

Celebrating the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex

wildlifematters

Winter 2022



**Herts &
Middlesex**
Wildlife Trust



**What's
Inside?**

Wild Snaps 2022

A majestic Kingfisher and more - find out what all the winning photos look like **10**

Archers Green

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Welcome



It's a fundamental role for the Trust to stand up for wildlife and, together with the other Wildlife Trusts, we are supporting a new campaign 'Defend Nature' to highlight the importance of policy and legislation in protecting nature. Detailed plans

have not yet been announced but we have concerns about the Government's deregulatory agenda and what deregulation could mean. Without strong legislation and policy, the loss of wildlife and wild places would accelerate.

You can read more about it and what you can do at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/defend-nature

We ask you to make your voice heard because with so many changes being proposed through both the Government's Growth Plan and Retained EU Legislation (Revocation and Reform) Bill there is a real threat we could see the loss of environmental legislation, policy protections and funding, significantly setting back nature's recovery. By acting now, we want to make sure this does not happen.

A huge amount of house building and infrastructure is planned locally and we are deeply concerned about the loss of crucial environmental protections, which are vital in the planning process to safeguard species and habitats.

The farming community is fundamental to nature's recovery but it seems Government is considering a u-turn on the promised Environmental Land Management Scheme, which offered far greater benefits for nature, to return to subsidies for landowners in England with minimal environmental regulation.

Protecting wild places is more important than ever and I'm delighted that, in September, the Trust secured a philanthropic loan to purchase Archers Green, a new nature reserve with flower-rich meadows, flanking the beautiful River Mimram. We are now fundraising to repay the loan, improve the site and manage it to benefit wildlife. You can find out more on pages 16-17.

Thank you for your support for wildlife and concern for its future. Please do add your voice to our #DefendNature campaign to protect it for us all.

Lesley

Lesley Davies
Chief Executive



Herring Gull © Nick Upton 2020VISION



Water Vole © Terry Whittaker 2020VISION



Make Colour with Plants © Lea Ellis

Get in touch

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

Twitter
@HMWTBadger

Instagram
@hertswildlifetrust

Facebook
@hertswildlifetrust

Registered Charity No: 239863

Membership
Lise Ashton
membership@hmwt.org

Design: TGDH www.tgdh.co.uk
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Cover: Kingfisher © John Roy - Wild Snaps
- Rivers Winner



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Wild News

Archers Green

The Trust has launched a fundraising appeal to raise £500,000 to buy and look after Archers Green near Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire.

Sitting in the Mimram Valley, a priority area for conservation action, this 20-acre site supports some of our most iconic, yet threatened wildlife, such as Water Vole, Skylark and Harebell. It is home to lowland meadows, wet woodland, marsh and chalk stream – all of which are priorities for protection and have earned Archers Green recognition as a designated Local Wildlife Site.

Read more about what makes Archers Green such a special place and how you can help to protect its future on pages 16-17.

Wild Snaps

We were delighted with the response to our 2022 Wild Snaps Photography Competition and the Wild Snaps judging panel thoroughly enjoyed looking through all the wonderful photos that were submitted.

Congratulations to our category winners, runners-up and the photographers who had their photos shortlisted and exhibited at St Albans Cathedral. Our front cover is illustrated by John Roy's brilliantly executed photo of a Kingfisher using his fishing rod as a handy perch. You can see all of the winning photos and runners-up in our special Wild Snaps feature on pages 10-13 and get snapping for Wild Snaps 2023!

Water Vole numbers on the up

During the summer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, in collaboration with the Woodhall Estate and with support from the River Beane Restoration Association, reintroduced 138 Water Voles to a stretch of the River Beane near Watton-at-Stone. This project is funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

Additionally, a survey has taken place on the River Ver, one year on from Water Voles being reintroduced. The results paint a promising picture for the future of the Water Voles on the river, concluding that they are now occupying a minimum extent of 4.3km of the Ver and associated water courses – that's a known range increase of 238% in one year! We were delighted to welcome Channel 5's news team to cover the story and share the good news in August.



Take Action

The Trust aims to have Water Voles back on all Hertfordshire rivers by 2030. To help us achieve this, we would welcome hearing from any landowners with a watercourse running through their land, to discuss its potential as a Water Vole introduction site – please do get in touch info@hmwt.org



©Natasha Aidinyantz



Our AGM

Our Annual General Meeting was held on 17th September in St Albans this year where we welcomed members to celebrate the Trust's progress to date and to show them the difference their support makes. Attendees were invited to listen to a range of talks, which included an introduction to our new nature reserve, Astonbury Wood, a 56-acre site of semi-natural woodland. Participants also enjoyed a local circular walk, taking in such highlights as the Peregrines on the Cathedral and the wonderful wildlife garden that has been created at George Street Canteen. It was lovely to see so many of our members there and to hear what being part of the Trust means to them.

Hello and Goodbye, Staff News

We welcome Hayley Lewis in the role of Marketing & Communications Manager.

Heidi Carruthers has transferred to the new job of Engagement Manager, from her previous role with the Wilder St Albans programme. Heidi will be leading on the creation of a new Engagement Plan for the Trust and the development and delivery of our new Wilder Communities programme.

Joining Heidi's team are Rachel Rogers, Engagement Coordinator, and two new Wilder Communities Officers, Lea Ellis and Esme Staunton Howe.



Spotted on TV

Keen-eyed viewers of the BBC's *Countryfile* programme may have spotted our River Catchment Coordinator, Sarah Perry, on their 'Drought Special' show, demonstrating the impact that this summer's drought has had on our local chalk rivers.

Sarah took the *Countryfile* crew to the River Mimram, just to the north of Welwyn in Hertfordshire, where she sampled eight groups of sensitive river invertebrates to show how the prolonged dry spell had altered the invertebrate pattern.

TV license holders can view the Heatwave Special episode on BBC's iplayer at bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001bmr

See more of our chalk river news on the next pages.

UK NEWS

Beavers are making a comeback across the UK

You made the government give a dam!

England has taken a few tentative steps towards seeing a return of Beavers to the wild, following new legislation announced by Defra. The legislation will provide legal protections for Beavers in England, making it an offence to deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or injure Beavers, or damage their breeding sites or resting places, without holding the appropriate license. The legislation is scheduled to come into force in the autumn.

These new protections could pave the way for Beavers to be released into the wild in England under license, finally making a widespread comeback after being hunted to extinction in the 16th century. This decision echoes the path taken in Scotland, where Beavers were declared a European Protected Species in 2019, affording them similar protections to those proposed in England.

The legislation was initially due to be laid in parliament on 19th July, but the UK Government held it up at the last minute. Following outrage from nature charities and the wider public, including lots of Wildlife Trust supporters, the decision was reconsidered and the announcement made just a few days later.

Beavers are ecosystem engineers. Their actions create thriving and dynamic wetlands that bring a wealth of benefits to both nature and people, including playing a critical role in adapting to a changing climate. Long-term studies of Beavers from the Scottish Beaver Trial and in enclosures in England have demonstrated the improvements they can bring to our rivers and wetlands, making it clear that Beavers belong in our landscape.

Commenting on the UK Government's decision, The Wildlife Trusts' chief executive Craig Bennett says: "The widespread return of wild Beavers can be a game changer for restoring lost wetlands, benefitting all kinds of wildlife, and helping people by holding water back in the landscape, reducing the risk of wildfires and reducing the risk of flooding downstream. Bringing back wild Beavers isn't just a dream, it is a critical part of addressing the climate and nature crises."

Whilst The Wildlife Trusts believe bringing back Beavers is essential, reintroducing any ecosystem engineer is a delicate operation. Natural England is developing guidance on the management of Beavers, setting out the actions that will or will not require a license. We are urging the UK Government to support ambitious and carefully targeted reintroduction projects, reward landowners who make space for wetlands created by Beavers, develop management systems that protect Beavers and resolve issues effectively, and support local Beaver management groups to deliver advice and assistance.

The news of this legislation came as Wildlife Trusts around England celebrated the birth of Beaver kits at enclosed projects on nature reserves. The Welsh Beaver Project, led by Wildlife Trusts Wales, also saw its first kit born at an enclosure at Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust's Cors Dyfi nature reserve.

Get the latest on our journey to bring Beavers back to Britain at

wildlifetrusts.org/saving-species/beavers

The Beaver comeback

- ↑
- 2001**
Kent Wildlife Trust bring the first Beavers back to Britain in an enclosure at Ham Fen.
- ↓
- 2009**
First Beavers officially released into the wild by the Scottish Beaver Trial.
- ↓
- 2014**
Beavers discovered living wild on the River Otter in Devon. Devon Wildlife Trust begin England's first wild Beaver trial.
- ↓
- 2017**
The Scottish Beaver Trial release more Beavers to reinforce the population.
- ↓
- 2019**
Beavers designated a European Protected Species in Scotland.
- ↓
- 2020**
Beavers allowed to stay on the River Otter.
- ↓
- 2021**
Wildlife Trusts release a record number of Beavers (17) into fenced areas across Britain.
- ↓
- 2022**
Legislation announced to make Beavers a protected species in England.
- ↓



UK UPDATE

Remembering Her Majesty The Queen

Queen Elizabeth II was celebrated for her passion for the outdoors, the countryside and rural life, lending her support to the work of The Wildlife Trusts and many environmental charities over the years. The Wildlife Trusts are proud to have been a part of Coronation Meadows — an inspirational idea to mark the 60th anniversary of The Queen's Coronation in 2013. These meadows will stand as a lasting natural legacy. So far, 90 new meadows have been created, including...



Fir Grove, Norfolk

Roadside verges hold some of the last fragments of Norfolk's flower-rich meadows, providing a seed base to create farmland meadows once more. Norfolk Wildlife Trust volunteers helped harvest green hay from a roadside nature reserve to create the seven acre Coronation Meadow at Fir Grove.

Dunchurch Meadow, Warwickshire

This new meadow was strewn with green hay harvested from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Draycote Meadow reserve, where up to 20,000 Green-winged Orchids bloom. Many new flowers have become established at Dunchurch, including Green-winged Orchids.



Wildfires are becoming more common due to climate change

Crisis calculations

The Wildlife Trusts have published a groundbreaking report examining the projected impacts of climate change on our nature reserves. It assesses the risks of a changing climate and what we need to do to help nature adapt. The report shows that extreme weather is already affecting many nature reserves through wildfires, flooding, and drought. Research finds

that by the 2050s, half of our nature reserves will have 30+ days of very high fire risk a year, and 55% will see nearby river flows drop by more than 30% during times of low flow. The report also shares innovative Wildlife Trust projects that aim to reduce the impacts on wildlife. Read the report at wtru.st/changing-nature

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Chalk up a win

Two Hertfordshire chalk rivers have been given a makeover to combat low flows and climate change. Work on the rivers Ash and Quinn, led by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, included adding gravel to address historic dredging, and the creation of ponds and ditches to shelter wildlife. This will help the rivers cope with the pressures of climate change. wtru.st/two-rivers



2 Pining for a comeback

Devon Wildlife Trust is part of a partnership that announced plans for a possible reintroduction of Pine Martens to the South West of England. The Two Moors Pine Marten Project is exploring the feasibility of bringing these once common mammals back to Exmoor and Dartmoor. At the same time, Kent and Sussex Wildlife Trusts are looking at returning Pine Martens to South East England. wtru.st/two-moors-martens

3 A tree for all

Alderney Wildlife Trust has been working with the States of Alderney to give every resident a free native tree to plant this year. They can be planted in gardens or at organised sessions, allowing everyone to get involved. As a result, by spring there will be at least an additional 2,000 trees in the ground. wtru.st/2000-trees

Credibility and capital letters

This edition of Wildlife Matters marks a turning point for the Trust – you may have already noticed that we are now capitalising the common names of species. Whilst some may sigh ‘not before time’, others may ask ‘why?’ Let us explain.

Like many fellow nature conservation organisations and charities have done in recent years, we have become guilty of dumbing down common species names and have intentionally written them in lower case letters, in line with our brand guidelines, for the purpose of style or easy reading. Within the conservation world however, there is growing recognition of the importance of capitalising common species names – our choice not to capitalise can not only create confusion, it can also suggest that we value the natural world less than a lot of things created by people. Habits need to be challenged and that’s exactly what our Director of Nature Recovery, Chloë Edwards, has done,

inspired by naturalist and ecologist, Graeme Lyons. Graeme has led a recent campaign for the adoption of a standardised approach to how we write the common names of species. Having heard Chloë and her team’s arguments for change, it wasn’t long before we were all on board and we hope you will be too.

Our given names are capitalised, as are names of places, companies, cars and even dog breeds – all signifying something specific and valued, rather than generic. If we place importance on doing this for these things, how can it be argued that the same importance should not be placed on making clear the inherent and specific

detail contained within species common names? Here at the Trust we value the natural world, all of its wonderful complexity and uniqueness and wholeheartedly agree that we should effectively treat common species names as proper nouns too, capitalising and hyphenating them correctly.

There’s also much more information to be determined from common species names than you may at first think, and so there’s huge potential for creating confusion when using lower case letters. Here’s a few examples to consider:

- *The common blue butterfly is mostly found in grassland habitats.* Are we

talking about one of several of the UK’s blue butterfly species that are common, or the species *Polyommatus icarus*?

- *The Common Blue butterfly is mostly found in grassland habitats.* Here, we are definitely talking about a specific species of butterfly, *Polyommatus icarus*.

A herring gull is a common gull but a Herring Gull is not a Common Gull.

Is ‘little ringed plover’ referring to a particularly small Ringed Plover or a Little Ringed Plover?

A key distinction to make is the difference between an adjective and a noun. By writing ‘scarce emerald damselfly’ the word ‘scarce’ is open to interpretation as an adjective, leading the reader clueless as to whether the writer is referring to one of a number

of emerald damselfly species, or the Scarce Emerald Damselfly. Write ‘Scarce Emerald Damselfly’ however, and there is no room for doubt that ‘Scarce’ is a noun, and that the writer is referring to a specific species.

Our new approach

At the Trust, we have the ability to change what we do and demonstrate how we value wildlife and science over style and trends. As such, we are choosing from here on in to move forward with a scientifically informative and unambiguous approach to how we write common species names.

Here is the updated approach we are now using across our communications:

- The first letter of each word in the common species name will now be capitalised. Where part of the name

follows a hyphen, it will be written in lower case. For example, Red-headed Cardinal Beetle.

- We will reserve the use of lower case for generic names only, for example “some common gulls were seen on one of our nature reserves, these included Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull and Common Gull”.

We’re in good company, and are delighted to join an ever-increasing number of organisations that are getting it right, including Sussex Wildlife Trust, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation and the British Trust for Ornithology.

You won’t see this change reflected everywhere overnight though - we have a lot of historic digital content and materials, as well as on-site interpretation, some of which will only be updated when it is prudent to do so. So please bear with us, we hope you are on board with our decision on this one and may even choose to follow our example too.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.com/2021/08/why-english-names-of-species-should.html



Wild Snaps

The Trust's annual Wild Snaps photography competition has become a real highlight of our year and we look forward to seeing all the wonderful submissions and sharing them with you. Here are the winning photographs and the runners-up, as well as a selection from our wonderful shortlist. Sit back and enjoy some of the best submissions of images of wildlife and wild places that can be found across the region.



Kingfisher © John Roy - Rivers Winner



Speckled Bush Cricket © Chris Gilbert - General Wildlife Shortlisted



Peregrine Falcon © Yves Gisseleire - General Wildlife Shortlisted

Back in August, on World Photography Day, we put out a call for amateur photographers and casual snappers across Hertfordshire and Middlesex to submit their best wildlife shots to our third, annual Wild Snaps competition.

In addition to the General Wildlife category we have run for the past two years, 2022 saw the introduction of two new categories - 'Rivers' to celebrate 10 years of the Trust's Living Rivers project and 'Under 16s' to encourage a younger audience to connect with nature.

The firsts didn't stop there. This year, we assembled a judging panel to shortlist the final 30 images for the all-important public vote. With over 500 amazing photos submitted, we were delighted to have the eyes and

opinions of our judges to make some very tough choices. Our thanks go out to Tom Hanner, an award-winning wildlife filmmaker and photographer, Jeanette Lendon of Jet Black Squares, a professional photographer who hung up her long lens and now champions smartphone photography, Will Jobbins, the winner of Wild Snaps 2021 and a talented macro-photography enthusiast, and the Trust's Conservation Manager, Tim Hill, a keen photographer who has contributed many of his photos to *Wildlife Matters* and many other Trust publications over the past 20 years. The panel's selection provided a shortlist of 30 stunning images which were put forward to an online public vote.



Hummingbird Hawk-moth © Keith Gypps - General Wildlife Winner

The winners and runners-up

In the General Wildlife category, the public were drawn to Keith Gypps' stunning photo of a Hummingbird Hawk-moth, captured in Fowlmere, near Royston. The runner-up prize went to Daniel Simpson for his photo of a fox cub, patiently taken after two weeks of waiting for the fox to appear from the bushes in a field, near his house, in Abbots Langley.

Celebrating 10 years of the Trust's Living Rivers project, the Rivers category was won by John Roy and his brilliantly executed photo of a Kingfisher using his fishing rod as a handy perch. We hope you agree that it's also made a

fantastic front cover! John Seymour was awarded runner-up for his dramatic photo of two male Mute Swans along the River Bulbourne in Berkhamsted.

The talent of Bruno Slim saw him named as the winner of the Under 16s category for his image of a Mute Swan cygnet inside its mother's wing at Verulamium Park in St Albans. And a wonderful image by Poppy Grey of a Buff-tailed Bumblebee on Chicory earned her the runner-up position in the category.



Mute Swans © John Seymour - Rivers Runner-up



Fox Cub © Daniel Simpson - General Wildlife Runner-up



Buff-tailed Bumblebee on Chicory © Poppy Grey - Under 16s Runner-up



Mute Swan © Bruno Slim - Under 16s Winner



Grass Snake © Ruth Watson - General Wildlife Shortlisted

Celebrating excellence

All 30 shortlisted photographs were exhibited in the North Transept at St Albans Cathedral throughout October, where the winners and runners-up were invited to collect their prizes from the Trust's CEO, Lesley Davies and Trustee, Lisa Clavering. Our thanks go to our hosts at the Cathedral, our judging panel, and to our prize sponsors Opticron, NatureSpy, Jet Black Squares, The Waffle House and Books on the Hill for their generosity and support.

"The range of subjects photographed and entered into the competition reflect the wonderful diversity of wildlife we have in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The winning photographs are exceptional and reflect a great deal of skill and patience to capture those very special moments which are always fleeting and will never be repeated."
Tim Hill, Conservation Manager



Fallow Deer buck © James Goodman - General Wildlife Shortlisted

Get involved!

We are very fortunate to have a community of people who regularly share their photographs of wildlife with us across Hertfordshire and Middlesex. These never fail to inform, surprise and delight both us and our followers. If you are out and about snapping wildlife and wild places this winter, please tag us @hertswildlifetrust on Instagram and Facebook and @HMWTBadger on Twitter. And look out for Wild Snaps 2023 next year!



FIND OUT MORE

Online

View all of the 30 shortlisted images and read the photographers' stories behind them at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildsnaps#Past

Wild Walks - Wilstone Reservoir

Whilst it might be tempting to stay inside on a cold winters' day, there are plenty of benefits to be had in getting outside and connecting with nature. As well as topping up on immunity-boosting Vitamin D, a walk in the wild aids physical fitness and pays in terms of mental wellbeing too. Indeed, the mental health charity, Mind, recognises the positive effect this can have and states that it can improve mood, reduce stress or feelings of anger, help you to feel more relaxed and even improve your confidence and self-esteem. What's more, this can all be had for free. So, whether some solitary time suits you or you're looking to burn some energy off the family, reap the rewards of a date with nature. Reserves Officer, Anna Daniels, takes us on a guided walk of one of her favourite locations, Wilstone Reservoir.

Wilstone Reservoir lies around 3km to the north-west of Tring – one of four reservoirs which collectively make up Tring Reservoirs. The reedbeds, wet woodland and open waters there provide a welcome habitat for birds and collectively put the reservoirs on the map as one of the best spots for bird watching in the south of the country.

Start the walk at the free car park and head up the stairs, where you'll be confronted with the huge expanse of water that is Wilstone Reservoir, take the well-trodden pathway around the rim – if you look diagonally to the

right, you'll see a hide, tucked into the trees and alongside it, the reedbed. Keep walking and you'll be there in 15-20 minutes.

Staying on the footpath, leave the open water landscape and head onto a more intimate woodland pathway. Look at the bright green lichen gracing the deadwood and the fans of fungi adorning the trees. A left turn by the information sign takes you up to the Paul Thrush Hide. Take shelter from the elements and enjoy this super

vantage point across the reedbed and the reservoir. Winter visitors abound at this time of year - Tufted Duck, Pochard, Teal, Gadwall, Wigeon and Shoveler should be relatively easy to spot and on a good day you might see Goldeneye, Goosander and Smew too! Note the tern rafts to the right – a breeding ground for Common Terns over the spring and summer if the Black-headed Gulls don't get there first! Before you go, you may want to take some time out



View from above

to admire the many photographs that have been pinned up on the hide's walls – giving you a birds-eye view even if you didn't bring your binos!

Head back down to the main path. At this point you have the choice to turn right and return to the car park for an out and back walk of approximately 1.3 miles or, take the left path for a circular walk of around three miles, for which you should allow about an hour and a half, depending on pace and stops.

If you decide to carry on with the longer walk, you leave the nature reserve and follow the public footpath alongside hedgerows, overlooking farmland. Walking conditions remain pretty flat until you take a shallow climb up to the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal – currently undergoing considerable restoration work. The height advantage provides fantastic views over the countryside and the reservoir below.

Continue to walk along the towpath until you see a silver gate to your left, flanked by a wooden post bearing a sign for Dacorum Borough Council Public Footpath 46. Head through the gate onto the downward path. Immediately to your right are some fine examples of old Ash coppice stools, amidst Blackthorn and Elder.

At the bottom of the hill, you'll be met by the majestic Hybrid Poplars, towering high above – such is their height that our reserves team prioritise surveying them for safety on an annual basis. You are now on a gravel path, bearing right and back in the nature reserve. Listen to the gentle noise of nature's wind-charm as the breeze meets the trees – a sound like water babbling over a brook.

Once again you are met with the sight of the reservoir and open skies. Winter is a time when we can experience intense colours up above - blue, orange and gold (and yes, grey too)! Seeing those skies duplicated in the water provides a double helping of joy and a well-placed bench provides the perfect spot for a spot of quiet reflection.

It's easy to get your bearings now and continue around the reservoir perimeter to return to the start point. If you're not done yet though, you can take a detour down the wooden stairs on the right and follow the pathway, which is signposted 'Mead's Tea Rooms' - a great place to warm up with a hot drink or snack, post-walk. Trust supporters, Puddingstone Gin Distillery are on the same development, with their shop open to the public on Fridays and Saturdays (plus other times by appointment). Time your visit right and you can pop in and pick up a bottle of their Ultrasonic Gin, inspired by the flight of native bats through the British countryside. The Trust receives a donation for each bottle sold so drink it (responsibly) guilt-free!



A place for quiet reflection

Visiting tips

- The steps to the top of the reservoirs can be pretty steep so good footwear is a must.
- Exposed to the elements and with large areas of open water these sites can be quite chilly on a cold day - an extra layer could be a good idea.
- You can visit one, two or even walk to all four Tring reservoirs using the Canal and Rivers Trust waymarked trails (the nature reserves are owned by Canal and Rivers Trust and managed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust).

For more information, visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/tring-reservoirs

For the trails map, visit canalrivertrust.org.uk/places-to-visit-pdf/Tring_Reservoirs.pdf

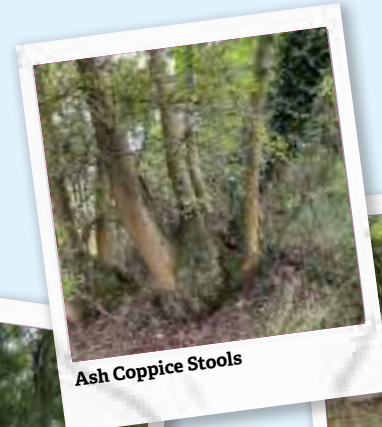
Join our free Winter Wildfowl walks at Tring Reservoirs on 10 December 2022 and 14 January 2023. For more information and to book, please visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events

Find out more about nature's benefits on mental health and wellbeing by watching The Wildlife Trust's video, featuring Dr Amir Khan at wildlifetrusts.org/nature-health-and-wild-wellbeing



Route to Tea Rooms

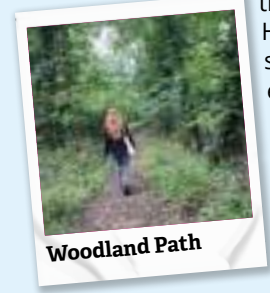
Puddingstone Distillery - Campfire Gin



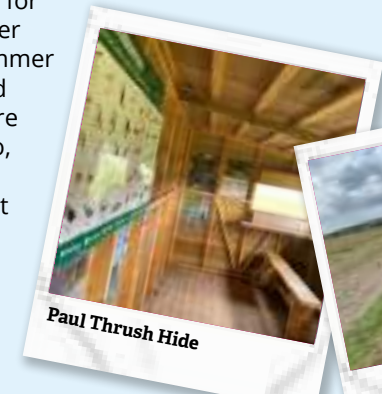
Ash Coppice Stools



Gateway



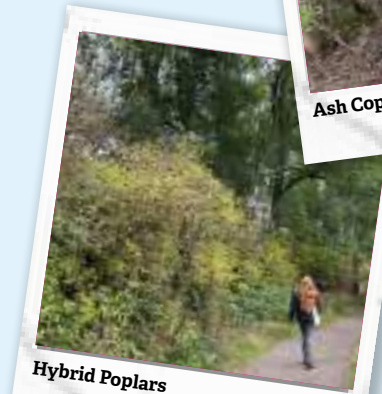
Woodland Path



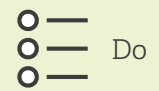
Paul Thrush Hide



Farmland footpath



Hybrid Poplars



Do

We'd love to hear about your walks in the wild this winter. Why not share them with us by tagging us on social - @hertswildlifetrust on Instagram and Facebook and @HMWTBadger on Twitter



Enjoy free of charge



Straight to the heart of Archers Green

In September, the Trust secured a philanthropic loan to purchase Archers Green and is now eagerly fundraising to raise £500,000 to repay the loan and care for the site together with the wildlife that thrives within it.

Read on to find out what makes our latest acquisition so very special and why safeguarding it for the future is vital.

We all have pictures in our minds of what is quintessentially English countryside. Authors and artists go to great lengths to describe our green and pleasant land – think Constable's 'The Hay Wain', Turner's 'The White Horse' or, in the case of this feature, Kenneth Grahame's 'Wind in the Willows'.

Grahame did a great job of putting the reader beside a beautiful chalk river on a summer's day and

whilst the nights have now drawn in, soak in that warmth and have that place in your mind's eye as we explore the very special place that is Archers Green.

Sitting in the Mimram Valley, near the village of Tewin in Hertfordshire, Archers Green lies in a priority area for conservation action. It includes priority habitats, identified in Hertfordshire's State of Nature report – lowland meadows, wet woodland,

marsh and a chalk river, supporting a wide range of rare plants and animals. This importance is recognised through its designation as a Local Wildlife Site. Sadly, in recent decades these habitats have been disappearing from Hertfordshire's countryside.

The River Mimram flows through Archers Green. The Mimram is a chalk river – one of 240 in the entire world – just as rare and globally important as the world's rainforests.



WATER VOLE

© Terry Whittaker 2020VISION

In Hertfordshire we are lucky enough to have around 10% of all chalk rivers on the planet and thankfully, at Archers Green, the chalk river is one of the best stretches of the Mimram. In such good condition, chalk rivers can appear ethereal – think gentle banks sloping down to a verdant river edge and gin-clear water babbling over gravels as the river carries on its meandering course.

Currently, there have been five bat species recorded at Archers Green – the Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noddy, Leisler's and Daubenton's, along with Grass Snake, Water Vole and Otter. Plus, those with an appreciation for our invertebrate population will value the recording of three red-listed water beetles at the site. Tune in to the birdsong that fills the air – home to a wide variety of birds, Archers Green residents include Yellowhammer, Redwing, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Cuckoo, Marsh Tit, Water Rail and Snipe to name but a few.

Archers Green forms part of a vital wildlife corridor connecting to other sites of importance for wildlife. It is adjacent to the 1,000-acre site of Panshanger Park and just one mile from the Trust's Tewinbury Nature Reserve – all three sites are connected by the River Mimram.



GRASS SNAKE

© David Chamberlain

The meadows at Archers Green are a thriving ground for rare plants, including Whorl-grass, Marsh Valerian, Harebell and Marsh Ragwort. So much lowland meadow has been lost over the last fifty years that those areas which survive need to be protected and their conservation actively managed.

Our vision for Archers Green

Whilst the starting point for Archers Green is a good one, the Trust will seek to improve the ecological value of the habitats by having a focus on conservation management. Over time, the ambition is to see diversification in the range of species and to see populations grow. We will achieve this with the support of our valued volunteers, who will help to look after the site as well as recording

the wildlife that thrives within it. This will allow us to monitor the changes and assess our management of this special location to protect it for generations to come.

A place for people and wildlife

Whilst general public access will be restricted to protect the sensitivity of the site and to allow conservation management to take place, a fenced public footpath passes through the middle of the site. This is part of the long-distance Hertfordshire Chain Walk and, as fortune would have it, there is an old stone bridge along the route, which is a lovely place to stop and look across the meadows and admire the River Mimram running below – a great vantage point to spot damselflies, dragonflies and fish. In line with the emerging management plan for the site the Trust will organise occasional educational visits and guided walks to allow groups to experience the special wildlife at the site close up, and once again, our volunteers will be key in making this happen.

Returning to the 'Wind in the Willows' for our final summary: "Sudden and magnificent, the sun's broad golden disc showed itself over the horizon facing them; and the first rays, shooting across the level water-meadows, took the animals full in the eyes and dazzled them. When they were able to look once more, the Vision had vanished, and the air was full of the carol of birds that hailed the dawn."

Let's keep hold of that vision.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

For more information about how we are working to reach our £500,000 fundraising target to secure and care for Archers Green, please visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/archersgreen

For more information linked to this article, please go to hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/stateofnature ldwa.org.uk/ldp/members/show_path.php?path_name=Hertfordshire+Chain+Walk



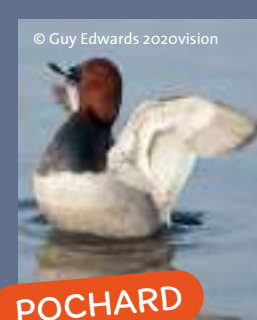
Divers and Dabblers

Steven Werrell is a Reserves Officer at the Trust. Here, Steven takes a look the different ways our winter wildfowl feed.

Winter is the best time of year to get acquainted with the many ducks and other wildfowl that we see on our ponds, lakes, rivers and wetlands. Many of our winter wildfowl will be migrating south from Northern Europe back to their wintering grounds in the UK and our wetland nature reserves provide a perfect habitat for their winter stay. This is due, in part, to the food available for them there, but also the way in which the habitats can accommodate the different ways that they feed. Wildfowl can be easily divided into two main feeding groups - divers and dabblers.

Simply put, *divers* dive under the surface of the water and *dabblers* dabble on and around the surface. Both can be found side-by-side on many of our reserves, but it is this difference in feeding behaviour between species that can help you to identify them.

Identifying Divers and Dabblers



POCHARD

Divers, such as the Tufted Duck, Pochard and Goldeneye, are often found on larger and deeper bodies of water where they can dive far down under the water to feed on a variety of fish, insects, molluscs and plants. These ducks will use their strong webbed feet (and sometimes even their wings) to swim. Sawbills, like the Goosander, are a group of diving ducks that will



SHOVELER

often chase and catch small fish under the water! The Sawbills, as the name suggests, have a thin, saw-like bill which helps them snatch hold of their prey under water.

Dabblers, such as the Mallard, Gadwall and Shoveler, are common on all bodies of water and often seen with their

'bottoms-up' feeding in the shallows. They will tend to feed on aquatic plants, seeds, molluscs and insects either on or just beneath the water's surface. When dabblers are 'bottoms-up' they will be perpendicular to the surface of the water and able to stretch their necks to reach down to nibble on plants and other submerged food. You may see them wagging their tails or kicking their feet in order to keep balance as they do this. The Shoveler lives up to its name by digging through the mud with its shovel-like bill, turning up plant matter and insects.

Our nature reserves at Tring Reservoirs, King's Meads, Stocker's Lake and Hilfield Park Reservoir are some of the best places to spot winter wildfowl in our area.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

You can find out more about these and our other reserves at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves



TUFTED DUCK

Male and female wildfowl of the same species can look remarkably different but they will use the same method of feeding, which helps with identification. Male Mallards show a grey and brown body with a striking emerald green head and yellow bill; whereas the females are a patchwork of shades of brown with an orange/brown bill. This is a phenomenon known as 'sexual dimorphism' which occurs in most wildfowl species. Winter is the best time to start learning how to identify wildfowl as the males often display vibrant and showy breeding plumage. Females can be a little trickier to tell apart, so starting with the males could be a good first step!



GADWALL PAIR



FIND OUT MORE

Online

You can also gem up on your bird knowledge from the comfort of home, we have dedicated waterfowl pages on our website, giving you much more information about some of the species that Steven has mentioned here: hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer/birds/waterfowl

Avian Flu and why you shouldn't feed the ducks this winter



MALLARD

Feeding ducks has long been viewed as a fun activity, particularly for families. However, this can have a negative effect on the health and welfare of our local wildlife.

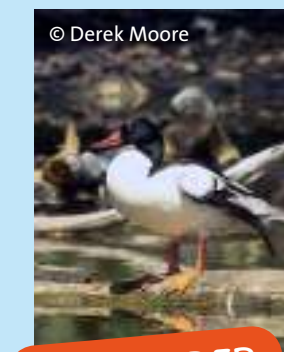
Right now we also need to be aware of Avian Flu which is having a devastating impact on our wild birds across the country, and we are already seeing outbreaks of the disease at some of our reserves.

One of the ways this can be spread is by contaminated food and so we would urge you not to feed wildfowl at all this winter.

Please rest assured that the wildfowl on our nature reserves will have a sufficient and varied diet from the habitat around them. Supplementary feeding is therefore not necessary.

Avian Flu is rarely passed to humans and the risk is therefore very low. However, please ensure you always take the following precautions if you do come across dead or sick birds on our nature reserves:

- Do not touch or pick up any dead or visibly sick birds that you find
- Do not touch wild bird feathers or surfaces contaminated with bird droppings
- Where dogs are permitted, they should be kept on a lead and away from dead or sick birds.



GOOSANDER



FIND OUT MORE

Online

You can find out more about Avian Flu and how to report suspected cases at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/avian-flu

Mistletoe: a plant of myth and mystery

Astrid Biddle is an Ecologist at the Trust and a well-respected botanist. Here, she shares her knowledge on a plant that many of us will only be fleetingly aware of over the festive period.

Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) is our only native, white-berried plant. Widespread in Europe, but here it sits at the northern limits of its range. It is hemi-parasitic, with green leaves capturing light and a network of haustorium (slender projections from the root of the parasitic plant) gathering water and minerals from a host tree. These long-lived perennials go unnoticed when trees are in leaf during the summer. Their scarcity and distinctiveness have made Mistletoe the subject of myth and celebration; from ancient Druidic

rituals with golden sickles through to a fertility symbol under which kisses were stolen.

Locally, Mistletoe has become easier to find in recent years. Populations have traditionally been static with clumps persisting in a particular location for more than a hundred years. It doesn't colonise new areas well, occupying strongholds in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, areas with traditional orchards. Orchards in other counties like Kent have never had high levels of Mistletoe and this is thought



to be down to climate. But things are changing and since 2000 it has been noticed that the distribution is increasing in eastern England. The biology of its spread is intriguing, as several factors need to be in place for a seed to successfully take hold.

The right pollinator

Flowers open in February to March with male and female flowers on separate plants. It is generally insect pollinated so requires early pollinators, namely flies like *Dasyphora* and early flying bees. The number of warm February days are increasing, but it is not currently thought that plants are producing greater numbers of berries.

The right bird

Mistle Thrushes (*Turdus viscivorus*) have traditionally been seen as the main consumer of the berries, but many of those in the UK will never see a Mistletoe berry. Thrushes are territorial birds, so the clumps will be guarded carefully. They are endozoochorous dispersers, gobbling down the whole fruit, seeds, and all. Once they have had their fill the birds don't travel far to relieve themselves or risk losing their territory.

Seed is perhaps ejected onto a latrine area off the end of a branch or onto a fencepost and may not meet a suitable host.

Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) also eat the berries and with warmer winters have recently started to overwinter here. Blackcaps are observed to carefully remove the seed, and because it is so sticky, they are forced to wipe their beaks on the nearest surface, which is most likely to be on a branch of the same tree. The seed is more likely to be placed where it can grow, but not spread far as they also need to guard their supply.

The right tree

Seeds can germinate on all trees, but can only grow successfully on a few species. These are most often on Apple, Lime, Hawthorn, and Poplar and less frequently on species of Maple, Willow, Crab Apple, and False Acacia. Orchards are the traditional location, but fruit-growing is not so economically viable these days, leading to a decline from the loss of orchards. Having said that, some of this loss is currently being balanced by an increase in the lack of Mistletoe control in unmanaged



orchards. Mistletoe is seldom seen in a woodland.

Where we have seen an explosion in population is our gardens and parks, where many of the host species, or their cultivars have been planted. Whether traditionally through orchards or more recently horticulture, the provision of host trees is highly man-made.

It is staggering to think of the complex webs of interdependency of our wildlife, so on your post-festive stroll take time to check out your local parks and gardens and marvel at the mystery of Mistletoe – Watford's Cassiobury Park would be a very good place to start!



Enjoy free of charge

Towards Net Zero

Climate change affects wildlife across all habitats and is one of the biggest drivers of change to biodiversity globally and nationally.

The two issues of climate change and biodiversity loss are completely interlinked. Not only is biodiversity affected by climate change but climate change is accelerated by biodiversity loss because high quality natural and semi-natural habitats store carbon in soils and vegetation. This was made clear in the Trust's 2020 State of Nature Report.

A main goal in the Trust's Strategy 2030 is therefore that nature plays a central and valued part in helping to address climate issues, and as part of our commitment to this, the Trust is striving to reduce its own carbon footprint.

In 2020 we set up an internal working group to pull together a Carbon Action Plan to set out how we can move towards the ambitious target of becoming a net zero organisation.

Our first task was to understand our impact. We now estimate our annual CO₂ emissions using an approach common to all the Wildlife Trusts which looks at factors such as land management, office energy use and business travel, and helps us to track changes over time and adapt our local practices to reduce collective emissions. Across the Trusts, this gave an estimate of 25,000 tonnes of emissions for 2021, equivalent to around 0.005% of the national emissions.

We have completed annual assessments since 2019 and much has changed since then. The Covid-19 restrictions meant much more working from home, which may have lowered the emissions of the Trust, but of course saw an increase in energy consumption

for staff members. We also saw a significant reduction in travel some of which has been sustained through a switch from face to face to online meetings and events, and less staff commuting.

Our last assessment, completed in April 2021, showed that the Trust creates over 117 tonnes of CO₂ through day-to-day practices and delivering work both on and off of our nature reserves. That's the equivalent of over 100 return flights from London to New York. It is not possible to accurately measure all our impacts, such as volunteer mileage, but using a set of business metrics we can measure change over time.

A vital piece of information that is currently missing from this assessment, which The Wildlife Trusts are working on, is accounting for the contribution that our collective land holdings have on sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. In Hertfordshire and Middlesex, ancient and coppiced woodlands, grassland, heathland and wetland habitats (both in our ownership and outside of it) make up about 16% of the county's total land area, which all play a critical role in locking up carbon from towns, cities and human activities, as well as promoting cooling. However, keeping these habitats in good condition requires some form of management intervention. We need to understand this carbon balance across the land we own and manage, as well as those areas for which we provide advice on their positive management.

What we have done so far:



Grebe House changed to energy efficient lighting, saving over 4700 kWh per year



Purchased a hybrid vehicle and rechargeable power tools



Reduced annual water consumption in the office by 12.5%



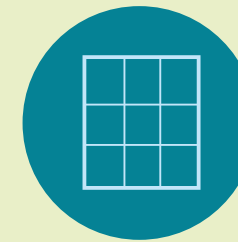
Encouraged reduced paper usage at offices and events



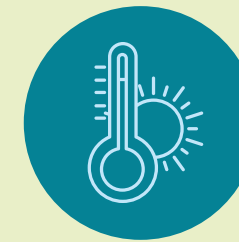
Switched to online meetings and events to reduce travel



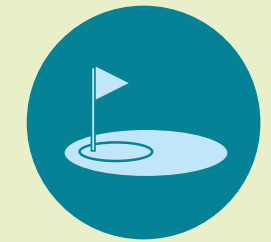
Increased our levels of recycling



Commissioned new office windows to improve heat retention



Worked to activate communities to tackle climate and nature crisis, including Wilder St Albans and other local projects in Dacorum and Watford.



Delivered nature-based solutions in the wider countryside, such as working with landowners, including, farmers, golf courses and schools to help them manage their land to better capture carbon and optimise its value for wildlife.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

As we operate in a nature depleted country, where we have lost most of our native keystone species, such as Bison and Beaver, managing the land in a way that promotes nature to flourish now often falls to people and the activities of our staff to keep ecosystems ticking over.

One of the greatest contributors to our carbon emissions is livestock grazing of nature reserves; but this traditional management technique is often fundamental to retaining the biodiversity of these sites.

Similarly, there are inevitable emissions from travel for reserves management, farmland advice and for people to volunteer and to attend our events. Our office in St Albans, an historic listed building, is in need of a major insulation project to bring it up to efficiency standards of the 21st century and make a real difference to our energy consumption.

We will continue working hard, individually and as one of 46 Trusts nationwide, to lower our impact by switching to green technologies, greener investments,

upgrading to energy-efficient infrastructure, and investing in nature-based solutions to tackle the climate emergency such as creating wetlands to store more water in the landscape. We will continue to join with the national advocacy and campaigns to raise awareness of the link between nature's recovery and climate change.

Some practical steps our members can take:

- Look for volunteering and events local to you, and take public transport or car share, where possible
- Go peat free in your garden
- Share your email address with us so if we need to get in touch we can save on paper by emailing you instead of posting
- Save water (and energy) in your home by turning off your taps/saving rain water

Everyone can make a difference, big or small, and collectively combat the climate and nature crisis.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Explore Affinity Water's Save Our Streams website to calculate your water footprint, get some great water saving tips and claim free water-saving devices at affinitywater.co.uk/saveourstreams

Thames Water also have some great water-saving ideas on their website. Find out more by visiting thameswater.co.uk/help/water-saving/water-saving-tips

Make your voice heard - #DefendNature

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/defend-nature

Weird and Wonderful Wildlife: Deadwood



There's a busy market for deadwood dwellings!

Stag Beetle © Terry Whittaker/2020vision, Wooden Sign © Sittipong_Srikanya, istock

Decaying trunks, rotting stumps, and fallen trees are all in hot demand. This prime real estate is home to a huge variety of wildlife. There's a fantastic range of properties in our deadwood portfolio, from the high-rise to the sprawling single-storey. These habitats all play an important role in the nutrient cycle, help to lock up carbon, and even improve the stability of our soils. Interested in seeing the particulars? Then let's go on a viewing and get to know the neighbourhood!

Family-friendly environment

Neighbourhoods rich in dead and decaying wood are home to incredibly diverse communities. Many of the residents are invertebrates and fungi that play an important role in breaking down wood. A lot of them are entirely dependent on dead or decaying wood for at least part of their life cycle — we call this saproxylic. Some of our most recognisable insects are saproxylic.



Nuthatch © Neil Aldridge

thrive in these locations range from the delicate stalks of Candlesnuff Fungus to the chunky Chicken of the Woods.

Location, location, location...

A third of all woodland birds nest in the hollows or cavities of dead trees.

Great Spotted Woodpeckers drill their own holes, whilst Nuthatches and Tawny Owls seek out existing gaps. Other birds of prey will use standing dead trees as a lookout post, or for somewhere to devour their prey.

Many of our bat species search for trees with lots of character (cavities, rot holes, fissures, and splits) in which to roost. Our biggest bat, the Noctule, isn't put off by a pre-loved home. They often favour old Woodpecker holes. The rare and elusive Barbastelle Bat, found only in woods with plenty of standing deadwood, often takes advantage of spaces behind lifted, flaky bark plates.

They are not alone in the vertebrate community in finding deadwood attractive. Through the seasons, many amphibians and reptiles will be taken with the charm of a log pile. Its amenities include shelter, a lookout point, somewhere to bed down, a sun lounger, and so many opportunities for eating out right on the doorstep — deadwood has it all!

On the water

It's not just land-lovers who appreciate deadwood. Fallen logs in rivers can



Chloë Edwards is Director of Nature Recovery at Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Chloë is a deadwood enthusiast and loves marvelling at the life in the various deadwood features she's nurtured in her garden.

provide the perfect refuge for fish and a whole host of aquatic invertebrates. They can also be a sprint spot for an Otter, or a perch for a Kingfisher. They even act as natural dams and can slow the flow of a river or stream, reducing erosion and holding water back in times of heavy rain, helping to make the landscape more resilient.



Fallen Scots Pine © Mark Hamblin/2020vision

Your next move

With 13% of all plants and animals known in the UK directly dependent on deadwood habitats, it's a vital component of our landscapes. We must respect it, protect it, and seek to create more of it! Make a garden more appealing by creating a log pile. If you have a tree stump in the garden, leave it for your new wild neighbours to move into. Pop out the welcome mat and wait to see who turns up to the housewarming!



FIND OUT MORE

Online

For tips on making a deadwood dwelling visit wildlifetrusts.org/log-shelter



Ride Wild – Reflecting on the ride of my life

In June this year, Ben Marston, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust supporter and co-founder of Puddingstone Distillery, took to the saddle in our Ride Wild Challenge, visiting 30 wild places on an eBike in just 30 hours. Ben's journey helped to raise funds for the Trust and to shine a light on the close proximity of wildlife sites accessible by sustainable transport. Ben now reflects on the ride and what it meant to him.

It was never the intention for me to be the lead rider on the Ride Wild challenge, but when criteria for the role were relayed to me it seemed like destiny. Enjoys cycling, yes. Should be a good ambassador for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, yes. Loves the outdoors, yes. Is familiar with Hertfordshire, yes. Happy to present a series of interviews across 30 sites, fitting in a 71-mile ride...erm, yes.

So that was it. Committed to the cause, in my head I was going to summon up my inner Matt Baker and Mark Cavendish, blending them effortlessly into a single persona and take on the challenge.

On the morning of 29 June, staff from Puddingstone Distillery, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Estarli, who sponsored the eBike for the challenge, gathered and within 15 minutes it started to rain, a lot. Slightly dampened spirits were quickly elevated by the site of a Hobby surrounded by twenty or so Swifts, keen to see it vacate the skies above Stocker's Lake. With the first photoshoot and interview completed it was time for us to also get on our way.

Alex Francis from Estarli, my companion for a big part of the ride, and I were soon pedalling along the Grand Union Canal towpath, gravel crunching under our tyres. The sun came out. We dried out. Hertfordshire looked beautiful as diamond droplets of water twinkled on the leaves of Oak, Beech and Alder.

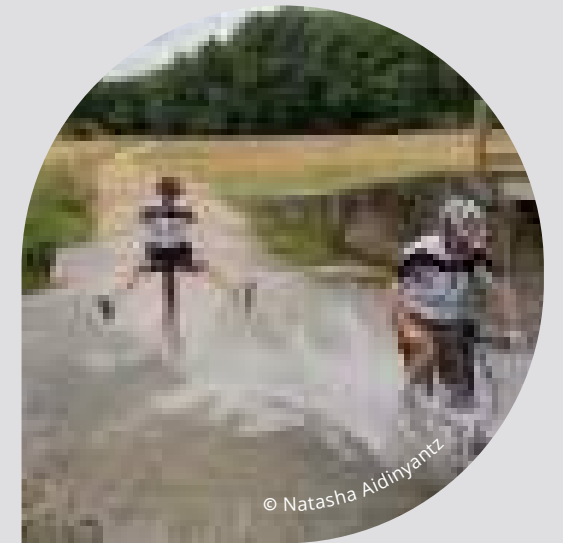
Over the next eight hours we rode from Rickmansworth to Tewin, traversing an array of landscapes using cycle lanes, roads, parks and towpaths. At each of the Trust reserves and other local project sites we were greeted by staff and volunteers bursting with a contagious passion for the environments in which they worked and boundless knowledge of the surrounding flora and fauna.

From lone foxes darting across golden meadows to Peregrine Falcons perched atop St Albans Cathedral, the diversity of what we saw was near baffling, but also indicative of the dedication of all those who support and protect the region's wildlife.

The first day concluded at Tewin Orchard where tired bodies were refreshed with fresh juice made from the apple trees we stood among. We literally drank in our surroundings.

Day two started with a dawn chorus. 4.30am is a wonderful time to be up and about. A White Egret gliding across the early morning sky was the first of many spectacles. The birdsong serenade was followed by the quieter babbling waters of the River Mimram, one of Hertfordshire's rare chalk streams.

The previous day we had walked barefoot across the grassland of



© Natasha Aidinyantz

Heartwood Forest, today I performed a series of yoga poses overlooking Waterford Heath. I could have stayed there all day.

The final stop on this amazing journey was King's Meads. Staring across the reserve to a distant flyover, I could not help but contemplate man's impact on the natural environment. And yet, at the same time I marvelled at how, amidst the hum of distant traffic, the soul was calmed by the chirp of Common Chiffchaff, the electric buzz of energetic dragonflies and explosions of colour sent forth by wildflowers nestled in the dense green foliage. Then it rained again.



© Natasha Aidinyantz

Your Wild WINTER

Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager, shares his ideas for going wild this winter in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.



Oak at Panshanger © Tim Hill

All Fall Down

Since 2008 I have been part of a nationwide project monitoring leaf fall from eight of our most common trees on behalf of the Met Office – Oak, Sycamore, Ash, Horse Chestnut, Beech, Lime, Birch and Poplar. The project involves estimating the percentage of leaves that have fallen from trees three times a week, from September through to the time when no leaves remain.

Over those 14 years I have found a general pattern which is repeated from year-to-year. Horse Chestnuts seem to be the only trees to lose leaves during September. In recent years, this has clearly been exaggerated by some trees succumbing to the Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner which results in premature browning and fall. Even in this year of serious drought, when there was great concern that a lack of water would result in trees defoliating, I didn't see any significant leaf fall from any trees apart from Chestnuts. The scale of fall can be impressive and

sometimes the Chestnuts have been bald by mid-November, with Limes and Ash not far behind. By the middle of October Poplars and Silver Birches will be starting to drop their leaves but it is the last week of the month when the fall really gathers pace, often coinciding with the first frosts of the year. In my experience, Silver Birches vary enormously from tree to tree with some holding on to leaves until the end of November. Oak and Sycamore are the last species to start losing leaves and it is usually the last week in October before they begin to drop. This is good news for late migrant warblers such as Chiffchaffs, which feast on the abundant aphids which are associated with Sycamore leaves. Small flocks of House Martins can often be seen feeding around Sycamores as they migrate south, also feeding on the numerous insects associated with the trees. Bats preparing for hibernation are also able to fatten up on this rich food resource. Oaks are always the last trees to become defoliated and there have been a few years when their crowns still held a scattering of leaves at Christmas. Watching trees drop their leaves has become something of an obsession for me and I now find myself assessing percentage leaf fall on trees wherever I go through the autumn months – perhaps I'm suffering from OCLFC – obsessive compulsive leaf fall counting! Why not have a go in your local area? If nothing else you will enjoy the autumn colours and get to know your Limes from your Poplars.

Chiffchaff in Sycamore © Tim Hill



Wonderful Wet Wildwoods

When my son Toby was growing up, he and I spent a great deal of time exploring the wilds of Hertfordshire and of all the places we visited, he was particularly fond of wet woodlands which he described as "well wicked!" The voice of youth essentially showed a real enthusiasm for what remain some of our most natural and truly wild places. Exploring wet woodlands often involves weaving through dense tangles of sodden branches and more often than not a welly boot full of cold, stinky water along the way. Almost guaranteed are mud encrusted trousers and jacket – almost irresistible to the young at heart! Even better, wet woodlands are living, breathing places with an abundance of wildlife just waiting to be discovered...

If natural succession is allowed to continue without intervention, grassland will be colonised by shrubs and trees to form woodland. Where the ground is wet, Alders and Willows tend to dominate eventually forming wet woodlands or 'carr' as they are sometimes known. Where the land is damp, rather than wet, Oak, Ash and Birch are found. Not surprisingly, wet woodlands are typically found along the Lea and Colne river valleys and around the lakes created by gravel extraction. As the land rises on the valley sides, it becomes drier and wet woodland will grade into drier woodland, all of which provides a wonderful mosaic of habitats for wildlife.

Willow and Alder carr is attractive to Woodpeckers which often excavate their nests in the soft wood. The 'drumming' song of Woodpeckers is

commonly heard in late winter as the birds establish territories and try to attract a mate. Wet woodlands are still one of the best places to look and listen for the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, now sadly, decidedly rare in our counties. The Trust's nature reserves at Cassiobury Park, Stocker's Lake and Amwell are worth a visit in search of this elusive bird. A vast diversity of insects live in and on the trees and not surprisingly many birds forage through the woods feeding on them. During the winter, flocks of Blue, Long-tailed and Great Tits are joined by less common birds such as Treecreepers and Redpolls. Occasionally, a squelching winter walk through the woods will disturb a Woodcock which fly off, jinking in a zig-zag through the trees, its stout reddish-brown form quickly becoming lost to sight. Where shade isn't complete, the woodland floor may support an interesting mix of flowers during spring and summer. At Stocker's Lake nature reserve, Broad-leaved Helleborine and Moschatel grow in the damp woodland surrounding the lake. In the wettest areas of the Alder carr, Large Bittercress can be found, a real rarity in Hertfordshire. Research has shown that a diverse structure is the key to a diverse insect population. Wind-blown fallen trees create gaps in the canopy which then allow shrubs such as sallows to grow and flower, providing nectar for many insect species to flourish. On sunny days in late winter bees can be seen making the most of this early food supply.

Not all our wet woodlands have developed naturally. On the border with Essex at Waltham Abbey in the Lea Valley, a large area of Alder woodland was planted at what is now the Royal Gunpowder Mills. Alder

makes the finest charcoal and the trees here were harvested to provide the raw ingredients for gunpowder, some of which may have been used by Guy Fawkes in his plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605. The wet Alder woodland is now nationally important for wildlife and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Herons used to nest in the tops of the trees and through the winter Siskins feast on the tiny seeds of the Alder cones, prised apart with their tiny, pointed beaks. The quiet woods and water courses provide home to deer, bats, badgers, and otters have bred here.

Not surprisingly, because of the rich biodiversity which wet woodlands support, they are a 'priority habitat' for conservation in the UK.

If you fancy getting out and deciding for yourself if wet woodlands really are 'well wicked', the Trust has a number of reserves worth visiting. In addition to those described above Rye Meads, Panshanger Park and Thorley Wash all have wet woods.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

If you fancy mixing wet woodland wildlife with history, a visit to the Royal Gunpowder Mills at Waltham Abbey, as described above, is highly recommended - visit www.royalgunpowdermills.com/

Sensing Winter

See this:

Take a magnifying glass (or turn binoculars round and look through the big lenses, which will act as a magnifier) and have a look at the incredible shapes created by frost and snow crystals.

Smell this:

As you walk through the snow, breathe slowly and deeply, taking in the purity of the winter air.

Hear this:

Take a walk in freshly fallen frosty snow and enjoy the creak and crump of your footsteps.

Feel this:

Experience the tingly chill of crafting snowballs and the warming glow when you get back indoors!



Stocker's Lake wet woodland © Tim Hill



Waxwing feeding on Sorbus fruits © Donald Sutherland

Ideas to experience and enjoy winter

Go local. Find a local walk, or continue exploring the walk you enjoyed in the summer and try to walk it weekly, seeing how the land changes through the chill of winter. Make a note of the wildlife you see and hear and look out for new growth as winter gives way to early spring.

Take time to watch what goes on in the local environment from your windows at home. By providing some food and water for the birds, you can help them through the short and cold days, enabling them to have sufficient calories to get through the long nights. Consider making a log of the birds you see each day and see if the numbers and species change as the months change, not forgetting to submit all your sightings to the Herts Bird Club - hnhs.org/herts-bird-club/recordsubmission

Set your watch to nature by aligning it to the activity of your local animals. In mid-winter look-up at about eight o'clock in the morning and you will see gulls flying overhead, heading for feeding at refuse tips or fields beyond the towns. If you look up again as dusk begins to fall you'll probably see

the same gulls heading the other way, back to their roosts on nature reserves such as Hilfield Park Reservoir or the Chingford Reservoirs in the lower Lea Valley.

If you have a garden, plan ahead to make it better for wildlife and consider planting a tree. One of the very best varieties for smaller gardens is the Rowan or Mountain Ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Rowans are great for wildlife throughout the year, their flowers provide pollen and nectar for insects and their fruit provides food for Blackbirds, Thrushes and if you're very lucky you might be graced by a Waxwing, one of our rare winter visitors which, in my experience cannot resist Rowan fruits. You can find out more about how to plant a tree with our handy guide which covers how to choose the best tree for you, where and when to plant it hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actions/how-plant-tree



Enjoy free of charge



© David Longshaw

Explore

NATURE RESERVE

SHOVELER



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/hilfield-park-reservoir

Why now?

November through to February is a fantastic time of year to visit Hilfield and see the wintering ducks and breeding bird species in the marginal vegetation around the reservoir.



Know before you go

BUSHEY, WD25 8DA

Public access into the reserve is restricted to Trust members only. Short-term key loans must be booked in advance and collected from Grebe House, our head office in St Albans. To book a key loan please contact the Trust on 01727 858901 or via info@hmwt.org.uk

Outside the reserve is a viewing platform on the east side of the site which gives good views across the reservoir and is accessible via Hogg Lane, and along a public footpath. Remember to wear wellies in the muddy season and stick to the path.

Wildlife to spot

Goldeneye, Goosander, Pochard, Smew, Wigeon.

Hilfield Park Reservoir

Winter is a great time to get to know our winter visitors and, on its large expanse of water, Hilfield Park Reservoir presents Trust members with an opportunity to do just that!

Hilfield is a nature reserve owned by Affinity Water and managed by the Trust. On the A41 towards Barnet, between Bushey and Elstree, the reservoir is one of the largest undisturbed areas for nature in the vicinity and boasts a number of waterfowl and other bird species. Our dedicated People and Wildlife Officer, Josh Kalms, looks after this reserve and with the help of our volunteers has been working hard to make the reserve a great place for wildlife this winter. This work involves pushing trees into the water, creating deadwood habitats for fish and place of refuge for wintering ducks such as Shovelers and Teal. Public access to the reserve is restricted to Trust members only.

Wrap up warm to face the blistering winds that sweep across the reservoir on a winter's morning and be in awe at the huge expanse of water. Once you have got a grasp of the elements, peruse the reedbeds

around the water's edge to find Goldeneye and Pochard ducks which have flown to the warmer winters of the UK from the bitter temperatures of Eastern Europe. Venture to the reserve just before sunset to the public viewing platform on the east side of the reservoir and you will be greeted with a golden back drop as the sun sits low above the water, in front of a display of roosting gulls travelling from their feeding grounds. Hilfield is the stage for the largest gull roosts in the county, regularly attracting over 10,000 gulls in the winter. If you are incredibly lucky and arrive at the right time, you may see a Peregrine Falcon swooping at speed to catch a gull for its dinner. Along the path by the edge of the reservoir, you will see Poplar and Willow trees where special boxes have been placed to offer a home for bats, including the rare Nathusius' Pipistrelle, to roost in the winter.



We've enjoyed a host of talks, walks and workshops for all ages during the summer and early autumn. We hope you've been able to come along and enjoy them with us! Here is a look at recent highlights from our Herts Wild Art project and ideas for upcoming activities - some inspiration to keep us active through the winter months.

Herts Wild Art

Earlier this year, we told you about Herts Wild Art and how we were hosting a series of art sessions for all, where you could come along, engage your creativity and connect with nature. Many of you will have seen 'Willoughby' our willow hedgehog sculpture by the wonderful artist, Deb Hart, gracing these pop-up and bookable events. Our thanks go to Arts Council England, who saw the merit in this initiative to boost mental health and wellbeing, and who provided funding for a host of creative events to take place. It's fair to say that we have been inspired to learn new skills, blown away by your creativity and overjoyed to see your big smiles, sense of achievement and pride in your work.

Nature-inspired Collaging workshops in June and August saw local multi-media artist, Sarah How, enable participants to take inspiration from the wild world and the colours of nature to create their own stunning collages from recycled, found and hand-painted materials.

At King's Meads nature reserve in August, we had a very successful Graffiti Canvas workshop, run by Mark Tanti of Demografix, a mural artist, who specialises in graffiti art. Mark was responsible for painting the fabulous wildlife murals on the flyover at King's Meads and shared his tricks of the trade with those who attended his workshop. We think you'll agree the results are outstanding!



Graffiti Canvas Workshop © Petra Green

September saw a wonderful Make Colour with Plants workshop held at Hitchin's Triangle Community Garden, where attendees learnt about the rich and complex colours contained in native plants from artist Susan Dye. The group visited the nearby allotment garden, where they discovered that



many of the plants were easy to grow and excellent for wildlife too. With their new-found knowledge, participants went on to create colours and use them to dye yarn and fabrics. Just look at the wonderful rainbow they've achieved through nature!

Willoughby's creator, Deb Hart ran a Willow Weaving workshop for us in September at PE Meads Farmshop in Wilstone, demonstrating how to put those skills to use in creating willow garden obelisks. All attendees were able to take their creations home with them and we look forward to seeing their photos of next year's crop of runner beans or sweet peas winding their way up them!

Willoughby has enjoyed a summer of adventure, showing up at our conference, AGM and at many of our

pop-up art sessions and workshops. He is now in permanent residence in the Trust's wildlife garden, please feel free to pop by and pay him a visit!

Don't worry if you've not had the opportunity to take part in the Herts Wild Art yet, there are more events coming up, and you can still head outdoors whenever you desire creative inspiration!



Nature-inspired collaging © Emma Norrington



Make Colour With Plants © Lea Ellis

Events coming up...

If you've been inspired by the events we've held as part of the Herts Wild Art initiative, check out our upcoming events programme - many of which are free to take part in.

Guided Walk 10 December and 14 January

Join us for a guided walk at Tring Reservoirs on 10 December and 14 January to find out about the bird species calling these wetlands home over the winter months. Ideal for families and birding beginners, our Reserves Officers will be on hand with spotting scopes and field ID guides to help you tell your Mallards from your Moorhens.

Online Talk 7 December

On 7 December, Reserves Officer, Steven Werrell will be giving an online talk on Conservation Grazing. Steven will introduce the grazing animals we work with on our sites and why, which sites and habitats we manage with grazing and the benefits it provides for wildlife.

Online Talk 7 February

On 7 February, River Catchment Officer, Sarah Perry, will be giving an online talk on the Living Rivers of Hertfordshire.

Online Workshop 13 December

The Herts Wild Arts sessions

continue, with local artist Martin Gibbons hosting an online pastels workshop in December.

Tree Planting at Panshanger Park

You can play your part in helping to create a new woodland at Panshanger Park in honour of the life of Her Majesty the Queen. In total, 17,000 trees will be planted in order to create a new 70-acre woodland as a lasting memorial to Queen Elizabeth II. Park owners Tarmac, in partnership with the Trust, Maydencroft and Hertfordshire County Council are involving the community in this exciting new chapter for the park. Throughout December and January, bookable weekday and weekend family sessions will be available to help plant this ambitious new woodland.

Weekday sessions take place from 10 - 16 December 2022 in both the morning (9.30am - 12pm) and afternoon (1pm-3.30pm), with weekend family events scheduled from 5 - 20 January 2023, mornings

(10am - 12pm) and afternoons (1pm - 3pm).

You can book places for any of our events by visiting hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events

Please note, if you represent an interested group or company wanting to help with the tree planting at Panshanger, please email panshangerpark@hmwt.org as these are managed separately to the individual and family bookable sessions.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Don't forget, there's also plenty you can do in your home or around your local area - getting out in nature is good for us all and doesn't have to cost a penny. You can access our free online resources via the Trust's website. Find ideas for activities at home at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actions

Look for information about our local species at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer and explore habitats at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/habitats

Wild Community

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



Thank you for supporting the Ride Wild Challenge

Through the Ride Wild Challenge we raised an amazing £6000 to care for local wildlife. A huge thank you to everyone that sponsored the event or bought a raffle ticket. You can read more about the challenge on pages 26-27.

The winner of the eBike was Vivienne from Hertford. Speaking about the raffle and her new bike, Vivienne said: "I was delighted to win the Estarli eBike in the raffle. I've been a member of the Trust for about 20 years and I have a keen interest in conservation and wildlife, especially in wetlands. Recently I have been involved with the Trust, together with my local community, in the purchase of Beane Marshes, a small wetland reserve near where I live. I believe local reserves are really important for all of us as ways of making a direct connection to nature and I have been using my eBike to do a bit more of this, to travel to nearby reserves such as Amwell, another wonderful wetland, where the Dragonfly walk is one of my favourite places and where I can see the Banded Demoiselle and sometimes Hobbys. I'm looking forward to exploring further afield in the Autumn and next year - thanks for the opportunity Estarli."

Thank you to Estarli and Puddingstone Distillery for sponsoring this event and providing the raffle prizes.

Welcome to new members European Flavours and Fragrances



European Flavours and Fragrances (EFF), who are based in Ware, near Amwell Nature Reserve, have recently joined the Trust as corporate members. Director of EFF, Spencer Kersey, stated: "We're very excited to be corporate supporters of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. As a business based in Ware, Hertfordshire, close to the Amwell Nature Reserve, we felt that being members of the Trust would be a great way to support the protection of the natural habitats that are on our doorstep. We hope our support of the Trust will also help to bring our colleagues closer to the valuable work the Trust does."



Take Action

Online

If you would like to find out more about how businesses can support the Trust, please visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/corporatesupport



Thank you to UK Power Networks

Thank you to UK Power Networks who spent the day with us apple picking at Tewin Orchard as part of their membership. The apples were then juiced and this will be sold to raise money to care for local wildlife and wild places.



£ Tesco Community Grants

A huge thank you to our volunteers from Tesco who helped with grass cutting and bramble clearance in the grassland beneath our apple trees at Tewin Orchard and Hopkyns Wood. Tesco has been supporting the Trust through their Community Grants scheme (previously known as Tesco Bags of Help) for over seven years and provided support for over 10 separate projects - we are incredibly grateful for this support.



Richard's midsummer fundraising Challenge

A massive well done to Richard Witter who completed his midsummers fundraising challenge to cycle over 260 miles in just one day! We are incredibly grateful that you raised over a thousand pounds and hope that you got a well-deserved rest afterwards!



Dan's half marathon challenge

A huge thank you to Dan Carr, Territory Leader at New Look, who took on the St Albans half marathon in June to raise money for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. He raised an amazing £340 to help protect local wildlife.

If you would like to take on a challenge and raise money for the Trust please email fundraising@hmwt.org



In remembrance

Our thanks and condolences to all the friends and family who kindly donated to the Trust in memory of Nigel Agar and Roy Thornley. 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 the Gift of Wildlife this Christmas

This year, why not gift someone a better future for wildlife. We all know that one person who is impossible to shop for, giving a wild gift will support nature on your doorstep and give them the joy of knowing wildlife near them is being looked after.

There is so much to choose from inside our Christmas shop; from wildlife sponsorships to gift memberships, from clothing to gin, there is a wild gift for everyone.

Wildlife sponsorships

By sponsoring a local species such as hedgehog, barn owl or water vole you can help us create suitable habitats to protect our precious wildlife. Choose between our postal and digital packs. Psst... our digital wildlife sponsorships are the perfect last-minute gift and will arrive straight in your inbox.

- Digital wildlife sponsorship | £15
- Postal wildlife sponsorship | £20

Gift membership

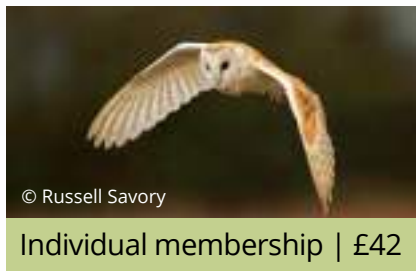
Give the gift that keeps on giving. Treat a loved one to their own membership of supporting the Trust for a whole year. With individual, joint and family memberships available, there is a gift membership for all your loved ones.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Explore the full range of wildlife gifts online at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop)



© Russell Savory

Individual membership | £42



© Russell Savory

Joint membership | £48



© Russell Savory

Family membership | £54



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