

# Annual Review <sup>2020/21</sup>

Creating a wilder Hertfordshire & Middlesex



Herts and  
Middlesex



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# Wildlife

## *Highlights*

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Our nature reserves continue to be home to a wide variety of species and we have seen the usual annual spectacle of carpets of bluebells in the woodlands, swallows swooping low over Amwell lakes and chalkhill blue butterflies at Hexton Chalk Pit.



### **Hunting dragons**

Norfolk hawker dragonflies were seen regularly at Amwell Nature Reserve and are suspected to be breeding at Amwell, Rye Meads and at Kings Meads.



**BLACK-NECKED GREBE**

## Glorious grebes

Nineteen black necked grebes were seen at Hilfield Park Reservoir in June. This nature reserve is the only place in the South of England where this rare water bird breeds.

## Birdlife booms at Amwell

A bittern was seen at Amwell in July, and was again spotted this winter along with a couple of bearded tits and water pipit.



**BITTERN**



**GREAT WHITE EGRET**

## Wonderful waders

A great white egret was spotted at Marsworth in an area of the reedbed that we have just finished lowering. Little ringed plovers nested at Amwell Nature Reserve again and Panshanger Park.

## A rare gem

Scarce emerald damselflies bred at Hertford Heath Nature Reserve. These are a rare and vulnerable species mainly confined to Essex and North Kent.



**SCARCE EMERALD DAMSELFLY**

**BARBASTELLE BAT**



**© SHUTTERSTOCK**

## Breeding bats

Eight new barbastelle bat maternity roosts were found across the county. Little is known about barbastelle breeding sites so the discovery of these maternity roosts is an important step forward in learning about these elusive bats.



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# Introduction

In a year that was defined by Covid-19 and its restrictions on almost all aspects of our lives, the Trust has still achieved much to be proud of, protecting and managing places for wildlife, helping people discover the natural world around them and working to ensure that nature has a place alongside our everyday lives.

Over this time many people found or rediscovered a love for wildlife. The nature reserves we care for have provided important havens not only for wildlife but also for visitors looking for an escape, and many people have enjoyed our programme of online activities.

We have been very pleased to welcome new supporters over the last year and it has been heart-warming to see our volunteers and existing supporters continue to stand by us. It has, though, been a difficult time with restrictions on our fundraising expected to have a long-term impact on our finances. We have also greatly missed the help from our volunteers out in the field and in our offices. Despite all this, the dedication of the staff team has shone through this year as we've worked out how to continue to deliver our work in new and often difficult circumstances.

The year started with the publication of the *Herts State of Nature* report, which sets out priorities for conservation over the coming years and underlines the need for landscape-scale, coordinated action; we are facing an ecological crisis, this action cannot wait. Collectively the Wildlife Trusts are calling for 30% of land to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030. Our work in the coming years will be focused on bringing bring people together to make a real difference for wildlife.

*Lesley Davies*     *M M*

**Lesley Davies**  
Chief Executive

**Mike Master**  
Chairman of Trustees

# Nature Reserves

The last year has been challenging on our nature reserves. Our usually busy volunteer teams were suspended in line with restrictions at a time when we saw an increase in visitor numbers and, sadly, an increase in anti-social behaviour. Despite these challenges, there have been significant achievements across our reserves.

At Balls Wood we are improving the woodland structure and have trialled deer exclosures to help the shrub layer regenerate. It is a superb place for woodland butterflies like the white admiral and purple emperor.

The Trust manages a variety of grasslands, from chalk sites like Hexton to wet meadows like Thorley Wash. There are so few areas of quality grassland left that keeping them in top condition through grazing and cutting is vital so they can be home to wildflowers and butterflies. The harebell photo on the cover was taken at

Frogmore Meadows, a fantastic site for orchids and other wildflowers.

With climate change, maintaining the water levels on our wetland sites is all the more important and at Rye Meads we're working to improve our understanding of the hydrology, while at Cassiobury Park and Lemsford Springs, we're making sure we look after the cressbeds which are important for specialist species like freshwater shrimp and, at Lemsford, the green sandpipers that feed on them.



## A New Nature Reserve for Hertford

We were delighted to work with the local community to secure the future of Beane Marsh in Hertford. Thanks to local community fundraising, a grant from Hertford Town Council and a generous individual donation to the Trust, we were able to purchase this 5 acre floodplain grassland site next to the river Beane. It is home to a variety of butterflies and dragonflies, and has great potential to become home to endangered water voles.

## Restoring The Majesty of The Meads

Our new project, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund, Thames Water and the Environment Agency, will restore the precious habitats of Kings Meads Nature Reserve. We will also be making the site more accessible to visitors through a programme of community outreach. Fencing has been installed so that traditional grazing of the floodplain meadows can be reinstated. Elsewhere, scrub clearance has opened up areas of valuable chalk grassland habitat.

## Affinity Water Biodiversity Project

At Stocker's Lake the grasslands, islands and meadows are cared for thanks to support from Friends of Stocker's Lake, volunteers from Affinity Water and a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. At Springwell Reedbed our management is focussed on encouraging breeding and wintering birds such as water rail and reed bunting. At Hilfield Park Reservoir, providing good habitat around the water margins for the nationally rare black-necked grebes to nest is a priority.

# Wider Countryside

Outside our nature reserves, our work in the wider countryside continued at pace with the Trust working with landowners and local authorities to help make more space for nature.



© JOSH KUBALE

## Jordans Farm Partnership

Tailor-made plans drawn up for farmers in the Jordans Farm Partnership are helping wildlife recover, focussing on key species and habitats relevant to each farm's local landscape. Further survey work on the Barbastelle bat maternity colony found last year on a Jordans Farm resulted in the discovery of 8 new maternity roosts and foraging areas, which is a very important finding for such a rare species.

## Local Councils

Through our partnership with Harpenden Town Council, we continued the new management of the Common leaving another 15% of the grass uncut this year – the rest was taken for hay. It's clear from monitoring that wildflowers and invertebrates are already benefitting from this new regime, with uncommon species like adder's tongue fern now doing well.

Our partnership with Stevenage Borough Council focused this year on writing

conservation management plans for their green spaces where biodiversity net gain might be delivered through the development process.

In Stevenage and Dacorum we worked with the Councils to install nesting boxes for swifts while re-roofing of social housing was taking place. In Hemel Hempstead a box installed early in the year was occupied immediately by nesting swifts in May and the pair raised young successfully. This demonstrates the difference that simple actions can make to a species which is under threat.

## People and Wildlife at Panshanger Park

At Panshanger Park we continue to work with Tarmac, the owners of this 1000 acre historic landscape of wetlands, woodland and grasslands. Our People and Wildlife Officer is delivering the conservation management plan for the nature reserve and developing a community of volunteers to help with management, ecological monitoring, guided walks, talks and events.

## Herts Environmental Records Centre

Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC), which is hosted by the Trust, now holds over 3.1 million records, an increase of

300,000 records over the year. The data is vital to ensuring that the ecological impacts of development are fully considered by developers and local planning authorities.

The role of volunteers is fundamental to this work, sending in new species records and helping to keep our knowledge of the wildlife of our area up to date. HERC is building on the impact of the 2020 Hertfordshire State of Nature Report with the Herts Natural History Society to identify conservation actions that would benefit the species of conservation concern where action is urgently needed to prevent further losses or extinctions.

## Planning

Our role in scrutinising planning applications is vital to ensure that the implications for wildlife are understood. We have continued to comment on planning applications and infrastructure proposals, including Local Plans, Minerals Plans and Neighbourhood Plans, and encourage local authorities to adopt the best possible policies to help protect wildlife.

### BEARDED TIT



© AMY LEWIS

# Connecting People with Wildlife

During the national lockdown, the Trust's role in helping people connect with wildlife became even more important. Our events programme this year was severely hampered by Covid-19 restrictions. Our face-to-face events programme was largely cancelled from March 2020 but in response we switched to a year of online events and activities..



## Wild At Home

In April 2020, we launched *Wild At Home*, which helped families with children stay connected to nature. This ran for 14 weeks in the first national lockdown with each week having a different theme and was reintroduced in January 2021 offering online events and activities for 6 weeks. This popular project has now been adapted into *Wild Child* which, with support from Hertfordshire County Council, launched in March for the Easter school holidays. *Wild Child* is now providing families with activities and inspiration to visit nature reserves and the wider countryside.



## Connecting with wildlife online

We launched a new online events programme and between June 2020 and March 2021, with 47 online events from drawing classes to winter tree identification. These events proved to be hugely popular and were enjoyed by over 3,300 people.



We entered into a new partnership with St Albans District Council to deliver *Wilder St Albans*. This pioneering urban conservation project will encourage and support the people, communities and businesses of St Albans to increase biodiversity in the District, helping to tackle the nature and climate emergencies that we face.

## DEVIL'S BIT SCABIOUS



## Go Wild At Hudnall Park

The Trust continued its partnership with Youth Connections (part of Hertfordshire County Council) to deliver the second phase of *Go Wild at Hudnall Park*, with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project is providing a wide range of nature-focused emotional wellbeing and learning opportunities for young people. This year we focused on installing fencing to allow sheep grazing which will help make the meadows more botanically diverse.

# The Year In *Numbers*

## Income

TOTAL **£2,176k**

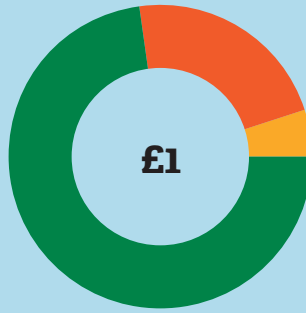


<b>£1,057k</b>	Membership
<b>£469k</b>	Grants
<b>£399k</b>	Fees & Contracts
<b>£182k</b>	Fundraising
<b>£66k</b>	Investment & other income
<b>£3k</b>	Legacies

## Expenditure

TOTAL **£2,025k**

For every £1 the Trust spends...



<b>73p</b>	Conservation & Nature Reserves
<b>22p</b>	Raising Funds
<b>5p</b>	Governance

## Thank you

We are very grateful to all our funders and supporters.

Full Accounts are available on our website - [hertswildlife.org.uk/publications](http://hertswildlife.org.uk/publications).