

# wildlifematters

Autumn 2019



Herts and  
Middlesex

NEWS FROM YOUR LOCAL WILDLIFE TRUST AND FROM AROUND THE UK

## Roving flocks

Meet the charismatic  
tit family 8



### » Bud-ding Detective

How to identify trees  
in winter 18

### » Life and Death

Find out what lives in  
and on deadwood 26

PROTECTING **WILDLIFE** FOR THE FUTURE



# WILDLIFE TRAVEL

More than 30 years of supporting nature conservation,  
**ALL our profits are donated to the Wildlife Trusts,**  
raising in excess of £220,000 since 1988.

Travel with us and help to protect your local wildlife.

**2020/21 destinations include:** Botswana, Ethiopia  
Chile, Colombia, Galapagos, Costa Rica  
Macedonia, Morocco, Armenia  
Scilly, Dorset, Devon, Burren  
France by train  
Poland  
Lesvos

relaxed pace  
expert leaders  
small friendly groups  
natural history holidays

[www.wildlife-travel.co.uk](http://www.wildlife-travel.co.uk)  
01954 713575



## Give the **Gift of Wildlife** this Christmas

Explore our range of Wild Gifts online at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop)



### Christmas Cards

10 for £5



### Experience Vouchers

from £10



### Wildlife Sponsorships

£20



### T-shirts

£19



### Identification guides

from £3.30

### Bug Explorer Kits

£10

### Gift Membership

Give the gift that keeps on giving.  
Treat a loved one to their own  
membership of the Trust for a  
whole year. From just **£42**.



Autumn 2019

# contents

Herts and Middlesex

NEWS FROM YOUR LOCAL WILDLIFE TRUST AND FROM AROUND THE UK



## LOCAL NEWS

- 4 Celebrating wildlife**  
Festival of Wildlife and Apple Day highlights
- 5 Rare bat population found**  
A new population of barbastelle bats discovered near Stevenage



## UK NEWS

- 6 A shore thing**  
New shoresearch programme launched for citizen scientists



## YOUR WILDLIFE TRUST

- 12** Discover how your local community has been supporting the Trust
- 16** Find what you can do to help local wildlife



## DAYS OUT

- 14 Stocker's Lake**  
Away from the hustle and bustle of the city lies a wildlife refuge
- 22 Nature's Calendar**  
Tim Hill shares his autumn and winter wildlife highlights



## CONSERVATION



### Meet the tits!

Learn more about this beautiful bird family

More on page 8

Great tits © Bob Coyle



## CONSERVATION

- 18 No Cold Case**  
Learn the skill of winter tree identification



## MICRO HABITATS

- 26 Deadwood**  
Learn more about this unexpected wildlife haven

# wildlifematters

## HERTS & MIDDLESEX WILDLIFE TRUST

Grebe House, St Michael's Street, St Albans, Herts AL3 4SN  
01727 858 901 info@hmwt.org  
hertswildlifetrust.org.uk

Editorial Team **Josh Kubale** and **Frieda Rummenhohl**  
01727 858 901 x 240  
Josh.Kubale@hmwt.org  
Frieda.Rummenhohl@hmwt.org

Membership **Alan Cotterell**  
01727 858 901 x 234  
membership@hmwt.org

Design TGDH www.tgdh.co.uk Printed on FSC® Certified Stock



More info online



Discover wildlife



Donate



Join an event



Do

Registered Charity No: 239863  
Registered in England: 816710

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced without written permission from the editor. The publishers do not necessarily identify with or hold themselves responsible for the views expressed by contributors, correspondents or advertisers.



Spring 2020 issue  
copy deadline:  
24 January 2020

Blue tit © Jon  
Hawkins, Surrey  
Hills Photography



Find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



## Welcome to the Autumn edition of Wildlife Matters.

As the days get shorter and colder, there are some wonderful autumn wildlife sights to spot – fungi in the woodlands and flocks of finches and tits out in search of food. The golden-brown leaves of oak, hornbeam and other trees make a spectacular backdrop to a wildlife walk.

Although there are still some magnificent wild places to explore, the picture on the whole for wildlife is not a pretty one. The State of Nature report, first published in 2013, has been updated for 2019. Sadly the report does not make happy reading - it reveals that 35% of English species have declined. Whilst there have been some 'winners', the alarming news is that 13% of the species assessed are now threatened with extinction. Butterflies have been particularly hard hit with numbers of butterflies down by 23%.

As our landscape becomes increasingly fractured, now more than ever we need to start creating a living landscape – a network of connected habitats where wildlife can move and thrive. Our nature reserves are important havens for wildlife, but alone they are not enough. We will continue to work with farmers and landowners to help them create spaces for wildlife.

Now, more than ever, your support for the Trust is vitally important. Thank you for continuing to fight for local wildlife.

*Lesley Davies*

## Celebrating wildlife

The Trust's Festival of Wildlife and Apple Day attracted close to 3,000 people this year.

Both events are free and family-friendly. They are a celebration of the wildlife we cherish and protect in Hertfordshire and Middlesex and aim to engage and inspire people.

The Festival of Wildlife at Panshanger Park was organised in association with Hertfordshire Natural History Society and in partnership with Tarmac. The July rain certainly didn't dampen the spirits, as welly boots and happy faces dominated the landscape. From minibeast safaris, a Chalk Stream Discovery Zone and a children's activity area to local craftspeople and

food producers, there was plenty to see and do over the course of the weekend.

Apple Day, a celebration of all things apple in October, offered tours of Tewin Orchard, craft stalls, home-made cakes as well as fresh apples and apple juice from the orchard. The nature crafts and storytelling marquee hosted a range of children's activities.

We thank Councillor Ken Crofton for helping to fund Apple Day with his Locality Budget and all our volunteers who helped make both events such a great success.



Festival of Wildlife 2019

## Rare bat found near Stevenage

One of Britain's largest barbastelle populations found near St Paul's Walden.

The colony of over 90 bats was found as part of the Hertfordshire Barbastelle Project - a research collaboration between Herts and Middlesex Bat Group and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The project aims to learn more about the barbastelle bat which is one of the rarest bat species in the UK with an estimate of around 5,000 specimen. The maternity colony is only the third to be discovered in Hertfordshire.

Tracking, using specialist equipment, helps find maternity roosts. The survey team uses remote detectors to find a concentration of barbastelle activity and commuting routes. Nets are then set up to catch the bats which are fitted with radio tags that lead the researchers to the maternity roost where emerging bats can be counted and surveyed.

Very little is known about this species in the UK and this project is directly contributing to records and helping to shed light on their activity in our area.



Barbastelle © SARAH MILLER



© TITH WILLY

## High Speed 2 at Broadwater Lake

It is with sadness that we have to announce that High Speed 2 is formally taking possession of Broadwater Lake.

The HS2 route crosses the Mid-Colne Valley Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) on a viaduct bisecting the Trust's Broadwater Lake. The nature reserve might be closed for public access for the duration of the viaduct construction, estimated to be seven years.

At the time of printing, we do not know the results of the independent review that was initiated in August, but we welcome the process. The Trust had objected to the HS2 route since it was first proposed due to the impact on the ecology of Broadwater Lake. While we have been unable to stop the scheme, we believe our collective action has helped reduce some of the worst impacts of HS2.



For up-to-date information, please visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/broadwaterlake](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/broadwaterlake)

## Council is taking swift action for wildlife

Stevenage Borough Council will provide funding to install nesting boxes for swifts as part of its social housing renovation.

The plan, which will see over 70 boxes installed over a five-year period, forms part of Stevenage's Biodiversity Action Plan that the Council developed in partnership with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The plan helps to ensure that wildlife is considered in new development and renovation works.

The work will be carried out by construction company Mulalley who are installing the boxes free of charge. Swifts have seen a drastic decline in populations – they have decreased by 53% between 1995 and 2016 – which is mainly due to a loss of suitable nesting places.



© MULALLEY

Swift box on house



Find out more about these and other stories at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/news](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/news)



# A shore thing



Shoresearchers: Ulster Wildlife

A shoal of citizen scientists across the UK will be learning more about our shorelines than ever before, following the launch of The Wildlife Trusts' new and improved Shoresearch programme this summer.

This national citizen science survey trains volunteers to monitor the marine life around our coasts, gathering valuable data that will help experts monitor our sea life and better understand the effects of pollution and climate change.

Surveys focus on the intertidal zone (the area of the shore that is covered by water at high tide, but exposed to the air at low tide). They take place on all shores, rocky, sandy and muddy alike, to chart coastal wildlife around the UK.

Anyone can become a budding marine biologist by attending a free Shoresearch event hosted by a coastal Wildlife Trust. Regular volunteers will be trained to identify and record intertidal plants and animals and their habitats, from colourful butterflyfish hiding in rockpools to weird and wonderful worms buried in the sand and mud.

Previous Shoresearch surveys have used different approaches depending on which part of the UK they took place in.

Now, for the first time, the same methods will be used across the UK, giving us even better data and ensuring that species records can be compared between different regions and changes can be monitored.

The data collected by Shoresearch in the past has already been key to securing many of our Marine Conservation Zones, revealing the special places on our coast that are most in need of protection. Following the Government's designation of 41 new Marine Conservation Zones this summer (bringing the total in English waters to 91), the Shoresearch programme will be crucial for monitoring the health of the coastal regions of many of these protected areas.

Shoresearch launched during this year's National Marine Week, the annual celebration of our seas in which thousands of people enjoyed coastal activities, from rockpool rambles to whale watching.

## A Year of Success for our seas

■ **More protection** – this May the Government announced the designation of 41 new Marine Conservation Zones, adding to the 50 already designated. These will form a vital series of underwater habitats which, with the right management, will allow nature to recover.

■ **Better information** – The Wildlife Trusts' new Shoresearch programme launched in July, giving citizen scientists the chance to survey our shores, gathering vital data on the health of our coastal wildlife.

■ **Fantastic support** – thousands of people across the UK, Alderney and the Isle of Man joined us in celebrating our seas during National Marine Week.



### Get involved

Learn more about Shoresearch and discover how you can get involved:

[wildlifetrusts.org.uk/shoresearch](http://wildlifetrusts.org.uk/shoresearch)

## End of an era

Stephanie Hilborne OBE has stepped down as Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts. Steph has led The Wildlife Trust movement, championing its beliefs and vision, for the last 15 years.

Under Steph's leadership, The Wildlife Trusts have been at the forefront of marine conservation, successfully campaigning for the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, led on landscape-scale conservation and published ground-breaking research on the benefits of nature for health and wellbeing.

Speaking about her departure, Steph said, "I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to be so central to this amazing movement of dedicated people who care so passionately about wildlife and future generations. I wish all my friends in the movement well as they go from strength to strength."

We wish Steph all the best in her new role as CEO of Women in Sport.



## 25 years of support

This November, The National Lottery celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and we look back on a quarter of a century of support for wildlife and wild places across the UK.

Since the first draw in 1994, The National Lottery has raised over £40 billion for good causes – including more than 800 Wildlife Trust projects.

This vital funding has enabled Wildlife Trusts to save thousands of hectares of land,

protect rare and vulnerable wildlife and bring people of all generations closer to nature, from helping barn owls in Northern Ireland to restoring wild landscapes in Scotland.

Learn more about the work that The National Lottery has supported at [wildlifetrusts.org/25-year-lottery](http://wildlifetrusts.org/25-year-lottery)



## Saving sand dunes

A pioneering project is stepping in to save Europe's most threatened habitat, sand dunes. Home to rare plants and animals, including fen orchids and sand lizards, the last century has seen them decline dramatically. The ambitious Dynamic Dunescapes project aims to reverse these declines, working with local people to bring life back to our dunes. This partnership project was made possible by £4m funding from The National Lottery. [wildlifetrusts.org/saving-sand-dunes](http://wildlifetrusts.org/saving-sand-dunes)



Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are working for you across the UK



### 1 Moor wildlife

600 acres of wildlife-rich moorland have been saved from potential development by Northumberland Wildlife Trust, thanks to incredible support for their fundraising appeal. Benshaw Moor is home to round-leaved sundews and sphagnum mosses, as well as nesting curlews, otters and rare butterflies. The site will now be protected as a nature reserve.

[nwt.org.uk/news/benshaw](http://nwt.org.uk/news/benshaw)



### 2 Tern tracking

For the first time ever, chicks from Wales' only Sandwich tern colony have been given special "flags" to help birdwatchers track their movements. Each flag, fixed to a ring on the bird's leg, has a unique code that can be read through a spotting scope, helping us learn more about these seabirds.

[northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/news/ringing-changes](http://northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/news/ringing-changes)

### 3 Going batty

The largest ever survey of Alderney's bat population has revealed the island's first live brown long-eared bat. For Alderney Wildlife Trust's 'Bat Week', visiting experts trained residents in survey techniques while conducting an island-wide study. They also found five pipistrelle roosts, including a maternity roost, and a natterer's bat.

[alderneywildlife.org/bat-week-2019](http://alderneywildlife.org/bat-week-2019)



# Meet the Tits

*Tsee tsee chuchuchu.* We hear the high-pitched song before we see it. A dash of blue between the trees, a yellow belly shoots past. We're at Gobions Wood in search of what is one of our most familiar birds – the tit.





Also known as chickadee – onomatopoeic after the “chick a dee dee dee” call, this bird family is a curious bunch. Tit actually means small, as in the word ‘titbit’ for a small morsel of food. And small they are. These predominantly woodland birds are well-known garden visitors. Their striking plumage makes for easy identification and they’re a joy to watch, daintily hopping and bouncing between the feeders.

### **Roving flocks**

In the UK we have eight different birds with the name, five of which can be found in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The best time to see them is the winter when bare-branched trees don’t obstruct the view and no colourful flowers camouflage the blue and yellow. While other birds migrate for the winter, tits mostly stay in the UK.

Here’s another reason why now is the best time to look out for them: between August and February, many tit species gather together and move through their feeding grounds in noisy flocks. This is a classic example of safety in numbers, with more eyes to watch out for predators, especially once the protection of the leafy canopy has gone. It is also thought that birds take advantage of individuals in the flock that are good at locating the best feeding sites.

These roving flocks can vary both in size and number of species they contain. An average flock may contain 10-20 birds but in exceptional circumstances can exceed 100. A typical number of species to expect might be four or five in such a group, such as blue tit, great tit, long-tailed tit, coal tit and goldcrest, although it is not unusual to count double that.

So keep your eyes peeled for these charming little birds as they move through gardens, hedgerows or woodlands and listen out for calls of different species in one place – chances are there’s a flock roving around.



Attract these birds to your garden by providing food and a nest box.



# Who's Who?



## Blue tit

The blue tit is one of our most colourful and recognisable garden visitors. Back in the days when milk was delivered to your front door in glass bottles, it was known to peck a hole into the foil cover and steal the cream from the top. While there are migratory species in northern Europe, British blue tits are strictly resident. In fact, it is thought that nearly 99% of all blue tits move less than 20km in winter.

Their striking plumage is mostly yellow but with a blue head, wings and tail – the blue tit is the only British tit with blue colour in its plumage. The face is white with two black stripes covering the eyes.

Blue tits prefer broad-leaved woodlands but thrive in urban and suburban areas. It is thought that their numbers are on the rise, potentially due to the provision of nest boxes and supplementary feeding in gardens.

## Great tit

Larger than the blue tit, the great tit also has a yellow belly, but with a big black strip down the middle. The head is white, with black cheeks.

Their call is distinctively indistinctive: It is a well-recognised double-note with up to 40 variations of it, so if you hear a call you cannot identify, it may well be from a great tit.

Even though they are woodland birds and, like all other tits, cavity nesters, they will happily nest in human proximity and man-made sites such as post boxes. This has made them a popular study subject for ornithologists and led to them being one of the most intensely studied birds.



See which birds you can discover on your winter walk. Visit one of our woodland reserves such as Balls Wood or Gobions Wood for a good chance of spotting them.

## Coal tit

The same size as the blue tit, the coal tit is more muted. The plumage is mainly grey with a distinctive black head and white cheeks like the great tit but it has a white stripe running down the back of the head.

It is a bird of coniferous woodland where it nests in tree holes. It has adapted and can also be found in parks and gardens with conifer trees and will happily make a home in nest boxes. Coal tits are active feeders, hunting out insects and spiders among the smaller branches and leaves of trees in woodlands. In the winter months, it will seek out gardens in search of food, in particular peanuts.

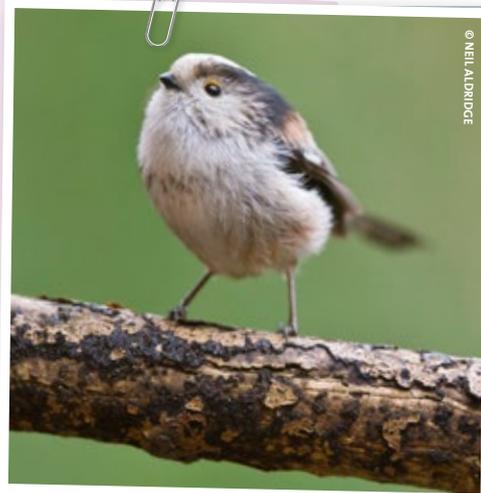


## Long-tailed tit

Probably the most acrobatic of our tits, the long-tailed tit is really living up to its name – its tail is longer than the body. It is a very small and rotund bird – essentially a small, fluffy, flying ball with a long tail.

Long-tailed tits have a beautiful plumage with a pale pink belly, white head, black eyestripe and a black, white and pink back. They're best found in hedgerows and woodlands but are a frequent visitor to our gardens and parks. They're very social birds and can often be seen in small groups hopping from branch to branch. Listen out for them in roving flocks. It is often their constant chattering giving the game away.

The long-tailed tit is not a typical tit. In fact, they are more closely related to some Asian species than to our blue tits and great tits. This explains why they are not cavity nesters like our other tits which will happily take to the nest boxes we provide. Long-tailed tits build elaborate domed nests in trees or shrubs, camouflaged with cobwebs and lichens and lined with a whopping 1,500 feathers to make it nice and soft for their offspring. In case their nest does not succeed, adults will sometimes help raising their neighbour's young, proving just how social they are by looking out for each other.



## Marsh tit

If you hear what appears to be a sneeze on your winter walk, watch out for the marsh tit whose song is a distinctive pitchoo. Compared to the long-tailed tit, the marsh tit does not what it says on the tin, being most often found in broadleaf woodland, parks and gardens. It's small and mostly brown with a shiny black cap, black bib and a pale belly. It is so similar to the willow tit that ornithologists didn't realise they were two separate species until almost the 20th century. Sadly, the willow tit is now locally extinct in our area – a fate that might befall the marsh tit as well. Having declined by 50% in the past 25 years, it has already found itself on the Red List of Species of Conservation Concern, most likely due to the decline in mature woodlands and dense understorey habitat.

Their diet consists of mainly insects, seeds and berries, but it will happily visit garden feeders when food sources elsewhere are scarce. If it finds a good supply, it will start hoarding, burying the nuts for tougher days. They nest in existing tree holes, rather than excavating their own, and can hold huge territories, up to three times the size of those of great tits.

## Your Vote Counts

Ware Asda kindly selected us for their green token giving scheme this summer. Thanks to your votes the store generously donated £500 to the Trust.

Thanks to Northwood Waitrose for donating £320 through their Community Matters scheme and a huge thank you to everyone that voted for us.



## A warm welcome

We are delighted to welcome Borrás Construction as new Silver Business Members. Borrás is a local, award-winning considerate construction company. Carol, their Social Value Coordinator said “At Borrás, we’re proud of becoming business members of the Trust. This partnership comes at a great time, with Borrás carrying out a lot of environmental work to sustain and benefit wildlife and the environment around us. Our aim is to develop and nurture a great relationship with the Trust.”



## Running Wild

This summer, adventurous supporters of the Trust bounced, crawled and climbed their way around the St Albans Inflatable 5k to help protect local wildlife. The fun-filled day helped raise over £550 for the Trust.

**Thank you to everyone who took part, you're amazing!**

## In Remembrance

We are extremely grateful to **Joyce Simpson** and long-standing member, **Dorothy Mary Whiteley** for kindly leaving a gift in their wills to the Trust. We are thankful for their support in this special way which will make a lasting contribution to our work.

Our thanks and sincerest condolences to the friends and families of **Harold Smith**, a much-loved volunteer and long-standing members **Margery Chambers** and **Etain Petty** for kindly donating to the Trust in their memory. These donations help us ensure the wildlife their loved ones cherished is protected for years to come.

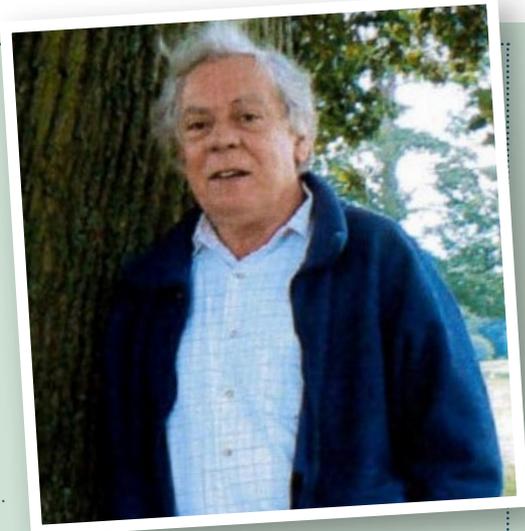


Find out how you can support local wildlife at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/fundraising](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/fundraising)

## A tribute to the late John Moss

John Moss, a skilled local naturalist and active Local Wildlife Sites surveyor, sadly passed away on 16 January 2019. John began volunteering with the Trust in the 1990s, helping to map the Phase 1 Herts Vegetation Survey. In 1997, he became a founding member of the Wildlife Sites surveyor team, visiting Wildlife Sites all over Hertfordshire, recording plants, mapping and describing habitats and submitting this information to the Trust and the Herts Biological Records Centre (now HERC).

During the winter, John joined other surveyors in the HBRC, inputting and retrieving information about the Wildlife Sites for the following year's surveys. In 2001-2, John spent two winters undertaking a veteran tree survey of 250 trees in Brocket Park, writing an article about this which was published in the Hertfordshire Naturalist. John continued his work for the Wildlife Sites Partnership until 2013 and was a regular and increasingly skilled surveyor with an extensive knowledge of the county. He was a quiet, modest and thoughtful team member with a keen interest in many aspects of the natural world, submitting many records for the Herts Bird Club as well as Butterfly Conservation. He is greatly missed by many.



## Puddingstone Distillery

It's been another busy year for our friends at the Puddingstone Distillery. Through running fantastic gin tasting events and selling the ever-popular Himalayan balsam gin they have raised over £1,700 to help us continue our local conservation work. We're grateful for their continued support.



## The Pudding Stop

Thanks to our friends at The Pudding Stop in St Albans for supporting the Trust and raising vital funds for wildlife. For every sale of their delicious Raspberry Eton Mess this summer, they kindly donated 50p to the Trust, raising an incredible £500 for wildlife. Thank you!

## Working for Wildlife Days

Platinum Business Members UK Power Networks enjoyed a day of picking apples at Tewin Orchard Nature Reserve. We were very happy to welcome a team of 16 UKPN staff who spent the day picking apples. Those were mostly pressed to produce delicious apple juice which was on sale at the Trust's Apple Day in October.

Sean Tyrrell, a commercial manager for UK Power Networks said: "We managed to pick over three thousand apples and filled all of the containers available with apples for pressing into juice and for sale at Apple Day. It is great to be able to get together as a team and help out in this way, especially with such a big event on the horizon for the charity. We had a lot of fun, but what we enjoyed most of all was making our own contribution to such a fantastic cause."

## Recycling for wildlife

If you are planning to declutter over Christmas and the New Year, please use your unwanted items to raise money for wildlife. Our new recycling partner, Recycling for Good Causes, can recycle many items from gadgets, to jewellery to stamps. You can send your items in the envelope provided in this issue, or by visiting [recyclingforgoodcauses.org](http://recyclingforgoodcauses.org). Every item recycled will generate funds to support our work.





© EMMA MATHIAS

Heron © TIM HILL

# 1 Stocker's Lake

On the edge of the big city, away from the hustle and bustle lies a green haven, a refuge for people to reconnect with nature and for wildlife to thrive.

Stocker's Lake, owned by Affinity Water, is one of the oldest gravel pits in the Colne Valley. Much of the gravel extracted from here in the 1920s and 30s contributed to development in the city, particularly the old Wembley Stadium. Since extraction ceased, the lake was allowed to fill with water which, over time, has created the nature reserve you find today, rich in wildlife.

Nowadays, Stocker's Lake is a paradise for bird watchers throughout most of the year. Winter particularly will see an influx of wildfowl on the lake, as thousands of ducks migrate in from places such as Russia, Iceland and Scandinavia. Stocker's Lake is also home to the largest herony in Hertfordshire. Herons are usually solitary birds but gather once a year in early spring to breed. You can see them stalking in the shallows of Stocker's Lake all year round, but from February, you can catch

a rare glimpse of up to 20 nests in the trees on the lake's islands, alongside little egrets which are classified as a rare breeding bird in this country.

Coming from Frogmore Lane, take the circular walk around the lake. Visit one of the three hides around the lake or the heron viewpoint. What wildlife can you spot? Wigeon, gadwall, pochard, mallard and shoveler are a plenty, diving and dabbling for food. Great crested grebes are more muted in their winter plumage. If the winter is particularly cold, you could also spot ducks like smew and goldeneye. Cetti's warblers can be heard blasting out their loud staccato melody from the reeds, but it is not often you can see them. What you can see are siskin galore – in winter, the alder trees on the north east side of the lake can often host flocks of around 50 of these charming finches. Recently, we discovered signs of water voles at the lake. They are the UK's

fastest-declining mammal and under serious threat of extinction. We have recently started an exciting project to protect the Colne Valley water voles, so this is a great step forward and shows that Stocker's Lake is a crucial link within the living landscape of the Colne Valley.

The Trust is working in partnership with Affinity Water to conserve and enhance Stocker's Lake for people and wildlife..

### Know before you go

**Location:**

WD3 1NB, just south of Rickmansworth

**Open:**

Open and free at all times



Find out more at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/stockerslake](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/stockerslake)



## 2 Tring Reservoirs

### Why now?

In winter, Tring Reservoirs are teeming with wildfowl migrating here, thus having become one of the best birdwatching spots in southern England.

### Know before you go

#### Location:

HP23 4PA, 3km North West of Tring

#### Open:

Open and free at all times, free parking at Wilstone Reservoir

**Wildlife to spot:** Wildfowl, especially shoveler and wigeon, bittern

#### The lowdown

Comprising four individual reservoirs – Startops End, Marsworth, Tringford and Wilstone reservoir – Tring Reservoirs are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for a number of reasons. Their situation on the lower chalk at the foot of the Chilterns escarpment results in diverse communities of plants and animals.

During colder months, you can find a large number of wintering wildfowl across all four reservoirs, including tufted duck, pochard, teal, gadwall, wigeon and shoveler with occasional goldeneye, goosander and smew if it is very cold. Marsworth Reservoir is a great place to see overwintering bitterns, as this site has a fantastic reedbed that retains its water to allow the birds to feed throughout the season.

In spring and summer, you might spot a passing osprey or hobby and large numbers of reed and sedge warblers breed here.



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

## 3 Lemsford Springs

### Why now?

The spring-fed lagoon of this old watercress bed never freezes. At a constant 10 degrees, the water provides a home for aquatic invertebrates, especially freshwater shrimp, attracting waders all year round.

### Know before you go

**Location:** AL8 7TN, Lemsford on the Western edge of Welwyn Garden City

**Open:** Open and free at all times; a key is required to get through the gate which can be obtained at the warden's house

**Wildlife to spot:** Wading birds, especially green sandpipers, water shrew

#### The lowdown

In the 19th and 20th century, watercress was cultivated here. When production ceased in 1966, Lemsford Springs became a Trust nature reserve shortly after. With 4.5 hectares, it's

relatively small but packs in an array of habitats, from lagoons to woodland to reedbed.

The reserve hosts a number of green sandpipers which have been the subject of a long-term study on their migration by volunteer warden Barry. The sandpipers are present throughout most of the year – migrating only for a short period of time in summer to breed in Norway.

In winter, our sandpipers and other resident birds will be joined by other waders when water courses elsewhere freeze over. Water shrew thrive here thanks to the abundance of fresh water shrimp and 50 different species of water snail can be found in the lagoon.



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

# Appeal Update

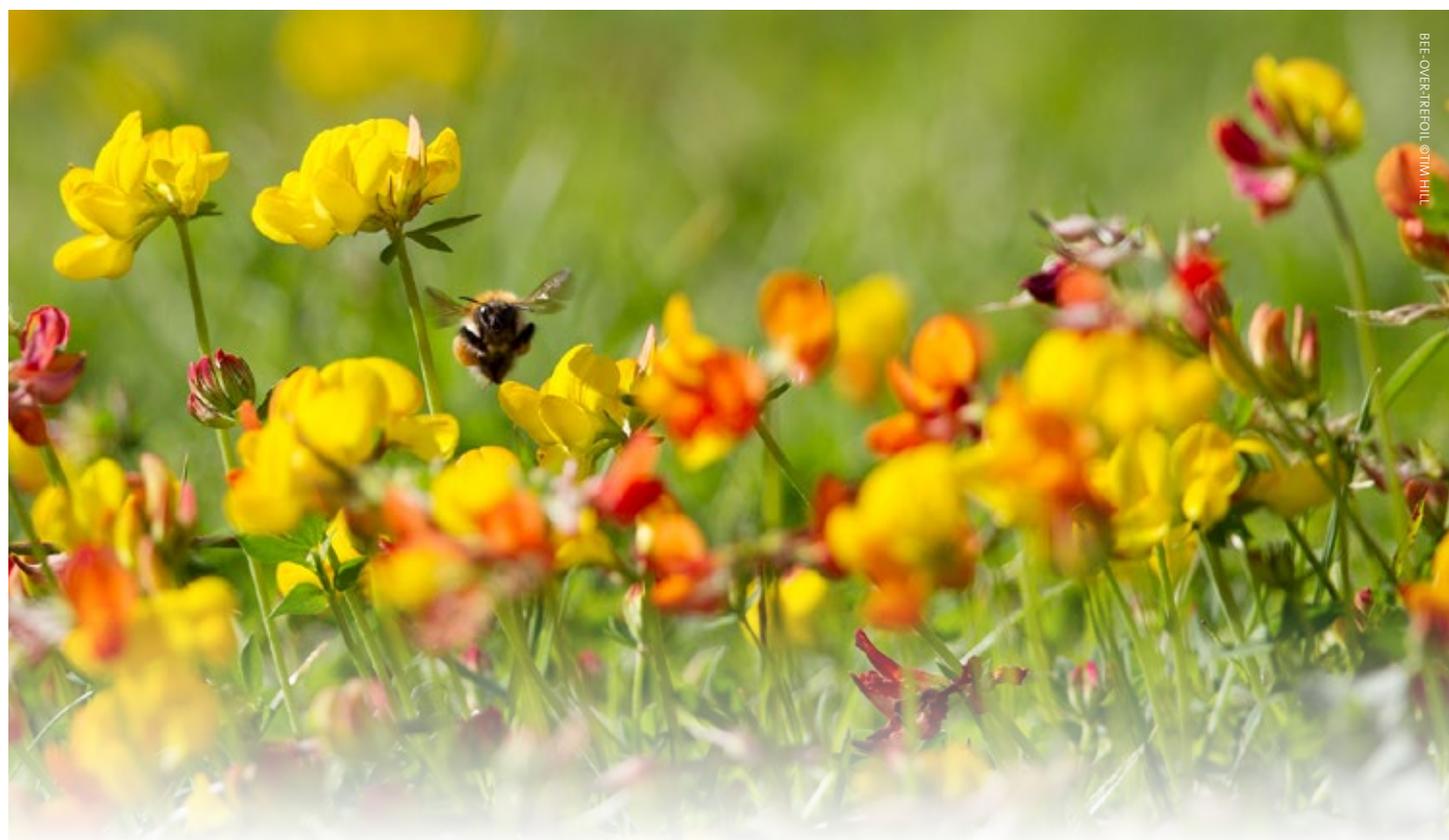
## Nature's Engineers

This summer, you helped us to raise an amazing £10,000.

Because of your support, cattle have been grazing at our nature reserves like Long Deans and Danemead to control scrub and help maintain our species rich grasslands.

Thanks to you our pigs have continued to help at Amwell, maintaining the bare ground habitat, for waders like lapwing.

**Thank you!**  
This work would not have been possible without your support.



## Now, let's get Hertfordshire buzzing!

Bees are essential, but many species are struggling. The devastating loss of 97% of our wildflower meadows across the UK has contributed to their decline.

Today, only 0.5% of Hertfordshire remains as wildflower meadow. This winter, we need your help. A donation today can help us carry out the vital maintenance work needed on our wildflower meadows and reserves to ensure they are in perfect condition for our bees when they return in the spring.

 Please support our appeal by donating online at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/appeal](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/appeal) or call 01727 858 901.

# New Year - New you!

Take part in a challenge event this year to get fit, have fun and help raise vital funds for wildlife.



## St Albans Inflatables 5k, Saturday 20 June

Gather your friends and take on the UK's biggest inflatable obstacle course.

With 15 fun-filled obstacles, you'll be flying down slides, clambering through tunnels and leaping over hurdles – and that's just to start!

It's suitable for all fitness levels so sign up today for an extraordinary day out.

**Tickets cost £30 and include an exclusive Trust T-shirt.**

Limited spaces available.



Book your place at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/challengeyourself](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/challengeyourself)

## Chess Valley Challenge, Saturday 13 June

Join us for our ten-mile walking challenge.

You'll discover the beautiful River Chess, explore our stunning Frogmore Meadows Nature Reserve and stumble across charming old villages and country pubs. The event is suitable for the whole family with a shorter walking route available.

**Registration costs £10 for adults and £5 for children.**



## What's your challenge?

Discover our range of challenges and find one to suit you.





# Solving a Cold Case:

## How to identify trees in winter

*Andrew Holtham is a longstanding Trust volunteer and tree specialist – regardless of the season. Andy has written a handy booklet 'Identifying Trees In Winter' and here helps us to tell ash from oak without relying on their leaves!*



Do you ever look at the giant skeleton of a tree in winter and wonder what species it is? Identifying trees in winter seems tricky – if not impossible – aren't they lacking all the features used for identification? Despite its reputation, identifying trees in winter is not much more difficult than in summer, just less familiar to most of us.

Trees cut both ways when it comes to identification. They are easy to spot and they do not run or fly away when you approach them. You can even come back another day to check up details you missed the first time – at least until someone decides to cut the tree down; this has happened to me more than once. On the other hand, we have to cope with all the exotic trees that have been brought back to Britain from around the world, making identification difficult – some of our streets and parks are like tree zoos. Some trees even have the annoying habit of producing hybrids together.

The form of a tree depends on its age and environment – think of an oak sapling, a 70-year old tree in dense woodland and a veteran tree in a park – all the same species, but how would you know? In summer, identification focuses on the characteristics of leaves, as these are more or less constant across a species whatever size and shape the tree. Flowers and fruit can be as useful, but they are not always there when you need them.

If a tree is evergreen – think conifers or holly – this approach will work all year round. Most of our trees lose their leaves in autumn which is why we need a different approach in winter. This is why we study the buds.



Learn new ID skills in this area and join one of the Trust's workshops "Identifying trees in winter" on 23 January and 20 February, led by Andrew, or a Winter Tree Walk on 7 December.

**Book your place at**  
[hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events)



# What are buds?

Buds are embryonic growth that lies dormant over the winter, ready to start growing next spring.

Buds can be waiting to produce new shoots and leaves, flowers or both. Normally, they are covered in bud scales that offer protection from the weather and pests – for instance they can contain toxins to deter browsing. Buds can grow on the end of a twig – then they are called terminal buds – or on the sides of twigs – then they are called lateral buds. Sometimes the two are a different shape and size.

When examining the buds, there are three questions that are always useful to ask:

- Are the lateral buds arranged in opposite pairs along the twig, or do they alternate up the twig?
- Are the lateral buds pressed tight against the twig (appressed) or do they stick out (distant)?
- How many bud scales are there? In particular, are there 3 or fewer, or more than 3?

Just answering these three questions can often go a long way to identifying your tree. The table shows how the common trees and shrubs in Hertfordshire divide on these questions.

	Alternate Buds		Opposite Buds	
	Appressed	Distant	Appressed	Distant
<b>&gt;3 Bud Scales</b>	Buckthorn Poplars (inc. Aspen)	Apples Beech Birches Cherry Plum Elms Hawthorns Hazel Hornbeam Laburnum	Oaks Rowan Walnut Whitebeans Wild Cherry Wild Service Tree	Buckthorn  Elder Field Maple Horse Chestnut Lilac Norway Maple Privets Snowberry Spindle Sycamore
<b>0-3 Bud Scales</b>	Willows	Alder Goat Willow Limes Sweet Chestnut		Dogwood (zero buds)  Ash Guelder Rose Wayfaring Tree (zero buds)

After this, the shape, colour and size of the buds can all be important. Be aware that colour can vary drastically.

Having got as much from the buds as possible, other clues can be brought into play – is the bark unusual? Is there any old fruit on the tree? Are there any flowers (some trees, such as hazel, carry male catkins over winter)? Is it thorny? And so on.

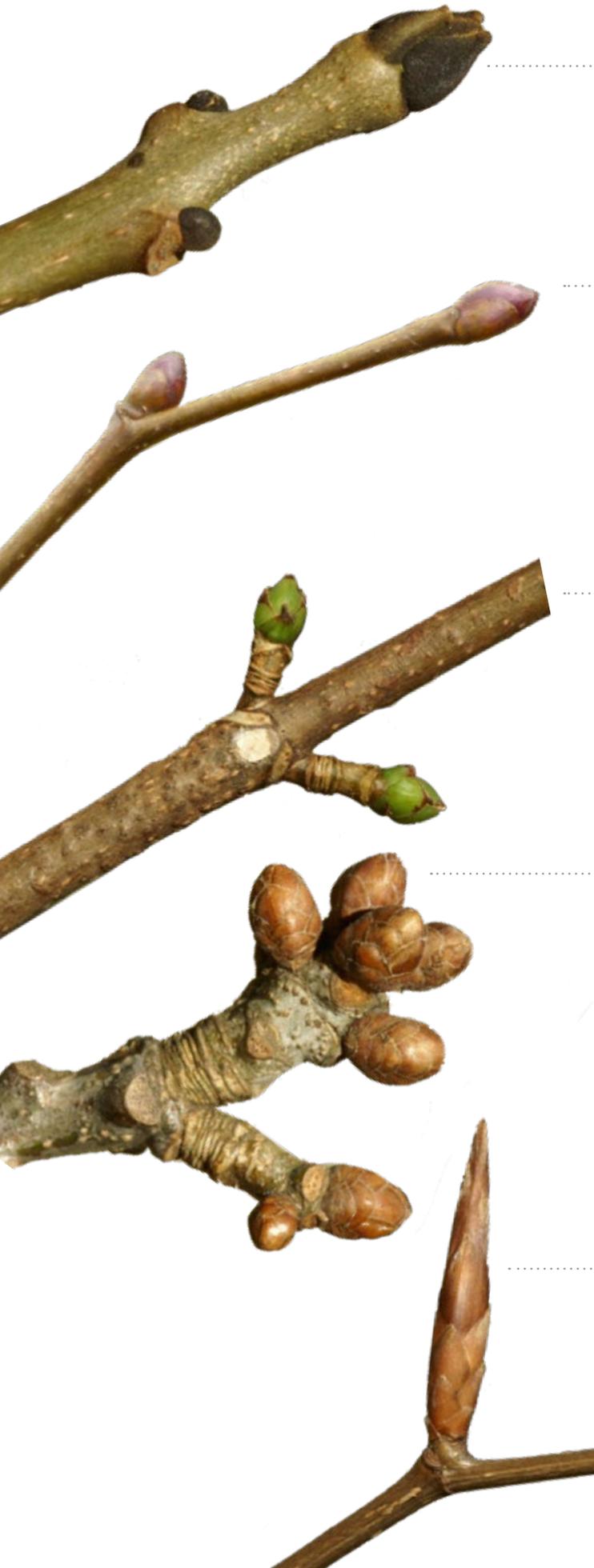
## Literary support

If you want to try your hand at winter tree identification, I would not recommend using a standard tree book; the illustrations of the buds and winter twigs are just not up to the job. It is much better to get one of the specialised field guides that are available. The Field Studies Council publishes two guides. One is a structured key where you answer a series of questions to gradually narrow your choice until the answer pops out – if you're lucky. It covers 71 species and is an excellent aid to learning, as it prompts you to ask the right questions about what you can see. It is a shame it does not include proper illustrations – merely line drawings – and it does not cope very well with Hertfordshire's elms.

The other book is a photo guide with photographs of buds, bark and twigs that you match to your tree. This is also a nice little book, but it only covers 38 species. The books work well together – use the key to make a tentative identification then use the photo guide to check everything looks right.

Another option is "Identification of Trees and Shrubs in Winter Using Buds and Twigs", an encyclopedia published by Kew, although, weighing in at 1.8kg, this can hardly count as a field guide.

**In the meantime, to get you started, here are five trees to look out for this winter:**



**Ash**

Ash is one of the easiest trees to identify in winter with its compact, sooty-black buds arranged in opposite pairs – there is really nothing else quite like it. On top of this there are often distinctive winged seeds still on the tree.

**Lime**

Lime buds have one or two larger scales and one small scale, giving them the look of a boxing glove or mitten. They are often deep red, or at least green with a distinct red tinge. We have three native species in Hertfordshire (common, small-leaved and large-leaved). Depending on the species, limes also often have strongly zig-zag twigs and a dense fringe of sprouts around the base of the tree.

**Sycamore**

Sycamore buds (like all maples) are arranged in opposite pairs, with each pair at right-angles to the ones immediately above and below it. They are large (up to 1cm long), green and scaly. There are often old helicopter seeds still hanging on the tree. Their closest relatives are field maple (whose buds are much smaller) and Norway maple (whose buds are usually red).

**Oak**

Often mature oak trees can be recognised from their overall shape and size, but their buds are also distinctive – they have clusters of brown, scaly buds on the ends of twigs. Cherry trees have similar looking buds, but their bark is smooth and stripy compared to oak's rugged ridges. Common (or English) oak is the most usual species to find in Hertfordshire, although sessile oak has similar buds- just a bit more slender and with more scales. The easiest way to tell them apart is if there are any old acorn cups about – common oak has a stalk to the cup whereas those of sessile oak are stalkless.

**Beech**

Beech buds are elegantly long with an attractive pattern of bud scales. The lateral buds (which are alternate) stick out from the twig at 60 degrees(which helps separate this tree from hornbeam – the closest look-alike in terms of buds). The bark is smooth and grey on even the largest tree.



Melissa Harrison



## Connect with winter this year

**Melissa Harrison** is a nature writer and novelist, and editor of the anthologies *Spring*, *Summer*, *Autumn* and *Winter*, produced in support of The Wildlife Trusts.

“ When I lived in a city, winter didn’t mean much more than a warmer coat for my commute. Now I live in a rural village it seems darker, longer and colder, but also more interesting, with so much to observe and take pleasure in. The slow cycle of the seasons is now a central part of my life.

These days nearly 90 per cent of us live in urban areas where, unless we get outdoors and immerse ourselves in nature, seasonal changes are much less noticeable than in the countryside. But while insulating ourselves from the colder months with 24/7 street lighting and temperature-controlled offices may be convenient, it comes at a cost. Our bodies and minds evolved in nature, alert to its cycles. Studies have shown that part of the brain knows what time of year it is outside and adjusts our immune system and metabolism accordingly, even if the subjects involved are entirely protected from seasonal cues.

It’s only very recently in evolutionary terms that we’ve started spending so much time indoors; just a blink of an aeon, in fact. Perhaps that’s why forging a year-round connection to nature can prove so rewarding, because it’s something our brains have evolved over millennia to do. Tuning in to cyclical events like the slow ripening of apples, the blossoming of ivy flowers providing late food for bees, the shy eruption of mushrooms among the leaf litter or the peeping calls of redwings migrating over cities after dark – these things root us in time as well as place, creating a feeling of connection that becomes stronger, more rewarding and more enriching with every passing year.

There’s a good case to be made for spending daily time outdoors in nature, whatever the weather (within reason!) and all times of the year. Perhaps it’s a lunchtime stroll that takes in your local green space, an evening run around a nature reserve or a new morning route to the bus stop that takes you across a nearby common: build it into your routine and you’ll soon feel the benefits. Having a dog is a great motivator; any owner will tell you the benefits to body and mind that come from taking their

four-legged friend out every day – even if they may grumble a little on rainy mornings!

Watching even the humblest place change through all four seasons will lead you to know it intimately, a deep, atavistic pleasure that connects us to our past and helps prepare us for an uncertain future, too. The more connected we are to our environment, the more likely we are to protect it – so when the days draw in, keep going out; keep looking, keep listening, keep loving the natural world. ”

**Study the seasons** Phenology is the study of cyclical natural phenomena. Several projects record sightings from citizen scientists, so you can contribute to these valuable, long-running studies of nature. Visit [wildlifetrusts.org/citizen-science](http://wildlifetrusts.org/citizen-science)



**Go wild this winter** From bugling cranes to bubbling brent geese, there’s a world of wild wonders to get you outside this winter. Find your next adventure at [wildlifetrusts.org/winter-wildlife](http://wildlifetrusts.org/winter-wildlife)

# Fly Agaric

## *Amanita muscaria*

Probably our most recognisable fungus, the fly agaric's distinctive red cap and white stalk has been featuring in countless stories, television shows and even videogames. The mushroom can be found in woodlands, parks and heaths between late summer and early winter.

Fly agaric is famously poisonous, although human casualties are extremely rare. Some cultures use it for its hallucinogenic and psychoactive properties. In Victorian times, fly agaric was commonly found on Christmas cards as a symbol of good luck. Some believe this mushroom may even have inspired the red and white suit of Santa Claus.



See if you can discover one for yourself at Balls Wood or Fir and Pond Woods Nature Reserve!



# Nature's Calendar

## November – February

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 months ahead.

### November

#### Harvest nestival

As autumn passes to winter, the landscape of our counties takes on a bare and rather beige look.

As the leaves fall and the vegetation dies back, the secrets of the summer are revealed: nests of birds punctuate the skeleton of twigs and branches. Less obvious are the empty nests of one of our most endearing small mammal, the harvest mouse. Contrary to its common name, it is an animal of the wetlands primarily but will also use crops adjacent to waterbodies. Their cylindrical nests are about the size of a tennis ball, woven intricately around and from live stems of grasses such that they continue to grow. The nests are created off the ground, sometimes over water. Their prehensile tails and light weight – less than a 2p coin – allow them to move through grasses and reeds along the stems, avoiding open ground and potential predators. By November, their breeding season will be over and the new generation will have dispersed, leaving the nests empty. Look for them in tall vegetation adjacent to waterbodies.



**The Herts Natural History Society is currently working to produce a new atlas of the mammals for the county. Please submit your sighting via [hnh.org/submit/mammals-amphibians-and-reptiles](https://hnh.org/submit/mammals-amphibians-and-reptiles) - every record counts!**

### December

#### Rhythm of the Snipe

Boing, boing, boing, boing and repeat, ad infinitum. If you have ever seen a jack snipe, you'll know what I'm talking about.

This is a wading bird with a unique behaviour – jack snipe constantly bob up and down whether at rest, feeding or even walking. It remains something of a mystery as to why they do it.

Jack snipe are the petite relative of the common snipe and they inhabit similar places – boggy ground with thick vegetation. They have a shorter bill and accordingly have a different feeding niche to their longer billed cousins – taking invertebrates from or just below the surface by probing. Their stunning plumage of gold, chestnut, cream and black feathers with two yellowy stripes running down their backs allow them to blend perfectly into nature's mid-winter mantle of dead grasses and reeds. This makes them extremely difficult to spot, but in recent years, there have been quite showy individuals at Lemsford Springs and Amwell Nature Reserve during December. Once you spot one, you will find that their bouncing is mesmerising and indeed quite calming.

No animal uses energy needlessly, so it must have a purpose. Could their bouncing send vibrations through the ground causing potential prey to move? That's one theory, what's yours?





Harvest Mouse

## January

### Life in the darkness

Every year in January and February, we carry out counts of hibernating bats at a number of locations across Hertfordshire.

During these counts, we discovered that bats are not the only creatures living in these dark places: cave spiders, one of our largest arachnids, are thriving alongside the bats. Arachnophobes, look away now.

These are big spiders – a legspan of up to 50mm and a body of 15mm. Their colouration varies from deep chestnut brown to burgundy red. They are slow moving and seem unbothered by ecologists with torches briefly illuminating their murky world. They feed on other invertebrates which reside in these dark places – slugs and smaller spiders. The cave spiders mate towards the end of summer and the female creates an oval egg sack which is usually hung from the ceiling. The spiderlings mature and grow over winter and disperse the following spring, attracted to the light at the entrance to the cavity.



© TIM HILL

## February

### Take a closer look

As children I think we all see the world in macro – a combination of natural inquisitiveness and being closer to the ground.

In his childhood, my son would always be the first to spot the spiders lurking in the undergrowth or the crickets nestling in the grass. As we age, we tend to adopt a wide-angle view and in so doing we miss much of the natural beauty of the world around us.

On a February day, my colleague Rob first showed me the female flowers of the hazel tree. This was an absolute revelation! The flowers are one of the most delicate and beautiful things I've seen, like a strawberry pink sea anemone, long fingers reaching forth from a green bud. So tiny, just millimetres long and with the help of a magnifying lens, covered in pale downy hairs. Hazels are monoecious, having both female and male flowers. The male flowers form the familiar catkins. Again, look closely and each catkin may contain in excess of 150 individual flowers. It is thought that the female flowers are fertilised primarily by pollen carried on the wind from the male flowers.



Hazel Flower

© TIM HILL



So, in preparation for your new macro viewing of the world, why not treat yourself to a hand lens? Alternatively, turn your binoculars round, put the eyepiece close to your subject and look through the big lens and be amazed at what you see. It's a whole new world when you get up close.



# The Nature of... Deadwood

Deadwood comes in all forms and sizes – a standing or fallen dead tree, the stump of a cut tree, dead branches of a tree or even dead shrubs. Despite its name, deadwood is full of life and provides a vital home for many woodland plants and animals.

From the smallest hoverfly to the mighty owl, around 40% of woodland wildlife is at least partially dependent on deadwood habitats. In the UK, around 2,000 invertebrate species are saproxylic – reliant on dead or decaying wood - for either all or part of their life cycle. If you have ever done a minibeast hunt in the forest, you will have seen lots of creepy-crawlies when you lift a log.

Woodlice, centipedes, millipedes and many other species love the dark and damp conditions and will happily make themselves a home in deadwood.

Other invertebrates feed on decaying wood as larvae, such as the rare stag beetle, many longhorn beetle species and the giant woodwasp. The large presence of invertebrates attracts predators, woodland birds and bats, with hedgehogs seeking out dead and decaying wood for a feast. Deadwood is a paradise for lichen and fungi too: look out for the distinctive candlesnuff fungus – it has a forked body with a black base and white, powdery tip and grows on rotting wood.

Dead and hollowing trees often boast an impressive number of holes and cavities that provide an ideal roost place for birds like the greater spotted woodpecker, tits and owls. Most of our bat species depend on tree holes for

summer and winter roosts. A pile of logs can serve as a hibernaculum for hedgehogs and toads over winter.

Deadwood plays a vital role in our rivers and lakes too. Fallen branches can provide cover for fish and water invertebrates, as well as creating pools used for spawning. Woody debris can narrow a stream, slowing the flow and reducing soil erosion.

Just like death is a part of life, deadwood is a part of a functioning ecosystem. Sadly, today, most managed woodlands contain less than 10% deadwood. On our reserves, we purposefully create deadwood habitats with log piles and tree stumps or by leaving dead trees standing.



**It's easy to include deadwood in your wildlife garden. Simply pile up a few logs and let nature do the rest.**

# Your photos...

Share your wild wanders!

 Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust  @HMWTbadger  Hertswildlifetrust



This juvenile hobby on a successful hunt was shot by Roy McDonald.  @Lakes4life



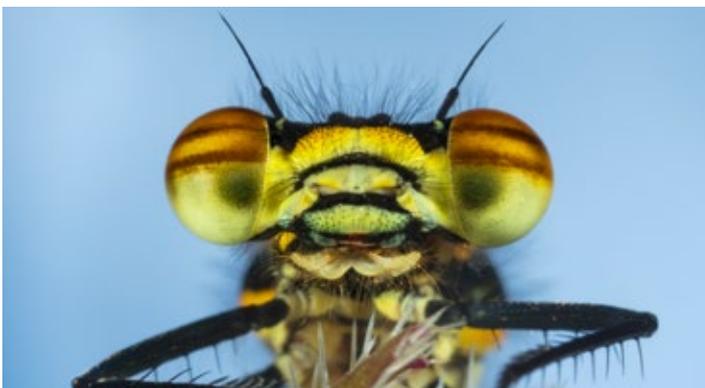
At Panshanger Park, **Andy Johnson** witnessed the rainbow trout popping up to see where its mate was going to with the osprey.  @lynher



This kingfisher, taken by **Andrew Brown**, clearly didn't get the memo of where to pose for the camera!  @hertskingfisher



These meadow browns, mating at Panshanger Park, were sent in by  **Don and Marion Ramsay**



Here's looking at you, kid! **Phil Thorogood** was mesmerised by this large red damselfly.  @phil\_thorogood



Hide and seek doesn't work when you've got four wings, as this willow emerald damselfly had to find out. Snapped by **Graham Canny**  **GrahamC57**



# Naturetrek

Group & Tailormade Wildlife Holidays

AFRICA | ASIA | AUSTRALASIA | EUROPE | THE AMERICAS

Naturetrek is the UK's leading wildlife holiday specialist offering:

- The widest choice of expert-escorted birding & wildlife tours worldwide
- Tailormade wildlife & cultural holidays crafted by experts
- Wildlife cruises on exclusive Naturetrek charters
- Birdwatching, botany, mammals & more
- Unrivalled expertise built over 33 years
- Best wildlife holidays available
- All at unbeatable prices



For our brochure, or for more information, call our wildlife travel experts

01962 733051 [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Naturetrek, Mingledown Barn, Wolf's Lane, Chawton, Alton, Hampshire GU34 3HJ