

Celebrating the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex

# wildlifematters

Summer 2022



**Herts &  
Middlesex**  
Wildlife Trust



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Inside?**

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# Welcome



I was delighted to see over 200 people at our first Wilder Future conference in May, where we brought together farmers, educators, golf course managers, community and wildlife organisations,

local authorities, volunteers and more besides. This many people showing they care about nature's recovery was heartwarming.

But that's not enough. While it's hugely encouraging and important to see that people care, wildlife only has a future if action happens. We brought all these different groups together to underline the message that the Trust has an important role to play but the future of wildlife cannot rely solely on us. All our attendees have the power to act and influence others. Over the coming months, we'll share some of the positive outcomes from the conference with you.

Simultaneously, we are working alongside our fellow Wildlife Trusts to lobby for strong policy and legislation. The Environment Act passed into law in November 2021 and is the first dedicated environmental legislation for nearly 30 years. The government has now published a Nature Recovery Green Paper and environmental targets, but we have serious concerns that these are weak and unambitious. Reminding our MPs that wildlife matters and their vital role to play remains as important as ever. Please visit our website for information on our campaigns and to add your support.

I hear regularly from our members how important it is for them to see and get up close to wildlife and I share that – the excitement of not knowing what you might see, hearing bird song, trying to recall the name of a plant. Perhaps I might bump into one or two of you on one of our nature reserves such as Hexton Chalk Pit to see the chalk hill blue butterflies on the wing, something I always look forward to.

As ever, thank you so much your support.

*Lesley*

**Lesley Davies**  
Chief Executive

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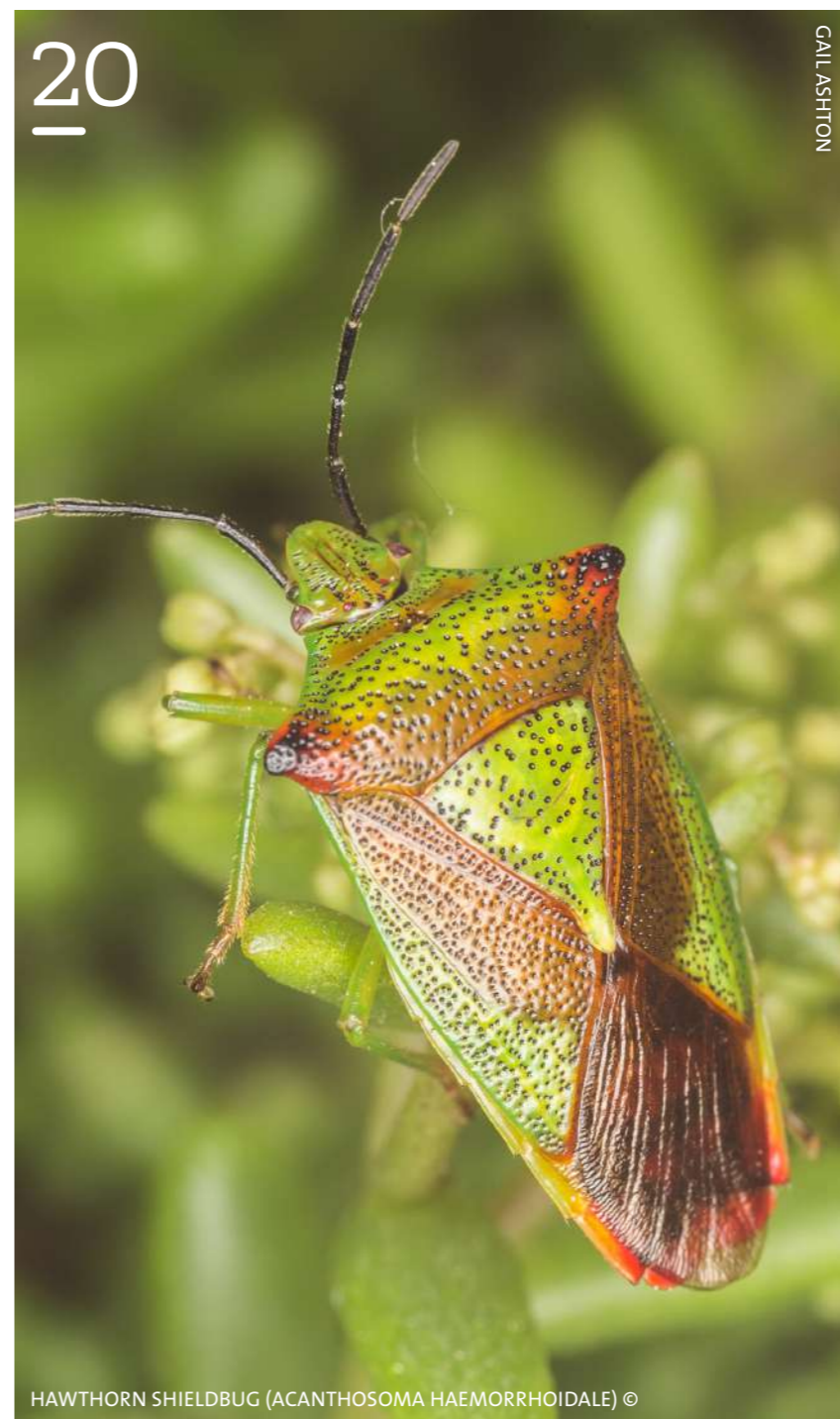


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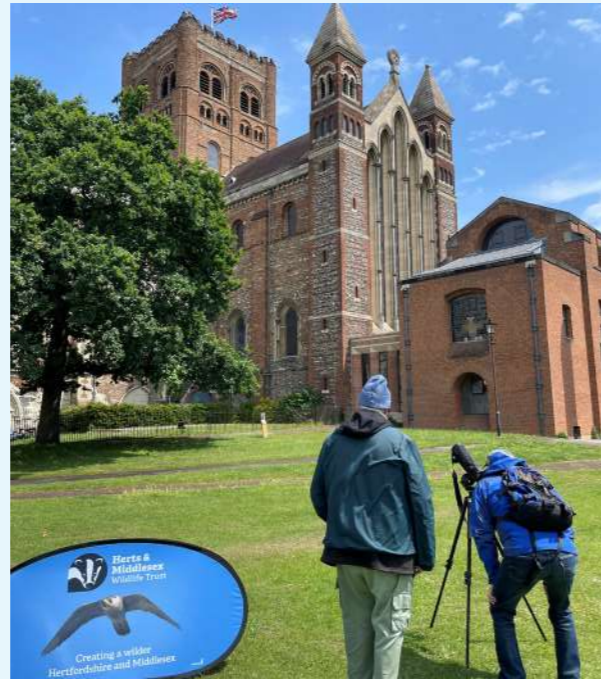
# Wild News

## Peregrine Falcons – helping to make St Albans wilder!

We believe that wildlife should have space to thrive alongside our everyday lives and that everyone benefits from having access to nature. The Trust's Wilder St Albans project, delivered in conjunction with St Albans City & District Council, aims to increase space for nature across the district and the wildlife these habitats support by coordinating a programme of practical action by the community. The first breeding pair of peregrines at St Albans cathedral are a demonstration that wildlife can find a home in our most iconic urban environments.

Over the past couple of months, locals and enthusiasts have enjoyed taking part in 'Peregrine Watch' a joint initiative by the Trust and the RSPB, allowing them a closer view of the peregrines.

You can find out more about these wonderful birds on page 18.



## Wildlife Garden Champions

**Wildlife Gardening Champions is an exciting, new initiative supporting St Albans' residents to turn their gardens into wildlife havens and exciting lifestyle spaces.**

15 volunteers have been trained to provide personal visits and offer free tailored advice on how to make gardens better habitats for wildlife.

The concept is a collaboration between Wilder St Albans, a project led by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and supported by St Albans City and District Council, and Wilderhood Watch, a St Albans-based group formed by residents determined to make St Albans friendlier for wildlife and people.


This scheme has been made possible by funding through St Albans City & District Council's Health Protection Board.



## Herts Wild Art

It has been great to see so many people connecting with wildlife through the Trust's Herts Wild Art project. Thanks to funding from the Arts Council, this new initiative is designed to help people connect with wildlife through art and there will be plenty more opportunities to get involved if you haven't already. See page 27 for more information and check out our programme of activities running through the Summer and Autumn to find the right activity for you.



  
FIND OUT MORE  
**Online**  
Find out about our activities at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/hertswildart](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/hertswildart)

## Wilder Future Conference

Over 200 delegates turned up to our first Wilder Future Conference which was held at Rothamsted in Harpenden on 25 May.

The event was hosted by the Trust's CEO, Lesley Davies, who was welcomed by guest speaker Craig Bennett, CEO of The Wildlife Trusts and Cllr Richard Roberts, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council. We heard inspiring accounts of groups and organisations taking action for wildlife on their local patch including, Howard Craft from Berkhamsted Golf Course, Heidi Carruthers from Wilder St Albans and Nadia Bishara from community initiative, Wilderhood Watch. Chloë Edwards, the Trust's Director of Nature Recovery gave her insights into restoring landscapes at scale and the road to achieving 30% of land connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030. Dynamic and ambitious panel discussions followed and the day was rounded off with a very positive networking session.



## Ride Wild Challenge

By the time you read this, our Ride Wild Challenge will have hopefully taken place. 30 wild places within 30 hours and 70+ miles across the region, travelling only by eBike!



We want to say a huge thank you to all of the team that have been involved in organising this event. Especially to our kind Ride Wild sponsors Puddingstone Distillery, and Estarli for their support. Thanks also to those of you who have donated in support of this fundraising challenge.

We hope it has helped to show the variety of wild places that there are to visit locally and just how accessible they are with sustainable transport.



FIND OUT MORE

**Online**

You can read more about the challenge and still sponsor the team on our dedicated website page [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/ridewildchallenge](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/ridewildchallenge)



## AGM - Save The Date!

We will be hosting our next AGM on 17th September. Look out for the notice, further details of the AGM, and how to book on our website from 16th August 2022 - [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events)

## Hello and Goodbye

We welcome Chloë Edwards to the Trust as Director of Nature Recovery from Kent Wildlife Trust. Chloë's appointment is instrumental to our strategy of 30% of land connected and protected for wildlife by 2030.



Other new starters include, Astrid Biddle, who has been appointed as an Ecologist, Natasha Aidinyantz joins us as Digital Communications Officer and Debbie Bigg further adds to our Development team in the role of Communications and PR Officer.

With heavy hearts, we say a fond farewell and thank you to two long-standing members of our Development team, Engagement Coordinator, Emma Matthars and Marketing & Communications Manager, Josh Kubale. Both of them have been instrumental in the development and success of our audience reach, supporter engagement and activities programmes. Communications Officer, Alicia Sanctuary also left the team for pastures new earlier in the year.

After 10 years with the Trust, Local Wildlife Sites Programme Manager, Carol Lodge has left to relocate. We are thankful for the many years she spent with us.

We are also sad to say goodbye to Lydia Ennis, Colne Valley Rivers & Wetlands Officer, Dave Willis, People & Wildlife Officer and Assistant Reserves Officer, Alex Popple. We thank them all for looking after our wild spaces and the work that they have done to protect local wildlife.

We wish Emma, Josh, Alicia, Carol, Lydia, Dave and Alex all the best with their next chapters and all our new starters the best of luck as they start out in their new roles with the Trust.



# UK NEWS



## Nextdoor Nature

A ground-breaking new Wildlife Trusts initiative is bringing communities together to rewild their neighbourhoods. Nextdoor Nature will give people the skills, tools, and opportunity to take action for nature in the places where they live and work. The initiative was made possible by a £5 million investment from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, to leave a lasting natural legacy in honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Nextdoor Nature will provide solutions to two of the most important issues that The Wildlife Trusts are working to address: the urgent need to create more space for nature, with a goal to restore 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030; and the need to make nature a part of everyone's daily life. We know that spending time in nature can bring huge benefits to our health and wellbeing, but we don't all have the same level of access to green or wild spaces.

Research shows that 85% of people in nature-deprived areas say more natural spaces would improve their quality of life. The importance of this was reinforced by the pandemic, which demonstrated how vital it is to have access to nature in your

local area. Nextdoor Nature will bring a wild touch to the places that need it most, improving the lives of people from some of the most disadvantaged areas across the UK. This could include establishing wild habitats and green corridors in areas of economic and nature deprivation, rewilding school grounds, or naturalising highly urbanised or unused areas. Most importantly, through Nextdoor Nature, it will be local communities that decide on what happens and drive the change in their neighbourhood.

The initiative will bring huge benefits for nature, too. One of the big problems facing our wildlife is fragmentation — wild places are isolated and disconnected, preventing plants and animals from moving freely across the landscape. By creating green corridors and wild patches in urbanised areas, we can reconnect our wild networks, creating pit-stops for pollinators, buffets for birds and bats, and highways for hedgehogs.

Liz Bonnin, President of The Wildlife Trusts, says: "We humans are key to solving the climate crisis and restoring our natural heritage. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, but Nextdoor Nature is

working to set that right, putting local communities at the heart of helping our wild places to recover, and making sure that no matter where we live, we can be part of this crucial endeavour."

Learn more about this inspiring new project at [wildlifetrusts.org/nextdoor-nature](http://wildlifetrusts.org/nextdoor-nature)

### Examples of communities that The Wildlife Trusts will work alongside include:

- Young people from minority ethnic communities, young people with disabilities and those who live in socio-economically disadvantaged areas of London
- Aspiring leaders in Scotland, who will have the opportunity to develop the skills needed to inspire and support their local communities to take action for nature
- Communities in Derby where language barriers (71 languages are spoken) and residential segregation have created some of the most socially isolated areas in the Midlands

## UK UPDATE

### Full marks for new school subject

This April, the UK Government announced the introduction of a new GCSE in natural history. From 2025, secondary school students in England will have the opportunity to study the natural world, developing an in-depth knowledge of wildlife and wider ecosystems, as well as real-life experience of nature. The GCSE will teach transferable skills in observation, identification, classification and data gathering, and how to apply this knowledge to real world issues. The announcement follows years of campaigning to make nature part of the curriculum, led by naturalist and writer Mary Colwell.

Providing young people with the knowledge to protect the planet is essential for the future of the natural

world, as is inspiring a connection to nature. The new natural history GCSE is a great first step, but this journey needs to start sooner and involve all pupils in the UK, regardless of the subjects they study.

We want to see children given opportunities to spend at least an hour a day learning outside, and for nature and climate education to be embedded across all subjects and at all levels. This message has been championed by thousands of young people through the Our Bright Future programme, who want greater opportunities to learn in, and about, nature.

Read our full response to the new GCSE at [wtru.st/new-GCSE](http://wtru.st/new-GCSE)

## UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



### 1 Raptor real estate

A pair of peregrine falcons have nested for the first time on St Albans Cathedral, thanks to a nesting tray provided by the Wilder St Albans project — a collaboration between Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and St Albans City and District Council. The St Albans pair is one of only five pairs breeding in Hertfordshire.

[wtru.st/st-albans-nest](http://wtru.st/st-albans-nest)

### 2 Hope for hazel dormice

Surrey Wildlife Trust has trained more than 100 volunteers to help hedgerows flourish across Surrey's North Downs, giving hope to the iconic hazel dormice. Even small gaps in a hedgerow can be a barrier to dormice, isolating populations. The new volunteer task force is surveying, laying and planting hedgerows to help dormice populations expand.

[wtru.st/dormice-hope](http://wtru.st/dormice-hope)



### 3 Scuttled cuttle

A rare pink cuttlefish was found on a Cornish beach, following late winter storms. This small species is more commonly seen in the Mediterranean, with only sporadic records from southern Britain. The discovery was made by Cornwall Wildlife Trust volunteers and recorded in the Trust's Marine Strandings Network.

[wtru.st/pink-cuttlefish](http://wtru.st/pink-cuttlefish)



### Sky-high ambitions

Wild About Gardens, an annual joint initiative between The Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Horticultural Society, is setting its sights sky-high as we go wild about our high-flying birds. This year, the focus is on swifts, swallows and martins — summer visitors that have suffered some serious declines. Plummeting insect populations and

loss of nesting sites have contributed to swifts and house martins joining the UK's red list, marking them as birds in dire need of help. The campaign is calling on the public to help by nurturing insect-friendly gardens and adding nest boxes to homes.

Find out more at [wildaboutgardens.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardens.org.uk)



# Explore

NATURE RESERVES

Summer is a great time to get to know our reserves and to enjoy all that they deliver. So that we can all continue to appreciate these special places safely, please take care around grazing livestock and give them space, keep dogs under close control and look out for safety signs. Enjoy exploring!

## 1. Frogmore Meadows

Situated in the Chess Valley, between the Hertfordshire/Buckinghamshire border villages of Chenies and Latimer, Frogmore Meadows is alive with colour during the summer months.

A unique spot, recognised by its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Frogmore Meadows sits in a floodplain, where traditional meadow management is employed to create a rich habitat of grasses, orchids and wildflowers. Furthermore, it's on the banks of the River Chess, a rare chalk stream of international interest and importance.

Within these lowland meadows, think of an abundance of white meadowsweet, yellow lady's bedstraw and purple southern marsh, whilst on the dry grassland you may

be lucky to spot the rarer heath spotted orchid – a delight for not only our eyes but for the senses and palate of the many different species of bees and butterflies it attracts. This is a habitat made possible by sensitive conservation techniques such as haymaking and conservation grazing.

By night, nocturnal hunters such as barn owls and bats sweep the floodplains in search of food whilst endangered water voles dart amongst the riverside vegetation.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Find out more at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/frogmore-meadows](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/frogmore-meadows)

### Why now?

This marvellous wildflower meadow is ablaze with colour from April through to August



### Know before you go

**CHENIES WD3 6ER**

**OPEN AT ALL TIMES**

### Wildlife to spot

Heath spotted orchids, Southern marsh orchid, betony.



JOSH KUBALE

KEVIN CASTER

**HEATH SPOTTED ORCHID**



JOSH KUBALE



**COMMON LIZARD**

## 2. Aldbury Nowers

If a meadow brimming with wildflowers and alive with butterflies is your idea of summer, then look no further than the chalk grasslands of Aldbury Nowers situated on the outskirts of Tring.

This is one of the best places in Hertfordshire to spot butterflies, solitary bees and a wealth of other insects, who thrive amongst the diverse range of flora – a haven for botanists too!

Visit during the height of summer and enjoy the sight of butterflies feeding on the

nectar provided by valerian or thistles in 'Duchie's Piece'. On a hot day, the shade of the surrounding woodland glades may be welcome but make for the slopes and you'll find butterflies at their most active.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Find out more at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/hunsdon-and-eastwick-meads](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/hunsdon-and-eastwick-meads)

### Why now?

A plethora of wild flowers to appreciate



### Know before you go

**ROYDON CM19 5EH**

Please note there is no official parking, the nearest place to park is Roydon rail station. Park there and walk one mile along the Stort Navigation towpath towards Harlow to reach the reserve.

### Wildlife to spot

Black knapweed, yellow rattle, pepper saxifrage



JOSH KUBALE

## 3. Hunsdon and Eastwick Meads

One mile to the north east of Roydon, in the East of Hertfordshire, you'll find these traditional wetland meadows, which have been managed in the same way for hundreds of years.

Visit in the summer months and a sea of pink and purple awaits you as ragged robin and black knapweed dominate.

The towpath or permissive path which runs alongside the River Stort provides a good walking route from which to observe the

colourful concoction that nature has put on show. Plus, stick to the paths and you'll help in the preservation of the traditional haymaking process that is still practiced on the Meads.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Find out more at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/aldbury-nowers](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/aldbury-nowers)

### Why now?

An abundance of summer wildlife to discover and the option of sun or shade to explore it in.



### Know before you go

**TRING HP23 5QW**

Please note that there is no official parking. Limited parking in layby of Northfield Road. The reserve is 0.2 miles along the track just beside the layby (there is a public footpath arrow opposite the track). Additional parking is at the National Trust's Pitstone Hill carpark. Alternatively, the reserve is a 15 – 20 minute walk from Tring Station or Aldbury Village.

### Wildlife to spot

Dark green fritillary, chalk hill blue, common blue, brown argus, common lizard



# Wild Community

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

## Glamping with a difference

Home Farm Glamping, near Borehamwood, is a family run enterprise who provide luxury camping – ‘glamping’ – on a stunning estate, with 150 acres of rolling green fields, avenues of ancient trees and a beautiful lake, all waiting to be explored. They have been working hard to ensure that this special site is managed for wildlife and encourage their guests to experience local wildlife during their stay. They are kindly supporting our work again this year by donating £3 for every booking to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Last year alone, their support raised a fantastic £2,376 for local wildlife, so we would like to say a big thank you. For more information or to book your stay in one of their fabulous yurts and help raise funds for wildlife at the same time, visit [homefarmglamping.com](http://homefarmglamping.com)



## New Look's fantastic fundraising

Nine local New Look stores are raising money this year to support Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. We were nominated to be their local charity partners by staff members, who had a brilliant fundraising push over Easter Weekend with Easter egg hunts, raffles, fancy dress and lots of chocolate! Thank you for all your hard work to promote the Trust – you are all *eggcellent!* Customers in participating shops can also choose to donate at the till with 75% of the donation going to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and 25% going to the Retail Trust.

## A warm welcome to MPI Limited

Welcome to new Business Members, MPI Limited, based in Hertford, who joined in April. Speaking about why they became members of the Trust, Adam Webb, Commercial, Quality & Sustainability Director, stated *"With 2022 being our 'Diamond Jubilee' we are aiming to make it a year of living and working more sustainably, in harmony with nature and are scaling up our biodiversity support to help protect wildlife on a local level."* Thank you for your support - we look forward to working together.



## Can your business help support nature?

By working together, your business can help local nature thrive and at the same time help to meet your own CSR, environmental and sustainability policies. We've made it easy for your company and staff to get involved and work in partnership with us. From becoming Business Members to bespoke partnerships and sponsorship opportunities – together, we can offer you something really special to meet your business needs. Contact Sarah Croft in our Fundraising Team at [fundraising@hmwt.org](mailto:fundraising@hmwt.org) to discuss your requirements.



## Thank you for protecting pollinators

In April, we teamed up with The Big Give who committed to double your donations, up to £5,000, to help support pollinators across Hertfordshire and Middlesex. Thanks to your amazing generosity, we surpassed our £10,000 target. This money will help us to care for and protect local wildflower meadows that bees and other pollinators need to survive.



## In memory

Our thanks and condolences to all the friends and family who kindly donated to the Trust in memory of Maureen Armstrong, Valerie Fullforth, Adrian Mole and Brian Sheppard. These donations make a lasting contribution to our local conservation work and ensure that the wildlife their loved ones cherished throughout their lives is protected for years to come.



## Give a gift to Nature

*"The future is much too important to leave to chance... that is why making a will is one of the most important jobs any of us has to do."* David Attenborough

After taking care of your loved ones, please consider leaving a gift in your will to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and help us create a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex for everyone to enjoy.

A gift, no matter what the size, will help to protect wild places and ensure future generations can continue to enjoy the natural world.

Visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/legacy](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/legacy) to find out more.



**Your  
Wild  
SUMMER**

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



## Dragon's Den

How do you tell the difference between a dragonfly and a damselfly? If you don't know and would like to find out, I can heartily recommend a visit to the dragonfly trail at our Amwell Nature Reserve this summer.

Dragonflies have been around for 300 million years. The largest dragonfly, meganeura was flying then, with a wingspan of up to 70cm! The human race are relative newcomers compared to dragonflies, only emerging about 300,000 years ago. All over the world dragonflies have played a significant role in culture, their shapes and behaviour influencing art, music and writing. Check out Ted Hughes's poem, Dragonfly - 'snakey stripes, a snakey flight' - a wonderful description. Dragonflies haven't always been loved though, in English folklore they have a variety of names such as devil's

darning needle, horse stinger, eye poker and adder's servant. In reality, they don't have stings and generally keep their distance from us and other animals.

At Amwell, the dragonfly trail is located on the edge of Hollycross Lake. Access to the trail is from the Amwell Walkway, which was formerly a railway line which ran to Buntingford, prior to being closed down, as well as many others by Dr Beeching in the 1960s. From the entrance the trail winds through wildflower-rich meadows to a special



interpretation board which provides information about dragonflies and their habitats. You'll also be able to find out the answer to that question posed above. From there, the trail gets really exciting! For the next 70 metres, you can literally walk on water, via a specially constructed boardwalk giving views over pools, bays and marshes. Throughout its length there are leaning rails where dragonflies, damselflies, other insects and fish can be seen 'up-close and personal'. An identification board will help you tell apart the darters from the skimmers.

### Species to spot

Amwell is one of the top sites in Hertfordshire for dragonflies and damselflies. Twenty-one species breed here - that's nearly half of all the species recorded in the UK! To see all the different species will require a number of visits throughout the season, as each species fly at slightly different times over the course of the spring and summer. The earliest flyers are the large red damselfly, followed closely by the hairy dragonfly. 'Hairies', as they are affectionately known, are the first of the true dragonflies on the wing and can be seen from June through into the summer, patrolling relentlessly along the edges on the pools and lake. On cooler days, when they are less active, they often provide great photo-opportunities by landing on posts, or the rails of the boardwalk. In the last few years, a new species has been added to the list of breeders, the Norfolk hawk. As its name suggests, it was formerly a species known only from East Anglia. It's a stunning insect with a tan body and emerald eyes which has given rise to its alternative name, the green-eyed hawk. Look for it perched on the stems of tall reeds and sedges.

### When and where to look

Warm sunny days in July and August are the best times to see large numbers of dragonflies and damselflies at the trail. Don't just look around the water for damselflies though. The tall grass in the adjacent meadows is just as important for them. It's here that they feed on smaller insects, building up their strength before returning to the water to fight for a mate and breed. Look also into waterside willow bushes. In August you may see one of our most easily overlooked species, the



**HOBBY  
WITH PREY**

willow emerald damselfly, another relative newcomer. Unlike most damselflies which hold their wings closed, this is one of the 'spreadwing' species, holding their wings akimbo, at a 45 degree angle from their bodies. Willow emeralds are also unique amongst our damselflies, laying their eggs directly beneath the bark of the branches of willows which overhang ponds and lakes. See if you can spot the crescent-shaped ridges - these scars are formed by the trees' reaction to the foreign body.

As you explore the trail, it's also worth looking into the sky regularly. Dragonflies often fly high over the reserve and sometimes this can be their downfall, falling prey to Hobbies, migratory falcons which catch the insects in mid-air and eat them on the wing.



**WILLOW  
EMERALD NYMPHS**





## Lower Lea

One species of damselfly that you may not spot on the dragonfly trail is the banded demoiselle, our largest species. If you have time, a short detour to the River Lea, which runs alongside the nature reserve should provide great views of this riverine speciality. As you leave the trail, turn left and walk along the old railway until you reach a bridge over the river. On sunny summer days it shouldn't

be long before you spot the fluttering blue-banded wings of the males or the bronze winged green-bodied females. When perched look out for the habitual way the males open and close their wings – perhaps part of their display to attract a mate.

As you peer from the bridge, look into the river itself as this is a great place to spot two of our most iconic fish species. Brown trout and chub both linger downstream of the bridge, their bodies swaying in the current. Look

out for the white lips which identify chub and the blotchy spots of the trout. If you have polarized sunglasses, take them with you as they will take the glare of the water, enabling you to see into the depths. In the margins of the river, look out for our freshwater lobster, the American signal crayfish. This invasive species is now ubiquitous in rivers and lakes, having spread the fungal plaque which has caused our native white-clawed crayfish to become extinct in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

## Sensing Summer

### See this

In your garden or local greenspace look out for bats at dusk, hawking for insect prey.

### Hear this

Get yourself a bat detector and listen to the clicks, clacks, clops and prrrts of bats as you watch them hawk.

### Smell this

Find a freshly cut hayfield and breathe in the heady aroma of the cut grasses.

### Feel this

Find a meadow and run your fingers through the grasses and flowers. Closing your eyes will make the experience all the more vivid as you feel the different textures and shapes.

# Four ways to experience and enjoy summer

## 1. Go local

Find a local walk, or continue exploring the walk you found in the spring and try to walk it weekly, seeing how the plants change through the summer months. Make a note of the wildlife you see and hear and at the end of the summer check back and see how things changed.

## 3. Indulge in some skywatching

During late July and August swifts will be gathering together in communal groups before they depart for Africa. As part of the bonding process after breeding they habitually whizz through the sky around their breeding areas, shouting out their screaming call as they go. For me, this is one of the highlights of the year, watching an animal seemingly in absolute joy of life. Some believe that at this time the birds are also looking out for potential nest sites when they return in following years so if you're thinking about putting up an artificial nest box, get it up in time for them to have a look before they go.

## 2. Become a citizen scientist

If you become enthused by dragonflies after visiting our trail at Amwell Nature Reserve described above, you have the opportunity to contribute to a new study getting underway in Hertfordshire. It's now 20 years since the atlas of dragonflies was published and Herts Natural History Society is now looking for all records of dragonflies and damselflies which will contribute to a new atlas. Now's the time to get out and start learning how to identify the species as fieldwork will continue for the next five years and details of the survey can be found at [hnhs.org](http://hnhs.org)

## 4. Embrace the prickly, stingy places

Wildlife doesn't always pick the picture postcard places to live and thrive. The dense tangle of herbage and flowers on 'waste ground', previously developed, or awaiting development so often provides an amazing food resource and refuge for many insects. Spending a little time watching a patch of this 'rank muck' will show just how valuable these places are to our wildlife. Pick a warm sunny day and allow yourself ten minutes or so overlooking a patch where the thistles are in flower. It won't be long before butterflies appear, feasting on the rich source of nectar. I remember visiting Rabley Pits near London Colney on such a day a few years ago and almost every thistle flower head had two or three feeding butterflies. The flowers of hogweed will be covered in soldier beetles and hoverflies all making the most of the bounty. Smaller insects such as aphids will become the prey of predators such as damselflies and dragonflies, feeding up before heading back to ponds and rivers to find a mate and breed.



PEACOCK AND COMMA BUTTERFLY





# Places to see chalk rivers

Summer is here and all the freshwater life that goes along with it is now emerging into action, above and below water...

If you're inclined to get outdoors and explore one of the world's rarest environments, then it's likely you will need look no further than the Parish or District you live within Herts and Middlesex.

Chalk rivers are internationally unique and the most biodiverse of all UK rivers. Almost all are in England and our county is home to 10% of the world's total, snaking across the landscape and joining up our wild and urban spaces.

our area, to the deep running clay catchment rivers of the east, easy riverside walks and vista spots take in the ever-changing visual feast that our chalk rivers, and their amazing wildlife, have to offer.

This picture-perfect vision of a chalk river (think "Wind in the Willows") which was once so widespread, has unfortunately seen many changes and problems over the years. Dredging, industry and transport have moved, re-shaped and impounded our rivers, whilst pollution and invasive species continue to add pressure on their native wildlife.

It may be commonplace now to mistake a chalk river as nothing more than a "ditch" at the bottom of a garden or running along a field boundary, but these special places are home to endangered plants and animals like wild brown trout and

water vole, in need of our love and attention now more than ever.

As reported in our Spring edition, for a decade, our Living Rivers project has been protecting, restoring and advising on sensitive management in partnership with a host of local groups, landowners, businesses and decision-making bodies.

It is high time the fate of our chalk rivers is reversed, from deteriorating to flourishing, and we are leading on many partnership projects to make this a reality; from invasive species control, to engaging communities in river and wetland restoration.

There are still amazing examples of healthy chalk rivers across the county to use as reference points to restore what has been lost and as "Noah Arks" that safeguard wildlife so that it may recolonize the wider watery landscape.

## River Catchment Coordinator, Sarah Perry's top five places to see chalk rivers:

### 1. River Rib

**"Standon to Barwick Loop" approx. 10km**

Ancient history lies beneath your feet in this river valley, with the Rib winding alongside the Roman Road Ermine Street, that once connected London to York. The river is publicly accessible along much of its route between Standon and Barwick Ford, and even further south towards Thundridge and Wadesmill. Take in built historic points of interest set amongst traditional floodplain meadows, wooded valley slopes, conservation headland and noteworthy meanders. Keep an eye out for kingfisher who love to nest in the steep clay banks, as well as glowworms in the ancient meadows. An excellent walking companion has been developed by Friends of the Rib & Quin [friendsoftherib.wordpress.com/the-river-rib-from-braughing-to-the-river-lea](http://friendsoftherib.wordpress.com/the-river-rib-from-braughing-to-the-river-lea)

### 2. River Beane

**"Watton to Waterford" approx. 8km**

From Watton-at-Stone train station, it's possible to walk along much of the length of the River Beane to Hertford North station (and return via train), taking in our nearby Nature Reserves at Waterford Heath and Beane Marsh to extend the route. A classic chalk river, the Beane has been altered through water abstraction and industry over the years, but none-the-less still supports good populations of invertebrates like mayfly, banded demoiselles and common blue damselfly. Take in Woodhall Estate parkland, woods and historic water meadows with the river at their side. The Beane has been a focus of much restoration and campaigning activity for 30 years and presents a changing tableau towards a re-naturalised state including weir bypasses, new channels and wetland creation to support its wildlife. Find out more from the River Beane Restoration Association [riverbeane.org.uk](http://riverbeane.org.uk)

### 3. River Hiz

**Ickleford Common approx. 3km**

One of only three rivers in Herts to flow north into Bedfordshire (instead of south to the Thames), the Hiz is a largely unspoilt chalk river from where it is joined by the River Oughton, just north of Hitchin in Ickleford. A longer or shorter bankside walk can be taken through this quaint village, which is home to several pubs for light refreshment! The Hiz marks the boundary of the historic Ickleford Common, flanked on its opposite side by family-owned pasture and Hitchin Lavender Farm, open to the public in summer. An easy walk over flat open ground, the winding river can be viewed up close to try and catch a glimpse of an elusive wild brown trout cutting redds (spawning holes) in winter or to admire the delicate water-crowfoot blooms in spring. Explore the route using Ickleford Parish Council's village maps available from [ickleford-pc.gov.uk/the-parish/parish-map](http://ickleford-pc.gov.uk/the-parish/parish-map)

### 4. River Stort

**Bishops Stortford to Roydon (various length routes)**

Walk the Stort along its navigation towpath, connecting Bishops Stortford in the north to Roydon in the south, served by several train stations along the way to make a linear sustainable journey. Explore Hertfordshire's most intact floodplain lying between the Stort Navigation and Old River Stort, fed by several brooks off the clay headland. A necklace of Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and traditional grazing marsh are home to protected water voles, who use the waterways to travel from place to place. If you're a water-lover, it's also possible to paddle the river by joining Whoosh Canoe Club who also help with invasive species control as part of our partnership effort [whooshexplore.co.uk](http://whooshexplore.co.uk)

### 5. River Mimram

**Tewinbury and Panshanger Park (various length / vista)**

Claimed to be the "jewel in Hertfordshire's crown" of chalk rivers, the Mimram does not disappoint. It is easy to visit both Tewinbury and Panshanger Park Nature Reserves, by car or foot from Hertford, to enjoy a sunny afternoon on the riverbank. Follow the Chalk Stream Trail at Tewinbury to learn more about this idyllic river or have a go at spotting colorful sailfin Grayling as they sway in the current under bridges in Panshanger Park [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves)



**Guide to chalk rivers of England is available from [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop)**

You can get 50% off the published price of this informative spotter's guide by entering code CHALK50 at the checkout.





# Top Gun – the Peregrine Falcon

A spectacular and iconic bird of prey, the peregrine is a super species, top trumping any other bird or animal on the planet with its speed ratings, reaching up to 200 miles per hour in full stoop. With their numbers in recovery, the birds are now breeding in the rich hunting grounds of towns and cities, where tall buildings mimic their natural nesting places on cliffs and bright lights illuminate prey. A great example of this is the pair of peregrines that have bred on St Albans Cathedral this year for the first time ever!

**Latin Name:** *Falco peregrinus*

**Length:** 39-50cm

**Wingspan:** 95-115cm

**Weight:** 600-1,300g

**Designed for speed:** Special adaptations in the bird's nostrils enable it to reduce the change in air pressure experienced at its record speed so that it can breathe.

**Status:** Green – numbers of peregrines are increasing across the country, with an estimated 1,700 breeding pairs across the UK, Isle of Man and Channel Islands (2014).

**Protection/threats:** Schedule 1 species, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act – disturbing them is a criminal offence. In some areas, peregrines still face being illegally killed to prevent predation on game birds and racing pigeons. Eggs and chicks are also stolen for collections and falconry.

**Breeding:** Peregrines mate for life and return to their nest sites year-on-year. They normally lay 3-5 eggs a year and each egg takes about one month to hatch.

**Fledglings:** The young fledge the nest between 35-42 days after hatching. Adult peregrines withhold food items and encourage the fledglings to take longer flights, dropping prey in mid-air for them to catch in a food pass. Their independence is gradual.

**Diet:** The most common prey item is feral pigeon however, peregrines prey on a wide variety of other bird species too.





## Garden Safari

Your outdoor space is a potential haven for wildlife; Photographer and author, Gail Ashton explains how you can help them thrive year after year.

It's high summer, and the air is full of the sights and sounds of insect life. Bees, solitary wasps and hoverflies are busily foraging for nectar; dragonflies and damselflies are hunting for smaller insects and at night moths seek out partners by moonlight. But did you know that our gardens and outdoor spaces play a critical role in the life-cycle of many of our insect species? According to Ordnance Survey, over half a million hectares of the UK is residential garden; an area larger than our national parks combined. This is a huge amount of land, full of potential as food and shelter for our wildlife, and there are some really easy ways to make our outdoor spaces wildlife friendly.

You may be asking why you should you want insects in your garden? Well, if you love birds, hedgehogs, foxes, frogs and bats, then you really do want lots of them! Insects make up a huge part of the diet of mammals and amphibians, and are an indicator of a healthy habitat. It doesn't matter if your garden is large or small. Even if you don't have one you can still help our insects around your home.

An important way to make your space favourable for flying insects is with flowers. Crocuses and grape hyacinth are excellent spring fuel sources.





DID YOU KNOW?

Ladybird larvae are famously the 'gardener's friend' for their ability to eat large numbers of aphids, but hoverfly larvae are also highly efficient at controlling aphid populations.

contrasting communities will live. Shady wood piles will harbour damp-dwellers, whereas an exposed spot will fill up with bee-flies, wolf spiders, and mining bees, all warming themselves in the warm rays of the sun.

Water is key to biodiversity, and there is the potential to have some form of watery habitat everywhere. Ponds support all manner of aquatic species, such as water beetles and bugs, dragonfly nymphs and dronefly larvae, as well as frogs, toads and even newts. It would be amazing for every garden to have a large pond, but it just isn't practical for everyone. If you have small children, a trug-sized container sunk into the ground can become a home for many invertebrates, and also a handy watering hole for birds and mammals. A small container filled with pebbles and twigs, surrounded with potted herbs can create a great micro-habitat for hoverflies on a balcony.



STAG BEETLE (LUCANUS CERVUS)

Most importantly, be patient. Individuals will only move in when the conditions suit them, and this can take time. Whatever outdoor space you have, whether it be a huge garden, or a tiny balcony, you can



DOCK BUG (COREUS MARGINATUS)

Early bees also love fruit blossom, so if you have the space, why not plant a fruit tree, such as cherry, or pear? In summer, insects love composite flowers such as daisies and dandelions, so leave some areas of your lawn unmown, to allow them to flower. The longer grass will also become a shelter for bugs, spiders, bush-crickets and moths. Herbs such as rosemary, thyme, oregano and mint make a fantastic addition to any garden; they are hardy, adaptable, edible, smell amazing and produce a long season of nectar-rich flowers loved by many species of bees and flies. They also grow just as well in containers as in the ground, so fill your courtyard or balcony up with them! We can even provide winter nectar sources – mahonia and winter honeysuckles are great fuel stops for the hardy bumblebee queens that can emerge on sunny winter days.

Invertebrates such as ground beetles, woodlice and springtails love dark nooks and corners, so build them a log pile with old bits of trunk, branches and twigs. Pile the wood up a corner of the garden and just leave it. You can create it in the sun or shade – both conditions will create contrasting habitats in which



HAWTHORN SHIELDBUG (ACANTHOSOMA HAEMORRHOIDALE)



COMMON DARTER (SYMPETRUM STRIOLATUM)

make a difference to our wildlife. And whatever you do to support them will reach further than your own home – it will have beneficial consequences for the wider wildlife community and even the entire planet.

their nest chambers in loose soil. You may also see their cuckoos, the nomad bees, looking to lay eggs in the mining bee nests.

**Summer:** The Hornet Hoverfly is a large mimic of the European Hornet, and loves a wide range of flowers. The almost as large Great Pied Hoverfly has black and white stripes. Also look out for dragonflies – even if you don't have water in your outside space. Dragonflies eat smaller flying insects and will travel some distance away from water to hunt for them. Speckled Bush-crickets, with their fabulous long legs and antennae, can be found hiding among vegetation.



DID YOU KNOW?

Some nomad bees sleep by clinging onto stems with just their mandibles, giving the impression that they are floating in mid-air!



BATMAN HOVERFLY (MYATHROPA FLOREA)

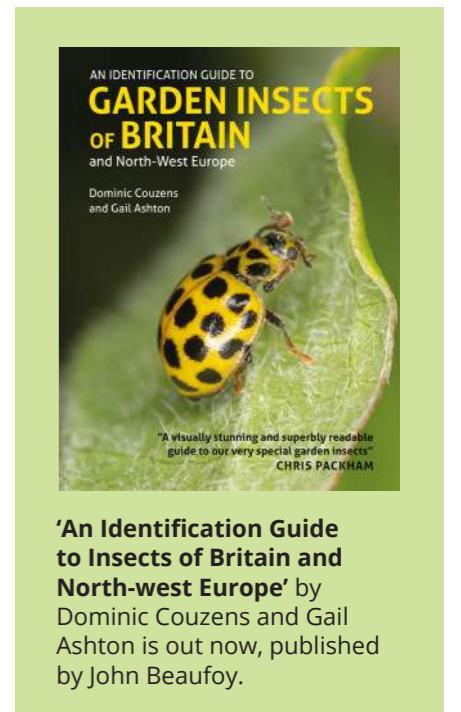
**Star species:**

**Spring:** Dark-edged Bee-flies and Hairy-footed Flower Bees are the heralds of spring. If you grow Primroses, Lungwort and Grape Hyacinth, chances are they will soon be buzzing around. Mining bees will also be out; look for them digging




DID YOU KNOW?


Some female damselflies will completely submerge themselves in the water during egg-laying.



'An Identification Guide to Insects of Britain and North-west Europe' by Dominic Couzens and Gail Ashton is out now, published by John Beaufoy.



**Bugs Matter**

 FIND OUT MORE

**Online**

For tips and ideas of how you can support insects and encourage other wildlife to visit your garden, check out [www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-gardening](http://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-gardening). Or, why not take part in the Bugs Matter garden Survey to share the findings of any journeys you undertake up until 31 August 2022? Find out more at [buglife.org.uk/get-involved/surveys/bugs-matter/](http://buglife.org.uk/get-involved/surveys/bugs-matter/) and help us all to learn more about our insect populations.





# The enchantment of hedgerows

Along muddy tracks switching to chalk paths, slippery with summer showers, and peaceful green lanes leading to shady tree tunnels and woodland copses, Trust volunteer, Melanie Woods became absorbed by the nature of these old ways. An entanglement of light and shadow, textures and colours delighted her senses and evoked a feeling of familiarity. Before long, she realised the spell these ancient routes cast was the enchantment of hedgerows.

Following tunnelled paths and sunken lanes, the past drew closer in mind and my thoughts drifted to our prehistoric ancestors. To the hunters and gatherers who wore networks through the undergrowth of deep forests, which protected them against the elements and predators. Clearings were cut, shrubs and saplings flourished and, where woodland and grassland crossed over, an important habitat was created for wildlife. Over time, these wild edge habitats were used for containing animals and protecting settlements. They became a vital feature of the patchwork of fields, lanes and hedges which still

exist in some areas today - hedgerows are a connection to the ways of our ancestors.

Many hedgerows disappeared due to communal farming in the Middle Ages but, as a result of the Parliamentary Enclosures introduced in the late 18th Century, they were replanted albeit more regimentally. Since World War II, hundreds of thousands of miles of hedgerow have been ripped out to make way for farm machinery. Where they remain, some are only in fragments, but enough to remind me that I walk where folk have trodden, cartwheels have turned and animals

have been herded for generations. They hold an atmosphere of deep-rooted history intertwined with diverse habitat like no other and slowly their value is being recognised.

## So why are hedgerows so precious?

Hedgerows assist in reducing soil erosion, flooding and absorbing carbon but more significantly because Britain has become habitat depleted. Many species often have only hedgerows for protection, safe navigation, vital food sources, nesting or simply as song posts - even an



over-trimmed hedge provides a mean perch! Imagine an unbroken network of hedgerows linking other important habitats like ponds and heaths, stretching across the length and breadth of Britain. The sad reality is that hedgerows are still unnecessarily removed and fragmented, with their life supporting role being reduced.

### Picture the scene...

It's early Spring, along a lane, sunlight falls on the most elven of trees - long, forgotten coppices of hazel, stripes of deep shadow and burnished gold deep in the hedge. The young leaves will soon host caterpillars for the still sleeping dormice. Yellowhammers might be found nesting at the base. A pale green carpet goes almost unnoticed but the woodcock is drawn to it. There is no gaudy colour, just the prettiest, delicate flowers blending into slender leaves. Ants love the seeds of dog's mercury, the ancient woodland indicator, but humans beware - it's highly poisonous to us.

On the strong, gnarly hornbeam, bright green leaf buds emerge. With their stems trained by the woodsman's billhook centuries ago, these are the most beautiful structures of all - their thick, twisting boughs almost serpent-like.

Spring progresses and the hedgerows, painted with vibrant greens, begin to weave their colourful cloak. Cuckoo pint flower spikes trap midges at their base, signalling the arrival of migrant birds. On verges, red dead-nettles are visited by snails, yellow archangel guides bees into its flowers with honey-coloured flight lines, whilst the flowers of the purple bugle spike the green shade. All manner of species seek moisture in mosses, vegetation and dew.

Solitary dunnocks shyly rummage for insects on the ground and moss on branches to line their hawthorn nests. They should, however, be careful - cuckoos also like to move their eggs in!

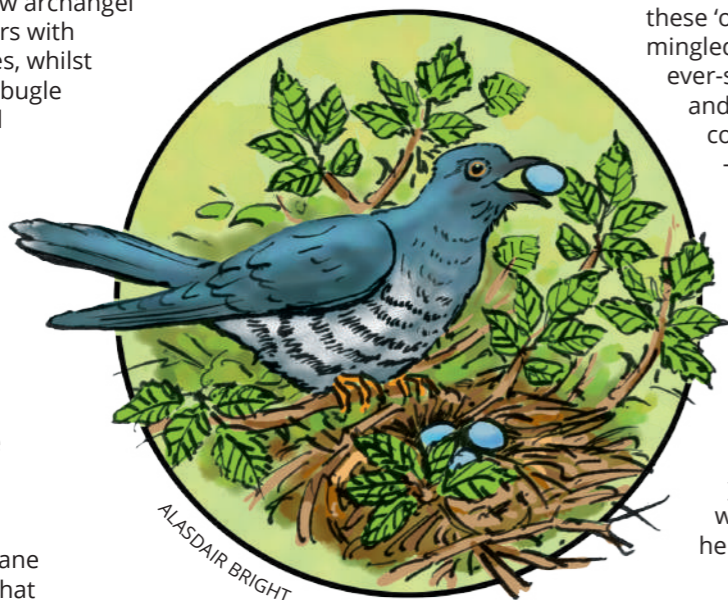
The path turns from the lane onto farmland. It seems that

the sky has descended as deceptively gentle clouds of white soften dark foreboding field boundaries - blackthorn has flowered, the fiercest of barriers, where blackbirds' and finches' nests are protected by its thorns. Caterpillars of black hairstreak butterflies feed on musky flowers. Gnarly hawthorn is beginning to leaf nearby, biding time until its tiny cream flower buds herald the end of spring. Both the blackthorn and hawthorn are imbued with ancient secrets of nature.

**Blue tits purposefully flit around in the maze of an oak, they have its twists and turns mapped out well, chirping noisily about the human interloper.**

Along dappled edges, there are scattered constellations of small stars where bees, butterflies and hoverflies dance, seeking nectar in the flowers of greater stitchwort and the pale sunshine of primroses. Healing herb-robert spreads red stems, its small pink flowers brightening showery spring days. Green-veined white and orange tip butterflies flit by the small fragrant flowers of Jack by the Hedge, as young cleavers reach up for light, clinging to grasses and stems.

Time passes. In a deep hedgerow the low warm light of the setting sun falls upon sleepy, nodding flowers of wood anemones - another ancient woodland indicator, spreading as



little as six foot per century. Indeed, the slow pace of nature is truly felt in this special place.

There are rustlings as night creatures stir. Hedgehogs trundle from heaps of leaf litter, making their way under shelter to snuffle for insects and worms, hares swiftly leap to the other side...these are lives that we have only a glimpse of.

Along an old drovers' lane, a badger plods uphill on a mission to a dew pond. Linger in the twilight, crooked branches become animated silhouette. Across a field, the ghost of a barn owl glides, the sky darkens and woody shapes are no longer separate from the night. It's time to go.

### Looking back in time

As one steps across the threshold into these 'other-worlds' a peace descends mingled with a sharp awareness. The ever-shifting tapestry of shapes and shadows, light and colour is a constant contradictory presence - a protective cloak yet a source of ancient fear for what moves within and beyond the edge. I came to understand that what we experience in these semi-wild places are archaic instincts kicking in, probably akin to what folks experienced as they moved around, settled and shaped the land over thousands of years. Perhaps that resonates with the wildlife that lives here too?

# Herts Wild Art

## - how will you make your mark?

Throughout Summer and Autumn 2022, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is hosting a series of art sessions for all, where you can explore your creative side inspired by the amazing wildlife all around us.

Whatever your age or ability, come and have a go! Pop along to one of our many drop-in sessions and meet 'Willoughby' - our larger than life willow hedgehog sculpture - or pre-book a course and learn a new skill under the guidance of an expert artist.



**HERTS WILD ART - WILLOUGHBY**

### Courses available to book now

- **Thursday 4th August** - Street Art Workshop, Kings' Meads
- **Saturday 12th August** - 2 x Nature-inspired Collaging Workshops, Home Farm Glamping (families)
- **Thursday 8th September** - Willow Weaving Workshop, PE Meads Farmshop (adults)
- **Tuesday 8th November** - Watercolours Workshop (online)
- **Tuesday 13th December** - Pastels Workshop (online)

Wildlife and art both have positive effects on wellbeing so enjoy the benefits and share the joy of your creations online - **#HertsWildArt**

This project is supported by Arts Council England.



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND**



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Find our drop-in sessions or book your place on one of the following courses at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/hertswildart](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/hertswildart)



# Weird and Wonderful Wildlife: Tree Galls

Andrew Holtham is a longstanding Trust volunteer and tree specialist. Here, he shares his knowledge on the bizarre lumps, bumps and growths that occur on plants when they are invaded by different organisms.

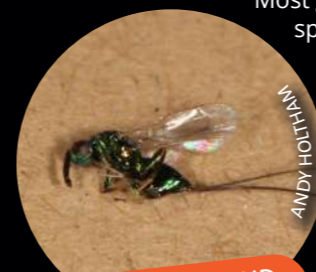
In 1660 Charles II was restored to the English throne after eleven years of republican government. He entered London on 29th May, and in celebration this date became a public holiday right up till the mid nineteenth century. It was known as Oak Apple Day – but what is an oak apple?

Oak apples are unusual growths on oak trees that bear a passing resemblance to small apples. The story begins with a small wasp that lays its eggs in oak buds at the end of winter. Somehow the eggs stimulate the buds to grow abnormally in spring – instead of producing leaves, shoots

and flowers the bud grows into the oak apple with up to 30 wasp larvae safely living inside, each within its own separate chamber. They feed on the 'apple', grow, and eventually pupate inside their chambers. The adult wasps then chew their way out and fly off to continue their life cycle.

The oak apple is an example of a gall, an abnormal growth on a plant resulting from the stimulus of another organism that uses the growth for food and shelter. For every gall there is a gall causer (in this case the wasp), a host plant (in this case the oak) and the abnormal growth (in this case the oak apple).

There are around 3000 different galls in the UK and they come in a huge variety of shapes and sizes, occurring on almost every type of plant you can think of. They are caused by a wide variety of organisms, including bacteria, fungi, mites and insects. Most are small, befitting the size of the creature that causes them, but crown gall (caused by bacteria) can be the size of a beach ball!

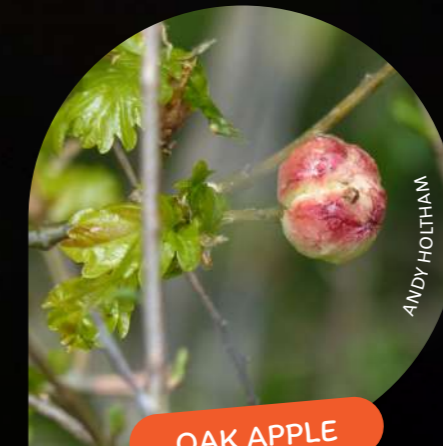


PARASITE FOUND IN AN OAK APPLE

Most galls are host specific, that is to say the gall causer will only associate with one species of plant. This means that if you can identify the host plant it is often straightforward to identify the gall. Oak trees are exceptional in being host to around 50 different galls – most species of plant only have a few each.

Although the gall offers protection to the organism living inside, it is not always enough. Many parasites have evolved to target galls; they lay their eggs in or on the gall and the larvae burrow in to kill the original

inhabitants. There are also inquiline, freeloading lodgers who use the gall for food and shelter alongside the original gall causer. Then we have parasites of the inquilines, parasites of the parasites...Over 20 species of parasite and inquiline have been found in oak apples, making them a mini ecosystem all of their own!



OAK APPLE

In almost every case there is no benefit to the host plant from having a gall, so in this sense the gall causer is a parasite. However there rarely seems to be much harm to the host plant, particularly in the case of trees where only a small proportion of the buds, roots or leaf area is ever affected.

Of course not every unusual feature on a tree is a gall. Bracket fungi grow on trees and feed on them but they do not stimulate abnormal growth in the tree. The same is true for leaf miners – they eat the existing leaf tissue without producing any extra growth. Unusual tree growth can be produced by a range of physical triggers such as animal damage to bark and buds – but unless the organism causing the damage goes on to live in the growth and feed on it, it does not count as a gall.

Many of the galls caused by wasps have fascinating life cycles. For instance, after emerging from oak apples the male and female wasps mate and the females then burrow down to lay their eggs on the fine roots of oak trees. These cause small, spherical galls to grow on the roots. After 16-17 months adult, wingless,

asexual wasps emerge and crawl up the tree to lay eggs in the buds – starting the whole cycle again.

Although galls occur on all types of plant tree galls are perhaps best known since they often become woody and can persist for many months, even years. Common examples are the hard, round, marble galls, and the extraordinary knopper galls – which always look to me as if an alien has exploded from the inside of the acorn! In both cases look for the small round exit holes that show that the inhabitant has left. Probably best known of the galls that do not grow on trees is robin's pincushion, found on wild rose.

If you want to search for the galls the easiest way is to head for the nearest oak tree and start looking carefully at the leaves and twigs. Late summer is best, giving the leaf galls plenty of time to grow. Otherwise just keep your eyes open for something that looks out of the ordinary and have an enquiring mind!



COMMON SPANGLE GALLS ON AN OAK LEAF



FIND OUT MORE

Online

You can find Andy's Spotter Guide to Oak Galls here:

[bit.ly/oak-galls](http://bit.ly/oak-galls)



# Planning for a wilder future

What does a wilder future look like? One where we create a Nature Recovery Network that extends into every part of our towns, cities and countryside, bringing wildlife and the benefits of a healthy natural world into every part of life. Currently only 16% of Hertfordshire can be classified as being in semi-natural condition with species-rich natural habitats supporting sustainable levels of wildlife, enabling it to move, reproduce and thrive.

For nature to recover, we need to double the amount of land managed for nature, creating an interconnected network across our entire county. Land of any size can contribute to the Nature Recovery Network – nature reserves, community spaces, gardens, farms, parks, churchyards, schools and new developments. This is why engaging with the planning process is so important.

The Trust examines all planning applications where it is considered that proposals may have an adverse impact on biodiversity. Developments are scrutinised to ensure that they comply with local and national planning policy regarding biodiversity. This is time-consuming work, which requires a keen eye for detail. Since 1997, the Trust has been fortunate to have been supported by Kate Aylett, an outstanding volunteer, who has reviewed vast numbers of planning applications, pulling out those of interest or concern for the attention of Planning and Biodiversity Manager, Matt Dodds.

Kate has decided that the time has come for her to pass the role onto someone else and the Trust is actively looking for a volunteer with the skills and enthusiasm to help protect habitats and ensure that wildlife can thrive alongside us. The best person to tell us more about this vital work is Kate herself. Here, she shares her experience of the role in the hope that it may inspire a new recruit:

"I originally trained as a Town Planner and qualified in 1981. Throughout my career I worked on planning applications alongside some policy work, so I was very familiar with the system.

Although I had done a bit of voluntary work for the Trust beforehand, it was when I took early retirement 25 years ago that I began to volunteer on a very regular basis, scrutinising planning applications in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

In the early days we relied upon consultation letters from the districts to enable the Trust to make comments upon proposed developments. Today the task of selecting applications which may be of concern to the Trust, and passing a list of these on to Matt, is so much easier – with around 22,000 planning applications submitted every year that progress is welcome! Each

district has an online system so you can search the list of applications submitted in any week and all the information is on a screen in front of you.

I used to come into the Trust's St Albans office every Tuesday morning and spend about four hours going through the applications but since COVID I've been doing the same job from home. In my work, the key is reading the description of the development and there are certain keywords that I look out for. For example, any residential development of 10 new dwellings or above, golf courses and barn conversions are all of interest, plus some loft conversions and adding floors to buildings can be worthy of consideration as bats may be present. It's also useful to have local knowledge when, for example, you recognise that a development is next to a river. There are times when the Trust is directly consulted, particularly where an ecological assessment, bio diversity net gain assessment or bat survey is submitted with an application. On some of the bigger sites, it may be, for example, that reptiles are involved.

The role would suit someone who has been slightly involved with the planning process before but attention to detail is more important and computer skills are needed too - a Trust member will already have their heart in the right place. I will be happy to train them up and over time, they will be able to pick out the key words or phrases that raise interest or concern. With the pressure on the environment, the role has become more and more important. There is pressure on the Green Belt and a need for new housing so it's a great opportunity to volunteer with the Trust and one that might not be as obvious as fieldwork, for example.

When asked what my greatest achievement has been over the past



25 years in volunteering with the Trust, it's difficult to pick out one particular case but I'm sure we've made a difference."

Matt Dodds commented: "Kate has been critical in delivering the planning work of the Trust, to ensure that that biodiversity is conserved and enhanced in line with the parameters provided by planning policy. She's a been an invaluable contributor to the Trust and I thank her for all her sterling work over the years. I hope someone reading this will be inspired by her and interested in taking the role forward."



FIND OUT MORE

## Online

If you are interested in a planning and biodiversity volunteer position to help the Trust achieve its ambition of 30% of land to be restored for nature by 2030, please get in touch with Matt Dodds, [Matt.Dodds@hmwtrg.org](mailto:Matt.Dodds@hmwtrg.org). Details of this and other volunteering opportunities can be found at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities)



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MATT JAMES

## Are you up for taking on a big, bouncy challenge to help wildlife?

The world's largest and best inflatable 5k challenge is coming to St Albans on Saturday 3rd September 2022. Are you up for taking on this big, bouncy and better than ever before course to raise money for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust? It promises to be an awesome day for family and friends. And, even better - you will be doing it knowing that you will be helping to protect your local wildlife and wild spaces!



FIND OUT MORE

**Online**

For more details and to register to take part, please visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/inflatable-5k](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/inflatable-5k)