

Early Birds

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warblers' song 21



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PROTECTING **WILDLIFE** FOR THE FUTURE



Welcome



This year started with the wonderful news that Mike Master, the Trust's Chairman, was awarded an MBE for his services to wildlife and conservation in the Queen's New Year Honours. Mike has been playing an important role in creating a positive future for wildlife by bringing the Trust to the attention of our MPs, local politicians, local businesses and many more. Read more about his involvement in our latest news on page 5. Congratulations Mike!

Once again, I'd like to say a huge thank you to all our members. Your response to our appeal last year and further asks has been very overwhelming! In addition to your amazing generosity, we have been helped to meet the challenges of 2020 by grant funding, in particular from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Emergency Fund. Thanks to this, we were able to adapt to the new circumstances caused by the pandemic.

Over the last year, I've heard from so many people about the importance of their daily connection with nature and that has certainly resonated with me. The most common question I hear is "but what can I do for wildlife?" and the good news is that everyone can do something to help.

Naturally, your membership is already making a great difference because it enables us to continue to work hard to make Hertfordshire and Middlesex a little bit wilder every day. Volunteering with the Trust is another great support and hopefully, it won't be too long before our usual full programme of activities can resume. Closer to home, if you have space, select nectar-rich plants for your garden and you'll be rewarded with butterflies, bees and hoverflies making regular visits, or a bird box might result in the delightful sight of young blue tits fledging.

Standing up for wildlife remains at the heart of what the Trust does and you can make a difference by contacting your own MP. With the delay to the Environment Bill, we are pushing for this time to be used to strengthen the legislation; take a look at our website to find out more. At a more local level, I'm pleased to say that some of our local authorities have adopted our model policies in their Local Plans, ensuring that any implications for wildlife will be fully considered, and we continue to work with those who aren't there yet.

Whatever you can do, every action for wildlife you take, they all add up and together you're making the difference!

Thank you!

Cover: Sedge Warbler
© Chris Gomersall/2020VISION



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© RUSSELL SAVORY

WATER VOLE



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© PETER TATTON

RIVER MIMRAM



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© MARK HAMLIN/2020VISION

SEDE WARBLE AT DAWN



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© JOSH KUBALE

BLUEBELLS

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Design: TGDH www.tgdh.co.uk
Printed on FSC © Certified Stock

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4 ways to get involved

Volunteer

Could you donate your skills and time to help look after wildlife? You can find all open positions at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering

Donate

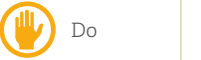
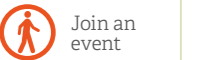
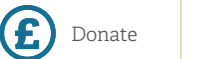
If you can spare a few pounds, please consider donating to help protect wildlife on your doorstep at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/donate

Shop

Our online shop stocks a range of wildlife items and gifts. All proceeds go towards our work. hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop

Campaign

Stand up for wildlife and take Action for Insects at wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects



WILD NEWS

Water voles to return to the ver

Endangered water voles will be reintroduced to the River Ver this year after a 30-year absence.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust in collaboration with the Ver Valley Society and local river owners have announced plans to reintroduce water voles to the Ver Valley north of St Albans. Around 150 water voles will be reintroduced to this stretch of the Ver as part of an ambitious programme to expand the territory of the animals in Hertfordshire. The habitat in that stretch of river provides the perfect conditions for water voles – dense bankside vegetation and clean water – but sadly water voles have not been seen here since 1987.

Water voles, typically found in healthy chalk rivers, are under serious threat from habitat loss – the majority of England's rivers are polluted and of poor ecological quality – and predation by non-native American mink. Since



WATER VOLE

©TERRY WHITAKER 2020/VISION

Thank you

The project is kindly funded by the Debs Foundation and the Lynda Foundation.

the 1950s, water vole populations have decreased nationally by over 90%.

Tim Hill, the Trust's Conservation Manager, says: "This is a major breakthrough for wildlife in the Ver Valley. Water voles are Britain's fastest-declining mammal and need

our help now – but it's not too late to bring them back from the brink, as this and other projects in the area prove."



You can find more information and updates at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/verwatervoles.



MIKE MASTER

Trust chairman receives MBE

Mike Master, Chairman of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, has received an MBE in the Queen's New Year Honours for his services to wildlife and conservation.

Mike Master has been volunteering on the Trust's Board of Trustees since 2007, becoming Chairman in 2009. He was instrumental in the Trust's purchase of Amwell Nature Reserve in the Lee Valley in 2006 and his contribution has been vital in establishing Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust as the leading voice for wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Mike Master said the award came "out of the blue" and that he was delighted to have received it. He said: "Wildlife is so

important for our health and wellbeing and we should all do what we can to protect it."

Lesley Davies, the Trust's Chief Executive, says: "We are overjoyed and proud that Mike has been awarded an MBE for his services to wildlife and conservation in Hertfordshire and Middlesex. A well-deserved reward for his dedication which will hopefully raise more awareness for our wildlife."

Congratulations, Mike!

Trust welcomes new colleagues

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust welcomes new faces and says goodbye to old colleagues.

In the recent months, we said farewell to some of our longest standing members of the team. Rob Hopkins, Assistant Reserves Officer, Martin Ketcher, Non-Native Invasive Species & Water Vole Conservation Officer and Laura Baker, Nature Reserves Manager, who are off on new adventures; we wish them all the very best.

Matt Clark has succeeded Rob Hopkins as Assistant Reserves Officer after completing his Reserves Traineeship with the Trust. At the same time, we have welcomed Jo Whitaker who has joined the Trust as the new People & Wildlife Officer for Panshanger Park (read on to find out more).



MATTHEW CLARK



JO WHITAKER

Panshanger park set for a wilder future

Panshanger Park will become a wilder place with a new community engagement and volunteering programme, thanks to a new partnership between Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Tarmac.

Jo Whitaker, the new Panshanger Park People and Wildlife Officer, is now based at the park, and will be helping visitors discover more about the park's wildlife and habitats. As well as supporting the existing team of dedicated volunteers in the nature reserve, Jo will be working to develop a new programme of volunteering activities including conservation, monitoring and interpretation across the park.

Jo's role is funded by Tarmac and employed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The new project builds on the Trust's previous work with Tarmac at the park and will include volunteering, community engagement and nature reserve management at Panshanger Park for the next five years.

Stuart Wykes, director of Land and Natural Resources for Tarmac said:

"We are really pleased to welcome Jo to the team at Panshanger Park, as we continue our long-term partnership with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. As the park grows in popularity, Jo's role will help our visitors learn about the park's history and wildlife and provide many opportunities for people to get involved in helping us protect and manage the park."

Panshanger Park is owned and managed by Tarmac who are working in partnership with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Herts County Council to open up the historic landscape to the public. The partnership is working in consultation with a range of stakeholders to create a financially-sustainable, exemplar country park which

will highlight and protect its varied wildlife, rich history and stunning landscape.



Find out more about Panshanger Park at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/panshangerpark



OSPREY LAKE AT PANSHANGER PARK

©JENNIFER GILBERT

WILD NEWS



Minke whales are seen regularly off our coasts each summer

UK UPDATE

Sightings up during seaside staycation surge

Our 2020 Marine Review

Seaside Spotting

- More than 30 bottlenose dolphins were seen 'partying' off the Teeside coast
- Large numbers of Atlantic blue-fin tuna recorded along England's south coast
- Baby Risso's dolphin photographed off the coast of Anglesey, North Wales
- Humpback whale filmed off Yorkshire coast, which has become a hotspot for whale-watching



The Wildlife Trusts' Living Seas teams are the eyes and ears of the UK coast, but this year their observations were joined by a surge in sightings from the public, as more people spent time around our coasts.

In this bumper year for sightings, highlights included the first orcas in Strangford Lough, Ulster, since the 1970s, and a rare 'run' of Atlantic bluefin tuna up the English Channel from Cornwall to Sussex. These impressive fish can weigh hundreds of kilograms and were sometimes joined by porpoises, minke whales and dolphins in a huge feeding frenzy.

Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts' director of living seas, says: "In 2020 people flocked to the sea as soon as lockdown restrictions were lifted — they needed the coast like never before. Wildlife Trusts around the country were reporting a surge of public interest in marine life and coastal species — people delighted in seeing marine life and it lifted the hearts of millions in this most difficult year."

It wasn't all good news for wildlife however. Although more people were spotting sea life, the restrictions of 2020 meant a lot of scientific monitoring work had to be cancelled, including more than

100 Trust Shoresearch surveys. These vital surveys help map and monitor the wildlife around our coasts, and the lack of data as a result of their cancellation could make it harder to assess the health of many of these plants and animals.

Wildlife Trusts were also unable to run many of their beach cleaning projects, though they were superseded by the hugely increased efforts of individuals and smaller groups during 2020. Cornwall Wildlife Trust, for example, reported that those people living within walking distance of beaches still carried on cleaning right through the lockdown. Working to clean up our marine environment is essential, with marine wildlife in greater peril than ever from plastic, nurdles, litter, discarded fishing gear and now disposable Covid masks too.

Better news for wildlife included the successful reintroduction of sand lizards to Fylde sand dunes, Lancashire, making it the most northerly population in England, and the discovery of a previously un-recorded seagrass bed off Northern Ireland's Ards Peninsula.

Read the full marine review, with many more amazing stories from around our coasts, at wildlifetrusts.org/marine-review-20

UK UPDATE

Wildlife Trusts welcome new president

Broadcaster and biologist, Liz Bonnin has been elected as president of The Wildlife Trusts. Liz will be championing The Wildlife Trusts' new 30 by 30 vision to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. Liz says, "It is a critical time for the natural world, and I hope that through lending my voice and support, and by working together, we can help to enforce the changes that must take place in order to secure a brighter future for our wild places."

Alongside Liz Bonnin's appointment, The Wildlife Trusts have also welcomed biologist and Springwatch presenter Gillian Burke as vice president, as well as four new ambassadors: environmentalist and birder, Mya-Rose Craig; actor and presenter, Cel Spellman; actor and



podcaster, David Oakes; and professor of biology and bumblebee expert, Dave Goulson.

LIZ BONNIN © ANDREW CROWLEY; BUFF-TAILED BUMBLEBEE © CHRIS GOMERSALL/2020VISION; BROWN TROUT © LINDA PITKIN/2020VISION



Neonicotinoids are a threat to bees and other pollinators

Bad news for bees

The Government has agreed to authorise the use of the highly damaging neonicotinoid thiamethoxam for the treatment of sugar beet seed in 2021. The Wildlife Trusts strongly oppose this decision. In 2018, the UK Government supported restrictions on the neonicotinoid pesticides across the European Union due to the very clear harm that they were causing to bees and other wildlife.

The neonicotinoid will be applied by "seed-dressing", which results in only 5% of the pesticide going into the crop. The rest accumulates in the soil, from where it can be absorbed by the roots of wildflowers and hedgerow plants, or can leach into rivers and streams.

To find out more, take a look at our Wild LIVE episode on the use of neonicotinoids wildlifetrusts.org/wild-live

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 A dam good job

Ulster Wildlife are using coconut fibre logs to create dams on Cuilcagh Mountain, re-wetting and restoring large areas of peatland. The boggy areas created will capture and store carbon, helping combat the climate crisis, and provide a better habitat for wildlife. This work, done in conjunction with local farmers, is part of a project to restore 16 hectares of degraded peatland on Cuilcagh.

2 Shark sanctuaries

Scottish Wildlife Trust welcomed the designation of a new suite of protected areas in Scottish seas. Four new Marine Protected Areas will help safeguard species like basking sharks and minke whales, alongside 12 new Special Protection Areas created to benefit Scotland's iconic seabirds. It is essential now that these areas are backed by effective management measures.



3 River restoration

Surrey Wildlife Trust are working with a wide range of partners to restore the natural course of the Rye Brook, near Ashted, helping to encourage brown trout upstream and capture flood waters. Riverbanks were reprofiled and natural bends and meanders were added, as well as a large riverside pond, to create more habitat for wildlife, including spawning areas for brown trout.



© TERRY WHITTAKER

WATER VOLE

Keep Rivers Flowing

As the summer sun warms the air, you sit by the edge of the cool chalk river. Huge trout motor in the current ahead of you as the mighty river dashes white and blue. The dark green water weed flails pendulously to a healthy, rippling flow; its minute yellow and white flowers settled above the surface dance side to side and seem adorned with bouncing jewels, as damselflies, demoiselles and caddisflies rest on the tiny stalks.

Glancing downstream, some small children gently swing their nets in an attempt to catch a delicately veined alderfly, as dozens more dart loosely around them. No more than two metres from you, amongst the fragrant water mint and floating grasses, a sudden rustle as something dives. You pivot round, but it's only another water vole. You see them all the time. It's just another normal morning by the chalk river.

For many of Hertfordshire's chalk rivers, a globally rare habitat, this is a scene from yesteryear. Memories of healthy chalk rivers abounding with wildlife are being eroded away quickly and at risk of being forgotten. Josh Kalms, People & Wildlife Officer at the Trust, delves into the secrets of our chalk rivers and what we can do to help them.

These rivers are fed by groundwater. Filtered through chalk, the water emerges - cool and crystal clear - as springs at the top of our valleys where groundwater levels are sufficiently high. Chalk rivers are rare – southern England has 90% of a global total of 180. They can be diverse and productive ecosystems brimming with wildlife, the mineral-rich water home to a range of specialist plants, in turn

being food for an immense diversity of aquatic insects. Birds, bats and fish eat these insects and provide food for other predators – larger fish, kingfishers, herons, otters. All the while, water voles, one of our river's herbivores – teetering on the edge of county extinction – consume the varied plants growing on the bank side, their feeding habits and burrows creating optimal conditions for other species.

However, these precious habitats are at risk of extinction themselves. One reason for this is a reduction in groundwater levels as a result of water abstraction from the aquifer to provide our household

and agricultural water supply, as well as changing weather patterns bringing variations of extremely low rainfall and flooding.

These factors and others are causing rivers like the Colne, Lee and many of their tributaries to dry up. Even after wet winters like the one we've just had, even after flood events have washed wildlife away, groundwater will soon drop once more and the rivers' ecosystems will feel the effects. If our winters continue to be mostly dry, the aquifer won't be able to recharge to feed our chalk rivers. Prolonged dry weather periods,



DRIED UP RIVER MIMRAM

© TIM HILL

such as the one we've seen from 2016 to 2019, combined with unsustainable groundwater abstraction are having devastating impacts on wildlife and so we continue to pull apart the web of life that binds our wetland flora and fauna.

Possibly the most worrying thing is how young people will be assessing the situation. Having grown-up near a sluggish, wildlife-depleted wetland today, we can't expect them to remember the diverse, shining, life-filled environment that once was. **Rare chalk rivers and their iconic British wildlife are being lost**, both literally and from the memories of our children.

Whilst we can't make it rain, we can all do something to help: reduce the amount of water we use and use it more efficiently. In Hertfordshire, our average water use is one of the highest in the UK – 158 litres per person per day; around 20 litres greater than the national average and enough to fill an entire water butt to overflowing. Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, predicts that in 20-25 years, there is a real chance that we will not have enough water for ourselves, let alone our chalk streams, if we do not act now.

Here's how you can help:

SAVE WATER, SAVE WILDLIFE!

Action	Annual Saving
Take quick, non-power showers instead of baths	27,000
Install a hippo/save a flush in your toilet cistern	5,000
Add flow limiters on your taps	15,200
Fix dripping taps	5,500
Install a water butt in the garden and use rain water to water the garden or wash your car	1,000
Cut the lawn longer to hold more moisture and avoid watering it	6,750
Use a watering can instead of a hose	22,500
Collect tap water while waiting for it to warm	3,600

Another way to help you save water is to install a water meter and monitor your use and to identify the water footprints of the products you consume and reconsider your consumption of those.

Download the app: 'Get Water Fit' or visit getwaterfit.co.uk to calculate your own water use and receive these free water saving devices, plus step-by-step advice on reducing your own consumption to save money and wildlife

The *Keep River's Flowing* is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of the Colne Valley – A Landscape on the Edge, in partnership with Affinity Water and Groundwork South. Josh Kalms is the People & Wildlife Officer for the Trust's nature reserves that are owned by Affinity Water.

Find out more about this project at colnevalleypark.org.uk/keeping-the-rivers-flowing

EXPLORE



OLD PARK WOOD

© CLARE GRAY

TAWNY OWL © MARGARET HOLLAND

1. Old Park Wood

Just behind Harefield Hospital, on the edge of a bustling city, a tranquil refuge is tucked away. Old Park Wood is a hidden gem and rich with wildlife. This nature reserve is a joy to visit throughout the year, however, it offers a particularly stunning sight in spring, when the woodland floor is transformed into a sea of colour

Spectacular blooms of bluebells, yellow archangel, lesser celandine, wood anemone and coralroot bittercress, the latter being a rarity in both the UK and Hertfordshire, create a rainbow of purple, yellow, white and more.

Old Park Wood is an ancient woodland, thought to have been continuously wooded since Saxon times. At the boundary of the woods, you may see a shallow ditch, flanked by a series of large stumps - the remnants of hornbeams whose stems would have been cut and 'layered' down to form a natural fence to hold livestock such as pigs, fattened up on acorns in a system known as pannage. Ancient woodlands are those known to have been present by 1650 and are an irreplaceable wild link to our past, hosting a unique biodiversity.

The wood is the ideal habitat for tawny owls which are perfectly adapted to these dense woodlands, having short wings for great


manoeuvrability and mottled reddish-brown plumage. It might be a challenge to spot them, their camouflage perfectly blending in with the trees, but listen out for the distinctive "twit-twoo" call. This call is actually a combination of a pair of owls, the female calling "twit" and the male replying with "twoo".

You might also hear the rhythmic drumming of a male great spotted woodpecker, marking his territory and attempting to attract a mate.

Know before you go

Location: UB9 6UX, near Harefield Hospital

Open: Open and free at all times

 Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/oldparkwood

Please visit our nature reserves responsibly and in line with Government guidance. For more information about how we work during Coronavirus restrictions, please visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/coronavirus.

2. Long Deans

Why now?

It's the perfect place to discover the first signs of spring.

Know before you go

Location: HP3 8BS, Hemel Hempstead

Open: Open and free at all times


Wildlife to spot

Kestrel, cowslip, song thrush, brimstone butterfly

The lowdown

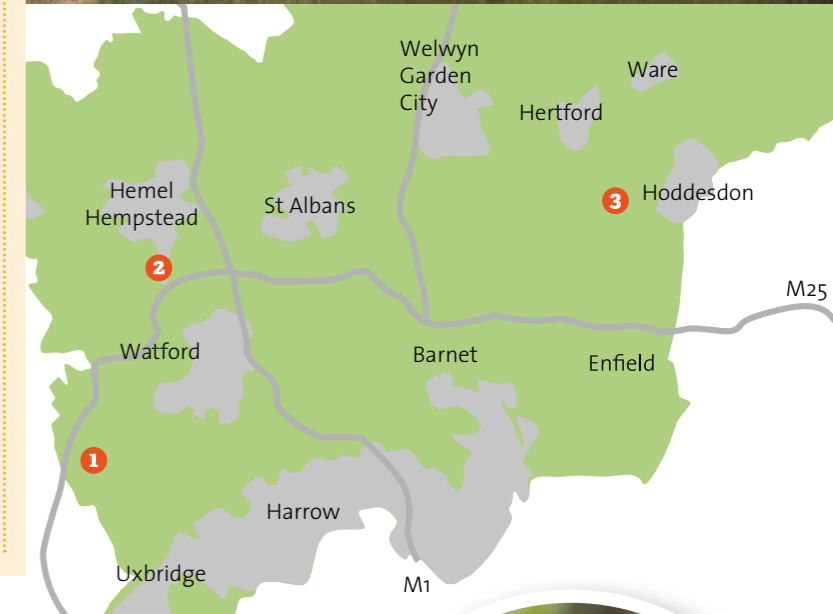
Visiting Long Deans at this time of year is like taking the first deep breath in spring after a long winter. The open space in this valley invites you to meander and take in the scent of a new season. Early butterflies, such as orange-tip and brimstone and bees such as white-tailed queen bumble bees can be seen swirling around the wildflowers. Lift your gaze up and you might spot magnificent raptors, such as buzzards and red kites wheeling and displaying on the thermals created by the early warmth of the spring sunshine.

The flower-rich grassland is scattered with impressive veteran trees which provide a home for fungi, invertebrates, birds and bats.

 Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/longdeans



LONG DEANS



3. Danemead

Why now?

Spring birdsong

Know before you go

Location: EN11 8GG, near Hoddesdon

Open: Open and free at all times

Wildlife to spot

Tree creeper, blackcap, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage




DANEMEAD

© CHARLOTTE HUSSEY

The lowdown

A wood pasture wander at this time of year is a symphony for the senses. Beautiful bird song fills the air – can you hear the high-pitched twitter of a goldcrest, the country's smallest bird's or the melodic scratchy song of blackcap or, if you're lucky, maybe a fluting call of a bullfinch from the dense scrubby edges.

In spring, look out for the diminutive opposite-leaved golden saxifrage in damp areas along the Spital Brook. This beautiful oak-hornbeam woodland is surrounded by rich history – the site is bounded by *Ermine Street*, a major Roman road that ran from London to Lincoln and York. *The Hertfordshire Way*, a 195-mile long-distance circular trail through the whole of Hertfordshire, passes through here.

 Find out more at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/danemead



GOLDCREST © JOHN BRIDGES

Datchworth Climate Group's veggie swap for wildlife

Datchworth Climate Group have been helping their local community reduce their carbon footprint by selling and swapping locally grown, organic fruit and vegetables at their monthly village stall. Last November, they decided to do even more for local wildlife by donating all the money raised from the veggie swap to the Trust – raising over £200 for wildlife. Thank you!



DATCHWORTH GROUP



Sophia's bee-autiful art to help save our bees

Last year, eight-year old Sophia set herself a challenge to do something positive for her local community by raising money to help our bees and pollinators.

Sophia created an incredible 'bee board' which she displayed outside her home to educate her neighbours about bees, and installed a pond, bug hotels and bird feeders in her own garden. Not only this, but Sophia also created and sold wonderful drawings, hand-painted cork coasters and bee-friendly flowers to raise an incredible £115 for the Trust. Sophia's drawings were proudly displayed in her neighbours' windows inspiring the local community (and even some people abroad!) to get involved to help bees. Determined to do even more, Sophia and her family took on the Chess Valley Challenge and raised a further £100 for the Trust. Sophia has been an inspiration to us all, with her hard work helping to protect our wildflower meadows – a vital food source for our bees so that they can continue to thrive. Thank you, Sophia!



If you would like to help local wildlife and raise funds for the Trust, please get in touch with Hannah at fundraising@hmwt.org.

In remembrance

We are extremely grateful to our member David Mattingly for kindly leaving a gift to the Trust in his will. His support in this special way will make a lasting contribution to our work for wildlife.

Our thanks and sincerest condolences to the friends and families of long-standing member David Murrell and Mr Wilson for kindly donating to the Trust in their memory. These donations help us ensure the wildlife that their loved ones cherished is protected for years to come.



© JOSH KUBALE

Thank you

You are amazing. Our work would simply not be possible without you, our incredible members. Despite what has been a tough time over the past year for everyone, together we have been able to continue to protect local wildlife and inspire people about the natural world.

Thanks to your support, we were able to help thousands of people stay wild, learn about and enjoy local wildlife with our online *Wild at Home* activities and events and inspire a new generation of wildlife lovers.

You have also ensured that our nature reserves and wild places have continued to be protected and cared for, despite many of our fundraising and volunteering activities being

suspended. These wild places have been vital for so many people in supporting their wellbeing during these difficult times.

Many people in our local community have got in touch to share what these wild places have meant for them over the past year...

"Oughtonhead is on our doorstep and is a very special place for us. We feel really lucky to be able to walk there every day."

"Have so enjoyed the beauty of your reserves local to us through the lockdown period. Thank you."

"During lockdown, my wife and I have got a lot of pleasure from our frequent walks in Balls Wood and Hobby Horse Wood."

Thank you for all your work in maintaining these wonderful oases".

"I am so grateful for being able to get out into the fresh air, the daily walks appreciating the changing seasons, and now being able to get out into the wider countryside."

"Nature and our beautiful countryside have helped us stay positive during this pandemic."

"Walking in the woods has been a lifesaver during lockdown, watching the changing seasons and the changes in the woods. Thank you."

All of this is made possible because of your support – thank you.

If you would like to share your stories of how your local wild places have helped you, please get in touch with Hannah at fundraising@hmwt.org

Local businesses protecting wildlife

Fitch Group

Fitch Group has been helping its employees around the world support their favourite charities. In recognition of their hard work and commitment during 2020, Fitch gifted each employee with funds to donate to causes close to their hearts. Tom Speller, a Fitch employee in its London office and dedicated member of the Trust, kindly selected us to receive a £100 donation to help us continue protecting the local wildlife that he loves. Our thanks to both Tom and Fitch Group for their wonderful support.



If you would like to talk about how your company or employer can support the Trust, please get in touch with Hannah at fundraising@hmwt.org



The surprising simplicity of scientific names

GRASS SNAKE *NATRIX HELVETICA*

Dicranopalpus ramosus? Streptopelia decaocto? Charcharadon charcharias? Vulpes Vulpes? If you're feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of scientific names, you're not alone. Dave Willis, People and Wildlife Officer, tells us about the method to the madness.

Understanding the scientific names of plants and animals can seem daunting: multiple long words which at first glance can appear unpronounceable and incomprehensible. However, once you know how they work, what they mean and why they are important, they can make much more sense.

Commonly known as "Latin names", the words used actually come from a range of languages. They are crucial in helping us to understand the classification and inter-relationships of all living organisms. This is because they are universally agreed as a system – whilst common names can vary in different languages, scientific names are like one world language, universally understood.

The grass snake, found in and around our

water bodies in the spring and summer, is a good example of how confusing common names can be. Across its range it is, or has been, known as grass snake (UK), barred snake (UK), Couleuvre à collier (France), Ringelnatter (Germany) and biscia dal collare (Italy). However, it has the same scientific name, *Natrix natrix*, or, after recent revision, *Natrix helvetica*, across western Europe and Britain.

At the same time, South Africa's grass snake – *Psammophis mossambicus* – is completely unrelated to our own.

Organising living organisms into some sort of framework that would recognise their connectedness and identity was formalised by scientists in the seventeenth century - Thomas Artedi and, more famously, Carl von Linne, or Carolus

Linnaeus as he eventually called himself. From Sweden, Linnaeus was writing and working at a very important point in history. Competing imperial powers were bringing specimens back to Europe, notably France and Great Britain, and these were being formally examined by what we would recognise as scientists.

The scientific name positions the organism in relation to all other living things via the Linnaean system. This detailed web of evolutionary connections between all life on Earth classifies all living things into Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus and Species – or, if you prefer a helpful memory hook for this sequence, 'Katy, Please Come Over For Granny's Scones'. In the case of our grass snake, it would go as follows:

Katy	Please	Come	Over	For	Granny's	Scones
Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Species
Animalia = animals	Chordata = animals with a flexible rod supporting their dorsal or back sides	Reptilia = reptiles	Squamata = scaled reptiles	Colubridae = a family of snakes	Natrix = Old World snakes	Natrix Helvetica = Grass snake

How scientific names originate

Scientific names are often used to describe characteristics. For example, if an animal is common (or regularly found) it will often have the species name "communis" or "vulgaris". Anything with "variegata" means dappled or speckled. "annularis" means spotted. Those words derive from Greek and Latin.

Sometimes a scientific name will feature a person's name, or eponym. It is considered rather bad form in the scientific community to name a species that you have discovered after yourself, however species are more often named after other people in order to recognise and honour them. This means that sometimes, a history of the organism's discovery or its circumstances can be gathered from its scientific name.

As you might expect, many are named after great scientists. The tiger shark is *Galeocerdo cuvier*, after the French anatomist, Baron Georges Cuvier. Similarly, famous biologists Richard Owen and Charles Darwin are honoured. Sir David Attenborough has twelve species named after him! Others honour close family or friends, particularly if they inspired the scientist in their love of natural history.

Some names describe more surprising characters, such as *Atelopus farci*, a toad species that was named after the rebel group FARC whose activities deterred deforestation in an area of Colombia, which eventually led to protecting the animal's habitat and preventing its likely loss.



WREN *TROGLODYTES TROGLODYTES*



SMOOTH NEWT *LISSOTRITON VULGARIS*

It is often assumed that discovering a new species means travelling to remote areas to find obscure and unseen animals or plants. Whilst this is the case sometimes, more often than not discoveries are made from museum collections or among animals that are already known.

In the same way, it can be discovered that animals which were believed to be distinct species are in fact the same. Nowadays, this is often established using DNA but can also be realised through morphological (body shape) characteristics.

Dinosaur names are among the most famous scientific names – which child doesn't know *Triceratops* (three horned face), *Iguanodon* and *Stegosaurus*? Interestingly, *Tyrannosaurus rex* is probably the most famous species that doesn't have a common name at all.

Often, the first named or most common species in a genus often has the same genus name as its species name, showing it to be the first example. The wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) is named after the Greek word "troglodytes" (troggle = hole, and dyein = to creep) meaning 'cave dweller, from its habit of building nests in holes. In some cases, the organism may have the same scientific and common names, such as boa constrictor, whose scientific name is *Boa constrictor*.

All scientific names are given by serious and professional scientists. Well, sometimes their sense of humour gets the better of them and we end up with a beetle genus *Gelae* (pronounced a bit like "jelly") which includes the species *Gelae bean*, *Gelae fish*, *Gelae belae*.



© NEIL ALDRIDGE

HOOPOE UPUPU EPOPS

Our favourite scientific names

Most nature enthusiasts and conservationists will have their favourite scientific names, even if they don't like to admit it. Here are a few of our colleagues' scientific names of choice:

Alex Waechter, Records Centre Manager: "*Fraxinus excelsior!* Because it sounds like a Star Trek ship name." (European Ash)

Matt Dodds, Planning & Biodiversity Manager: "*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium...* just say it" (opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage)

Tim Hill, Conservation Manager: "*Sylvia borin* – garden warbler - its plumage is plain brown/grey and about as *borin*' as it gets! Acknowledging, of course, that beauty is in the eye of the beholder... and it more than makes up for it with the loveliest song."

Emma Norrington, Head of Fundraising & Communications: "Mink are called *Neovision vision!* An 80's synth band – surely?"

Sarah Perry, Living Rivers Officer: "*Urtica dioica* – because it 'urts ya!' (Stinging nettle)

Lesley Davies, Chief Executive: "It's an occasional visitor to these shores, I like the hoopoe aka *Upupa epops*. Just makes me smile."

Ian Carle, Nature Reserves Manager: "Mine is *Anthoxanthum odoratum* (sweet vernal grass) because I think the first part of the name sounds like a great name for a series of heavy metal albums - always makes me chuckle..."

In fact, Ian goes on to explain "'odoratum' means sweet smelling in Latin, which is a great description as this grass gives new mown hay its sweet smell. If that wasn't enough, the first part of its name 'Anthoxanthum' is actually derived from two Greek words, anthos meaning flower and xanthos meaning yellow, alluding to the yellow spikelets produced by this grass when it flowers."

So, there you have it – there's a lot in a name. Not only do these names act as time capsules, classifiers and guides, they can also be poetry and quips. They advance science and add an extra dimension to our enjoyment and understanding of the natural world.



Dive deeper into the curious world of scientific naming and join us at the online event "Scientific Naming for Beginners" on 25 March.

More on page 19.

2021 MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

We would love to know a little more about you, what you think of us and your views on our work. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey either online or by post.

Online

Visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/membersurvey or scan the QR code.

Post

Fill in this form and return it to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Grebe House, St Michael's Street, St Albans, AL3 4SN.

We will let you know the results of the survey in a future issue of *Wildlife Matters*. All responses are anonymous. Thank you!



Your Membership

1) What type of membership do you have?

- Individual
- Joint
- Family
- Life

2) How long have you been a member of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust?

- 1 year or less
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

3) What were your reasons for joining Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust?

Please tick your top 3 reasons for joining the Trust

- To help support local wildlife
- To help care for nature reserves and wild places
- To support the Trust to protect wildlife through the local planning system
- For information about visiting local nature reserves
- To learn about the wildlife in my local area
- For ideas and advice about what I/we can do to help wildlife e.g. wildlife gardening
- To be part of a national movement campaigning for wildlife
- To attend walks, talks and events
- Other, please state

4) Would you recommend becoming a supporter of the Trust to a friend?

Please Circle

Yes / No / Maybe



© TOM MARSHALL

HEDGEHOG

Continued overleaf

Trust Publications and Communications

5) On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is 'never' and '5' is very often, how often do you use the following to get news and information from the Trust?

- Wildlife Matters
- E-news
- Social media
- Website

6) On a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 is “not at all” and 5 is “every time”, please rank these article subjects on how often you read them.

- News and updates about the Trust
- National news about the Wildlife Trusts
- Species identification
- Gardening for wildlife
- Trust nature reserves
- Seasonal wildlife and where to see it
- Practical activities to do at home
- Fundraising updates

7) Are there any subjects that you'd like to see in Wildlife Matters that we are not currently covering?

8) To reduce our carbon footprint, and help to save costs, we could create an electronic version of Wildlife Matters. If this were available, would you be interested in receiving it as an alternative to a printed version?

Please Circle

Yes / No / Maybe



Wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex


9) What do you feel is the greatest threat to wildlife in our area?

- Climate change
- Building development
- Intensive agriculture
- Habitat loss
- Large infrastructure projects (Such as HS2)
- Other (please state)

10) What more could Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust do to support individuals and groups to take their own local action for wildlife?


- More guidance and practical advice on our website
- More local activities to help groups plan and deliver their own wildlife projects
- Downloadable resources for different groups – at home, schools, community groups, businesses.
- Providing more regular updates on our work through social media
- Other (please state)


Go Wild Events

 Our online event programme continues to be diverse and hugely popular. Online events are a great alternative to get closer to nature and learn about wildlife from the comfort of your home.

The programme covers a wide range of nature-related topics. You can watch the talk on 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 so don't delay and book your place today. Visit hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events for full listings and booking.

 We would like to give everyone the chance to learn more about our fascinating wildlife. Please support this with a donation if you can when booking your place.



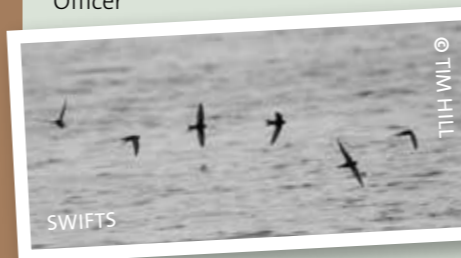
Friday 19 March | 2pm – 3pm

Helping Hertfordshire's Swifts ONLINE

Swifts spend nearly their whole life in the air - they eat, sleep, drink, bathe and even mate on the wing. But, like many other species, they have suffered a tragic loss of habitat and nest sites. Learn what work is being done in Hertford and further afield to help them to breed and thrive in Hertfordshire.

Suitable for adults.

Presenter: Jenny Rawson, Senior Reserves Officer



Thursday 25 March | 7pm – 8pm

Scientific Naming for Beginners ONLINE

Have you ever wondered why everything has two names – the common one we usually use in everyday life, and a scientific one usually made up of two (or more) words you don't recognise? If you would like to get a grip on how and why scientific names work, join us to discover the simple rules that are used to name animals and plants.

Suitable for adults.

Presenter: Dave Willis, People and Wildlife Officer

Tuesday 30 March | 2pm – 3.30pm

Learn to Sketch Red Kites ONLINE

Settle down with your sketch pad and pencil and accompany us for an online tutorial on beginning to observe and sketch birds in flight. Local artist Martin Gibbons will show you how to start field sketching birds, going through the basics of shape, form, depth and adding detail. By the end of the session, you will have sketched a magnificent red kite!

Aimed at adults, but suitable for children drawing alongside adults.

Presenter: Martin Gibbons, Volunteer



Wednesday 1 April | 6pm – 7.30pm

Bird Song for Beginners ONLINE

Join us for an enjoyable discussion about the most common birds you are likely to hear from your back garden or local walk. Learn to identify the birds by their song and revel in the dawn chorus. There will be plenty of opportunities to ask questions!

Suitable for all ages.

Presenter: Rob Hopkins, Volunteer

Wednesday 5 May | 7pm – 8.30pm

Summer Tree Identification ONLINE

Do you know your beech from your birch? Learn how to use the various keys, guides and identifying marks to aid you in identifying Hertfordshire's trees in their summer state.

Suitable for all ages.

Presenter: Andy Holtham, Volunteer



“Impressed with the software used - we enjoyed the chat interaction, the multiple-choice questions and the activity downloads!”

“REALLY great session - thank you so much for putting it on. My 4-year old loved it and dashed straight into the garden to look for snakes in the compost heap!”

“Very well organised and knowledgeable delivery and presentation.”



Gillian Burke

@gillians_voice

Together for nature

It was the best little hide! A hibiscus bush with the perfect little-girl-sized hollow, where I would spend whole mornings, watching butterflies and jewel-like sunbirds flitting and darting nervously from flower to flower. I had no access to field guides and no idea what the birds were called. To be perfectly honest, it didn't really matter because I was quite content with just watching and occasionally trying to draw what I saw in a little notebook. This was my Kenya in the late seventies. No internet, no clubs, no daytime telly, no distractions — just the world outside to explore and discover.

With time and freedom on my side, I got to know the many moods of the natural world. Beautiful flowers hid thorns, lush green grass hid snakes, the same wondrous sun, that gently warmed up the day, would birth violent afternoon storms that, in turn, gave way to the cooling sweet smell of the earth. I loved it all. All this gave me a profound sense, even as a little girl, that everything in nature had its place.

My younger self had yet to learn that this is what biologists call diversity — the single word that describes the infinite possibilities, expressions and connections of life on earth. From a biologist's perspective, all this variety is not just the spice of life, it is the source of nature's resilience and adaptability.



Viewed with this lens it is hard, therefore, to believe that there is still the need to debate diversity in the conservation and environmental sector but clearly we do. From senior leadership roles to volunteer positions, just 0.6% are from black, mixed and other ethnic groups. This is a famously quoted figure and one that likely extends to under-representation from white working class backgrounds as well.

One thing that we can all agree on is that we have the fight of our lives right now in meeting the twin challenges of the climate and ecological crisis. As 2020 is set to go down in history as 'one hell of a year', there is a precious opportunity to set a course for a truly 21st century mind-set. If we are ever really going to walk the walk and actually do things differently, we are going to need the full power of diverse voices and perspectives to forge resilience and adaptability in a fresh, new system that serves everyone and everything, and exploits nothing and no one.

The Wildlife Trusts are committed to putting equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of our movement. Find out more:

wildlifetrusts.org/wild-about-inclusion

WILDER IS HEALTHIER

Research published by The Wildlife Trusts in 2019 showed that children experience profound and diverse benefits through regular contact with nature. It's essential that all children (and adults too) have the opportunity to experience nature in their daily lives, but 42% of people from minority ethnic backgrounds live in the most green-space deprived areas, compared to just 15% of white people*. We need at least 30% of land to be restored for nature, helping wildlife recover and bringing nature into everyone's daily lives.

Gillian Burke is a biologist and wildlife presenter and has recently become vice president of The Wildlife Trusts.

*England's green space gap, Friends of the Earth

The Early Bird...

Spring has sprung and with it the first hesitant voices are starting to fill the air. Not long until a full-blown symphony of birdsong heralds a new day. Senior Reserves Officer Jenny Rawson tells us what to listen out for – and when.

Even if you are no early riser, you might want to set your alarm early in spring. Just before the morning sunlight fills the air, the dawn chorus begins with male birds calling out to mark their territories and to encourage prospective mates. It is thought that bird song at dawn is more effective than at mid-day because the sound carries further in the still air, meaning that more females will hear it. The earliest risers will be up and singing from 4am.

Spring is known as being a time of new life. It is also a key time for migration when birds arrive in the UK to breed. If you are new to birdsong, spring is a good time to learn, as the arrival of our spring migrant birds is staggered. This is a great way to learn each new species one by one.

You will, of course, hear a range of birds sing in a dawn chorus, such as robins, tits or blackbirds, but this article focuses on the lesser known warblers, a group of birds in the bird family of *Sylviidae*.

No special skills are required to enjoy the dawn chorus – just close your eyes and lose yourself in the concert – but being able to distinguish the different tunes and identify the individual birds can increase your enjoyment and give you a sense of achievement too. If you're used to identifying birds from their looks rather than their voice, bring your binoculars. As the sun starts rising, you might get a glimpse of the songsters.

Where to go

Good sites to listen to warblers are those with dense thorny habitats, this could be your local park or woodland. To find some of the more specialist species, such as reed and sedge warbler you will need to visit your local wetland site.



Who's singing when?

Have a listen to some birds to prepare your own dawn chorus outing at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/dawnchorus



Chiffchaff

1. One of the first warblers you hear in spring is a true sentinel of warmer times. Their tune is simple enough, they keep chanting their own name – *chiffchaff chiffchaff chiffchaff*. If you can spot the chiffchaff perched high in the treetops, look closely with your binoculars and you might be able to spot so-called 'pollen horns' where the feathers around their beaks are full of pollen from their feasting on goat willow flowers after their long migration from Africa to spend the summer in the UK.



Blackcap

2. The blackcap, arriving shortly after the chiffchaff, is a scrub dweller and you are more likely to hear than see them in the thick undergrowth. Blackcaps can be identified by their rather scratchy but melodic call, not dissimilar to blackbird song. The males have a black 'cap' and females have a brown 'cap'.



Sedge Warbler

3. If you visit a local wetland with reed and sedge beds, listen out for the explosive sound of the sedge warbler. Their scratchy song is sung from low in the vegetation but, as they move into spring and want to attract a mate, they will launch up in song crescendos as a display flight. If you do get a glimpse, look out for a light eye stripe, known as a 'supercilium'.



Willow Warbler

4. One bird you need a bit of luck to see is the willow warbler. They have become less common in Hertfordshire but are well worth discovering, as they have a lovely descending song. About the same size as a chiffchaff, they can be difficult to tell apart by their looks, but you will be able to tell the difference when you hear it!

1

2

3

4

March

April

May

5

6

7

8



Reed Warbler

5. Just like the sedge warbler, the reed warbler skulks low in the vegetation and can be challenging to distinguish. However, in contrast to the sedge warbler, the song of the reed warbler is croaky and continuous – they sound like they don't pause for breath at all. This isn't true, of course, as birds are able to sing whilst they breathe, alternating their song with short deep inhalations and exhalations.



Grasshopper Warbler

6. One of our most distinctive warblers can be found on our wetland reserves in Hertfordshire, including Rye Meads, Thorley Wash and King's Meads. The grasshopper warbler really lives up to its name – its strange song sounds like the stridulations of grasshoppers – the buzzing sound they make by rubbing their legs against their wings. They like to sing from a low perch and have the amazing ability to throw their song over large distances, which makes them notoriously difficult to see – but fascinating to hear nevertheless.



Whitethroat

7. A more common warbler that you might hear but rarely see is the whitethroat. As scrub dwellers, they nest safely away from the threat of predators but, compared to blackcaps, whitethroats will often sing from the top of their bush, proudly proclaiming their territory. You can tell them from their russet brown back and bright white throat. In contrast to the common whitethroat, the lesser whitethroat has a rattling song and a pale white throat, with a slate grey head.



Garden Warbler

8. Contrary to its name, the garden warbler doesn't normally inhabit our gardens but is a bird of woodlands. Those birds have mostly grey plumage with no distinctive features – unfairly, their Latin name is *Sylvia borin*. Luckily, looks are not everything and garden warblers make up for their "boring" look with a lovely bubbling song. This shows many similarities to their relative, the blackcap, and can even confuse the most knowledgeable birdwatchers each spring until they get their ear in!

5 places to see blue butterflies



COMMON BLUE © GUY EDWARDES/2020VISION

Common blue butterflies are found on wildflower meadows across the UK

The blue butterflies are some of our most dazzling and endearing insects; winged gems that come alive in the spring or summer sunlight and dance from flower to flower. They shimmer in shades of blue and silver, although a few of the UK's nine resident species are misleadingly brown. Some of these butterflies are now only found in the few places their favoured habitat remains. Many of these areas are now nature reserves, protected by The Wildlife Trusts. Some, however, can be seen more widely: common blues emerge around May and fly over many grasslands, including road verges, and holly blues appear around April to flutter through parks and gardens. Your best chance of spotting butterflies is on a calm, sunny day.

See the spectacle for yourself

Aldbury Nowers

This stunning chalk grassland is a haven for butterflies, including the small and chalkhill blue.

Where: HP23 5QW, near Tring

Balls Wood

The wide sunny rides of this tranquil woodland are awash with a variety of butterflies in summer. Look out for common blues and brown argus.

Where: SG13 7PW, Hertford Heath

Hexton Chalk Pit

This unique reserve, an old chalk pit with wildflower-rich grassland is home to a large colony of chalkhill blue butterflies.

Where: SG5 3JP, Hexton

Frogmore Meadows

This nature reserve is a home to beautiful wildflowers which provide an important food source for bees and butterflies, including common blue.

Where: WD3 6ER, near Rickmansworth


Fir and Pond Woods


This diverse nature reserve features woodland, meadow and wetland habitats that are rich in invertebrates, including common blue and brown argus.


Where: EN6 4DG, Potters Bar

Did you discover any butterflies?

When spotting butterflies, please be sure to follow Government guidance on social distancing and stay local. And remember to share your best photos with us!

 [@HMWTBadger](#)

 [Hertswildlifetrust](#)

 [Hertswildlifetrust](#)

Companion planting

Feed yourself and your local wildlife with these tips from **Kate Bradbury**.

Nasturtium
Tropaeolum majus
Nasturtiums can lure aphids from beans and egg-laying butterflies from brassicas. You can also transfer white butterfly caterpillars on to nasturtiums from your cabbages and kales. Their flowers attract bumblebees, the main pollinator of tomatoes.

Thyme
Thymus vulgaris
This low-growing herb can deter blackfly from broad beans and roses. You can also make a tea from its leaves and spray it on brassicas to prevent whitefly.

Mint
Mentha spicata
Its strongly scented leaves deter insects with a taste for carrots, onions and brassicas, including flea beetle. Best grown in a pot as it can grow out of control in open ground.

Beans
Fabaceae
Brassicas and salad crops need nitrogen-rich soil to grow well. Plant them alongside beans, whose roots fix nitrogen into the soil.

Marigold
Calendula officinalis
Its leaves repel whitefly from tomatoes and can lure aphids from beans. Its flowers attract pollinators as well as aphid predators like ladybirds, lacewings and hoverflies. Its roots work with soil fungi to deliver more nutrients to other plants.

Companion planting is an age-old tradition of organic gardening, designed to help plants grow better, aid pollination, deter insects from munching your crops and encourage the predators that eat them. It basically involves the planting of wildflowers or other crops alongside your main crop — think of them as little friends or guardians, there to keep your plants happy and safe.

Most companion plants are strongly scented and therefore can deter insects in search of their host plant. Others attract more beneficial insects, such as ladybirds and lacewings, which then prey on aphids and other crop eaters. Some companion plants are 'sacrificial', meaning you grow them so that insects lay eggs on them instead of your prized crop. Others can benefit the soil, such as nitrogen-fixing legumes, which help leafy plants grow better, or calendula, whose roots work particularly well with soil fungi, which aid the uptake of soil nutrients. All of this helps you work in harmony with nature, protect your crops and help them grow better. What's not to like?

On my allotment I grow calendula with tomatoes, onions and garlic with carrots and parsnips, and nasturtiums with beans and brassica crops. I also grow nettles, fennel, teasels and other wildflowers

along my allotment boundaries. These are fantastic wildlife plants, and so bring in a range of insects and birds. Nettles give me a head start on other allotmenters: coming into leaf early in the year, nettles attract the nettle aphid, *Microlophium carnosum*. This feeds only on nettles and emerges from hibernation sooner than other species, so attracts aphid predators — such as ladybirds, hoverflies and lacewings — early in the year. This means the predators are already on hand when the blackbean aphid starts breeding on my broad beans. Then in summer, fennel flowers attract hoverflies, which then lay eggs on aphid clusters — I rarely have a problem with aphids. Other wildflowers attract pollinating bees, which stay to fertilise my bean and tomato flowers. I also like to grow caterpillar foodplants for moths and butterflies because they're nice to have around. I like to think of them as my companions, so companion planting can benefit the gardener, too!

Gardens and allotments are a vital habitat for many of our struggling insects. Get tips for helping them at:

 [wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects)



Kate Bradbury is passionate about wildlife-friendly gardening and the author of *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone* and *Everything in association* with The Wildlife Trusts.

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH BAILEY, PHOTO © SARAH CUTTLE

YOUR WILD SPRING



Conservation Manager Tim Hill tells us about his favourite seasonal wildlife highlights and suggests ways to enjoy the natural world this spring.

A trip to Teletubby Land

The long Easter weekend in April provides a great opportunity to search out the Easter flower, or pasque flower as it's more commonly known. The word pasque is derived from paschal or passion - associated with Easter. It also happens to be the county flower of Hertfordshire. The beautiful purple pasque flower has always been a rare plant in Hertfordshire, but now it's only found in one place, Church Hill at Therfield Heath near Royston. This rounded hill is of interest in itself, looking like one of the mounds in Teletubby Land! The pasque flower is rare because its habitat - short grazed chalk grassland - is rare, not only in Hertfordshire. Much of this habitat was lost in the last century through conversion of grassland to arable and



PASQUE FLOWERS

© TIM HILL

loss of grazing which allowed more vigorous tall growing plants and scrub to shade-out this low growing plant. The chalk grassland at Church Hill is grazed by sheep, preventing the vegetation from growing too tall. If you would like to visit Church Hill and see the pasque flowers for yourself, access via the Trust's

Fox Covert Nature Reserve. The number of flowers varies from year to year, but up to 60,000 have been counted in the past. This is one of Hertfordshire's most spectacular springtime spectacles and one now perhaps unique in the country. One request, though, please be careful where you tread.

If you go down to the woods this spring...

...you're in for a treat. Hertfordshire is blessed with a wonderful array of woodlands, covering almost a tenth of the county. Our most characteristic woodland is dominated by oak and hornbeam. Historically, these woodlands would have been managed intensively as a crop, albeit on a very long rotation. Hornbeams were coppiced (cut to the ground), triggering

vigorous re-growth which was harvested for firewood, also known as 'rangewood' as it was the first choice to fuel the ranges or cookers, burning long and hot.

Oaks were grown to maturity to provide timber for structural use in buildings or ships. It's thought that 6,000 oak trees were used to build HMS Victory, Lord Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar.

Whilst our woods are no longer managed so intensively, there are many clues to their past management, if you look closely.

In spring, the woodland floor of these ancient places is a time of colour, as flowers burst early to capture the sunlight before the blanket of leaves on the trees steal the sun's radiance. My favourite and one of the first to bloom is the wood anemone. In the early morning light, they form a constellation across the woodland floor, their white, six-petaled flowers twinkling as distant stars in the night sky. Next in the season is wood sorrel, a plant whose delicate white flowers look etched with the purple lines of bored doodling. Delicate emerald green trefoil leaves complete its perfection. Last to flower is the bluebell, arguably the most iconic woodland wildflower of all. In its prime, the bluebell is at its finest after rain when the flowers glow as if illuminated by indigo-bulbed torches and the honey-sweet scent teases on the breeze.



WOOD ANEMONES

© MARK HAMLIN 2020 VISION



See

Look up! Spend time watching the sky for the arrival of migrant birds such as swallows, swifts and sand martins.

Smell

Get down on your hands and knees to breathe in the sublime scent of bluebells in an ancient woodland.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT



RED ADMIRAL

Early Butterflies

Spring often feels like coming out of hibernation for us humans. We have more energy, are more active and often spend more time outside, taking in the first warm sunrays of the year.

We are not alone - similarly to hedgehogs and bumblebees, some butterfly species go into hibernation as adults, whilst others over-winter as eggs, caterpillars or chrysalises - pupae. Come warmer

weather, the former will be the first ones that we can see dancing around our gardens.

Where to look

Once the adult butterflies awaken from their slumber, the first thing on their mind will be a good meal so they'll be seeking out gardens, parks and woodlands with early-flowering plants.



Help butterflies thrive in your garden! Plant a variety of nectar-rich flowers that are in bloom throughout the year to attract different butterfly species that are on the wing at different times of year. More at hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/attractbutterflies.

4 SPECIES TO SPOT



PEACOCK © PAUL THRUSH

Peacock

Perhaps our most familiar butterfly, the peacock is deep-red with black spots and blue 'eyespot' on both the forewings and hindwings.



BRIMSTONE © TIM-HILL

Brimstone

The brimstone is a large butterfly with a greyish body and characteristically veiny and pointed wings. Males are lemon-yellow, while females are greenish-white with orange spots in the middle of each wing.



COMMA

Comma

Ragged, orange wings with brown spots distinguish it from similar species. Its underside has brown colouring, making it look like a dead leaf.

Red Admiral

The red admiral is mainly black, with broad, red stripes on the hindwings and forewings, and white spots near the tips of the forewings.

Hear

Visit a local pond and listen to the crescendo of croaking as male frogs do their best to woo a mate.

Feel

Take off your shoes and socks and enjoy the unrivalled pleasure of walking through a dew-soaked meadow.



SEVEN WAYS TO EXPERIENCE AND ENJOY SPRING

1 Listen to the dusk chorus

The dawn chorus is great, but if you're a night owl who struggles to get up with the lark, you can enjoy the dusk chorus instead! As the sun sets, birds will start singing and calling to re-establish their nesting territories. On a warm spring evening, there is nothing more mindful than settling down and letting the sounds of birdsong ease away the stresses of the day. The fluting song of the blackbird is my favourite. What's yours?



2 Create a bee nesting block

To provide nesting places for insects such as red mason bees you can try creating a special home for them. Find a large lump of wood and then using an 8mm or 10mm drill bit, drill holes to a depth of about 50mm. Secure the block to a fence where you can see it easily, sit back and wait for the bees to arrive. You'll know when they've finished their nest as they will fill the holes with a plug of mud. If you're lucky you may even attract leaf-cutter bees.



3 Say no mow!

If you have a garden, think about making it a bit wilder by leaving some of the lawn uncut - the more the better. Doing this will allow any flowers that may be lurking in the sward to grow, flower and set seed, providing shelter and food for insects such as butterflies and bees. Create some bare earth patches in the lawn by removing the turf. This will provide places where solitary bees such as ash mining bees can dig a burrow and nest.



4 Enjoy the wonders of pond life

Look for a pond near you and take time to visit regularly through the spring. With a little bit of luck, you may see mating frogs, toads and newts and, in due course, their offspring in the form of tadpoles, toadpoles and efts. In April, look out for the first damselflies, usually the red-eyed.



6 Breathe in and smell the trees

Search out lime trees as they flower and immerse yourself in their sweet and heady fragrance - a scent that is definitely heaven sent! Look closely at the trees and see just how many insects are making the most of their blossom. Each tree has a unique scent - see if you can learn a few trees by their smell alone. The hawthorn is my least favourite - sometimes they just smell too much like public lavatories to me!

5 Count your blessings

April is the peak time for migration so why not see how many birds visit or fly over your home and garden in a month? If you set aside some time every day, you will be amazed how many different species you will accrue. During April 2020 in Hertfordshire, 123 different species were seen in total including rarities such as stone curlew, which were recorded calling as they flew over someone's house at night. If you do have a go, make sure that you submit your sightings to the Herts Bird Club or London Natural History Society.



7 Get baking

Why not try your hands at these delicious cookies and celebrate the return of our favourite mammal in spring?

Milo, 9, donned his apron as soon as he saw our Hedgehog Cookie Tutorial on YouTube and couldn't wait to show us the tasty result. His mum Jo told us: "The work you're doing is really firing up Milo's imagination and interest in wildlife and he can't wait to get out to some of your reserves soon. Initiatives like Wild At Home are fantastic for kids like Milo who love learning about wildlife and how to protect and help birds and animals."



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