

Celebrating the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex

# wildlifematters

Spring 2025



**Herts &  
Middlesex**  
Wildlife Trust

## What's Inside?

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# Welcome



Having been fascinated by wildlife since a young child, I've been so lucky to have spent my career in the nature conservation sector. Back in 2014 I joined Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust as the Chief Executive and realised my long-held dream of

playing a leading role in giving wildlife a positive future. And now a little over 11 years later, I'm heading off to my retirement.

My dream of course wasn't really about my career aspirations, it was that having worked and volunteered in the sector for so long, I could see the urgent need for more action for wildlife and I wanted to play my part in that. It has been a privilege to work for the Trust and throughout my time here I've been so impressed by how much people really care about our wildlife and wild places, from our staff team and trustees, to our volunteers, members, donors and business partners. It's been heart-warming, reassuring, encouraging and inspiring.

The Trust's wonderful nature reserves are home to some of our rarest and most vulnerable species, and our work in the wider countryside is making a huge difference to creating, linking, and improving habitats. The last decade has been a step change in our engagement work and so many more people are now finding out what a special natural world we have, and being inspired to take action. Standing up for wildlife remains a focus for the Trust, whether that's leading the fight to protect Broadwater Lake SSSI, influencing housing allocations, or convincing local authorities and businesses to prioritise nature in their decision-making.

Wildlife and the Trust mean so much to me and I'm so pleased to be leaving the Trust under the excellent leadership of our Chair, Peter Tallantire, and new Chief Executive, Laura Burrows. The Trust relies on all of its members and volunteers and my hope is to see this support continuing to grow, so the Trust can do more and our supporters can be the collective voice for nature.

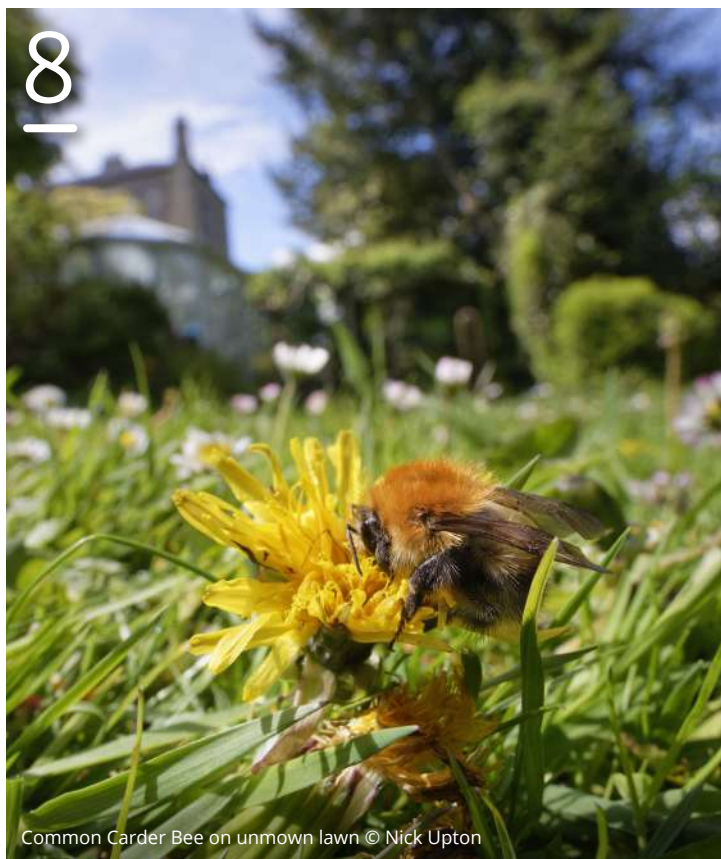
So please keep caring, keep supporting, and help make sure wildlife has a positive future.

Wishing you all the very best and with great thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lesley'.

**Lesley Davies**  
Chief Executive

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Common Carder Bee on unmown lawn © Nick Upton

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Skylark © Vaughn Matthews

## Get in touch

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

**Registered Charity No:** 239863

**Membership Team**  
membership@hmwt.org  
hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/mymembership  
01727 858901 (select Option 1)

**Twitter**  
@HMWTBadger

**Instagram**  
@hertswildlifetrust

**Facebook**  
@hertswildlifetrust





Meadow at Harefield Hospital © Debbie Bigg

### Did you know we have a members' webpage?

Visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/mymembership](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/mymembership) to find frequently asked questions and how to manage your membership. You can also discover more about our local conservation projects and campaigns, as well as upcoming events so that you can explore your beautiful local wildlife.

**Cover:** Drone-fly on Clematis © Nick Upton 2020VISION

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Join an  
event



Discover  
wildlife



Donate



Do



Take  
Action



Enjoy free  
of charge



Make your voice heard  
- #DefendNature

All details correct at time of printing.



# Herts and Middlesex Wild News

## Our new Chief Executive

We are thrilled to welcome Laura Burrows to the Trust. Laura's background is primarily in the charity sector with a focus on membership, fundraising and supporter engagement experience. Laura is currently Managing Director of the Holocaust Educational Trust where she has led their strategy development and people plan covering organisational culture and staff training. Prior to this her roles included General Manager for the National Trust in the Chilterns, and National Corporate Partnerships Director for Cancer Research UK. Laura lives locally and has a love for nature and the outdoors.



As we welcome Laura, we also wish Lesley Davies, our current Chief Executive, all the very best with her upcoming retirement. We are hugely grateful for the dedication and commitment Lesley has given to the Trust over the last 11 years. She leaves us a more impactful and wider reaching organisation, delivering more for nature now and ready for the future. Thank you, Lesley.

## Threat to Broadwater Lake

Broadwater Lake SSSI in the Colne Valley remains under threat from the proposed development of a new Watersports Facility and Activity Centre. We understand that Hillingdon Council are preparing an amended submission for the development. At time of going to press, we don't have any further updates but please keep an eye out for the latest news on our campaign to save this nationally important protected wetland at [ow.ly/lfs650S9Lew](https://www.ow.ly/lfs650S9Lew)



## Strategic Changes to Our Nature Reserves

As part of our ongoing efforts to maximise the impact of our conservation work, we have undertaken a thorough review of our nature reserves and how we can best allocate our limited resources for nature's long-term benefit.

The nature crisis has escalated, and with it, the financial and operational challenges of managing our estate. After careful consideration, the Trust, with the approval of our Trustees, has made the decision to step away from seven of our nature reserves, which collectively make up less than 3% of our total land holdings. The reserves are: Longspring Wood, Oughtonhead, Rabley Pits, Royston Chalk Pit, Stocking Springs Wood, Uxbridge Alder glade and Willowmead.

Whilst these seven sites are home to some important habitats, our continued involvement will only put increased strain on our resources and divert our energy and investment away from caring for our most ecologically valuable sites or those facing the greatest risks.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers and other supporters who have been involved in helping to care for these nature reserves over the years.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

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





## A decade of good deeds at Panshanger Park

As reported in our last issue of *Wildlife Matters*, from 2014-2024, Panshanger Park's owners Tarmac funded a People and Wildlife Officer, hosted by the Trust. Today, we continue to play an important role providing expert ecological advice and other guidance to the park team, including Tarmac's site managers, Maydencroft.

As the shape of our relationship changes, we've looked back over the last decade, and charted how much we've achieved for people and wildlife through this project; from the creation of a viewpoint over Osprey Lake in 2015 to Hertfordshire's first Dragonfly Hotspot in 2023, and from engaging over 3,500 children in nature activities at Panshanger Park Forest School from 2014-2018 to appearing on the BBC's *Countryfile* in 2019 in front of four million viewers...you can read more and discover the full timeline at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/blog/decade-panshanger-park](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/blog/decade-panshanger-park)



Cuckoo Flowers at Panshanger Park © Tim Hill

## Wilder Schools Toolkit

As you may have read in our Spring 2024 edition of *Wildlife Matters*, we're offering every school in our area the opportunity to become a Wilder School, enabling school grounds to provide connected wildlife corridors and safe habitats across our landscapes. Becoming a Wilder School also provides an opportunity for our young people to build a connection to nature and learn outside the classroom.

We've now launched a Wilder Schools Toolkit to help schools communicate their status as a Wilder School and encourage their school community to enjoy the many benefits of a relationship with the natural world.

**If you work, volunteer or are connected to a local school that you think could benefit from a Wilder Schools visit, please email [wildersupport@hmwt.org](mailto:wildersupport@hmwt.org)**



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

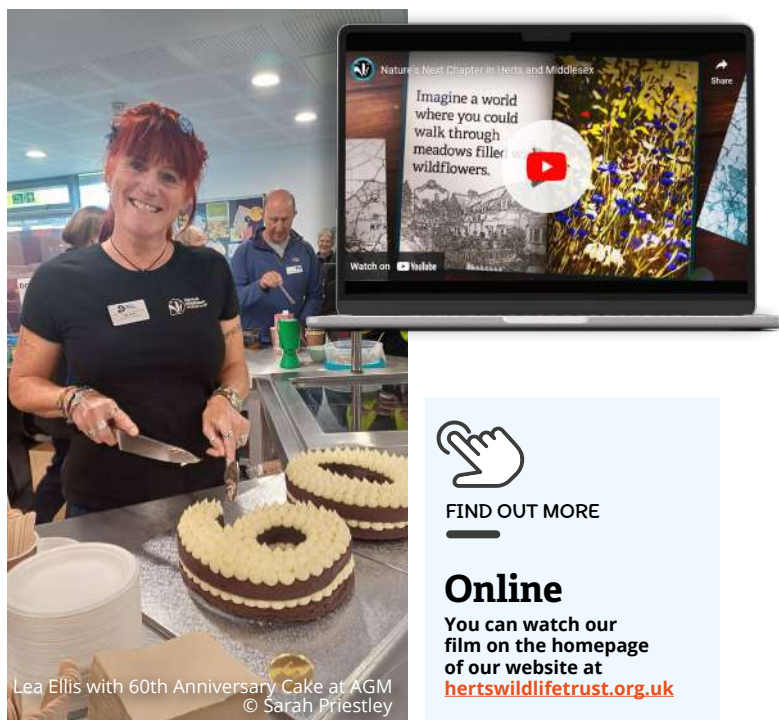
Find out more at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/your-wilder-schools-toolkit](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/your-wilder-schools-toolkit)

## AGM

### Reasons to Celebrate

Thank you to everyone able to attend our AGM at the end of September and who joined us in celebrating the Trust's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Those who came along got to preview 'Nature's Next Chapter in Herts and Middlesex', which charts how the wildlife crisis has come about and what we can do to restore nature. This short film was made with the professional support of Louise Turner, Trustee, and kindly narrated by Chris Packham.



Lea Ellis with 60th Anniversary Cake at AGM © Sarah Priestley



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

You can watch our film on the homepage of our website at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)

## UK UPDATE

Simonside, on The Rothbury Estate, is set to become a flagship site for nature conservation in the UK

## Securing The Rothbury Estate for nature

South Simonside © Duncan Hutt

The Wildlife Trusts have purchased part of the Rothbury Estate in partnership with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and have launched a £30 million appeal to secure the entire estate – for nature and the nation. The charities have agreed a two-phase purchase agreement over two years.

The charities will consult the local community on plans to buy and care for the largest piece of contiguous land to be on the market anywhere in England for the last 30 years and create a showcase for nature recovery on a vast scale.

The 3,800-hectare estate has an important place in the hearts of Northumbrians. By acquiring The Rothbury Estate, Northumberland Wildlife Trust aims to enhance the rich natural heritage of the estate for future generations. A successful purchase of the entire site will avoid the land being broken up into multiple ownerships, helping to ensure public access and create a sustainable future for farmers.

The current purchase includes the Simonside Hills and a mixture of lowland, woods, riverside and

farmland – the western side of the Estate – an area that is especially valued by the urban communities of Newcastle Upon Tyne and Tyneside. Notable wildlife includes Curlews, Red Grouse, Merlins, Cuckoos, Mountain Bumblebees, Emperor Moths and Red Squirrels.

Mike Pratt, Chief Executive of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, says:

“We’re very excited to be part of a once in a generation opportunity for securing a stunning area of countryside where people and nature can thrive side by side. It signals the start of something unique in Northumberland and it will also have impact on a national scale. We’re looking forward to working with local people to create an exemplar of how nature, farming and community are integrated – something local people can feel immensely proud of.

“We’ll be talking and listening to people who live and work in the area over the coming months to evolve a long-term plan for the Estate that respects its traditions and the livelihoods that depend on it. We will preserve and enhance public access and recreational

opportunities to allow people to enjoy this wonderful place.”

Craig Bennett, Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts, says:

“This is a thrilling moment for The Wildlife Trusts who are working collectively – coming together from across the UK – to create a national flagship for nature recovery for the very first time. It’s a historic moment for our federation.

“The Rothbury Estate will come to play a key role in revitalising local economies, delivering multiple societal and environmental benefits – and it’ll provide the most amazing example for the rest of the country on a scale not seen before. We’re all absolutely delighted to be part of securing this precious piece of natural heritage for the nation and we want to hear from everyone who is keen to support our appeal.”

Find out more about how you can support The Wildlife Trusts to secure the entire estate by visiting [wildlifetrusts.org/appeals/rothbury-estate-nature-and-nation](https://wildlifetrusts.org/appeals/rothbury-estate-nature-and-nation)



## UK UPDATE

# 2024 marine review

## People power marine recovery projects

Innovation, new research and a whale-sized volunteering effort has helped The Wildlife Trusts learn more about changes in UK seas in the 2024 marine review.

Seaside volunteers clocked over 12,000 hours backing wildlife initiatives around UK shores. This included recording sightings of Humpback Whales, White-beaked Dolphins and climate-indicator species including colourful sea slugs and mauve jellyfish. The data helps experts understand more about how species are faring in busy seas and the impact of climate change on marine wildlife.

Volunteers tallied thousands of hours identifying and recording wildlife through the national citizen science survey, Shoresearch and volunteering days organised by Wildlife Trusts. Data collected helps experts monitor how pollution, climate change and invasive

species are impacting UK wildlife. 2024 surveys highlight the spread and occurrence of non-native species and climate change indicators, such as, the first record of the kelp seaweed, Wakame, at Wembury in Devon, also found at Torquay and Brixham.

Volunteers also gathered almost 3,000 kilograms of rubbish by hand from UK beaches on clean-ups organised by Wildlife Trusts. With under 10 per cent of UK seas protected from the most damaging fishing activities, The Wildlife Trusts urge policymakers to do more to save our seas. Find out how you can join the volunteer effort: [wildlifetrusts.org/closer-to-nature/volunteer](https://wildlifetrusts.org/closer-to-nature/volunteer)



## UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



### 1 Celebrating seal pups

Cumbria Wildlife Trust is celebrating seal pups born at its coastal nature reserve at South Walney near Barrow for the 10<sup>th</sup> year running. The growth of the Grey Seal colony from single figures in the 1980s and 90s to over 500 since breeding began in 2015 is a great conservation success story. [wtru.st/Cumbria-seal-pups](https://wtru.st/Cumbria-seal-pups)

### 2 Mini beasts

The smallest beetle in Europe has been discovered by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The tiny beetle, *Baranowskiella ehnstromi*, found at Rutland Water Nature Reserve, measures just 0.4mm in length and feeds on spores of a bracket fungus. This is the third British record for the species and first outside East Anglia. [wtru.st/Rutland-beetle](https://wtru.st/Rutland-beetle)



### 3 Pine Martens return

15 Pine Martens were released at secret locations on Dartmoor after a 100-year absence. After two years of meticulous planning and consultation with local communities, the reintroduction, led by Devon Wildlife Trust and seven partners, is an historic step in the restoration of the region's woodlands and wildlife. [wtru.st/pine-martens-return](https://wtru.st/pine-martens-return)



Temperate rainforests will feature in The Wildlife Trusts' garden at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show

## Bringing the rainforest to RHS Chelsea Flower Show

The Wildlife Trusts are bringing rainforests to RHS Chelsea Flower Show! The British Rainforest Garden, designed by award-winning Zoe Claymore and sponsored by Project Giving Back, will evoke the lush, wet woodlands that once swathed vast areas of the west coast of the British Isles. By bringing the enchantment of temperate rainforests to Chelsea, we hope to inspire people to support the restoration of this threatened habitat and show how nature-

friendly gardening can help British wildlife thrive.

Inspired by the ambitious 100-year mission of The Wildlife Trusts and Aviva to bring rainforests back to the British Isles, the garden will share the story of this precious habitat that once blanketed a fifth of our country and is now so rare that it only covers about 1% of the land. Restoring them will create beautiful places for people to enjoy, help wildlife recover and tackle climate change.



**Tim Hill**, the Trust's Conservation Manager shares a delightful account of a May morning at Amwell Nature Reserve - as poignant today as when it was penned 20 years ago. He also gives some great ideas for going wild this spring with family and friends of all ages.



Tim Hill © Frieda Rummenhohl



## A Cathedral of Nature

The late Trevor James, Revd. Tom Gladwin and Graham White. If you have ever visited the Trust's Amwell Nature Reserve you should whisper a quiet thank you to these three people. Between them, they were responsible for establishing and developing what has become an internationally significant place for nature. Their achievement should be an inspiration to us all, showing what can be achieved through

persuasion, tenacity and hard graft. In recognition of their achievements, the three hides at Amwell are named after them. I can think of no better way to try to persuade you to visit this special place than including Tom Gladwin's own words here, written in 2005 but uplifting still 20 years on.

*"Two hours after dawn on a May morning and a light mist rests gently over Hollycross Lake. From the gate*

Sothorn Marsh x Early Marsh hybrid Orchid, Amwell © Tim Hill





Amwell © Charlotte Hussey

*the wide vista of fresh greens and blues, framed by the woodlands of Easneye and Amwell, is supreme. Many performers of the dawn chorus are still in full voice – music from a multitude of voices such as Cuckoos, Blackbirds, Blackcaps and Willow Warblers. Others*



Willow Warbler © Tim Hill

*are already completing nests or feeding young. Rings ripple out on the surface of the lake as fish begin to rise and are themselves hunted by buoyant Common Terns.*

*So much promise, and so much to see and enjoy. Comfortably warm now, the mist lifts, and the increasing colony of richly purple marsh orchids is seen at its best. A Greenshank rises, calls, and hurries northwards. Small numbers of House Martins and Swallows are also passing. These, like many other spring migrants, will have rested here, fed, and gained the strength for the next stage of their journeys.*

*Despite the early date a large dragonfly is hawking along the embanked hedgerow by the River Lea. It's a rare*



Hairy Dragonfly at Amwell © Tim Hill

*Hairy Dragonfly! Could this be the year when the species returns to breed again in Hertfordshire? Could it happen here, already the richest site in the county for these dazzling insects?*



Common Carder Bee on unmown lawn © Nick Upton

*Passing the developing reed-bed, listening to 'churring' Reed and Sedge Warblers, other hopes resurface. Might the time come when rare Bitterns that have wintered here on several occasions also stay and breed? Surely this magnificent reserve justifies such hopes. After all, the Otters released in 1991 have successfully survived, bred, and remained here.*

*Back to the present as a Little Ringed Plover, another rare breeding bird, flies close, calling anxiously and leading away from its eggs. A little further on and a Great Crested Newt, a fully protected species, sinks from the surface of the dyke by the hide. From here the view across Great Hardmead Lake is truly wonderful.*

*There are a multitude of breeding waterfowl, including Great Crested Grebes, Gadwall, Pochard, even Egyptian Geese, to be enjoyed. By the water's edge, some late Teal and a drake Garganey, Ringed Plovers, Common Sandpipers, and an evidently tired Whimbrel.*

*Mid-morning, and along the path back there are many colourful insects, including Holly Blue and Orange-tip butterflies, and a bright red Cardinal Beetle. Finally, a greeting from new arrivals, 'Did you see the Marsh Harrier?'*

*Moral, scientific, educational and aesthetic, there are many reasons for conserving wildlife. What has been created at Amwell embraces all of these. Rich in wildlife, a place of great beauty and hope, a place that uplifts the spirit, it is indeed one of the great cathedrals of nature."*



Holly Blue © Josh Kubale



FIND OUT MORE

## Online

Plan your visit to Amwell Nature Reserve this spring at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/amwell](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/amwell)



Enjoy free of charge

## Experience spring in your local green places

### See this:

Indulge in some sky-watching by lying down and looking up. What can you see? Maybe your first Swift, a bumblebee whizzing-by or a Buzzard drifting over?

### Hear this:

Whilst you stare upwards, listen for the scream of a Swift, bzzzzz of the bumblebee or the mewing of the Buzzard.



Buzzard © Tim Hill

### Smell this:

Sample the scents of newly burst leaves of five of your local trees. A favourite of mine is the resinous perfume of Black Poplar.



Spring sunshine © Debbie Bigg

### Feel this:

After the dark, cold months of winter is there any better feeling in the world than the gentle warmth of spring sunshine?



# Five ways for you to experience and enjoy spring



## 1. A Nightingale sang in who knows where?

The Nightingale was regarded as extinct in the 2020 Hertfordshire State of Nature. In 2024 however, there were a number of reports of Nightingales singing in our area so this spring why not head out and listen for our songster supreme. They generally favour dense cover so start off exploring your local countryside and scouring for scrub. Even if you don't find a Nightingale hopefully you'll find a Whitethroat or Blackcap along the way.

## 2. Tails of the Riverbank

Over the past 10 years Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, working in collaboration with partners have returned Water Voles to three rivers, the Stort, Ver and Beane. The Boxmoor Trust has also put them back on the Bulbourne. Before the vegetation gets too high, spring is a great time to look for this iconic resident of the riverbank. To give yourself the best chance of seeing one, find a good vantage point overlooking the river, stand or sit quietly and wait patiently. You may hear them first – listen out for rustling as they move through the reeds. Given they spend most of their time amongst vegetation I can't guarantee you'll see a whole vole at any one time, but heads or tails, I can guarantee it will be an experience to remember.

## 3. May flies by

In May it's worth setting aside time for a few walks along our chalk rivers in the hope of hitting upon a day when the mayflies emerge. The flies have evolved such that they emerge *en-masse*, thereby reducing slightly the risk of predation. If you visit the river on the right day you will experience one of nature's great spectacles -

thousands upon thousands of insects taking to the air and dancing over the river in a mesmerising ballet. Many individuals will perish before escaping the river's grip, food for fish such as Brown Trout, which become embroiled in a feeding frenzy such is their addiction to these tiny packs of protein.

## 4. Stop mowing, get buzzing!

The best lawns for wildlife are those where some areas are allowed to grow long, allowing flowers to bloom and set seed. Selfheal, speedwells, daisies, clovers and Bird's-foot Trefoil will all thrive if mowing is reduced, even for just a few weeks. Just raising the cutting blades on mowers to 50mm will allow flowering to take place below the cut. Why not try it as the flowers will quickly attract butterflies such as the Common Blue, and bumblebees.

## 5. Hear the world come alive

April is the perfect month to be still and listen and where better to start than the dawn chorus? If you have young charges – children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews - make a plan to get up early and

have a 'dawn adventure' to see the sun come up and listen to the birds welcoming the new day. It'll be even more enticing if it involves a special breakfast afterwards! Ideally you and your young listeners should be up and in place an hour before dawn. You don't necessarily have to travel – back gardens or the local park can be great places to listen too. Once in place, settle down, close your eyes and just listen – this is something we do all too rarely. The important thing for me is not to get too hung up on identifying the birds but to just let the children enjoy a moment of stillness with nature providing the soundtrack.

**Here are our top five nature reserves for a tuneful, break-of-the-day visit:**

- Cassiobury Park, Watford
- King's Meads, Ware
- Old Park Wood, Harefield
- Balls Wood, Hertford Heath
- Fir and Pond Woods, near Potters Bar



FIND OUT MORE

**Online**

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



# Down-to-earth birds

It's nesting season and whilst we might naturally think of nests in trees and hedges, there's a fascinating group of birds that defy convention and build their nests on or near the ground. These ground-nesting birds face a variety of challenges to protect their eggs and young from both predators and environmental challenges. Here, we meet a few of them and discover some of their survival strategies.

## Skylark

A farmland and grassland habitat-dweller, the male Skylark displays some impressive aerial and vocal antics, hovering vertically at up to 300m whilst in full song, before parachuting back down to earth. It is on the ground though, that these birds nest, choosing open areas where the vegetation is up to 50cm high. Skylark chicks become independent in just two weeks – which is handy considering that their parents can have up to four broods in a breeding season!





## Lapwing

A familiar species found on farmland and wetlands, Lapwings can often be seen flying as a flock in winter skies. Come spring, they disperse with some birds heading back to their continental breeding grounds whilst others remain here to breed. The female will sit on the nest – little more than a scrape in the mud in an open area - and by late spring fluffy chicks will appear and venture out to forage. If the nest is threatened the parents will attack or 'mob' potential predators.



## Snipe

At home in marshes and wet grassland, Snipe make a simple scrape in the moist soil to nest and key to its breeding success is that the immediate area surrounding it stays wet over spring and summer. This enables the birds to use their long beak with a flexible tip to probe the soft soil for food sources, close to their nest. By using a jerking motion, they can suck up worms, insect larva and snails without having to remove their beak from the mud – somewhat like a straw!



## Yellowhammer

A farmland bird, the sparrow-sized male Yellowhammer stands out in a mixed flock with bright yellow plumage, whilst the female is altogether less showy and can be hard to tell apart from other female buntings. In April, the female builds a cup shaped nest of grass or plant materials on or close to the ground in field margins where there is long grass, scrub and woodland edges, or in hedgerows, where ready food sources lay close to hand.



### DID YOU KNOW?

According to The State of Nature

Report 2023, 43% of bird species in Great Britain are threatened with extinction. Between 1970 and 2021, common bird species have declined on average by 16%, but within this group, farmland birds, including some of these ground-nesting birds, have suffered particularly strong declines of on average 59%.

## Together we can help by:

- **Keeping dogs on leads and staying on marked paths** – A bounding or inquisitive dog can disturb wildlife. By keeping your dog on a lead and sticking to pathways, you can help to avoid the possibility of eggs being trampled upon or scaring adult birds off their nests; vulnerable chicks can soon perish if left alone. This applies to all grassland areas, whether there is signage requesting you do so or not.
- **Supporting landholders with their management plans** – Have you heard about our new Chalk Rivers and Farm Advisory project? Ground-nesting birds are just some of the wildlife that will benefit - [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/chalk-rivers-and-farm-advisory](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/chalk-rivers-and-farm-advisory)





# Nature's healing power

The Trust's Communications Officer, Debbie Bigg, visited Harefield Hospital to learn how the Trust is working with the team there to improve the biodiversity of the site to aid nature's recovery and to support the health and wellbeing of the hospital's community.







Healing Garden © Debbie Bigg

I'd heard from my colleague Tim (Hill) that he was working with the Sustainability Team at Harefield Hospital on the production of a conservation management plan for the site, following a botanical survey and increasing interest within the National Health Service (NHS) of the growing evidence linking natural environments with human health – green space = less stress. In tandem, the hospital was adopting a 'salutogenic' approach, one where wellness focuses on health and not the disease. This created a platform for Harefield Hospital, which is internationally recognised for treating the complex needs of people with heart and lung disease, to consult with the Trust. Its objectives being to:

- Restore, enhance and care for nature
- Manage the site to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits for patients and staff, including building new recovery spaces

Andrew Jackson, Environmental Sustainability Manager at Guys and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, in which Harefield Hospital sits, has been instrumental in putting the management plan into action. Andrew filled me in on the various pots of funding available within the NHS for nature-based initiatives, such as hedging packs, woodland creation and orchards. At Harefield, a funding bid for an onsite Nature Ranger is planned, who will also support with patient and staff activities.

Based on recommendations in the plan, Andrew showed me how a

new path has been put in to provide accessibility to two Borough Grade II ponds, where benches and a covered area provide a welcome retreat for patients well enough to be there, it being some way from the hospital wards.

Those whose care needs are greater have other options though and I was fortunate to get a tour from Rosie Pope, a founder of Harefield's Healing Garden. Rosie's son was a heart transplant patient at Harefield in 2012/13. During that time there was nowhere easily accessible or pleasant to go outside and Rosie saw how important that was. It motivated her, and co-founder, Catherine Perry, whose father was a patient at Harefield, to work with the hospital and its charity to fundraise and create a Healing Garden for patients and visitors that was sympathetic to wildlife.

The Healing Garden is thoughtfully designed, featuring curving paths that meander and slow you down. Green is the main colour so as not to be exhausting to look at and it has several ergonomically designed benches so there are plenty of places to sit and rest. Wildlife-friendly plants adorn it - Buddleia and Verbena attract bees and butterflies and it incorporates an insect hotel and butterfly mound.



Meadow at Harefield Hospital © Debbie Bigg

This garden does not stand alone, it is part of a patient's journey; a new Intensive Treatment Unit (ITU) Sun Therapy Area is planned, the Peace Garden offers high-dependency patients a view of shrubs and flowers

from their ward windows as well as a quiet space to take in nature, the Healing Garden gives patients and their families a place to wait or recover (some transplant patients can be onsite for over 18 months) and then there's the wider grounds with parkland shaded by mature Oak trees and meadow, where Tim has worked with the site team and volunteers to increase the floral diversity of grassland though seeding wildflowers, and, of course, the ponds too, where dragonflies abound.

When patients arrive via the helipad in the spring and summer months, a blooming wildflower meadow awaits them. But it's clear not all of this is just for the sake of the patients – staff, visitors and wildlife are benefitting from it too.



Rosie Pope © Debbie Bigg

Rosie said something that struck a chord with me, "Let nature get involved in healing". That's something that's very apparent at Harefield Hospital and something we need to hear more of!

## Online

The Trust offers advisory and consultancy services to a wide range of businesses, public bodies, clubs and organisations wishing to aid nature's recovery. For more information email [tim.hill@hnmwt.org](mailto:tim.hill@hnmwt.org)

## Help Build a Health Service Fit for the Future

The NHS has launched *Change NHS* to hear people's views, experiences, and ideas which will shape a new 10 Year Health Plan for England. The Wildlife Trusts are working with the NHS's consultation team and you can have your say at [wildlifetrusts.org/give-nature-place-nhs-reforms](https://wildlifetrusts.org/give-nature-place-nhs-reforms)



# Could you become a Trustee?

## Help to make a wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex

The Trust is committed to seeing more land in recovery for nature and more people taking action for wildlife. We recognise the importance of a healthy natural environment to people's wellbeing and to addressing climate impacts.

The need for the Trust to stand up for wildlife is as important as ever, and crucial to this is that we support and look after our staff team.

We are looking for **two** new Trustees to join our Board. Please visit our website to find out what skills and experience we are particularly looking for - [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities)

You will need to have a passion for ensuring a positive future for wildlife,

and be able to think strategically. As a Trustee you oversee our strategy, risk management and financial sustainability, and will be an advocate for the Trust. You will provide advice and support to the dedicated and highly skilled staff team who run the organisation day-to-day.

As a minimum you will need to attend quarterly Board and Committee meetings and the AGM. Trustees can be appointed for up to three consecutive three-year terms. This is a voluntary role but reasonable expenses will be reimbursed.

We are a welcoming and open organisation, committed to the principles of Equality Diversity and Inclusion. While all applications will

be considered on merit, we would strongly encourage anyone from a minority background to consider applying as we need all perspectives if we are to succeed in our mission.

If you'd like to help make a difference for wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex as one of our Trustees, please contact Becky at [becky.vernon-clinch@hmwt.org](mailto:becky.vernon-clinch@hmwt.org) for an information pack.

Closing date: 9am on Monday 14 April  
Interviews will be held on Wednesday 14 May

Please visit our website for more information about the Trust - [www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)



# Is that a Bee, a Wasp or a Hornet? No it's a Hoverfly!

Ian Carle, the Trust's Nature Reserves Manager, gives us an introduction to hoverflies – vital components of healthy gardens and often overlooked pollinators.

As their name suggests hoverflies are a type of fly that can hover. Some species are masters of disguise and mimic insects that can sting – this is thought to make them less likely to be eaten!

When they're not trying to give predators the slip, they do a great job of pollinating plants. Most hoverflies have mouthparts suitable for pollinating flat open flowers, but a few such as the Common Snout have specialized extendable mouthparts that are able to get pollen from tubular flowers such as Campions and Bluebells.

Although adult hoverflies can be found all year round their time in adult form is short with most only surviving from a few days to a couple of months. Most species spend more time as larvae than they do as adults so when trying to encourage hoverflies it's important to provide conditions to suit the larvae as well as plenty of flowers for the adults to feed on.

Larvae generally like damp conditions such as those found in the rotting vegetation of compost heaps, decaying tree stumps and under the bark of fallen branches. Ponds or, on a smaller scale, hoverfly lagoons (a grand name for a mixture of water and fallen leaves placed in a small open container) provide great habitat for hoverfly larvae.



If you'd like to identify which hoverflies are visiting your garden or local green space, and find out what you can do to save them, visit [wildaboutgardens.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardens.org.uk)

**Be a hoverfly hero!**

Whether pollinating plants, hunting aphids or breaking down waste, hoverflies help keep gardens healthy. Discover more about these incredible insects and how you can help them in return.

[wildaboutgardens.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardens.org.uk)

The Wildlife Trusts

RHS  
Inspiring everyone to grow



# The power of nature notebooks

## Small observations, big impact on wildlife

Joanna Foat shares why she believes we should all have a nature notebook to aid in our efforts to protect wildlife.

Many renowned botanists, like Ellen Hutchins – Ireland's first female botanist – began their passion for nature with a simple notebook. Hutchins famously spent five days admiring a piece of seaweed, carefully preserving fragments and sketching her 'little beauties' of mosses and lichens. The eminent Francis Rose's field notebooks are all we have as records for some of the rarest of British lichens historically.

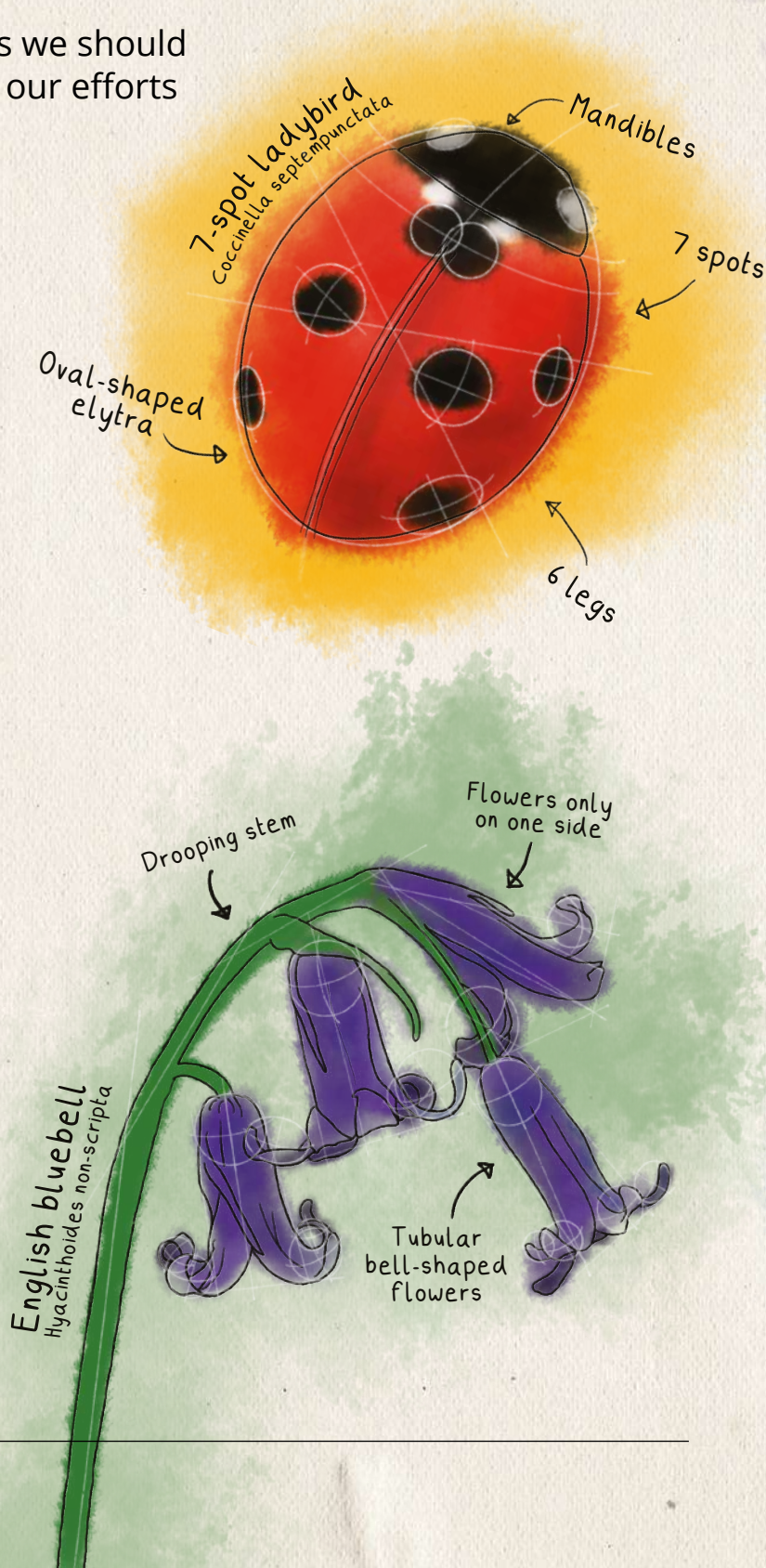
Early records of flora and fauna like these in notebooks across the UK have laid the groundwork for The Wildlife Trusts in protecting nature reserves since 1912. As we face the dual nature and climate crises, collecting data on wildlife is more critical than ever. These precious sightings not only inform conservation projects but also, eventually, government policies.

Nigel Doar, Head of Research at The Wildlife Trusts, highlights the need to engage more people of all ages in recording wildlife. Not everyone, he notes, starts with a vast knowledge of species.

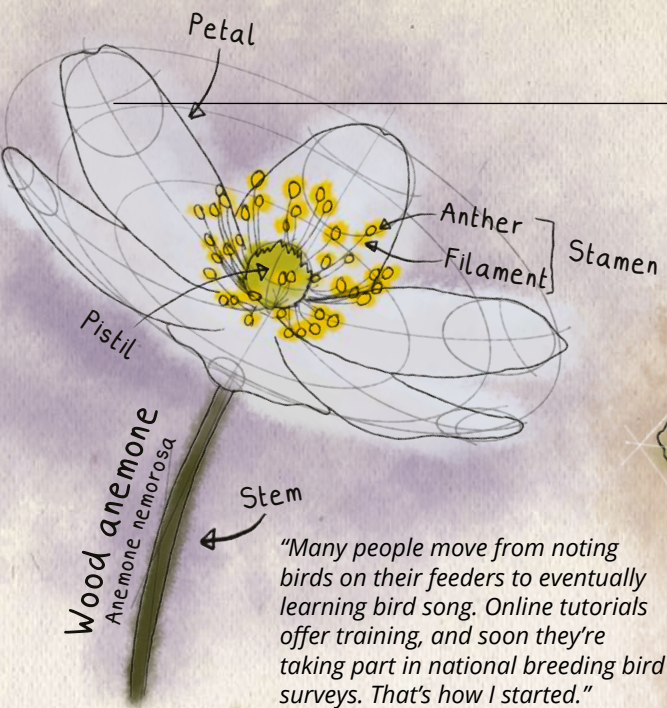
*"We can worry too much about what something is, when just taking notice and enjoying the beauty in nature can spark interest."*

He recalls his own challenges as a student identifying an Oak tree in a hedgerow, a process akin to spot-the-difference. Conservationists use a classification system of taxonomic units – essentially the identification of shared characteristics – to help them work out the species or family of species of a particular plant or animal. Nigel shared that his teacher said a 'difference' is what I call a recognisable taxonomic unit, and that *"sometimes that is just enough when you are starting out"*.

Mike Waite, Director of Research and Monitoring at Surrey Wildlife Trust, sees first hand how curiosity leads people from casual observation to structured surveys and contributions to science.





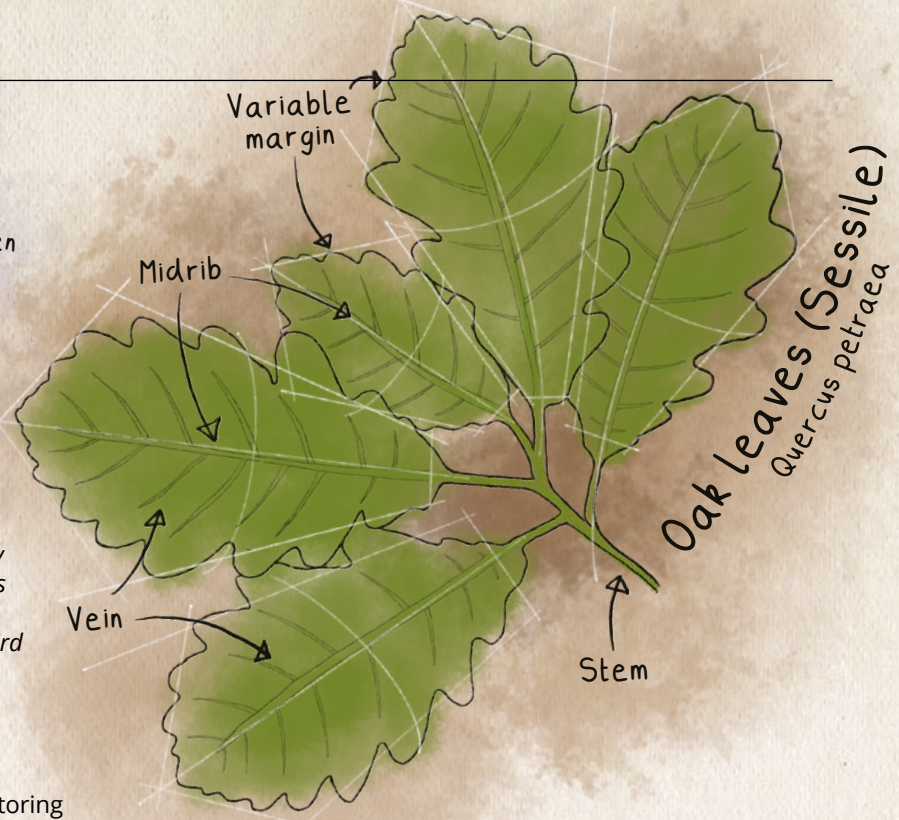


"Many people move from noting birds on their feeders to eventually learning bird song. Online tutorials offer training, and soon they're taking part in national breeding bird surveys. That's how I started."

Nowadays, he advises the local council on its nature recovery strategy, priority species list and measuring progress towards restoring 30 per cent of land by 2030.

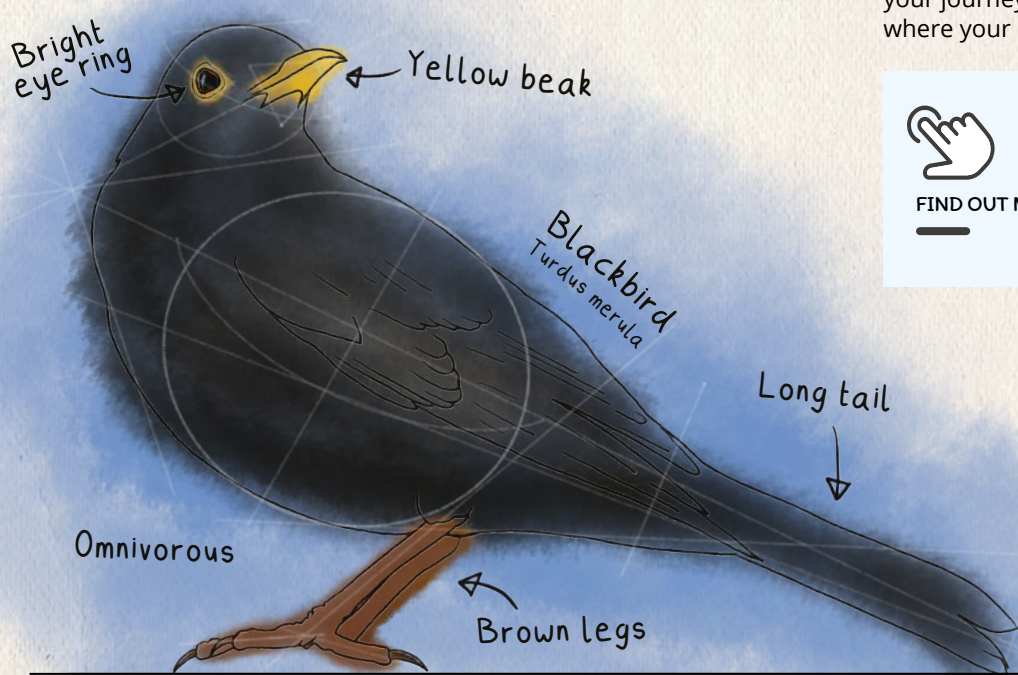
He notes that although some citizen scientists may be naturally introverted or solitary, their observations on rapidly advancing species like dragonflies – as indicators of climate change – are invaluable. *"Many new dragonfly species have colonised the UK from the continent over the past decade, providing clear data on environmental shifts."*

The Wildlife Trusts across the country offer citizen science programmes where volunteers learn identification skills and can contribute to conservation surveillance data. Projects include Shoresearch, Seasearch, Riversearch and Nature Counts for species monitoring to name just a few.



Thousands of people are getting involved walking transects to count the number of butterflies, mapping the distribution of Hedgehogs across a city, or reporting field signs of Otters along river banks. This data directly supports species conservation and habitat restoration, local strategies for nature recovery and is vitally needed to lobby government to protect nature.

What could be more rewarding than spending your weekend immersed in nature? This hands-on connection not only deepens personal engagement but also contributes to science. So, pick up a notebook, jot down your observations, and begin your journey as a citizen scientist. You never know where your notes might lead.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Find out more about how you can take part in citizen science at: [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/citizen-science](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/citizen-science)



# Weird and Wonderful Wildlife

## Amorous Amphibians

As spring approaches and the days get longer and warmer, our resident amphibians can be found making their way to bodies of water for mating and reproduction. Tirzah Bottomley, Assistant Reserves Officer at the Trust, tells us more about the fascinating mating rituals of frogs, toads and newts.

The first amorous amphibian off the mark is usually the Common Frog which can breed as early as January but is most frequently seen from February onwards. Toads and newts tend to be a little later and usually start reproducing in March. Saying this, amphibian breeding is being observed earlier every year, this is due to warmer temperatures caused by our changing climate.



### Toads

The Common Toad can be found throughout mainland Britain and spends most of the year on land. Every year come spring, toads migrate to the same pond they were spawned in to breed. They use the same route to travel to these ponds and can travel up to a kilometre on warm, damp evenings.

When it comes to mating, the male toads must fight to impress the females. Once the male catches the female's attention he jumps on her back and grasps on using nuptial pads. The resulting position is called amplexus, during which the male can fertilise the eggs as they are laid by the female. Mating can be extremely competitive and can often result in mating balls. This is where more than one male will try to form amplexus with a female and can sometimes sadly result in the female dying.

Toad eggs are usually seen under the surface and are in long thin strands. Common Toad eggs are in double strands whilst the much rarer Natterjack Toad eggs can be identified by a single strand.



### Frogs

The Common Frog usually hibernates near breeding ponds and can start breeding in colder conditions than toads. This gives them a head start against other amphibians, which can be advantageous, but it can also put the eggs at risk of freezing. The mating process of frogs is remarkably like that of toads. The male frog attracts the female by croaking and a successful male will hop onto the female and form amplexus. He fertilises the eggs as the female lays them and often must fight off other males with his hind legs at the same time! Frogs can lay up to 2000 eggs per season, which form clumps on the surface known as frogspawn.



## Newts

Our three native newt species here in the UK – Smooth Newt, Palmate Newt and Great Crested Newt - all head to ponds to breed in the spring. The males must put their best foot forward and impress female newts with a courtship display to win the opportunity to mate. A victorious male will drop its spermatophore, a capsule of sperm cells, that the female will collect into her cloaca for fertilisation. The female then lays individual eggs into vegetation and protects each of them by folding the leaf over the egg.

Please do not disturb breeding amphibians or their eggs. Moving them can cause the spread of disease and invasive species between ponds as well as disturbing these incredible creatures' life cycle.



Great Crested Newt © John Bridges



Great Crested Newt egg © Bruce Shortland



Discover  
wildlife

Discover more fascinating facts about these amphibians on the Wildlife Explorer pages of our website at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer)



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Our Balls Wood Nature Reserve in Hertford Heath, and Old Park Wood Nature Reserve in Harefield are great places to visit and observe amphibian signs of life – get more information at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves)



## Change for Good

In the last issue of Wildlife Matters, we celebrated the impact of our Nextdoor Nature programme and how it gave people the skills, tools and opportunity to take action for nature; 95% of its participants said that as a direct result of the project, there is now greater collaborative working between residents, local organisations and groups, and 82% feel there is now greater decision-making about wildlife in the hands of local people. Now, that's something we want to build on! So, I'm delighted to be able to share that our Wilder Communities team is evolving - we've been successful in gaining funding for two new members of staff- courtesy of the Species Survival Fund, National Lottery Community Fund and Spire Charitable Trust.

## One Quick Win for you!

### **Reduce food waste and feed the birds.**

During spring our garden birds are nesting and feeding their young so your leftovers will provide them with a welcome food source. Cooked too much pasta or rice? Don't throw it away – as long as it's unsalted you can put it out for the birds. Likewise, they'll appreciate pieces of redundant cheese, fruit that has passed its best – fresh or dried, unsalted meat fat, and even your biscuit crumbs! Plus, you'll get the satisfaction of watching them tuck in through your window!





# Meet our two new Wilder Community Officers



## Kate Sheard, covering Ware, Hertford, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield

I started in October 2024, attracted by the combination of people and wildlife elements. Nature is really important to me; it's helped my own mental health struggles so I want to enable others to connect with their local wildlife and empower them to help create space for nature in their everyday lives.

My project focuses on increasing people's awareness of the importance of local rivers and chalk streams and how people can help protect these as well as wildlife in their local communities, benefitting the local environment and also people's health and wellbeing. I hope that in a year's time more people are helping wildlife to thrive and sharing their stories to inspire others to do the same. I aim to increase the number of ponds in gardens and community areas in these towns and eventually countywide. Ponds are a fantastic way to encourage wildlife and they don't even need to be that big - a container pond is a great feature in any space (read more about ponds on pages 26-27).

I'm excited every day by nature, from ducks in a local park, a buzzing bee, a Robin struggling to eat a worm in a car park, the Peregrines calling above the cathedral where they nest, to watching a Starling murmuration! Nature is for everyone if we just stop and take notice.



## Amy Trotter, covering Watford

I started working for the Trust in January this year.

The role attracted me because of my passion for environmental issues, wildlife, and empowering others. I have the chance to combine these interests and make a positive impact on both nature and local communities.

I hope to bring together individuals from all communities, empower them to improve neglected green spaces, reconnect with nature and play a part in addressing the climate crisis. I want to learn what nature means to them, what their community needs and support them to create an area they can take pride in.

I'll work towards reducing barriers to accessing nature, engaging people with community activities, highlighting the health benefits of being in nature, and watching their confidence, knowledge and skills grow as they take on the responsibility of maintaining their green spaces.

Having teenage children, I feel it appropriate to share some of my favourite sloth facts. Sloths can hold their breath and stay under water longer than dolphins, and move so slowly (like my teenagers), that moss and algae grow on their fur!



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FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Find out more about our Wilder Communities work at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-communities](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-communities)

To get in touch with Kate or Amy email [wildersupport@hwmwt.org](mailto:wildersupport@hwmwt.org)





# Our Wild Supporters

Meet some of  
our local wildlife  
champions



Fir and Pond Woods © Charlotte Hussey

## £ Wildlife Guardians

Since we launched the scheme in 2023, our Wildlife Guardians have played a crucial role in championing the protection of wildlife across our area.

By contributing £500 or more annually, Guardians are part of a dedicated community of like-minded supporters, all united in their passion for creating a wilder future. To show our appreciation, Guardians have the opportunity to enjoy a special relationship with us by receiving dedicated support, opportunities to hear from our leadership team, and invitations to special events designed to deepen their connection to nature. In 2024, our Wildlife Guardians enjoyed events including a visit to Berkhamsted Golf Club to learn about our conservation collaborations, and a tour of Fir and Pond Woods in celebration of the reserve's 50th anniversary.

This is a pivotal time for nature, but together, we can ensure that Hertfordshire and Middlesex remain home to the diverse wildlife we all cherish.

## Online

If you would like to find out more about becoming a Wildlife Guardian and safeguarding precious habitats and rare species for future generations, please visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/guardians](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/guardians) or contact Alice by email [guardians@hmwt.org](mailto:guardians@hmwt.org)



## 🍂 Celebrate the life of a loved one or mark a special occasion with a dedicated plaque

A specially engraved plaque is a meaningful way to celebrate life's milestones, such as weddings, anniversaries, and birthdays, or to honour the memory of a loved one. By dedicating a plaque, you'll not only create a lasting tribute but also help support our essential work across Hertfordshire and Middlesex. These plaques will be displayed in our Grebe House Wildlife Garden in Verulamium Park in St Albans.



## Online

For more information, please visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/dedication-plaques](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/dedication-plaques) or call the Fundraising team on 01727 858 901 (Option 1).

## 🌸 In remembrance

We thank Joseph Nolan - 'Joe' for his generous gift to the Trust in his will. He and his wife are fondly remembered by his two daughters Sue and Jenny: "Our Mum and Dad, Jean and Joe Nolan, spent many happy hours at Rye Meads birdwatching, or just enjoying the peace and beauty of the area".

We would also like to thank Joyce Hone, Hilda Marjorie Ronald, Venetia Shirley Benfield, Annie Constance Love and Sonia Jean Hearn for their generous legacies.

Thank you also to Deborah Bartram for remembering her husband, Chris with a kind donation to the Trust.

Thank you for supporting the Trust in this special way. Our condolences go to all friends and family.





## Working for Wildlife

Business members, Saba UK joined us for two days of volunteering at Patmore Heath Nature Reserve. The sun shone as they got stuck into bramble clearing and coppicing – a fantastic day of teamwork!

**If you'd like to arrange a nature-based engagement event for your business then get in touch by email at [partnerships@hmwt.org](mailto:partnerships@hmwt.org)**



 **Wildlife  
Travel helps  
nature take  
flight!**

A huge thank you to Wildlife Travel, for their generous £500 donation to the Trust this year. Founded in 1988 with the sole aim of supporting conservation, Wildlife Travel has been donating its profits to Wildlife Trusts across the UK for over 35 years, contributing an incredible total of just over £241,000 to date!

**Learn more by visiting [wildlife-travel.co.uk](http://wildlife-travel.co.uk)**

## How businesses can support the Trust

There are many ways that local businesses can support the work of the Trust and help to drive nature's recovery - Business Memberships, Activities for Business Staff Teams, Project Sponsorship, and Fundraising Challenges to name but a few.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Find out more at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/corporate-support](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/corporate-support) or get in touch with us by email at [partnerships@hmwt.org](mailto:partnerships@hmwt.org)



## Mayor of Hertford's Wild Year

Following a year of fundraising for the Trust and Mudlarks, Councillor Vicky Smith (Mayor of Hertford 2023/24) presented a cheque for £5154 to our Chief Executive, Lesley Davies and Chair of Trustees, Peter Tallantire. Thank you, Cllr Smith, for this amazing donation and for all your hard work!



## Did you know we offer Community Membership?

Community Memberships are great for all kinds of groups - from scouts and guides, to local interest groups – everyone is welcome! By becoming a member of the Trust, your group will discover local wildlife and wild places. All whilst protecting the nature that is on your doorstep – find out more by visiting [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/community-membership](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/community-membership)



# Pond life

## The best way to boost wildlife in your garden

Boosting the wildlife in your garden couldn't be simpler or more exciting. What you need is a garden pond. Believe me you won't regret it, says the BBC's Justin Rowlatt.

There'll be a little digging. You need to go a bit deeper than you'd expect. Just over a metre is good. All the wonderful pond creatures that are going to make their home in your garden need somewhere to shelter away from the ice that will form in winter.

Then you'll need a pond liner, gravel, some native UK pond plants and aquatic compost bags. Then you just fill it with tap water and wait. This is when the magic happens.

During the first week or so your pond will go a sickly shade of green as algae makes itself

at home. If you're lucky, you'll get your first creature in the second or third week. Mine was a hoglouse, a watery cousin of the woodlouse.

Next came mosquito larvae. I had loads, wriggling and squirming beneath the surface. I was transfixed – my wife was not so impressed. But don't worry, they are the lure that is going to tempt in other creatures for whom mosquito larvae are the tastiest of treats.

The nymphs of dragonflies and damselflies can't get enough of them. Frogs and newts love

them too. And if any do manage to hatch into actual mozzies, they'll be dinner for Swallows, Swifts and bats.

What you've created is an entire ecosystem, an intricate food web. The algae is food for the insects who are food for the frogs who are food for Hedgehogs. You get the picture.

When you find yourself wondering why you are spending so long just staring at your new pond here's the answer: what is unfolding before you is nothing less than the story of life on earth.



**Justin Rowlatt** is the BBC's first ever Climate Editor. He describes his job as reporting from the front line of climate change. Justin is also a huge fan of ponds. He put his in three years ago and hasn't looked back.







### Pond algae

Learn to love your algae. It is the bottom of the food chain and without it your pond would be a lot less enticing.



### Hoglouse

Hoglice are an aquatic relative of the woodlouse. And before you get sniffy about these little lice, you should know they are one of the most ancient animal species on earth at more than 300 million years old.



### Rat-tailed Maggot

This is one of my favourite pond creatures. Think of maggots but with snorkels attached to their bums. Except because Rat-tailed Maggots are aquatic, they are wonderfully clean and mutate into beautiful hoverflies.



### Marsh Marigolds

There are few sights more cheerful than a clump of bright yellow Marsh Marigolds. Think buttercups but bigger and framed by dramatic dark foliage. They provide a hiding place for frogs and nectar for insects.



### Yellow Flag Iris

There are lots of water iris species around the world but only one real choice for UK ponds, in my opinion. The Yellow Flag Iris, the only aquatic iris native to the UK.



### Hornwort

This is one of the workhorses of a thriving pond. Hornwort is a dark green plant that floats beneath the surface releasing life-giving oxygen. But beware, just like algae, happy Hornwort will grow like topsy.



### Large Red Damselfly

On a sunny spring day there is always at least one red damselfly hovering, like a tiny helicopter, over my pond. These creatures live out their entire lives before your eyes and their nymphs Hoover up mozzie larvae.



### Common Frog

We have three. All slightly different colours. My wife insists she recognises each one. You'll be spellbound as they lay their spawn. The tiny black dots in the centre evolve into surprisingly rapacious tadpoles and then, majestic frogs.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

For more wildlife gardening tips and project ideas go to [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-gardening](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-gardening)



# What's On

We've already got lots of exciting events scheduled for spring and into early summer 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.



FIND OUT MORE

—  
**Online**

Find out more about our events programme and book at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events)

## April

5 April

**Nature Writing Workshop**, Hitchin  
Triangle Community Garden, Hitchin

22 April

**Introduction to Butterflies**,  
Aldbury Nowers, Tring

## May

9 May

**Dawn Chorus Walk**, Astonbury Woods,  
near Stevenage

22 May

**Introduction to Butterflies**,  
Aldbury Nowers, Tring

## June

3 June

**Dragonflies of Amwell**, near Ware

4 June

**Learn to Draw Kingfishers**, Online

## July

18 July

**Butterflies and Wildflowers Walk**,  
Hexton Chalk Pit, Hexton

## Save the date

**30 May to 8 June – Hertfordshire Rivers' Week**

Look out for a full programme of events as we launch our inaugural Hertfordshire Rivers' Week!

## Give the gift that matters!



Explore our shop for wildlife-friendly products including Species Sponsorships, T-shirts and Gift Memberships at

[hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop)

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