

Celebrating the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex

wildlifematters

Summer 2023



**Herts &
Middlesex**
Wildlife Trust



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Welcome



In May, our Trustees visited Astonbury Wood, one of our newest nature reserves. It was a delight to visit the wood in Bluebell time and to learn so much about its wildlife from Ian Carle our Nature Reserves Manager. This underlined how important it is that such special sites are protected so wildlife can flourish.

By contrast, one of our most precious nature reserves, Broadwater Lake, is under threat from a development proposed by Hillingdon Council. The Lake, part of the mid-Colne Valley SSSI, is nationally important for its wildlife, particularly wildfowl like Shoveler and Pochard. The Council wants to relocate the Hillingdon Outdoor Activity Centre (HOAC) here. We are sympathetic to HOAC, which has been affected by HS2, but Broadwater Lake is not the right place for a development like this; a fact which the Council has publicly acknowledged in the past. We have made our position clear to the Council and will object to a planning application that impacts the SSSI. We will be calling on everyone to stand up for nature and make their voice heard – we cannot see this vital wildlife refuge damaged in this way. Please keep an eye out for updates on our website, social media and e-news. You can also read the article on page 24 to find out how vital this wetland habitat is.

Thanks to the support of our members we can stand up for wildlife. We prioritise influencing planning decisions and, with the support of volunteers, we review local and neighbourhood plans and planning applications. In the last year, the team scrutinised over 1,300 planning applications, raising comments and objections, resulting in better outcomes for our local wildlife.

I'm delighted to say our Archers Green appeal is going well, and, at time of going to press, we have reached £343,580 of the £500,000 target. I'm also delighted to say that we have reached a milestone with 1,000 volunteers giving their time, a huge thank you to everyone. If you'd like to find out more about what happened in the last year, take a look at our Annual Review highlights on pages 30-31.

Thank you as ever for your interest and support.

Lesley

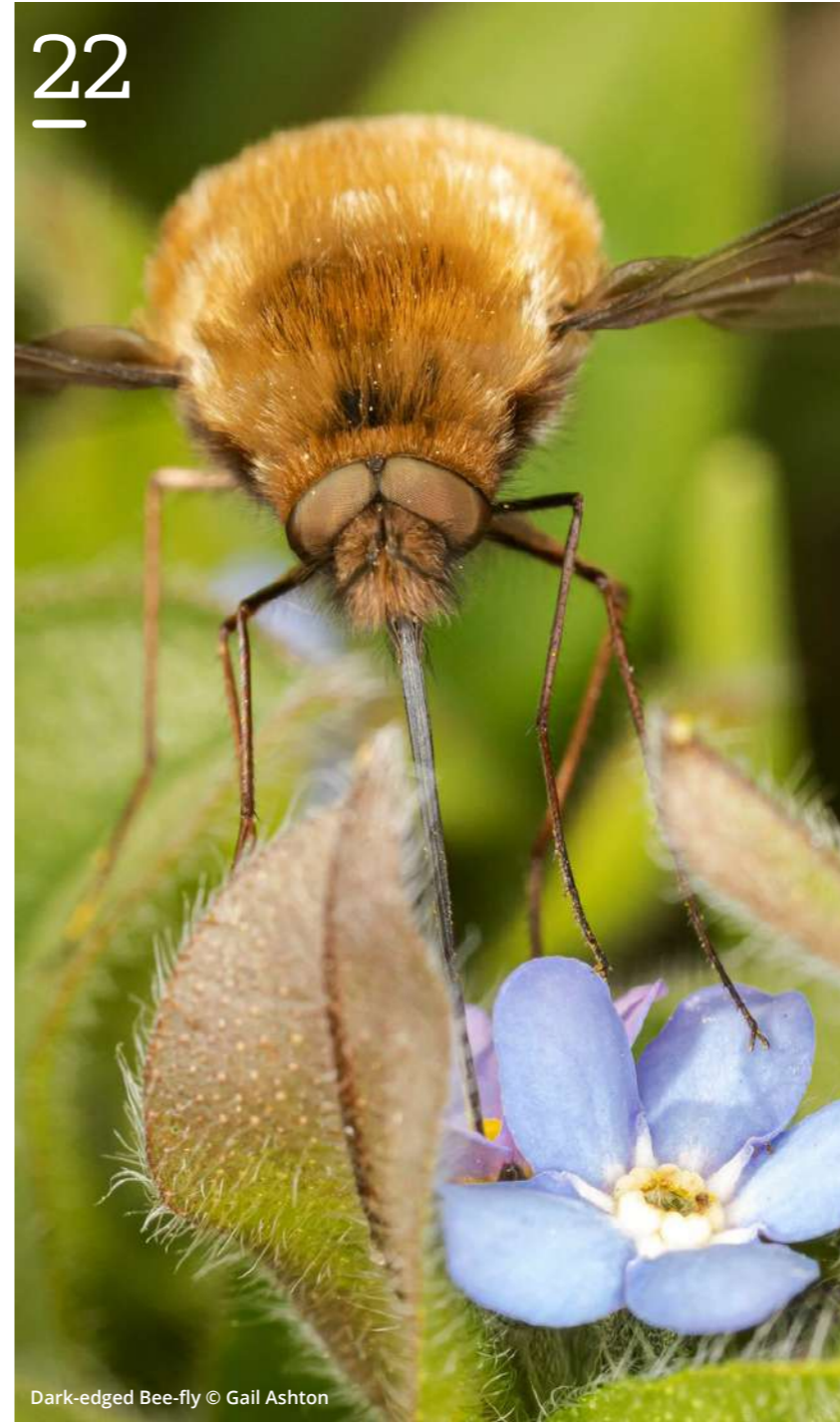
Lesley Davies
Chief Executive



River Mimram © Peter Tatton



Harvest Mouse © Amy Lewis



Dark-edged Bee-fly © Gail Ashton

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Cover: Beautiful Demoiselle © Tim Hill

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Wild News

Since our last issue, we've been busy on our nature reserves, in the wilder countryside and hard at work in the community. We've been improving habitats for wildlife, welcomed rare visitors – some for the very first time - and even secured a new nature reserve! We've spoken to thousands of people – one-to-one, in schools and groups, as well as at our events with an unfailing amount of enthusiasm. Plus, we've shared our stories and motivation in the press, on air and on TV. All of this, along with your membership, and the support of our wonderful volunteers has an impact on our strategic aim of achieving a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex by 2030. Here are a few of our news highlights.



Astonbury Wood © Frieda Rummenhohl

Astonbury Wood Our New Nature Reserve

You may have already seen the happy news that we took ownership of the lease for Astonbury Wood, near Stevenage, at the end of March, establishing a new nature reserve. This followed a major fundraising campaign to purchase the long-term lease for the 54-acre site from Hertfordshire County Council and manage the woodland for wildlife and the community. We're delighted that we have been able to safeguard the future of this Local Wildlife Site, where woodland has existed since at least the 1600s. Ancient woodland was once widespread throughout the country but the habitat is now rare and irreplaceable. With ancient woodlands supporting the highest diversity of species of any woodland type, we take on the role of being custodians of Astonbury Wood Nature Reserve with great responsibility. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the campaign and we welcome you to understand exactly what your donation is helping us to protect by reading the article on page 8.

Ancient Astonbury Wilder Woods Funding

Thanks to National Lottery players, we have recently been awarded £162,698 from the The National



Made possible with

Heritage Fund

Lottery Heritage Fund for our new project, Ancient Astonbury and our Wilder Woodlands. The two-year project will employ a new Wilder Woodlands Officer to support our woodland work across the county with a special focus on Astonbury Wood Nature Reserve. Using the momentum of the public appeal, we will use Astonbury Wood as a best practice example of how to effectively care for woodlands and engage the local community, alongside dealing with conservation issues such as Ash dieback. The new Wilder Woodlands Officer will also offer support for a number of other key Trust woodlands, including Balls Wood, Fir & Pond Woods, Gobions Wood, Long Deans, Longspring Wood and Old Park Wood.

Threat to Broadwater Lake SSSI

This Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is under threat from development by Hillingdon Council. They say their planning application to relocate the Hillingdon Outdoor Activity Centre to the site will be submitted in early July.

We cannot let this nationally important site be damaged. As soon as we have access to the full plans we will assess their impact and prepare our response. At the same time we will email our supporters with clear advice and guidance so that you can stand up for wildlife and have your say. #SaveBroadwaterLake



FIND OUT MORE

Online

hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/threat-broadwater-lake-sssi and read about how vital this wetland habitat is on page 24.

Hello and Goodbye

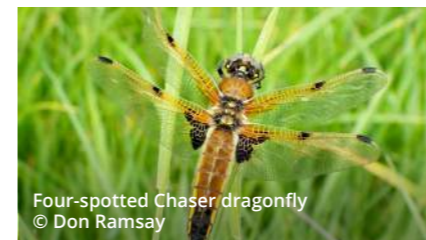
We said a sad farewell to Finance Officer, Frances Grant, and warmly welcome Jonathan (Jono) Mortlock into the fold as Frances' replacement.

Congratulations to our Fundraising Administration Assistant, Carys Worsdale on the birth of her baby boy, Osian. Whilst Carys is tending to her young family, we welcome Vicki Loberman, who will be providing maternity cover. Also off on maternity leave is Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC) Manager, Alex Waechter – we wish Alex all the best for her new arrival. Congratulations are in order for Ellie Smith, also of HERC, who is stepping up to the role of Senior Data Officer.

Heather McIntosh joins us as an Ecology Intern but is no stranger to the Trust as she is also the volunteer warden at our Amwell Nature Reserve and a Local Wildlife Site volunteer surveyor. Heather will be assisting Ecologist, Astrid Biddle, with her work on the Chalk River Biobank Project.

Also, new to the Trust is Jess Pinches, joining us as Digital Communications Assistant, and who we're delighted to have onboard.

We're sure all our new team members will have a positive impact on the future of the Trust.



Four-spotted Chaser dragonfly © Don Ramsay

New UK Dragonfly Hotspot at Panshanger Park!

It's official – Panshanger Park is a Dragonfly Hotspot as recognised by the British Dragonfly Society – find out more on page 14.



Peat bog © Mark Hamblin 2020Vision

Peat-free Gardening

Last year we welcomed the news that the Government would ban the sale of bagged peat compost in England by the end of 2024. Recently, that gave way to disappointment when the UK Government confirmed there won't be a ban on ALL peat gardening products until 2030. Thriving peatlands are the answer to many of the challenges we face today, including clean water, carbon storage and habitat loss. We will continue to push for change but in the meantime, our FREE 'Greener Gardening' guide will help you with the transition to going peat-free at home.

We can also take heart then from Nic Wilson, a respected nature and garden writer and Trust volunteer at our Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve, who also curates the Peat-Free Nurseries List, which now includes over 120 growers across the UK. Nic started the list in 2019 after she found it difficult to source peat-free plants. Since then it has had over 20,000 hits and sends hundreds of people to peat-free nurseries every month. You can find the list here:

dogwooddays.net/2020/04/30/updated-peat-free-nurseries-list/



A magnificent milestone

As we approach our 60th year, we're delighted to recognise that a new milestone has been reached – we've tipped the 1,000 active volunteers mark with 1,065 people generously giving up their time for wildlife throughout our last financial year! Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers past and present for making a world of difference to our local wildlife and habitats. Find out what else we have to celebrate this year in our annual review on pages 30-31.

Cotswold Outdoor Discount for Trust Supporters

We are pleased to be able to share with you a 15% discount for supporters of The Wildlife Trusts, which can be used at Cotswold Outdoor. Use code AF-WILDLIFE-M5 online, or contact membership@hmw.org to be emailed a flyer to use in-store. You can also use your discount with Snow and Rock and Runners Need.

Full T&Cs apply. Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer or discount. Selected lines are exempt. Excludes electronics. Partnership discount is only valid for Explore More members upon production of membership identification or use of valid discount code online. Offer expires 31/12/23.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Download your copy of our FREE 'Greener Gardening' here wtru.st/download-peat-guide



FIND OUT MORE

Online

cotswoldoutdoor.com
snowandrock.com
runnersneed.com

Making the most of your Membership

Your membership helps us to look after the wildlife and wild places across the region which is fantastic! We hope you enjoy receiving *Wildlife Matters* and attending our walks and events, to learn more about the impact your support is having. Do look out for our special member-only events too!

UK NEWS



Nature reserves along the route of HS2, like Calvert Jubilee in Buckinghamshire, have been destroyed.

On the wrong track

More than 100,000 people have signed The Wildlife Trusts' open letter to the UK Government about HS2, after our latest report into the project highlighted major errors in HS2 Ltd's calculations – meaning more nature will be lost along the line than was agreed by the Government, and attempts to repair the damage the scheme is causing will be inadequate. The letter urges the Government to oblige HS2 Ltd to accurately recalculate its figures, providing a more realistic picture of the scale of the damage.

Our new report, HS2 double jeopardy, was the result of an almost year-long audit of HS2's official nature loss calculations. The report revealed

a number of errors and causes for concern, including inconsistent mapping and modelling, wild spaces and habitats being undervalued, and huge numbers of trees entirely missing from the calculations.

HS2 Ltd promised that nature would not lose out when much-loved natural areas and important habitats were destroyed to make way for construction of the high-speed rail line. Our report found that HS2 Ltd's 'accounting tool' for assessing impacts on nature is untested, out of date and fundamentally flawed.

Construction on HS2 has already caused irreparable damage to precious wildlife sites; it's vital that HS2

Ltd and the Government listen to our concerns and act accordingly. Now is the time to reflect on the failings of the scheme so far and rethink the next steps, to prevent further excessive damage to our natural world. The Government needs to learn from HS2 to ensure that future 'green' infrastructure truly can support nature's recovery rather than exacerbating its loss.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at wildlifetrusts.org/hs2

Our open letter called for HS2 to:

Re-map existing habitats along Phases 1 and 2a, correcting mapping errors, applying the correct nature values to habitats, and ensuring no habitats are excluded.

Immediately pause all construction and enabling works and halt the passage of the Phase 2b Hybrid Bill while these latest audit findings are assessed by the Government.

Recalculate the total impacts to nature, by using an up to date and proven methodology, such as one directly comparable to the government's current Biodiversity Metric 3.1. If changes to the methodology are made these should be transparent and evidence based. It is critical that HS2 Ltd ensure all data is made publicly available at the point the figures are released to facilitate transparency and enable independent scrutiny.

Change the scheme's design and delivery to limit the adverse impacts and enhance biodiversity in a way that is commensurate with the scale of the damage i.e. by achieving a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain for replaceable habitats for each phase of the scheme. Once impacts have first been avoided, limited and compensated for, Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was before the development took place by 'delivering more for nature than is lost'.

UK UPDATE

Wild Isles on location with Wildlife Trusts

This spring, viewers were captivated by Sir David Attenborough's latest documentary, Wild Isles. The show celebrated the wildlife of the British Isles, demonstrating to an audience of millions that the UK is home to incredible animals, dramatic battles for survival, and internationally important wild places. Many of the spectacular scenes shown in the documentary were captured on Wildlife Trust nature reserves.

The cameras revealed the incredible lifecycle of the Large Blue butterfly at Daneway Banks in Gloucestershire, where caterpillars trick ants into accepting them into their nest. At Wiltshire's Langford Lakes they filmed hobbies hawking for dragonflies, snatching them from the air with lightning reflexes, whilst at Lackford

Lakes in Suffolk they revealed Rabbits being hunted by Buzzards. Flowers featured strongly as well, from buzzing meadows to the fly-fooling Lords-and-ladies, with visits to Avon's Prior's Wood and Hutton Woods, Gloucestershire's Lower Woods, and Wiltshire's Clattinger Meadows.

Sir David himself travelled to Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire, to marvel at Manx Shearwaters and sit amongst the Puffins as he reflected on the threats facing our wild isles. The show didn't shy away from discussing the worrying declines in our wildlife, or the actions that have led to them.



Wildflower meadows are essential habitats for pollinators

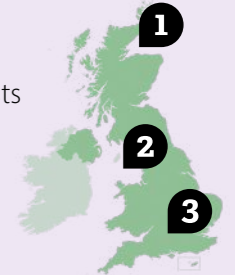
Long may they bloom

This year marks the tenth anniversary of Coronation Meadows, a restoration project launched in 2013 to celebrate 60 years since the coronation of Elizabeth II. As part of the project, many Wildlife Trusts provided seeds from their own meadows to create or restore meadows in

other parts of their region. Wildlife Trusts also took on custodianship of some of the new meadows, helping wildlife flourish. A new audit has revealed the success of the project, with 101 new wildflower meadows created or restored over the last decade.

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Birds not birdies

The Scottish Wildlife Trust is part of a coalition of seven environmental organisations fighting to save rare coastal dunes from the construction of a golf course. Proposals to develop Coul Links in East Sutherland threaten irreparable harm to a vital and protected habitat. The proposals come just three years after a previous application was turned down due to the damage it would cause nature.

wtru.st/coul-links-proposal

2 Fungi find

An incredibly rare fungus has been discovered in a survey by Manx Wildlife Trust and the Isle of Man Fungus Group, working with Manx farmers. The Butterscotch Waxcap, *Gliophorus euoperplexus*, had never been recorded on the island before, with only 70 specimens of the species recorded worldwide.

wtru.st/new-waxcap



3 Healing nature

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has launched a new 10-week nature-based-therapy programme for veterans and service leavers living with mental health issues. Wild Transitions will take place at the Trust's Green Lane Wood nature reserve, providing a space for veterans to connect with nature and learn skills to help them transition into new employment or volunteer roles.

wtru.st/WildTransitions



Get to know Astonbury Wood and its inhabitants

At the end of March, we took over responsibility for Astonbury Wood – our new nature reserve. An ancient woodland, where sweeping carpets of Bluebells bloom in springtime, choirs of songbirds fill the air and many hundreds of fungi species afford the site national recognition. We are delighted that, with your support and a successful public fundraising campaign, we are now custodians of this special place.

As a pillar of our strategy for nature's recovery across Hertfordshire and Middlesex we recognise that nature plays a central and valued role in helping to address climate issues. Protecting Astonbury Wood is vital in safeguarding diminishing ancient woodland habitat, the wildlife it supports and the wood's significant role in capturing and storing carbon.

As one of our most famous supporters Sir David Attenborough said:

“Ancient trees are precious. There is little else on Earth that plays host to such a rich community of life within a single living organism.”

So, let us tell you more about this very special, 54-acre site, near Stevenage, which has been continually wooded since at least the 1600s. Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC) have kindly provided us with their records for the site, sharing the historic data they hold on the beneficiaries of the rich wildlife habitat it provides, having developed very special flora and fauna over many hundreds of years.

The woodland is predominantly Oak and Hornbeam. Some areas of Hornbeam have been historically coppiced, whereas other areas have been cleared as grassy rides, allowing light to penetrate the woodland floor. In spring, showstopping Bluebells

dominate but stick to the paths and alongside them you can see Wood Anemone, Wild Primrose, Lesser Celandine and Dog's Mercury. Other flora which can be found within the wood includes Wood Spurge, Small Teasel, Lords and Ladies, Enchanter's Nightshade, Figwort, Wood-sorrel, Early and Common Dog Violet, Foxglove, Wood Millet, Broad Buckler, Male Ferns and Ground Ivy.

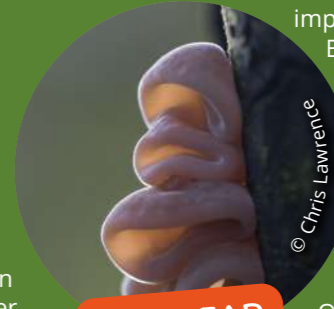
Smooth Newts thrive around the wood's several ponds, alongside Common Toads and Common Frogs. Dragonflies and damselflies favour the habitat too – look out for Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker, Common Darter, Azure Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Banded Demoiselle and Large Red Damselfly. In addition to the ponds, a stretch of Stevenage Brook gives life to aquatic species. Around these damper areas, Yellow Iris, Fools Watercress, Creeping Buttercup, Branched Bur-reed and Water Mint pepper the scene. Grey Herons can be seen frequenting the ponds, whilst Kingfishers and Grey Wagtails dart along Stevenage Brook.

Bryophytes add to the wood's myriad of colour - more than 80 species of moss have been recorded here, including local rarities such as Sessile Grimmia and Golden Thread-moss. Other species include Hart's-tongue Thyme-moss, Common Feather-moss and Silky Forklet-moss.



FOXGLOVES

Nationally recognised for its importance for fungi, Herts Environmental Records Centre have over 650 fungi species recorded at the site. A visit in autumn might see you happen upon King Alfred's Cakes, Birds' Nest fungi, Jelly Ear, Shaggy Parasol, Variable Oysterling, Oakbug Milkcap, Clustered Bonnet, Wrinkled Peach, and Hairy Curtain Crust.



JELLY EAR

Numerous bird species frequent the wood, including Nuthatches, Treecreepers, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and Chiffchaffs, plus several species of tits and finches, including the Marsh Tit, a Herts Species of Conservation Concern (HSCC) and a red-listed species, along with fellow red-listers Starlings and Song Thrushes. Tawny Owls have also been recorded around the site.



TREECREEPER

Supporting a range of mammals, from Fallow Deer to Foxes, Astonbury Wood is home to many of our smaller mammals too - Bank Voles,



SMOOTH NEWT



Wood Mice, Common Shrews, and mature woodland-favouring, Yellow-necked Mice dwell alongside Stoats and Weasels - both of which are Herts Species of Conservation Concern.

Brown, Large White, Small White, Hedge Brown, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Orange-tip, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Comma, and Red Admiral. Also, on the wing, more than 370 species of moth - Blood-vein, Large Yellow Underwing, Mottled Beauty, Common White Wave, Green Carpet, Common Emerald and Brimstone Moth to name but a few. Entomologists will appreciate that close to 70 species of spider are found on the site, along with beetles, bees, wasps, ants, snails and the Speckled Bush Cricket, which favours the woodland habitat.

As you can see, Astonbury Wood really is a wonderful place for wildlife but having secured the wood our work does not stop there. Over the coming months, our priority is to collect further habitat and species information to inform our long-term plan for the woods' management and to set out how the community can get involved.



SPECKLED BUSH CRICKET

An array of invertebrate species call Astonbury Wood home. Butterfly enthusiasts will enjoy a number of sightings that may include Meadow

Get ready for

Wild Snaps 2023



Winner General Wildlife Category - Hummingbird Hawk-moth © Keith Gypps

Our annual Wild Snaps Wildlife Photography Competition is back for a fourth year in 2023 and we are making sure that you, our members, are the first to know about it!

The competition, which encourages amateur photographers and casual snappers to engage with nature, will once again launch on World Photography Day - 19 August - and this year we'll be inviting entries over the following categories:

- General Wildlife
- People & Nature
- Under 16s

The competition will follow the same process as last year; following the launch, all entries will be submitted to our wonderful judging panel who will produce a shortlist of photographs that will be put out to a public vote to decide the winners.

Once again, we have some fantastic prizes being donated, all of which will be revealed on launch day. In a change to last year, we'll be producing an online showcase of all the shortlisted entries so as many people

as possible will be able to access and enjoy the fabulous images of wildlife found across Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Whether you choose to arm yourself with a simple camera, apply an extensive range of lenses or stick to using your smartphone, get prepared for Wild Snaps 2023 and get snapping!



Winner Under 16s Category - Mute Swan © Bruno Slim



Winner Rivers Category - Kingfisher © John Roy



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Check in with us again on 19 August at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildsnaps to get the full competition details or look out for our social posts - @hertswildlifetrust on Instagram and Facebook and @HMWTBadger on Twitter.



BLOOD-VEIN



FIND OUT MORE

Online

We welcome you to experience all that Astonbury Wood has to offer for yourself. Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/astonbury-wood

Hertfordshire's Living Rivers Network project

How we have reduced the threat to our chalk rivers in just 21 months

With just 240 chalk rivers in the world they represent one of our rarest habitats globally. A majority of these precious river systems are found in Southeast England and here, in Hertfordshire, we are lucky to be custodians of 10 per cent of the world's chalk rivers. Due to their rarity and significance for wildlife, these habitats are classified as Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats.

Yet, these precious habitats face threats from a combination of factors such as land-use changes, pollution, over-abstraction and historic industry – all of which are directly linked to a growing population. Add to that there's the possible impact of climate

change - another factor we need to adapt to, having experienced some of the driest, hottest summer months on record in recent years. In 2020, *Hertfordshire's State of Nature* report identified that these special chalk rivers, which have a unique ecology

due to their clean, mineral-rich water and consistent flows were not achieving good ecological status and underlined the need for urgent action to be taken.

So, that set the scene for the 21-month Hertfordshire's Living



Rive Beane Water Vole reintroduction team © Natasha Aidinyantz

Rivers Network project, designed to directly address those threats. Led by the Trust and funded under the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) - being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency, the project focused on the River Lea and its tributaries - the Mimram, Beane, Ash, Rib, Quin and Stort and with a total coverage of more than 1,000km², that left us plenty to be getting on with!

Sarah Perry, our River Catchment Co-ordinator, took the reins of the project, supported by the wider team at the Trust, and working in collaboration with a range of partners. The schedule of work undertaken throughout the project has been complex, time-consuming and not without blood, sweat and tears - but those things can all be put behind us when it comes to celebrate the positive outcomes that have been achieved. We commissioned evaluation experts Heritage Insider to

help us identify our impact against the following National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes:

- **Hertfordshire's chalk rivers are now in better condition** thanks to targeted capital works and invasive species removal there has been an improvement to river banks and margins.
- **People have 'skilled-up' to take care of their local catchments** thanks to a major push on developing the abilities of volunteers to monitor, track and evidence changes in the river system.
- **Heritage is better recorded and Water Voles are back on the River Beane** thanks to a baseline data and ongoing monitoring, it was possible to get our most endangered mammals back on the river. The project has set the groundwork to support, manage and monitor the journey to species recovery. Add to that, wider monitoring which is enabling us to build a more robust and real-time picture of river health through, for example, riverfly monitoring.
- **Our reputation is elevated** thanks to all the hard work and the relationships we've developed, our profile as a 'can-do' partner and enhanced capacity makes us investment-ready.

The work of this project has laid the foundation for

the recovery of our chalk rivers in Hertfordshire and has made a significant contribution to the major task of restoring these vital habitats. So much has been accomplished on a fairly small budget, and we have been able to deliver incredible value for money. What's more, the lasting effects of this work will be felt by wildlife and communities for many years to come. Far from sitting on our laurels, these building blocks will help us strive towards our strategy of creating a Wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex by 2030.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more about our Living Rivers project at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/living-rivers

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



The National Lottery Heritage Fund



BROWN TROUT



River Mimram © Richard White

Your Wild SUMMER

Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager, highlights some of his favourite seasonal wildlife and makes suggestions for things to look out for and do through the summer months ahead, starting with a dragonfly adventure at Panshanger Park.



Tim Hill © Frieda Rummenhohl



Banded Demoiselle © Josh Kubale

On 29 July 2023, the Trust, working in partnership with Tarmac and the British Dragonfly Society will be celebrating the newly designated Panshanger Park Dragonfly Hotspot.

What is a Dragonfly Hotspot?

British Dragonfly Society Hotspots are special places, carefully chosen because they are fantastic places for dragonflies and damselflies to live and thrive and they also have easy access for everyone to visit with a chance to see these amazing insects. They also provide an excellent way to learn about dragonflies and damselflies and their conservation through fun events, courses and workshops. Hotspots have volunteering opportunities too, so that everyone can get involved in keeping the habitat in tip-top condition. The Dragonfly Hotspot project was launched in Scotland in 2014, and there are now 10 thriving Hotspot sites across the country. Panshanger Park will be the 11th!

The journey to the launch of the Hotspot

1981

In 1981 Tarmac, the owners of Panshanger Park, were granted planning permission by Hertfordshire County Council to quarry sand and gravel. Since then over five million tons of aggregates have been removed and some of the holes created through this process allowed to fill with water, creating the five lakes we see today. In addition, the Broadwater is a significant wetland feature created by Humphry Repton who landscaped the Park in the late 18th century.

2005-2007

On a smaller scale but adding valuable diversity to the wetlands, a series of ponds were created at the eastern end of the Park from 2005-2007. With the River Mimram providing flowing chalk river habitat as well, the Park provides a smorgasbord of watery habitats which has proved irresistible to dragonflies and damselflies.

2008

In 2008 Alan Reynolds completed a survey of the Park and recorded a total of 18 species out of a possible 19 species regularly recorded in Hertfordshire. This placed Panshanger Park equal third best site in the county!

Beech tree © Bell Hill 2020VISION

Dragonfly trail



Emperor dragonfly © Tim Hill

At the launch of the Dragonfly Hotspot in July, a new dedicated dragonfly trail will be unveiled and I want to give you a taster of what you can expect when you visit. The 3km waymarked trail begins at Thieves Lane car park and includes dedicated interpretation to provide insights into the world of these fabulous predatory insects. Leaving the car park, enjoy a big sky to

the west with woodlands framing the Mimram valley to north and south. Your first stop will be the dragonfly ponds themselves where you can get acquainted with the intriguing life cycles of dragonflies from the new interpretation located here. For example, did you know that dragonfly nymphs can hatch from eggs within a few weeks, but in some species the eggs over-winter and hatch the following spring. Nymphs can take from a few months to three years to develop to the adult stage,

the water is pure and supports a unique community of wildlife. **Look out** for Banded Demoiselle damselflies fluttering over the river and amongst the bankside vegetation as they seek a mate to breed. Females are metallic green and have a greenish tinge to their wings whilst males are blue and have dark blue patches on the wing. South of the River is an area known as the Rifle Butts, so named from its use by soldiers learning to shoot before going off to fight in World War One. The area was sown with wild flowers in 2015 and now provides a home for many insects. This is a great place to look out for dragonflies such as Migrant Hawkers and Brown Hawkers flying quickly as they hunt for smaller insects and eat them as they go. **Listen out** for the rustling of their cellophane-like wings.

On sunny days, Kings and Riverside Lakes are alive with dragonflies and damselflies. It's worth finding a comfortable place and waiting for what comes along. Red-eyed Damselflies habitually perch on floating vegetation such as Water Lilies. At the height of summer, there will be hundreds of Common Blue Damselflies over the



© Tim Hill

MIGRANT HAWKER



lakes, some searching for mates or the lucky ones, locked into the mating wheel and depositing eggs as they go. Look for Four-spotted Chaser dragonflies which favour perches on tall stems from which they dash after rivals but keep returning to the same place.

Our largest dragonfly species, the Emperor, is one which rarely perches, having seemingly endless energy, cruising back and forth across large lengths of shoreline, holding a territory



FOUR-SPOTTED CHASER

in pursuit of a mate or to hunt smaller insects. Sometimes however, predator becomes prey and it's always worth keeping an eye out for a Hobby, a smaller migratory falcon which specialises in the catching and eating of dragonflies on the wing and reasonably common at Panshanger Park.

From Riverside Lake it's back to the starting point at the car park. Each dragonfly and damselfly species emerge as adults and fly at different times from spring to autumn so it's definitely worth visiting a few times!



RED-EYED DAMSELFLY

Do Dragonflies and damselflies are very photogenic. Whilst you are visiting the new Dragonfly Hotspot at Panshanger or seeking out these fascinating creatures on our reserves have your phone or camera close to hand and remember you'll be able to enter our Wild Snaps Photography Competition soon - see page 11 for more details.

While you're walking the Hotspot trail

See this:

Look down into the River Mimram and look for the shadowy shape of a Brown Trout hardly moving in the flow.

Smell this:

As you walk around the lakes you will be engulfed in the menthol mist of Water Mint, the aroma released when you tread on its leaves.

Hear this:

Little Grebes, or Dabchicks to use their country names, are common and have a loud trilling teeteeteeteeteeteete call which they yell while scooting across the lake.

Feel this:

As you crunch along the gravelly tracks, it's worth noting that this is the same substrate quarried over the past 40 years from here and used to build numerous roads and buildings in Hertfordshire and beyond.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/panshanger-park

Check out our dragonfly events on the back cover or visit www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events to find out more.



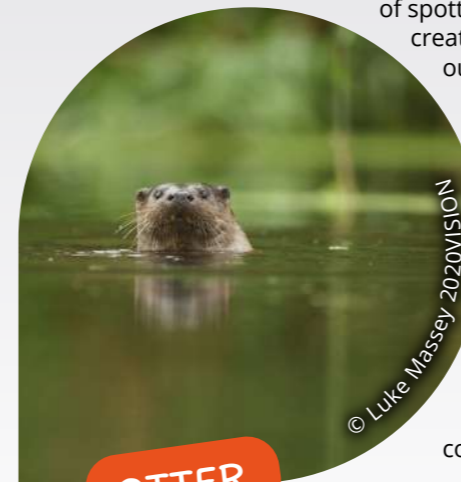
Suggestions to experience and enjoy summer

Keep it local

Continue a local walk, saunter it weekly, seeing how the land changes through the long warm days of summer. Make a note of how trees' leaves change from the vivid shiny greens of early summer, becoming more matt as their shades darken.

A creature of the dark

A dark shape moves silently through the moonlit water of the river. It approaches the base of an old pollarded Willow and, with a gentle sploosh, the shape becomes an Otter as it appears on the river bank and then just as quickly, it's gone as it slips out of site beneath this ancient tree. With their nocturnal habits, Otters are never easy to see but a dusk or dawn walk in late summer provides a chance



OTTER

of spotting this elusive creature extinct from our counties in the 1990s. You will need to be very quiet and stop and watch regularly or alternatively settle into one of the hides at our nature reserves for a few hours of quiet contemplation.

Definitely worth a look...



SMOOTH NEWT EFTS

By August many of the creatures that bred in our ponds and wetlands will be leaving and looking for suitable places to spend the winter. Smooth Newts are one of our more common amphibians, breeding in ponds of all shapes and

sizes. Our small six year-old garden pond now has a population approaching 20! Young newts, or efts as they're known, leave the ponds at the end of summer and search out damp, dark nooks and crannies where they are safe from predators such as large birds. Favourite hideaways include spaces below logs or is often the case in our littered world below lumps of old carpet. Lifting such things carefully will often result in finding one of our modern-day dinosaurs, albeit in a tiny form.

Wandering warblers

Ringling studies in Hertfordshire show that August is the peak time for the southerly movement of warblers, including both adults and young birds which fledged from nests earlier in the summer. It's a great time to enjoy these perfectly plumaged, long-distance travellers as many of them begin journeys to as far afield as sub-Saharan Africa. The wetlands and woodlands of our river valleys are great places to spend time watching migration take place. One Reed Warbler which bred in the reedbeds of the Lea Valley was found to have been ringed as a nestling and was 11 years old. This meant that it may well have crossed the Sahara Desert 22 times - astonishing for an animal weighing only 12 grams, about the same as AAA battery!



Wild Walks

Discover the sights and sounds of Cassiobury Park Local Nature Reserve

When thinking about where to go for a wildlife wander, Watford may not seem the most obvious choice for many. Yet, right here in the centre of this bustling town is an oasis of calm, a rich mix of healthy habitats and an abundance of wildlife. Welcome to Cassiobury Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR) – a most easy to reach nature reserve, served by excellent public transport links and within walking distance of the town. Add to that buggy and wheelchair friendly paths and a host of facilities and

attractions in the wider park, including a café, washrooms, children’s play area, splash park, sports facilities and a miniature railway – it offers something for everyone. As well as all that, running alongside the reserve, the Grand Union is a hive of activity with its colourful narrowboats and captivating locks, and this is flanked by Whippendell Woods – an ancient woodland site offering shade and respite from the summer sun. Ready to go?



Join us as we take an amble with Anna Daniels, a Reserves Officer at the Trust and lead on the Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Wood project in partnership with Watford Borough Council.

We started our visit at the park’s main car park on Gade Avenue, taking advantage of the 2-hour free parking (you still need a ticket).

From the car park, head down the path towards the River Gade. At the end of the path, turn left and note the veteran parkland trees – there’s some lovely examples of Horse Chestnuts, as well as deadwood, which provides an excellent habit for beetles. Cast an eye towards the chalk river and appreciate the abundant marginal vegetation – our visit in late May, saw us take in bright yellow Flag Iris, Red Campion and flowering nettles, plus long strands of Water-crowsfoot adorning the river with its delicate white flowers. On the far-side, the reeds hint to the extensive wetland habitats and carr woodland beyond – it’s the perfect place to spot Herons, Kingfishers and dragonflies so take a pause and watch a while.



FLAG IRIS

When you are ready to move on, look into the woodland on your left, where we have cut glades, to enhance biodiversity by increasing the levels of light which creates more structural diversity and micro-habitats. Preferring the shade of the canopy, there are some quite spectacular ferns worthy of attention.

A little further on you will come to Water-crowfoot Bridge – a brilliant vantage point for this aquatic plant. Spot Mayflies, dragonflies and damselflies at play and listen to the birdsong that fills the air – Song Thrush, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Stock Dove create a magical melody.

Carry along the path and look to the open areas – these aren’t here by chance but are the result of a conservation technique known as ‘scalping’, creating sunny rides and diversity of vegetation structure through cutting. Look for butterflies enjoying the warmth of the woodland edge – an Orange-tip caught our eye as it fluttered past.

RED-HEADED CARDINAL BEETLE



Further along the path a Red-headed Cardinal Beetle was an interesting spot for us!

Eerie barking can be heard from the depths of the reserve but

rest assured this is just the sound of the Muntjac – another local resident. Movement in the trees and a burst of song suggest further life is afoot – a tit flock – Long-tailed Tits, Blue Tits and Great Tits all coming together, in the canopy of the Alder trees – a common indicator of wet woodland.

Glance to your left and you’ll see a well-placed bench – a perfect spot to take a break and enjoy watching life on the Grand Union Canal. Or, look right and take a seat in the hide, where you can spot yet more wildlife amidst the Alder, Willow and sedge-bed below the trees.

If you’d like to get off the formal paths, now is your chance to take a right and explore the meadows beyond, or, do as we did and continue onto the Rustic Bridge. Note the changing flow of the Gade – the clarity of the gravel bed below indicating its healthier path. We



were fortunate to spot a Little Egret and Chub in the water below, as well as a Holly Blue butterfly adjacent to the river.



The most secluded parts of the reserve are to the northern edge of the park – should you wish to explore the Watercress beds here, cross the Rustic bridge and keep to the right of the river for an out and back walk. We decided to head out of the reserve, stopping to look at the pretty Herb Robert flowers before making our way through the avenue of mature trees. We then took a right, noting the growing variety of ornamental trees, and stopped to examine the loose catkins of a Turkey Oak and mass of Sycamore seeds.

Pathways connect all areas of the park and it’s easy to navigate and choose your own route. We chose to walk downhill over the grass and back to the car park, having had a lovely two-and-a-half-mile stroll.

- —
- — Do
- —

Improving the reserve’s value for wildlife at Cassiobury Park takes an army of volunteers. If you’d like to support the work we do there, find out how you can get involved at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering.

Whilst we welcome everyone to enjoy the delights of Cassiobury Park LNR, we thank you for keeping dogs out of the water. Your support with this reduces the risk of bank erosion and the transfer of flea treatments, which can contaminate the water and cause harm to wildlife.



You can find out more about visiting Cassiobury Park LNR at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/cassiobury-park-lnr

Get to know the Harvest Mouse



Ellie Smith is a Senior Data Officer at Herts Environmental Records Centre, which manages information of habitats, species and sites across the county and is hosted by the Trust. Ellie is a volunteer for The Mammal Society and coordinates their Harvest Mouse Survey locally, recruiting and training volunteers in nest searches – in what she says is an easy way to get involved with biological recording. Here, Ellie shares her fascination for one of our smallest mammals and details the work that is being undertaken to find out more about the Harvest Mouse.

Perhaps it is the ‘Harvest’ in Harvest Mouse that provides an instant association with summer – think ripe, swaying cereal fields and the picture starts to build but please allow me to expand the view.

Weighing just 6g when fully grown (about the same as a 2 pence piece!), the Harvest Mouse is the smallest rodent in Britain. Well adapted to life in the “stalk-zone”, they are our only mammal species with a prehensile (capable of grasping) tail, which they use as an extra limb to grip hold of stems when climbing amongst tall vegetation such as grasses and sedges. They are russet-brown in colour with a fully white underside, and, unlike our other mouse species, they have short muzzles and small hairy ears. They are particularly elusive though, so you would have to be very lucky to spot one!

Harvest Mice were historically described as abundant in cereal fields, but nowadays they tend to favour wilder habitats, including rough grasslands, marshes, and reedbeds. Within Hertfordshire, reedbed habitat is rare covering only about 20 hectares. This is an increase from just 12 hectares in the early 2000 as a result of dedicated work by many across the region. This will have benefitted Harvest Mice, as they require undisturbed areas of tall and dense vegetation in which they can forage and build their nests. One of the largest reedbeds in Hertfordshire and positioned along the River Lea which connects it to neighbouring habitats, Stanborough Reedmarsh Nature Reserve, which is managed by the Trust, is a perfect home for the species. By managing this habitat rotationally outside of the breeding season, we are able to maintain the reedbed whilst minimizing disturbance.

Not much is known about the current status of Harvest Mice in the country, as they are incredibly under-surveyed, but they are believed to be in decline; in 2020, they were assessed to be Near Threatened in Great Britain on the Red List for British Mammals [1]. In addition to the loss and fragmentation of our wilder habitats, it’s believed that this decline is due in part to the modernisation of farming practices, which have reduced the habitat suitability of arable fields

for Harvest Mice. Another cause for concern is their susceptibility to extreme weather conditions such as cold spells and floods, which are becoming more and more frequent as climate change progresses...



Harvest Mouse Nest © Ellie Smith

There was a clear need for more information about the species, and so in 2021, the Mammal Society launched the National Harvest Mouse Survey. This project aims to gather data on the current distribution of Harvest Mice across the country to inform conservation action using nest surveys, which are an excellent (and very easy!) way to identify Harvest Mouse presence.

Harvest Mice make their tennis ball-sized nests by weaving together strips of long vegetation which are still attached to the surrounding plants, suspending them above the ground. They are the only small mammal in Britain to nest in the stalk-zone of tall



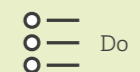
Harvest Mouse © Natalie Rogers HWWNT

vegetation in this way, making their nests a unique field sign to look out for in the winter months, once the vegetation has died back and the breeding season has ended.

As part of this project, I trained volunteers at Rye Meads Nature Reserve to identify suitable Harvest Mouse habitats and recognise these nests, then helped to coordinate surveys across Hertfordshire. This winter (October 2022 – March 2023), we found more than 90 nests from 12 different nature reserves across Hertfordshire – some of which were brand new sites for the species! This

was a very promising start, and I’m hopeful that next season – which will see us surveying at new locations around the county to build on our understanding of their distribution – will be equally successful. The data will help to inform conservation strategies and improve the outlook for these small mammals.

[1] Mathews F, and Harrower C. (2020). IUCN – compliant Red List for Britain’s Terrestrial Mammals. Assessment by the Mammal Society under contract to Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage. Natural England, Peterborough ISBN 978-1-78354-485-1 (<https://www.mammal.org.uk/science-research/red-list/>)



If you’re interested in joining the hunt for Harvest Mouse nests on our nature reserves and across Hertfordshire this autumn/winter, please visit the Mammal Society website to sign up mammal.org.uk/science-research/harvest-mouse-project/.



Harvest Mouse © Amy Lewis



Harvest Mouse © Amy Lewis



Weird and Wonderful Wildlife

Parasites, Parasitoids and Cuckoos

The Cuckoo bird is famous for its habit of sneaking its eggs into the nest of another species, cunningly offloading the weighty task of bringing up its offspring onto the unsuspecting host. This behaviour is called parasitism, and it is relatively rare among vertebrates. Shift one's gaze to insects, however, and it is a far more common occurrence.

Insect parasitism is a fascinating and diverse world. Behaviour ranges from secreting eggs into the nests of other

insects (much like the bird), to a more brutal method - injecting eggs directly into the tissue of a plant or animal host. Sometimes the host will survive, and sometimes it will be killed (known as parasitoidism), as it is slowly eaten to death from the inside.

Parasitic insects are all around us. In spring, one of the first to appear is the Dark-edged Bee-fly - a charismatic little fluffball which could easily be mistaken for a bee as it zips around our gardens. The big giveaway is the



CUCKOO BUMBLEBEE

long, rigid proboscis which is used to probe into tubular flower heads. Bee-flies are classic 'Cuckoos'; they search out the nest holes of mining bees and flick their eggs towards the entrance. The larvae hatch and crawl into the nest tunnel where they seek out and eat the mining bee's pollen provisions and even the bee larvae themselves.

Also hiding in plain sight are the solitary cuckoo bumblebees, which don't go to the effort of creating their own colonies. Instead, they leave their eggs in the nests of social bumblebees; their young are then raised by their unsuspecting adoptive colony's workers.



TACHINID FLY

The tachinid flies are a large family of parasitic flies, many of which are specialised to particular hosts. *Phasia hemiptera* is a parasite of shieldbugs; the fly lands stealthily on the back of the shieldbug and attaches eggs to it. The emergent fly larvae then burrow into the shieldbug's body and consume its innards.



BRACONID WASP

Surprisingly, some hosts can survive this ordeal. *Dinocampus coccinellae*, a tiny braconid wasp, lays its eggs inside the Seven-spot ladybird. The wasp larva proceeds to feast on the non-essential innards (this keeps the host alive and larder-fresh). It then leaves the ladybird's body and spins a cocoon underneath; at this point



SEVEN-SPOT LADYBIRD

the ladybird becomes paralysed and doubles up as a bodyguard for the pupating wasp. Once the adult wasp emerges, some of these erstwhile 'zombie ladybirds' will regain movement and even continue their normal lives.

Cynipid wasps lay their eggs into the buds of immature acorns, causing a gall to form. The acorn becomes misshapen and crinkly as it transforms into a cosy home for a wasp larva. But here's where it gets *really* interesting. Another parasitic wasp, the beautiful, metallic *Ormyrus* seeks out the cynipid larvae within the gall using sensory superpowers, injects its ovipositor into the gall and lays an egg *into* the concealed larva. Yep, parasites have parasites too.



PARASITIC WASP

This mind-boggling behaviour is called *hyperparasitoidism*, and is common in the insect world, but on a scale far too small for us to observe unless we look very closely.

Whether we are repulsed by or intrigued by it, insect parasitism is a fascinating and essential part of our ecosystems. Individual species are not threatened by parasitism; it seems to naturally regulate population levels (the potential applications of which are being thoroughly studied by the agricultural industry as a viable alternative to chemical pesticides). Though it may sound brutal, parasitism has evolved over hundreds of millions of years to reach the delicious levels of complexity we see today, and the more we discover about this diverse behaviour, the more we will understand and appreciate our incredible insect cohabitants.

Words and photographs by © Gail Ashton 2023



Gail Ashton is a wildlife photographer, writer and artist specialising in insects. She gives workshops and seminars about insect diversity and ecology. Gail is a contributing photographer for the RSPB and writes for magazines such as BBC Countryfile and Bird Watching. Her book 'An Identification Guide to Garden Insects of North-west Europe', co-written with Dominic Couzens and published by John Beaufoy, is out now.

The importance of wetlands in the Colne Valley

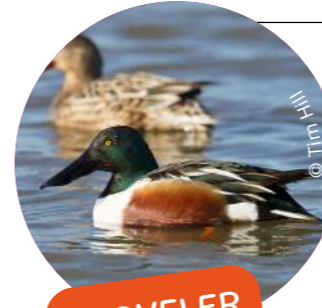
Heading out of west London, The Colne Valley Regional Park provides a first real taste of the countryside, leaving the metropolis behind. From Rickmansworth in the north to Staines and the Thames in the south, and from Uxbridge and Heathrow in the east to Slough and Chalfont St Peter in the west, much of this mosaic of farmland, woodland and wetland, comprising of over 200km of river and over 60 lakes, lies within the operational area of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

The Colne Valley Regional Park was established in 1967 to preserve areas for leisure, recreation and conservation – it's a setting where people can connect with nature and enjoy the outdoors, and a place where wildlife seeks refuge. The myriad of habitats and wildlife corridors that make up the park is not just recognised for its importance locally but also nationally and internationally.

The Colne Valley's diversity of wetlands support nationally significant populations of water birds Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Smew, Great Crested Grebe and Cormorant. It's the mix of plentiful food with undisturbed refuges

that make the valley so attractive to this diversity of birds. There are two key refuges in the Colne Valley. The Mid-Colne Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) encompasses the Trust's Broadwater Lake Nature Reserve, which includes Korda Lake, Long Pond, the River Colne and the western side of Broadwater Lake. To its north, another Herts and Middlesex managed nature reserve, Stocker's Lake provides another indispensable refuge for wintering birds. Together, these two sites enable birds to exploit other waters across a much wider area to which they can retreat when there is disturbance elsewhere.

Broadwater Lake was created by dredging for sand and gravel between the 1960s and 1980s and the 80-hectare lake itself represents 60% of the Mid Colne Valley SSSI. The lake is bounded on the west by the River Colne – a chalk stream, which is internationally rare, being one of only 240 worldwide. This biodiverse habitat is rarer than tropical rainforest and attracts a unique mix of wildlife. The Colne is especially important for bats, most significantly, Daubentons and Pipistrelle, with maternity roosts abundant here. Water margins provide a wonderful habitat for dragonflies and damselflies, whilst vegetated margins play host to Reed



SHOVERLER

and Sedge Warblers. In late summer, the lake becomes a haven for moulting ducks, who are unable to fly for about six weeks.

Grassland, wet woodland, reedbed and ponds add to the variety of habitats at the site – a heady mix for wildlife! It's well documented that HS2 Ltd have currently taken possession of the Trust's nature reserve and removed public access while work is ongoing. However, that does not stop the Swallows, Sand Martins and Swifts hunting insects over the SSSI's lake, bats flying over the river on warm summer evenings and wildfowl currently breeding in Scandinavia planning their winter visits to this vital wildlife haven.



POCHARD

Gravel extraction also led to the formation of Stocker's Lake, albeit some decades earlier in the 1920s and 1930s – in fact, gravel extracted from here was used in the building of the original Wembley Stadium! Today, Stocker's Lake is a harmonious site for people and wildlife. Whilst its circular path is foot, buggy and wheelchair friendly, it's home to the largest heronry in Hertfordshire with as many as 30 pairs of the birds breeding here in springtime, whilst in winter birdwatchers flock to see its influx of migrant wildfowl. Recent research has found that a Nathusius Pipistrelle bat flew all the way from Latvia to make the most of the habitats and food at the Lake – an international refuge for this tiny creature!

It's hard to believe that this area so close to one of the world's major cities constitutes wetland and wildlife gold!

Working in partnership

Fish are another wonderful wildlife feature of the Colne Valley and the presence of Chubb, Barbel, Bream, Carp, Tench, Trout, Eels, Pike, Perch and Dace is, of course, of much interest to the local angling community.

The Trust has worked in partnership with Colne Valley Regional Park, Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative and with funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund, matched with support from HS2 Additional Mitigation Plan, to train 44 anglers in wetland ecology, fisheries management and managing change, there have been 27 conservation/fishery management plans produced, and 23 fisheries have started practical conservation works to increase biodiversity.*

You can find out more about this project by watching the 'Love Fishing Love Nature – The Colne Valley' video: [youtube.com/watch?v=NRh4_Ol04Kc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRh4_Ol04Kc)

Endangered Water Voles have also benefited from the Trust's work in the Colne Valley with new volunteers being trained in Water Vole surveying and monitoring, for American Mink, a predator of Water Voles. Many landowners have been given habitat management advice beyond identified work sites and over 30km of river/ditch network surveyed for signs of occupation by our team and volunteers.

The progress that has been made in the Colne Valley on a landscape scale is testament to all the parties who have worked tirelessly to improve habitats, increase populations and enable their spread.

*2019 figures



WATER VOLE

© Terry Whittaker 2020VISION

Striving to protect the future of wildlife in the Colne Valley

Earlier this year, we called upon Government to re-evaluate nature loss in the Colne Valley following the publication of a new evidence report 'HS2 double jeopardy: how the UK's largest infrastructure project undervalued nature and overvalued its compensation measures' revealing fundamental flaws in the way HS2 Ltd has assessed the value of nature along the construction path of HS2. Find out more and read the full report here: [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/news/new-report-hs2](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/news/new-report-hs2)

Despite Broadwater Lake being an SSSI and already undergoing major disruption from HS2, this essential wildlife site now faces a new threat. Hillingdon Council are proposing to relocate the Hillingdon Outdoor Activity Centre (HOAC) to Broadwater Lake. While we support HOAC's aims of encouraging people to enjoy the natural environment and we recognise that their closure due to the construction of HS2 was a huge loss of the local area, this is not the right place for the centre and the development must not be allowed to go ahead. As it stands these proposals will cause irreversible damage to this nationally important site, acknowledged by its designation as an SSSI, and we are monitoring the situation carefully.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Please follow and support us on this journey as we do all we can to protect this nationally and internationally important site and stand up for its wildlife. Follow us @hertswildlifetrust on Instagram and Facebook and @HMWTBadger on Twitter to get the very latest updates.



For more information on the threat to Broadwater Lake and to find out how you can help to defend nature, visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/threat-broadwater-lake-sssi](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/threat-broadwater-lake-sssi)

wilder COMMUNITIES

Funding for the Trust's innovative two-year pilot project Wilder St Albans has recently come to an end. Here, Engagement Manager, Heidi Carruthers looks back, reflects and shares some of the truly inspiring stories of community-led action from across the District.



In April 2021 we embarked on Wilder St Albans aiming to educate and empower local communities and networks in the District to encourage them to take practical action to increase wildlife habitat on *their* patch.

Fast forward to 2023 and we're proud to report that more than an incredible 200 individual actions have been reported back to us over the lifespan of the project. These include the creation of 34 ponds, the installation of 42 swift boxes, five streets becoming the first in Hertfordshire to be 'Glyphosate Free', nearly two hectares of new meadow habitat have been created, 150 water voles were introduced back to The River Ver, and so much more!

These actions and many others are proof that there is a huge groundswell of interest and a large appetite amongst St Albans residents and landowners to create a Wilder St Albans. And that is something we should all be proud of!

Although the St Albans District Council supported project has officially

wrapped up, this really is just the beginning of a movement for change. We will no longer have a dedicated officer based in the District but the grassroots action continues and is causing ripples across the District and beyond. As an organisation, we have learnt so much over the last two years about the importance of taking time to listen to people and support them in a way that is right for them. All that we have learnt has been fed directly into the development of our wider Wilder Communities work. What better way to celebrate the project than to share some stories from the community. Here are four 'buds of brilliance' from across the District of St Albans.

- The student-led School Council at Skyswood Primary School in St Albans has driven forward plans to



volunteers back in the autumn of 2021, a team cleared a sunny scrub bank, seeded it with hedgerow wildflowers and planted a small row of trees to separate the bank from the road. After 18 months, the perennial wildflowers are starting to flower and the bank is coming alive with pollinators.

intergenerational allotment project bringing together their Saturday youth club and Tuesday morning coffee club to grow food as well as herbs and flowers to support pollinating insects.

leeannaswish.org/
As the Wilder St Albans project has shown, there are lots of people and projects, big and small, that are making a real difference. Amazing things can happen when we come together. And as we've seen time and again, you don't have to be an expert to do something good for nature.

For all of the project staff involved, it has been both humbling and a privilege to work with so many passionate people that are giving their time and energy to drive forward positive changes for local wildlife where they are. Wilder St Albans was where it began for us, with Wilder Watford and Dacorum following on. Now it's time for more villages, towns and boroughs to join in the fun!

create a pond - they have dug a whopper at 7m x 3m, which has been made possible with help from their supportive PTA. The School Council has created a scrapbook on how they made this happen, to share with their school community and other local schools.

- Jeff Lewis from the Smallford Station Project had a vision to make the entrance of this historic St Albans station more welcoming for people and wildlife. With the help of local

- A group of residents living on the same St Albans road organised and led a 'pond walk' for their neighbours. This short walk took in garden ponds along their road of all shapes and sizes with the aim of encouraging those without one to get digging! Four new ponds were dug as a result of one pond walk! wilderhoodwatch.org/toad-road/
- Leeanna's Wish is a local group that provides support for protected groups living in and around St Albans. Early this year they set up an

What Can We All Do to Support the Natural World

One Quick Win for Wildlife

Sharing is caring and plant swap groups are becoming increasingly popular, a win for communities both socially and ecologically.

There are many active groups across the UK sharing plants, seeds and space to connect with nature and it is easy to do with neighbours, friends and family. In particular, pollinator plant swaps are a great way of building crucial pollinator corridors in local areas for bees, butterflies and moths. No matter how small, from window boxes to gardens, these havens allow plants and pollinators to flourish and for us to enjoy the sounds, sights and scents they bring with them.

Go on... get swapping with friends and neighbours or search 'plant swap' to find a local group in your area.

Foxglove © Niall Benvie 2020VISION

Wildlife Wave

All of us have a part to play in spreading the word about the nature crisis and empowering others that there is something they can do to help. Why do we need more people talking about wildlife? Because we need more people on nature's side. We would love to challenge our members to have a conversation with just one other person about helping local wildlife. Let's try to create a wave of conversations. Now that the weather is warming up, why not have a chat with your neighbour over the garden fence or on the doorstep or with another parent at the school gates and share something you have noticed. It could be the solitary bees busily going in and out of the brickwork, the swifts screeching overhead or birds nesting close by. When we notice things in nature, we build a connection to it and your enthusiasm for the natural world will almost certainly be infectious.



Swift © David Tipling 2020VISION

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

Our Wild Supporters



Archers Green bridge © Lesley Davies

Archers Green campaign update

Last September, we launched our most ambitious campaign to date - to raise £500,000 to help us buy and protect Archers Green, a 20-acre site near Welwyn Garden City which is home to globally rare and fast declining wildlife habitats and species.

At the time of going to print, £343,580 has been raised towards that target, which is incredible. Thank you so much.

Latterly, our campaign has become particularly local and community focused. We continue to submit applications to grant-making bodies, including charitable trusts and foundations as well as secure support from local partner organisations, groups and businesses, but we still need your help please to hit our campaign target and secure this gem of a site.

Help us to save and protect Archers Green

As well as making a donation, there are lots of other ways you can support us. We would love you to reach out to your individual social networks, community groups, schools and employers, to see what support they can give. For example, simply sharing our campaign with your friends, family and colleagues is a great place to start - let them know how important Archers Green is for our wonderful wildlife and what a difference their support will make. Another fun idea is to raise funds by holding a bake-sale or organising a sponsored walk or other fundraising event in your local community.

If you have an idea for an activity and would like some help with your plans then get in touch! You can email our Fundraising Team at fundraising@hmwt.org

Together we can help save and protect this wonderful local site with its iconic habitats.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

For more information about Archers Green please visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/archersgreen or scan the QR code



£ New Look's year of fundraising to protect local wildlife

A massive thank you to the staff of New Look and the retailer's customers, for raising an incredible £3,165.94 for the Trust during 2022 through staff fundraising activities and customer donations at the till across nine local stores.

♥ Waitrose Enfield gives the Trust a little love

The Trust is so grateful to Waitrose Enfield for their incredible £1,000 donation through their *Give a Little Love* campaign. Thank you.

Does your workplace run a charity giving scheme? Do they encourage - or even match fund - staff fundraising? If this sounds like something you and your colleagues could support us with, please get in touch today. Drop us an email at fundraising@hmwt.org - we'd love to hear from you!

🌸 Easter Fundraising Installation in St Albans

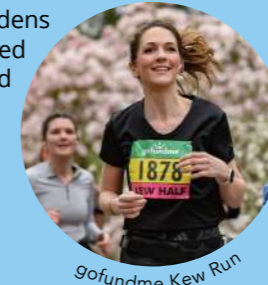
Hardware and software developer Christian Bianchini created an Easter installation - The Buzzy Bunny - for the St Albans community to enjoy, and to raise funds for the Trust. The idea of the game was to complete the loop in under two minutes without touching the copper wire and the buzzer sounding. Participants had lots of fun, received a chocolate egg for taking part and £127 was donated to the Trust. Thank you so much Christian and everyone who donated.



Running for wildlife

Huge thanks to Trust member, Rebecca Fincham, who ran in the Kew Gardens Half Marathon on 2 April and raised a wonderful £988.65 for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

Rebecca told the Trust: **"I absolutely loved running the Kew Half Marathon for the Trust. Running through the Cherry blossom, Magnolias and Daffodils in Kew was exhilarating - an energetic gardener's day out! The atmosphere was great, with lots of supporters and even when the last few miles along the Thames felt a bit gruelling, running for such a great charity and the support everyone had shown through their sponsorship kept me motivated throughout! I have loved every minute of this experience!"**



Sofundme Kew Run



FIND OUT MORE

Online

For more fundraising ideas, tips and advice, visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/fundraise and download our free Wild Fundraising Pack to get you started.

🌸 In remembrance

We would like to thank James 'Jim' Newman for kindly leaving a gift to the Trust in his will. We are extremely grateful to him for thoughtfully remembering the Trust in this special way. His friends and family also chose to support the Trust with donations in his memory. Our thanks and condolences go to them, as well as to the friends and family of Chris Barlow, Chris Bartram, George Harkus, Brenda May Lewis and Christopher Reeve who kindly donated to the Trust in their memories. These donations make a lasting contribution to our local conservation work and help ensure that the wildlife their loved ones cherished is protected for years to come.

🌸 A tribute to the late Brian Vincent Parkhouse

Brian was born on 30th October 1938 in Harrow on the Hill and throughout his life he was a lover of wildlife and the outdoors. In 1959, Brian married the love of his life, Kay, and they settled in Hertford. When Kay sadly passed away in 2005 it left an enormous hole in Brian's life and after a chance meeting with a volunteer when he was out walking one day he decided to volunteer for the Trust. For nearly 20 years, Brian showed a wonderful commitment and dedication to the Trust. He did a wide range of volunteering tasks including scrub clearance, infrastructure repairs and meadow cuts often accompanied by Dennis, a dog belonging to one of Brian's sons. Whatever the weather, Brian was ever-present on our midweek volunteer work parties in the Hertford area, and he was someone who was always enthusiastic and could be relied on for his calm head in any situation. One of Brian's lasting legacies amongst the volunteers and reserves staff, is his trusty old garden fork. Many garden forks have not stood the test of time, with bent prongs and broken handles, but not Brian's fork. Like Brian himself, the fork was constant, strong and unbreakable. Any work party of 'tree popping' would have been significantly less successful if it were not for Brian's fork and he took great pride in it. Work parties will not be the same without him. Brian will be remembered dearly and greatly missed by all those that knew him. The Trust is most grateful for all the donations received in Brian's memory. Thank you.



Astonbury Wood © Frieda Rummenhohl

🌸 Our Big Give Ancient Woodlands campaign

Thanks to your incredible generosity, £14,455.69 has been raised in our Big Give campaign to help protect and manage irreplaceable ancient woodlands across Hertfordshire and Middlesex. It's because of all our wonderful donors, a generous pledge from one of our major donors, and our Champion funder, The Reed Foundation, that threatened and treasured species that live in our local ancient woodlands will be protected. It's heartwarming to know, the money you donated will provide vital restoration work to ensure these unique habitats can thrive and provide a sanctuary to wildlife for years to come. Thank you.

Annual Review 2022/2023

When we look back over the past year and reflect on what has been achieved it is clear that we need to start with a big THANK YOU to all our staff, volunteers, members and other supporters. Together, everyone has helped enable us to achieve an enormous amount for wildlife, our local habitats and people.

From new nature reserves to first records, from restored habitats to newly created ones and from new associations with communities to a growing number of volunteers, this is a selection of highlights, headlines and milestones reached during the course of the 2022/2023 financial year.

Wildlife Highlights

Wild places across Hertfordshire and Middlesex have provided a year of wondrous wildlife sightings and recordings.



Feathered friends



- Throughout the winter, Jack Snipe were seen regularly at Lemsford Springs and rare ducks, Pintail and Goldeneye, were spotted at Amwell.
- Great White Egret were seen at Tring Reservoirs and there was the first record of a Cattle Egret for Hilfield Park Reservoir.
- Over 500 Golden Plovers made a showing at Tring.

Intriguing Invertebrates



- Good populations of Dingy Skipper butterflies were sighted at Waterford Heath and Aldbury Nowers, plus Chalkhill Blue butterfly numbers increased at Hexton.
- Nationally scarce bee, *Nomada flavopicta* was recorded at Aldbury Nowers and the Short-winged Conehead bush cricket was found for the first time at Thorley Wash.
- Emerald Dragonfly and Common Darters benefitted from the new ponds at Hilfield Park Reservoir, whilst Lesser Emperor dragonfly were seen at the new ponds at Wilstone Reservoir.



Fabulous flora

- Two plants of Herts Species of Conservation Concern were recorded – Mudwort and Lesser Marshwort, both of which are largely aquatic.
- Nationally rare, Norfolk Bladder-moss, and a Hertfordshire-rare moss *Riccia cavernosa* were recorded.
- A survey unveiled the highest numbers of Coralroot Bittercress at Old Park Wood since the early 1980s.
- There was a first record for Autumn Gentian, a late-flowering biennial, at Aldbury Nowers.



Magnificent mammals

- For the first time, the Harvest Mouse was found at Thorley Wash.
- Water Voles were reintroduced to the River Beane, and a 238% expansion of Water Vole populations recorded on the River Ver (one year post-reintroduction).



More space for nature

- During the year, we've made some great strides to ensure nature has a place to thrive.
- We acquired Astonbury Wood Nature Reserve, an ancient woodland site, near Stevenage, and Archers Green Nature Reserve, with flower-rich grasslands and a superb stretch of the River Mimram, near Welwyn Garden City.
 - Through our work, 28.6km of river was restored, protected or managed positively, 47 new ponds were created, plus 10 ponds were restored, protected or managed positively.
 - Through our pioneering Angling and Nature Conservation Project, 27 management plans for fisheries in the Colne Valley were put into effect, demonstrating true landscape-scale delivery.

More people taking action for wildlife

We all have a part to play in building a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex – here's how people-power helped nature's recovery over the past year.



Supported by over 22,500 members



Milestone of 1,000 active volunteers reached



Volunteers collectively gave over 2,650 days of their time



Launched Nextdoor Nature community projects in *Wilder Dacorum* and *Wilder Watford*



Launched Herts Wild Art combining the interests of art and nature to inspire more people



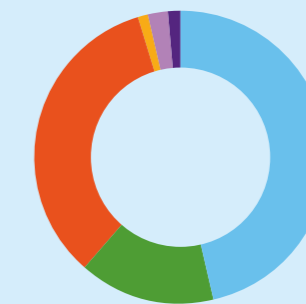
Over 4,400 people took part in over 300 Trust events

Standing up for nature

Creating a vibrant and sustainable future for wildlife means putting nature's recovery at the heart of local decision-making.

- During the last year, a total of 21,334 planning applications were reviewed, with 1,349 requiring further scrutiny.
- Herts Environmental Records Centre, which is hosted by the Trust, surpassed 3.2 million records held – vital data which informs conservation planning.

The Year In Numbers



Income:
TOTAL £2,564k

£1,190k
Membership Subscriptions

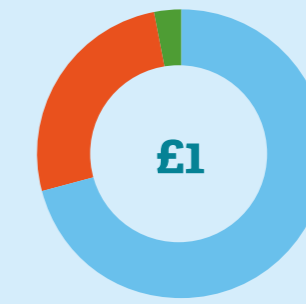
£863k
Donations, Gifts & Grants

£54k
Fundraising Activities

£390k
Fees & Contracts

£33k
Legacies

£34k
Investment & other income



Expenditure:
TOTAL £2,782k
For every £1 the Trust spends...

71p
Conservation & Nature Reserves

26p
Raising Funds

3p
Governance

We are very grateful to all our members, donors, grant funders and other supporters over the year.

Full details can be found in our Trustee Report and Accounts - bit.ly/43JWrTt



What's On

We've already got lots of exciting events scheduled for summer and into early autumn and we're adding more all the time. Here's a taster of what's on offer but make sure to check our events pages on the website to see what else is happening near you. Many of our events are free to attend and lots are suitable for families. Please note that places are limited, so we encourage you to sign-up as soon as you can to avoid disappointment.



July

- 21 July** **Wild Gin Tasting**, Tring Reservoirs, 1:30pm – 4:00pm, (over 18s)
- 22 July** **Great Oak Heritage Walk: In Royalty's Footsteps**, Panshanger Park, 2.30pm – 4.30pm

August

- 1 August** **Discover Hedgehogs**, Hornbeam Wood Hedgehog Sanctuary, Harpenden, 2.00pm – 3.00pm, (families)
- 2 August** **Bug Hunt At Purwell Ninesprings**, Purwell Ninesprings, Hitchin, 10.00am – 2.00pm
- 8 August** **Summer Tree Identification Workshop**, Fir and Pond Woods, Potters Bar, 10.00am – 3.30pm
- 16 August** **Hertfordshire's Dragons Online Talk**, 7.00pm - 8.15pm, MEMBERS ONLY
- 19 August** **Dragonfly Walk At Panshanger Park**, Panshanger Park, 2.00pm – 3.30pm
- 19 August** **Herts Pride - come and see our stand**, Cassiobury Park, Watford
- 25 August** **Bat Walk**, Astonbury Wood, near Stevenage, 7.45pm - 9.45pm, MEMBERS ONLY
- 29 August** **Discover Hedgehogs**, Hornbeam Wood Hedgehog Sanctuary, Harpenden, 2.00pm – 3.00pm, (families)

September

- 6 September** **Bat Walk**, Home Farm Glamping, Elstree, 7.30pm – 9.00pm
- 8 September** **Bat Walk**, Fairlands Valley Park, Stevenage, 7.15pm – 9.15pm
- 13 September** **Nature Writing Workshop**, Triangle Community Garden, Hitchin, 10.30am - 12.30pm
- 16 September** **Hedgehogs And How To Help Them**, Hornbeam Wood Hedgehog Sanctuary, Harpenden, 2.00pm – 3.00pm, (adults)
- 16 September** **Dragonfly Walks At Panshanger Park**, Panshanger Park, 11.00am – 12.30pm and 2.00pm – 3.30pm
- 23 September** **Bat Ecology And Survey Workshop**, Bayfordbury Campus, Bayfordbury, 1.00pm – 9.00pm
- 27 September** **Wildlife Gardening Online Talk**, 7.00pm – 8.30pm, MEMBERS ONLY

October

- 10 October** **What's Beneath Our Feet At Panshanger Park?**, Panshanger Park, 10.30am – 12.30pm



Join an event



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more and book your spot at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events



Heritage Open Days Weekend at Panshanger Park

Over 9 and 10 September, explore areas of Panshanger Park not usually open to the public through a special series of events.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

We will be hosting our next AGM on 30 September at All Nations Christian College, Easneye. Look out for the notice, further details of the AGM, and how to book on our website from 1 September 2023 – hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events