

wildlifematters

Summer 2018



Herts and
Middlesex

NEWS FROM YOUR **LOCAL WILDLIFE TRUST** AND FROM **AROUND THE UK**

Dragons and Damsels

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Middlesex's most
colourful residents **8**



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NATURE RESERVE**
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PROTECTING **WILDLIFE** FOR THE FUTURE



FESTIVAL of WILDLIFE



Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 July
10:00am-4:00pm
Panshanger Park

Join us for a FREE family festival at the beautiful Panshanger Park for a weekend of walks, talks and conservation activities to celebrate the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Find out more at:
hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/festival

In partnership with



Summer 2018

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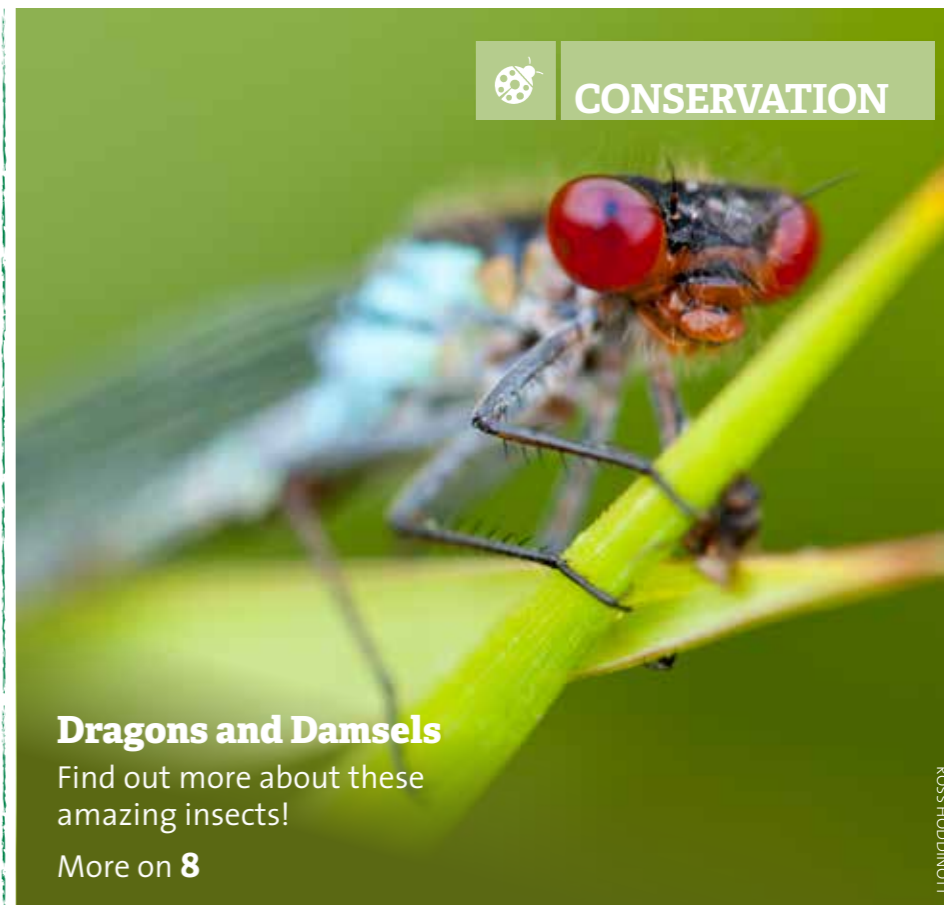
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wildlifematters

HERTS & MIDDLESEX WILDLIFE TRUST

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From the Chief Executive

22,000 Members, 2,000 volunteer days, thousands of people enjoying events, and new business partners are just some of the highlights of the last year which you can read about in our Annual Review included in this edition. All of which have meant that we've made positive strides in giving wildlife a better future, including the rather exciting return of some species which were once lost from our patch.



Volunteers are at the heart of all of this, and we are immensely fortunate to have such a dedicated group of volunteers, giving so much time to looking after our nature reserves, surveying wildlife, helping in the office and the Grebe House Wildlife Garden, and much more.

We've recently written to our local MPs about the potential threat to Local Wildlife Sites (Page 7) and have had some positive responses. I would encourage you to add your voice and ask your MP to add their support too.

This edition has a focus on invertebrates, some of the most important, and often overlooked, wildlife. From butterflies and spiders

to worms and snails, these incredible creatures are all around.

It's the perfect time of year to get out and look for wildlife in the sun – do let Herts Environmental Records Centre know what you find at www.hercinfo.org.uk Thank you for your support.

Lesley Davis

Wild Trax

Wild Trax is a new and exciting youth project based in Aylesbury & Tring. It is a partnership scheme between Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust and the Natural History Museum at Tring, with funding from the Rothschild Foundation.

Our goal is to aid young people aged 11-18, to enjoy and help the natural world while pursuing their passions. We aim to provide a friendly environment in which young people can socialise, showcase their skills and develop new ones, while having fun and working together to help their local community and its wildlife.

So far the project has been working with several schools in the area, finding out what young people would like to do, helping them make their school grounds more wildlife friendly and setting up taster sessions at our reserves. We want to demonstrate that, no matter your interests, you can help nature, so Wild Trax will incorporate digital media, blogging, photography, arts & crafts, construction, as well as classic practical conservation activities such as surveying and habitat management. We hope to give opportunities to experience all of the above through various taster sessions. We will then encourage the young people to design their own nature-benefiting project (individually or in groups) and support them in carrying it out. We know that time is precious so all the work the young



people carry out with us will be recognised by awarding them a Wild Trax certificate and a certificate from vInspired – a nationally renowned volunteering scheme. This project is a great way for young people to gain new skills and show off their brilliance to future academic bodies and employers!

If you know a school or youth group, or even an individual, in Tring or Aylesbury who would be interested in getting involved with our youth project either as a participant or sharing their expertise as a volunteer please contact Beth, Wild Trax Project Officer, at wildtrax@bbowt.org.uk

Bats

Our Barbastelle project is full steam ahead with staff and volunteers putting up 24 bat boxes at Balls Wood, three potential maternity colonies detected and a license to radio-tag barbastelle successfully applied for. There's plenty more planned with acoustic monitoring, mist netting and harp trapping planned over the summer and box checks scheduled for the autumn. Watch this space!

Barbastelle aren't the only bats in town and we have lots of surveying and events planned over the next year to ensure that the Trust creates the best habitat possible for these protected animals. Nathusius' Pipstrelle bats are the focus of a new project in the Colne Valley which will include surveying, tagging and monitoring.



New species

Our Records Centre Manager, Ian has been busy in his spare time – at Hexton Chalk Pit he made first site records for the treehopper *Centrotus cornutus* and plant bug *Strongylocoris leucocephalus* making Hexton only the second site for this chalk grassland species in the county; at Panshanger Park he found eight new species, including four fly species, two woodlice, a spider and a fern.

At Danemead, Ian found one of only four species of snakefly in the UK which was a new site record and whilst out with the Herts Invertebrate project Ian found the nationally scarce down shieldbug, another completely new record for Hertfordshire and particularly exciting as the insect was thought to be extinct in the east of England.

Gail Ashton (Page 10) found a fan-bristled robberfly at King's Meads – a first in Hertfordshire - and a leaf-rolling weevil was recorded at Balls Wood. While this isn't a first for the site, it is a nationally rare species and one of our most important species on the reserve.

These records are essential to caring for these special sites and ensuring that our wildlife is provided with the best habitat possible. Please let us know what you see – be it insect, plant, bird, mammal or other at hercinfo.org.uk



Down shieldbug



Plant bug



Treehopper



Campaign begins for Nature's recovery

We all need the future to be more wild as an urgent priority. Please help us build momentum for a Nature Recovery Network

As we stand on the brink of the biggest ever shake-up of environmental rules, The Wildlife Trusts are calling for politicians to introduce new laws to build a wilder, better Britain.

Central to this would be a requirement for Local Authorities to produce local Nature Recovery Maps, showing where the remaining wildlife is and how it can be reconnected and expanded. These maps, produced with wide local consultation, would join up to form a national Nature Recovery Network. For the first time our landscapes would be farmed and developed in an integrated way that benefits people and wildlife.

The campaign for a Network kicked off with a presentation at Westminster

in May. 48 MPs heard The Wildlife Trusts explain the need to rebuild nature after decades of destructive practices.

"We know from research across the globe that a healthy, wildlife-rich natural world is essential for our wellbeing and prosperity," said Nigel Doar, Director of Strategy at The Wildlife Trusts. "Nature needs to recover – for the sake of wild

plants and animals, and for everything it brings us: better health, climate control, flood management, enjoyment, employment and more."

The Westminster Government recently consulted on future English planning policies and public payments to farmers. As part of their campaign for a Nature Recovery Network, The Wildlife Trusts lobbied strongly for the planning system to protect Local Wildlife Sites, and for government payments to farmers that help them create and look after places for wildlife.

Nature needs to recover – for everything it brings us

Our vision for the future

1 Nature is normal
Children have trees to climb, fields to explore and ponds to investigate.

2 Green developments
All housing and other development creates a net gain for wildlife.

3 Wilder cities
Green roofs, green walls, pocket parks and trees are common.

4 Buzzing countryside
Farmland is crisscrossed by colourful habitat for wild pollinators.

5 Long-term fisheries
All fishing is sustainable and jobs are secure.

6 Recovering seas
Sightings of whales and other sea creatures are increasing.

7 Fertile soils
Nutrients are staying locked in soils rather than eroding and blowing away.

8 Restored uplands
Instead of just close-grazed grasslands, the trees and peat bogs are back, reducing flooding and locking up CO₂ from the air.



Read the report and join our campaign on wtru.st/natnet

25,000 stand up for Local Wildlife Sites

An incredible 25,000 of you responded in just two weeks this spring when the Government proposed to take all reference to Local Wildlife Sites out of the National Planning Policy Framework.



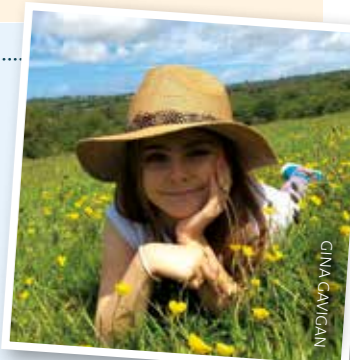
This change would have removed all protection for England's 42,000 Local Wildlife Sites. These are quiet, often unnoticed places where wildlife thrives – meadows, woodlands, city oases. Although they tend to fall under the

radar they are a critical part of our wildlife resource. Designated Local Wildlife Sites cover 3% of Wales and Northern Ireland, 5% of England and 1.7% of the Isle of Man. They are recognised and protected in planning policy – the process is one of their only protections – but nevertheless some are still lost each year.

Because of your action, Housing Minister Dominic Raab has agreed to revisit the wording (in England). Thank you! But these special spaces are far from secure – we may need your help again soon to save our Local Wildlife Sites.

Nature: good for you

Following 30 Days Wild this June, researchers at the University of Derby have proved that seeing beauty in the natural world leads to improved wellbeing and happiness. The three-year study involved thousands of participants, and demonstrated the positive impact of wildlife on our health.





Hertfordshire and Middlesex's Dragons and Damsels

Now is the perfect time to go in search of Hertfordshire and Middlesex's most colourful residents – dragonflies and damselflies!



Emerald damselfly

Dragonflies have been around for at least 300 million years – pre-dating even dinosaurs. Fossil records show that these prehistoric dragonflies had wingspans stretching up to 75cm (nearly two and a half feet)! Thankfully today's dragonflies are significantly smaller and the biggest dragonfly in the world today only has a wingspan of around 20cm (7 and a half inches).

Spot the difference

Dragonflies belong to the insect order *Odonata* – meaning 'tooth'. Within this there are two sub-orders, *Anisoptera* (dragonflies) and *Zygoptera* (damselflies). There are some easy ways to tell the two apart when you're out and about enjoying the summer.

The easiest way to tell at a glance which is which is to check what position the wings are at rest – dragonflies rest with their wings open while damselflies rest with their wings closed. When flying the dragonfly has a strong flight and damselfly flight is weaker with more of a flutter. If you are lucky enough to get up close then check the eyes – dragonfly eyes touch at the top of the head.

Despite traditional nicknames like 'Devil's darning needles' or 'horse stingers', dragonflies and damselflies don't sting.

When to spot them

An estimated 42 dragonfly and damselfly species are native to Britain and of these, 26 species can be found in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. We are lucky enough to have many of these beautiful creatures at many of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's nature reserves.

Dragonflies and damselflies can be seen best over the warm summer months but can still be spotted as late as November. Adult dragonflies are most active between mid-morning and mid-afternoon, when temperatures are at their highest. Dragonflies are cold-blooded and must warm themselves before flying, so flight is generally restricted to sunny weather.

Where to spot them

Adult dragonflies and damselflies feed on small insects. Both groups hunt for their food on the wing – hovering, darting, chasing or just pursuing their quarry at amazing speed. Dragonflies are some of the fastest insects in the world and can reach speeds of up to 30 miles per hour, so head towards open water to spot them in action, hunting for insects.

The Trust's **Amwell Nature Reserve** near Ware is the top site for dragonflies and damselflies in Hertfordshire, with 21 Hertfordshire species being recorded here – scarce chaser, Norfolk hawkler and willow emerald dragonflies have all been spotted here in recent years. The

Dragonfly Trail on the reserve is open from May-October and offers fantastic opportunities to see these creatures up close.

Boardwalks stretch out over reedbeds, pools and ditches and

a circular walk provides a chance to see orchids at close proximity too.

King's Mead Nature Reserve comes a close second for places to spot our winged beauties, with 18 species spotted through the summer months including the scarce hairy dragonfly.

Head to **Stocker's Lake** in Rickmansworth, keeping an eye on open areas at this gravel pit, to see thousands of damselflies over the lake as well as dragonflies such as the emperor and broadbodied chaser.

Take a walk through the dappled woodland of **Fir and Ponds Wood** meandering past the reserve's ponds where sixteen species of dragon and damselfly have been recorded.

Hertford Heath is another great place to see dragonflies – sit quietly by the end of the ponds in the middle of a still summer's day and you're sure to spot some colourful dragonflies such as the emperor and common darter. The scarce emerald damselfly was found again recently, showing there is now a breeding colony at this reserve.



Broad bodied chaser

JOSH KUBALE



Common darter

Help your local dragonflies and damselflies

We're raising funds to improve wetlands at local nature reserves to ensure that our amazing dragonflies can continue to thrive. Turn to the back page to find

out more and donate or visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/appeal

Visit our website for upcoming dragonfly and damselfly events in your area.



My Wild Life

Gail Ashton is a wildlife photographer based in Hertfordshire specialising in macro photography of invertebrates. Her field work is undertaken during the active months from spring to autumn photographing species in their natural habitats. This takes her all over the country, visiting amazing places for wildlife.



Swollen-thighed beetle



Black-headed cardinal beetle

A keen naturalist from a young age, Gail is a member of several conservation organisations and is currently transforming her own garden into a nature friendly habitat for insects, birds and mammals.

She is currently undertaking a project called 500species2018 which sees her trying to photograph 500 invertebrates this year.

Gail, what made you start the 500species2018 project?

I began the project to reconnect myself with both the natural world and photography. I've always loved both of these things, so invertebrate photography was a natural convergence of the two. It's also a project to show people this hidden world, and help them connect and empathise with the insect world, to understand their importance to the planet, and why we should protect and conserve them and their habitats. It's already working on my family – they are all taking in interest. My children often shout me to say they've found an insect, and are learning to identify species. Most importantly, they are learning that invertebrates are not to be feared. They will even carefully handle some bugs and beetles now. For this alone, my project is already worth it!

Have you always been passionate about invertebrates?

No, not at all! I was a bird lover as a child. In fact I remember being terrified of spiders as a young child. But a couple of years ago a friend of mine, who is an entomologist, introduced my family and me to the incredible world of invertebrates. I wanted to get closer to them, and see them in better detail, so I went out with my camera and a macro lens. My first photographs weren't that great, suddenly I could see so much colour, texture and character in these tiny animals. I was hooked.

What has been your favourite species to photograph?

My overall favourite invertebrate so far this year is the leaf-eating bloody-nosed beetle (*Timarcha tenebricosa*) It has a terrible name but it is such a fantastic beetle. It will happily walk around your hand, and its got so much character in its face. It always makes me smile! My favourite Hertfordshire species this year? There are so many to go out and find! The tiny leaf-rolling weevils in Broxbourne Woods are amazing. I've also really enjoyed photographing the dragonflies and damselflies, as they have extraordinary body structure, virtually unchanged for hundreds of millions of years; it's a glimpse into the prehistoric age.

Have you faced any particularly challenging subjects?

Without a doubt, butterflies have been the biggest challenge this year! The newly emerged spring butterflies were so busy collecting nectar and finding a mate, they literally wouldn't sit still! I had to create an entirely different shooting set-up for butterflies and moths, using a fast focus lens and flash, just to keep up with them!

What is your favourite place in Hertfordshire or Middlesex that your project has taken you?

There are some beautiful reserves in our area. Broxbourne Woods is really stand-out, with its open heathland and woodland rides – the diversity there is astonishing, it's great for beetles. Thorley Wash is also lovely, running alongside the Stort Navigation. It's great for dragons and damsels. But I've also found some amazing insects just walking around parks, in gardens and hedgerows and my local green spaces. The amazing thing about invertebrates is that they are everywhere!



Broad-bodied chaser

We are now over half way through the year – how many of the 500 have you got?

I'm around half-way. When I started this project I really had no idea whether 500 species would be way too easy or impossible! I reckon I've got until around mid-September to keep finding species. After that they will start to disappear for the winter. It would be great to complete the project, but even if I don't, I've had the most amazing time doing it, met fantastic people along the way, and I've learned so much about the natural world.

Do you have any tips on how people can support their local wildlife in their own back garden?

My family and I started to turn our own garden into a wildlife garden last year, and one of the best things we did was make a small pond, as it attracts wildlife that wouldn't normally visit, and the birds prefer it to the birdbath as a drinking source. We've also planted winter flowering shrubs such as Christmas box and wintersweet, to provide food for any insects which emerge too early. And flowers! Cram in as many pollinator friendly flowers as you can, such as catmint, flowering salvia and verbena (leave the deadheads on through the winter – goldfinches love eating the seeds).

How can people keep up to date on your project?

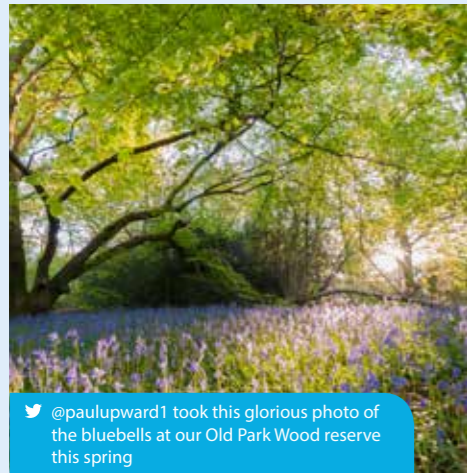
I'm posting the project in full on Instagram (@bumblebeetlebug), with highlights on Twitter (@gailashton). Do come and take a look!



Tweets from the field...



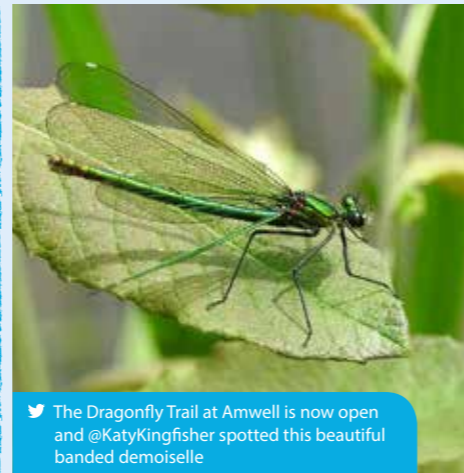
Social media highlights from the past few months



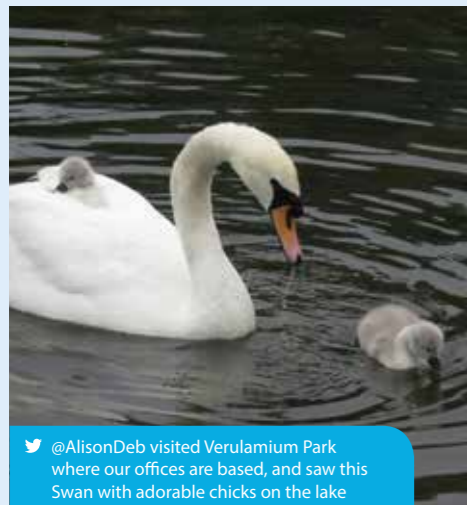
@paulupward1 took this glorious photo of the bluebells at our Old Park Wood reserve this spring



@Rob_Stubbs1 caught this frog taking his morning swim at Oughtonhead Nature Reserve in March



The Dragonfly Trail at Amwell is now open and @KatyKingfisher spotted this beautiful banded demoiselle



@AlisonDeb visited Verulamium Park where our offices are based, and saw this Swan with adorable chicks on the lake



Senior Reserves Officer @JennySherwen snapped this bright red cardinal beetle at Thorley Wash reserve in Bishop Stortford before a spring downpour



@Paulhdigiman found this spotted flycatcher at Sandon Church

We love seeing your pictures from our reserves and hearing about your wildlife experiences in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. Get involved in the conversation on Twitter @HMWTBadger, Facebook at /hertswildlifetrust or on Instagram at /hertswildlifetrust.



Wild about worms!



Each year The Wildlife Trusts and Royal Horticultural Society celebrate wildlife gardening and encourage people to use their gardens to take action to help support nature.

This year Wild About Gardens is going wild about worms! These wriggly fellows are well known to gardeners all over. At first glance they might not seem particularly special, but they're essential for our soils and wildlife. There are no less than 29 earthworm species in the UK and each one has an integral role in our ecosystem. It's time to take action for the worms in your garden!

Engineers of the earth

Earthworms are true engineers – they specialise in moving through the soil, creating networks of burrows and mixing the earth. This means oxygen and water

can flow through the soil, allowing water to drain away after heavy rain. They also break down and recycle decaying plants, releasing nutrients to increase soil fertility, which helps soil microorganisms and fungi to thrive.

It's in the poo!

So how do earthworms do all this? First, they eat the organic matter in the soil, such as dead leaves and plants. This breaks it down into smaller pieces, which they then pass out as 'casts', or worm poo. These casts are very high in nutrients that improve the quality of the soil, helping plants to grow.

Smooth movers

Earthworms can move smoothly through even very dense soil due to the mucus covering their bodies. They move by contracting the muscles surrounding their body, forcing their way through the soil. This moves air through the burrows, further mixing the soil.



CAROL SHEPPARD

Welcome worms into your garden

- 1. Feed your soil** – whenever planting, take the opportunity to work a little peat-free garden compost into the soil.
- 2. Mulch your leaves** – collect leaves in the autumn for leaf mould and use it to mulch acid-loving plants like rhododendrons, or add to a home potting compost mix.
- 3. Stack sticks** – lay small stacks of logs or woody prunings directly on the soil. They will eventually decompose into worm food.
- 4. Let your earth breathe** – reduce the amount of hard surfacing; lift unnecessary paving and plant up instead. This will give worms somewhere to live.



ALAN PRICE



ELEN JACKSON

It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as these lowly organised creatures

Charles Darwin on earthworms



In remembrance

Gwendolene Card, a long-standing member kindly left a legacy to the Trust. We are grateful that she chose to remember the Trust in this special way. Her support over the years and her legacy gift will make a valuable contribution to our ongoing conservation work.



Our thanks also to the kind donations received in memory of **Pat Watt, Roy William Lutner, Sally Rose, Patricia Hilda Cole, John Foster, Robin Garfield Macdonald.**

We are extremely grateful to the friends and family who donated to the Trust in memory of a loved one. These donations are a special way to help honour their lives, ensuring that their memory lives on through the protection of wildlife for future generations to enjoy. Our sincerest thanks and condolences to all of their family and friends.

Through these donations and legacies the Trust is able to continue our conservation work, protecting the local wildlife they all cared so much about. Thank you.

A wild gift idea

Struggling to find a meaningful gift for a friend or family member that loves wildlife?

Why not treat them to one of our wildlife sponsorships. Containing a personalised certificate, fact cards, a beautiful photo of your sponsored species and more, it's a wonderful way to treat a loved one and support your local wildlife at the same time. Excitingly this year, there's even more species to choose from, including a brand new barn owl sponsorship pack.



For more information, please visit: www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlifesponsorships

Annual General Meeting

Join us at Wheathampstead Memorial Hall on **22nd September** to learn about our achievements over the last year and our exciting plans for the future. The day will consist of our Annual General Meeting followed by short talks, a light lunch and a local guided walk. **If you would like to join, book a place on www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/AGM**

Happy anniversary to our business members

We would like to say a big thank you to **Cemex UK, Thames Water Utilities and The Institute of Motor Industry (IMI)** who have supported us throughout the years with their business memberships.

This year is particularly special for these businesses as they celebrate some milestone anniversaries: Thames Water Utilities and The Institute of Motor Industry have been members of the Trust for 10 years, whilst Cemex UK has been a member of Trust for an outstanding 30 years! Thank you.

Longstanding business members like these, are vital in helping us to continue our conservation work and we hope to celebrate more anniversaries in the years to come. **If you are interested in supporting the Trust through your business please visit www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/corporate**

Could you host a collection box?

Could your shop, pub or other small business help the Trust raise vital funds for our conservation work by hosting a collection box and our Go Wild events guides?

Hosting a collection box and our leaflets in your business is a simple and effective way to support your local Wildlife Trust. If you think you can help, please get in touch by calling **01727 858901** or email fundraising@hmwt.org.uk and help encourage your staff and customers alike to enjoy the local wildlife on their doorsteps.



Where the Wild Things Are

Are you part of a local community group that would like to hear about wildlife and conservation?

Our talk 'Where the Wild Things are' has been developed especially for community groups that are interested in learning about the work we carry out across the county. It explains why species and habitats need protecting, what conservation projects are happening near you, and how you can help protect your natural heritage. So, if you belong to an organisation that invites guest speakers and you'd like to find out more please contact us at communitytalks@hmwt.org or call **01727 858901** ext. 261.

Working for Wildlife Days

Looking for a great opportunity for your next team away day? Our Working for Wildlife Days are a great way for businesses to give back to the community by doing their bit for local wildlife.

Why not join us for a Himalayan balsam work party? A simple yet fun way to support the Trust, you'll help us pull the invasive plant on our reserves; vital work that is undertaken every summer. The non-native invasive balsam smothers our riverbanks and damages delicate river ecosystems and the wildlife that live within them.

These staff events provide a great opportunity for your staff to experience first-hand what it means to protect local wildlife, whilst team building and learning new skills in an inspiring setting.

Visit www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/workparty to organise your Working for Wildlife Day or contact the Fundraising Team on **01727 858901** or email fundraising@hmwt.org to discuss your requirements.



Farr Brew

We celebrated the launch of **Farr Brew's new pale ale in support of the Trust at St Alban's Ye Olde Fighting Cocks pub.**

The beer has been named 'Wildside' by competition winner Lucy Moore and will be on sale on tap in selected pubs around the county. Wheathampstead based Farr Brew will also work with the Trust to ensure that the area they grow their hops is wildlife friendly.

We would also like to say a big thank you to all the businesses stocking our new beer, without their support this venture would not be possible. **If you are a local business and would like to include Wildside as part of your range of local beers please contact Nick at nick@farrbrew.com**

Look out for bottles of Wildside at the Trust's Festival of Wildlife, Panshanger Park, 28/29 July.



Water vole

PAUL THURSH



Go Wild Events

PAUL THURSH

We are delighted to be offering a huge range of events over the summer from workshops to walks, with something for all ages. Here we list new events added and our top picks. Find all of our events and book at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events

Learn to use a traditional scythe, discover the fascinating lives of bats on one of our bat walks, or take a leisurely cruise on the River Lea. Below is just a selection of what you can find on our website – booking is essential for all events (except open days) and places are snapped up quickly. Don't delay to book your place today!

Open Days

Saturday 28th & Sunday 29th July | 10am - 4pm

Festival of Wildlife

PANSHANGER PARK
Festival of Wildlife, in association with Herts Natural History Society, will once again take place in Tarmac's beautiful Panshanger Park, near Hertford. The Festival, held in partnership with Tarmac, will celebrate the rich diversity of wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The event is free of charge and offers guided walks and expert talks by the Trust and Hertfordshire Natural History Society, as well as a whole host of drop-in activities.

Sunday 7th October | 12pm - 4.30pm

Apple Day

TEWIN
Join us for our annual afternoon Apple Day, an event for all the family and packed with children's activities. There will be apples for sale along with apple juice, preserves, tea, coffee and cake. Experts will be on hand to identify varieties of apple and provide advice on fruit tree care. We will be providing guided walks around the orchard and there will be a scavenger hunt for the kids.

Guided walks and outdoor activities

These events are free to attend. However, as a registered charity, any donations are greatly appreciated. We suggest a donation of £3 per person for members and £5 for non-members to cover our administration costs.

Friday 27th July | 2pm - 3.30pm

Chalkhill Blue Spectacular

HEXTON CHALK PIT NATURE RESERVE
Enjoy a guided walk around Hexton Chalk Pit to witness the chalkhill blue butterfly spectacular. There will also be a chance to see a good range of butterflies and special chalk grassland plants.

Sunday 5th August | 1.30pm - 3pm

Black-necked Grebe Watch

HILFIELD PARK RESERVOIR NATURE RESERVE
A rare chance to see and learn more about this nationally important species that breeds at Hilfield on a walk around this closed access nature reserve.



Black-necked grebe

LUKE MASSEY

Thursday 9th August | 10.30am - 12pm

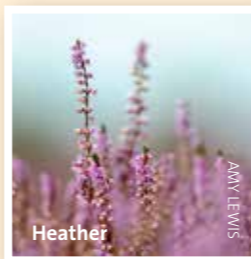
Wiggly Creatures Pond Dipping

STANMORE COUNTRY PARK
Bring the kids along for this school holiday event and see what wiggly creatures live under the surface of the balancing ponds at Stanmore Country Park.

Monday 13th August | 10am - 12pm

Heather and Heathlands Management Walk

HERTFORD HEATH NATURE RESERVE
Take a short stroll across Hertford Heath to see the heather in flower with our Reserves Officer. They will explain how this rare area of Hertfordshire heathland is being managed for the benefit of the variety of wildlife that lives here.



Heather

AMY LEWIS

Friday 17th August | 8pm - 10.30pm

Evening Stroll at Thorley

THORLEY WASH NATURE RESERVE
Come on an evening stroll around Thorley Wash as the light fades. Our volunteer warden will guide you with bat detectors to see what hunters we can find over the water and along the tree line. Stop and spend time stargazing and identify stars and summer constellations.

Thursday 23rd August | 1pm - 3pm

Family Minibeast Safari

CASSIOBURY PARK, WATFORD
Hunt for the many different minibeasts that live in the nature reserve. Using sweep nets, we'll see what we can catch and then look at finds together to identify the insects we find.

Friday 31st August | 7.30pm - 9.30pm

Creatures of the Night

AMWELL NATURE RESERVE
Discover the creatures of the night at Amwell on this evening family event. Join us at dusk to listen for bats hawking over the lakes after their insect prey using bat detectors and get up close to moths in the light traps we will set up. We'll help you to identify them before releasing them back into the night.

Friday 14th September | 7.30pm - 10pm

Bats of Panshanger Park

PANSHANGER PARK
After a 20 minute talk about the bats found here, we will use bat detectors to listen for Daubenton's bats swooping over the water and Natterer's bats hunting along the tree line.

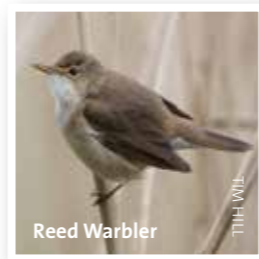


DAVE SUTTON

Saturday 29th September | 10.30am - 12pm

Autumn Birds

SPRINGWELL REEDBED NATURE RESERVE
Come along for an autumn stroll along the banks of Springwell Lake where we hope to spot migrating birds and late blooming wildflowers. We will look over Springwell Reedbed in an attempt to spot more wetland birds.



Reed Warbler

TIM HILL

Workshops and Experiences

Tuesday 7th August & 9th October | 2pm

The Grove Garden Tour with Afternoon Tea

CHANDLERS CROSS, WATFORD
Enjoy a gentle stroll around the beautiful gardens of The Grove guided by their Head Gardener. The tour will take in the Formal Gardens and after you will return to the historic heart of The Grove for a sumptuous afternoon tea. £75 per person.

Monday 20th August | 6pm

The Grove Gin Tasting and Formal Garden Tour

CHANDLERS CROSS, WATFORD
Enjoy a short tour of the beautiful Formal Gardens with The Grove's Head Gardener, then learn about how local gin distillery, Puddingstone, who have worked in partnership with the Trust to produce special edition gin using the flowers of the invasive himalayan balsam plant, produce their gin. Enjoy two cocktails plus samples, along with a selection of canapes. £50 per person (aged 18 and over).



Sunday 2nd September | 11am

The Grove Wildlife Walk and Picnic

CHANDLERS CROSS, WATFORD
Take a leisurely stroll along the Wildlife Trail with the Trust's Conservation Manager, Tim Hill, finishing the walk in the glade, where a picnic will be prepared for you and enjoy the rest of the afternoon at leisure. £50 per person.

Wednesday 15th August | 1pm - 4pm

River Lea Wildlife Cruise

WARE
Settle in for a 90 minute cruise along the river. Along the way, learn about the river and what lies beneath the water, as well as help spot what wildlife can be found along the water margins. From Hertford lock you can then join our Reserves Officer for a one hour



stroll through King's Mead, returning back to Ware. Learn about the fantastic wildlife of this beautiful nature reserve which is one of the largest areas of water meadow in Hertfordshire. Alternatively, stay aboard the boat to take the gentle cruise back to Ware. Adults £15, Children (under 16) £8, Infants (under 12mths) free.

Thursday 9th August & 6th September | 7pm - 10pm

Wild Gin Tasting

WILSTONE RESERVOIR
Take a short stroll along the banks of Wilstone Reservoir and discover the wildlife of this beautiful nature reserve. Then return to the nearby Puddingstone Distillery for a fascinating talk from their Director, Ben, who will give an insight into the history of gin and how the special balsam gin is made. The evening wouldn't be complete without trying a couple of delicious cocktails from the gin menu along with some samples. £25 per person (aged 18 and over).



JOSH KUBALE

Wednesday 22nd August | 10am - 3pm

Wildlife Sketching Workshop – Black and White

LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY
Learn how to create detailed studies of the textures and character of wildlife using pencil and charcoal at this workshop led by Hertfordshire artist Collette Hoefkens. You'll be shown basic and fundamental drawing techniques that can be applied to any subject, and have the opportunity to work on a detailed piece inspired by wildlife. £40 per person.

Saturday 11th August | 11am - 2pm

Traditional Meadow Management – Learn to Scythe

FROGMORE MEADOW NATURE RESERVE
An introduction to traditional methods of meadow management used to improve botanical interest. Join Reserves Officer, Rob, who will explain why mid-summer mowing to cut and remove vegetation after peak flowering is important for wildflower meadows. Learn the safe and efficient use of a traditional scythe and how to bale hay without the use of mechanisation. £10 per person (aged 18 and over).



Common red soldier beetle

JOSH KUBALE



Amwell Nature Reserve

Amwell Nature Reserve near Ware is a former gravel pit and supports outstanding communities of breeding birds. The reserve includes two waterbodies, Great Hardmead Lake and Hollycross Lake, which were excavated between 1973 and 1990, and a variety of wetland, grassland and woodland habitats.

Amwell Quarry is one of four sites which qualify and make up the Lee Valley SPA (Special Protection Area) and Ramsar designated sites. Designated in 2000 Amwell Quarry holds internationally significant numbers of wintering gadwall and shoveler. The site also regularly supports wintering bittern.

If you enter from Amwell Lane, Great Hardmead Lake unfolds before you, the sun hitting the expanse of water as reeds and wetland flowers such as hemp agrimony and purple loosestrife dance in the wind during the summer months. If you haven't visited the reserve before make sure you stop here and take in the reserve from the higher vantage point.

Bird hides and viewpoints

There are three large bird hides and two viewpoints on the reserve – perfect for getting up close to the birdlife that flocks here.

For panoramic views over the reserve head to our largest hide, the White Hide, where close views of the islands and tern rafts can be enjoyed year-round. Tern rafts are important for the common tern,

in addition to gulls, who use the site; the rafts offer stable, small islands with little disturbance which limits the risk from predators. Essential raft repairs are carried out yearly by the Trust's team who row out to the rafts to carry out maintenance.

Amwell is one of just a handful of places in the county where bitterns can be seen. We cut rides and 'bittern bays' in the reedbed to help visitors see the elusive bird from the Bittern Pool viewpoint and around the margins of Great Hardmead Lake. An overwintering bird in Hertfordshire, the bittern will often sneak across the ride in front of the James Hide. This two storey hide overlooks a pool and a bird feeding station which is stocked over winter and is great for seeing garden birds, reed buntings and the occasional marsh tit up close.

To view Rough Holme Island stop by the Gladwin Hide and spot ducks such as widgeon, gadwall, shoveler and goldeneye. During colder winters smew can also be seen.



Wildlife

Amwell is a birdwatcher's paradise – there is wildlife to see year round with migrating birds visiting in the spring and autumn and winter waders and bittern enjoying the winter months. Due to its status as a Special Protection Area, islands and scrapes are managed to provide the specific habitat needs of birds such as the little ringed plover. This bird needs areas of bare gravel to breed so water levels are managed carefully to ensure that vegetation doesn't thrive on the islands.

Birds such as reed and sedge warbler and reed bunting benefit from our reedbed management and white throat and chiffchaff benefit from our coppicing of scrub to create dense of marginal habitat on the edge of the reedbed.

We have felled willow and poplar trees to open up the shoreline and encourage marginal vegetation. The trees created lake edge habitat, with the dense tangle of branches allowing fish to shelter and breed; essential to the birds at Amwell who rely on fish for their diet including bittern, heron and kingfisher.

Dragonflies

21 of Hertfordshire's 26 species of dragonflies and damselflies can be seen at Amwell making this the best site in the county to see these winged beauties. There is a dedicated dragonfly trail with boardwalks that take visitors across pools and alongside Hollycross Lake in the north west of the site and gives the chance to view dragonflies close up, hunting over open water.

Look out for the Norfolk hawkler and lesser emperor dragonfly, as well as the scarce chaser. Turn to the back page to see how you can help us conserve these beautiful insects and their habitat.

The Future of Amwell

The Trust has secured funding from Environment Agency to achieve a large scale habitat creation and restoration project in 2018 that will help to support the key species on the reserve. Shallow scrapes will be created to support waders and wetland invertebrates; trees and scrub will be removed to create shorelines rich in vegetation for fish, insects, mammals and birds.

We're also excited to welcome new grazing animals to the reserve including pigs and goats which is a first for the Trust!

Lea Valley Wader Strategy

The Trust is working in partnership with RSPB, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and Tarmac in an effort to address the decline in breeding wading birds in the Lea catchment through a new strategy.

Amwell is one of the sites benefitting from the project, which sees the partners working together to provide suitable breeding habitat for wading birds including little ringed plover, ringed plover, redshank, snipe and lapwing.



Reserves Roundup

Thanks to the generosity of our members, allocations of grant funding, and to our wonderful team of volunteers...



At **Danemead** a borehole has been dug and a concrete pad laid ready for a drinking trough to be installed for the cattle.

Thanks to our Affinity Water partnership a suite of wetland improvements has taken place at **Stocker's Lake** including the creation of ditches and ponds and reedbed enhancements.

At **Aldbury Nowers** the meadows have been cut and grazed, including removing of blocks of scrub for regeneration. Mining insect scrapes have been created and wooden bee banks made from cut logs.

Thanks to Abbots Langley Parish Council we were able to run three volunteer work

parties at **Longspring Wood** to restore footpaths and clear holly.

At **Thorley Wash** we have finished scrub clearance and started fence repairs ready for cattle grazing in late summer. A March water vole survey showed good signs of water voles across the reserve.



Nature's Calendar

July-October 2018

Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager, highlights some of his favourite seasonal wildlife and makes suggestions for things to look out for and do through the months ahead.



July

Festival Fever

Forget Glastonbury, forget Glyndeborne, forget Cheltenham – all worthy festivals in their own way but if you want to revel in the splendour of Hertfordshire's nature, there is only one – the Festival of Wildlife, taking place at Panshanger on the 29th and 30th July.

The event is organised by the Trust in association with Hertfordshire Natural History Society and in partnership with Tarmac. It promises to be the biggest and best yet. The festival brings together some of our most experienced and knowledgeable naturalists all keen to share the wonder of wildlife with visitors of all ages. The festival is very much a family affair with many children's activities – storytelling and minibeast hunting prove particularly popular! Herts Natural History Society organise a programme of talks. Last year a real favourite was, 'Have I got Poos for You?' – Graham White's amusing and informative introduction to species' faeces, from scats to spraints. He is to return this year, by popular demand! Entry is free – see you there.



JOSH KUBALE



August

Monochrome Marbles

When I first joined the Trust I visited Long Deans Nature Reserve in early August and vividly remember seeing scores of what looked like mini chess boards flitting through the long grass – marbled white butterflies.

The habitat here is perfect for them, tall grasses and an abundance of common knapweed, the flowers of which provide a valuable source of nectar. The reserve has a great deal of red fescue – the favoured food of the caterpillars of marbled whites. This species was formerly rare in our counties but from the 1990s has spread east from small colonies in the west. Harpenden Common is a reliable place to see them as are the road verges which are now left to grow long around Stevenage. If you fancy having a go at finding your own this year, seek out dry sheltered places with tall grassland on a warm day in July or August.



September

Something's Awry

"That's a funny looking dunnock on the fence." So said my wife Kate at twenty past six on Sunday 17th September 2017.

Dunnocks are regulars in our garden, picking up bits of seeds dropped by other birds at the feeders in the hedge above. I turned to see what was so funny about this particular individual and my heart skipped a beat, quite literally. There, not 10 metres away on our fence was a wryneck, a bird I have only seen a handful of times in my 40 years birdwatching and most of those abroad. The Birds of Hertfordshire describes the wryneck as a *rare passage migrant*. It was formerly a widespread but uncommon species which last nested in 1977.

...on our fence was a wryneck, a bird I have only seen a handful of times in my 40 years birdwatching

This was one of those moments when I wasn't quite sure what to do next. Should I just sit and enjoy it? Should I risk moving to get my camera? Convinced it would fly off at any moment, never to be seen again, we watched it for about five minutes, before I got up slowly and dashed to assemble my camera, rattling off hundreds of photographs. It perched on the fence preening, quite oblivious to us marvelling at this once in a lifetime moment. Slowly but surely it made its way down the garden as the light faded. The last I saw of it was it flying up into the field maple at the end of the garden, presumably to roost. Despite a good look the next morning we never saw it again. The morale of this short tale, take a good look at your dunnocks – something may just be awry.

October

The Belchers are Back

If you head out to large woods in the north and west of Hertfordshire in October you may well hear the loud and repetitive belching of fallow deer bucks.

For a couple of weeks their bodies are flooded with testosterone which drives them in search of an opportunity to procreate. At the same time, the female deer – the does – are in oestrus and ready to mate with the strongest and most attractive buck.

The result of this hormone-driven frenzy is the rut, when the next generation of deer will be created. Bucks will belch, posture, parade, scent mark with pungent pee and if necessary fight their competitors for the chance to mate. The opportunity is short and the stakes are high – if they miss the chance to breed it will be a year before they can try again. Their belching is a deep guttural noise, designed to carry far, to draw in potential mates and to tell other males to push off. They need to make themselves sound and look as big as possible because size matters, in all senses, if they are to get the chance to pass their genes on to the next generation. At this time they have magnificent antlers. Unlike other species of deer theirs are palmate, with flat plates between the individual horns. It's not until the following June, that fawns will be born.

In Hertfordshire, the Natural History Society, in partnership with the University and Trust is currently collecting records for a new mammal atlas, to be published in 2020. The distribution map for records gathered so far shows a north and westerly bias. If you go in search of the belching bucks this October and are lucky enough to find them, please remember to submit your sightings through the Society's website – <http://mammal-atlas.hnhs.org>



The Nature of... Soil

Soil is amazing, it filters the water we drink, provides nutrients to grow the food we eat, holds water to help prevent flooding, and stores more CO₂ than the atmosphere and vegetation put together!

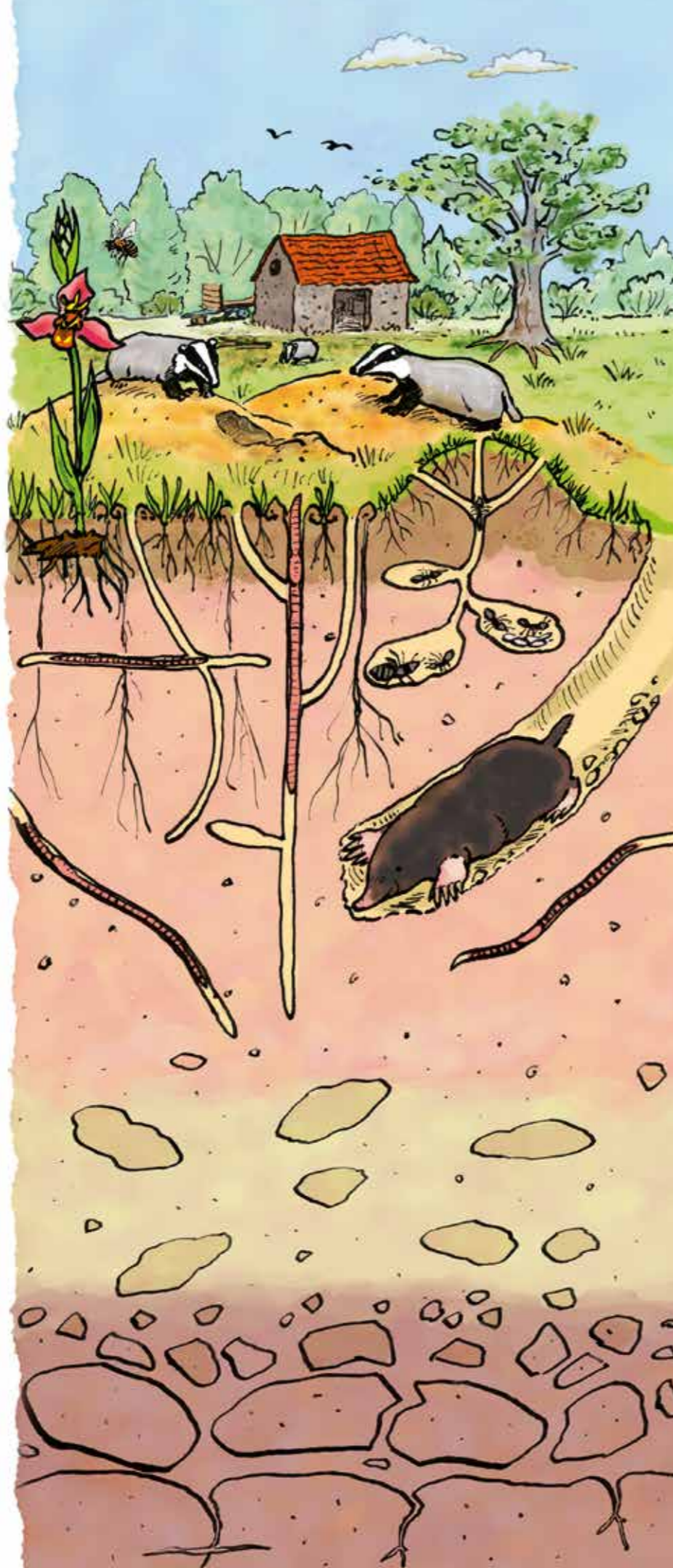
So what is it? A mixture of four parts – minerals, decaying plant matter, air and water in differing proportions and containing many complex ecosystems of fungi, plants and animals. The precise mix of the soils four component parts dictates the type of plants that will grow – waterlogged soil supports wetland plants such as marsh-marigold, soil containing large amounts of calcium supports plants like common rock-rose and in soil with low amounts of calcium, plants like heather thrive. Orchids, some of our most fascinating plants, often depend on the presence of different species of fungus in the soil to enable them to grow.

It has been said that a handful of soil contains more living organisms than there are people on the planet! Amongst the soil dwellers are earthworms; sometimes called 'nature's plough', turning, mixing and aerating the soil – you can read more about worms on Page 13. There are 29 species of earthworm alone in the UK and so far 16 have been recorded in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Ants play their part too, building tunnels and chambers under the soils surface, the hills they produce often create niches for a different suite of plants and invertebrates compared to the surrounding area. The invertebrate biodiversity of the soil is incredible from mites to woodlice, millipedes to ground nesting bees.

There is also plenty of larger life underground – moles, which have very small eyes and internal ears to prevent them from being clogged and damaged while tunnelling, and badgers who dig large, sprawling setts to accommodate their clans and spend increased amounts of time underground over winter when food is less plentiful.

Take a closer look at the ground when you are next outside and marvel at the variety of life beneath your feet.



We work hard to help our local dragonflies – but we need **your support** to do more...

The dragonfly has a fascinating lifecycle. With such complex needs, it requires a variety of different habitats to survive at each life stage – highlighting the importance of our Living Landscape approach. Thanks to our management and creation of wetland habitats, improved water quality and the changing climate, our dragonfly populations are rapidly growing. But now, the pressure is on us to create enough suitable habitats to support these beautiful insects.

With your help, we can protect and improve our wetlands across Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

A gift from you today will help us manage and create suitable habitats at your local nature reserves, so our amazing dragonflies can thrive here.



Yes! I want to help my local dragonflies and other wetland wildlife by providing habitats that they depend on to survive.

Here is my gift of (please tick) £50 £100 £150 Other: £

I enclose a cheque payable to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust OR please debit my Credit/Debit Card* (*delete as appropriate)

Name on card Expires Security code
Card number MM / YY (last 3 digits on signature strip)

giftaid it Help us to make the most of your donation to the Trust
Gift Aiding your donation means we reclaim your tax – at least 25p for every £1 you give us

My Gift Aid declaration: Yes, I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the current tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations it is my responsibility to pay the difference. please tick

Please make sure you have signed and dated your kind gift, with thanks

Title Initials Surname Signature Date

If you do not need a receipt and would like to help us save costs, please tick this box

Keeping in touch
Your personal details will only be used by the Trust and will not be passed on to any third party, except for the purposes of enabling them to carry out activity on the Trust's behalf (such as sending regular correspondence etc.). Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust will never sell your contact details to another organisation.

As a current supporter, we already have contact preferences for you. You can change these at any time by contacting us on 01727 858901 or info@hmwt.org.

Thank you for your support!

Please help us raise **£22,000** to improve wetlands at your local nature reserve so our dragonflies can thrive

Breeding: Removing invasive species

Non-native wetland plants can choke up our rivers, streams and open water. At Amwell and Tewinbury we regularly manage these so that more favourable plants can grow, which our dragonflies need to breed.

Cost: £125 to run a half-day volunteer work party

Egg laying: Removing scrub

Ponds and open water on our reserves such as Hertford Heath and Tring Reservoirs, provide great egg laying sites. We remove encroaching vegetation from within the water bodies to prevent them drying out.

Cost: £250 to coppice willow scrub and remove saplings from a reedbed habitat

Egg: A female dragonfly lays her eggs into the water or onto wetland plants.

Adult: After its body and wings have dried and hardened in the sun, the dragonfly starts hunting for small flying insects. It then returns to open water to breed.

Nymph: A nymph emerges from the egg and lives underwater; eating almost anything smaller than itself.

Emergence: The nymph crawls out of the water, up a plant stem and slowly breaks out of its larval skin.

Adults: Creating woodland glades & rides

We create large, sunny openings (glades) and channels (rides) at our wet woodlands, like Balls Wood and Old Park Wood, to provide sheltered areas for dragonflies to bask in and warm up.

Cost: £400 to open up and lengthen the woodland edge

Hunting: Grazing with cattle

Our wet grasslands like Thorley Wash and Rye Meads are great hunting grounds. Grazing prevents scrub from building up and keeps these reserves wet, open and diverse habitats for dragonflies.

Cost £30 to replace or install 15 fence posts for livestock fencing

Emergence: Restoring marginal wetland habitats

Thinning bankside trees around ponds, rivers and lakes lets in more sunlight and allows plants along the water's edge to grow, onto which adults can emerge from their larval skin.

Cost: £500 to remove bankside willows at one wetland reserve

Nymphs: Clearing & creating ponds

We manage existing ponds on sites like Purwell Ninesprings and Balls Wood to keep them open and healthy. We also create new ponds to provide more open water for dragonfly nymphs to hunt.

Cost: £360 to dig out and restore two ponds with an excavator

