

Celebrating the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex

wildlifematters

Summer 2025



**Herts &
Middlesex**
Wildlife Trust

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Welcome



As the new Chief Executive of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, I'm delighted to be writing to you for the first time in *Wildlife Matters*. The past few months have flown by, and it's been an absolute pleasure getting to know our brilliant staff and volunteers, and to speak to some

of our passionate supporters. Thank you all for such a warm welcome.

And what a time of year to have joined...as summer bursts into full bloom, getting outside, taking a mindful moment to hear bird song, breathe fresh air and take in the sights and smells of summer always make me feel better. Science tells us that spending time in nature is a great way to boost our health and wellbeing and this is anecdotally evidenced by Nic Wilson's article 'Seeking Sanctuary' in which she talks about her relationship with nature and living with chronic illness on page 16.

More and more of us are on screens for work, or entertainment – (I know I am guilty when I tell my children to put their phones down!) so building a deeper connection to nature is more important than ever. Get the family outdoors, meet a friend, go for a walk and read 'Your Wild Summer' on page 8 for more ideas to take in the magic that is our natural world.

This spring, we were proud to have launched Hertfordshire's first-ever Rivers Week. You can read more about how we celebrated the precious chalk streams that flow through our counties with local communities on page 12.

Thank you all so much for your continued support, there is always more to do, but to be able to visit our reserves, speak to our teams about their work in our communities and with our brilliant partners in the wider countryside provides a much-needed sense of hope. In the following pages, you can read how your membership helps us to restore and protect our natural world – please know you are making a difference... your membership matters.

With thanks and best wishes,

Laura

Laura Burrows
Chief Executive

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Poster and raft making at Chalk Stream Challenge © Heidi Mansell

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Sabey's Pool © Debbie Bigg

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Brown Hare © Jamie Hall

Did you know we have a members' webpage?

Visit 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: Water Vole © Paul Thrush

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wildlife



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Action



Enjoy free
of charge



Make your voice heard
- #DefendNature

All details correct at time of printing.

Herts and Middlesex Wild News



Calling for nature to be at the heart of planning

The proposed Planning and Infrastructure Bill currently making its way through Parliament could pose a serious threat to local nature protections. If passed without key environmental safeguards, it risks making it easier to override local voices and sideline wildlife in the name of development. We believe there is a better way – one that puts nature at the heart of planning, not as a barrier.

Laura Burrows, the Trust's new Chief Executive wrote to our local MPs to ask them to support recommendations for amendments to the Bill, specifically related to chalk rivers. You can take action too by signing the 'Don't abandon the Chalk Stream recovery pack' petition, which is open until 25 August at: petition.parliament.uk/petitions/711368

You can also find out how the Trust team met with local MPs during Herts Rivers Week on page 12.

The First Herts Rivers Week

We held our very first Herts Rivers Week from 30 May to 8 June. Discover how we came together to celebrate our globally rare and beautiful chalk rivers and inspire action for their future protection on page 12.



A Rollercoaster of Emotions

Our community and supporters were understandably upset and outraged when it was reported that the Peregrine Falcons at St Albans Cathedral had their first clutch of eggs destroyed on 7 April. Whilst we didn't expect them to breed again this year, the pair went on to defy the odds by laying a second clutch of three eggs at the beginning of May. In the process, they delivered widespread joy to the many thousands of avid fans watching the live webcam feed on their nest. Three fluffy white chicks successfully hatched in June and, at the time of going to press, we are enjoying watching them preparing to fledge the nest. The Peregrines' story goes to show just how resilient nature can be!

For information on our new Peregrine Sponsorship packs see page 24.



The hide at Tewinbury after the fire



The new hide at Tewinbury © Anna Daniels

New Hide at Tewinbury

Following a fire in April 2024, which was a result of vandalism and caused the destruction of the hide at Tewinbury Nature Reserve, a new hide has been constructed to enable nature-lovers a screened view of the wildlife which thrives within the tall fen and swamp habitat, and on the lagoon. Our reserves team salvaged what they could of the old timber hide and opted for a single storey design with an open back. The hide is accessible for wheelchair-users, with a wheelchair access point, which was also repaired as part of the works. A feature has been made out of the fence panel next to the hide, with slots cut into it providing a new viewing screen.

The hide will enable views of species such as Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Tufted Duck, and Swift, as well as the opportunity to watch mayflies, dragonflies and damselflies.

Vandalism is a frequent and costly problem for the Trust, and diverts our reserves team away from vital conservation work. It is hoped that the simple design of the new hide will only attract those who are genuinely interested in wildlife.



LNRS landholder event
© Gascoyne Estates

Local Nature Recovery Strategy – Have your say!

As previously reported in *Wildlife Matters*, The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Hertfordshire, sets out nature recovery priorities to the mantra of “bigger, better, more joined up”. With a draft of the LNRS now available, a public consultation will start on 7 July and will be open for 8 weeks, giving you the opportunity to comment and influence the future for our local wildlife. Find out more at bit.ly/4llaM0P

Disability Confident Committed



Here, at the Trust we have taken steps to improve disability inclusion and are committed to recruiting, retaining and developing disabled people and those with health conditions. We're proud to share that the Trust has signed up to the Disability Confident scheme. This commitment is part of our ongoing effort to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace for everyone.

A sad farewell to John

All of us at the Trust were deeply saddened by the death of John Rowley - his loss will be felt far and wide by the many people he met over the years as the Volunteer Warden of Fir and Pond Woods Nature Reserve for eight years, and through volunteering for the Trust for over 20 years. We are truly grateful for John's enthusiasm and passion, which has greatly benefitted the wildlife at Fir and Pond Woods and inspired more people to care for and engage with nature.

Our thoughts are with John's family and all of those whose lives he touched at this difficult time.



John Rowley (8th from left) with volunteers at Fir and Pond Woods © Anna Daniels

UK NEWS

New report shows nature's value for money in flood management



A new report commissioned by RSA Insurance, an Intact company, and The Wildlife Trusts shows that every £1 invested in Natural Flood Management (NFM) is expected to deliver £10 of benefits over 30 years. Nature is one of the best defences against flooding in a changing climate, but the partners behind the report believe that more investment, data and support is needed to increase its long-term positive effects.

Natural Flood Management means investing in Beaver wetlands, creating ponds, restoring bogs, rewilding rivers and de-paving so that these areas can soak up water and hold it back in times of high rainfall. Evidence collated by the Environment Agency shows that natural flood management is effective at reducing the overall damage from flood risk; the new report has gone further to focus on wider benefits including better habitats for wildlife, carbon storage and improvements to health and well-being.

Alongside the devastating impacts that flooding can have on people, it is the UK's most expensive natural hazard, costing approximately £2.2 billion annually. This is projected to rise by a range of 19-49% by the 2050s according to the UK's latest Climate Change Risk Assessment.

The new research looked at 10 Natural Flood Management schemes created by individual Wildlife Trusts. Collectively, they had an average total cost-benefit ratio of 4:1 over 10 years rising to 10:1 over 30 years.

Kathryn Brown, Director of Climate Change and Evidence at The Wildlife Trusts, says: *"One in six houses across the UK is currently at risk of flooding and climate change is leading to more frequent and heavier rainfall – and we know that this will become more severe in the future. The good news is our research proves that restoring natural habitats can help us tackle the effects of climate change – and in doing so, help reverse nature declines."*

"The economic benefits of investing in Natural Flood Management are clear but just 1% of the public funding for managing flood risk in England goes to Natural Flood Management. Natural approaches to water management should be the UK Government's first port of call wherever appropriate – and we need to see such benefits regularly accounted for, measured and valued by both the Government and private sector in future."

To read the full report and find out more about Natural Flood Management, visit wtru.st/Natural-Flood-Management

Natural Flood Management Schemes

- **Upper Sherbourne, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust:** leaky dams and retention pools installed to help stop properties and roads flooding in a suburb of Coventry.
- **Limb Brook, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust:** wetland expansion, 20 attenuation ponds created, 50+ leaky dams installed, de-culverted streams and hedge planting.
- **River Otter, Devon Wildlife Trust:** wetlands restored by Beaver dams, which can reduce flood flows by an average of 30%, even during wet (high flow) conditions.
- **Gloucester & Cheltenham Waterscapes, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust:** 50 homes will benefit from decreased risk of flooding due to the creation of rain gardens, de-paving driveways, green verges, attenuation ponds and scrapes, which were delivered through RSA funding.



UK UPDATE

Beavers are coming home!

Earlier this year, The Wildlife Trusts celebrated the UK Government's decision to licence reintroductions of Beavers into the wild in England and acknowledge free-living populations for the first time in 400 years.

The Government's decision to accept applications to return Beavers into river catchments in England enables this native species to roam wild in our rivers and lakes once more.

In Wales, The Welsh Beaver Project, led by Wildlife Trusts in Wales, is currently waiting for Welsh Government's decision on the protected status of Beavers following a consultation.

Currently, only 14 per cent of rivers in the UK are considered to be in good ecological condition. Beavers are natural ecosystem engineers – experts at creating healthy wetlands. Their dams retain, release and filter water, restoring natural wetlands, rivers processes and wildlife too.

The Government recently committed to spending billions of pounds on hard infrastructure to combat flooding as well as compensating farmers for lost crops due to changing weather patterns. Releasing Beavers represents a nature-based solution to many problems our rivers face and is shown to significantly reduce flood peaks; as acknowledged by our report into natural flood management.

The return of Beavers has been carefully planned over a long period of time. Natural England has developed a detailed licencing regime and application process so stakeholders are engaged, landowners supported and wetlands are created to improve wildlife and the health of rivers.

To find out more information about wild Beavers near you, visit wildlifetrusts.org/beavers



Nature is missing from Government's planning reform

The Wildlife Trusts are disappointed to see measures to boost nature's recovery largely absent from the most recent UK Government's Planning & Infrastructure Bill. Although the Bill shows some safeguards to the Nature Restoration Fund, including an 'overall improvement test', these need to be stronger.

Becky Pullinger, Head of Land Use Planning at The Wildlife Trusts, says: "If the UK Government is serious about recovering nature

alongside meeting housebuilding and other development targets, it should introduce Wildbelt designation in the bill – protection for areas of land which could be earmarked for future nature recovery – as well as a promise to protect Local Wildlife Sites.

"We have just five years to meet legal targets to halt the decline in biodiversity. So, we need to ensure public, private and charity investment in habitat restoration on key sites is protected for the longer term."

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 The art of Manx

Manx Wildlife Trust in collaboration with Visit Isle of Man announced the inaugural Biosphere Photographers in Residence for 2025. Ciara Hardisty and Adam Morgan's work will contribute to a lasting artistic legacy that highlights the Isle of Man's distinctive status as the world's only whole nation UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

2 Blistering record

The only native British species in the World's 100 Most Threatened Species list was discovered by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust at Rutland Water. The Willow Blister fungus (*Cryptomyces maximus*), recorded in England for only the second time since 1876, was previously only known in a few places in Pembrokeshire.

3 Rare butterfly refuge

A recent egg count of the rare Brown Hairstreak butterfly on the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust Asham Meads nature reserve in Oxfordshire revealed 43 eggs and a 33% increase on 2022. Despite increasing threats from climate change and habitat loss, stable numbers were recorded here. wtru.st/brown-hairstreak





Your Wild SUMMER

Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager takes a deep dive into what ponds offer wildlife and spectators. He also gives some great ideas for going wild this summer with family and friends of all ages.

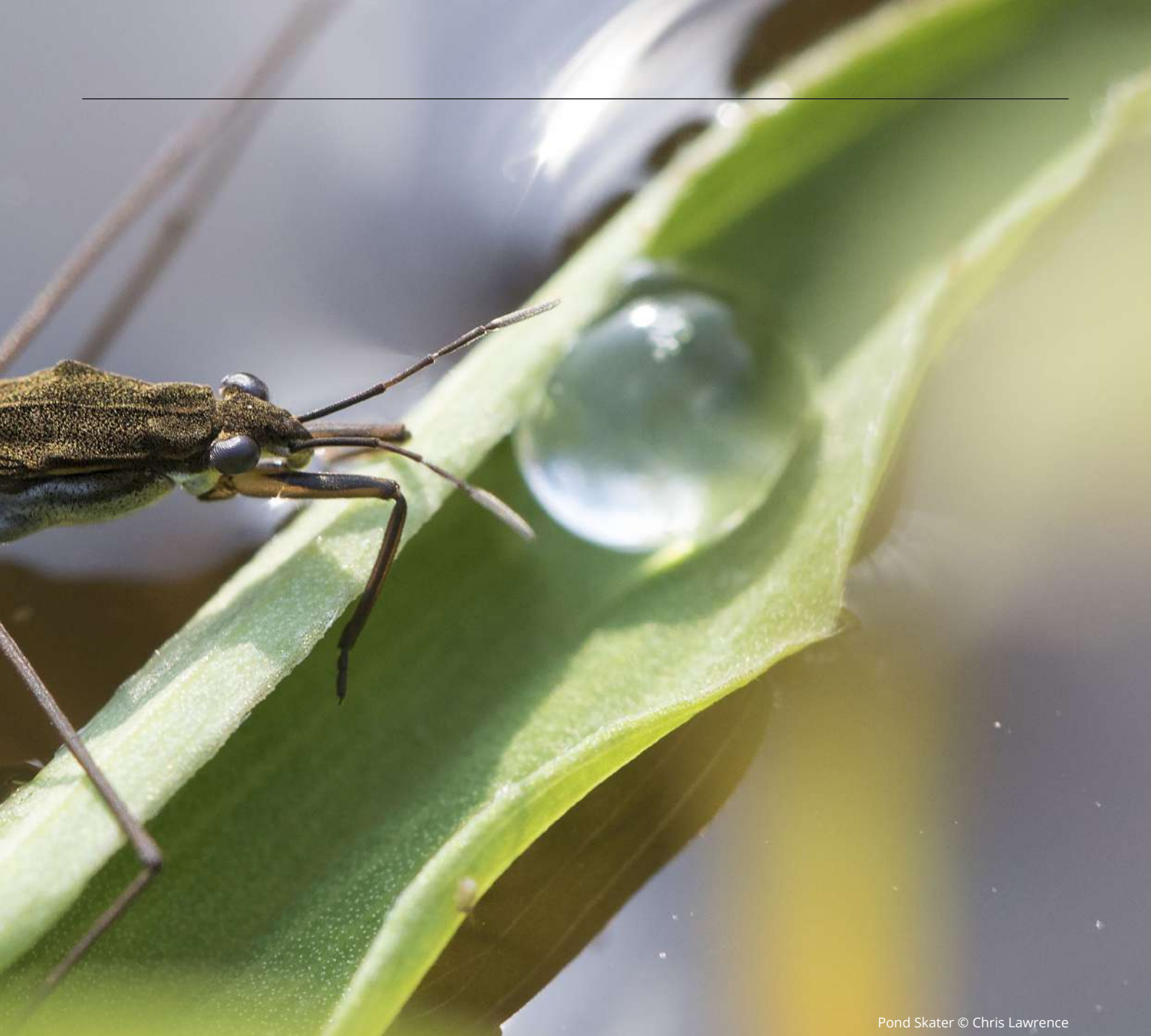


Exploring the Pondiverse

I love ponds, always have and probably always will. Some people may spend their lives staring out at the universe with awe and wonder but for me there's the same feeling from staring down into the depths of the *pondiverse*. In the warm summer months, I highly recommend spending some time staring into these worlds within our world; part of our world, but so very different from our own.

Charles Darwin mused that all life might have started in a "warm little pond", and it's now estimated that two-thirds of all freshwater species live in this type of habitat. The *pondiverse* is an amazing place with a hugely diverse community of creatures living side by side. Here we'll find skaters and slaters, damselfly and dragonflies, beetles and boatmen, snails and shrimps, frogs and fish, leeches and larvae and

Honeysuckle © Ross Hoddinott 2020/VISION



Pond Skater © Chris Lawrence

countless wrigglers too! The behaviour and appearance of some of them rival anything that Hollywood has to offer. In fact, many a good science fiction monster has its basis in the creatures of the *pondiverse*. My favourite must be Ridley Scott's Alien, the creature described by one of its victims as a, "*Perfect organism, its structural perfection, matched only by its hostility.*" Well that creature was based fairly and squarely on a dragonfly nymph, complete with its extendible jaw.

And in the case of the nymph, hostile it is, taking on and eating almost anything in the pond, including

tadpoles and fish bigger than itself. Woe betide that tiddler that gets too close, because in a pond, "no one can hear you scream..."

Subject to your own safety considerations, one of the best ways of increasing nature at home is to create your own *pondiverse*. Big or small, any wetland will support a good number of species. Two things dictate how biodiverse a pond will be – the quality of the water and its location. The ecosystem within a pond starts with plants, which are eaten by small insects and molluscs that are in turn eaten by carnivores such as other bigger insects, amphibians, fish and birds. Many species at the bottom of the food chain are very sensitive



to water quality and are unable to tolerate pollution. Numerous species, such as dragonflies, use the pond for only part of their life cycle and





Broad-bodied Chaser © Vaughn Matthews

they may be dependent on quality terrestrial habitat close to the pond as adults. So, for maximum diversity ponds should be unpolluted and nestled within a diverse natural habitat. Some tall vegetation will provide foraging for adult dragonflies, which may typically spend up to three years in the pond as those alien-like nymphs before emerging in the warmer months. A rockery nearby will provide potential hibernating places for newts which breed in the pond. If you can't find space for a pond, try to squeeze in a bird bath, which will not only cater for the ablutions of birds but will provide valuable drinking water too.

Whether it's your own pond or one in your local park, if you would like to put names to some of the creatures

you spot living in the *pondiverse*, the Field Studies Council have an excellent series of laminated identification guides which will help you on your journeys of discovery. Another handy hint is to wear polarised sunglasses, which reduce the force of light reflected off the water's surface, making it easier to see into the depths.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

For more information on the Field Studies Council's guides mentioned in this article, visit field-studies-council.org/shop



Woodpigeon © Jon Hawkins

Experience mindful summer moments in your local green places



Enjoy free of charge

See this:

Be calmed by the shimmers and shakes of Aspen leaves moving in the summer breeze.

Hear this:

Be lulled by the soporific coo-coo, cooo of Woodpigeons singing from treetops as the sun goes down.

Smell this:

Breathe in the heady, heavy scent of Honeysuckle flowers in local hedgerows.

Feel this:

Find your nearest publicly accessible chalk stream and, taking care, dip your fingers or toes into the water and enjoy the gentle movement of the cool water over your skin.

Ways for you to experience and enjoy summer



Discover
wildlife



Stars in your eyes

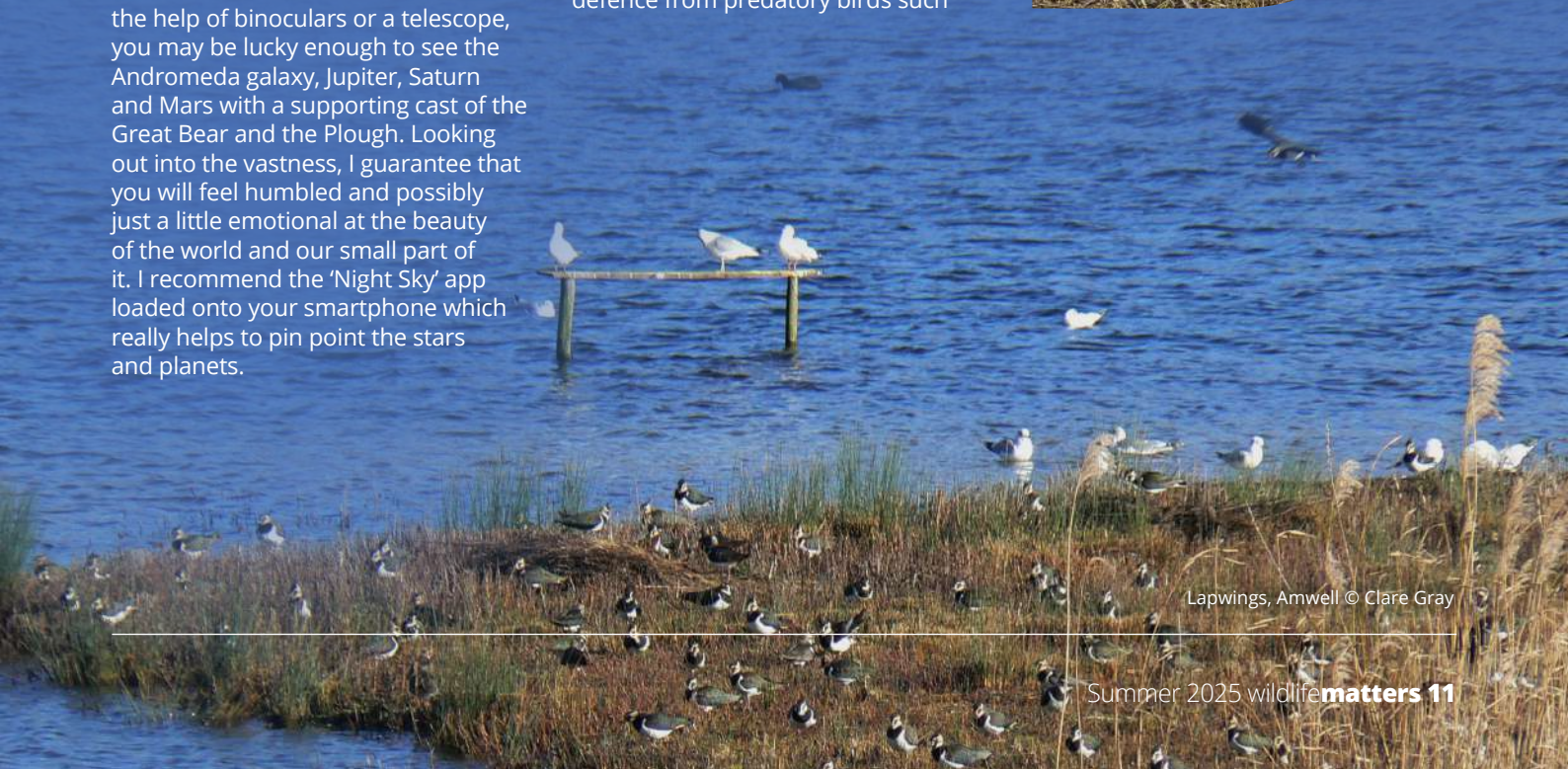
Located as we are in the built-up south of England means that, at night-time, we don't really experience true darkness. Fortunately, there are parts of Hertfordshire which although not truly 'dark sky', provide an opportunity to experience the true wonder of the universe. My favourite place is Therfield Heath which wraps around the Trust's Fox Covert Nature Reserve. Keep an eye on the weather forecast, pick a clear night and head up to this highpoint to be there well after sunset – the school summer holidays present an opportunity for a next day lie-in for the younger stargazers amongst us! Towards the end of summer and with the help of binoculars or a telescope, you may be lucky enough to see the Andromeda galaxy, Jupiter, Saturn and Mars with a supporting cast of the Great Bear and the Plough. Looking out into the vastness, I guarantee that you will feel humbled and possibly just a little emotional at the beauty of the world and our small part of it. I recommend the 'Night Sky' app loaded onto your smartphone which really helps to pin point the stars and planets.

Wader watch

August is a month of post-breeding gatherings in the bird world. One of my favourite sights is at the Trust's Amwell Nature Reserve, in the Lee Valley. From mid-July we lower the outlet sluice to reduce the water level in the largest lake, Great Hardmead. We do this to expose a wet, insect-rich muddy margin that provides feeding for migrant wading birds moving south from breeding grounds further north. By August, the water level will be at its lowest, with large expanses of mud on offer. Usually at this time, the most numerous wader is the Lapwing. They gather together in front of the elevated viewpoint. Most of the time they just loaf around but occasionally, they will pivot forward and peck viciously at some item of food that takes their fancy. Children may enjoy a game of who's going to peck next! Grouping together like this means that there are many pairs of watchful eyes, scanning constantly for potential predators. If one spots something worrying it fires off an alarm call which alerts the rest of the group. Within a microsecond other birds scream and there is an explosion of green, black and white as the flock takes to the sky, dispersing in all directions. This is the perfect defence from predatory birds such

as Sparrowhawks or Peregrines as the mass of shapes makes it difficult for them to select a victim to pursue. After the initial melee, birds eventually relax and start calling, "Peewit, peewit" to one another as they slowly flap back to ground and gather together once more. Can younger members of your party mimic their call?

There are lots of events to keep the young and young at heart entertained throughout the summer – and many of them are free to enjoy. Check out the back cover for more inspirational ideas to create 'your wild summer'!



Lapwings, Amwell © Clare Gray

Reflections on Herts Rivers Week: celebrating our rivers, protecting their future

This spring, from 30 May to 8 June, we held our very first Herts Rivers Week – a celebration of our globally rare and beautiful chalk rivers.

Through a week of inspiring events, walks, talks, and family activities, we provided our local communities with the chance to explore these precious waterways, learn about the wildlife they support, and discover the challenges they face.

But it was much more than just a celebration – it was a call to action

too. We shared how simple changes in our daily lives can help protect our rivers, from reducing our water use to joining a river clean-up or spreading the word, demonstrating how every action matters.

They say a picture paints a thousand words so take a look at what we all got up to!



Chalk Stream Challenge, River Mimram, Pangshanger Park © Heidi Mansell



MPs back call to protect chalk streams from harmful planning reforms



MPs Chalk Streams Drop-in session - Nicola Thompson, Rivers Officer with Chris Hinchliff, MP for North East Hertfordshire



Participants examining stream dipping finds at Stanborough Park © Marissa Kodikara



Pond dipping at the Chalk Stream Challenge © Heidi Mansell



Chalk Stream Explorer at Waterford Heath - Peter White, Volunteer, Nicola Thompson, Rivers Officer and Nicholas Buxton, High Sheriff of Hertfordshire



Dragonflies and Nature Ramble at King's Meads © Andy Holtham



How to draw a Kingfisher online event © Rachel Rogers



Sarah Perry, River Catchment Coordinator, Chris Hinchliff MP, and Tim Hill, Conservation Manager at Buntingford © Office of Chris Hinchliff MP



Stream dipping at Stanborough Park © Marissa Kodikara

Sabey's Pool

– angling site or nature reserve? It's both!

Communications Officer, Debbie Bigg visited Sabey's Pool in Rickmansworth to find out what a committed group of anglers are doing for conservation.



Walking through the ornate gate flanked by twisted vines and crossing a chalk stream, there's a feeling of entering a secret garden as you come into Sabey's Pool and this special site, alive with birdsong and the sporadic plop of a fish breaking the lake's surface is indeed quite magical – it is an idyllic haven abundant with wildlife that one rarely sees in 2025.

Sabey's Pool was a former marina, used by 'Sabey's' – a company which used their boats to transport rubbish out of London. It's been a fishery for many years since run by West Hampstead Angling and Conservation Society. One of my guides, the Society's Environmental Advisor, Tony Booker told me how he fished there as a boy aged nine, becoming Club Secretary in his teens – it's clear from the early introduction that Tony has poured his heart and soul into protecting this unique place. Put Tony together with my other guide, Fisheries Manager, Anthony Johns, a relatively new kid on the block, and you have a pair of anglers, who have put conservation at the very heart of their operations.

Between 2019 and 2023, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust in collaboration with Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative (now renamed as Colne Valley Fisheries and Conservation) led a project which trained over 40 fisheries managers how to maximise biodiversity alongside providing satisfying angling. With support from the Trust, the knowledge gained enabled those who completed the course to prepare their own habitat management plans, integrating fishing with wider nature conservation. Inspired by hearing about the project on the radio, Anthony bagged himself a place on the project's conservation training course and that began a long-term relationship with the Trust. A well-informed, integrated management plan for the site ensued and what Anthony, Tony and the society's volunteers have achieved since is truly inspirational.





Sabey's Pool © Debbie Bigg

Firstly, take the cutting down of trees – often a contentious subject but here there is a real case for the greater good. The additional light afforded by selective removal has increased the site's biodiversity, with extensive nettle patches now giving way to a much more diverse range of vegetation. More light and wind reaches the lake and without fallen leaves rotting in the water, the problem of silt and stagnant water has been eradicated. This has all had a positive effect on the abundance of invertebrates and the many fish species that subsequently feed upon them – resulting in bigger fish and happy anglers!

Habitats for Water Voles have been created by planting Yellow Flag Iris, with seeds collected from existing plants grown in the on-site aquatic allotment. Volunteers at Sabey's Pool lugged 40 tonnes of hardcore to create a more sinuous shoreline of bays and spits for Water Voles to thrive in. Now, neatly submerged in an abundance of vegetation, two distinct populations of these, our most endangered mammals thrive here, thanks to that huge physical effort. The Water Voles can take comfort from the presence of an American Mink monitoring raft too, albeit today it is virtually redundant such is the success of the Trust's partnership with the Waterlife Recovery Trust to eradicate the predatory invasive non-native species (INNS), which has been the biggest threat to their survival over the past 50 years.

The planting of the irises has also helped to reinforce the banks of the lake, which have come under erosion

from the burrowing activities of the American Signal Crayfish, another INNS, for which the fishery has an Environment Agency license to 'trap and despatch'. Tony tells me that within a three-year period, they have trapped over 1.5 Tonnes of the unwanted guests, who are responsible for creating substantial amounts of sediment through their tunnelling.

Birdsong is at an off-the-scale level, our feathered friends seem very happy to be here and it's easy to see why. The showiest member of their order, the Kingfisher makes frequent darting flights across the lake from its breeding ground – another of the Society's conservation projects - a vertical bank created by the anglers with specially made nesting holes, where two or three broods a year have been raised each year since its construction.

"Everything you do for conservation helps your fishing."
– Anthony

And there's more...Virginia Creeper, another INNS, has been controlled to enable more plant life to flourish. Fisherman's huts on the site are made from plastic sheeting manufactured from recovered plastics found in the sea and rivers – they are also flood-proof, which is useful considering flooding events at the lake are becoming more frequent. The aquatic



Tony with American Signal Crayfish trap © Debbie Bigg

allotment is dominated by sedge and, according to our Conservation Manager, Tim Hill, is "one of the best fen habitats in the county".

A maelstrom of bats appear at dusk, Grass Snakes are regularly seen and Canada Geese goslings have recently hatched...Next-up a pond is planned to provide further habitat for dragonflies and damselflies.... I could go on...there's a lot to say about Sabey's Pool and all of it is positive but overall, this is a fine example of the approach needed to managing land and water in the quest to turn the nature crisis around.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

If you're a custodian of land in Hertfordshire or Middlesex and would like advice on enhancing it for wildlife, the Trust may be able to support you – contact us at info@hmwt.org



Seeking Sanctuary

Nic Wilson is a writer, editor and Guardian country diarist for Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. She works for BBC Gardeners' World Magazine, specialising in wildlife, wild plants and environmental issues. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. Nic's memoir on nature, place and chronic illness, *Land Beneath the Waves*, is her first book. Here, she shares her unique insights on what Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve, nature, and volunteering with the Trust mean to her.



When I moved to Hertfordshire 22 years ago, I missed the landscape and birds of the North. Although I live only a few minutes' walk from one of the Trust's reserves, at the time I thought you needed to be in the mountains or on the coast to engage with the natural world. How wrong I was.

I became a stay-at-home mum a few years later and started to explore the local area, gradually getting to know what would become 'my patch' – Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve on the edge of Hitchin. I realised the reedbeds, water meadows and alder carr (the wet woodland) were full of wildlife. This little reserve became a sanctuary for me, especially when I began to struggle with mental and physical health.

I live with energy-limiting illness and chronic pain. Being in the reserve brings me a sense of peace that helps me relax. It also inspires me to learn more about the wildlife I see. I've spotted Otter spraint down by the River Purwell, Common and Jack Snipe in the reedbeds and fungi like Scarlet Elfcup in the woods. In the summer, Reed and Sedge Warbler breed in the reserve, and we get the Willow Emerald Damselfly and Migrant Hawker dragonflies around the reedbed ponds.

When my illness means I'm bed-realmed (unable to get out of bed) for days, or even weeks, I miss the sensory experience of the outdoors. So there's nothing better than visiting the wet meadows when I begin to recover, to enjoy the scent of Water Mint and the sound of the wind playing the reeds. I also research local landscape history when I'm in bed – a completely different way to explore the reserve – through time rather than space. I've learnt that the reeds

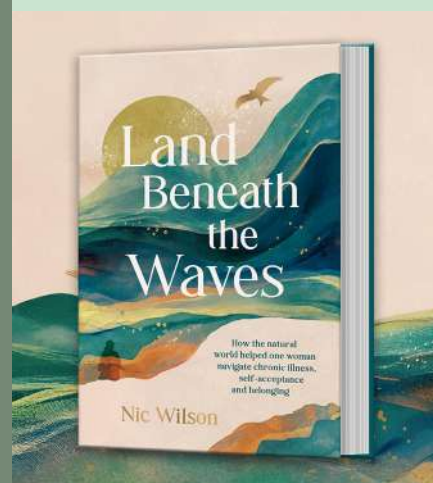


Purwell Ninesprings © Josh Kubale

used to be cut and sold in Hitchin for thatching and that the town's skaters turned the Purwell meadows into an ice rink in the winter. I've also read about the Medieval heronry near the springs, where young Herons (known as branchers) were caught and sent to London for banquets. There's even a legend that Henry VIII visited in 1525 to go hunting for Herons down by the river.

Six years ago, I started to volunteer with the Trust at the reserve. I've learnt to lay hedges, coppice trees and scythe the meadows, and I've made good friends along the way. I love the sense of community that conservation volunteering provides. It's helped me connect with local folk and given me a stronger sense of belonging. Now I'm an enthusiastic advocate of nearby nature and I help run Hitchin Nature Network, a community group working to make Hitchin a more nature-friendly town. I hope my nature memoir, *Land Beneath the Waves*, will encourage more people to notice the wildlife around them and be inspired by its great variety and beauty.

Land Beneath the Waves, published by Summersdale, is available from all good bookshops. You can follow Nic on Bluesky @nicwilson.bsky.social and find her book tour dates on her website: www.nicwilson.co.uk



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Discover how a legacy donation is funding conservation work at Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve here: hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/blog/lasting-legacy



Join an event

Nic will be running a Nature Writing Workshop on 15 September in Hitchin. Please see the back cover for more details of the event and how to book.



Weird and Wonderful Wildlife

Aquatic Invertebrates

People and Wildlife Officer, Josh Kalms dips beneath the surface of ponds to uncover some fascinating facts about the creatures which lurk within their depths.



Flatworms

Flatworms are fascinating, soft-bodied invertebrates found in freshwater ponds. They belong to the group *Platyhelminthes* and are known for their shape-shifting abilities.

Movement: They move by beating cilia (tiny hair-like projections) on their ventral (underside) surface, allowing them to slide over a mucus film, including on the undersurface of the water.

Shape shifters: Flatworms can expand and contract their cells, flexing their bodies in every which way.

Feeding: They are key nutrient recyclers, primarily feeding on small invertebrates and organic matter, sucking them up with a muscular pharynx (throat).

Regeneration: Flatworms can regenerate lost body parts, making them remarkable survivors. If one were to be cut in half, each piece can regenerate into a complete individual.



Cased Caddisflies

These intriguing aquatic insect larvae are known for constructing crafty cases from materials they find around them, glued together by a silk secretion from their jaws.

Survival shell: The case provides camouflage and protection from predators. As the larvae grow they add materials to the front of the case. Some species incorporate a long stick to the back end to stop them becoming fish food!

Upcyclers: Some species can be identified by the materials used to construct the case and the way in which it has formed. Sticks, sand, stones, snail shells and cut plant leaves are all possibilities.

Indicators: Many caddisfly species will perish in even mildly polluted water, making the group a good indicator of aquatic pollution.

The larvae metamorphosise into winged adults.



Midge Larvae

I know what you're thinking... "I don't like midges!"

But most midges emerging from a pond can't bite – they won't even have mouthparts – they are 'Chironomids' and are an essential part of the food chain.

Larvae: Referred to as 'bloodworms' – the red colour is due to the presence of a hemoglobin-like molecule.

Easy customers: They eat detritus and algae in the pond. Most are not fussy about water quality. They are food for almost every carnivorous species in the pond.

Help wildlife: Put a bowl or tray of water in a quiet place in the garden. You will be attracting these insects to mate and lay eggs. In doing so, you will set up a chain of events to help populations of amphibians, predatory invertebrates, bats and birds.

Water Scorpion

Water scorpions are the ninjas of the pond world! These aquatic insects are true bugs and may sound scary, but they're not true scorpions.

Habitat: They hang out in freshwater ponds and marshes, lurking stealthily among the plants.

Snorkeling killers: Their long 'tails' are actually breathing tubes. They will sneakily hold this snorkel to the top of the pond so they can wait underwater to ambush their prey.

Feeding: These predators use their powerful, super-fast front legs to snag unsuspecting fish and insects. They use piercing mouthparts to suck the juices from their victims.

Camouflage: Their talent for blending in with aquatic plants makes them the ultimate hide-and-seek champions of the pond!

The Trust runs various opportunities to have a go at pond and stream dipping with the expert knowledge of our team members and volunteers to hand – check out our events on the back cover if you'd like to come and have a go!



Annual Review 2024/2025

We start with a huge THANK YOU to all of our staff, volunteers, members, and supporters who collectively have contributed to nature's recovery. From species recovery projects, restored and newly created habitats and work with local communities, we've made significant progress in creating spaces where nature can flourish, both on our reserves and across the wider landscape.

Taking a leading role in the production of the Hertfordshire **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** has been a major focus this year. The strategy, due for launch in autumn 2025, will set out priorities for action across the county for many years to come.

Here is a selection of some of the highlights in the 2024/2025 financial year.



Supported by over
23,500 members



Assisted by
653 active volunteers



Volunteers collectively gave
2,430 days of their time



More than 2,700 people took
part in over 100 Trust events

More Space for Nature

- Thanks to funding from Highways England, the Environment Agency, and Defra's Species Survival Fund we undertook significant restoration works to the River Lea and its associated wetland habitats at Lemsford Springs and Stanborough Reedmarsh Nature Reserves.
- At Wilstone Reservoir, part of Tring Reservoirs Nature Reserve, specialist equipment helped create habitat for Bitterns, while Water Buffalo at Thorley Wash Nature Reserve shaped wetlands through their natural wallowing.
- We began a three-year project, funded by the Environment Agency, to help landowners improve chalk stream habitats in the River Mimram catchment, working closely with the local farm cluster.

Fabulous flora

- The critically endangered Scarce Tufted-sedge has been introduced to four sites to boost resilience of this nationally rare plant. It was previously only found on one site in Hertfordshire in the whole of the UK.
- Over 1900 Helleborines were found at Fox Covert Nature Reserve.
- The near threatened Thatch-moss was rediscovered at Fir and Pond Woods Nature Reserve.



Intriguing invertebrates

- The Pin-stripe Wolf Spider *Pardosa monticola* was found at Aldbury Nowers Nature Reserve, only the second record in the county.
- At Archers Green Nature Reserve, the Small Semaphore Fly was recorded, a new species for the Herts Environmental Records Centre database, along with the Eyed Rush Moth, a new site for this Herts Species of Conservation Concern.
- At Whitwell on the River Mimram, the first Beautiful Demoiselle damselfly was found, exciting news as this is one of our indicators of a healthy chalk stream.



Magnificent mammals

- Nationally rare Barbastelle bats were found at Astonbury Wood Nature Reserve.
- Since their reintroduction to key sites across our area in recent years, Water Voles have been thriving—spreading along the River Beane, with new sightings upstream to Watton-at-Stone and downstream to Hertford, and on the River Ver, they have reached Redbourn upstream and Sopwell downstream.
- Water Voles have also been recorded at Lemsford Springs Nature Reserve for the first time in 17 years.

Data and evidence

- Herts Environmental Records Centre, which is hosted by the Trust, reached the milestone of 3.5 million records of species observations on the database.
- In the Beane Valley, we continued to support and develop citizen scientists to collect environmental data to inform conservation and enhancement of the river.
- Evidence gathering for thousands of new sites for the Herts Ancient Woodland Inventory is now complete, helping secure recognition and stronger safeguards for these irreplaceable habitats.

Wilder Communities

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

Engaging and inspiring

- Volunteers delivered 22 talks to local community organisations and visited 21 schools to give advice on making more space for nature in their grounds.
- Thanks to funding from the Government's Species Survival Fund a three-year project started in Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, Hertford, and Ware to support communities to make more space for nature, with a particular focus on rivers and wetland habitats.
- Work in Watford continued with a new three-year programme getting underway to enable urban communities to take local action for nature, thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and Swire Charitable Trust.



Standing up for nature

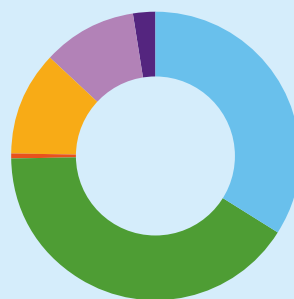
Securing a thriving, sustainable future for wildlife relies on making nature's recovery central to local decision-making.

- Through the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership, we're helping shape the county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy—advising on priorities, supporting mapping, and engaging key stakeholders.
- We are leading the Trust's highest-profile campaign to date to protect Broadwater Lake SSSI from a harmful development proposal by Hillingdon Council—an ongoing effort to safeguard this vital wildlife site and prevent a dangerous national precedent.
- We continue to actively engage with local and national politicians to shape policies and decisions that deliver the best possible outcomes for wildlife.

Financial summary

Our Strategy sets out the need to create more space for nature and to inspire more people to take action for habitat and species recovery. This action is urgently needed. We secured around £2.1mil unrestricted income in the last year, thanks in most part to our members, and ended with a surplus. However, as the scale of the nature crisis continues to grow, so do our costs for delivery. Throughout the 2025/2026 financial year, we will continue to ask our supporters to help us raise vital funds to support our local wildlife and wild spaces.

The Year In Numbers



Income:

TOTAL **£3,840k**

£1,310k

Membership

£13k

Fundraising

£404k

Legacies

£1,568k

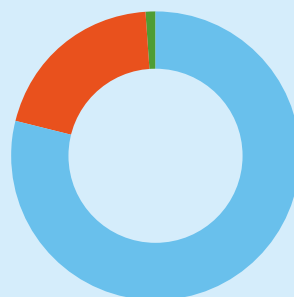
Donations, gifts and grants

£452k

Fees and contracts

£93k

Investment and other income



Expenditure:

TOTAL **£3,444k**

79%

Conservation

20%

Raising funds

1%

Governance

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

The financial information above has been taken from the draft accounts for the year. Full details of the Trust's finances can be found at bit.ly/43JWrTt



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wilder

COMMUNITIES



As I write, we are still enjoying hot sunshine but very little rain. Whilst this has been great for the emerging insects, I am desperately saving any wastewater I can to put on the garden. Perfect timing to raise awareness of the water around us for our first Herts Rivers Week. Wildlife still needs water, as we all do, and giving some thought to this in your garden or outdoor space can make a real difference. One easy task is to 'Pledge a Pond' for wildlife whether it be a large lake or a washing up bowl pond!

Did you know?

Approximately two thirds of our planet is covered by water and two thirds of our bodies filled with it. Hertfordshire has 10% of the world's chalk streams. Water is precious, life-giving, but never to be taken for granted.

Herts Rivers Week

A whole host of events and activities were offered as part of Herts Rivers Week; we hope that people learned lots and had fun – you can see what we all got up to on page 12!

Pledge a Pond

Kate Sheard, Wilder Communities Officer focusing on chalk streams, says "Between the 19th and 20th centuries, we've lost 50% of our local ponds and so we're doing something about that. Adding water, especially a pond, is one of the most effective ways to bring more wildlife into our personal and public spaces. Ponds are biodiversity hotspots, home to many species of plants, insects, and amphibians. Providing vital shelter, food, and breeding spaces as well as drinking water for many birds and mammals. Our new initiative **Pledge a Pond** asks people to add their existing ponds on our map whether in their garden, school grounds or community spaces and encourages new ponds to be created and mapped too. This will give us a real sense of where ponds in our area are located whilst encouraging new ponds to be created, no matter how big or small. It will also enable us to send our pledgers helpful resources so that they can enhance their ponds value for wildlife."



The Chalk Stream Challenge



The Trust has launched *The Chalk Stream Challenge* to get youth, uniformed groups and individuals exploring their local chalk streams in Hertfordshire through a range of activities, which are flexible and

can be customised according to the participants' age ranges. These include wildlife spotting, games of poo sticks to learn about the river's flow and speed, looking out for invasive species and examining the different types of habitats which flank the river. The first challenge route explores the River Mimram as it flows through Tarmac-owned Panshanger Park, near Welwyn Garden City, and can be completed as a 3.5km circular walk. More routes will be added in future – watch this space!

Once the Chalk Stream Challenge has been completed, participants can order an embroidered badge to promote their new-found knowledge.

Many thanks to the volunteers from the Watercress and Winterbournes LPS who developed the challenge and to Kate, and Heidi Mansell, our Chalk Rivers & Farm Advisory Officer, for adapting it to our local area.



Nurturing nature in Watford

Amy Trotter, Wilder Communities Officer for Watford is working with the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership, who want to turn an area of disused land into a community garden at Garston Station and are seeking volunteers to work on the project and maintain it. Amy recently supported a school visit to the site with a bug ID workshop, and is signposting the organisation to information on planting for wildlife and how to build their own pond. Amy said "It's still early days but I'm also hoping to support with a bio blitz to identify wildlife already present on site so we can see how diversity and volume increases over time."



One Quick Win for you!

Save water and have fun! Use buckets, tubs or old jam jars to catch raindrops - everyone picks a container and leaves it outside, whose fills up fastest? Who collects the most? Celebrate your champ and use the winnings to water your indoor and outdoor plants! Also, did you know running taps can waste up to six litres of water a minute? Time to chillax, fill a jug with tap water and keep it ready to go ice cold in the fridge. And keep the tap turned off when brushing your teeth, by using a glass of water to rinse you could save up to 64 cups of precious drinking water each time. Your small actions help make the biggest difference!



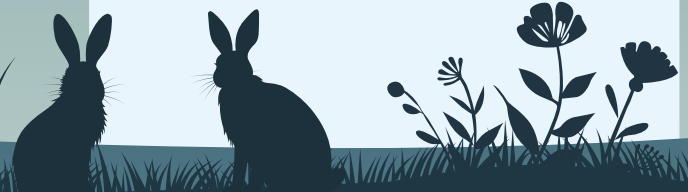
FIND OUT MORE

Online

See how you can Pledge a Pond for wildlife at:
hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/pledge-pond-for-wildlife
Learn more about *The Chalk Stream Challenge* here:
hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/chalk-stream-challenge



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Our Wild Supporters

Find out how people continue to be champions for wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex

Thank you

£ Wildlife in Crisis appeal

WE DID IT! Thanks to the generosity of our brilliant supporters, we reached our target to raise £280,000 to help local wildlife.

We launched the appeal last year at a critical point. As the scale of the nature crisis has grown, our costs have continued to rise. We decided to ask for your help and what a wonderful response we had!

People from across our area stepped up to support nature through donations, grants, and legacies. These funds go directly to our core conservation work - helping vulnerable wildlife and restoring vital ecosystems. Challenges still remain, but the support received through this campaign gives us confidence to move forward, knowing our local wildlife has a wonderful community backing it - thank you.



© Jamie Hall



© Barry Trevis

Peregrines at St Albans Cathedral

The local community and our other supporters have been keenly following the progress of the pair of Peregrine Falcons at St Albans Cathedral, which have nested there since 2022. With only five nesting pairs recorded in our area, they are a reminder of how resilient nature can be in the face of change and adversity.


You can find out more about these majestic birds by purchasing one of our new Peregrine Sponsorship Packs, all proceeds go towards supporting local wildlife.




FIND OUT MORE


Online

More information can be found at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop



 **An egg-cellent achievement!**

A huge thank you to the John Lewis Welwyn Knit & Natter group, who raised a fantastic £168 by making and selling knitted Easter chick egg-cosies to partners and customers. We're really grateful for this fabulous support!

 **Online**
Find out more about how you can fundraise for the Trust at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/fundraise

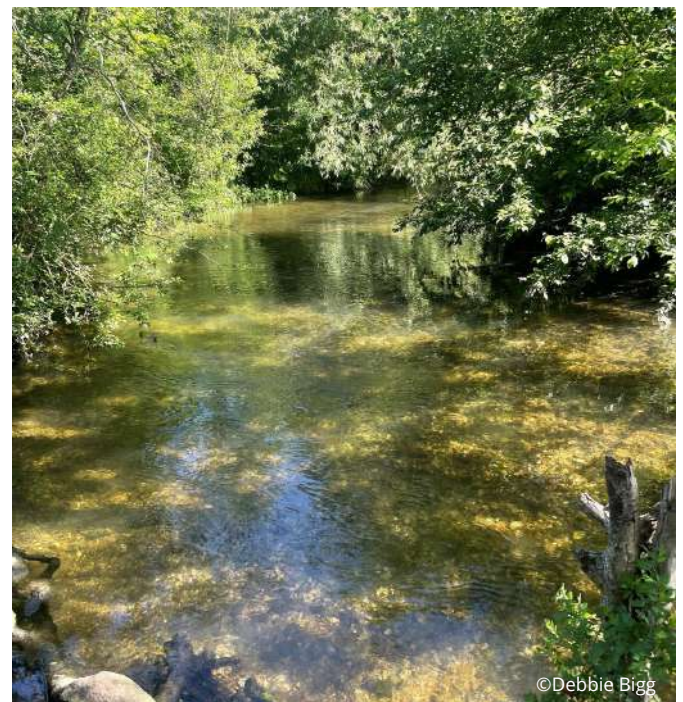
FIND OUT MORE

In remembrance

We would like to thank John Peter Philpott and Michael Brazier for kindly leaving a gift to the Trust in their Will.

We would also like to thank the friends and family of Ron Wiles, Richard Arnold, Tania Rowe and Clement Burgess who donated to the Trust in their memory.

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



Business members 'Spring' into action!

A huge THANK YOU to all our Business Members who have confirmed their membership renewals this spring including – UK Power Networks, Tarmac, Thames Water Utilities, Institute of the Motor Industry and MPI Limited. It's wonderful to have this vital support for another year and we look forward to continuing to work with you all.

We welcome applications from local businesses to join our growing network of Business Members. This is a great way to support nature's recovery and develop a deeper relationship with the Trust.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

You can find out more about our fees and benefits packages on our website: bit.ly/4noxK9o

The Big Give - together, we made double the difference!

Chalk rivers are not only beautiful but also a vitally important natural resource — sadly, they face a range of threats, including pollution, climate change, abstraction, and human modification.

Between 22–29 April, we teamed up with The Big Give to double donations from the public and raise £20,000 to bring life back to local rivers. Thanks to your incredible generosity, we exceeded our target!

The Magical Kingdom of Moss

Zoe Claymore, the award-winning garden designer behind The Wildlife Trusts' British Rainforest Garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, connects us to moisture loving plants in our gardens from our Celtic past.

Temperate rainforests, which once covered a fifth of the UK but now cover less than one per cent, contain one of the oldest plants in the kingdom – moss. These prehistoric plants have been around since before the dinosaurs. They are phenomenal and need their moment to shine. So why not give your garden the temperate woodland makeover with moss, ferns and lichens.

You may already have moss in your garden in the damp, shady environments. These mossy habitats are sacred and need time to be left alone to grow. Sadly, often people don't see moss as a plant in the garden, they see it as a problem that needs to be scraped off. We absolutely have to stand up for these ancient mossy places or they will be lost.

Moss is an essential part of any garden ecosystem where fungi grows and a host of small creatures find shelter and food. Beetles, slugs and snails to tiny springtails and microscopic creatures attract birds and other animals higher up the food chain.



I spent my childhood playing on mossy boulders over the River Lyd, in a temperate woodland in Lydford Gorge out the back of my grandparents' house. I firmly believe moss is a great addition to any garden: when I feel the soft, velvety cushion under foot or in my hands, I still have that childlike sense of wonder.

In my British Rainforest Garden, I use a leaning Silver Birch tree and Hazel tree to create a British rainforest vibe, whilst water trickles over natural stone boulders to evoke the sounds of the forest. Garden-friendly adaptations include an accessible wooden walkway through the wonderland, and a living wall covered in ivy, ferns, woodland flowers – and moss, of course!



Zoe Claymore is an award-winning landscape and garden designer based in southwest London. In 2025 she won RHS Gilt Silver Medal and coveted People's Choice award in the All About Plants category at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Illustrations by Hannah Bailey





Foxglove

The charismatic, tall pink Foxglove flowers are a reminder of the hazy days of summer buzzing with bumblebees and moths.



Ferns

Have fun with ferns and throw them some shade in the garden so those lush, curly fronds can thrive. This is the Purple Royal Fern.



Hazel

Hazel trees are good in the city for smaller gardens, great for wildlife and can be coppiced to use as stakes in the garden.



Hypnum cupressiforme moss

This is great moss for lawns and very ecologically adaptable.



Black spot lichen

Lichens are epiphytes or "air plants" that survive on nutrients and moisture in the air. They are made of fungus and algae, 'rock up' on trees and take time to grow.



Dicranum scoparium moss

This gorgeous moss is great for adding patches to the lawn. It's amazing under foot, so soft and spongy and easy to maintain.



Silver Birch

Silver Birch trees often don't grow straight in these habitats, so to celebrate nature's resilience, I've included a leaning tree. Embrace the imperfect, don't get rid of it.



Oak Moss lichen

Lichen takes time to grow on the bark of a tree, thriving on sunlight and moisture. There are many different types of lichen that spread slowly with wonderful names from Oak Moss to Shaggy Strap and Handwriting Lichen.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

For more wildlife gardening tips and project ideas go to hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-gardening

What's On

We've already got lots of exciting events scheduled for summer and into early autumn and we're adding more all the time. Here's a taster of what's on offer but make sure to check our events pages on the website to see what else is happening near you. You can also sign up to our monthly E-news at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk and see our latest offerings there too.

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

Life at the Lake

Throughout the school summer holidays, 'Life at the Lake' will be taking place at Stocker's Lake **every Tuesday and Thursday from 29 July until 12 August inclusive.**

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

We will be hosting our next AGM on **27 September**. Please save the date for now. We will share further information and details about how to book your place after 1 September 2025 – hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events

July

18 July

Butterflies for Beginners, Online

August

2 August

Bat Walk, Thorley Wash Nature Reserve

5 August

Aerial Invertebrates of Heath and Wood, Hertford Heath Nature Reserve

7 August

Summer Holiday Drop in at the Wildlife Garden, Grebe House, Verulamium Park, St Albans

12 August

Summer Tree Identification Workshop, Panshanger Park

16 August

Late Summer Stroll at Thorley Wash, Thorley Wash Nature Reserve

18 August

Summer Holiday Drop in at the Wildlife Garden, Grebe House, Verulamium Park, St Albans

19 August

Smartphone Safari, Grebe House, Verulamium Park, St Albans

19 August

Scything Workshop, Astonbury Wood Nature Reserve

September

15 September

Nature Writing Workshop, Hitchin Triangle Community Garden, Hitchin

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