

## NEWS RELEASE

23 August 2010  
For immediate use

### Purwell purchase protects furry friends

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has secured a future for endangered mammals in Hitchin with the purchase of Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve. Water voles and otters will be amongst the animals protected by the acquisition.

Alison O'Dea, Wetlands for Water Voles and People Project Manager, said: "We have managed Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve for the last thirty years so it was wonderful to acquire the site from the Flint family recently. This is the best site in North Herts for water voles. The reserve is great for other wildlife too - otter footprints have been seen.

"We will be felling a number of trees on the site because they have started to encroach on the wet meadow, where water voles like to make their nests. This vital restoration work ensures that we maintain a balanced habitat for the protection of a diverse range of wildlife at Purwell Ninesprings. We have a great variety of woodland, meadow, reedbed and open water at the site – these habitats require careful management."

The Trust will also be carrying out works to make it easier for people to watch wildlife. A number of choked ponds will be restored and a board walk and viewing platform installed. Viewing areas on the boundary of the reserve will also be created – perfect places to spot our furry friends from.

The Wetlands for Water Voles and People Project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

**Ends/**

#### Notes for Editors

##### **Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust**

We are the leading voice for wildlife conservation in Hertfordshire and neighbouring areas. With 43 nature reserves spanning 1,900 acres, from beautiful woodlands and wetlands to rare patches of



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heath and orchard, we take practical action every day to help wildlife to flourish. The Wildlife Trusts are unique in being the only organisations that work to protect the full range of UK habitats and species, at a local level. <http://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/>

### **Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve**

The reserve is approximately 2km from Hitchin Railway station. Entry is from the Gypsy Lane bridleway which joins the junction between Kingswood Avenue and Purwell Lane at its north end, and Wymondley Road at its south end. There is a small parking area at the Kingswood Avenue end.

### **Wetlands for Water Voles and People Project**

Purwell Ninesprings is one of five wetland havens identified across Hertfordshire within the Wetlands for Water Voles and People project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and partners. These are some of the best wetlands in the county and provide great opportunities to get close to wildlife. The water vole project is now in its final stages and HMWT is undertaking an evaluation survey to find out how successful it has been - <http://englandmarketing.co.uk/survey/hmwt/hmwt.htm>

### **Water voles**

Water voles are the fastest declining mammals in the UK: 90% of the population has disappeared in the last 50 years as a result of habitat loss and the introduction of the North American mink. In Hertfordshire, water voles were once common but are now restricted to just a few wetlands in the Lee, Mimram, Beane and Chess Valleys and at Purwell Ninesprings.

### **Otters**

Otters became extinct in Hertfordshire in the late 1970s, with the River Mimram reputed to have supported the last breeding female otter at Tewinbury Nature Reserve in 1978. The cause of this national decline was direct persecution, loss of habitat and the contamination of wetland systems with pesticides. In 1991, two groups of captive bred otters were released into Hertfordshire by The Otter Trust. It was hoped that they would eventually re-colonise other rivers in Hertfordshire.

### **OtterCAM!**

A stealth camera is on the prowl in Hertfordshire on the look out for otters and other wildlife. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust staff check the camera regularly – any interesting sightings will be posted on the Trust's YouTube page!

### **Other wildlife at Purwell**

As well as water voles and otters, there are other species present: common frog, common toad and smooth newt have been recorded and the reserve supports several locally important bird species, including water rail, reed warbler, sedge warbler and reed bunting. Kingfishers have nested and wintering bird species include snipe, siskin and redpoll.

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