch it!

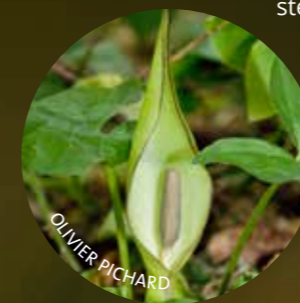
How to identify them: Keep your eyes peeled for the curvaceous, pale green flower with a purple or yellow 'spadix' (a spike of tiny flowers on a fleshy stem). In autumn, lords-and-ladies produce an upright stalk of bright red berries that is conspicuous among the leaf litter.

When to see them:

April to May

Where to find them:

Fir and Pond Woods



OLIVIER PICHARD

Wood anemones

Known to exist in ancient woodlands, wood anemone pretty and low-growing flowers which spread slowly through root growth, rather than pollination. These woodland wildflowers grow best in early spring before canopies of trees overhead have covered the floor in shade.

How to identify them: Wood anemones grow around six large white or purple streaked petals with bright yellow anthers (the centre of the flower which contains pollen) on top of a bed of green flaked leaves.

When to see them: March to May

Where to find them: Hobbyhorse Wood, Old Park Wood, Stocking Springs Wood

Wild daffodils

A commonly known sight of spring, planted daffodils cluster in gardens, parks and on roadsides from March until April. Wild daffodils are less commonly known and can be found in ancient woodlands and on damp meadows.

How to identify them: Sitting on top of grey-green leaves, pale yellow petals encase a darker yellow trumpet, which is unique to the wild variety of daffodil. Wild daffodils are usually shorter than the planted kind and cluster together on the ground.

When to see them:

March to April

Where to find them:

Stocking Springs Wood



ROSS HODDINOTT 2020 VISION

Primroses

Primroses are humble and hardy little plants; they prefer to grow in clearings of woodlands, in hedgerows and grasslands. They are an important food source for the rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly, which was last recorded in Hertfordshire for the first time since 1988 at Aldbury Nowers in May 2021.

How to identify them: This low-growing plant has rough tongue shaped leaves which are large and creamy flowers with darker yellow centres.

When to see them:

December to May

Where to find them:

Stocking Springs Wood



VAUGHN MATTHEWS



MARK HAMBLIN 2020 VISION



DREAMSTIME

Weird and Wonderful Wildlife: Water shrews - wetland wolverines!

Hidden among the thick, green bankside vegetation of Hertfordshire's waterways lives a voracious predator with a venomous bite. It has been here since mammoths roamed the land but is unique amongst our mammal fauna – this wonderful creature is the water shrew.

Biology and evolution

Water shrews are the largest of the mainland shrews and can be distinguished by their characteristic black and white coat. The underside of the animal is a white to grey colour, with the head, back and sides being a uniform black. From the nose to the start of their tail they are about 60-70 mm in

length and weigh about 18g in summer, dropping to 12g in winter.

Water shrews are members of the *soricinae*, or red-toothed shrew, family. So-called because they have teeth with red-tips. Their teeth are infused with iron which helps to resist wear and causes the characteristic colour.

What makes water shrews truly unique compared to other mammals in the UK

is that its bite is venomous. The poison in its saliva is strong enough to immobilise frogs and small fish. The famous venom of the water shrew is neurotoxic, which means it acts on the nervous system. It is especially effective against frogs and other small vertebrates and means that the shrew can tackle prey up to 60 times heavier than itself.

There are a few quirky characteristics of shrews, which help them to adapt to their

way of life. For example, water shrews have body hair that is "I" shaped in cross-section. This allows the animal to trap small bubbles of air to aid buoyancy and insulation when they dive into the water. Surprisingly, dives only last a matter of seconds, and often the underwater foraging succeeds only in bringing up a twig or bit of leaf!



Although water shrews are only underwater for approximately 10-20 seconds, they can dive to almost two metres.

DID YOU KNOW?

Lifestyle

Water shrews do not live a long time, rarely longer than 14 -19 months. Young water shrews are born at the end of the year, and spend their first winter as juveniles, before mating between April and September. Gestation takes about 20 days, or three weeks, with most of the over-wintering population being relatively young.



Water shrews do not hibernate but will spend more time in their nests and less time in the water.

DID YOU KNOW?

Despite their name, water shrews only obtain about 50% of their food from the water. This number reduces in winter too, when the water becomes cooler. When hunting in water, they are particularly fond of water shrimps and other invertebrates. On land they hunt insects and are our only shrew species that regularly eat centipedes and millipedes. Shrews store or "cache" their food, hiding food away in burrows for later. Storing food is a useful way for shrews to spend less time and energy on hunting.

In times when food is scarce, water shrews can actually shrink. Their skeleton, organs and musculature all reduce in size in order to cope with the reduced amount of food. This is known as the Dehnel Phenomenon.

Water shrew territories stretch along heavily-vegetated banks of water bodies

and it is here that you might be able to spot food caches and shrew poo. The size of the territory varies from roughly 80 to 370m². The size of the territory tends to expand in the summer when young are born to increase the amount of food in the nearby area.



You can identify the water shrew poo by finding traces of invertebrates inside!

DID YOU KNOW?

A particular favourite habitat of water shrews appears to be old watercress beds. The combination of clear, well-oxygenated water, vegetation cover and plentiful food make these habitats perfect for them. They are known to inhabit Lemsford Springs Nature Reserve, near Welwyn Garden City.

Studying and caring for shrews

Studying these small, fast and elusive creatures is tricky. One of the standard methods of studying small mammals is through the use of harmless traps.

Small furry residents get used to a box-like trap full of food with its door rigged open. Then, when the mechanism is set, they find themselves stuck in a little chamber, well-provisioned with food and bedding. All shrew trapping has to be done by following the licence conditions set out by Natural England. Alternatively, to simply monitor populations and movement of the species, tubes in which the shrew can feed and poop are used to examine the tracks and signs of the animal.

As with much of our wildlife, water shrews are threatened by habitat loss and the loss of invertebrates at the base of the food pyramid. Studies have shown that water shrews prefer water bodies with higher levels of dissolved oxygen because this is good for the invertebrates which make up so much of their diet. The fast flowing, oxygen-rich waters of Hertfordshire's chalk rivers are therefore perfect water shrew habitat. As with so much of our wildlife, preserving these and the dense corridors of vegetation that line their banks appear to be the key to protecting our local water shrews.



DREAMSTIME



SHUTTERSTOCK

Ashes to Ashes

Ash dieback is sweeping the country, devastating our native ash trees. It is estimated that up to 95% of ash trees may be lost across the country, dramatically changing the makeup of our woodlands. Senior Reserve Officer, Dan Townsend, takes a look at the picture in Hertfordshire and Middlesex and looks at how the Trust is coping with this new challenge on our nature reserves.

The mighty ash trees on our nature reserves have stood for decades but are now succumbing to a new threat – ash dieback. Ash dieback is a fungal disease that severely affects ash trees, for which there is no known cure. The disease was first identified in Europe in the early 90s and has been present in the UK since at least 2012. The disease impacts the trees ability to transport water from its roots to its crown – the very top of the tree - and Infected trees become weak and are at greater risk of losing limbs or falling down completely.

Ash dieback in Hertfordshire and Middlesex

In Hertfordshire we are lucky enough to have mixed woodland with lots of different species of trees but the effects of ash dieback will still be very obvious to visitors to nature reserves such as Gobions Wood and Balls Wood.

The Trust's Reserves Team are assessing the health of ash trees on our nature reserves. About half of the nature reserves that we care for are affected and our response to the disease requires a significant investment in time and resources.

Affected trees near to footpaths or along roads pose a risk to public safety because of the risk of falling branches or collapsing trees. To keep our visitors and property safe, we are undertaking a targeted programme of works on our nature reserves. Some trees need to be felled immediately because they are already dead or dying. The loss of these trees will result in unavoidable changes to some of our nature reserves, but the work is being carefully timed to minimise the impact on wildlife such as nesting birds.

We will continue to monitor the reserves in our care over the coming years. The symptoms are easier to spot in mid-late summer, when a healthy ash should be in full leaf. It becomes much harder in autumn, when leaves are naturally changing colour and falling. We only fell trees from September – February to avoid the nesting season.

How you can help

Ash dieback is primarily spread on the wind but visitors to affected sites can help to reduce the spread of the fungus by brushing soil, mud, twigs, leaves and other plant debris off their footwear and wheels - including the wheels of cars, bicycles, mountain bikes, baby buggies and wheelchairs - before leaving the site. They should then wash these items at home before visiting another similar site.



FIND OUT MORE

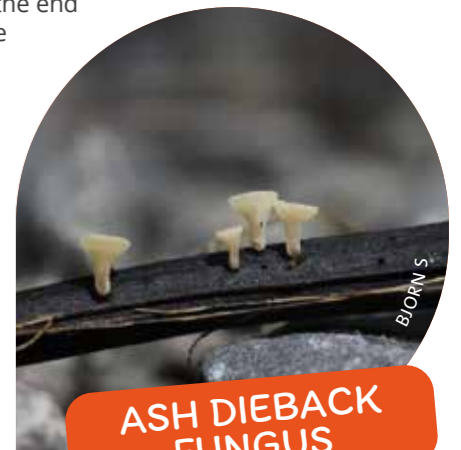
Online

Read about ash dieback and the Trust's response on our website at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/ashdieback

Life after death

Ash dieback will not be the end of native ash trees in the UK, but it will have an enormous impact on our wild landscapes. Evidence suggests that a small proportion of trees are resistant to ash dieback, so where it is safe to do so we will allow nature to take its course in the hope that these trees will eventually help the ash population to recover.

As larger ash trees are felled, it will create space in the woodland canopy and more light will reach the woodland floor. This will allow other plants to generate and flowers to bloom. Where possible, the felled trees will also be left in place and the slowly-decaying deadwood will provide an important home for invertebrates.



ASH DIEBACK FUNGUS



M J RICHARDSON

Ash dieback factfile

- Common names:** ash dieback, ash chalara
- Scientific name:** Hymenoscyphus fraxineus
- What does it affect?:** water transport systems in ash trees
- Areas affected:** the whole of the UK
- Origin:** originally from Asia, arrived in the UK via Europe



On the *verge* of **recovery**

Discover a roadside haven with wildlife-friendly verge expert, Mark Schofield

Road verges make up 1.2% of the UK, some 2,600km² — that's an area the size of Dorset. This county-sized tract of land, hidden in plain sight, is home to over 700 species of wildflowers, representing 45% of our native flora. In many cases, verges act as vital corridors for wildlife and can often be the last stand locally for scarce or declining wildflowers, such as sulphur clover, spiked rampion, Deptford pink, and perennial flax.

The safety of road users demands that verges are maintained with shorter turf on approach to bends and junctions and with safe pull-over zones. However, beyond these requirements there are huge opportunities to create more space for nature. Huge opportunities that are all too often missed.

Many verges are mown too frequently and the cuttings left in place, which first creates a physical barrier to growth, then increases the soil fertility as the cuttings decompose. This gives an unnatural

advantage to the most competitive plants. Spoil from ditch clearance is often spread across verges with similar effect. Conversely, too little mowing can also be a problem; many verges are left unmown and the strips of grassland are lost as they grow into scrub. Scrub is great for wildlife, but a mix of habitats which include scrub and wildflower areas is far better.

A road verge that is well managed for wildlife can be a set of parallel worlds each offering different niches for wildlife. Tall, wide, diverse, native hedgerows at the back of the verge, complete with trees, can grade through infrequently trimmed tall herbs and tussocks to grassland meadows mown once or twice a year, where the cuttings are collected and removed. Here mowing is best done in late summer, to allow seed to ripen and insect lifecycles to complete, or even later where soil is poorer.

Removing cuttings simulates wild

grazing and reduces fertility in the soil, maintaining more natural conditions that support a wider diversity of wildflowers and the invertebrates that rely on them. Open drainage ditches can add habitat for aquatic and marginal plants too, but spoil should be disposed of away from the verge where possible.

Verges near you may be crew-cut strips that flank suburban crescents and cul-de-sacs, or they might be overgrown rural lane sides. Your local highways authority (typically your county council or unitary authority) will have these managed under contract. A local petition may be able to reduce the frequency of cuts in your area, delivering cost savings and lowering the carbon footprint for public services. Cutting and collecting the cuttings is the main challenge cited by authorities, but affordable machinery exists to achieve this; and it has been implemented with success by some councils.

There are roadside nature reserves across the UK that set the standard for roadside habitat, but we must call for better management of the rest of our verges if we want to achieve a national Nature Recovery Network.

For advice on where to start, visit wildlifetrusts.org/verges

**Your
Wild**
SPRING

Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager gives some ideas for going wild this spring in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.



PAUL THRUSH

**GARDEN
WARBLER**

Nature's soundtrack

At this time of year, the volume control on the natural world is turned right up as our wild places are quite literally alive with birds all with just one thing on their minds: finding a mate, building a nest and producing the next generation.

Time is of the essence with many birds having arrived back from wintering grounds in Africa with just a few months to raise their family before they're off again. Time is also of the essence for us, their audience, all trying to remember the varied calls and songs of the birds once more before they stop singing, having found a mate or become totally invisible as the trees and shrubs become fully leaved.

If you fancy getting to grips with your local birdsong I suggest two things. Firstly, buy an alarm clock and be prepared to set it for an hour

before dawn. Secondly, invest in an audio guide to the songs of Britain's birds - the Collins Bird Guide is my particular favourite. Before heading off into the field, familiarise yourself with the songs of those birds you can expect to see. Head for somewhere where you can experience a mix of habitats - wetlands are always good - and just listen. Closing your eyes helps to focus the mind on the aural splendour. From the reedbeds you'll be calmed by the slow rhythmic, churr, churr, chee, chee of reed warblers repeated endlessly from birds clinging to the tops of the stems. In bramble patches and other tall vegetation, sedge warblers will hammer out their harsher, more discordant notes. From adjacent scrub and woodland, chiffchaffs sing their names proudly, again and again and again and again. Altogether rarer now but sharing almost identical plumage is the willow warbler. More than any other, its beautiful mellifluous descending trill is the definition of spring to me. Arriving later, another favourite, the garden warbler arrives. With a plumage of rather stylish, subtle greys, creams and browns, its song is easily mistaken (by me at least) for its close relation, the blackcap. These birds are the true warblers - their bubbling, flutey notes cascading down from the trees. Once you hear the birds well, try to see them and in so doing, confirm your identification.

Go with the Flow

2022 is the 10th anniversary of the Trust's Living Rivers project.

Living Rivers was initiated to raise awareness of chalk rivers and achieve restoration and conservation of this globally rare habitat. Whilst most of our rivers are degraded sadly, there are a few places where their characteristic features and wildlife can be enjoyed. One such place is the River Mimram at Tewinbury where the Trust, supported by John Davis and in partnership with the Tewinbury Farm Hotel, has created a dedicated Chalk River Discovery Trail. Spring is the perfect time to visit and explore.

One of the things which makes chalk rivers so special is the water in them. Chalk rivers are almost entirely fed by groundwater. This groundwater originally fell as rain, before sinking into the chalk and being stored underground in the aquifer. At various points along the Mimram valley, this groundwater emerges from springs and feeds the river. Because it has been filtered through chalk, the water is pure, clear, mineral-rich and constant in temperature, flowing from the springs at about 10° celsius. This means that the river never freezes and even in the harshest winters provides feeding for wading birds such as snipe and green sandpipers.

When you visit, have a look for the bare gravel on the river bed.

The spaces between the gravel are home to many small animals and plants. These include invertebrates, such as freshwater shrimps and the larvae of mayflies, caddisflies and stoneflies. Fish rely on the clean gravel. Female brown trout create hollows in the gravel with their tails, called redds, into which they deposit their eggs. Newly hatched tiny fish, called fry find shelter in the gravels. Areas of faster flow will help to scour the river bed and keep the gravel clean. If gravel becomes covered by silt, the oxygen supply is cut off and invertebrates and fish eggs may suffocate. Ensuring that the gravels remain clean is one of our prime conservation goals for chalk rivers!

As you overlook the Mimram you should be able spot a water plant with long, divided leaves looking like a long-toed bird's foot. This is water 'crowfoot', one of our most characteristic chalk river plants. For most of the year it remains submerged, its leaves providing cover and food for invertebrates and fish but in late spring it sends shoots above the water and blossoms with yellow-hearted white flowers. Insects are attracted to the flower and in so doing, pollinate the plant. Water crowfoot needs light and will only grow in parts of the river that are open and shade-free and our conservation work tries to achieve a suitable balance of shade and light.

From April onwards look out for our largest and most spectacular



BEE FLY

damselfly, the banded demoiselle. The males are unmistakable, iridescent blue with dark patches on with wings whilst the females look dark green with bronze wings. They spend most of their time hunting for smaller insects in tall vegetation along the river, only returning to the water in search of a mate. After mating, the female lays her eggs into the stems of submerged plants such as water crowfoot. After hatching, the nymphs take up to two years to mature, feeding on other aquatic invertebrates.

Alder is one of the most common trees found along the banks of the River Mimram, thriving where their roots are in damp ground. The roots of alder help hold the bank together and prevent erosion. Otters may use cavities within alder roots to 'lie-up' during the day. Its catkins and seeds provide food for a range of insects and birds, and its leaves are a food plant for the caterpillar of several moth species. Alder wood makes the very best charcoal. Historically it was an important crop in the Lea Valley where it was grown to produce charcoal, a key ingredient in gunpowder, manufactured in factories along the river.

**WATER
CROWFOOT**



TIM HILL



Read more about the Living Rivers project on pages 8-11

MARK HAMBLIN 2020 VISION

Five ways to experience and enjoy spring

1. Walk and watch

Find a walk which you can start from home and which encompasses a variety of habitats such as woodland, grassland and wetlands.

Try to walk it at least once a week through the whole spring and record what you see along the way be it flowers, butterflies or birds. During the first Covid lockdown in 2020, we did just this and it's a great way of seeing how the natural world changes through the seasons.



MALE BANDED DEMOISELLE - WWT RESERVES CO. UK
BANDED DEMOISELLE

2. Dilly with the daffodils

The Trust's Stocking Springs Wood has a large colony of wild daffodils – one of the few places in Hertfordshire. By the end of March, they will be in their full glory, nodding happily in the spring sunshine. As the daffodils go over, they will be replaced by a beautiful carpet of bluebells – a good reason for another visit!

3. Get back to your roots and have a go at growing your own food.

If you have a garden or a large pot, growing potatoes is a joy from start to finish. First things first, purchase some seed potatoes – one of the most reliable and delicious varieties are charlottes. The potatoes need 'chitting' for a few weeks and that's the time to get your hands dirty, preparing the ground or pot. Within a few weeks of planting, shoots will appear above ground. Cover these with soil and continue doing so through the spring. By high summer your crop should be ready – organic potatoes, no food miles and the feel-good factor of being just a little bit self-sufficient.



4. Grow your own bird food

Now is the time to plan ahead and create your own bird feeding plot. It's relatively easy. Cultivate and fertilise an area to create a good seed bed. Then, in May, sow a variety of seed rich crops such as quinoa, buckwheat, triticale, oats millet and sunflowers. You could do the same in a large pot. If it's a dry summer, consider watering with washing-up water or water from a butt. By the time autumn comes you should have a dense crop which will be irresistible to your local birds.

5. Relax and indulge in some cloud watching

After all that work growing food for yourself and the birds, take time to relax and indulge in some cloud watching. Pick a spot with a big sky, lie down and let the clouds drift by, marvelling at the infinite different shapes and how they change constantly, never to be the same again. If you're very lucky you may see the sickle shapes and screams of swifts, newly returned from Africa. It's a perfect way to unwind, in the midst of nature, living in the moment.

Sensing Spring

See this:

Look out for our insect equivalent of humming birds – the hovering and darting flight of the dark-edged bee-fly as it seeks out nectar from low-growing flowers.



Smell this:

Get up close to wild flowers (like ragged robin, left), close your eyes and see if you can smell the difference between a few different species.

Hear this:

Visit your local chalk river and unwind to the gentle trickling sound of water flowing slowly over gravels.

Feel this:

Find a quiet place and enjoy the gentle caress of a warm springtime breeze across your face and through your hair.

What's On

We are delighted to be offering a range of in-person and online events over the coming months, from workshops to walks, with something for all ages. Discover new events and our top picks near you.

Booking is essential for all our events and places are snapped up quickly! Don't delay and book your place today. Visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events for full listings and booking.

Get Closer to Nature

As spring approaches and the days get longer, head outside and join us for a guided walk to spot the signs of spring – from emerging spring flowers to identifying beautiful bird-song at dawn. Our range of walks will cover species identification, general rambles around a nature reserve or other wild place in Hertfordshire and Middlesex, and exciting dusk experiences for all the family, listening to our aerial-hunting bats using bat detectors.

Alongside our nature-related guided walks we are also working with a variety of partners to offer other ways to get close to nature this spring and summer. We are excited to be offering a new experience this year – learning about natural dyeing with woad. Spend a day in Hitchin Community Garden learning about how to grow plants for extracting dyes. Then try dyeing different materials using woad. For families we have arranged hedgehog workshops and badger watching sessions, and there will be plenty of opportunities to get creative this summer with a variety of art-based workshops and drop-in sessions.

Finally, for the adults, we have our ever-popular wild gin tasting experiences with a bat-related twist.

Booking is essential for most events so don't delay and book today!

Bring Nature Into Your Home

We are committed to bringing nature into your home and continue to offer a range of online talks, workshops and learning opportunities. Although our online programme is more suited to the colder months, we have a fascinating talk about the little-known water shrew lined up for April, and a bi-monthly series of nature journaling online sessions for all ages.

We are adding new events all the time so please keep checking the website for dates, availability and booking.



Everything for wildlife,
ecology and conservation

Bat detectors

Camera traps & accessories

Moth traps & insect nets

Field guides

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