

wild

SPRING
2026



Herts &
Middlesex
Wildlife Trust

**Hedgerows –
a hero of a habitat**

4

ways you can
experience
spring
page 8

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE YELLOWHAMMER

Species Survival Fund

Sarah Perry says "Brown Trout already spawning on new gravels."

Meet the Slaneys

And see what's thriving in their urban garden





Laura Burrows,
Chief Executive

“Welcome to your new look magazine, I hope you like it!”

I want to start with a huge thank you to all our members for your continued support. Your voice has never been so important.

As we enter 2026, nature is under attack like never before. In the months leading up to Christmas we saw the adoption of the damaging Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which risks environmental regression by weakening essential environmental safeguards. As I write this, the Nuclear Regulatory Review is proposing weakening the Habitat Regulations and potentially even removing the duty on public bodies to support conservation and access of National Parks and National Landscapes. And finally, to confirm what many of us know, a Government Nature Security Assessment has just been shared to highlight that **biodiversity loss is not just an environmental issue but a serious national security threat.**

We are indeed living in turbulent times, but I am hopeful people care, with Wildlife Trusts' memberships continuing to rise across the country. The love of nature in our surroundings is a unifier in these divided times. We know nature underpins everything, our food systems, economy, physical and mental health. Understanding the scale of the threats we face is essential if we are to stand up for nature, to be its voice.

That's also why I'm so hopeful about the launch of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies. They offer a genuinely exciting opportunity for collaborative, county-wide action to restore nature, bringing together farmers, landowners and community groups to deliver landscape scale recovery and create a “bigger, better, more joined-up” natural environment for both wildlife and people.

Finally, as I keep reading about our mental health and the link to increased screen time, I wanted to share a new year theme: ‘more green time, less screen time’, spring is on its way in all its hopeful, joyous colour, let's get out there and enjoy it!

FEATURES

10 The Species Survival Fund: Impact in Action

See the difference this landmark two-year project is already making for nature where you live.

16 Close up on Bird Courtship

How do our feathered friends woo a mate?

18 Meet the Slaneys

Head into this couple's urban garden

BARN OWL © RUSSELL SAVORY; HAWTHORN BLOSSOM © RICHARD BURKWARD;
GIRL WITH BUG POT © LIANNE DE MELLO; COMMON BLUE DAMSELFLY © JON HAWKINS



REGULARS

4 Wild Spring

Join Tim Hill to find out why our hedgerows are such important habitats and discover the wildlife they support. Plus, Tim shares his love of Swifts, and gives you tips to get the best out of the season.

9 Step-by-Step

Tidy up your community space and become a litter picker with this simple guide.

12 Wild Action

The latest wildlife news from Hertfordshire and Middlesex, plus coverage of UK-wide developments.

20 Wild People

Hear from our Senior Leadership Team, discover the difference you can make for wildlife, and find out what's on!

26 Spot the Difference

Hone your detective skills and learn how to identify a Common Blue Damselfly from an Azure Damselfly.



**Save the date -
Herts Rivers Week**
23 - 31 May
[hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/
herts-rivers-week](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/herts-rivers-week)

Get in touch

We'd love to hear from you, whether sharing your thoughts on the magazine or your adventures in nature in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

- 📷 @hertswildlifetrust
- 🎵 @hertswildlifetrust
- 📘 @hertswildlifetrust
- 🖱️ hertswildlifetrust.org
- ✉️ info@hwmwt.org
- ☎️ 01727858901
- 📍 Grebe House, St Michael's Street,
St Albans, Herts AL3 4SN

Wild

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On the cover

Yellowhammer
© Russell Savory

**Wild but true...It's widely cited that
the Yellowhammer's song inspired
Beethoven's Fifth Symphony!**



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Hedges and Edges



SHELTER HARVEST MOUSE © AMY LEWIS

Wild Spring

Explore and enjoy the nature on your patch

Spring is a great time to notice the beauty of hedges and seek out the wildlife they support.



Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager, reveals why hedges are vital for wildlife, and shares some of his seasonal nature highlights you can look out for and try through the spring months.

In December 2025, Hertfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was launched. Laura Burrows, the Trust's Chief Executive said, "It is an opportunity to restore our most vulnerable habitats, give wildlife the chance to thrive, and ensure our communities prosper hand in hand with nature." With about 70% of our land used for farming, this landscape has a significant role to play in nature's recovery. Here it is the hedges and edges that bound the food-producing fields that provide home to many species, some of which are declining. The LNRS includes a suite of actions which landholders may choose to implement to help wildlife.

FIELD GUIDE

A Spring Morning



Tim Hill, Conservation Manager, encourages us to look to the skies in search of Swifts.

"Fifteenth of May. Cherry blossom. The swifts

Materialize at the tip of a long scream

Of needle. 'Look! They're back!'"

I share Ted Hughes's excitement at the return of Swifts to our skies and come May mornings my eyes are always on the sky, looking for that first sickle, scything through the sky. More often than not though, it will be a distant and soft 'screeeeee, scree, screeee' that will alert me to the arrival of the first Swift. The challenge then is to peer into the heavens and try to pick out a bird which may be hundreds of feet above, sweeping through the sky. These birds are mercurial, here, and then gone in an instant. In many ways it's that elusiveness, enabled by speed, that fascinates me. Here is a bird that spends its life on the wing, flying here from Africa, touching down to nest in our roofs for a few weeks from May before departing southwards again in August.



In replacing gappy bargeboards and soffits in our roofs with impenetrable UPVC we have deprived Swifts of many nesting opportunities and numbers have declined by 68% between 1995 and 2023. In an attempt to right that wrong, over the last couple of years I have been working with Sandridge Parish Council and Hertford Swift Group piloting a scheme where over 60 residents have signed up to have subsidised nest boxes installed on their homes. The decline in Swifts has been recognised by making them a priority species in Hertfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, calling for more nesting places to be created. Hopefully there will be more schemes like the one piloted in Sandridge, thereby ensuring that those birds arriving back in May are able to secure the next generation of this sovereign of the sky.



See how you can take action for Swifts at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actionforswifts



The Nature of a Hedge

Hedges are not only an important wildlife habitat in their own right, they also provide sheltered links which enable creatures to move through our countryside. Spring is one of the best times to seek out hedges and experience their beauty and the animals which depend on them.

Wildlife corridors

Hedges are one of the most important features in the landscape of lowland Britain. They shape the countryside and some have been around for centuries. Our oldest and often most diverse hedges are all that remain of larger woodlands, long since cleared. Originally designed as barriers, to define boundaries and secure grazing animals, hedges and their associated grassland habitats have become one of the most important routes by which wildlife is able to move. Bats, which may breed in buildings on farms, will navigate along hedgerows and use them to travel to feeding areas or temporary roosts in nearby woodlands.

Shelter and survival

Hedges provide shelter to a huge range of creatures. At ground level, cavities below the hedge provide hibernation places for Great Crested Newts which may have bred in ponds anything up to half a mile away. The best hedges will be buffered by flower-rich grassland which will provide shelter for foraging small mammals. Harvest Mice will weave their tennis-ball sized nests into tall grass close to hedges. In turn, the mice and voles will be hunted by predatory birds such as Kestrels and Barn Owls, which will often perch in the top of the hedge or on adjacent fence posts, alert to the movement of their next meal.



Hedgerow homes

Farmland birds are a priority for conservation in the LNRS and many species rely on hedges to build their nests. My particular favourite is the Yellowhammer or 'scribble lark' as it's known traditionally, so named as its pale eggs are decorated with what look like the squiggly doodlings of a fountain pen. Seek out bushy hedges during early spring and you should be rewarded with the beautiful and unique song of the Yellowhammer, often likened to, "little bit of bread and no cheese". At this time of year, the males are establishing territories to hopefully attract a mate and perch prominently on the top of hedges, singing their hearts out. If a mate is found the pair will lay three to four eggs in a nest on or close to the ground. Sadly, Yellowhammers declined by 66% from 1967 to 2023 and are now 'red-listed' in the UK as a bird of conservation concern. In recent years, Heidi Mansell, the Trust's Chalk Stream and Farm Advisory Officer has been working with farmers in the River Mimram catchment with a focus on improving the fortune of Yellowhammers and hopefully a little bit more cheese in the landscape in future!



Nature's larder

Hedges provide a vital natural food supply. To many insects, the leaves and stems of the hedge plants provide food. Hawthorn, one of our most common hedge species hosts a rare jewel beetle *Agrilus sinuatus*, the larvae of which feed in the trunks of older trees. Look out for the distinctive D-shaped holes from which adults have emerged. The insects themselves provide food for small mammals and birds. Pollinated flowers in the spring will provide the bright red fruits of winter which will provide sustenance for birds such as Bullfinches and migrant thrushes including Redwings and Fieldfares. The seeds within the berries often pass straight through the birds and when deposited will germinate into new plants.



Sensing Spring

See this

Get up early or stay up late and enjoy the golden hours of dawn and dusk when the light is at its softest, highlighting the pure beauty of our nature.

Smell this

Seek out the flowers of Honeysuckle scrambling through a hedge and breathe in their sublime, delicious scent.

Hear this

Enjoy the soporific buzzing of busy bees as they gather pollen in a flowery meadow.

Feel this

Experience the rough leathery leaves of Wych Elm in hedgerows whilst out searching for the scribble lark!



BEE ON KNAPPWEED © MARCUS WEHRLE



THE POINTY-HEADED SEDGE WARBLER © TIM HILL

4 ways you can experience and enjoy *spring*

Grow your own bird food

Now is the time to plan ahead and create your own bird feeding plot. It's relatively easy - cultivate and fertilise an area to create a good seed bed, then in May sow a variety of seed rich crops such as Quinoa, Buckwheat, Triticale, Oats, Millet and Sunflowers. You could do the same in a large plot. If it's a dry summer, consider watering with washing-up water or water from a butt. By the time autumn comes you should have a dense crop which will be irresistible to your local birds.



Stars in the Stream



Late June is when Water-crowfoot is at its peak and the best place to see it is in the River Mimram at Tewinbury or Panshanger Park. The leaves are the 'crow's foot' but this is difficult to see in flowing water, where the leaves

are stretched out by the current. The plant forms a vital part of the ecology of chalk streams. The leaves provide habitat and cover for invertebrates and fish. As it grows it forms dense swathes. As the gin-clear spring water flows, it forces channels to open up where flow is greater, scouring silt off the gravel base of the river creating perfect spawning grounds for Brown Trout and habitat for mayfly nymphs. At this time of year, the white and yellow flowers seem to sparkle like stars in a bottle green sky, moved constantly by the ebb and flow of the current below. It's a wonderfully mindful experience.

The Pointy-headed Reed-walker

By mid-April thousands of small birds will be arriving back to this area from their wintering homes in Africa. Amongst this mass arrival is one of our most striking and noisy summer species, the Sedge Warbler. As its name suggests, this is a bird of wetland habitats dominated by tall vegetation. If you want to enjoy these stunning little birds head for one of the river valleys – the lower Lea Valley and mid-Colne are the best places to find them. Its scientific name is *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, meaning 'pointy-headed reed walker' which aptly describes the bird and its behaviour. However, more often than not Sedge Warblers will be seen in the tops of bushes in April where they will sing their hearts out until they attract a mate. Their song is far from soothing – it's a harsh, aggressive mix of churr, charrs, rattles and clicks which often involves phrases mimicking the songs of other birds. Research has shown that it never sings the same phrase twice and those males which have the most diverse songs achieve the most matings!

Look down!

In spring the floor of ancient woods is a flowery extravaganza as the plants burst early to capture the sunlight before the blanket of leaves on the trees steal the sun's radiance. One of the first to bloom is the Wood Anemone. In the early morning light their six-petalled flowers form a starry constellation across the dark woodland base. Next in the season is Wood Sorrel, a plant whose delicate white flowers look etched with the purple lines of bored doodling. Delicate emerald green trefoil leaves complete its perfection. Last to flower is the Bluebell, arguably the most iconic woodland wildflower of all. In its prime, the Bluebell is at its finest after rain when the flowers glow as if illuminated by indigo-bulbed torches and the honey-sweet scent teases on the breeze...



SUNFLOWER © AMY LEWIS, HONEYSUCKLE © NIAL BENNIE 2020VISION, WATER CROWFOOT RIVER MIMRAM TEWINBURY © TIM HILL, WOOD ANEMONE HOBBYHORSE WOOD © EMMA MATTHARS

Spring cleaning for nature

STEP BY STEP

1 Get equipped

Welcome spring pickers! You'll need heavy-duty gloves, appropriate footwear, a litter picker (to protect hands and backs) and two bags: one for general waste and one for recycling. Check with your local council or library for free litter pickers and bags.

2 Pick the right spot

Although you might notice rubbish on roadsides or in waterways, it's important to stay safe and avoid these areas. Keep to well-lit areas with accessible paths. Think carefully about your litter pick and plan your route beforehand.

3 Safety first

Bottles, bags, food wrappers, toys and clothing are common finds. But some things are best to avoid, including sharp metal and glass. Report hazardous materials, like needles and syringes, to your local council instead.

4 Look out for wildlife

Enjoy spotting wildlife and taking action for nature at the same time. Joyful birdsong, erupting golden daffodils and Brimstone butterflies on the wing are just some of spring's delights.

5 A team effort

Invite family and friends, join an organised litter pick, beach clean or set up a spring pickers challenge in your local community. If you're going solo, make sure you let someone know where you're going.

6 A clean sweep

When you have finished litter picking, give yourself a pat on the back with those well-washed hands. Welcome spring with hundreds or even thousands of fewer pieces of litter!

Species Survival Fund: Impact in Action

In early 2024, the Trust's Species Survival in Hertfordshire's Chalk Rivers project was awarded £1,723,840 from the Government's Species Survival Fund. As our project concludes, we look back at what was achieved.



The fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

"A boost for nature"

Sarah Perry, River Catchment Coordinator

"There are only around 260 chalk rivers worldwide, and 10% are found in our area. These rare rivers support vulnerable species such as the critically endangered Water Vole, wild Brown Trout and Kingfisher. Despite their importance, chalk rivers face major pressures from pollution, abstraction and climate change, with droughts and flooding becoming more frequent. This funding enables us to restore and protect these incredible habitats for wildlife and future generations."



3 Ambitious Project Delivery Elements

River Restoration

The project set out to restore chalk river habitats across 11.15km of the River Lea Catchment and to improve the area's ability to adapt to climate change by providing natural flood management measures, improving habitat for over 109 different species.

Water Vole Conservation and Invasive Non-native Species (INNS) Control

The project was to deliver a programme of monitoring and conservation of Water Vole populations on and around the rivers, as well as tackling INNS and testing new biological control methods that could inform future delivery planning.

Community Engagement

Connecting people to their local rivers and wetland habitats was central to the project. In addition to volunteering, we wanted to support communities in Hertford, Ware, Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City by offering advice and support for groups to take their own action for wildlife in their local areas.



RIVER LEA AND STANBOROUGH REEDMARSH © DEBBIE BIGG

6 project highlights

- **River Ash restoration:** Seven kilometres of chalk river restored in one of the most ambitious projects in the South East.
- **Monitoring Water Voles:** Assessing the populations across many Key Sites in Hertfordshire, plus tracking the distribution of reintroduced Water Vole populations.
- **Herts Rivers Week:** A new annual celebration raising awareness and inspiring action for rivers and wetlands.
- **Himalayan Balsam trial:** Early success using innovative techniques to control this invasive plant.
- **A mink-free Hertfordshire:** Due to the low catch of mink, Hertfordshire has now essentially become free of mink to the benefit of Water Voles and other wetland wildlife across our region.
- **Connected nature reserves:** River Lea restoration between Lemsford Springs and Stanborough Reedmarsh, creating new wetlands, restoring reedbed, improving flood resilience and engaging local communities.

My baseline monitoring is starting to show results - we have had a 177% and 30% increase in river invertebrates, including mayfly and stonefly at two sites on the River Ash, monitored before to after restoration in just one year. We are recording Brown Trout already spawning on new gravels introduced by the projects. And on the River Lea, Teal, Common Snipe, Woodcock and Green Sandpiper have all been spotted at the new wetlands created - only three months after they were dug!"

Sarah Perry



The Species Survival Fund project has reached its end but that doesn't mean a stop to our work on chalk rivers, and we continue to work in partnership with funders, landholders, organisations and communities to support nature's recovery.

What we delivered

Over two years, Trust staff, volunteers and machinery worked together to achieve lasting change, including:



Improving the rivers resilience to low flows and reconnecting floodplains to attenuate high flows



88

New volunteers

Raising riverbeds with thousands of tonnes of gravel

11.59km

Chalk stream restored

27

Creating three hectares of new wetland habitat across 27 ponds/backwaters/scrapes

40.58

Hectares of floodplain habitat enhanced/reconnected

8km

Removing weirs and easing barriers to open up migratory fish passage by approx. 8km



Using science-led methods to control invasive species, trialling new techniques for Himalayan Balsam at three locations

3,020

People engaged

4,170

Volunteer hours

Mobilising hundreds of volunteers for practical work and surveys



Piloting *Herts Rivers Week* to engage communities through events and interpretation



11.2km

documented Water Vole range expansion on two rivers



70+

Maintaining a network of 70+ mink rafts to protect our native wetland wildlife

43

Engaged with 43 community organisations

Find more

Find out more about our work for chalk rivers at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/living-rivers

Wild Action

How we're making an impact for nature



UPDATE

Broadwater Lake

Hillingdon Council submitted a revised planning application in November 2025 to build a new Watersports Facility and Activity Centre at Broadwater Lake. Since the initial planning application in 2023, elements of the proposed development have been scaled back – thanks in no small part to the thousands of you who forced the Council to rethink its plans. However, the fundamental issue remains unchanged: this development is still proposing to negatively impact a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - a place that exists first and foremost to protect wildlife.

Find more

Together with the Environment Agency and many others, the Trust has objected to the revised planning application and you can read why at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/threat-broadwater-lake-sssi

We are currently awaiting the date of the Planning Committee meeting when the application will be reviewed - check the webpage above for updates.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION



Sarah Perry

Congratulations to our fantastic River Catchment Coordinator, Sarah Perry, for being awarded the Marsh Staff Award for Leadership and Innovation in Nature Restoration.

The aim of this national award is to recognise and celebrate an individual who has successfully led an innovative or transformative project to bring back wildlife. In doing so, the leader will have demonstrated strong strategic and partnership leadership resulting in a significant step forward in our agenda to bring back nature.

Fiona Mahon, Director of Nature Recovery said "This award recognises all of Sarah's fantastic work on river restoration and catchment hosting over the past eight years - she really is the face of chalk streams and rivers in Herts, and I'm so thrilled that her dedication and expertise has been recognised with this award."



Thank you, Martin



We are indebted to Martin Ketcher, who has retired from his role as the Volunteer Warden at Purwell Ninesprings Nature Reserve, near Hitchin, after 46 years. Martin has been a valued member of the Trust since 1975 and began volunteering with us that same year.

Over his many years at Purwell Ninesprings, Martin has observed many changes in our wildlife; in an 80's winter he recalls there being up to 40 Snipe on the North Meadow, whereas recently there has only been the odd one or two. In earlier years, Turtle Dove, Cuckoo and Spotted Flycatcher were regular visitors but accordingly these have now been replaced by Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Red Kite over the reserve.

Martin, who has praised the support of his fellow volunteers at Purwell Ninesprings, will continue to support the Trust and to volunteer. Thank you, Martin, for all your hard work and service to wildlife.



Letting the light in

After a long absence of Hornbeam coppicing at Astonbury Woods Nature Reserve, near Stevenage, Iain Ward, Wilder Woodlands Officer, supported by our reserves team, has re-instated this ancient, sustainable woodland management technique. Trees are cut near the ground every few years and they then regrow from the base. This encourages light to the woodland floor allowing the seed bank to flourish - spring wildflowers including Bluebell, Primrose, Wood Anemone and Lesser Celandine all grow here. Going forward, deer fencing will be used to protect the compartment and its new growth. This work has been carried out as part of our *Ancient Astonbury and Wilder Woodlands* project, thanks to National Lottery players and The National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Herts Rivers Week

Last year we held our first Herts Rivers Week and it's back for 2026! Between 23- 31 May, we are welcoming you to celebrate our local chalk rivers with us through a varied programme of events, with water-saving ideas and other ways you can contribute towards the preservation of these extremely rare and special habitats. See back cover for more information.



Managing the reedbeds on our reserves

Each winter, we carry out essential reedbed management across several of our reserves using a specialist contractor and their *Truxor*—a lightweight, amphibious machine that works on both land and water using caterpillar tracks and a cutting bar, with a rake attachment to collect cut material. This year, the *Truxor* has been in action at Marsworth Reservoir (Tring Reservoirs), thanks to funding from the Chapman Charitable Trust, and at Amwell, near Ware and Rye Meads, near Hoddesdon, creating a series of channels, scallops and small cleared blocks within the reedbeds. The cut reed is then raked out to remove nutrients and prevent the area becoming too dense. These works encourage healthy new growth, create a more varied reedbed structure, and provide vital feeding areas for species such as the Bittern.



Reaching Rothbury

SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH, now in his hundredth year, has stepped forward at a critical time to champion the Rothbury Estate Fundraising Appeal, with just one year left to raise the £30 million needed to complete the purchase. Over £10 million has already been raised from individual donations ranging from £5 to £5 million.

This vast upland of over 3,800 hectares, the size of central London, is the largest area of land to be put on sale in England in decades.

Sir David Attenborough says: "time is running out to save the historic Rothbury Estate. This huge, heart-shaped expanse of moorland, rivers, forest and upland in Northumberland needs your help. People know and love the Simonside Hills that rise here. They walk the ridges and listen for the calls of the Curlew. They watch for Red Squirrels and admire the views as they scramble among the crags. They walk along its remote paths and marvel at the astonishing rock carvings left by our distant ancestors, who once lived here.

"The Wildlife Trusts have launched an appeal to buy this very special place. They will work with local farmers to care for the area and breathe new life into its precious wildlife habitats".

The size of the Rothbury Estate gives it great potential to contribute to nature restoration targets in the UK. Restoring its habitats for wildlife such as Curlew, Pine Marten, Beaver and Golden Eagle will have real significance for a greater area beyond its boundaries because the Estate lies at the heart of a 40-mile nature corridor, stretching from the north-east coast of England to the central Scottish border.

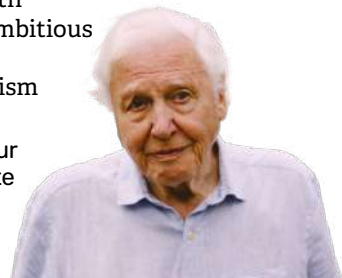
The Wildlife Trusts, in partnership with Northumberland Wildlife Trust, have ambitious plans to integrate nature recovery with farming, recreation, education and tourism on the Estate.

Find more

Discover the ways to support our purchase of the Rothbury Estate at wtru.st/rothbury-appeal

Thanks!

Our fantastic supporters have helped us to raise over £10 million already to save this special site.



A focus on farming

A new Wildlife Trusts report reveals the UK pig and poultry sector's vast pollution impact, with intensive farms creating waste equivalent to 4,160 Olympic-sized swimming pools and driving pesticide-heavy grain production that harms rivers, wildlife and countryside. wtru.st/ppreport



Space for Everyone

A Space for Everyone, a new guide for land managers funded by People's Postcode Lottery, gives practical tips on making nature reserves, walking trails, lakes and rivers more accessible, inclusive and welcoming for all visitors. wtru.st/everyone



Q&A

Ruth Williams, Head of Marine Conservation at The Wildlife Trusts, gives us the deep dive into the 2025 Marine Review.

Marine Views

WHAT DID YOU discover in this year's Marine Review?

We had a great year for Puffins on Skomer in Wales and Muck in Northern Ireland! But also had to deal with a couple of serious incidents, including a bio-bead spill in Sussex and oil tanker collision in the North Sea. Our Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers were brilliant at providing a rapid response.

Were there any surprising or rare species sightings?

We love getting reports of Leatherback Turtles, which are rarely seen but are resident in UK seas, feeding on jellyfish. The spread of non-native Slipper Limpet is not such good news. We also saw huge blooms of octopus—an indication our seas are warming.

What's the latest on banning bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas?

Following Sir David Attenborough's film, *Ocean*, we had an incredible swell of public support for our campaign to ban bottom trawling collecting 18,435 responses to the UK Government's consultation. Now we need to keep the pressure on to ensure these seabed protections are implemented swiftly and strongly.

Why do we need to protect seabeds in the fight against climate change?

In the UK our muddy seabeds store 240 million tonnes of carbon. But bottom towed fishing gear and developments that damage the seabed can also release carbon back into the atmosphere.

What can we do to support healthier, more resilient seas?

Choose seafood from sustainable local stocks, caught using low impact fishing methods and give different species a try—check out the Cornwall Good Seafood Guide for info. Get involved in a local beach clean or Wildlife Trust-led citizen science programme, like Shoresearch, to help gather evidence needed for better ocean policies.

What gives you the most hope for the future of our marine wildlife?

From disco-coloured seaslugs in our rockpools, to lush seagrass meadows teeming with fish and Humpback Whales or tuna breaching just off the shore—our seas are awesome, but under huge pressure. By working together, with UK and devolved governments and industry, and supporting your local Wildlife Trust, we can achieve healthy seas for the future.

**Find
more**

Sign up to our marine newsletter at:
wtru.st/marine-mailing

16,000

trees planted by Radnorshire Wildlife Trust and The Woodland Trust across the Wye catchment this winter.



19

Pine Martens reintroduced to Exmoor by Devon Wildlife Trust—the species' first return in over a century.



4 ways your support is making a difference

Red-billed Choughs soar again in Kent skies after

200 years

thanks to Kent Wildlife Trust and partners.



5,000

homes invited by Ulster Wildlife and fragrance company FieldDay to join the *Let Nature In* wildlife gardening campaign.





THE

An ode to lovebirds across the British
Isles and their rituals of courtship

Language OF Lovebirds

Jenny Shelton, Senior Media Officer at The Wildlife Trusts, shares her life-long passion and fully-fledged fascination for birds



JANE AUSTEN, ONE, of our great English writers and an authority on matters of the heart, once observed that, in courtship, 'the man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal'.

The same can be said of the bird kingdom. In spring, birds—from mighty Ospreys to garden Robins—turn their sights to the business of breeding. Much like in Jane Austen's time, the rules of romance are strictly observed. A female might find herself courted in a number of ways: a serenade, a dance, or the giving of a gift, like the Kingfisher's delicate presentation of a fish. Then, once the male has declared his intentions, it's up to her to accept or refuse.

I once watched a male Osprey return to a nest in southern England, where these birds had once vanished from the landscape. He had flown ahead of his mate from West Africa to claim their territory and awaited her arrival. When she appeared, he wooed her with gifts of sticks and shiny fish until she seemed satisfied with his devotion.

Courting birds often use visual cues, with more glamorous males coming out on top. The extravagance of the peacock's tail, which offers little protection from predators, was evidence to Darwin that it must therefore be appealing to the female. Many birds can also see on the ultraviolet spectrum, which makes some colours glow vividly—like the blue of a Blue Tit's crown (the brighter the better).

Along with gift-giving and looking gorgeous, another route to a female's heart is through performance—be it an impressive vocal range or elaborate dance.

I was creeping through a thicket one day in early spring when a sound of such richness exploded from the thorny branches. The Nightingale's song is unmistakable: a heart-piercing performance of different sounds, hitting notes both high and low in a combination of complex phrases. It's easy to appreciate how a bird with such vocal abilities must be in tip-top breeding condition. Sadly, Nightingale numbers have plummeted by 90% in the UK in the last 50 years.

My final focus brings us back to the ballroom, where all the best romances play out from *Persuasion* to *Grease*. Now's the time to watch for the alluring dance of the Great Crested Grebe. What begins with tentative head-shaking and bill-dipping builds to the pair's wonderful weed dance.

But there's one bird that outperforms them all with an aerial ballet that few get to witness: the Hen Harrier. On a windswept hill somewhere, right now, a silvery male will be twisting and turning through the air, its wings opening and folding, its body rolling as it climbs and dives, chattering in an urgent attempt to charm a female hidden in the heather. If he wins her heart, he wins the chance to pass on his genes.

So, while Austen may have lamented a lack of female agency, had she looked to her garden finches or the singing Starling, she might have been encouraged to find that female choice, in fact, holds the power to perpetuate life itself.

Loch of the Lowes Scottish Wildlife Trust

Visit Loch of the Lowes in autumn to watch the breathtaking Osprey, a stunning fish-eating bird of prey, soaring and fishing above tranquil waters. Don't forget your binoculars!

Location:
Dunkeld, PH8 0HH

Fingringhoe Wick Essex Wildlife Trust

Experience the magical Nightingale chorus on a guided walk at Fingringhoe Wick in spring, where up to 40 males fill the evening air with their unforgettable, melodic song.

Location:
Fingringhoe, CO5 7DN

Tring Reservoirs Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Tring reservoirs are known as one of the best bird-watching spots in the south of England. Witness the passion of the Great Crested Grebe courtship dance here in spring.

Location:
Tring, HP23 4PA

"It all happens in the pond - it's like a little drama out there when it gets going."

Meet the Slaneys



Chris and Gaynor Slaney

CHRIS AND GAYNOR Slaney have been members of the Trust for over 20 years. Since 1992, they have lived on a busy main road in Oxhey, just south of Bushey Train Station, where, at rush hour, traffic is nose to tail. At first sight, this urban setting might not be the obvious location for a wildlife haven – but stand to be surprised, for this couple's garden attracts a great variety of wild visitors. Let's hear how they've encouraged them.

"The hedge is one of the first things we did, putting in mixed native species – Holly, Field Maple, Blackthorn, Hawthorn and wild roses. It's been really successful and we've had lots of nests over the years - Dunnock, Wrens, Robins and Blackbirds are in and out of it.



When we first dug the pond, within a very short period of time, we had dragonflies. On one hot day, we had a Sparrowhawk bathing in the shallows. At the age of four or five, our son, Edd, used to sit by the pond for hours, counting the frogs. We've recently had to re-line the pond and whilst we were doing that, there was a female Southern Hawker dragonfly ovipositing on one of the

logs – once she had started nothing was going to stop her. The variety of nooks and crannies at the water's edge is for frogs and newts to hide away - it's newt city in there. We find them all over the garden, and love how they pretend they're dead and then scuttle off!

Hedgehogs are one of the reasons we left a gap under the gate and they regularly visit the garden. When our children were young, we nursed a very unwell, one-eyed, baby Hedgehog back to health. Our kids named him Colin, and he made a leaf home under the ivy – he must have lived there for over a year.

We have left the grass to grow longer and have noticed we get a lot more butterflies, moths, grasshoppers and insects. And we've seen more bats too so we're sure it's had a knock-on effect.

A couple of years ago, we had the chance to buy the bank beyond our fence, next to the road. We stepped it with sleepers and planted herbs, bulbs and perennials. We've since seen a female Hairy-footed Flower Bee on Catmint and a male on the Comfrey in the same flower bed. People stop by to talk, they're interested in what we've done and the wildlife we're looking at."



Wild People

Stories from our family of nature lovers



Our wildlife gardening top tips:

You have to let go a bit and not be so tidy."

Gaynor

However small, get a pond (without fish). You'll get so much joy from it."

Chris

Chris is a keen photographer and is responsible for all the wildlife photos on this spread. He cites his hobby with making him more tuned-in with nature and seeing things he never expected to see. During the pandemic Chris simultaneously photographed a sequence of three dragonflies emerging from nymphs and documented their progress in a spreadsheet. He shared the exciting transformations he recorded with the couple's grandchildren and other children too. They all loved the 'real-life' nature lesson.

This incredible couple's enthusiasm for nature in their urban oasis is clearly infectious for both people and wildlife!

Find more

Visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-gardening to discover our many 'How to' guides.

Leading the Trust towards

2030

Laura Burrows Chief Executive



My aspiration for the future of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is that we help create a wilder landscape where nature thrives AND people benefit. We

can't do this alone, partnerships continue to be central to our work, as does the need to raise vital funding, so that by 2030, we can show how we have delivered on our three goals:

- More land managed and protected for nature.
- More people taking action for wildlife.
- Nature recognised as vital for tackling climate change and improving wellbeing.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is key to this, joining up habitats, restoring species, and shaping planning decisions so growth supports nature. This is a great opportunity to create bigger, better, more connected places for wildlife and communities.

For me, it's also about how we at the Trust are engaging new audiences and inspiring the next generation so that by 2030 and beyond, wildlife and people flourish together.

Fiona Mahon Director of Nature



I am thrilled and proud to be leading the Trust's nature recovery work across Hertfordshire and Middlesex. I have great ambitions for the Trust, and believe that there are exciting opportunities to develop and grow our partnership and engagement work with a range of new and existing stakeholders and communities, including farmers, private

landowners and businesses, through initiatives

such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), carbon offsetting and via delivery of the recently published Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire.

The trick is to make nature relevant to and valued by business and society, so that nature recovery becomes the bedrock of green economic growth in the region. The Trust can help by working with partners and communities to demonstrate the multiple co-benefits that come from nature recovery projects and sustainable land management, ranging from skills training and job creation to improved health and wellbeing.

By scaling up and connecting project delivery in the wider landscape, including landowner initiatives, with nature reserves and other protected wildlife sites, we can build a resilient urban and rural landscape where both nature and people can thrive. Alongside this, we need more case studies to demonstrate to politicians and decision-makers that a healthy natural environment is not a blocker to growth, but rather a prerequisite for sustainable development and future prosperity for all.

**Find
more**

Find out more about the Trust's strategy for nature's recovery at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/Wilder2030

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 a new Trustee 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

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 for an information pack.

Closing date: 9am on Monday 13 April.
Interviews will be held in May.

**Find
more**

Please visit our website for more information about the Trust
www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk

"Good things can happen when we come together for a common aim."

Wild People WILDER COMMUNITIES



Lea Ellis,
Engagement
Manager

I 'VE NEVER BEEN able to say I have a favourite time of year; each season has its own magic and wonder. In spring, the Hawthorn trees which are lavishly covered in white and pink blossom always remind me of hedgerow bridesmaids, heralding the way for the coming summer. There is something about spring that fills me with feelings of hope, fresh new beginnings and another chance to try and make our world a better place.

As always, the Engagement Team is out and about in the community, encouraging people to do positive things to help protect nature and in turn our own wellbeing. Part of our work will be to highlight Hertfordshire's new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), a wonderful example of partnership working across the county and which we are very pleased to have been a part of. Good things can happen when we come together for a common aim.

However, we acknowledge this isn't an obvious focus for many people - prices are still rising whilst for many, wages are not;

the stresses and demands of modern living leave very little headspace to consider that our wildlife and green spaces are also suffering. Yet we are inextricably linked. The Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership came together to look at ways that residents and workers of Hertfordshire could all be involved in helping to change things. The resulting LNRS is a weighty document to read if you're not used to that kind of thing, but it's basically saying 'This is our home, we share it with other people, wildlife and nature. Let's work together to do everything we can to look after it, and in turn look after each other and ourselves'.

That's why you'll find us dropping into your school to show you how the grounds can be a wonderful place to play and hang out, as well as somewhere to support pollinators, birds and offer calming, fragrant sensory areas. You might see us giving a talk about how to make more space for nature or encouraging neighbours to create a Hedgehog Highway in their street. Maybe you'll join us on a wellbeing walk in your local park or in view of a stunning carpet of woodland



Bluebells. We will be working together with community groups who also care passionately for the environment and want to support ordinary people to do something amazing for nature - imagine getting a Swift box installed on your house or place of work and then experiencing the thrill of the first nesting couples, knowing that you helped to make that happen!

Still feeling that all this activity couldn't possibly be for you? It takes one tiny pebble dropped in a (washing-up bowl) pond to create ripples which turn into gigantic waves. Just one person to say, "I have an idea" or "I want to help" to get the ball rolling on some amazing projects. We want to hear from you. For positive change to happen, we need to work together and the LNRS outlines this on a Herts-wide scale. Everyone is part of nature - let's play our parts together.



Find
more

If you want to discuss bringing your wild idea to life, please drop us an email at wildersupport@hmwt.org

Nature Champions at Work



Heidi Mansell,
Chalk Rivers & Farm
Advisory Officer

In December, the Hertfordshire Zoo team joined the Trust in Digswell to take part in a hedge planting project.

The team planted a variety of hedge plants including Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Hazel, which were generously provided by Affinity Water's Water in the Landscape Fund.

The planting session was led by Heidi Mansell, the Trust's Chalk Rivers & Farm Advisory Officer. Heidi's role is funded by the Environment Agency and plays a key part in helping to bring together land owners, stakeholders and communities to improve river and landscape health across the region.

The day brought plenty of chances for wildlife spotting and by the end of it an impressive 370 hedge plants had been planted. A fantastic contribution to local nature!

370

**hedge
plants
have been
planted**



Wild Supporters

Croxley Park businesses unite for local charities



Croxley Park business community donated over £660 to the Trust as a result of their annual fundraising efforts. **Thank you to everyone for your amazing contribution!**

At Croxley Park, we launched a year-long fundraising initiative with the aim of raising £5,000 for local charities in Watford. Through a series of workshops, charity raffles, competitions and fundraising at our events throughout the year, occupiers and visitors came together to support a range of good causes. Thanks to this collective effort, over £8,000 was raised and is being shared equally between 12 local Watford charities."

Boots, Brambles and Teamwork!

Business members, Saba UK joined us for two days in October and November at our two nature reserves, Frogmore Meadows and Waterford Heath, where despite the odd shower, they got stuck into Blackthorn removal, tree popping and scrub clearing. A great day of teamwork!

**Find
more**

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



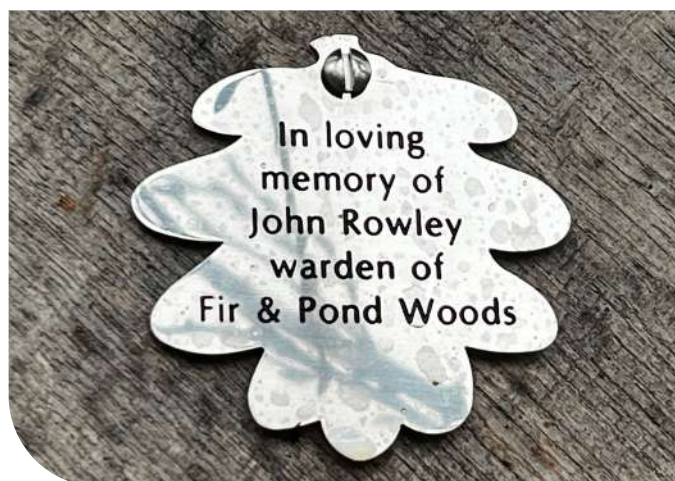
You helped protect local woodlands



Thanks to everyone who has donated to our woodland appeal over the past year. A key moment in the campaign was our participation in the Big Give's Christmas Challenge in December and thanks to the generosity of our matched funders and supporters we surpassed our £20k target! All appeal donations have made a welcome contribution to our essential conservation and safety work across our woodland sites, for which we are incredibly grateful.

**Find
more**

For the latest updates visit: hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/protectwoodlands



REMEMBRANCE

We are grateful to all those who have chosen to donate to the Trust in memory of their loved ones, including Chris Bartram's wife who gave a special donation in memory of her late husband at Christmas time.

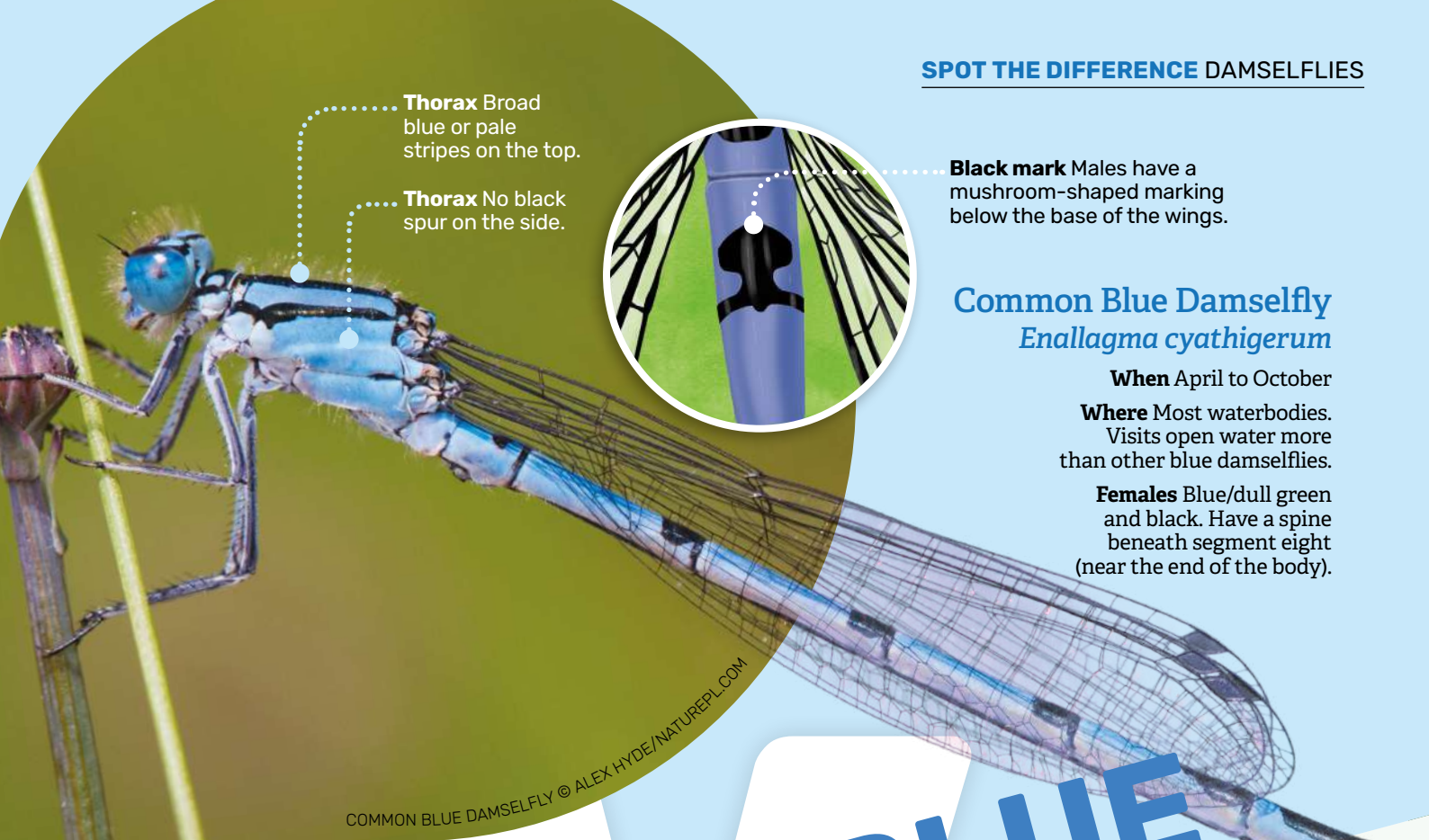
Our thanks again go to the family and friends of John Rowley, a long-term supporter and Volunteer Warden of Fir and Pond Woods Nature Reserve. Following their donation, the Trust has installed a dedication plaque in our Wildlife Garden at Grebe House in John's memory.

We also share our warmest gratitude to both John Peter Philpott and Irene Edna Page for kindly leaving a gift to the Trust in their Wills.

Thank you to all our Business Members who have confirmed their membership renewals this spring, including European Flavours & Fragrances.



Discover how your business can make a real difference for local nature – explore our membership options and benefits online: hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/corporate-support



Thorax Broad blue or pale stripes on the top.

Thorax No black spur on the side.

Black mark Males have a mushroom-shaped marking below the base of the wings.

Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

When April to October

Where Most waterbodies. Visits open water more than other blue damselflies.

Females Blue/dull green and black. Have a spine beneath segment eight (near the end of the body).

COMMON BLUE DAMSELFLY © ALEX HYDE/NATUREPL.COM

COMMON BLUE AZURE

Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella*

When April to September

Where Prefers smaller, sheltered ponds and streams. Stays near the edges of larger lakes.

Females Green (occasionally blue) and black. No spine beneath segment eight of the abdomen.

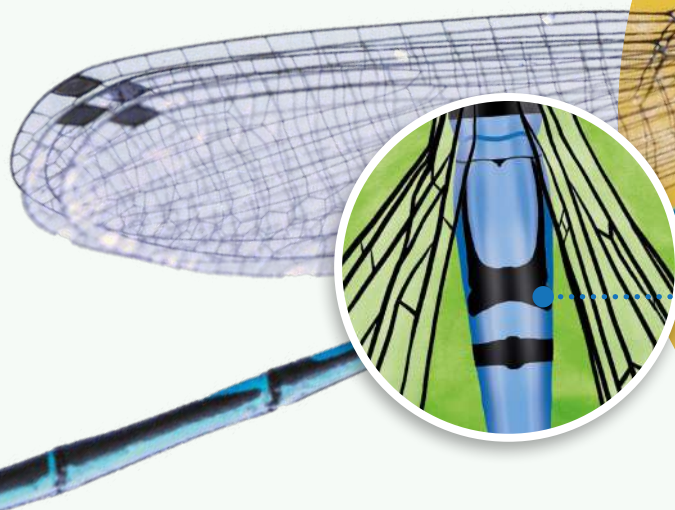
Two of our most common damselflies, easily confused at a glance. So how do you spot the difference?

AZURE DAMSELFLY © ROSS HODDINOTT/NATUREPL.COM

Thorax Narrow blue or pale stripes on the top of the thorax.

Thorax Black spur on the side of the thorax.

Black mark Males have a U-shaped marking, detached from the black ring below.



DISCOVER BRITAIN'S INSECTS

Explore • Identify • Protect

Search
ID UK Insects App
and download from
the App Store and
Google Play



What's on this Spring?

We've got lots of exciting events scheduled for you this spring and into early summer. Here's a sample to whet your appetite but we're adding events all the time. You can see what else we have coming up and book your place at hertswildlifetrust.org/events



more than
270

species
of Bee



21 March – Help Build a Bee Tower – Stocker's Lake, Rickmansworth

Did you know that there are more than 270 species of bee in the UK? Come and find our team at Stocker's Lake for this family-friendly drop in session and learn more about these fascinating and important creatures. After brushing up on your bee

knowledge, you can then help to build a collection of bee towers. Why not take a walk around the nature reserve afterwards and see what bees and springtime wildlife you can spot?

31 March – Signs of Spring Walk – Cassiobury Park, Watford

Join our knowledgeable Reserves Officer, Sam, for a guided walk around Cassiobury Park. Take the opportunity to admire the beautiful spring flowers, listen to the birds heralding in the season and identify other signs of life as the weather warms and the days get longer.



31 March - Easter Holiday Smartphone Safari – Verulamium Park, St Albans

Learn to use your smartphone to take stunning nature photos, with professional photographer, Jeanette. The rules of photography are the same whether you have a smartphone or a £20k camera – composition, exposure and passion. You'll start off in our wildlife garden and then take a stroll through Verulamium Park, learning how to take photographs of the plants, flowers, trees and landscape along the way.



11 April - Five Lakes Springtime Walk

Explore the beautiful lakes of the Upper Colne Valley. Join us for a scenic 6km guided walk around five stunning lakes, a perfect way to immerse yourself in nature this spring. Along the route, our expert guide, Josh, will introduce you to the local wildlife and help you pick out a few springtime birds by their songs, perfect for nature lovers.



The Hedgehog Walk – 30 March to 30 April

Join in this fun and family-friendly fundraising challenge in partnership with Timmy Time of the multi-award-winning studio Aardman, and walk, wheel, crawl or roll 3km with Timmy and friends.



Find more

Find out more at wildlifetrusts.org/hedgehog-walk



Save the date! Herts Rivers Week – 23 to 31 May

Get ready to celebrate our second Herts Rivers Week when we'll be shining a spotlight on our globally rare and beautiful chalk rivers.

Expect inspiring events, walks, talks and family activities that help you explore these precious waterways, learn about the wildlife they support, and understand the challenges they face.

And while it's a celebration, it's also a call to action – discover how small everyday changes, from saving water to joining a river clean-up, can make a real difference to the future of our rivers.

Find more

Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org/herts-rivers-week



30 Days Wild – June 2026

From 1 May, sign up for 30 Days Wild and enjoy a month-long wild adventure this June.

Find more

Find out more at wildlifetrust.org/30dayswild

You don't have to be a member to take part in 30 Days Wild so share this link with family and friends and enable them to discover the many joys that can be found in nature.