

Wild Snaps

Some of the best photos from our Photography Competition 8



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PROTECTING **WILDLIFE** FOR THE FUTURE



Welcome to the winter edition of Wildlife Matters.

It's certainly been a few months of change. A new nature reserve for the Trust, Beane Marsh in Hertford, has been a highlight and is a wonderful example of the local community coming together to protect an important habitat on their doorstep.

At the same time, we saw entries to our Wild Snaps Photography Competition flooding in – I hope you'll enjoy seeing some of the best in this edition of Wildlife Matters – and we were able to hold the second Chess Valley Challenge in September. Sadly, we weren't able to meet many of you as usual at our annual Members Day in September, but we did manage to hold our first online AGM. Thank you to everyone that was able to join us!

I'm really pleased that we've been able to continue our vital work advising farmers and other landowners, raising awareness of the need to increase the amount of land being actively managed for wildlife. Our nature reserves continue to play a crucial role; our Chairman Mike Master and I were very pleased to show Henry Holland-Hibbert, the Hertfordshire High Sheriff, around Hertford Heath and Balls Wood. As well as being able to spend a couple of hours in such beautiful surroundings, visits like this are a real delight – a chance to talk with pride about the work that our fabulous reserves team and volunteers are doing to make these habitats so biodiverse.

There's been a lot going on nationally which could make a big difference for wildlife. At the end of September, the Prime Minister gave his backing to a target to see 30% of land managed for wildlife by 2030, an ambition that the Wildlife Trusts have been campaigning for nationally. It is a welcome step forward, but we'll be keeping a keen eye on this to ensure that the commitment is meaningful and does make the change for wildlife that is so urgently needed. If we get this right, it could not only help nature's recovery but also address the effects of climate change.

However, the intention to create more land for wildlife could be jeopardised if the reforms to the current planning system go ahead unchanged.



HERTFORDSHIRE HIGH SHERIFF HENRY HOLLAND-HIBBERT, LESLEY DAVIES, MIKE MASTER

While it's clear that the current system could work better for wildlife, I've written to all our MPs to raise our concerns that the proposed reforms could make it far worse, making the case that the new planning system must have nature's recovery at its heart and planning decisions must be based on robust, accurate, detailed and thorough ecological data. I know that many of you will have taken your own action on this, contacting local Councillors and politicians to make the case for wildlife.

It's been a time of change in the staff team too. I'd like to say many thanks to Laura Baker who stepped down from her position as Nature Reserves Manager. I'm delighted that Ian Carle, formerly HERC Manager, has taken over from Laura, and Alex Waechter has moved from Data Officer to take over from Ian as HERC Manager.

None of us really know what the coming months hold in store for us all, but the Trust will be doing all we can to continue our volunteering and to encourage people to care about their local wildlife. What we can be sure of is that our winter birds will soon be returning to our nature reserves and gardens and there'll always be something new to look out for. I know that I'll be making time to get outdoors to see the changes and I hope you're able to do the same.

I'd like to finish by reiterating my thanks for all your support for the Trust. The response to our appeal has been hugely encouraging and the generosity of our members really heart-warming. You are all making such a difference to what we are able to do for wildlife.

Lesley Davies



Winter 2020

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© JON HAWKINS SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY



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Nature of Beane Marsh

Discover the Trust's newest nature reserve

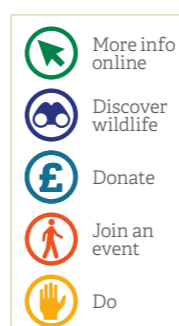
wildlifematters

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Damselfly
© Barry Lockwood

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Chess Valley Challenge raises thousands for wildlife



The second Chess Valley Challenge saw 80 attendees walk the ten miles from Rickmansworth to Chesham along the Chess Valley Walk on Sunday 27 September, raising more than £3,000 to protect local wildlife.

We had worked hard to make the event COVID-secure, with agreement of local police and Three Rivers District Council. Departure times were staggered, only groups of up to six people were permitted to register and the walk was entirely self-guided.

The Chess Valley Challenge was initially scheduled to take place in June but had to be postponed due to Coronavirus restrictions,

so we were delighted to be able to make this happen after having had to cancel so many events this year.

A big thanks to all our walkers and to our sponsor Affinity Water, who all raised crucial funds to help the wildlife we love!



Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/chessvalleychallenge.

40 years' dedication



MARTIN KETCHER AT PURWELL NINESPRINGS

Recently, our volunteers at Purwell Ninesprings and volunteer warden Martin Ketcher celebrated their 40th anniversary work party – the first task at the reserve took place on Sunday 5 October 1980.

Over that time our volunteers will have undertaken in excess of 300 volunteer tasks – on this one reserve!

This just goes to show that we couldn't do the work we're doing without your fantastic support. Many of you have been dedicated to helping wildlife by supporting the Trust as a member or volunteer – or both – for many years.

Thank you!

Privacy Policy update

We are committed to keeping your personal information safe and secure and to protecting your privacy. How we do this and why is explained in our Privacy Policy, along with your rights regarding to your personal information and how we might use it to keep you updated about the work you are helping to make possible.

We have recently carried out a review of our Privacy Policy and you can see the updated version on our website or request a paper copy. We promise to continue to respect your wishes about how you want us to stay in touch and you can change your contact preferences at any time by emailing info@hmwt.org or calling 01727 858 901.



Find the updated policy at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/policies#privacy

Hertford residents fund the Trust's newest nature reserve

We are delighted to introduce our newest nature reserve, Beane Marsh, thanks to a community group in Hertford who raised more than £100,000.



DR TOM DAY, JOHN HOWSON, VIV JONES, JILL DIGBY, JENNY RAWSON

Beane Marsh, an area of floodplain grassland just a short walk from Hertford North Station, was put up for sale in 2019. The *Save Beane Marshes* community fundraising drive that followed raised more than £100,000 to protect the site for wildlife. This money, coupled with additional funding from Hertford Town Council and a significant donation from one of our long-standing members, enabled us to purchase the land and protect it for future generations.

The five-acre site lies next to the River Beane, one of Hertfordshire's rare chalk streams, and is home to a variety of wildlife including rare marshy plants and a variety of insects such as dragonflies. Beane Marsh sits within the Beane Valley and provides a rare and valuable floodplain grassland habitat as well as a crucial connection by river to other nature reserves such as Waterford Heath to the north and King's Meads to the south.

We can now start to prepare a management plan for the site. We will be carrying out a programme of habitat and species surveys over the coming year and working with the local community to develop a plan for how best to share the story of the site and its wildlife. As a wetland site, public access will be limited.

The Trust's Head of Living Landscapes, Dr Tom Day, says: "I am delighted, not only that we managed to help save this fantastic place, but also about the level of engagement shown by the local community. The people of Hertford are clearly passionate about wildlife and we are honoured to be chosen to look after this amazing new nature reserve. Beane Marsh needs specialist management and we're looking forward to getting started to tap the full potential of this site for wildlife."

John Howson of the *Save Beane Marshes* community group says: "A wonderful community effort made it possible for us to

raise the money for the purchase of this amazing piece of land, a task that seemed nearly impossible when we started. It is one of Hertford's most visible and iconic pieces of countryside lying as it does a short walk from Hertford North railway station. We must pay tribute to those people whose amazing generosity has made this happen. We are so delighted to have been able to see this through to completion."

Learn more about the habitat at Beane Marsh on page 30 and join our online event on 24 November (see also page 16).



Find more about our newest reserve at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/beanemarsh.





Stag beetles are one of many species in danger.

UK UPDATE

Wildlife Trusts launch biggest ever appeal to kickstart nature's recovery by 2030

As we struggled through the worst pandemic in living memory, the importance of nature in our lives became clearer than ever. Science shows that humanity's basic needs — from food to happiness — can all be met with a healthy natural environment, where wildlife surrounds us.

But sadly, nature is not all around us, at least not in the abundance it should be. Many of our most treasured species like hedgehogs, bats and basking sharks are all at risk, as well as many of the insects that pollinate our food crops.

Loss of wild places and the breaking up of those that remain into small fragments has had a disastrous effect. Only 10% of land is protected in the UK and much of this is in poor condition. While some areas of the seabed are officially protected, harmful activities such as bottom trawling are only banned in a handful of locations.

All is not lost, as we know how to turn things round: we need to see nature's recovery happening across at least 30% of our land and seas by 2030. This would enable our wild places to connect and allow wildlife to move around and thrive. The Wildlife Trusts are fighting to make this a reality through our new 30 by 30 campaign, and we recently called for a new landscape designation for England called "Wildbelt" that would put land in to recovery for nature and help us reach 30%.

Craig Bennett, chief executive of The

Wildlife Trusts, said: "We've set ourselves an ambitious goal — to raise £30 million and kickstart the process of securing at least 30% of land and sea in nature's recovery by 2030. We will buy land to expand and join up our nature reserves; we'll work with others to show how to bring wildlife back to their land, and we're calling for nature's recovery through a new package of policy measures including big new ideas like Wildbelt."

Wildlife Trusts are fundraising to tackle, on a scale not seen before in the UK, the joint climate and ecological emergency. Restored habitats will capture carbon, helping to tackle climate change, and bring people the health benefits associated with contact with the natural world. There are amazing projects right on your doorstep that need support to take flight.

Craig added: "The next ten years must be a time of renewal, of rewilding our lives, of green recovery. We all need nature more than ever and when we succeed in reaching 30 by 30 we'll have wilder landscapes that store carbon and provide on-your-doorstep nature for people too. Everyone can support and help us to succeed."

Support our campaign today to bring our wildlife back:

wildlifetrusts.org/30-30-30



UK UPDATE

New ambassadors for nature

Award-winning actor Alison Steadman, Bradford-based GP and TV presenter Dr Amir Khan, presenter and filmmaker Hannah Stitfall, science communicator Sophie Pavelle and Iceland managing director Richard Walker are taking up the new role of Ambassadors for The Wildlife Trusts. The nature enthusiasts will use their voices, influence and audiences to help us raise awareness of the urgent need for nature's



recovery, and encourage more people to take action.

Speaking about her new role, Alison Steadman said, "I'm extremely proud of all the work the Wildlife Trusts do with the local communities in which they work, but have come to see that collectively, they're a force to be reckoned with. Their work is important, from big picture landscape restoration, to encouraging and supporting people like you and I to do our bit for wildlife, whether it's in our garden, or campaigning on issues close to our heart."

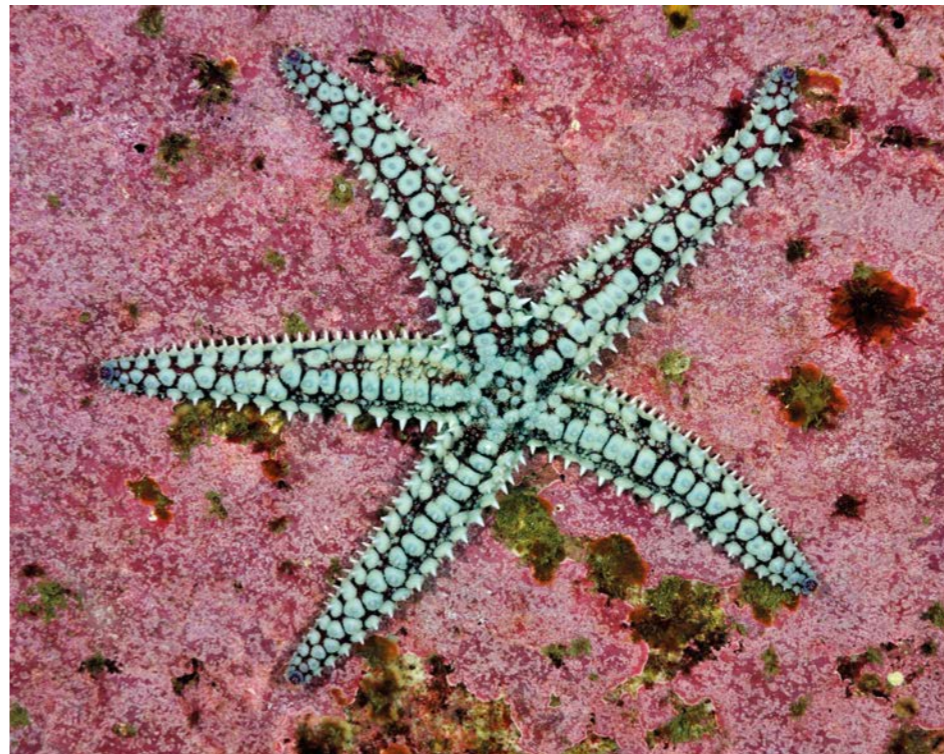
You can learn more about our new ambassadors and hear their views on The Wildlife Trusts' website:

wildlifetrusts.org/ambassadors

THE CHANGES WE NEED

Some examples of projects gearing up to help bring back 30%:

- Derbyshire Wildlife Trust is hoping to restore natural processes and healthy ecosystems on a huge scale in their **Wild Peak** project, bringing back more wildlife and wild places.
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust is planning a number of **reintroduction** to bring back missing species including beavers, cirl buntings and choughs as part of its Wilder Wight project.
- Lancashire Wildlife Trust is helping to combat climate change at the first ever UK **carbon farm**, which is locking up carbon and bringing back wildlife habitat as the peatlands are restored at Winmarleigh.
- Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust is planning to restore reed beds, fen swamps and meres, increasing water resilience on **Bourne North Fen**, supporting improved agriculture and water quality — which is good for wildlife — whilst reducing flood risk.



ALISON STEADMAN © CLEARWATER PHOTOGRAPHY, SPINY STARFISH © LINDA PITKIN/2020 VISION, CRANES © NIKKI WILLIAMS

Safer areas at sea

In 2019 an independent panel was tasked by the Government to review whether Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) could be introduced to English waters. Over 3,000 Wildlife Trust supporters responded to the panel's consultation, backing our call for HPMA introduction. HPMAs would offer the strictest possible

protections for the marine environment, giving nature the best chance of recovery. By removing all pressure, from fishing to construction, our shallow seas, shores and diverse seabeds can become healthier, more productive and full of life once more. wtru.st/help-our-seas

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Hip hip hoor-hay!

Cumbria Wildlife Trust have recently taken ownership of Bowberhead Farm, home to internationally important flower-rich northern hay meadows — a rare habitat with only 900 hectares left in existence. In time these meadows could help create a joined-up network of restored, wildflower-rich grasslands across Cumbria and northern England. cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk/bowberhead

2 Crane comeback

A pair of common cranes has bred at Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust's Willow Tree Fen. This is the first pair to breed in Lincolnshire in over 400 years. Crane's were driven to extinction in the UK in the sixteenth century, but a small number returned in 1978 and eventually started breeding. The population has slowly grown and spread, with 56 pairs attempting to nest in the UK in 2019. lincstrust.org.uk/willow-tree-fen



WILLOW TREE FEN

3 Duke's reprieve

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust purchased Deacon Hill, Winchester's only remaining stronghold for the endangered Duke of Burgundy butterfly. This is a crucial piece of land in a network of sites around Winchester that are managed by the Trust with wildlife in mind. hiwwt.org.uk/deaconhill

STAG BEETLE © TERRY WHITTAKER/2020VISION

Wild Snaps



Communications Officer Frieda Rummenhohl is a keen hobby photographer. She looks back at this summer's Photography Competition and shares photographer Russell Savory's top tips on photographing wildlife and how to get started.

For amateurs as well as professionals, photography is a way to see the world – wildlife photography even more so. Despite being one of the more difficult subjects – after all, most wildlife won't stay still, look in the right direction or move over to better lighting when you ask it to – wildlife photography has become increasingly popular.

It is, in fact, incredibly rewarding and a wonderful way to get closer to nature – imagine sitting on the edge of a river for hours waiting for the kingfisher to perch on that exact stick – and then it does!

This is why we launched a new Photography Competition this summer. Through Wild Snaps we wanted to celebrate our wildlife and at the same time find out how you discover and experience it through the lens of a camera. We launched the competition on 19 August, World Photography Day, and invited entries of up to two wildlife photos. From cheeky foxes and majestic kingfishers to buzzy bees, we received an incredible 250 wildlife shots.

The best 30 were put to a public vote and, after more than 820 votes, we were able to announce the results: Barry Lockwood is our Wild Snaps 2020 Photography Competition winner! You

can admire his winning image on the cover of this magazine. Liam Edwards and Matt Livesey were worthy runners up with



LITTLE OWL



FOX CUB

their lovely images featured in this article. Prizes included vouchers for wildlife watching equipment, kindly sponsored by Opticron (£300 winner; £100 each for runners up). Furthermore, our friend Jeanette from Jet Black Squares offered an exclusive Smartphone Photography Masterclass to John Roy, chosen at random out of all voters by the Trust's team.

When I called Barry to break the news about his win, he was "gobsmacked". He told me that a cancer diagnosis made him pick up photography only last year to "leave my wife, children and grandchildren some nice photos to remind them of me". Practising photography and learning about editing have helped Barry on this journey and the winning shot was taken at Amwell Nature Reserve on his first time out with a camera after eight weeks of radiotherapy. I'm sure you'll join me in congratulating Barry for this amazing shot and wishing him all the best for the future – and many more fantastic wild snaps!

To celebrate the high number of great submissions, our usual Your Photos section on page 31 is a Wild Snaps Special.

Wildlife Photography – 5 Top Tips

Wildlife Photography can seem daunting but practice makes perfect. We have asked Russell Savory, professional wildlife photographer and friend of the Trust, for his top tips on how to get started.

Don't splurge on expensive equipment

You don't need an expensive DSLR or the best-on-the-market lens to take great photos. If you're just starting out, your smartphone will do nicely. You can build up your equipment over time and as you get more practice, but remember: the photographer takes the photos, not the camera!

Be patient

If there's one skill you can learn from wildlife photography, it is patience. Unlike people, wildlife doesn't do what you want them to and it never turns up on time. If you go out to photograph wildlife, make sure you take your time and be patient. I have spent hours on end sitting in a ditch waiting for water voles to come out – they ended up swimming through my legs! Maybe choose easier-to-photograph species for your first outings ...

Plan ahead

If you're after a particular animal, consider the best time and place when it is active. You would expect to waste a lot of time waiting for a barn owl to show up at noon... Visit locations beforehand for a recce. Find out where the animal usually is at different times and plan the best spots and angles.

Change perspective

Level up – or down. It's not always best to shoot at eye level. Be prepared to get down on your knees (or even tummy!) to take that shot to the next level – quite literally. An image of a duck on a lake will look better when taken from water level.

Celebrate achievements

If you're starting out with wildlife photography, it's easy to get discouraged (cue: wildlife doesn't do what you want!). Don't give up, keep at it and practice, practice, practice. Go easy on yourself and celebrate your achievements - that close-up bee in your garden or that lovely duck at the lake. Remember that wildlife photography takes time and professionals like me often spend hours and hours waiting for the perfect shot and rack up thousands of shots to get it. Have fun and keep going!



Pack your phone or your camera, get outside and get snapping! Find some inspiration on the next pages and share your images with us via email or on social media!





© STEVE KENNY BIRDS EYE STUDIOS



BITTERN © JAMIE HALL

1. Amwell

Once a working gravel pit, today a haven bustling with wildlife all year round: Amwell Nature Reserve near Ware is one of the most important places for wildlife in the county and is well-used and enjoyed by the local community. It hosts a mosaic of habitats including reedbeds, grassland and woodland as well as a fantastic, panoramic view over Great Hardmead Lake with Easneye Woods behind. The reserve lies in the Lee Valley, which connects the site with other nature reserves and habitats along the River Lee, providing a wildlife corridor stretching from Hertford to the Thames, creating a *Living Landscape*.

In summer, it is best known for its dragons – the reserve is home to over 20 species of dragonfly and damselfly and has its very own Dragonfly Trail – but it really shines in the winter months when a large number of wintering birds call it home.

Visit the viewpoint overlooking Great Hardmead Lake and see what you can spot for yourself. The viewpoint is seldom short of birdwatchers, most of whom will be happy to share their observations. Wintering gulls provide quite a spectacle as they come to roost on the lake in large numbers every evening, screeching, crying and cawing. These are mostly black-headed

and lesser black-backed gulls with the occasional, more unusual, Caspian and yellow-legged gulls being spotted by visitors. Many come to Amwell in winter to see wildfowl such as gadwall and shovelers and also smew. Read more about this rare visitor on page 29.

Follow the path from the main viewpoint to the Bittern Pool Viewpoint. With some patience and a bit of luck, you'll find one of our most elusive winter birds skulking in their favourite wet reedbed home: the bittern. It is a bird from the heron family, with a black and brown plumage providing perfect camouflage between the reeds.

Know before you go

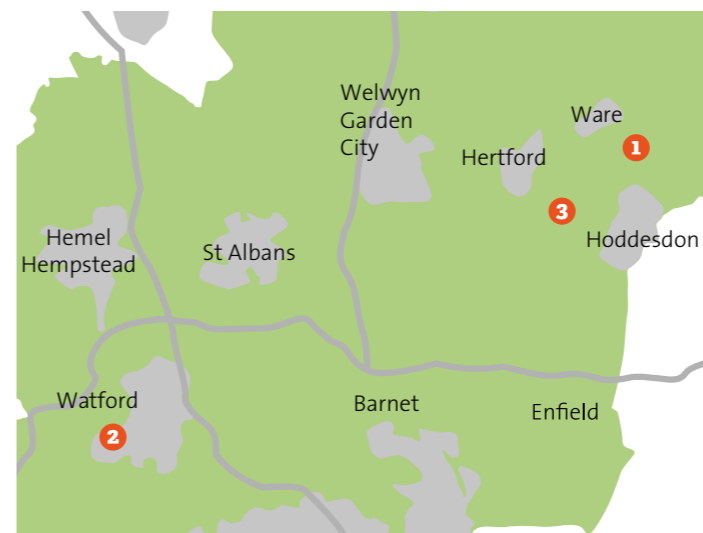
Location: SG12 9SS, near Hoddesdon

Open: Open and free at all times

Please note: bird hides may be closed due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions



Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/amwell



2. Cassiobury Park

Why now?

Bare trees reveal flashes of orange and blue, as kingfishers whizz along the River Gade in this urban wildlife haven.

Know before you go

Location: WD18 7LG, in Watford

Open: Open and free at all times

Wildlife to spot:

Grey heron, little egret, kingfisher, long-tailed tit and jay.

The lowdown

A wildlife haven nestled in a corner of Watford's Cassiobury Park, this Local Nature Reserve provides some peace close to the hustle and bustle of suburbia. What were once shallow watercress beds have developed into marshes and open pools, surrounded by wet woodland of alder and willow, providing cover and nesting sites for birds throughout the seasons.

Grey herons and little egrets can be spotted silently skulking in the undergrowth, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

Once you step into the calm of the nature reserve and follow the trails along and across the River Gade, it's easy to forget that Watford Junction train station is less than a mile away.



Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/cassioburypark



© CLARE GRAY

3. Balls Wood

Why now?

A tranquil woodland with open rides to soak in the winter sun, abounding with wildlife throughout the year.

Know before you go

Location: SG13 7PW, near Hertford Heath

Open: Open and free at all times

Wildlife to spot:

Hares, foxes and woodland birds.

The lowdown

From beautiful woodland flowers such as wood anemone in spring and butterflies fluttering through the wide, open rides in summer to fungi in autumn and mammals in winter, this beautiful varied woodland is worth a visit every season of the year.

In winter, many tit species form so-called roving flocks. With a bit of luck, you might spot them bundled together on a crisp winter's day. Woodland birds are easier to spot in winter when no foliage obscures the view, so don't forget your binoculars! Can you spot the country's smallest bird, the goldcrest? They are often seen feeding amongst the conifer trees and can sometimes be heard by their high-pitched call.

As an added bonus, you can extend your visit, as Balls Wood lies adjacent to two more nature reserves: Hertford Heath is one of the last remaining heathlands in Hertfordshire and Hobbyhorse Wood is one of the Trust's smallest reserves.



Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/ballswood

In remembrance

We are extremely grateful to long-standing member, Moira Petty for kindly leaving a gift to the Trust in her will. We are thankful for her support in this special way, which will make a lasting contribution to our work.

Our thanks and sincerest condolences to the friends and family of Diane Skirkett, Pat and Peter Lomer and long-standing member Charles Lansdown, who kindly gave donations to the Trust in their memory. These donations help us ensure the wildlife their loved ones cherished is protected for years to come.

Wildlife Champions

Originally planning to run the St Albans Half marathon in June, Robert was not disheartened when it was unfortunately cancelled. Determined to still raise funds for the Trust, Robert organised his own 10km run, from Shenley to Well End, raising over £150 to help protect wildlife. Well done to Robert for his amazing achievement!

Sophia, age 7, has been on a mission to save our bees this summer. Wanting to do something positive during these challenging months, Sophia brightened up her street by creating a beautiful educational 'bee board' to sell her wonderful artwork, hand-painted cork coasters and bee-friendly flowers, all of which raised an incredible £115 for the Trust. Sophia and her family also took on the Chess Valley Challenge, a 10-mile walk, raising over a further £100. An inspiration to us all – thank you, Sophia!



ROBERT WYE



Action for biodiversity at Gobions Wood

Thanks to funding from Biffa Award, we have created two fantastic woodland glades that have completely revitalised this wonderful woodland. New sheep fencing was installed to enable us to graze the acid grassland meadows to increase biodiversity and secure the future of this beautiful habitat. Information boards will now inform visitors about the site's rich wildlife and history.

Thank you Biffa Award and Landfill Communities Fund!

Membership perks

Don't forget that you receive a **15% discount** at *Cotswold Outdoors, Snow+Rock, Cycle Surgery and Runnersneed*. If you have taken up exercise in lockdown, you can stock up on gear with the code **AF-WILDLIFE-M5** in-store or online (T&C apply).



LARGER THAN LIFE ADVENTURES



Local businesses protecting wildlife



New England Biolabs (NEB)

With environmental stewardship at the heart of their business, New England Biolabs (NEB) is always looking at innovative ways to promote sustainability, from reducing the amount of plastic in their products to offering free butterfly-friendly wildflower seeds with purchases. Inspired by their local fen habitat at our Purwell Ninesprings Nature

Reserve, the team at NEB UK wanted to support local wildlife this year by raising funds for the Trust. By making a donation for every Monarch Nucleic Acid Purification Kit sold between January and March, they raised an incredible £8,910 to protect our precious fens and local wildlife. Our sincerest thanks to everyone at NEB UK for their incredible support.



Find out more about New England Biolabs' environmental stewardship at neb.com/sustainability.

Home Farm Glamping

A local glamp-site on the edge of London, has brought glampers back to nature while raising funds to help wildlife. Home Farm Glamping near Borehamwood have donated £3 of every booking in 2020 to the Trust. Glampers could discover the wildlife that calls the site its home with Trust-led wildlife and bat walks throughout summer. Home Farm Glamping have raised a total of **£1,896** for wildlife. A big thanks to Jess and the team their ongoing support.



Book your 2021 glamping trip at homefarmglamping.com



HOME FARM GLAMPING



Little Otter Books

Our friend Charlotte at Little Otter Books, a local children's book seller, helped protect wildlife this summer by donating 10% of book sales to the Trust throughout August. Passionate about nature, Charlotte also helps to promote the benefits of reading and getting outdoors to our wild places through her fantastic blog. Thank you!



Find out more at littleotterbooks.co.uk/blog

Tommy & Lottie and Abigail's Flower Truck



The Trust is delighted to announce a new partnership with Tommy & Lottie, an ethical and sustainable, nature-inspired clothing brand for kids and adults and Abigail's Flower Truck, a

pop-up flower truck that allows you to create your own bouquet across Hertfordshire. Passionate about our natural world, the two businesses wanted to do more to help protect local wildlife, so they designed the Bee Collection to support the work of the Trust. For each item sold within the bespoke range of bee-inspired items, from bee-tees to the newly launched bee sweatshirt, a donation is being

made to the Trust - all to help raise funds for wildlife and our wonderful bees. We're enjoying working with Tommy & Lottie and Abigail's Flower Truck and we are very grateful for their support.



To find out more about the partnership and shop the Bee Collection visit tommyandlottie.com

We asked, you helped. Thank you!



Thank you from all of us at Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

We sent a out letter in June, asking for your help in response to the drastic impact on our income that COVID-19 had left us facing. It was a worrying time for everyone, and we weren't sure what would happen. But, having had to cancel so many events and activities which we would usually rely on to fund our work, we took the decision to ask you - our wonderful members - for help. And goodness, did you help!

Thanks to you, so far, over £62,000 has been raised to help reduce the impact of these challenging times and ensure our essential work to protect local wildlife continues. As you can imagine, this generous response has brought us into a much better position than we thought possible a few months ago.
All because of you.

Along with your generosity, we have worked hard to secure funding from grants and other supporters who share our commitment and passion to protect our natural world, especially during a time of crisis such as this. Because of you, our amazing members, with this additional support we have been able to provide the care our beautiful wild spaces need, and to adapt to change in these uncertain times.

Small groups of volunteers are back working on our nature reserves and helping to carry out careful management of these vital homes for wildlife. We have continued to connect people with wildlife by running small activities on our sites and creating new events and activities online. We were even able to go ahead with the delayed Chess Valley Challenge, which was inspiring for everyone involved (find out more on page four), and we have introduced new campaigns to educate and inspire local action for wildlife. **All of this has only been made possible, thanks to you.**

What happens next is crucial and we're certainly not out of the woods yet. We still do not know the full impact of the COVID-19 crisis, with essential funds still needed to ensure we can take forward our conservation work and continue to adapt to the challenges this crisis brings. What we do know is that none of our work so far this year in protecting precious local wildlife, for today and in the future, would have been possible without your dedicated support.

So, from everyone at the Trust, thank you for everything you do to protect local wildlife.



Melissa Harrison

The home patch

When you look back at the spring and summer of 2020, what will you remember? The challenge of home-schooling? The frustrations of domestic confinement? Fear of illness, or perhaps illness itself? Our shared period of lockdown was a long, strange time, yet for many of us it came with an unexpected silver lining: the opportunity to rediscover (or discover for the first time) the overlooked green spaces around our homes.

Especially in the early weeks, when restrictions were at their strictest, all many of us saw of the outside world was during a brief walk each day. As one of the sunniest springs on record unfolded, we sought out parks, nature reserves and urban green spaces, hungry for contact with the natural world. For some time now we've been reading about the benefits of contact with nature to our mental and physical health, but this year it was really brought home to us, as our deepest instincts drove us to listen out for birdsong, plant windowboxes, cherish humble pavement weeds and take daily note of spring's progress, drawing deep comfort, amid frightening changes, from one of the eternal verities.

So what happens now that many of us are back at work each day, and car trips for leisure are once again allowed? Do we consign the local discoveries we made to the dustbin of memory, filing our wonder-filled walks under 'strange things we did in lockdown'? Or can we take something crucial from the weeks we spent close to home, using what we learned to transform the post-Covid world?



I've written before, in these pages and elsewhere, of the importance of having a 'home patch' that we care for and connect to, physically, mentally and emotionally. Knowing where the swifts nest on your street, which oak in the park is always the last into leaf, why the mason bees nest on one side of a nearby building and not the other – these things root us in place and time, in ways that often prove deeply beneficial both to the world around us, and to ourselves.

If, during lockdown, you found yourself seeing your local area with new eyes, don't turn away from it now. Consider becoming a Friend of your nearest park, or supporting The Wildlife Trusts; look online for Forest Schools who want help connecting kids in your area to nature, or other charities that have been doing unsung work to protect and preserve green spaces where you are.

At the very least, please don't stop visiting the places you discovered in lockdown, no matter how tempting it is to forget them in favour of somewhere further afield. We need them, just as wildlife needs them: not just grand National Parks, but nearby nature, too.

There could still be a new local gem to discover. Find out if there's a Wildlife Trust reserve near you:

 wildlifetrusts.org/nature-reserves

A LITTLE BIT WILD

It may have seemed as though the birds were singing more loudly during lockdown, but in fact, it's likely they were able to lower their volume as they had far less noise pollution to compete with. This will have saved them precious energy, and may also have boosted their chances of reproductive success.




Melissa Harrison is a nature writer and novelist, and editor of the anthologies *Spring, Summer, Autumn* and *Winter*, produced in support of The Wildlife Trusts.

ILLUSTRATION: ROBIN MACKENZIE


Go Wild Events

GOLDENEYE AT DAWN

 Our online talks programme continues to be hugely popular and we have an exciting line-up of speakers and topics coming up. Our winter walks programme includes winter wildfowl identification, wildlife spotting for families, winter tree identification and other winter walks on our nature reserves.

After the cancellation of so many planned events this year, we are delighted to be carefully reintroducing guided walks through the winter months. These may look a little different to what you may be used to, but we are determined to continue to bring you closer to nature, either in person or remotely. Due to the greatly reduced capacity, the walks are likely to book up quickly and are therefore not included in this events guide. More events will be added on a regular basis.

Learn from the comfort of your own home
Our online programme covers a wide range of nature-related topics. You can watch the talk your PC, Mac, laptop, mobile phone or tablet; no software download is required. If you can't make the time of the live event, you can still register in advance to receive a recording afterwards to watch in your own time.

 **Booking is essential for all our events and places will be snapped up quickly! Don't delay and book your place today. Visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events for full listings and booking.**

Tuesday 24 November | 7pm – 8pm

ONLINE
Introducing Beane Marsh Nature Reserve

Discover the Trust's most recent nature reserve acquisition. Join a panel of experts for an interesting overview of the site, the story of how it was saved



BEANE MARSH NATURE RESERVE

for wildlife, future plans to protect and enhance it for wildlife by the local community and how you can get involved in helping to restore this beautiful reserve.

Presenters: Dr Tom Day, Head of Living Landscapes and Jenny Rawson, Senior Reserve Officer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust; plus special guests

Wednesday 25 November | 7pm – 8.30pm

ONLINE
Winter Wildfowl Identification

Join us for a 60-minute talk and Q&A session. This event is for those wishing to get to grips with wetland wildfowl (including ducks, geese, rails, herons and grebes). By the end of the session, you'll know your divers from dabblers and

goldeneye from gadwall. There will be plenty of time at the end for questions.

Suitable for adults or very keen under 12's!

Presenter: Josh Kalms, People and Wildlife Officer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust



MALLARDS

© ANDREW PARKINSON 2020VISION

Thursday 3 December | 7pm – 8.30pm

ONLINE
Winter Tree Identification

Join us for a 90-minute talk about how to use the various keys and guides to aid you in identifying trees in their winter state. Learn about how bud and twig characteristics, along with other identifying marks, can be used to help you to correctly identify the trees most commonly found in Hertfordshire.

Suitable for adults but all welcome.

Presenter: Andy Holtham, Volunteer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Thursday 10 December | 7pm – 8.30pm

ONLINE
Introduction to Spiders

Join us for a 60-minute talk and Q&A session introducing spider biology, behaviour, ecology and conservation. There will be plenty of opportunities to ask questions!

Suitable for all ages.

Presenter: Dave Willis, People and Wildlife Officer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust



CROSS ORBWEAVER

© NICOLA TAGGART

Thursday 14 January | 2pm – 3.30pm

ONLINE
Learn to Sketch Birds

Settle down with your sketch pad and pencils and accompany us on an online tutorial about how to observe and sketch birds quickly while in the field. Local artist, Martin Gibbons, will show you how to begin field sketching birds by going through the basics of shape, form, depth and adding detail.

Aimed at adults, but suitable for older children and teenagers.

Presenter: Martin Gibbons, Volunteer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust



Thursday 21 January | 7pm – 8.30pm

ONLINE
Geology of Hertfordshire

Join us for a 60-minute talk and Q&A session, giving a brief introduction to the geology of Hertfordshire and Middlesex and then reviewing how this affects the siting and nature of the Trust's reserves.

Suitable for adults but all welcome.

Presenter: John Myres, Volunteer, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Thursday 28 January | 7pm – 8pm



BADGER

© ANDREW PARKINSON 2020VISION

ONLINE
Learn About Badgers

This interactive, family event will focus on teaching children about badgers, what they look like, where they live and how to care for them. There will be lots of opportunity to ask questions, participate in quizzes and watch videos filmed at our badger hide in Tewin Orchard.

Aimed at families but all welcome.

Presenter: Chris Wood, Chair, Herts and Middlesex Badger Group

“Absolutely brilliant initiative taking full advantage of the technology now available. There were lots of new things to learn and enough time for questions.”

“The talk was very good and the polling and interactions with the audience were well placed. Thank you for organising this.”



Living on a **Prey-er**

Seemingly supernatural senses, large and powerful talons, a hooked bill and a ruthless hunting instinct, every body feature is designed for the perfect kill. Their piercingly sharp vision is many times stronger than our human eyesight, the slightest rustling noise cannot escape their excellent hearing and it is thought that they can identify urine trails of small mammals from far overhead.

Raptors are magnificent and hugely impressive predators. Their strong, broad wings and shaped tails allow them to sail on thermals, effortlessly soaring high in the skies on the lookout for prey.

Sadly, this ability has made them the target of persecution throughout Europe. As early as the 16th century, bounties have been put on most larger raptors to protect domestic stock, but persecution really took off with the rise in game shooting. Thankfully, raptor killing is illegal in the UK today and, although many birds have been hunted to the brink, some raptor species are recovering and are doing well.

In the UK, we have 15 raptor species, split into three basic groups: eagles, hawks and falcons. All of these are diurnal – active during the day – in contrast with the mostly nocturnal owls. Of the 15 species, six are currently breeding in our area, while others are occasional visitors. All of our raptors are carnivores, although some have more particular tastes, such as the osprey which specialises in fish. Many of the larger birds are also scavengers. Others rely solely on live prey like voles, other rodents or small birds.





Who's who?

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

The most widespread bird of prey in the country, buzzards can often be seen soaring high above our heads, looking out for their next meal. Its broad wings – perfect for wheeling on thermals – can make it appear larger than it is; a formidable sight nevertheless. Buzzards can vary in their colouring – from dark brown to much paler plumage - with a mottled underside and a short, rounded tail.

After being almost persecuted to extinction in the last century, their numbers have quadrupled in the last 50 years thanks to legal protection. They have adapted well and can now be found in a variety of habitats across the country. You might hear one before you see it so listen out for the plaintive 'kee-yaaa' call that could be mistaken for the meowing of a cat.

Wingspan: 110-130cm

Where to see them: Grassland, farmland and woodland



BUZZARD © TIM HILL



© JON HAWKINS - SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY

RED KITE

Red kite (*Milvus milvus*)

Their presence often announced by a shrill call, red kites are now a common sight across most of Hertfordshire and

Middlesex. They have made a fantastic comeback since being reintroduced in the Chilterns in the 1990s, making them one of the great conservation successes in the country.

Red kites are easily identified by their forked tail. Their reddish-brown and white-grey mottled plumage and long, black-tipped wings with white patches are a magnificent sight as they wheel in the skies looking for carrion.

Wingspan: 175-195cm

Where to see them: Woodland and farmland, urban areas and along A-Roads

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

A fairly familiar sight in the countryside and sometimes in our urban areas, numbers of kestrels have been declining since the 1970s. This is mainly due to habitat loss and changes in agricultural practices leading to a loss of their favourite prey – voles.

Compared to larger raptors, kestrels are quite small. Their plumage is beautiful with a grey head, dark-banded tail, gingery-brown back and a creamy speckled underside. Their most distinctive feature is their unmistakable hovering – a technique more commonly used by insects and smaller birds like hummingbirds. In fact, kestrels are *wind-hoverers*, using the breeze to stay practically motionless in the air.

Wingspan: 71-80cm

Where to see them: Grassland, heathland and sometimes urban areas



KESTREL © TIM HILL



PEREGRINE FALCON © BERTIE GREGORY 2020 VISION

Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

The peregrine is a large and powerful falcon and a master predator. Its flight is swift and agile and can reach speeds of up to 390 km/h, making this falcon the world's fastest animal. Peregrines usually go after feral pigeons and doves, snatching their prey mid-air.

It is dark slate-grey above and white below, with black bars across its chest and belly. It has a white throat and cheeks and a strong, black distinctive moustache and mask. The peregrine's call is said to sound very much like a villain's laughter.

After a long history of persecution – to keep them from predated on game birds and racing pigeons – peregrines are slowly making a comeback. Until recently, the peregrine falcon was only found in the north and west of the UK. Over the last couple of decades, it has been spreading south, moving into urban areas including Watford and St Albans. Tall buildings can replicate the precipitous cliff edges that peregrines would naturally nest on. Just this year, a pair has been found breeding in Welwyn Garden City for the first time, on old Shredded Wheat silos in the Wheat Quarter.

Wingspan: 95-115 cm

Where to see them: Mostly urban areas where they nest on tall buildings

Seasonal visitors Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

The hobby is a small falcon that prefers a warmer climate – it's a summer visitor and spends our colder months in sub-Saharan Africa. Superficially similar to the peregrine with a dark hood and a moustache, a slate grey upper and striped underside, the hobby also wears rusty orange "trousers" and has an orange-red undertail. Its wings are narrow and pointed, allowing for incredible agility in flight – sometimes likened to a swift.

The hobby was the favourite bird of Peter Adolph, a keen ornithologist and game designer. In fact, he liked the bird so much he wanted to name a new invention after it. When he was not granted the trademark he applied for he chose the bird's Latin name instead – and Subbuteo was born!

Wingspan: 70-92cm

Where to see them: Heathlands and wetlands in summer



HOBBY © DAVE CURTIS

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)



© JON HAWKINS - SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY

SPARROWHAWK

With its small size – the male being somewhere between a blackbird and a collared dove – rounded wings and a long tail, the sparrowhawk is perfectly adapted to narrow habitats such as dense woodland where it usually nests. It can often be seen in our urban parks and gardens – a well-visited bird feeding station offers a lush buffet of prey, which it can surprise-attack from cover.

Males have a blue-grey back and white underparts showing reddish-orange barring. Females are generally about 25% larger – with browner plumage above and grey bars below. They both have reddish cheeks.

Wingspan: 55-70cm

Where to see them: Variety of habitats, including gardens

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Visit a large body of freshwater – such as Panshanger Park or Amwell – in spring or autumn and you might be in for an impressive sight. Ospreys don't currently breed here – there are only a few hundred breeding pairs in the UK and their stronghold is currently Scotland and the North of England. However, they spend the winter in Africa and can stopover in our area, resting here for a few days or weeks before continuing their journey.

The osprey is a large bird of prey with dark brown upperparts and contrasting white underparts that can appear mottled in females. Their piscivorous diet is aided by a specialist hunting technique; having spotted its prey, the osprey dives down into the water legs-first, using its strong talons to grab and hold on to a fish before it carries it off to a tree.

Wingspan: 145-170cm

Where to see them: Some large wetlands in spring and autumn



© PETER CAIRNS 2020 VISION

OSPREY

Did you know?

- Most female raptors are larger than their male counterpart
- Raptor broods hatch in intervals to make sure at least one chick, the eldest, survives
- Just like owls, raptors often swallow their prey in one gulp and regurgitate fur and bone as pellets
- The word 'raptor' comes from the Latin raptare which means 'to seize and carry off', as raptors capture their prey with their feet unlike other birds which use their beaks
- Predators like our raptors are an important part of our ecosystem, helping to keep populations under control and in balance
- From woodland, grassland, farmland and even cities, raptors inhabit a variety of habitats

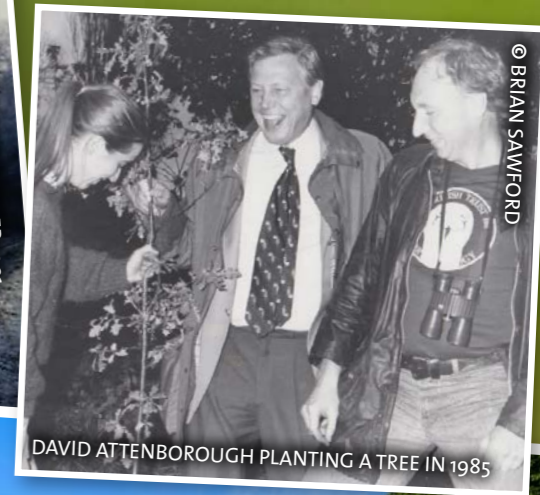


Happy Birthday, Lemsford Springs!

GREEN SANDPIPER



THE MAIN LAGOON IN WINTER 1991



DAVID ATTENBOROUGH PLANTING A TREE IN 1985

© BRIAN SAWFORD
© LUKE MASSEY



DAVID ATTENBOROUGH RAKING WATERCRESS IN 1985 © BARRY TRAVIS



© JOSH KUBALE

The King of Rock'n'Roll is blasting out of the radio and we are wearing flares and platform shoes – well, some of us anyway. 1,500 people journey to a small farm in Somerset to attend the first of many Glastonbury Festivals. Paul McCartney leaves The Beatles, effectively dissolving the band. It's 1970 and amidst the hustle and bustle in the world, a new nature reserve has just come to life.

After more than 100 years of watercress farming, supplying the metropolitan Victorians who liked the spicy, peppery taste, production had ceased in 1966 by the River Lea in Lemsford, leaving the site to lie idle.

The ecological importance was quickly realised and, with the help of local naturalists, the Trust purchased the site for £2,500 – equivalent to almost £40,000 in 2020. Small in size but huge in potential, today Lemsford Springs Nature Reserve is home to a range of habitats – from the main feature of the spring-fed lagoons, to wooded areas, meadows and reedbeds, making it a perfect place for birdwatching all year round.

The reserve's volunteer warden is Barry Trevis who has been involved with Lemsford Springs almost as long as the site has been in Trust ownership. For his dedication to the reserve, its management and bird studies, Barry was recognised as 'Herts Outstanding Naturalist' by the Herts Natural History Society in 2019.

Over the years there have been more than 500 volunteer work parties, some with up to 30 volunteers helping at once.

Volunteers have helped deliver crucial structural works including the installation of bird hides and bridges, supported by National Lottery funding, and all this work has helped and this has turned the former watercress farm into a peaceful refuge for animal as well as human visitors.

Records show 127 different bird species at the site, from rarities such as night heron, dipper, bittern and osprey to more commonly seen snipe, water rail and kingfishers. During the winter months, the reserve is famous for its population of overwintering green sandpipers – it boasts the highest density of this bird in the whole country! The birds, thriving on the abundance of fresh-water shrimp in the lagoons, have been the subject of study for almost 40 years. Barry and his team of expert ornithologists have led the longest-running wader colour-ringing study in Europe, monitoring movements, feeding behaviour, site fidelity and territoriality of green sandpipers. Modern technology has enabled the team to fit the birds with tiny GPS devices to help track migration patterns.

Over 60 nest boxes installed around the site provide a home for

blue tits, great tits and tawny owls. Just last year, we were able to follow a pair of kestrels putting up residence and starting a family in one of the boxes. Apart from birds, the nature reserve is great for water shrews which feast on freshwater shrimp. The largest of the shrew family, water shrews have venomous saliva to stun their prey. They're incredibly agile – blink and you'll miss them!

Over the last five decades, countless wildlife enthusiasts, photographers, naturalists, environmental and community

groups and schools have visited the reserve to enjoy the wildlife and peace and quiet, photograph a bobbing sandpiper and learn more about the natural world. Numerous summers have been spent exploring tiny aquatic wildlife in pond dipping sessions and guided walks have revealed hidden gems. Sir David Attenborough visited twice in the late 80s, raking watercress with local school children and planting a tree. Other well-known visitors have included David Bellamy, Mike Dilger, Julia Bradbury, Nick Baker and others.

Looking ahead

In the face of the joint climate and ecological crisis, wetland nature reserves like Lemsford Springs continue to be much-needed wildlife havens. The best way to protect our wild spaces from detrimental effects from development, droughts and other issues is to expand and connect them to create a Living Landscape.

The Wildlife Trusts' 30 by 30 campaign is looking to do just that – we want and need 30 per cent of land and seas protected for wildlife by 2030. Learn more about this ambitious goal on page six.



Sadly, due to ongoing access restrictions, Lemsford Springs remains closed for now. We hope to be able to reopen it safely for you as soon as we can. You can find all updates at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/LemsfordSprings.

Wild Christmas

Flocks of thrushes chatter in hedgerows, feasting on glistening red berries; frost forges delicate tiny sculptures on every surface; ducks dabble and dive on lakes and reservoirs. Although many of us yearn to hunker down and hibernate until spring, winter has plenty of gifts to offer. Have yourself a merry wild Christmas!



© CATALIN APOSTOL

Bring nature inside

'Tis the season to be merry, preferably indoors and wrapped in a cosy blanket. If you really don't want to leave the house, then why not bring nature to you? Ditch the plastic decorations and use natural materials from your garden or nearby wild patch. Look out for twigs, pine cones, leaves and ivy or holly sprigs – when out foraging, please take only as much as you need and make sure you leave plenty for wildlife.



Use the small twigs to design star patterns for decoration. You can attach pine cones together in a garland or paint them green to look like a Christmas tree. Dried oranges make for a fragrant eyecatcher hanging over the mantelpiece – simply slice them and bake at around 65 degrees in the oven for a few hours (turning occasionally).



Discover more ideas for a sustainable Christmas at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/echristmas



ROBIN IN SNOW © MARK HAMBLIN 2020VISION

Mini adventures

While it may feel as if most of the natural world has gone into hibernation, there's lots to experience in the cold months if you know where to look.



Go on a mini adventure and discover just how much nature has to offer.

Sunsets and night skies

Before getting cosy on the sofa, get outside and marvel at the day's last light – you won't be disappointed! Sunsets in winter are often more intense and colourful than in summer. Meteorologists think it's connected with conditions that influence how light travels through the atmosphere.

Another benefit of early dusk is plenty of time to go stargazing – for a magical experience for the young ones before bedtime. An easy constellation to spot is Orion's Belt – an hourglass-shaped group with three parallel stars as the belt in its centre. At the top of the hourglass are Rigel and Betelgeuse, two of the brightest stars in the sky.



Watch HERC Manager Alex Waechter's top tips for stargazing at youtu.be/aEYJhFJSeVA.

Animal tracking

If we're lucky enough to get snow this winter, channel your inner Sherlock and investigate tracks and clues. Which animals might have passed through?

Fox prints are similar to those of small dogs, deer tracks are easily identified by their cloven hooves. Telling the exact species from bird tracks can be difficult. Duck prints have three claws with visible webbing in between them, while bird prints show a long middle toe, two shorter and splayed outer toes, and a long backward-pointing toe. Elementary, my dear Watson!



WADER TRACKS © PETER CAIRNS 2020VISION

Give the gift of wildlife

Treat the wildlife lover in your life with a wild Christmas present and make a real difference for wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Wildlife sponsorships

By sponsoring a local species such as hedgehog, barn owl or water vole you can help us create suitable habitats to protect our precious wildlife. Six options at £15 each.

Winter visitors

Half of the UK's bird population are migrants. Many breed in our area and fly to much warmer climates in autumn, others find our shores temperate enough to spend the winter here. The cold season is the perfect time to see wildlife that you normally wouldn't during the rest of the year.



Redwings can be found feeding in fields and hedgerows, venturing into gardens only when it is very cold, while the sociable fieldfare can be seen flocking in groups of a dozen to several hundred. Both can be heard on clear, starry nights.



The Trust's reserves Stocker's Lake and Amwell are a one-stop shop for wintering wildfowl, including goldeneye from northern Europe, wigeon from Iceland and Russia and, if it's cold enough, the rarer smew from Scandinavia (read more about smew on page 29).



REDWING © MARGARET HOLLAND

Help wildlife

The festive period can make us feel exceptionally charitable, so why not make a tasty Christmas wreath for your garden birds?

All you need are pine cones, long twigs, garden wire, soft lard and bird seed, grated cheese, dried fruits or unsalted nuts. Twist together the twigs into a ring and fasten with the wire. Mix the lard with the bird seed and the rest of the ingredients and smear it over the pinecones. Attach the cones to the wreath, decorate with festive greenery such as holly or ivy and hang it up in the garden. Your garden birds will be delighted about this little Christmas present.



BLUE TIT

© TIM HILL



Buy your bird food from our friends at Vinehouse Farm who donate £10 for each new customer and 4% of every sale to the Trust. vinehousefarm.co.uk



Visit our Online Gift Shop at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop



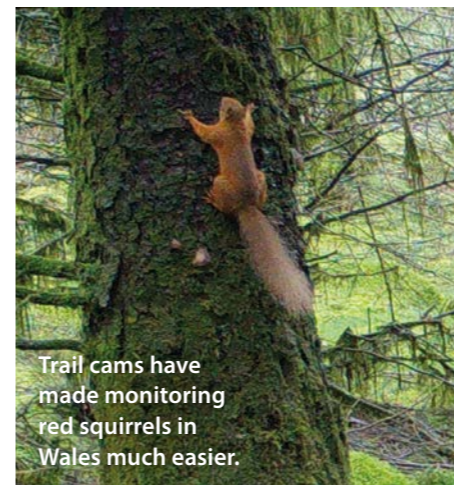
Caught on Camera

Revealing the hidden wildlife on our nature reserves



The Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales

The Mid Wales Red Squirrel Partnership was set up in 2002 after sporadic sightings and records. Before camera traps, red squirrels were extremely hard to detect in mid Wales. They're in fairly low numbers, and live almost exclusively in forestry plantations with very little human activity. Camera traps have been a revolution in this project, allowing uninhabited areas for red squirrels to be surveyed in a non-invasive way with minimal disturbance. Cameras are set up where chewed pine and spruce cones are found to see if it was a red or grey squirrel.



Trail cams have made monitoring red squirrels in Wales much easier.

Alderney Wildlife Trust

Alderney have been using trail cams to record water rails around their ponds. The cameras were used to show how accurate an acoustic method was at counting the birds with the aim of finding how many overwinter in Alderney. They found 34 rails using the acoustic method, which was many more than expected and cameras confirmed these numbers. The trail cams have also revealed some interesting insights into the life of a water rail, including a courting pair on Valentine's Day and autumn footage of young birds stretching, hopping and getting ready for big migration flights. It is fairly unusual to observe this behaviour as the rails are so secretive.



Trail cams have given us a glimpse into the lives of the elusive water rail.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Camera traps have been an essential tool in helping Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Stuart Edmunds prove the presence of pine martens in the county, where they were presumed extinct for decades. Although there were reported sightings as far back as the 1960s, they were impossible to verify until Stuart began using camera traps. The first Shropshire pine marten appeared on camera in July 2015, in woodland previously deemed unsuitable habitat for the evasive mammals. Pine martens are usually betrayed by their scat, but camera traps have now recorded them inhabiting several woodlands across south Shropshire, despite no scat being found. Camera traps can also be used by bait stations, where martens are encouraged to give a clear view of their chest "bib" pattern, which is an essential way of telling individuals apart. Without camera traps, we wouldn't have realised there are pine martens living across the wider landscape at all. They are now a key tool in monitoring the population and distribution of martens in Shropshire and beyond.



Pine martens have made a comeback in Shropshire.

Kent Wildlife Trust

Kent have been using trail cameras at Ham Fen for the past few years to enable them to view the activities of reintroduced beavers, an animal that is crepuscular — mostly active at dawn and dusk. The footage has allowed them to watch the construction of a dam, observe the beaver coppicing trees and feeding on the branches, and revealed a little of the interactions between individuals. They've watched adults grooming each other, seen a family group stripping bark from branches on the bank of the stream

and observed the interesting interaction between a young beaver and a large adult when they met nose to nose in the stream — the adult made a huge tail splash and disappeared under water!

As well as providing some very interesting and entertaining viewing, the images and videos obtained from the trail cameras are helping Kent Wildlife Trust build a better picture of the activity of these elusive animals and understand more about the group dynamics at Ham Fen.



Kent have been watching their reintroduced beavers build a dam!



With the use of trail cams, Gordon has got up close and personal with many wild species.



Gordon Buchanan

The power of trail cams

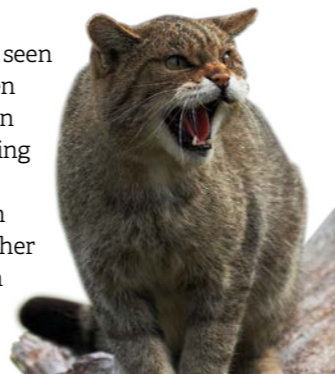
In the early days of my career, as I wiled away many hours waiting for wildlife to show up I would have this nagging desire. More of a wish than a desire, given that what I longed for was impossible. I wanted to be invisible. With invisibility my job would be so much easier. I could get closer to animals to observe their behaviour. Filming wildlife would be much less time consuming and much more revealing.

Although technology has marched on a startling pace over the past three decades — I think invisibility is going to be beyond even the most talented tech boffins. But in many ways camera traps are the next best thing when it comes to wildlife watching. They never tire, get cold, fall asleep or have families that they need to get back to!

I first used camera traps with real success back in 2007. I realised immediately

their value for filmmakers, zoologists and conservationists and have continued to use them to this day. They have given me views of creatures that would have been impossible to see in any other way. Giant otters and jaguars in South America, snow leopards and tigers living at high altitude in the Himalayas. Red pandas, wolves, leopards and illusive Scottish wildcats and pine martens closer to home.

The worlds of secretive, seldom seen animals have been opened up to us in startling and exiting ways. I now wile away moments in nature with another wish... I just wish I had more camera traps!



Behind the wild scenes

See more photos and footage from trail cams and webcams across the UK and find out how to set up your own.



wildlifetrusts.org/
caught-on-camera

Nature's Calendar

November to February

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.

November

The hunter hunted

A starling murmuration is one of nature's greatest spectacles, often involving thousands of birds, sometimes more.

A few years ago I watched a flock of 400-500 starlings with a few colleagues over Springwell Reedbed – one of the Colne Valley's secret gems and, with about seven acres, the largest reedbed in London.

Before settling down to roost for the night, starlings gather together and form a super-flock, creating amazing smoky patterns as they twist and turn in unison, flying back and forth over the reedbed. During this preparatory gathering, the birds become the target of predators hoping to catch their supper. A number of sparrowhawks started hunting the flock from perches on either side of the reedbed.

As we watched, I noticed another larger bird of prey flying in from the far side – a peregrine falcon! It swept in through the starlings at great speed, ignoring them entirely and instead snatched the smaller, male sparrowhawk in its talons before flying off. The hunter had become the hunted! It was an incredible sight none of us had ever witnessed before and will never forget.



December

Corvid alert!

Jack, jack! Corrr-corr, kaw-kaw, rarr-rarr, crah-crah – these are a few of my favourite sounds.

They all belong to the corvid family of birds – in our counties represented by jackdaws, carrion crows, rooks, magpies, jays and more recently ravens. Widely regarded as our most intelligent birds, members of the family can be seen almost anywhere from town centres to the most rural areas, but ravens are only now becoming established again in Hertfordshire.

In the distant past, ravens were a common breeding bird in the county, but persecution led to them becoming extinct during the 19th century, a situation mirrored across much of the country. Since 2006, when a pair was discovered nesting near Whitwell, numbers have been increasing slowly.

See one for yourself this winter. Head to Amwell Nature Reserve, spend some time at the viewpoint overlooking Great Hardmead Lake and you should be lucky enough to see a bird flying to, from or over Easneye Wood, to the east. Panshanger Park has also become a reliable place, along with the Gorbambury estate in St Albans and Ver Valley in the west. Their lovely 'crawwk' call will alert you to birds flying overhead. Ravens are rarely seen perched away from nesting times so best become familiar with their shape in flight.

These are big birds, almost as large as a buzzard, and they have distinctive wedge-shaped tails. Their wings are long, relatively narrow and feathers at the tip are often spread wide, like fingers. Ravens also stay with their mates throughout the year so, more often than not, they will be seen in pairs.



January

The designer duck

As we welcome 2021, I recommend a trip to one of the Trust's wetland nature reserves – Tring Reservoirs, Stocker's Lake or Amwell – for the spectacle of thousands of wildfowl gathered together.

Most of the birds breed far to the north and during winter, they migrate south to the relative warmth of southern England.

Internationally important numbers of shoveler and gadwall visit the Lee Valley, along with pochard, tufted duck, teal and wigeon. Occasionally the usual suspects will be joined by scarcer species such as goldeneye and goosander or the rarest of our winter ducks – the smew. It breeds in Scandinavia and Russia then moves south, primarily to Holland and Denmark where the majority of birds winter.

Back in the 1980s and 90s, during severe winters, there were over 30 smew recorded in the Lee Valley, but in these milder times numbers have declined as many birds stay on the continent. The males are majestic with predominantly snow-white plumage contrasting with bands of black feathers on the head and wings – if Gucci designed ducks, this would be their finest work. Smew belong to the 'sawbill' family – their beaks designed to catch and hold onto small fish.

A close-up view is rare, but their pallid plumage is almost luminous on murky winter days – they stand out as if caught in a spotlight which seems appropriate for this designer duck.




February

Rise and shine

Warmer, sunny days towards the end of winter will often result in a few butterflies coming out of hibernation.

Commas, peacocks and red admirals taking to the wing bring fresh colour to winter's mantle. Occasionally, a stunning sulphur-yellow brimstone may be spotted too.

These butterflies will have spent the winter hibernating in cool, undisturbed places such as sheds, outbuildings and cellars. As the butterflies wake and emerge, they are hungry and early flowering shrubs such as willows and blackthorn provide valuable nectar to these early fliers.

 If you have a garden, it's good to provide flowers of any form at this time of year – any nectar source will be appreciated by these early insects. Research by the Royal Horticultural Society found that the best thing gardeners can do for insects is to provide flowers throughout the year.

 Find out which plants are best for which season at hertswildlifetrust/nectarcafe.





The Nature of...Beane Marsh

Next to the River Beane in Hertford, as you walk down Beane Road, sits an unassuming wild patch that holds a valuable secret – it is one of the rarest habitats in the county.

Beane Marsh, the Trust's newest nature reserve, is a **floodplain grassland**. In the not too distant past, before many waterways were straightened or made navigable, rivers were much more closely connected to their floodplain habitats. Many wildlife-rich sites have been subsequently lost to drainage works needed for agriculture or building development. In their more natural state, rivers would occasionally flood into their floodplain grasslands. These wet grasslands would have traditionally been used to graze livestock.

Despite its relatively small size, Beane Marsh boasts a mosaic of habitats – from wetter areas of fen and swamp to semi-wet, marshy margins and dry grassland. As such, the site could provide shelter and food for a wide variety of wildlife.

Floodplain grasslands can be rich in invertebrates – dragonflies and damselflies zoom through the tall grass, feeding on smaller insects. An abundance of insects also attracts larger predators. On warm summer evenings, swifts and bats come to forage over the grassland and along the river.

Reed bunting and other wetland birds such as sedge warblers

and reed warblers are found in the wet margins of this reserve. Mallard and moorhens enjoy easy access to the River Beane, for food and sheltered nesting opportunities. Kingfisher can be seen darting up the river, perching on an overhanging branch, on the look-out for a tasty stickleback.

The rhythmic drumming of a great spotted woodpecker in one of the trees can be heard here. Grey herons and little egrets skulk through the reeds. Water voles inhabit the nearby River Mimram at Panshanger Park and are found downstream on the River Lea at King's Meads – might Beane Marsh provide a haven for these much loved mammals in the future?

Beane Marsh hasn't been managed for wildlife for many years and it will need some TLC to become the best floodplain grassland habitat it can be. At the Trust, we're positive that it'll soon join the ranks of other Trust nature reserves teeming with wildlife.

Find more about Beane Marsh and its extraordinary story on page five and at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/beanemarsh.



Your photos Wild Snaps Special Edition



A group of juvenile starlings, by Annie Sutcliffe, is well camouflaged in this elder tree.



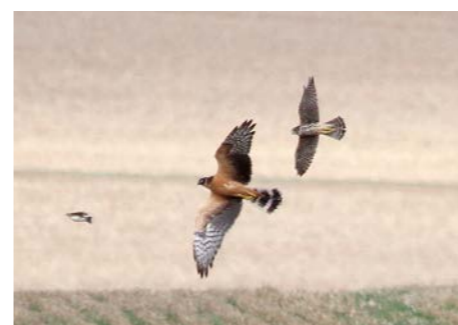
Fred Tual hit the shutter at the right moment when a blackbird was about to devour a berry in front of a perfect little hedgehog highway.



A beautifully iridescent ruby-tailed wasp posed for Graham Canny at Amwell Nature Reserve.



"Many a little makes a mickle" or so the red kite will have thought when going after a rather small prey mid-air. Shot by Steve Montgomery.



A rare visit of a pallid harrier in a showdown with a merlin over a poor skylark was witnessed by Owen Crawshaw at Therfield Heath. The smaller and faster merlin outmanoeuvred the harrier, caught the skylark and escaped with its prey.



Share your wild wanders!



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11-year old Luke Todd can easily take on the adults with his photography skills.

Leave a natural legacy

Thank you for all you're doing already for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Please keep protecting the wildlife you love for future generations to enjoy with a simple act that won't cost you anything now but could one day make a huge difference.

After taking care of your loved ones, please consider leaving a gift in your Will to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and help us protect wildlife for everyone.



Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/legacy
or call us on 07769 648610.